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**NEGOTIATING WOMEN AND MEDIA: PARTICIPATION,  
PORTRAYAL AND PATRIARCHY**

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.4965>**ABSTRACT**

Indian media has traditionally been patriarchal, with women as obedient wife/mother/decoration on television, cinema, and advertisements. Newsrooms are still male-dominated and include women in "soft beats" and political leaders generally portrayed as appearance, family, or personality and not policy. These portrayals disempower credibility, limit aspirations, and deter women from coming into public life. Despite all this, women directors, journalists, and sportswomen have made a name for themselves and won respect, and women-centered films and web series began to feature empowered heroines. The internet offers other forms of exposure in the form of independent journalism and activism, but it also exposes women to trolling, abuse, and gender violence, revealing the very contradiction inherent in the internet. There are structural recruitment, promotion, and leadership shortages but framed by initiatives, feminist critique, and reform efforts. There is equality achieved through equal employment opportunity, anti-harassment legislation, gender-sensitive content regulation, and intersectional analysis coping with caste, class, and internet danger in finding representation with inclusivity in the media.

**KEYWORDS:** Patriarchy, Representation, Stereotypes, Empowerment, Digital Media.**INTRODUCTION**

The Indian media, as its international counterpart, traditionally relegated women to limiting roles—housewives, caretakers, mothers, or helpless dependents—thus reinforcing patriarchal formations that bound femininity to domesticity and subordination (Patowary, 2014; Singh, 2018). Doordarshan TV soaps of the past, such as Hum Log and Buniyaad, would cast

women in the ideal wife and submissive mother roles and embedded patriarchal values into the cultural landscape. Bollywood also maintained such portrayals, where heroines remained in mainly decoration or sacrifice positions, confirming the secondariness of women (Khan, 2018). Even in the 2000s, when "new" images were on the rise—e.g., the tomboy heroes of films like *Dil Chahta Hai* or the "autonomous" woman of urban soap operas—they went on to replace one stereotype with another, stereotyping femininity as it had long been shown or characterizing women's liberation in terms of consumerism and metropolitan elitism, entrapping little girls' gendered selves in limiting frameworks (Rodríguez & Figueroa, 2024). Patriarchy, masculine dominance, still affects media content and representation, dictating stories and enforcing gender norms. Indians' newsroom power structures are controlled by men and women typically end up on the "soft beats" of lifestyle or culture, political and investigative reporting being men's domain. Advertisement also domesticates women—rendering them mothers who wash clothes using detergent or wives washing clothes in the kitchen—hence perpetuating gender subordination (Doost & Sibly, 2020). Political journalism also exhibits such bias: women politicians such as Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, or Mamata Banerjee have also been labeled in terms of their being family members ("daughter of...," "wife of...") and not political acumen, showing how media is aligned with patriarchal control over storytelling.

Media is also a site of struggle, though. Female reporters, filmmakers, and social media personalities are exerting agency through content generation, subversion of stereotypes, and leadership. Independent filmmakers like Zoya Akhtar and Mira Nair introduce women with complex subjectivities, while television news anchor-journalists like Nidhi Razdan and Barkha Dutt, in collaboration with Ravish Kumar, enter political news reporting that has traditionally been male-gendered. When they are also represented in decision-making, representation interacts affirmatively with presentation and participation (Murtiningsih et al., 2017). Patriarchal media continue to restrict the political ambitions of women, and it is evidenced through research that Indian women politicians are less covered and more gendered in news reporting than their male counterparts (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018), therefore, thus, providing evidence for the even broader sociopolitical importance of patriarchal domination of media.

### **Research Objectives**

Below are the research aims set out to offer focus and guidance for the study. They will define the specific objectives the research will seek to achieve, offer boundaries for the

inquiry, and determine the inquiry is addressing the issues of greatest concern in deliberation methodically.

- To explore how Indian media (film, TV, press, and cyber media) supports or subverts patriarchal models in representing women.
- To study women's labor in media space, i.e., newsroom pyramids, access to leadership, and web-based activism.
- To identify the media representation effect on women's aspiration, political participation, and self-perception.
- To study means of resistance—through feminist critique, alternative platforms, and different narratives—through which agency is negotiated under patriarchal media regime.
- To study the ambivalence of digital media as empowerment platform and harassment space.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been properly constructed in relation to the purpose intended to be served by the study. They have been constructed to gain insight, guide the whole research process, and attain systematic inquiry to allow focused analysis without going off track from the main concerns and issues of this inquiry.

- How are Indian women represented on television, in cinema, news, and advertisements, and how far do these representations perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes?
- What are the cultural and structural constraints that restrict women's participation and leadership roles in Indian media businesses?
- In what ways are media representations constructing women's political ambition, professional presence, and public image?
- How are digital media reshaping women's media agency—as voice possibilities and harassments?
- What are the counter-resistance tactics (e.g., feminist media culture, alternative media outlets, progressive narratives) that are utilized to resist patriarchal storytelling?

### **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative comparative content analysis case study of Indian media—TV soap opera (Anupamaa), film (Thappad, Queen, Dangal), advertisements, and news articles on women leaders (Mamata Banerjee, Smriti Irani). Case studies also include online platforms (Khabar Lahariya, Feminism in India) and journalists (Rana Ayyub, Barkha Dutt). Data will also be

collected from qualitative interviews with women journalists, documentary filmmakers, editors, and activists and policy analysis of Press Council rules, UNESCO programs, and diversity programs in the newsroom. Theoretical backgrounds will be found in feminist media studies, intersectionality (class, caste, gender), and performativity theory by Butler, placing Indian research within a comparative world context (Hollywood film criticism, #MeToo, UN GMMP).

### **Significance of the Study**

The study makes a contribution to feminist media studies by placing India-centric case studies at the forefront of global gender and media debates, offering empirically informed understanding of how patriarchal portrayals affect women's political ambitions and career advancement. The study creates an entry point to media policy reform through the discovery of equal recruitment, anti-harassment policy, and gender-sensitive imagery, and the empowering participatory potential of the digital media in terms of enhanced security and facilitation of participation. As a tool of policy-making, activism, and journalism, it creates the imperative for building gender equality in media.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is geographically bounded, concentrating on urban mainstream and new media but not on rural and regional settings. Its temporal focus (1980s–2020s) might exclude more extended continuities of history. Selection of aging journalists and media managers due to aging or institutionally mediated gatekeeping might limit selection. Feminist and interpretive paradigm application might result in researcher bias. Finally, the examination of digital empowerment might give too much emphasis to elite, English-speaking women's experience at the cost of marginalized voices.

### **Women's Involvement in Media**

Women's involvement in Indian media remains suppressed by sexism, harassment, cultural restraints, and patriarchal newsroom cultures. Asymmetric opportunities for employment and promotion, and weak protective policies, solidify patriarchal institutions (Macharia et al., 2024). Gender-based discrimination in reporting is such that women are assigned to "soft beats" such as lifestyle, health, or education while the men have political and crime beats, excluding women from career advancement (Silveirinha et al., 2023). Though some companies have made some improvements—such as BBC mentorship schemes and Indian initiatives such as UNESCO's Women in News South Asia—systemic imbalances persist (Rattan et al., 2019).

Leadership is strongly gender-biased. Even with a couple of exceptions—editors Barkha Dutt, Nidhi Razdan, and Faye D'Souza more visibility in prime-time news broadcasts—editorial boardrooms and ownership remain predominantly male. Masculine cultures in newsrooms do not accept women's hegemony, opening up hegemonic narratives (Ihejirika, 2017). Women news anchors and editors typically face credibility concerns, their command being questioned in ways that will never even enter the minds of the male complements (Ette & Obong, 2022). Without institutional reform, such as open recruitment and gender-sensitive working environments, leadership gaps are generated (Rattan et al., 2019).

Social media and cyberspace offer other arenas, however, where women circumvent traditional gatekeeping. Indian women journalists, activists, and influencers like Rana Ayyub, Dhanya Rajendran, or feminist collectives such as Feminism in India make use of digital media to speak out, act as activists, and subvert stereotypes. Virtual platforms introduce visibility and resistance (Lupinetti, 2015), while also subjecting women to trolling, doxxing, and gender violence, as seen in the "Bulli Bai" and "Sulli Deals" harassment cases (Macharia et al., 2024). Women are also subjected to new requirements of self-presentation online as they are empowered and susceptible to violent digital spaces (Ramspott et al., 2024). New media thus, as potentially emancipatory, performs patriarchal hierarchies anew.

### **Media Portrayal of Women**

Patriarchal stereotypes are also enhanced by the mainstream and mass media, where women are represented as homemaker, caregiving, and subordinate and men as public and hence perpetuating unequal gender relations (Das, 2014; Ihejirika, 2017). Indian television serials such as *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* or *Anupamaa* daily bind women into homely roles of submissive wife, mother, or victim and hence perpetuate traditional gender roles (Das, 2014). South Asian representations tend to link womanhood with domestic honor, self-control, and modesty, while women in other parts of the world continue to be relegated to passive or unidimensional roles that reinforce inequality (Ihejirika, 2017).

Indian female protagonists in Indian cinema, with the exception of stereotypes, are sexualized and objectified for the viewership male, reduced to decorative beings and incomplete characters (Sascha, 2022). Bollywood "item songs" such as *Munni Badnaam Hui* or *Sheila Ki Jawani* sexualize women's bodies, reinforce thinness and restriction on women's agency. They influence self-concept, normalize unrealistic expectations, and reinforce gender inequality (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). The young women assimilate these images, which are their ideal and make them susceptible (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Sexism exists even in production hierarchies, where the women are under-represented in decision-making roles

within journalism and film (Sascha, 2022). Despite such normative stereotypes, feminist activism and scholarship in India have made possible strong representation.

Queen (2014), Thappad (2020), and Dangal (2016) are some films that feature women with agency, power, and redemptive trajectories that force patriarchal narratives. Indian web series like Delhi Crime and Four More Shots Please! place women in dynamic, assertive roles that challenge conventional gendered assumptions. Current global shift—such as rebooting Disney fairy tales—illustrate how feminist critique and intersectional analysis redefine media representation, in terms of diversity, agency, and women's empowerment (Ihejirika, 2017; Silveirinha et al., 2023; Rodríguez & Figueroa, 2024).

### **Patriarchal Institution in Society and Media**

Media strengthens patriarchy by strengthening masculine viewpoints and omitting females, e.g., in ads, news, and entertainment that enhance gender difference (Ihejirika, 2017). For example, Indian advertisements portray women acting family, care-giving roles—e.g., an advertisement of household items or fairness creams—while men hold authority, financial, and technology positions. Along with Tribunnews.com, where women turn into consumerist, subservient beings (Ihejirika, 2017), the Indian media objectifies the woman's body so much that she is treated as a consumer item and not an agent.

Both television and cinema reinforce male domination in production and narrative. The "item songs" of Bollywood fetishize women's objectification, and mainstream stories reduce women to sacrificial mothers, leaving wives, or love interests, making sexist ideologies ordinary (Sascha, 2022). In liberal cinema, too, women protagonists are characterized by relations with men, taking away their autonomy and reinforcing patriarchal norms.

Politically, women leaders are constructed in the media along lines of domesticity, dress, and femininity at the expense of policy contribution, dismissing them (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018; Fafowora, 2023). Indira Gandhi was also referred to as the "only man in the cabinet," whereas women like Mamata Banerjee and Smriti Irani in the contemporary period are always greeted with sexist headlines over their looks, wedding, or emotionalism rather than ruling. This type of reporting is associated with fewer visibility and political aspirations for women, deepening structural inequalities (Silveirinha et al., 2023).

While patriarchal media practices exist across cultures, they are based on a system of male dominance. In India and South Asia, depictions reinforce modesty values and gendered identities—i.e., television serials romanticize the "ideal bahu" who is sacrificial and submissive (Ihejirika, 2017). In Nigeria, patriarchal constructions are adjusted by women in leadership in compliance with expectations in local cultures (Ihejirika, 2017; Ette & Obong,

2022), whereas Western media construct feminization of states and militarization of men as guardians, gendering scripts naturally (Sztejn, 2017).

### **Negotiating Agency and Resistance**

Indian men-dominated media women negotiate access through networking, diplomacy, and strategic conformity, only balancing subordination and agency (Ihejirika, 2017). Similar to their Nigerian university peers, Indian women journalists and anchors negotiate, and resist hegemonic norms to occupy leadership, narrate stories, and promote gender equality (Ete & Obong, 2022). For example, top anchors like Barkha Dutt and Ravish Kumar's women colleagues explained how women navigate editorial pyramids ruled by men at the top. Gender-sensitive newsroom policies embracing the Press Council of India are lessening bargaining, though patriarchal-hued recruitment and promotional guidelines remain self-limiting and necessitating structural reforms (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Indian media texts are also contested sites, and feminist analysts and campaign campaigners have challenged patriarchal practices—e.g., Bollywood's habit of frequent use of stereotype "item numbers" or women commodification as passive dependents—while provoking counter-discourses (Ihejirika, 2017). Interventions such as the #MeToo campaign within Indian media spaces compelled agencies to redefine workplace cultures, maintaining the double role of the media as both reproducer and critic of gender norms (Byerly, 2012). While stereotyping still exists, recent storytelling on films like *Thappad* (2020) and TV web series like *Delhi Crime* focuses on women's empowerment, thereby bringing about cultural change (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Social media has also facilitated Indian women to construct identity, autonomy, and solidarity beyond the mainstream media. Women journalists, activists, and influencers like Rana Ayyub and Sushmita Dev are present on Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube challenging patriarchal constructions and bringing feminist voices to the forefront (Lupinetti, 2015). Yet, harassment campaigns, trolling, and online violence faced by women politicians and journalists reflect offline inequalities and silence voices (Ramspott et al., 2024). The abuse and trolling of female parliamentarians and reporters, for instance, indicate how invisibility and exploitation undermine empathy. Thus, as important as policies and sentinels such as India's Information Technology Rules 2021 are to making engagement safer, digital media continue to be a powerful platform for agency, resistance, and redefinition of the gender role of women (Macharia et al., 2024).

### **Impact of Representation of Media on Women's Desire and Engagement**

Sexist underrepresentation and stereotypical representation still demoralize women's political aspiration by discrediting their perceived credibility (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018). India's election reporting studies reveal that women candidates receive short shrift, with disproportionate focus on personal lives, dressing, or family backgrounds rather than policy platforms. For example, the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saw extensive media focus on leaders like Smriti Irani's rivalry with Rahul Gandhi, but far less attention to her policy positions. These patterns are consistent with international research that sexist representations discourage women from political engagement, even if there are reservations or quotas, e.g., in India's Panchayati Raj (Silveirinha et al., 2023).

Indian media gender representations also influence role attitudes, aspirations, and body image, reinforcing objectification and constraining women's ambitions (Ihejirika, 2017). Advertising and Bollywood often represent women in stereotypical roles—pleasing others, as sexual objects, or secondary to a male hero—referring to internalized restrictiveness. Long-term stereotypes influence self-esteem and profession choices even if newer stories, like the success stories of women sportspersons Mary Kom and P.V. Sindhu, highlight the redemptive function of future representations (Santonniccolo et al., 2023).

Stereotypical representations limit women's presence in public life. Indian television debates provide a welcome to fewer women experts, and therefore, they yield tokenistic presence and repeat exclusionary modalities. Representative representations, though—such as features about women-headed self-help groups in rural India or political leader profiles about women leaders like Mamata Banerjee and Sonia Gandhi—multiply the voices of women and extend democratic inclusion. As UN Women (2020) depicts, media stands in the middle of either reinforcing or breaking gender bias, with discursive change for the positive coupled with more gender-balanced outcomes (Ette & Obong, 2022).

### **Case Studies: Women, Media, and Patriarchy**

Indian mass media continues to reproduce and reproduce patriarchal norms by keeping women in home, subservient, or victimized positions, affirming gender inequality and limiting their identities (Ihejirika, 2017). The majority of television soaps feature women as obedient wives, mothers, or self-sacrificing women, naturalizing gender hierarchies. Feminist activism has started the revolution of strong characters—e.g., authoritative female protagonists in shows like Delhi Crime or Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo—but Bollywood turns to stereotypes, depicting women in the form of romance objects or male fantasies because of ingrained commercial conventions (Das, 2014). For instance, even in otherwise progressive

films such as *Pink* or *Thappad*, women's autonomy is constructed within a foundation of patriarchal resistance, wallowing in the achievements and ongoing challenges. Women managers and executives within Indian news media similarly face underrepresentation and stereotyping on similar terms to the international patterns.

Reportage on politicians like Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, or Mamata Banerjee accentuates background, personality, or looks prior to policy, a traditional Nigerian media construction of women politicians against their competence (Fafowora, 2023). Indian mass media institutions' hierarchy, from news management to pay inequalities, reiterates patriarchal boundaries, compelling women editors and correspondents to traverse the high wire of visibility and authority in men's domains (Ihejirika, 2017). At the same time, global and cultural patriarchal demands intersect in India uniquely: native gendered discourses of women's domesticity and modesty are intermingled with transnational commercial media rationality, possibility and challenge both. Virtual publics, for example, have opened up spaces of negotiation and opposition, and initiatives such as rural women's news collective *Khabar Lahariya* opposed mainstream exclusion and survived online harassment and gendered violence (Ette & Obong, 2022).

On the other hand, Western media in America has advocated for feminist-led reform through initiatives such as #StrengthHasNoGender and activism conducted by organizations such as the Geena Davis Institute, whose agenda is economic and social return on representative balance (Lee, 2018).

Postmodern feminist critique of Hollywood and Disney follows the trajectory of the representation of women towards increased complexity, agency, and leadership (Ihejirika, 2017; Silveirinha et al., 2023). Despite the extent to which there continue to be challenges being faced around the world, institutional change and cultural intervention announce the end of patriarchal hegemony, if not uneven and problematic in the Indian context.

### **Theoretical Frameworks & Methodologies**

Feminist media studies study how patriarchal discourse forms representations of women in media and how women subvert and negotiate them. Intersectional explanations situate gender in terms of caste and class, more specifically in the case of India's Dalit and tribal women whose presence is firmly outside upper castes. Postmodern feminist critiques invoke the risk of the single story in allusions to the obligation to account for women's lives in their diversity. Gender performativity theories (Goffman) describe how women perform and create identities through active performance with media—e.g., Indian television women journalists negotiating "professional neutrality" with feminine social roles (Ihejirika, 2017; Lupinetti,

2015). Research therefore strives towards nuanced representations eschewing stereotypes (Rodríguez & Figueroa, 2024). Content analysis continues as a useful tool to measure women's presence, roles, and stereotypes in the media.

Global research efforts like Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) illustrate systemic underrepresentation (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018), and Indian studies show the same patterns. E.g., Indian women political leaders in Indian political news are generally described as "wives" or "victims" instead of leaders, a pattern reflected with international media sexism studies. Studies of Indian advertising always reveal gender inequalities: men have loud, assertive voice-overs in commercials on television, and women do household or beauty jobs (Collins, 2011; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). The study offers us clues to measure equality efforts in Indian media. Discourse and ethnographic analysis reveal women's daily lives in newsrooms, revealing workplace cultures constructed by gatekeeper men.

Indian women journalists will be likely to report encountering glass ceilings and "glass cliffs," receiving risky or "soft news" assignments that hinder career advancement (Silveirinha et al., 2023). Interviews and case studies explain women's working agency in predominantly masculine newsrooms, such as older women anchors who are constantly made to build professional value when dealing with their male counterparts (Ihejirika, 2017). Indian media discourse analysis reveals us framing strategies—sensationalized portraits of women politicians or gender violence minimized because they are gendered—that both reinforce bias but also identify points of resistance, as when feminist cyberspaces like Khabar Lahariya positions rural women center front of its politics and deconstructs patriarchal narratives.

### **Challenges and Limitations in Women's Media Negotiation**

In spite of progress, patriarchal values pervade Indian media in the guise of discriminatory hiring practices, restricted career growth possibilities for female journalists, and masculine newsroom environments that mute them (Ihejirika, 2017). The "glass ceiling" persists at management levels—men remain highly represented in Indian large news channels and movie industries. Content and production sexism also naturalizes inequality, such as the way it is commonplace that women are eroticized in Bollywood item numbers or TV debate women anchors occasionally feature without much involvement in decision-making (Macharia et al., 2024). Both overt behavior, like gendered wage gaps, and covert prejudice, like assigning women "soft beats" (lifestyle, health) rather than "hard beats" (politics, defense), demonstrate that patriarchal dismantling happens not only through policy but through culture at a larger scale (Sascha, 2022). Women professionals and decision-makers remain underrepresented in the media, with their presence restricted and their stereotyping

minimized to decrease credibility, political aspiration, and public approval (Silveirinha et al., 2023; Ozer, 2023).

For example, Indian women leaders such as Smriti Irani or Mamata Banerjee are in the news for their personal life, look, or temperament and not for their policies or leadership skills. This uneven attention limits role models for young women, encouraging exclusionary trends that dissuade women from active life (Rattan et al., 2019). Digital spaces, as open as they are to women for participation, subject them to online harassment, misogyny, and threats to reputation.

Indian feminist journalists and commentators like Barkha Dutt and Rana Ayyub also have faced systematic trolling, doxxing, and death threats for putting forth counterarguments. All these incessant vitriol compels women to maintain visibility while exposing themselves to vulnerability and hence become extremely reluctant to engage in online discussions (Ramspott et al., 2024; Lupinetti, 2015). Policies to tackle the same are in the offing, stronger digital illiteracy, and safety mechanisms that can protect women's online presence and agency (Macharia et al., 2024).

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

Women's media agency in India is situated within embedded patriarchal hierarchies, negotiated on the basis of institutional thresholds and biased content practices. Women's underrepresentation as experts, leaders, or credible voices in Indian media reinforces stereotypes and cuts ambition short. For example, women politicians like Mamata Banerjee or Smriti Irani face gendered media framing that mocks their looks or personality over policy engagement. Likewise, women like Ravish Kumar's colleague Nidhi Razdan have spoken about how news pyramids stay exclusionary by putting women in managerial positions or "serious" beats like politics and economics, perpetuating structural disparities. This, in itself, also provides women with a more vocal position but at the cost of holding them back by affirming patriarchal thought (Ihejirika, 2017; Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018; Szein, 2017). Gender equality within Indian media will therefore necessitate gender equality reforms within the realms of equitable hiring practices, senior-level leadership positions, and robust anti-harassment policies—particularly pressing in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement that unveiled sleazy newsroom cultures.

Efforts such as The Hindu's gender-sensitive reporting work shops or Doordarshan's highlighting women achievers give signals of greater inclusion, but much more has to get institutionalized. Not any less important is the representation of women in various empowered positions. Stereotypes are reinforced by widespread media and TV, whereas

positive storytelling—e.g., movies like *Dangal* or series like *Delhi Crime*—portray women as leaders, professionals, and change agents who push against constrictive representations (Macharia et al., 2024; Rattan et al., 2019; Beard et al., 2020). Future studies need to explore the long-term impact of this kind of portrayal on women's political engagement, professional aspirations, and self-perception.

An intersectional analysis is hence needed, especially in India, as religion, class, and caste are intersecting with gender in mediating media representation—e.g., Dalit women politicians like Mayawati are doubly excluded by media. Cross-case analysis across multiple regions and media systems in India—national TV, regional newspaper, and internet—can provide deeper insight into women's negotiation strategies. Similarly, new channels of empowerment through the form of blogs such as *Feminism in India* and social movements such as #SelfieWithDaughter have been opened up by online media, but with attendant risks of internet trolling and abuse, such as the abuse that has been showered on women journalists such as Rana Ayyub. These extremes need to be addressed in order for strong media policies to be formulated that increase women's digital and institutional agency (Ette & Obong, 2022; Ihejirika, 2017).

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