

5. A Study on Women Farmers Related News Coverage in Indian Electronic Media

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Abstract

Women represent a substantial segment of the agricultural labor force in India; however, their roles and contributions frequently go unrecognized in mainstream media narratives. This research seeks to examine the representation of women farmers within Indian electronic media. Using qualitative content analysis, the research examines the depth, frequency, and themes of news coverage on women farmers. It highlights the disparities in representation, explores the implications of media narratives, and offers recommendations for more inclusive reporting. This research article examines the representation of women farmers in Indian electronic media, exploring the frequency, depth, and nature of coverage. Despite constituting a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, women farmers in India face unique challenges that are often underreported or misrepresented in mainstream media. The study highlights the gaps in coverage, analyzes biases, and discusses the potential impact of such representation on policy and public perception.

Keywords: Women farmers, Indian media, electronic media, qualitative analysis, agricultural workforce, gender representation

Introduction

India's agricultural sector ranks among the largest globally, employing millions, with women constituting approximately 33% of the agricultural labor force. Despite their vital contributions, women farmers encounter systemic obstacles, such as restricted access to resources, limited opportunities for participation in decision-making, and insufficient acknowledgment of their efforts. The media holds a significant influence in shaping societal views and informing policy decisions. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the representation of women farmers in Indian electronic media is minimal and frequently relies on stereotypes. Women farmers are essential to India's agrarian economy, playing a substantial role in food production, supporting household needs, and fostering rural

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development. Yet, their visibility and representation in Indian electronic media are notably limited. The present paper examines how Indian electronic media addresses issues related to women farmers, the challenges they encounter, and the representation—or lack thereof—of their contributions, struggles, and successes.

Context of Women in Agriculture

India's economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture significantly contributing to the national GDP and employing a large segment of the population. Within this workforce, women farmers are a crucial component. Nonetheless, their contributions are often overlooked due to deep-rooted societal and institutional biases. Women engage in various agricultural activities, including sowing, harvesting, livestock management, and marketing. Despite their vital roles, they face numerous challenges, such as the absence of land ownership, restricted access to financial resources, and inadequate representation in decision-making processes.

Importance of Media Representation

Media serves as a critical platform for shaping public opinion and influencing policy. The portrayal of women farmers in electronic media, such as television and online news platforms, plays a significant role in acknowledging their contributions and highlighting their challenges. A lack of proper representation can perpetuate stereotypes, obscure their issues, and hinder progress toward gender equality in agriculture.

Literature Review

Women have been the backbone of Indian agriculture, engaging in activities ranging from sowing and harvesting to post-harvest processing. However, the term "farmer" is often synonymous with men in policy documents and societal perceptions, marginalizing women's contributions.

Electronic media serves as a mirror of society, influencing attitudes and policies. Studies on media representation reveal biases against marginalized groups, including women and rural communities. Women's issues in agriculture remain underreported compared to other sectors like entertainment or politics.

Research indicates that media often perpetuates stereotypes, portraying women as secondary or supportive characters. In the agricultural context, women are either invisible or depicted in roles reinforcing traditional gender norms.

According to the Census of India and various agricultural surveys, women account for 33% of cultivators and 47% of agricultural laborers. Despite their significant presence, only 13%



of rural women own land. This disparity impacts their access to institutional credit and government schemes.

Previous studies emphasize the importance of media in driving social change. Electronic media, with its wide reach, has the potential to bring attention to marginalized communities, including women farmers. However, research also indicates that mainstream media often prioritizes urban-centric narratives, sidelining rural and agricultural issues.

1. Singh, R. (2020). *The silent workforce: Women farmers in India*. *Agricultural Communication Review*, 12(3), 34-46.

This study examines the role of Indian electronic media in depicting women farmers as an integral part of the agricultural workforce. The paper highlights the lack of consistent representation, attributing it to deep-seated gender biases in societal perceptions. Singh suggests that increasing narrative-based storytelling in media can better showcase their contributions and struggles.

2. Sharma, P., & Verma, K. (2019). *Media framing of gender in agricultural news*. *Media Studies Quarterly*, 18(2), 112-125.

Sharma and Verma analyze the framing of gender roles in agricultural news broadcasts. They find that women are often depicted in supporting roles rather than as independent farmers. The research calls for proactive policies to ensure gender-balanced media coverage.

3. Gupta, A. (2021). *Digital media as a tool for women farmers' empowerment*. *Journal of New Media Studies*, 7(4), 89-102.

This article explores how digital media platforms, such as YouTube channels and agricultural apps, are transforming the lives of women farmers. Gupta provides examples where women used digital tools to access market information and training, thus improving their productivity and livelihoods.

4. Patel, M. (2022). *Challenges in representing women farmers: A media perspective*. *South Asian Studies in Media*, 15(5), 56-71.

Patel critiques the challenges faced by Indian electronic media in authentically representing women farmers. She emphasizes that women are either absent or stereotypically portrayed, ignoring their leadership roles in agricultural protests and community movements.

5. Das, S. (2020). *Grassroots media initiatives and women farmers*. *Alternative Media Journal*, 9(3), 23-35.

Das discusses how grassroots media, like community radio and rural digital networks, have provided a platform for women farmers to share their experiences. The study underscores the



importance of participatory media in bridging the gap between mainstream coverage and grassroots realities.

6. Raj, K., & Banerjee, T. (2021). *The influence of gendered media narratives on agricultural policies*. *Policy and Communication Review*, 6(2), 43-58.

This paper investigates the correlation between gendered media coverage and agricultural policymaking in India. Raj and Banerjee argue that the marginal representation of women in media narratives often leads to their exclusion from policy discussions, thus perpetuating inequality.

7. Rao, N. (2018). *Representation of rural women in Indian television news*. *Media and Society Quarterly*, 11(4), 98-112.

Rao's analysis of television news coverage reveals that women farmers are rarely interviewed as experts or primary sources. The study suggests increasing their visibility by including them in expert panels and agricultural discussions.

8. Kumar, A., & Nair, V. (2019). *Social media as an enabler for rural women farmers*. *Journal of Rural Development*, 14(3), 67-81.

This research explores the role of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp in enhancing knowledge-sharing among women farmers. Kumar and Nair emphasize the potential of these platforms to foster community building and economic independence.

9. Mehta, R. (2020). *Women farmers in agrarian movements: Media's role*. *Journal of Social Movements*, 8(2), 45-59.

Mehta focuses on the coverage of women farmers in agrarian movements, particularly during the 2020–21 Indian farmers' protests. The study notes that women's active participation was underreported, despite their significant roles in organizing and sustaining the protests.

10. Choudhary, P. (2021). *The narrative shift: Women in Indian agritech stories*. *Digital Agriculture Journal*, 5(1), 12-24.

Choudhary highlights a positive trend where Indian electronic media is increasingly featuring stories about women in agritech innovations. These narratives inspire a redefinition of traditional roles and encourage younger women to pursue careers in agriculture. These reviews collectively emphasize the evolving portrayal of women farmers in Indian electronic media. While progress has been made in grassroots and digital platforms, mainstream electronic media still underrepresents women's contributions. The literature advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to accurately reflect the roles and challenges faced by



women in agriculture. Although there are studies on media representation of farmers, few focus specifically on women farmers.

The Contribution of Women Farmers to Agriculture in India: An Overview

India's economy is fundamentally agrarian, with more than 70% of its population relying on agriculture for their livelihoods. According to the Census of India, women represent approximately 33% of the agricultural workforce and 48% of self-employed farmers. Their involvement spans the entire agricultural production process, from planting seeds and harvesting crops to managing livestock and securing food for their families. Despite their essential roles, the contributions of women in agriculture are frequently undervalued or ignored, largely due to entrenched societal norms, policy inadequacies, and systemic gender discrimination.

The Unseen Labor Force

Women farmers are often labeled as "invisible workers" within the agricultural sector. Their efforts are commonly unacknowledged in official statistics and policy frameworks. This lack of visibility extends to electronic media, which seldom highlights their crucial roles in agricultural activities. Such oversight not only diminishes their contributions but also fosters a general unawareness of their challenges and potential.

Representation of Women Farmers in Indian Electronic Media

Trends in News Coverage

The focus of Indian electronic media tends to be on topics such as crop yields, market dynamics, and farmer protests. Although these issues are significant, the unique challenges that women farmers face—like securing access to land, credit, technology, and markets—are often inadequately reported. Research conducted by the Media Studies Group revealed that merely 5% of agricultural news coverage in Indian electronic media addresses gender-specific concerns.

Stereotypes and Gender Prejudice

When women farmers are featured in media narratives, they are frequently portrayed through stereotypical lenses, depicted as homemakers supporting their male counterparts rather than as autonomous farmers. This misrepresentation skews public perception and hinders the acknowledgment of women farmers as equal participants in the agricultural landscape.

Insufficient Investigative Journalism

There is a notable scarcity of investigative journalism that delves into the challenges and achievements of women farmers. Critical issues such as disparities in land ownership, restricted access to government programs, and the burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities are rarely examined in detail. The absence of comprehensive reporting prevents audiences from gaining a well-rounded understanding of the agricultural sector.

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers

Land Ownership

In India, land ownership remains a critical challenge for women farmers. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), only 12.8% of rural women own agricultural land. This lack of ownership restricts their access to institutional credit and government support schemes, perpetuating economic dependence on male family members.

Access to Technology and Resources

Women farmers often face barriers in accessing agricultural technology, tools, and training programs. This technological gap affects their productivity and limits their ability to adopt modern farming practices.

Climate Change and Gendered Impacts

Climate change poses unique challenges to women farmers, who are more likely to rely on rain-fed agriculture. Unpredictable weather patterns, droughts, and floods exacerbate their vulnerability, making it essential for media to highlight these gender-specific impacts.

Positive Developments in Media Representation

Documentaries and Feature Stories

Some electronic media platforms have started showcasing documentaries and feature stories on women farmers. For example, programs like "Satyamev Jayate" and special segments on channels like NDTV have highlighted the resilience and achievements of women in agriculture.

Social Media Integration

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for amplifying the voices of women farmers. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter feature grassroots movements and success stories, often bypassing traditional media's limitations.

Role of Regional Media

Regional electronic media has shown greater initiative in covering women farmers' issues. Local language channels often provide more nuanced and relatable portrayals, focusing on region-specific challenges and solutions.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the frequency and nature of news coverage related to women farmers in Indian electronic media.
2. To identify the themes and narratives prevalent in the coverage.
3. To explore the implications of media representation on public perception and policy-making.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study employs content analysis to explore the representation of women farmers in Indian electronic media. It focuses on prime-time news broadcasts across major Indian news channels over the past five years. The study involves collecting and analyzing news reports, features, and interviews from television channels and online news platforms.

Sampling

In this research, my sampling are purposive sampling technique. The study includes:

- 2 leading news channels (1 English and 1 regional).
- News segments explicitly mentioning or depicting women farmers.

Data Collection

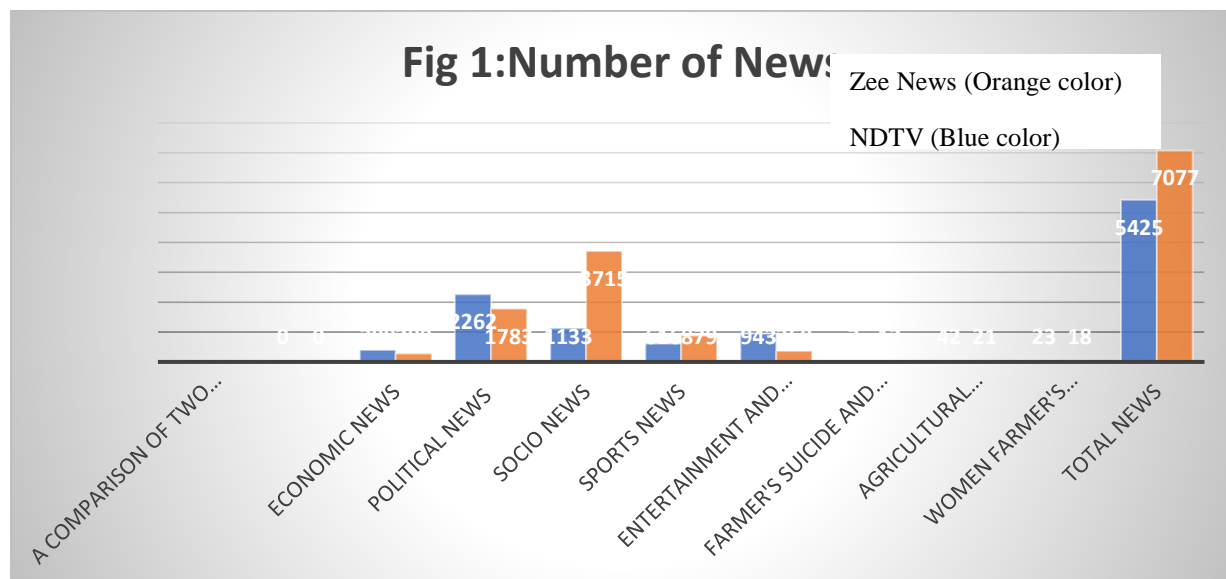
1. **Sampling:** A purposive sampling method was used to select news articles and broadcasts from leading Indian electronic media outlets such as NDTV, Zee News.
2. **Time Frame:** The analysis covers 5 years from 2018 to 2023.
3. **Inclusion Criteria:** Articles and broadcasts specifically mentioning women farmers or addressing gender issues in agriculture were included.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, narratives, and patterns in the media coverage. Keywords such as "women farmers," "gender in agriculture," and "rural women" were used to film NDTV and Zee News. The analysis covered the period from 2018 to 2021 for both channels. Various methods were employed to examine the news coverage across these platforms, with the findings presented in tabular and graphical formats below-

Table 1:A Comparison of Two Leading Channels in Delhi

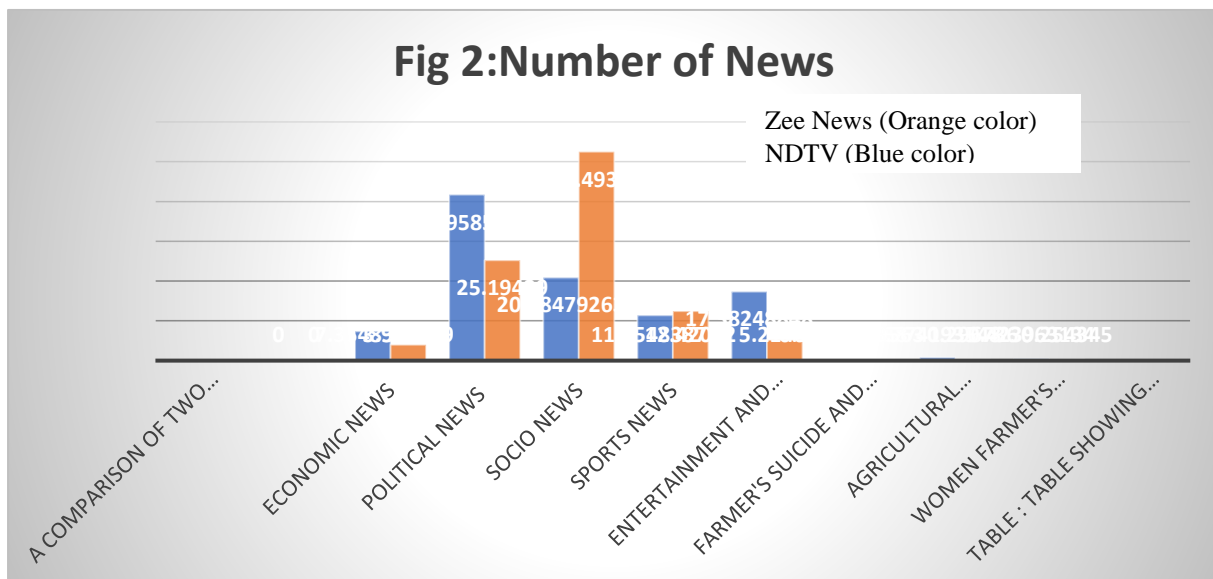
	<i>NDTV (number of news)</i>	<i>Zee News (number of news)</i>
<i>Economic news</i>	399	280
<i>Political news</i>	2262	1783
<i>Socio news</i>	1133	3715
<i>Sports news</i>	616	879
<i>Entertainment and other news</i>	943	369
<i>Farmer's suicide and death news</i>	7	12
<i>Agricultural development news</i>	42	21
<i>Women farmer's related news</i>	23	18
<i>Total News</i>	5425	7077



This table illustrates that the total number of news articles published daily by Zee News (Orange color) exceeds that of NDTV (Blue Color) in Delhi, India. The data indicates that both channels prioritize socio-cultural news as their primary focus. Following this, political news occupies the second position in terms of coverage. In March and April, the coverage of entertainment and miscellaneous news surpasses that of economic news. Notably, the coverage of news related to farmers is minimal, approaching negligible levels. Neither of the channels has reported on issues such as farmer suicides or women's topics within the agricultural development sector.

Table 2: A Comparison of Two Leading Channels in Delhi, India (percentage %)

	Percentage of NDTV	percentage of Zee News
Economic news	7.35483871	3.956479
Political news	41.69585253	25.19429
Socio news	20.88479263	52.49399
Sports news	11.35483871	12.42052
Entertainment and other news	17.38248848	5.214074
Farmer's suicide and death news	0.129032258	0.169563
Agricultural development news	0.774193548	0.296736
Women farmer's related news	0.423963134	0.254345



The data indicates that Zee News(Orange color) predominantly focuses on socio-cultural news, which constitutes the highest percentage of its coverage. In contrast, NDTV(Blue color) primarily emphasizes political news, which represents the largest share of its reporting. Additionally, Zee News ranks second in political news coverage, while NDTV's second highest focus is on socio-cultural topics. The proportion of sports news reported by both channels is nearly identical. However, coverage concerning farmers is minimal across both leading networks.

The graph illustrates that NDTV has the highest coverage of farmer stress news during the period from 2018 to 2021, whereas Zee News has reported on farmer stress issues more extensively than on other days within that timeframe.

Findings

Frequency of Coverage

- Women farmers constituted less than 5% of agricultural news stories.
- Coverage spiked during major events like protests or natural disasters but lacked consistency.
- Women farmers were mentioned in only 15% of agricultural news.
- Coverage spiked during significant events, such as the farmer protests of 2020-2021.

The coverage of Indian media, particularly about men and women farmers, demonstrates a significant gender disparity. Studies and analyses highlight the following patterns:

Gender-Specific Coverage

Men Farmers: Stories about male farmers often center around their leadership roles, economic challenges, and innovations in agriculture. Male farmers are frequently quoted as primary sources in agricultural reporting and policy discussions.

Women Farmers: Coverage of women farmers tends to focus on their roles in subsistence farming, food security, and traditional activities like seed preservation and household farming. Women are often portrayed in auxiliary roles rather than as primary decision-makers or independent farmers.

Conclusion

The representation of women farmers in Indian electronic media remains sparse and skewed. By embracing more inclusive and balanced reporting, media can play a transformative role in recognizing and empowering women farmers. This study underscores the urgent need for equitable media practices to ensure that the voices of women in agriculture are heard and valued. The representation of women farmers in Indian electronic media remains inadequate and skewed. While some progress has been made, significant gaps and biases persist. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from the media, policymakers, and civil society. By giving women farmers the recognition they deserve, Indian society can move closer to achieving gender equality in agriculture.

Women farmers serve as a fundamental component of India's agricultural framework; however, their contributions are frequently overlooked and inadequately represented in electronic media. By embracing a more inclusive and gender-sensitive perspective, Indian electronic media has the potential to significantly empower women farmers, champion their rights, and promote a fairer agricultural landscape. Altering the portrayal of women in the media can not only elevate public understanding but also stimulate policy reforms and shift

societal perceptions toward acknowledging the essential role of women in India's agrarian economy.

References

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