Information of Press Council of Maharashtra

ISSN NO. (Online/E-Journal): 3139-499X | Vol. 1 | Issue 3, July to September 2026

Article 1 | Language: English | Published: July to September 2026

Women in Indian Journalism with Special Reference to Maharashtra: An Empirical and Analytical Study of Expansion, Gender-Based Challenges, Leadership Representation, and Transformative Media Impact

Miss Sania Iliyas Khan

ABSTRACT

The participation, representation, and influence of women in Indian journalism have undergone a remarkable transformation over the past century, evolving from marginal and symbolic involvement to a position of substantial authority, intellectual contribution, and socio-political impact. This transformation is not merely quantitative in terms of increasing numbers but is profoundly qualitative, reflecting a shift in the nature, scope, and depth of journalistic engagement undertaken by women across print, electronic, and digital media platforms. In the context of Maharashtra—one of India's most progressive, industrially developed, and media-rich states—women journalists have emerged as a vital force in shaping public discourse, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring inclusive representation of marginalized voices.

This research-based feature article presents a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of the historical evolution, contemporary roles, regional expansion across districts, structural challenges, legal safeguards, digital transformation, leadership participation, ethical responsibilities, and empowerment potential of women journalists. It particularly emphasizes the district-level engagement of women journalists across Maharashtra, where they actively report on governance, rural development, agriculture, public health, education, environmental sustainability, gender justice, and socio-economic inequalities.

Despite their increasing prominence, women journalists continue to face systemic challenges such as gender discrimination, wage inequality, workplace insecurity, lack of leadership representation, and rising incidents of digital harassment. These challenges necessitate not only robust legal frameworks but also effective institutional mechanisms, policy interventions, and cultural transformation within media organizations. The study concludes that empowering women journalists is essential for strengthening democracy, ensuring accountability,

promoting transparency, and achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

Introduction

Journalism, widely recognized as the fourth pillar of democracy, plays an indispensable role in shaping public opinion, ensuring governmental accountability, promoting transparency, and facilitating informed citizen participation in democratic processes. In India, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) establishes journalism not merely as a profession but as a fundamental democratic function. Within this constitutional and democratic framework, the participation of women in journalism represents a critical advancement toward achieving gender equality, social justice, and inclusive governance.

Historically, Indian society has been characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that limited women's access to education, employment, and public life. Journalism, being a public-facing and often high-risk profession, remained largely male-dominated for decades. However, with the expansion of education, urbanization, economic liberalization, and technological advancements, women have increasingly entered the field of journalism, challenging traditional gender norms and redefining professional boundaries.

In Maharashtra, this transformation is particularly significant due to the state's strong media infrastructure, diverse linguistic landscape, and active civil society. Women journalists in Maharashtra today are not only participants but also leaders, innovators, and change-makers, contributing across multiple domains such as investigative journalism, political reporting, social advocacy, and digital media entrepreneurship. Their growing presence reflects a broader socio-economic shift toward gender inclusivity and empowerment.

Historical Evolution

The journey of women in Indian journalism is deeply intertwined with the country's socio-political evolution. During the pre-independence era, women's participation in journalism was limited but not insignificant. Educated women and social reformers used print media as a tool for advocating women's rights, education, and social reform. These early contributions laid the foundation for future generations of women journalists.

In the post-independence period, the expansion of newspapers, radio broadcasting, and later television opened new avenues for women. However, their roles were often restricted to soft beats such as culture, education, and lifestyle journalism. The turning point came during the economic liberalization of the 1990s, which led to the proliferation of private media channels, increased competition, and greater demand for skilled professionals. This period witnessed a significant increase in the entry of women into mainstream journalism.

The 21st century digital revolution further accelerated this trend by democratizing access to media platforms. Women journalists began to establish independent digital platforms, engage in freelance journalism, and reach global audiences. In Maharashtra, the growth of regional media, especially Marathi journalism, provided additional opportunities for women at grassroots levels, enabling them to connect with local communities and address region-specific issues.

Contemporary Role and Influence

In contemporary India, women journalists occupy a dynamic and influential position within the media ecosystem. Their contributions span across diverse fields, including politics, governance, economy, science, environment, health, education, and human rights. They are actively involved in investigative journalism, conflict reporting, policy analysis, and multimedia storytelling.

Women journalists often bring a unique perspective characterized by empathy, inclusivity, and social awareness. Their reporting tends to focus on marginalized communities, gender issues, and grassroots realities, thereby enriching public discourse and promoting social justice. In Maharashtra, women journalists have played a crucial role in covering issues such as farmer suicides, drought conditions, urban infrastructure challenges, public health crises, and women's safety.

Their influence extends beyond reporting, as they actively participate in shaping narratives, influencing public opinion, and contributing to policy discussions. Through editorials, debates, and digital platforms, women journalists have become key stakeholders in the democratic process.

District-Level Presence in Maharashtra

A defining feature of women journalism in Maharashtra is its extensive reach across all districts, encompassing metropolitan cities, semi-urban regions, rural areas, and tribal belts. From Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur to remote districts such as Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, Chandrapur, and Osmanabad, women journalists are actively engaged in professional journalism with remarkable dedication and resilience.

At the grassroots level, women reporters serve as vital links between local communities and the broader media ecosystem. They report on issues such as agricultural distress, water scarcity, rural healthcare, education gaps, tribal rights, infrastructure development, and government welfare schemes. Their reporting is often grounded in firsthand experience and community engagement, providing authentic and impactful narratives.

Women journalists in Maharashtra operate across multiple languages—Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, and English—ensuring inclusivity and wider reach. The adoption of digital tools, mobile journalism, and social media platforms has further enhanced their ability to report from remote locations and reach diverse audiences.

Despite facing infrastructural limitations, safety concerns, and socio-cultural barriers, women journalists across all districts continue to perform their duties with professionalism, integrity, and commitment, significantly contributing to democratic governance and public awareness.

Structural Challenges

While the progress of women in journalism is commendable, it is accompanied by persistent structural challenges that hinder their full participation and growth. Gender discrimination remains a significant issue, affecting hiring practices, role assignments, promotions, and leadership opportunities. Women are often underrepresented in decision-making positions, reflecting systemic biases within media organizations.

Wage disparity continues to be a critical concern, with many women journalists receiving lower compensation compared to their male counterparts for similar roles. This not only violates legal principles but also undermines professional equality.

Safety concerns are particularly acute for women engaged in field reporting, especially in conflict zones, rural areas, and politically sensitive environments. The rise of digital media has introduced new challenges, including cyber harassment, online trolling, and threats, which can have serious psychological and professional consequences.

Additionally, the demand for irregular working hours, extensive travel, and high-pressure environments creates challenges in maintaining work-life balance. In rural areas, these challenges are compounded by limited access to resources, technology, and institutional support.

Legal Framework and Institutional Safeguards

The legal architecture governing the rights, safety, dignity, and professional equality of women journalists in India is both comprehensive and constitutionally grounded, yet its effectiveness depends largely on implementation, awareness, and institutional accountability. The Constitution of India provides the foundational framework for gender justice through Article 14 (Equality before Law), Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Sex), Article 16 (Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment), and Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression). These provisions collectively establish not only the right of women to participate in journalism but also the obligation of the State and institutions to ensure a non-discriminatory and enabling environment.

In addition to constitutional guarantees, several statutory enactments directly and indirectly protect the rights of women journalists. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) is of particular significance, as it mandates the establishment of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), defines workplace harassment in broad terms, and imposes legal obligations on employers to prevent and redress grievances. Media

organizations, whether print, electronic, or digital, are legally bound to comply with these provisions, failing which they may incur civil and criminal liability.

Furthermore, the Code on Wages, 2019, which subsumes earlier labor laws including the Equal Remuneration Act, reinforces the principle of equal pay for equal work, thereby addressing systemic wage disparities. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 extends protection to workers in terms of safety standards, working conditions, and welfare measures, which are particularly relevant for journalists engaged in field reporting under hazardous conditions.

From a judicial perspective, landmark decisions of the Supreme Court have significantly shaped the legal landscape. In Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997), the Court laid down binding guidelines on workplace sexual harassment, recognizing it as a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, and 21. In Randhir Singh v. Union of India (1982), the Court emphasized that equal pay for equal work is a constitutional goal. Similarly, in Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015), the Court upheld freedom of online expression, which is critical for women journalists operating in digital spaces.

Despite the existence of these robust legal frameworks, the challenge lies in effective enforcement, institutional compliance, and awareness among women journalists regarding their rights. Strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, conducting regular legal awareness programs, and ensuring accountability of media organizations are essential steps towards realizing substantive equality.

. Digital Era and Emerging Opportunities

The advent of the digital age has fundamentally redefined the structure, accessibility, and dynamics of journalism, creating unprecedented opportunities for women to participate, innovate, and lead within the media ecosystem. Digital platforms have effectively dismantled traditional gatekeeping mechanisms that once limited entry into journalism, thereby enabling women to establish independent voices through blogs, podcasts, video journalism, and social media-based reporting.

One of the most significant advantages of digital journalism is the flexibility it offers in terms of work structure, allowing women to engage in freelance journalism, remote reporting, and entrepreneurial ventures. This flexibility is particularly beneficial in addressing challenges related to work-life balance, enabling women to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal commitments.

Moreover, digital tools such as mobile journalism (MoJo), data journalism, multimedia storytelling, and real-time reporting have enhanced the scope and impact of journalistic work. Women journalists are increasingly leveraging these tools to produce high-quality, data-driven, and visually engaging content that reaches diverse audiences across geographical and socio-economic

boundaries.
However, the digital transformation also presents new challenges, including the rapid spread of misinformation, increased competition, and heightened exposure to online harassment. The absence of robust regulatory frameworks for digital media further complicates issues related to accountability and ethical standards.
Therefore, while the digital era offers immense opportunities for empowerment and innovation, it simultaneously necessitates the development of digital literacy, ethical awareness, and cybersecurity measures among women journalists. Institutional support in the form of training programs, technological access, and legal protection is essential to maximize the benefits of digital journalism.

Leadership, Representation, and Institutional Participation
Despite the increasing participation of women in journalism, their representation in leadership and decision-making positions remains disproportionately low, reflecting a persistent “glass ceiling” within media organizations. Women are often underrepresented in roles such as editors-in-chief, news directors, media owners, and policy-makers, which limits their influence over editorial direction, content prioritization, and institutional governance.
From a governance and policy perspective, the inclusion of women in leadership positions is not merely a matter of representation but a fundamental requirement for ensuring diversity, inclusivity, and balanced decision-making. Studies have consistently shown that gender-diverse leadership leads to more comprehensive, ethical, and socially responsible journalism.
To address this disparity, media organizations must adopt proactive measures, including gender-inclusive recruitment policies, transparent promotion criteria, leadership training programs, and mentorship initiatives. Additionally, institutional mechanisms such as gender audits, diversity reporting, and accountability frameworks can play a crucial role in monitoring progress and ensuring compliance.
Legal principles of equality and non-discrimination, as enshrined in the Constitution, further reinforce the need for equitable representation. The absence of women in leadership roles may not only reflect institutional bias but also raise concerns regarding compliance with constitutional mandates and labor laws.
Encouraging women’s participation in media unions, professional associations, and regulatory bodies is also essential for strengthening their collective voice and influence within the industry. Ultimately, achieving gender parity in leadership is critical for transforming the media landscape into a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic space.

Ethical Journalism, Gender Sensitivity, and Social Responsibility

Ethical journalism forms the cornerstone of a democratic society, requiring adherence to principles of truth, accuracy, fairness, and accountability. Women journalists have played a significant role in strengthening these ethical standards, particularly through their emphasis on sensitivity, human dignity, and social justice.

Their reporting often focuses on issues such as gender-based violence, child rights, human trafficking, social inequality, and marginalized communities, thereby bringing attention to areas that may otherwise be overlooked. This approach not only enhances the depth and quality of journalism but also contributes to informed public discourse and policy development.

Gender-sensitive journalism requires careful consideration of language, representation, and context, ensuring that reporting does not perpetuate stereotypes, discrimination, or victimization. Women journalists have been at the forefront of promoting such practices, advocating for responsible reporting that respects privacy, dignity, and human rights.

Furthermore, ethical journalism in the digital age requires vigilance against misinformation, sensationalism, and the misuse of technology. Women journalists, particularly those engaged in digital media, play a crucial role in maintaining credibility and trust by adhering to fact-checking standards and ethical guidelines.

Institutional frameworks such as the Norms of Journalistic Conduct issued by the Press Council of India provide guidance on ethical practices; however, their effective implementation depends on individual commitment and organizational culture.

Women Empowerment through Journalism: A Transformative Paradigm

The increasing participation of women in journalism represents a broader process of social transformation and empowerment, wherein women are not merely participants but active agents of change. Journalism provides a powerful platform for women to voice concerns, challenge systemic inequalities, and advocate for policy reforms.

Through investigative reporting, opinion writing, and public engagement, women journalists contribute to raising awareness on critical issues such as gender discrimination, domestic violence, workplace harassment, and socio-economic inequality. Their work often leads to tangible outcomes, including policy changes, legal reforms, and increased public awareness.

In the context of Maharashtra and across India, women journalists at the grassroots level play a crucial role in amplifying local issues, thereby bridging the gap between marginalized communities and policy-makers. Their contributions are instrumental in strengthening democratic accountability and promoting inclusive development.

Empowerment through journalism also has a multiplier effect, inspiring future generations of women to pursue careers in media and other professional fields. It fosters confidence, independence, and leadership, thereby contributing to the overall socio-economic development of

society.

However, for journalism to serve as an effective tool of empowerment, it is essential to ensure access to education, training, resources, and institutional support for women. Addressing structural barriers and ensuring gender equality within the media industry are critical prerequisites for achieving this objective.

Conclusion

The evolution of women in journalism in Maharashtra represents a powerful narrative of resilience, transformation, and empowerment. From limited participation to widespread influence across all districts, women journalists have significantly contributed to strengthening democratic values, promoting transparency, and ensuring inclusive representation.

However, achieving true gender equality in journalism requires sustained efforts to address structural challenges, enforce legal protections, promote leadership opportunities, and create a supportive and inclusive work environment. The future of journalism in Maharashtra—and India as a whole—depends on the active participation, empowerment, and leadership of women.

A gender-inclusive media landscape is not only a matter of equality but also a necessity for ensuring balanced, ethical, and responsible journalism that serves the interests of all sections of society.

Keywords

Women in Journalism, Indian Media, Maharashtra Journalism, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Media Ethics, Digital Journalism, Rural Journalism, District-Level Reporting, Press Freedom, Gender Bias in Media, Workplace Safety, POSH Act 2013, Equal Pay, Media Leadership, Women in Digital Media, Mobile Journalism (MoJo), Social Impact Journalism, Investigative Reporting, Media and Democracy, Cyber Harassment, Online Trolling, Media Law in India, Regional Journalism, Inclusive Media, Grassroots Reporting, Public Awareness, Social Justice Reporting, Media Transformation, Women Leadership in Media

© 2026 Press Council of Maharashtra. All rights reserved. | Information of Press Council of Maharashtra, Vol. 1 | Issue 3

Downloaded: 01 Nov 2026, 3:20 PM IST