

## Exploring the Role of Media in Women's Political Empowerment

– G Uma

Assistant Professor, School of Gender and Development Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

 [guma@ignou.ac.in](mailto:guma@ignou.ac.in)  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7629-0604>

– Ramesh Yadav\*

Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and New Media Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

 [rameshyadav@ignou.ac.in](mailto:rameshyadav@ignou.ac.in)  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3535-0110>



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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** There is less attention on the role of media in shaping women's role for making local governments vibrant and deepening democracy among every segment of the people in the Indian society. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments passed in 1993 by providing 50 per cent reservation of seats for women in rural and urban governments. In the meantime, Beijing Platform for action 1994 addressed the role and responsibility of media to bring positive news about women in governance and passed the resolution on the same. By looking at the existing decisions, the purpose of the study is to discuss explicitly the role of media in encouraging and sustaining women's representation in the local governments to address the concerns of gender issues and making local governments vibrant institutions for deepening democracy.

**Research Design/ Methodology:** The existing Covid situation made the authors to use existing data and resources in the form of books and journals to explore media, gender and governance. We used electronic databases to draw the data. The authors extensively referred to UNICEF resources for Gender and Media and UN Women for Gender and Governance. The significance of increasing women representation in media and governance was understood through various scholarly articles to understand Gender, Media and Governance.

**Findings:** In the 21st century, significant changes have happened in India. The economy has been globalized, and politics has been localized. In this crucial juncture, the media tried to impose the existing gender roles on women to make the women realize the significance of care work. This needs to be addressed by sensitizing the entire media. Women can be portrayed positively. Not only bringing more stories on women, but it is also the role of media to recruit more females to make the entire media space gender just. Market and liberalized economy impose already existing gender roles on women to sustain private space. This will help males to work in the market-based economy. Media being part of the market economy, may not realize the ideology of neoliberal economic policies and act as the market to impose existing gender roles on women. Media, an important social institution, has a significant role in deepening democracy.

**Originality/Value:** The critical mass theory proposed to balance both genders in organizations and institutions. The existing data discussed in this paper showed that women do not represent the media organizations well. This needs to be addressed by the media to bring gender-sensitive stories and news items. The study conducted by UN Women pointed out that women journalists mainly cover women issues. Male Journalists need to be gender sensitized to present news items and stories sensitively. Increasing women's representation in local boy institutions is a significant affirmative action. Media is the only significant institution to bring positive changes about women leadership and the significance of deepening democracy.

**Paper Type:** Research Thought

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\*Corresponding Author (Ramesh et Al)

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## Introduction

The passage of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA), 1992 ([india.gov.in](http://india.gov.in)) provided legitimate space for women to be actively involved in the day-to-day affairs of the local governments. The Act has opened the opportunities for women to exercise their right to be involved in village governance by contesting elections legitimately, participating in the gram sabha meetings and raising the issues related to gender, ensuring the integration of women's concerns in all policies and programmes and getting opportunity to identify and manage natural resources.

The acts and other initiatives are taken at Fourth World Conference on Women 1994 in Beijing, Gender and Development Approach, Rights-Based Approach paved the way for the government to formulate appropriate policies and programmes from gender-transformative way, and women got legitimate space in public policies, especially in the local government institutions. The Fourth World Conference on Women under action, equality, development, and peace was resolved to address women's concerns in media (<https://www.unwomen.org/en>). The Strategic Objective (J1) further stated the significance of increasing women's participation in all decision making and making ways for women to express their ideas freely through media and new technologies of communication. The Strategic Objective (J2) stated the significance of promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media (<https://www.unwomen.org/en>).

## Methodology

We used secondary resources in the form of books and journals to explore media, gender and governance. We used electronic databases such as research gate, Proquest, JStor, Google Scholar. The authors extensively referred to UNICEF resources on Gender and Media and UN Women on Gender and Governance. The significance of increasing women representation in media and governance was understood through various scholarly articles, and the significance of formulation of Public policy using the concept and theoretical understanding of Gender, Media and Governance was further explored through this present paper.

## Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

The opportunities created to involve women in governance in Panchayati raj institutions are slowly and surely impacting grassroots governance (Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra and Esther Duflo, 2004). We can tell that the foundations have been laid to extend this social revolution to all levels of decision-making. India has 12.6 per cent of the elected representatives in their Parliament ([ipu.org](http://ipu.org)). The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> CAA enactment facilitated many women in rural and urban local bodies. Local governments are perceived to be close to people, and they could bring positive changes

in the lives of livelihoods of the people. Local governments have existed before the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA in rural areas. But it has existed with the support of State governments in India. The elections are held for Panchayats only if State governments are sensitive enough to realize the significance of Local Governments before enacting the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA. There was no reservation for women and marginalized communities before the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA. But, the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA gave constitutional status to the panchayats with the following significance. As India called as Panchayati Raj System (Local Governments at the rural areas), a Uniform three-tier system was created with district Panchayats/ Zilla Parishad, Block level (Panchayat Samiti) and Village level (Gram Panchayats). The Act also created opportunities to establish a finance commission and Election commission to conduct elections regularly and allocate necessary finances to address the needs of the local people.

Gram Panchayat needs to conduct gram sabha a minimum of two times a year to discuss the overall development of the panchayats in all aspects. Constitutional guarantee to conduct regular elections also helped the panchayats to fill the vacant seats within six months if Seats became vacant. It was 33.3 per cent of seats reserved for initial years for women, and later it was extended to 50 per cent for women. Reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) was made according to the proportion to their populations. State Government transferred certain functions and functionaries to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. There are 2,53,268 Gram Panchayats in India. In that 1292203 elected as women representatives in Gram Panchayats.

## Women in Governance and Critical Mass Theory

Various theories discussed the significance of increasing women's representation in governance at various levels, from local self-governments to Parliament. The critical mass theory has discussed balancing genders at various decision-making bodies to bring gender-sensitive planning and policymaking. Researchers from multiple disciplines have applied the concept of critical mass in different ways in their work in the past three decades. It has gained significance in both social sciences and management disciplines to improve women's representation at various levels to bring gender-just policies, programmes and decisions (Sandra Gey, 2001).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter first introduced the concept of the critical mass. She tried to conceptualize the concept of critical mass by studying fortune 500 companies to explore token behaviour. According to her 1976 study among fortune 500 companies, she concluded. If any company / organization consists of Uniformed groups with only one kind of person (either male or female), it has one significant social type. Unlike Uniformed groups, Skewed Groups have an immense preponderance of one type over another, up to a ratio of perhaps 85:15. Tilted Groups don't get dominated by



one group. The decisions taken by the tilted group does not significantly affect any group. In this situation, with a ratio of perhaps 65:35, dominants are just a majority and token a minority. Balanced at a typological ratio of about 60:50 to 50:50, the group becomes balanced (Sarah Childs and Mona Leena Krook. 2005).

The study carried out using critical mass theory/concept came to a conclusion and proposed the reasons for women's active and passive participation in politics and organizational decision-making. Thus, it is crucial to growing from a few token individuals to significant numbers at all levels and institutions and organizations. Once the percentage of women increases in organizations and politics, women will effectively work for changing organizational policy climates to bring gender-just policies. They can also influence male colleagues to support and promote gender-friendly organizational culture (Sandra Grey, 2001).

Along with improving women representation, it is significant to bring gender sensitivity among males and females. Society already socialized in a certain way by imposing gender roles for both genders. It is crucial to socialize in a gender-sensitive manner among males and females to bring expected changes. Tremblay and Pelletiers's study of Canadian Legislative candidates concludes that an increase in feminist attitudes is more significant than simply adding to the number of women in the legislature. Gendered political institutions are unlikely to change significantly without a broader social transformation. What is required is not a critical mass of women but a critical mass of feminists.

According to the study conducted by Drude Dahlerup, the changes are expected when the percentage of women increases in a particular proportion. This includes bringing renewed and feminism in political discourses, a suitable environment for all in political life, gender-sensitive policy, cultural attitudes, and behaviour.

By looking at the critical mass theory, this paper is concerned with two institutions—one media. Media is an important social institution to bring certain perceptions among the masses. There are various media exits in the 21st century. We need to see whether women's percentage in media organizations is high and whether women can bring stories and news gender-sensitive manner? Secondly, the critical mass of women representatives formed at the Panchayati Raj institutions through two radical amendments to the Constitution of India. The Indian state has taken affirmative action by introducing minimum quotas for women in rural and urban local bodies. However, most of the women came to power with gender-related handicaps. These include illiteracy, lack of exposure to governance, familial responsibility, social and cultural factors, a poor image of women's leadership. Women's poor performance and inability to build power have severe criticism.

## Media and Gender

Media is to be significant social institutions to create a perception about issues among the masses. It is an important platform. In the era of digital media, there are various kinds of media, including print and electronic media. Cinema is also a critical medium to create perception. In this paper, the author limits her discussion to print, electronic, and social media. When the government brings significant legislation and policies, the media provides necessary information about the particular policies and programmes. Media can create certain perceptions among the masses on policies and programmes. The existing studies pointed out the lack of women voices in the popular media (Gender Inequality in Indian Media: A Preliminary Analysis 2019).

The UN Women, in collaboration with digital media platform Newslaudry and Team Work Arts, studied 55 news organizations which included 14 television channels, 13 newspapers, 12 magazines, 11 digital media websites, and five radio stations operating in 10 cities found that only 13.6 per cent of the women held leadership positions in magazines and 0.9 per cent of women occupied a leadership position in news channels. The percentage of women journalists in English newspapers was around 30 per cent (it was 29.4 per cent in Hindustan Times; 28.5 per cent in The Indian Express; 22.1 per cent in Times of India; 22 per cent in Economic Times; 21.9 per cent in The Hindu, and 18.2 per cent in The Telegraph). The study further revealed that women predominantly write articles related to gender issues. Among those articles, women journalists in Times of India wrote nearly 76.2 per cent of articles related to gender. The coverage of gender issues in Hindi newspapers is in a dismal scenario. The study examined 205 Hindi newspaper articles. Of which only three per cent covered gender issues.

Regarding television debates, a negligible percentage of women comprise panellists in TV debates. Debates related to gender issues in television channels are 3. Per cent, In that women constituted 47.8 per cent (Gender Inequality in Indian Media: A Preliminary Analysis 2019).

The study conducted by UNICEF, 2021 enough though brought positive findings by concluding that girls and women are well-represented as characters (49.6%) and dominate screen time (59.7%) and speaking time (56.3%). However, we need to ponder these findings further. In advertisements, girls and women primarily sell domestic and beauty products to target female consumers (UNICEF, 2021). Like other social institutions, media and advertisements reflect existing patriarchal notions by imposing gender roles. The presence of women in certain advertisements and giving less space for gender issues in print, digital electronic media may reinforce gender socialization. Instead of bringing positive changes among the younger generation, norms are problematic, intergenerational transfer of gender roles. It is challenging to find empowering role models for the younger generation.

If media imposes care work is essential for women, it may impact the younger generation. They may not prefer politics and paid work. They may consider paid work and politics are male space.

## The Existing Reality in Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

This paper analyses the role of media in bringing more women into local bodies and media institutions by keeping the above theoretical understanding as to the base. This may help society change public spaces' perception, and more women voluntarily occupy the position. The existing theory says that once women come to the position, delivery goods and services change between men and women. Men concentrate more on creating assets like building and road construction. In turn, women concentrate more on soft resources like improving accessibility of health facilities, ensuing more children to enrol on schools and addressing practical gender needs like food, water supply etc. (Palanithurai G.2001). Secondly, when women discharge their duties, they face numerous problems both in public and private spaces.

Even though the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act provided opportunities for women to participate in activities and become leaders of rural local bodies in the governing and decision-making process, it is imperative to recognize the true nature of the social inequalities and disabilities that hamper them. Women participated at the local level as self-help members and co-option members of Panchayats before 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA as tokenism. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA, women occupied leadership positions, and they were expected to perform various activities with less support from various fronts. They could exercise their political power to bring meaningful changes in their constituency—the critical mass of women in the political institutions expected to perform critical functions. Therefore, the development process will take a new turn and women's participation in governance will produce far-reaching implications in the people's lives. The reservation for women has provided numerous opportunities for women and other marginalized groups to influence governance and the public institutions for the benefit of women and marginalized sections of society. Affirmative action taken by the government in providing reservations for women is a significant decision in contemporary India. Through affirmative action as political representatives, more than a million women are directly part of the Panchayati Raj institutions. Women came to power irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds with certain limitations due to their gender. The existing studies pointed out that they face numerous problems every front of women. It is a challenge for the country to make the necessary conditions for women to work freely and fairly to make the existing institutions gender just one and change existing gender relations.

Being an important social institution, it is the responsibility of the media to create a significant opinion among the

masses on reservations and reasons for increasing women's representation in local bodies. The existing studies pointed out the numerous problems women face at various levels, and they were never considered leaders of the institutions. Women who came to occupy leadership positions have their vision for their constituency even though social institutions failed to recognize their capacity. At the same time, they face numerous problems due to the existing patriarchy. Women represent half of the country's population. It is essential to include and provide political participation at the grassroots level, crucial for democratic decentralization. The political process at the national and sub-national levels has limited women's opportunities in the electoral process. They exercise their agencies at the national and sub-national level elections. With the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> CAA extension, the Indian Parliament first introduced the Bill on September 12, 1996, to provide reservations for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The Bill aimed to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies for 15 years on a rotational basis. The Bill was reintroduced in the Parliament in 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003. Finally, the Bill lapsed in 2004. The government of India introduced a newer version of the women's reservation bill in 2008, proposing—third of the seats would be reserved for SC/ST Women. It was passed in Rajyasabha in 2010, pending with Loksabha (Behan Box).

Furthermore, patriarchy and socio-economic marginalization have driven women into the backwaters of politics. In other words, half of the population was denied the fundamental human right of participation in political institutions. In the above situation, 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA is important. Women are dealing with power relations in their daily lives through their coping strategies at socio-cultural and economic levels. Even though the common perception of formal politics fails to include women, politics in various forms and manifestations is present in women's daily lives. This may be attributed to the patriarchal system and the socio-cultural-economic and religious norms and practices. Women have been excluded from the political power structures, which has resulted in inequitable sharing of resources.

The ideology of division of labour forces women to be confined to the private sphere of life and restricts women's very existence within domestic roles as wives and mothers. Male hegemony prevails in the decision-making process in the private and the public sectors. Politics should be a democratic, participatory, accountable and transparent means of a just, humane and equitable society. The political system should incorporate the interests of and be accessible to all sections of society of which women constitute half. High cost of electioneering, improper and illegal practices, violence and corruption are some of the reasons that prevent women from participating in politics.

In South Asia, the public/private divide is constituted and operated in gendered terms. Masculinity is associated with public spaces; private spaces like home are associated



with femininity. The process of gender socialization starts once the child is born. Girls and boys are socialized in a certain way, and society makes them act in feminine and masculine ways—the nature of every activity in public and private spaces designed in a certain way. Girls and women are expected to take on specific activities, and boys and males are expected to take up certain activities. If girls/ Women cross the existing boundaries designed by the various social institutions, they may be doing certain illegitimate activities. They might face the consequences. The existing notion in the social institutions about politics is masculine, and males are suitable to take up politics as a profession. This makes women hesitate to take up activities. Complying with the prescriptions of good behaviour translates as confining oneself to the domestic realm, desisting from association with men outside the prescribed kin group and ensuring that one is not implicated in any activity that may be scripted as immodest therefore immoral. This restriction has significant consequences for women's material independence and access to education, determining entry into public spaces and essentially locating women as autonomous citizens complementary to their position within their families and communities. Its implications for women as political actors are debilitating. To expose oneself outside the domestic space may place one's reputation at risk. This argument is also employed to blame women who are sexually harassed or assaulted while engaging in non-domestic activity and justify such violence.

The tensions inherent in the sexual division of labour and the attendant boundaries of private and public may also be implicated in the community–state relation. While devolving power to communities, the state could resist considering that women are better placed than men to manage essential resources such as potable water. The existing studies pointed out that elected women representatives at the Gram Panchayat level can address the practical gender needs like water, health, education and concentrate on soft infrastructure.

Many women in Panchayat established their capability to address the concerns of ordinary people, and leadership capacity is established.

Though women enter the public sphere (through nationalist struggles or revolutionary movements, for instance) and actively participate in it, there is nothing immutable about this. They frequently retreat into the more secluded private sphere – either because the state and the law force them to do so or because patriarchal ideology in society re-asserts itself. Meanwhile, the globalization of the economy has exerted different types of impacts on Indian women at different levels with differences of intensity. Likewise, the localization of the political process will impact the lives of women. The negative impact of globalization can not be overcome by localization of the political process if women are not correctly oriented, trained, capacitated, conscientious and associated. The enhancement of the overall empowerment of women to

draw women into the public space could be achieved through localization of the political process.

The globalization process has driven various social groups into poverty, and the poverty alleviation task has become quite complicated. Further, all the routes to access resources for women, impoverished women, have been closed as the market-driven approach has taken away all the shared resources. In the competitive market process, women's rights and the marginalized sections are the casualties. How to protect their rights enshrined in the Constitution and secure their livelihood are the major issues being faced by the women in the thick of the women's movement.

The decentralization process has opened up opportunities for women and other marginalized groups to influence the allocation of government and community resources in their favour and protect and promote their women rights. However, there are a variety of barriers to women hailing from the marginalized sections exercising their powers. It is challenging to work for women's social, economic, and political empowerment, particularly those from marginalized sections. No doubt, it is necessary to work to empower women for which the oppressive power of the existing gender relations is to be exposed and challenged. Further, gender relations have to be reshaped (Reference). This exercise could be started at the level of the Elected Women Representatives of rural local bodies as they constitute a critical mass since one-third of seats have been reserved for women. The critical mass will perform the critical function only if they are oriented, conscientious and trained in the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender relations.

Findings and Conclusion (Role of Media in improving women representation as well as sustaining women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Media itself

In the 21st century, significant changes have happened in India. The economy has been globalized, and politics has been localized. In this crucial juncture, media can act as an agent of change by bringing stories regularly on women leadership to change the perception in the society. They can also regularly publish the role models and change agents to provide confidence among women to participate in politics. The notion of patriarchy and the existing gender roles have had an enormous impact on women. The media tried to impose the existing gender roles on women to make the women realize the significance of care work. This needs to be addressed by sensitizing the entire media. Women can be portrayed positively. Not only bringing more stories on women, but it is also the role of media to recruit more females to make the entire media space gender just. The globalized economy operates to maximize the profit in the market. Market and liberalized economy impose already existing gender roles on women to sustain private space. This will help males to work in the market-based economy.

Media being part of the market economy, may not realize the ideology of neoliberal economic policies and act as the market to impose existing gender roles on women. Media, an important social institution, plays a significant role in deepening democracy.

### Originality/Value

The critical mass theory proposed to balance both genders in organizations and institutions. The existing data discussed in this paper showed that women do not represent the media organizations well. This needs to be addressed by the media to bring gender-sensitive stories and news items. The study conducted by UN Women pointed out that women journalists mainly cover women issues. Male Journalists need to be gender sensitized to present news items and stories sensitively. Increasing women's representation in local boy institutions is a significant affirmative action. The existing patriarchal attitudes in society make women face gender-based problems and gender-based violence. The patriarchal society in India is reluctant to consider women as a political leader. Media is the only significant institution to bring positive changes about women leadership and the significance of deepening democracy.

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### GJEIS Prevent Plagiarism in Publication

The Editorial Board had used the Ouriginal – a Swedish anti-plagiarism software tool which is a fully-automatic machine learning text-recognition system made for detecting, preventing and handling plagiarism and trusted by thousands of institutions across worldwide. Urkund is GDPR compliant with privacy by design and an uptime of 99.9% and have trust to be the partner in academic integrity. <https://www.orkund.com>] tool to check the originality and further affixed the similarity index which is {7%} in this case (See below Annexure-I). Thus, the reviewers and editors are of view to find it suitable to publish in this Volume-13, Issue-3, July-Sep 2021

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### Reviewers Memorandum



**Reviewer's Comment 1:** The paper is based on a quite interesting theme. It discusses the role of media in encouraging and sustaining women's representation in the local governments to address the concerns of gender issues and making local governments vibrant institutions for deepening democracy.

**Reviewer's Comment 2:** The paper is descriptive in nature. It has been divided into various sections namely Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women in Governance and Critical Mass Theory, Media and Gender & others and the authors have given proper explanation to each section.

**Reviewer's Comment 3:** The paper is comprehensive in nature. It talks about all the related aspects. Also, it is well structured and author has provided important references by which readers can gain detailed knowledge on the subject matter. Overall, the paper offers a strong basis for further study in the area.



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### Editorial Excerpt



The article has 02% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for the publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the author (Uma) and accordingly all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "Exploring the Role of Media in Women's Political Empowerment" both subject-wise and research-wise. The present research article discusses explicitly the role of media in encouraging and sustaining women's representation in the local governments to address the concerns of gender issues and making local governments vibrant institutions for deepening democracy. Overall, the paper promises to provide a strong base for the further studies in the area. After comprehensive reviews and editorial board's remarks the manuscript has been categorized and decided to publish under "Research thought" category

### Acknowledgement



The acknowledgement section is an essential part of all academic research papers. It provides appropriate recognition to all contributors for their hard work and effort taken while writing a paper. The data presented and analyzed in this paper by (Uma and Ramesh) were collected first handily and wherever it has been taken the proper acknowledgment and endorsement depicts. The author is highly indebted to others who had facilitated in accomplishing the research. Last but not least endorse all reviewers and editors of GJEIS in publishing in a present issue.

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