



THE CHANGE WE SEEK

CHAMPIONING GENDER SENSITIVITY
IN MEDIA FOR AN EQUAL WORLD

IMPACT REPORT 2005-2025



Leadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First





**I see words
where others just
hear sounds.**

*Elizabeth Jean Thomas
Founder of Phonologix.
Kotak customer.*

I believe no child should be
robbed of the joy of speech. I want to use
technology to help put words in their mouths.
Not as a researcher, but as an entrepreneur.
Luckily I have Kotak behind me. Backing my conviction.
And anticipating my every financial need.
Allowing me to not just see twinkling
stars, but to listen to them.

***Hausla hai toh
ho jayega.***



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We are forever grateful
and remain committed to
carrying forward
Mr. Sista's vision
of bringing together
corporates, media
and communication
professionals, to create a
more gender-equal, fair
and inclusive society.



BOBBY SISTA
FOUNDER, POPULATION FIRST
1930-2024

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Laadli

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MEMORABLE MILESTONES

2018

- A fundraiser event with stalwarts from the field of music, 'Legends for Laadli' launched in collaboration with Banyan Tree



2015-16

- An ABBY for gender sensitivity introduced at The Advertising Club and AAAI's Goafest
- Laadli collaborated with Asia Society's 'New Voices Fellowship' for Screenwriters with the theme 'Making Heroine the New Hero'



2017

- Laadli Media Awards go international covering South Asia region

2014

- Gender scoring of ads introduced in Campaign India magazine



2012

- Safe Abortion Advocacy initiative launched in collaboration with Ipas



2011

- Dr. AL Sharada was co-opted on to the PCPNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act) State Supervisory Board
- Youth Initiative "Madhyam" was re-launched as "Laadli Change Makers Clubs"
- Laadli Fellowships announced which became annual feature since then
- Laadli organized a consultation with creative directors of General Entertainment Channels

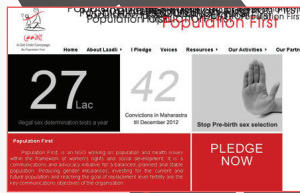
2010

- Laadli invited to make a presentation at Portfolio Night and AdAsia event
- The book "Missing: Half the Story – Journalism as if Gender Matters" was released on May 11, 2010



2009

- Dr. Sharada invited by US Government on International Visitor Fellowship Program to represent India on the theme "Role Of NGOS In Addressing Global Gender Issues"
- Million Signature Campaign



2008

- National Creative Excellence Awards launched



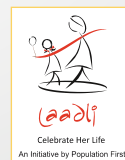
2007

- Laadli Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity launched
- 'Maadhyam – Youth For Change' college-based programme launched
- Laadli community-based intervention was launched through Ganeshotsav



2005

- Laadli campaign launched
- 1,700 college students participated in Laadli Youth Flash, billed as the first ever flash mob organized in India



CHANGE BEGINS WHEN SOMEONE BEGINS TO QUESTION WHAT THEY SEE

Mission Laadli: A Reaffirmation of Purpose – By Dr. AL Sharada



Laadli was born out of a deep concern about the falling sex ratios. The question that kept coming back to us was simple but unsettling: why are girls not welcome in Indian families? As we explored this further, it became clear that there is a widespread undervaluation of women and girls. This is both reflected in and reinforced by media and communication around us. If we wanted to address these deeply rooted biases and forms of misogyny, we knew we had to engage with the spaces that shape public thinking, including media, advertising, films and other content platforms. That understanding became the foundation of the Laadli Media Advocacy Initiatives.

One of the most encouraging parts of this work has been the people we have met along the way. Media professionals open to rethinking their work, educators who welcome these conversations into their classrooms, and media students who are willing to ask critical questions.

The Laadli Awards have played an important role in this journey. More than recognition, they signal that thoughtful and sensitive storytelling matters. Over the years, the Awards have helped bring visibility to work that may otherwise have gone unnoticed, stories that challenge stereotypes, question norms, and present women and gender with greater honesty. They have also created a space where media professionals can reflect on their own work, learn from others, and feel encouraged to do better. In many ways, the Awards have helped shift the conversation from simply pointing out what is wrong to actively celebrating what is being done right.

I remember speaking with media students who said they had never really looked at media through a gender lens before. That moment, when someone begins to question what they see,

is important. It may feel small, but it is where change begins. When young professionals start thinking this way early on, it naturally reflects in the work they go on to do.

At the same time, it would be inaccurate to say that things have completely changed. There are more stories today that show greater awareness and balance. While we are seeing many positive portrayals of both men and women, there is also a noticeable return of hyper masculinity in some big box office successes, films that audiences are clearly embracing. This makes it important to keep bringing the conversation back to sensitivity, responsibility, and equality. We still come across content that relies on stereotypes, sometimes passed off as humor or tradition. So, while there is progress, there is also a tendency to slip back, and that keeps us alert.

“In many ways, the Laadli Awards have helped shift the conversation from simply pointing out what is wrong to actively celebrating what is being done right.”

It is also important to note that the responsibility for gender equality is now being taken up more widely. Groups such as the Women in Cinema Collective, Indian Creative Women and others have started raising these concerns within their own industries. This shift is significant. It shows that the focus is not just on what we see on screen, but also on what happens behind the scenes. If workplaces are not fair and inclusive, it is difficult for the content they produce to reflect equality. Supporting such efforts and working together will be crucial going forward. Another area where our understanding has

deepened is in looking at gender along with other realities like class, caste and region. Through our fellowships and masterclasses, we have tried to bring these layers into the conversation. These platforms encourage participants to engage with complexity and look at issues from different perspectives, so that the stories being told are more grounded and representative.

Our work with advertising has also been an important part of this journey. Analysing ads through a gender lens has helped us engage with creators in a constructive and non-judgemental way. The idea has been to open up dialogue rather than shut it down, allowing creators to reflect on their work without feeling defensive. This has led to greater openness and, in many cases, more thoughtful communication.

Taking a moment like this to reflect is important. It helps us recognise what has been possible so far, while also reminding us of what still needs attention. The media landscape is changing rapidly, especially with the rise of digital platforms and AI-driven content creation. This means our work must continue to evolve.

What gives me confidence is that Mission Laadli has never been a solitary effort. It has always been built through partnerships, sometimes formal, often organic. Each collaboration and each conversation has added depth to this journey. I am deeply grateful to Anuja and Team UNFPA, a partner who has supported Laadli right from its infancy.

At its heart, Mission Laadli is a commitment to fairness, dignity, and responsible storytelling. Reaffirming that purpose simply means continuing this work with clarity and intent.

Because the stories we tell, and the ones we choose to question, will shape the world we live in. ■

The author is the former Director of Population First and currently a Trustee on its Board. She has been associated with the organisation since its inception and has played a key role in shaping its vision, direction and initiatives.

UNFPA — A PARTNER WITH A SHARED VISION



Frederika Meijer

UNFPA Representative, India and Bhutan

“Laadli began as an idea that promised to bring about a silent revolution in mainstream media. It aimed to push the levers of change and challenge gender stereotypes in everyday television commercials and news reporting. It was not about one-time statements, but about an ongoing movement that would create a visible shift over time. It focused on subtle yet impactful storylines that would gradually seep into everyday conversations and help build a more equal narrative. The shift may have been barely noticeable to the everyday viewer, but its impact was deeply perceptible to those who spearheaded this change.”



Argentina Matavel Piccin

UNFPA India Representative

“UNFPA recognizes the critical role of the

media in shaping perceptions around the value of women and girls. Policies and services impact women and men differently whether in health, education, the workplace, disasters, pandemics or other areas. I am glad our award winners have written a range of stories and analysed them using a gender lens. I hope they keep revisiting conversations around gender and raise the bar on reporting from a gender perspective.”



Dr. Natalia Kanem

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UNFPA

“Media can shape the way we think, what we believe, and how we think, as individuals and societies, value women and girls. By amplifying diverse voices and stories, and challenging stereotypes, the media has the power to transform social norms and promote gender equality and inclusion.”

Andrea Wojnar

Country Representative, UNFPA India and Country Director Bhutan

“Media plays a critical role in addressing discriminatory social norms, shaping popular perceptions on gender roles and



identities, and challenging stereotypes. UNFPA India is proud to partner with Population First for engaging diverse media to create an environment where women and girls are respected and valued.”



Sriram Haridass

Deputy Country Representative, UNFPA

“Mainstreaming gender in media is not just about devoting space for issues concerning women and girls but about making sure that all gender identities are equally represented. It is also about viewing every story from the standpoint of its impact on men, women and persons with alternate gender identities. The Laadli campaign has been working for over a decade to bring about transformative change in the way media and communications portray diverse gender identities.”

GENDER SENSITISATION CANNOT BE AN AFTERTHOUGHT



Actor, Director, Writer, Producer. **Nandita Das** dons many hats, including that of a Social Advocate. She spent five years doing community work on completion of her Masters in Social Work – after her ‘accidental debut’ with ‘Parinati’ (1989) when she had no intent of pursuing an acting career. She hence considers ‘Fire’ her real debut. She went on to use her fame for issues of social justice and human rights and supported campaigns like ‘Dark is Beautiful’. She made her directorial debut with ‘Firaaq’ in 2008. We invited Das, who was Chief Guest at the 12th Laadli Media Awards in (2022), to reflect on the evolution and emancipation of women before and behind the camera then (1996/2008) and now (2026) – on changes she sees, the change she seeks, and Laadli’s role.

I shot for *Fire* in 1996. Back then, the conversations around women’s issues were very different. The feminist movement of the ‘70s had impacted us, but it was not a mainstream issue like today. The conversation was more about equality than equity, and ideas of agency and desire were not discussed so openly. There were hardly any women filmmakers.

By the time I directed *Firaaq* in 2008, there was a shift. A few more women were visible behind the camera, though largely as assistants and cogs in the wheel. It was still a struggle to be taken seriously and to be trusted with decisions and resources. Even crews were not used to women helming projects and would often address me as “Sir” before quickly correcting themselves to “Madam”. It was a small but telling indication of the societal mindset. Women filmmakers in India were more than before, but still only a handful.

Today, in 2026, there is far greater visibility and participation in filmmaking. Not just assistants, but many more women are now heads of departments. They are producers, writers, directors, editors, sound designers and even cinematographers – which, for the longest time, was seen as a male profession. There are now more women-led stories and complex characters portrayed by women, especially in web series. There is a more evolved language around gender. These are some of the things I am grateful to see.

At the same time, visibility, or even conversation around gender, is not the same as equal opportunity and equity. I would like to see far more nuanced and diverse portrayals of women

as complex individuals, rather than reducing them to simplified ideas of “strength”. We are also at times confusing notional choices with real ones. Objectification of women and pandering to the male gaze has not decreased. Behind the camera, especially in technical and decision-making roles, representation is still limited. Equally important is the need for safe and equitable workspaces. More than before is still not equal. And increasingly, there is a gap between the language of progress and the lived reality. So much discussion around gender has to translate into action. People are often becoming fatigued by the rhetoric without meaningful change actually taking place.

Laadli’s Role

Laadli has played an important role in building awareness and acknowledging work that is helping shape a more gender-sensitive discourse. I think every organisation has to keep reinventing and ask what it wants to do next to give more meaning to its intent.

I wouldn’t know how much Laadli can expand its scope of work or grow into other areas to ensure that sensitive media and cinema continue to find a voice. Can it give seed grants to journalists and filmmakers to focus on stories that need to be told but are not? Can Laadli support scripts at an early stage, where many biases originate, to embed empathy and more realistic representation of women into the script? Films don’t have to be just women centric; portrayal of any character and how the story unfolds can still have a distinct female gaze. Maybe it’s worth thinking, how organisations like Laadli can support work that has a social conscience from the beginning.

Also, tracking impact more systematically could be valuable. This would help in a deeper understanding of how narratives are evolving, who is telling them, and who continue to be left out.

Sensitising Future Creators

Gender sensitisation cannot be an afterthought. It needs to be intrinsic to the way storytelling is taught and practised. Working with film schools, writers’ labs, and young creators is important so that they have the space to question, experiment and create without fear of judgement or failure. With social media and shrinking attention spans, many young people are increasingly trapped within their gadgets instead of exposing themselves to different experiences and realities. Meaningful change in representation comes from observing people and contexts, from curiosity and empathy, and from constantly evolving one’s perspective and imagination. ■

“Increasingly, there is a gap between the language of progress and the lived reality. So much discussion around gender has to translate into action.”

- Nandita Das

THERE'S STILL HEADROOM FOR SENSITIVITY AMID WINDS OF CHANGE

The first edition of the 'Marriage Conversations' campaign by Tanishq released in 2021 was originally conceived with five different scenarios - five couples-to-be, each engaged in a difficult but critical conversation before embarking on a married life together. The team at Dentsu Webchutney, with Binaifer Dulani (now with Talented) handling creative, zeroed in on Kopal Naithani of Superfly Films to direct them. The power of the idea was incredible and its impact on her profound, recalls Naithani. It was her first film for the brand. "I just heard the idea and I was in love. I felt that this was the advertising I had been waiting for. Directing for Tanishq was always an aspiration of mine. While I had got scripts for the brand earlier, the first one to materialise was 'Marriage Conversations'. That made it extra special," says the Director & Founder, who started directing ad films in 2010 and launched her production house in 2016.

She explains, "We brought our personal experiences into it. We eventually decided to make just three scenarios, choosing themes that were real and resonant. We went into every detail and made quite a few changes as we went along. The feedback after launch was overwhelming. And later I was told it also won the Laadli Award for Gender Sensitivity. While I had not heard of the awards before that, I realised that it's not an award you can enter - organisers actually sift through the sea of work and recognise work for gender sensitivity. Winning on that front makes it a prestigious recognition."

Naithani's work was recognised on the Laadli Awards stage again for Tanishq (Superwoman, 2023); Urban Company (Choti Soch, 2024); Titan (Aage Badegi, 2025, which she did not direct but produced); and Tanishq (Her Choice, 2025).

The filmmaker, who started off as costume assistant at Nagesh Kukunoor's Hyderabad Blues, spent a few years as costume stylist before working her way up to AD with filmmaker-producer-director Shoojit Sircar, and eventually emerged as director. She had never studied film academically.

She recalls that when she started directing ad films, there were only a handful of female



Tanishq's 'Marriage Conversations'



"Laadli is not an award you can enter - organisers actually sift through the sea of work and recognise work for gender sensitivity. Winning on that front makes it a prestigious recognition."

- KOPAL NAITHANI

directors and technicians. She realised the value of mentoring on being selected as part of the first cohort of Cannes Lions' 'See It Be It' talent programme to accelerate female and non-binary talent in advertising.

"I've had a tough path to becoming a director, and then within that finding my own identity. It's been a very long journey to creating my own space and I think it all started with 'Marriage Conversations'. At 'See It Be It' I realised the value of having a mentor and the enormous difference it makes. I was possibly the oldest person in the cohort and maybe the only ad film director. I realised that if I had that kind of mentoring 15 years earlier, my career might have been quite different," she notes.

She set up 'She Directs Ads' to enable such mentoring for upcoming women ad film directors and technicians in 2025. She believes that while there has been a lot of action from brands promoting gender-centric conversations, platforms like Laadli still have a lot to do.

"Every brand today needs to stand for something. Sometimes, how they choose to express themselves may prove counter-productive to the cause they seek to highlight. That's where real sensitivity comes in - there is a need to spotlight what has been done right and what could be done better. I understand that Laadli also engages with the creative and media communities to sensitise them, besides organising the Laadli awards. It's equally important today that ad films are not just championing causes but also nuanced, for which such engagement is critical," signs off Naithani.

Naithani will be among adlanders willing to make the time for such efforts. For she believes that there is still room for change that initiatives like Laadli champion. ■

A CASE FOR LAADLI TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES

We invited journalist, researcher and author **Pamela Philipose** to reflect on gender focus in news media, Laadli's relevance and its role in the years to come.



I remember when I was with The Indian Express, Bobby Sista coming over with AL Sharada to meet me at my office in Delhi. Bobby had this big project in mind: the Laadli Awards.

As a communications giant with a conscience, who had seen much success in the corporate world, he felt this would be his contribution to advocating on women's issues and to raising gender awareness more generally. Bobby was a great marketing person and he knew how to communicate the idea to the largest number of people possible. He wanted the media to take note of the phenomenon, so that they in turn shore up their gender reportage.

I have been on the jury of the awards on and off for very many years and I have been following the awards. I am very impressed by the fact that the Laadli team has never taken their eyes off the ball since 2007-08, when the awards were launched.

The Laadli Awards initiative has been able to make important interventions in the media world. Over the years, it broadened its outreach – from mostly print it moved to newer news media as well as advertising.

It so happened that around that time, in 2008, I had moved to Women's Feature Service (the only syndicated news service in India with a gender perspective, which I have since exited as Editor-in-Chief and Director). We wanted to put out stories on women, which would be used by mainstream media. But as the years passed by it became clear that, such a syndicate was increasingly becoming redundant because media organisations had by then recognised the gender beat as an important one. Women, who did not matter to the newsroom earlier, suddenly became a promising constituency.

This is partly because by then, with economic liberalisation, women came to be embraced by

the market, a trend reflected in the plethora of saas-bahu television serials across language categories in India. Shows like *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* portrayed women as goddesses of both conservatism and consumption, reflected in the ornate jewellery and garments worn by the main characters. While mainstream print media did not go that far, here too there was a sudden emphasis on women making smart consumer choices. Women's Day specials now focused on the woman's right to a good life. It was interesting to observe these two parallel tracks of coverage – women as consumers and women as agents of change.

Over a period of time, a certain fatigue set in. Old stories no longer made sense and newspapers and TV channels realised that. So new angles were explored by some sections of the media. Gender, for instance, was no longer seen as a

men-women binary.

Gay rights began to be mainstreamed with people of privilege joining the LGBTQ+ movement. The importance of bringing intersectionality into reportage came to be recognised. To some extent, intersectionality brought in questions of caste, economic status and location, although I would say not to the extent necessary. Coverage still remained largely urban-centric and oriented to the upper echelons of society. Rural women continued to remain largely without a voice and without agency, although we have seen bold experiments such as the Khabar Lahariya revolution in Bundelkhand, where local women took up the challenge of reporting on their own realities, producing sterling work in the process.

On Laadli's role...

The Laadli Awards have remarkably kept apace with change, despite the challenges. They have also come to be seen as setting exciting standards in journalism and have encouraged an emerging generation of journalists to work hard for such recognition – media professionals who are constantly looking for new angles to a story and innovative ways to report it. Now there is a decided emphasis on stories that could get the attention of the Laadli juries! It has helped incentivize gender reporting and what is very interesting to observe is that it is not just women who are competing for these awards but men and transgenders.

This could have a downside too. People produce stories just for winning an award and forget the interests of the larger audience of readers and viewers. I firmly believe that when an award comes from Laadli, it should be for stories that speak for the greater common good. Juries need to keep this principle in mind too.

Yet with all the challenges of change, sometimes chaotic change, the Laadli Awards have been able to recognize and reward journalistic excellence. I believe it is well placed to push the boundaries of exciting and relevant media work in the country in the years ahead. ■

“The Laadli Awards have remarkably kept apace with change, despite the challenges. They have also come to be seen as setting exciting standards in journalism and have encouraged an emerging generation of journalists to work hard for such recognition – media professionals who are constantly looking for new angles to a story and innovative ways to report it.”

- Pamela Philipose

LAADLI MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS FOR THE GENDER GAME CHANGERS

Since launch, 157 journalists across the country writing in multiple language media have been endowed with Fellowships worth over Rs.42 lakh – leading to 357 stories heralding change across 92 media outlets.

The Laadli Media Fellowships were announced in 2012-13 with the support of UNFPA, building on the Laadli Media Awards launched in 2007 and ongoing advocacy initiatives.

It was launched with the understanding that in-depth media stories based on investigative and research-based reporting takes a back seat, given an always-on news cycle and battle for eyeballs and attention, with focus increasingly on viewership/ readership and

attendant ad revenues.

The Laadli Media Fellowships invites applications from journalists across the country every year. It currently offers upto Rs.50,000 to each selected journalist, to pursue four stories within four months on the year's given theme, with a commitment from their editors to publish them. Since its launch, 157 journalists across the country writing in multiple language media have been endowed with Fellowships worth over Rs.42 lakh –

leading to 357 stories heralding change across 92 publications straddling print and online media.

What started with newspapers with a readership of more than 1,00,000 was eventually extended to all media with the advent and growth of digital media. In addition to offering financial assistance, the selected journalists are trained in gender-sensitive storytelling through mentorship and orientation workshops.

CURATED AND SUPPORTED STORIES IN. :		
1. MADHYAMAM.COM	27. GUJARAT SAMACHAR	53. ODISHA PATRIKA
2. 101REPORTERS.COM	28. HER STORIES	54. PEOPLE'S ARCHIVE OF RURAL INDIA
3. AMAR UJALA	29. HINDU TAMIL THISAI	55. POSITIVECONNECT.IN
4. BEHAN BOX	30. HINDUSTAN	56. PRABHAT KHABAR
5. CHHATISGARH KHABAR	31. HINDWI BELA	57. PRABHATA VELUGU
6. DAINIK BHASKAR	32. CITIZENMATTERS.IN/	58. PRAJAVANNI
7. DAINIK GANA ADHIKAR	33. INDIE JOURNAL	59. RAJASTHAN PATRIKA
8. DAINIK JAGRAN	34. JK PRESS SERVICE	60. SAKAL & ESAKAL.COM
9. DAINIK JAGRAN WEBSITE	35. KALAM NIGHA / VIL MEDIA	61. SAMBAD
10. DAINIK TARUN MITRA	36. KASHMIR IMAGES	62. SANGAI EXPRESS
11. DECCAN CHRONICLE	37. KASHMIR UZMA	63. SHETHEPEOPLE.TV
12. DESERT TRAIL	38. KASHMIR OBSERVER	64. TAMEEL-I-IRSHAD
13. DESHABHIMANI	39. KERALEEYAM	65. TEAM BIRIYA
14. DESHBANDHU	40. KERALEEYAM MASIKA	66. THE CHENAB TIMES
15. DOOL NEWS	41. LAZAWAL.COM	67. THE CITIZEN
16. DOWN TO EARTH	42. LEAFLET.IN	68. THE FEDERAL
17. EASTMOJO.COM	43. MADHYAMAM DAILY	69. THE HINDU
18. ETVBHARAT.COM	44. MAKERSINDIA	70. THE LOCAL WIRE
19. FEMINISM IN INDIA (HINDI)	45. MATRUBHUMI.COM	71. THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
20. FEMINISMINDIA.COM	46. MISSINGPERSPECTIVES.COM	72. THE NEWS HASHTAG
21. FORBES WOMEN	47. MOOKNAYAK.COM	73. THE SAKALA, ODIYA DAILY
22. GAON CONNECTION	48. NAV SHAKTI	74. MAHARASHTRA TIMES
23. GNTTV.COM	49. NAVGUJARAT SAMAY	75. THE TRIBUNE
24. GORAKHPUR KI AWAZ	50. NAXTRA NEWS	76. THEFEDERAL.COM
25. GREATERKASHMIR.COM	51. NEWS 18	77. THEHINDU.COM
26. GROUNDZERO.IN	52. NORTHEAST NOW (NENOW.IN)	78. THENEWSMINUTE.COM
		79. THEPRINT.IN
		80. THEWIRE MARATHI
		81. THEWIREURDU.COM
		82. TWOCIRCLES.NET
		83. URDU.PRATILIP.COM
		84. WEB DUNIA
		85. WIRE.IN
		86. WOKE MALAYALAM
		87. WWW.INDIATIMES.COM
		88. MAXMAHARASHTRA.COM
		89. WWW.NEZINE.COM
		90. YOURSTORY
		91. YOUTH KI AWAAZ
		92. ZEE MEDIA DIGITAL

2023

Theme: Intersectionality of gender with patriarchy / climate change / disability / the digital divide.

◆ **10 Winners** from across Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Karnataka,

writing in six languages.

- ◆ **English:** Renuka Kalpana, Monalisa Patsani, Sonal Kellogg, Aishwarya Tripathi, Ratna Bharali Talukdar, Maitreyee Boruah
- ◆ **Hindi:** Swati Shaiwal Sharma, Aishwarya Tripathi, Rehana Kousar
- ◆ **Urdu:** Rehana Kousar

- ◆ **Assamese:** Ratna Bharali Talukdar
- ◆ **Marathi:** Shailaja Tiwale
- ◆ **Malayalam:** Remya KH

◆ Fellowship-driven stories across: **40 media outlets**

2024

Theme: Gender-Based Violence and its Intersectionalities vis-à-vis Marginalised and Vulnerable Groups

◆ **16 Winners** from across Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Orissa, writing in six languages.

◆ **English:** Geetha Sunil Pillai, Priya M Menon, Haritha John, Aishwarya AVRaj, Sohini Sengupta

◆ **Hindi:** Apoorva Singh, Aashika Shivangi Singh, Amarpal Singh Verma, Pooja Rathi, Kinshuk Gupta

◆ **Bengali:** Sudarshana Chakraborty

◆ **Odia:** Anuj Kumar Das

◆ **Marathi:** Shailaja Tiwale, Heenakaasar Hasan Khan

◆ **Malayalam:** Jamsheena Mullappatt, Anisha A Mendez

◆ Fellowship-driven stories across: **16 media outlets**

2025

Theme 1: Mental Health of Women and Persons with Alternate SOGI

◆ **15 Winners** from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and West Bengal, writing in four languages.

◆ **English:** Ananya Ray, Harshitha Padmavinod, Ina Goel, Aliya Bashir, Rayees Ramzan, Tanushree Ghosh, Varsha Prakash, Meenakshy.S, Sadaf Masoodi, Abid R Baba

◆ **Hindi:** Malabika Dhar, Rohit Prashar, Saba Khan

◆ **Odia:** Anuj Kumar Das

◆ **Malayalam:** M Jasheena

◆ 15 Fellowship-driven stories across: **13 media outlets**

Theme 2: Technology-Enabled Gender-Based Violence and its intersectional Dimensions

◆ **15 Winners** from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Delhi, Maharashtra and Odisha, writing in six languages.

◆ **English:** Ambika Sharma, Ashna Butani, Diya Maria George, Akshita Prasad, Geetha Sunil Pillai, Varsha Torgalkar, Aarushee Shukla, Musheera Ashraf

◆ **Hindi:** Kavita Swami, Priti Kharwar

◆ **Odia:** Aiswarya Parija

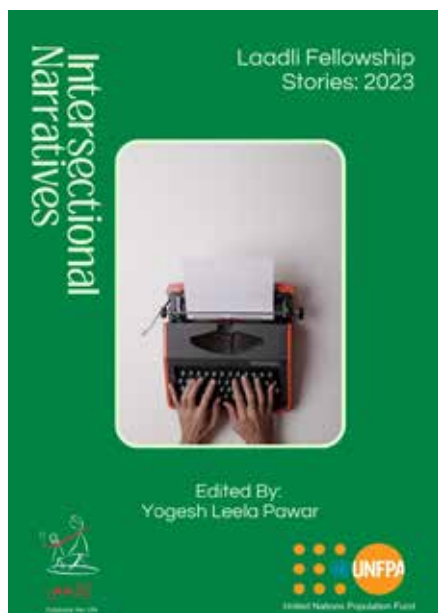
◆ **Urdu:** Abdul Muqet, Abdul Muqet

◆ **Gujarati:** Asmita Dave

◆ **Malayalam:** Anisha A Mendez

◆ 30 Fellowship-driven stories across: **14 media outlets**

EXCERPTS 2023



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TAKING AWAY AGENCY: MOBILE BAN FOR GIRLS IN GUJARAT'S VILLAGES

Sonal Kellogg | shethepeople.tv | 13-July-2023

Even as the government of India is promoting Digital India initiative in a big way and in Gujarat college students are even given electronic tablets to enable students to get digitally empowered, thousands of girls in hundreds of villages of several districts in Gujarat are banned from keeping and using mobiles on the pretext that it would spoil them.

This ban is being applied in villages of Dangs, Panchmahals and Mahisagar districts which are all tribal districts of the state located on the eastern border of Gujarat. There are a total of 14 tribal districts in Gujarat out of 26 total districts and most of them are lagging in various development parameters like life expectancy, child mortality, maternal mortality, infrastructure development, having good hospitals, colleges and other facilities, etc.

This mobile ban is adversely affecting girls whose agency has been taken away from them and if they are found with mobile phones, they

are often beaten up, restricted in their houses and the mobile phones taken away. In some cases, their studies are discontinued and they are married off early.

Parents and village elders believe that girls are getting spoiled by mobiles as they are using them to get in touch with boys and eloping with them, so there is a collective decision in all these districts to not allow girls and young women to use mobiles. They don't want the girls to bring shame to their families, say village elders.

In an extreme case three years ago, a 17-year-old Adivasi girl from Kuva village in Devgarh Baria block of Dahod district committed suicide by consuming poison on June 8, 2020. It is reported that her parents found that she was in possession of a mobile so she took this extreme step. Ironically, the mobile was not hers but her friend's. The other girl had given it to her for safe keeping so that her parents would not find her with the mobile.

LEISURE, LOVE, AND WORK – THE INTERNET IS EMPOWERING AND REVOLUTIONISING THE LIVES OF RURAL WOMEN

Aishwarya Tripathi | Gaonconnection.com | 28-July-2023

Kalpana dreams of entering police services. But there are no established tutoring centres in her hometown Mahoba, so the 22-year-old is hooked on to the online coaching portal of PhysicsWalla to prepare for a competitive examination to enter police services.

Her younger sister, Babli, has no interest in physics but spends a large part of her time scrolling down her Instagram feed to find new recipes. The day Gaon Connection met the young woman, she was trying out a fried rice recipe she had seen on Instagram, on her firewood chulha.



The internet on smartphones has become a powerful catalyst for rural women's economic

and social empowerment. Nielsen's India Internet Report 2023 reveals that India has more than 700 million active Internet users aged two years and above as of December 2022 – 425 million (61 per cent) of whom are registered in rural India.

Nearly half of the rural population is online with a usage surge of 40 per cent in 2022 as compared to 2021, the report noted. Interestingly, female users grew by 27 per cent as compared to its male counterpart that grew by 18 per cent between 2021 and 2022.

DON'T WOMEN HAVE A LIFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA? (Translated from Malayalam)

Remya K H | Matrubhumi.com | 22-July-2023

"She is a fraud"

"First, put on a nice dress, and then care about telling the truth."

"Those who praise her excessively, should look at her other posts as well. Why does a person displaying a half-naked body on a public platform find nudity so annoying?"

"It is all a drama for achieving celebrity status." "Do you have to destroy the life of a poor young man just to become famous?"

It is disheartening to see that the woman who courageously confronted a young man for nudity on public transport faced such a barrage of rude and victim-blaming comments on social media. It highlights the ongoing challenges and prejudices that women often encounter in society. Social media, on the one hand, has provided a platform for women to express themselves, connect with the world, and find empowerment through various avenues like friendships, entertainment, business ideas, and support networks. Movements like "Me too" have shown the

strength of collective voices against sexual assault, bringing women together from different parts of the world.

However, even in the virtual world of social media, women are not immune to scrutiny and judgment. They continue to be subject to unfair evaluations based on various parameters, such as their appearance, behavior, and associations. This extends the struggle for gender equality and the right to freedom from public spaces to the digital realm.

EXCERPTS 2024



▲ [CLICK FOR ALL STORIES IN FULL](#)

HOME SWEET HOME? THE SUFFERING BEHIND THE VEIL OF SMILE THAT WOMEN IN INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS CARRY

Apoorva Singh | gnttv.com | 24-December-2024

In India, the home often conceals stories of silent suffering, hidden behind smiles and veils of familial duty. The walls may not speak, but they bear witness to emotional scars, bruises, and broken spirits. For countless women, "home sweet home" is just a mask hiding their pain, a place where abuse continues under the weight of cultural norms and societal expectations.



Take Aarti (name changed), a 32-year-old school teacher from Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. While she didn't have physical wounds, she suffered deeply. Married into a controlling family, she faced years of mental abuse. Her husband decided how she spent money, whom she met, and even what she wore. "It felt like I was imprisoned without bars," she said.

Aarti's story is just one of many. Millions of women in India face domestic violence every day, a problem rooted in long-standing patriarchy and societal norms.

IS A WOMAN JUST A SUGARCANE FIELD TO BE RAVAGED? HARASSMENT OF FEMALE SUGARCANE WORKERS AT WORK

Heenakaasar Khan | Nav Shakti | 18-December-2024, (Translated from Marathi)

We went to a village for sugarcane cutting. Our twelve-year-old daughter, who is mentally challenged, had to come with us as there was no one at home to look after her. While we were working in the field, she was alone in the hut. The village overseer took her to the field, gagged her when she screamed, and raped her.

She didn't tell us anything when we returned in the evening. Days passed. Since she didn't understand menstrual cycle it, I took care of her. When she didn't get her period for a month, we took her to the hospital and found out she was pregnant. Because of her mental condition, the doctors refused to perform an abortion.

Eventually, she had to give birth." Sunanda (name changed), a forty-year-old sugarcane worker, calmly recounts the abuse her daughter suffered. Her eyes are dry as she tells the story. "What could we do? We had no one to support us," she says, accepting the situation with resignation.

BODIES AS BATTLEFIELDS: WHAT FUELS THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA?

Geetha Sunil Pillai | Themookanyak.com | 18-December-2024



It was March 14, 2006, a dark day that altered her life forever. Eighteen years ago, in Telgaon, Maharashtra, Ramabai's life was shattered.

subjected to unimaginable public humiliation—a scene seared into their memories forever.

Stripped naked and paraded through her village, her only 'crime' was challenging the caste hierarchies as a Dalit woman. Her seven-year-old son Ajay was dragged from his school, stripped and paraded naked along with his mother and

The reason behind Ramabai's horrific public humiliation and subsequent social ostracism in her village seems rooted in a toxic mix of caste-based prejudice, gendered control, and a suspicion that painted her as a threat to powerful figures.

RamaBai single mother from a marginalised community, was perceived as "overly smart" and defiant simply for asserting her autonomy – first in her divorce proceedings and later in her travels outside the village.

LOST IN PAPERWORK: THE STRUGGLES OF SEX WORKERS CHILDREN IN MAHARASHTRA'S SANGLI DISTRICT FOR IDENTITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Shailaja Tiwale | Sakal | 29-December-2024 (Translated from Marathi)

Twelve-year-old Nikita (name changed) from Sangli, Maharashtra showcased remarkable talent in Abacus, earning her eligibility for a scholarship designed for underprivileged students. However, the absence of a caste certificate has prevented her from receiving the benefits she rightfully deserves. "Had she received the scholarship, it would have provided ₹13,000 annually, which could have significantly supported her education," says her mother, Nima (name changed), a sex worker.

Sixteen-year-old Rima (name changed) from Sangli district of Maharashtra has been playing karate since 7th grade and is now in 10th grade. Despite her dedication and talent, she faces significant hurdles due to the absence of a ration card, which is essential for securing additional sports marks and other benefits. Rima recently represented Maharashtra at the 68th National School Games in Madhya Pradesh, earning third place and a bronze medal. "Without a ration card, she's unable to access the ₹25,000 assistance provided by the district sports department," shares her mother, Yashda (name changed), a sex worker.

These are just a few examples of how the children of sex workers are denied opportunities for higher education, scholarships, and employment due to the barriers created by the absence of essential documents.

XENOPHOBIA AND POLICE BRUTALITY HAUNT MIGRANT TRANS WOMEN IN KERALA

Haritha John | thenewsminute.com | 23-December-2024



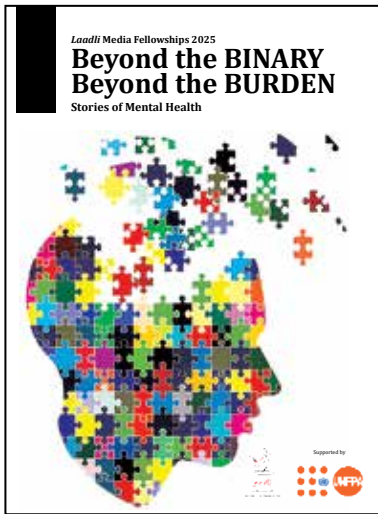
These women have moved into the district over the last 15 years in search of freedom and opportunities. However, what they found in "trans friendly" Kerala was the violence that transgender

women across India face, including from the police. Firstly, the government's trans protection schemes do not cover immigrants. Therefore, many migrant trans women do sex work or begging on night trains leaving from Ernakulam.

Several times, the railway police on these trains have assaulted them, resulting in severe physical injuries, they alleged. They also alleged that they have been brutally assaulted by local residents and the local police, too. Almost all of the migrant trans women TNM met bear injuries and wounds from these physical assaults.

What makes their situation worse is xenophobia, anti sex work sentiments, and harmful stereotypes of trans women among local residents – including transgender women from Kerala. So, while a majority of transgender women who are from Kerala are organised either under the traditional Jamaath system or with the help of NGOs, most migrants are left out of these networks as well, and have to deal with police atrocities by themselves.

EXCERPTS 2025



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QUEERING THE CAMPUS: EXPLORING THE REALITY OF TRANSITIONING AS A STUDENT IN THE INDIAN UNIVERSITY SPACE

By Ananya Ray | feminisminindia.com | 12-August-2025

Saira and her partner Paro, who is an ex-student of the Bhawanipore Gujarati Education Society in Kolkata recounted how, as trans students who were in the process of transitioning, they had to learn how to not use the washroom for long hours. ‘Especially, during ward medical duty, which would go on for prolonged periods, it was very uncommon and difficult not to be able to use the washroom,’ says Saira.

‘The experience of transitioning on campus is especially harrowing for students because of the invisibilisation they face daily on campuses’, says Aritra Chatterjee, a mental health professional based in Kolkata. ‘Sometimes in Social Sciences

departments, the faculty is sensitive, but there is a lack of gender sensitisation among non-teaching staff like security guards, hostel wardens and administrative workers whom students have to interact with daily.’ When asked whether there are trans students in the hostel, the persons in-charge in the Jadavpur University hostels as well as the hostel security guards said ‘There is no one like that in the hostel and no one like that has ever asked for hostel accommodation here’. The fact that trans students do not avail hostel spaces in most universities is rooted in their systemic exclusion from these spaces. ‘Even though I wanted to get a PG for a while, I’ve always felt that my home would be better than the boys’ hostel on campus,’ says M.

IN KASHMIR, CONFLICT AND SOCIAL STIGMA TAKE A TOLL ON MENTAL HEALTH

By Rayees Ramzan | youthkiawaaz.com | 14-August-2025

Despite their vastly different circumstances, Saleema from the border and Pinky from the city share a common thread: the psychological burden of being marginalised by forces beyond their control. For one, it is the geography of war; for the other, it is the politics of identity.

Dr. Shazia points out that both groups experience “chronic stress that becomes part of daily life.” In conflict zones, this stress comes from fear of violence; in the transgender



community, it comes from rejection and discrimination. “Both create an environment where mental health deteriorates without visible wounds.”

HOSTILE CLASSROOMS – LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR TRANS YOUTH IN BENGALURU’S EDUCATIONAL SPACES

By Harshitha Padmavinod, citizenmatters.in | 12-August-2025



Manini, a socially-transitioned trans woman pursuing a Master’s degree in Kannada Literature at Bangalore University, says, “You won’t find many transgender students open about their gender identity in schools and colleges, because the teachers are often unaware about the subject and end up abusing us in the name of ‘helping’ us.”

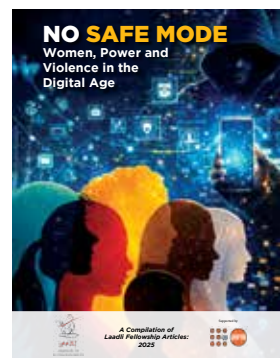
Manini moved to Bengaluru seven months ago but hasn’t come out at her university, fearing stigma. “The faculty’s ignorance hits harder when we are still trying to understand ourselves. I became depressed, fearing something was wrong with me when I realised I was attracted to men,” adds Manini.

Most educational institutions and their staff find it challenging to accept an individual’s right to live their true gender, and have a limited understanding of the emotional needs of transgender students. This lack of awareness about the trans community often extends to counsellors.

FROM PRESENCE TO SILENCE: HOW CYBERBULLYING AFFECTS GIRLS IN INDIA

Ambika Sharma | youthkiawaaz.com | 10-December-2025

“The moment I posted something online on Instagram, I felt like everyone was judging me intentionally or planning to pass some offensive comments intentionally on me. Now, I have completely stopped posting everything due to this fear of being bullied by someone.” says Sheetal*



▲CLICK FOR ALL STORIES IN FULL

Self-regulation through censorship has become common and more of

a defense coping- mechanism which comes at the price of confidence and ability to express oneself freely.

Girls have started erasing their online presence, aspects of their individual personality in order to avoid getting harassed or bullied through derogatory comments online. Academic performance is also impacted as emotional stress and fear take dominance in one’s mind and hinders one’s ability to perform and concentrate properly on their studies. Over time, these memories and experiences might shape social participation, career choices and comfort with navigating digital spaces which have now become essential and a part of one’s academic and professional life.

LAADLI MEDIA AWARDS THE CRUSADE CONTINUES

When the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (LMAAGS) were instituted in 2007, its scope was restricted to Mumbai. The very next year, it went national. Since its eighth edition, its spread covers all of South Asia in collaboration with the International Advertising Association (IAA). In 2007, it received 300 applications. In its fifth edition, there were 1500. There was no looking back, because this was an idea whose time was overdue.

Since launch, LMAAGS has identified and celebrated over 1800 winners and their work across journalism, advertising, books, theatre, cinema, OTT and more. An overwhelming majority of awardees are from journalism and news media, where regional legs and top winners therein compete for the national finale.

The regional legs ensure that regional language media is addressed and sensitised, serving

a pressing need as pointed out by veteran journalists who have guided LMAAGS over the years. Laadi also gives regional language media practitioners the platform to compete for the national awards, giving their stories equal significance. As with all Laadli Awards, the absence of an entry fee underlines the commitment to the cause of gender sensitivity and removes a critical barrier to participation.

It wasn't just Indian language media that embraced Laadli. Since it went international, LMAAGS has impacted the media and initiated conversations on gender in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Maldives.

Several past and recent winners we spoke with underline the importance of the awards in mainstreaming gender in media. Newsrooms have woken up. And as practitioners have pointed out, once you're awakened to the issue

of gender sensitivity, it's hard to unsee it.

Laadli has always held the belief that gender sensitivity in media isn't just about writing women-centric stories but about applying a gender lens to all stories. Laadli's work with media was to leverage the influence, reach and strength of the media and advertising industry to challenge the gender stereotypes prevalent in society. The initiative works through the year on advocacy and capacity building programmes with media, advertising and filmed entertainment stakeholders and their representative bodies across the country. In parallel, it engages future practitioners with customised engagement.

This year-long effort culminates in the regional and national (South Asia) awards functions, where the winners are ones who have championed the gender cause through their work, thereby impacting perceptions towards shaping a gender-equal society.

SALMAAGS 2023 – AT A GLANCE

The third edition of South Asia LMAAGS returned in 2023 after a hiatus, with the support of South Asia Women in Media (SAWM) and Asian Federation of Advertising Associations (AFAA). 11 awards were given to awardees from six countries for their consistent reporting on gender issues.

The winners were Fatana Bayat and Meena Habib from Afghanistan (Persian), Sharmin Shams and Israt Jahan Urmi from Bangladesh (Bengali), Aishath Nazuha and Aminath Khalisa from Maldives (Dhivehi), Bhrikuti Rai and Bidhya Rai from Nepal (Nepali), Fatima Nazish from Pakistan (Urdu), and Sunanda Hettiarachchi and Vineetha Matthaka Gamage from Sri Lanka (Sinhalese).

Following the call for entries on April 25th, Laadli took the help of social media and mass email marketing to reach a broader range of journalists for the 13th edition, resulting in many new faces applying for the awards. This is important, as those who have won three Laadli Awards were not allowed to enter again. A total of 857 entries were received of which 765 were shortlisted. The general consensus within the juries was that the quality of entries had improved over the years. The edition saw 30 jury meetings



Tuesday, December 12, 2023
at The Tata Theatre, NCPA, Nariman Point, Mumbai

Special Awardees



VIMLA PATIL Laadli of the Century



ARUNA RAJE PATIL Laadli Lifetime Achievement Award



BHANWARI DEVI Laadli Iconic Rural Feminist Award



KONKONA SEN SHARMA Laadli Woman Behind The Screen

involving 55 eminent personalities. They were drawn from academia, media, journalism, social activists, changemakers, business strategists, authors and more from across the country and some from overseas.

At the end of the process, 87 journalists were presented with the Laadli Media Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity in the regional leg, while 31 received Jury Appreciation Citations.

Laadli collaborated with Lok Samvad Sansthan, a Jaipur-based non-profit working on projects related to social development, public policies, human development, and more for the past two decades, for the 2023 edition of LMAAGS. UNFPA continued to support the initiative this year.

View the full [2023 report](#) here.

2023 WINNERS - EXCERPTS

WHY INDIAN SEX WORKERS DREAD GOING TO A HOSPITAL

Johanna Deeksha Victor | www.scroll.in | December 12, 2022

Vijaya Kumari said that she had often taken young women who needed abortions to hospitals. "Once a very young woman asked me for help," she said. When Kumari took her to a government hospital, the woman was asked to undergo an HIV test. "But they asked her to pay for it," she said. The woman immediately responded that she would come back later. "A few weeks later, I went to see her and she said she had taken some medicines on her own and bled out," Kumari recounted.

Kumari said she was shocked and urged the young woman to get medical help, but she refused. Indeed, many of the sex workers that

Scroll.in spoke to said that because of the financial hurdles they encountered, and the unempathetic attitudes of doctors in government hospitals, women often chose to buy over-the-counter abortion pills.

However, as Seshu noted, women who used them "without a proper prescription, and instructions,



Design | Shiuli Jamuar

risk excessive bleeding, and other long-lasting impacts on their reproductive health."

ISN'T IT HIGH TIME OUR COURTROOMS BECAME SURVIVOR-FRIENDLY?

Remya Harikumar | Mathrubhumi.com | July 16, 2022

(Translated from Malayalam)

"I was called for the trial years after the case was filed. My mind was whirling. I felt brave, I felt strong, and I was hopeful of getting justice for everything that happened to me. I was shaking as I entered the courtroom. Police, court.... everything was new to me. Still, I went to trial, determined to face those people who mercilessly hurt me physically and mentally. I was prepared to reveal everything, tell everyone what really happened. When I tell the truth to his face, he will finally understand the depth of his cruelty and my words will really pierce his mind – that was what I thought. But what really happened was this – I felt like running away. All those questions from the defending lawyers do that to you; you will just want to flee from that courtroom and never come back. Initially I answered their questions boldly. Then their attempt was to weaken me mentally, to force me to keep silent. They even asked me the colour of the discharge after intercourse. My whole body still trembles thinking of that harrowing time. It made me hate courtrooms." — A survivor who is now identified through the name of her native place. These words still haunt Kerala.

ABUSED IN SHELTERS, SPURNED BY KIN: WHY TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS NEED MORE THAN 'RESCUE'

Mohua Das Menon | The Times of India | August 4, 2022

The world now knows about those caught in the trap of what is often referred to as modern day slavery, but the stories of struggle after they escape the clutches of traffickers, remains largely untold.

Take the case of Kamla* in Bengal, that tops the country as a trafficking hotbed according to NCRB's 2016 report. A week into the nightmare of being forced into flesh trade, Kamla found her way to a shelter home after being rescued. But her trauma did not end there. Kamla described suffering physical and mental abuse at the hands of senior residents – mostly women stuck in the home due to procedural issues or those seeking repatriation.

"I'd have to follow all their orders, wash their clothes and utensils or they'd beat me up. They would also abuse me sexually." Support services to address her issues, too, were wholly inadequate. "When I tried to tell the shelter staff, they gave me sedatives in the name of vitamins to stop me from getting aggressive. I felt powerless and slit my wrist," she says.

10 YEARS AFTER NIRBHAYA, HOW FEARLESS ARE WOMEN?

Preeti Agyaat | www.hastaksher.com | December 1, 2022

(Translated from Hindi)

As we know the culprits of Nirbhaya got a death sentence on March 20, 2020, but now the question still remains the same, that even after 10 years of that inhuman incident of Nirbhaya, how many more Nirbhayas will we have? How safe are women?

Superficially the scenario looks better but the

following facts also must be known. What do the statistics say?

The report released this year (2022) by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) states that the rate of crime against women, which was 56.5% in 2020, has increased to 64.5% in 2021. This rate is calculated on the basis of the

number of incidents per 1 lakh population.

According to this, 3,71,503 cases of crime against women were reported in the year 2020 while 4,28,278 cases were registered in 2021. There has been a 13% increase in registered incidents of rape. In the year 2020, this number was 28,046 which has increased to 31,677 in the year 2021.

SALMAAGS 2024 – AT A GLANCE

The 4th South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (SALMAAGS), supported by UNFPA in collaboration with South Asia Women in Media (SAWM), was special for a reason – the edition coincided with UNFPA's golden jubilee year in India. Befittingly, UN Under Secretary General and UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem chaired the event where special Laadli UNFPA@50 Awards were conferred on six individuals who have mindfully used a gender lens in their sphere of work.

They were: Anthropologist and Ethnographic Filmmaker Dr. Harjant Gill (Redefining Masculinities); Independent Journalist Nidhi Jamwal (Feminising Climate Solutions); pioneer of elderly care initiatives in India Dr. Sheilu Sreenivasan; Filmmaker and Writer Paromita Vohra (Empowering Adolescents and Young People); IT expert Anita Gurmurthy (Consistent Advocacy to Bridge the Digital Gender Divide); and Filmmaker, Activist and Journalist Bishakha Datta (Building Conversations Around Right to Bodily Autonomy).

Acclaimed Actor-Director Ratna Pathak whose work straddles theatre, TV and cinema was the Chief Guest.



Wednesday, October 9, 2024
at The Tata Theatre, NCPA, Nariman Point, Mumbai

Special Awardees



DR ARMAITY DESAI Laadli of the Century
BACHI KARKARIA Laadli Lifetime Achievement Award
VRINDA GROVER Laadli Gender Champion Award

Moving up from six in the previous edition, 14 South Asia winners from seven countries were recognised in 2024 for consistent reporting on gender issues.

They were: Zarghoona Salehi (English) and Waslat Zuha Khan (Urdu) from Afghanistan; Tapashi Rabeya Akhi and Shumana Sharmin from Bangladesh (Bengali); Damchoe Pem and Yangyel Laden from Bhutan (English);

Aishath Mohamed and Zamath Ahmed Waheed from Maldives (Dhivehi); Binita Dahal (Nepali) and Kalpana Bhattarai (English) from Nepal; Jamaima Afridi (English) and Rabbia Arshad (Urdu) from Pakistan; and Sonali Wanigabaduge and Anya Wipulasena from Sri Lanka (English).

After the regional awards where 74 journalists were awarded, the 4th edition of SALMAAGS recognised 57 stellar contributions in media, advertising, literature, theatre and cinema for pushing boundaries and igniting candid and insightful discussions around gender.

View the full [2024 report](#) here.

2024 WINNERS - EXCERPTS

5 YRS SINCE ROHINI ASHRAM RAID, CBI CAN'T CATCH RAPE ACCUSED 'GODMAN'. BUT YOU CAN FIND HIM ON YOUTUBE

Apoorva Mandhani | *The Print* | July 5, 2023

When the new committee, formed under the supervision of former Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Kiran Bedi, visited the Rohini ashram last year, it was confronted with a small room on the third floor of the building. The inmates allegedly "resisted the inspection" of this room, according to the panel's September 2022 report, seen by ThePrint.

Inside, the team stated, they found around 300-350 mobile phones, batteries and chargers. One of the inmates was in the room with two laptops. The room also had a locked cupboard, which had to be opened with the assistance of the local police. Inside, the committee found another big batch of new mobile phones.

When the inmate in the room was asked to switch on the laptop, the team found a lecture delivered by Dixit in 2021 on the



Graphic by Soham Sen, *ThePrint*

laptop. The committee claimed that in another Adhyatmik Vishwa Vidyalaya ashram in Nangloi, a lecture delivered by Dixit in August 2022 was found playing on the TV on 31 August, 2022. The report recommended: "The inmates are continuously receiving the latest discourses of Baba Virendra Dev Dixit

digitally. Despite being absconded, affairs of the ashram are being managed by him. An investigation be directed regarding the chain of communication to get hold of the absconded Baba."

WRESTLERS V/S THE SYSTEM

Harini Calamur | *shethepeople.TV* | May 31, 2023

In 2017, the Me Too movement shook the world. In a world where the onus of sexual harassment or sexual assault was on the woman – you must have done something to provoke him. The floodgates opened, as women across nations, across age groups, across race and religion, came out to say “Yes, I was sexually harassed”. And other women added their voice – Me Too. It was an incredibly powerful moment in history, as women finally could open up about their deep pain on not just having to cope with the harassment, but also the silence that followed. In a world where silence was the norm, a powerful movement emerged, starting as a whisper, growing into a resounding shout that continues to echo across the globe. It all began with courageous women come out and sharing their experiences, talking about their deep sense of shame and humiliation. Talking about the deep hurt that came from a world that would not believe them. And, a power structure that would stand by those who molested.

Today six years later, nothing has changed. The power structure – powerful men, and women who enable sexual harassment by their implicit silence, and explicit support – is back in full force shielding men in powerful positions from the consequences of their actions.

4 OF 5 LIVING ORGAN DONORS IN INDIA ARE WOMEN, 4 OF 5 RECIPIENTS MEN: STUDY

Steffy Thevar | *The Times of India* | Aug 10, 2023

Mayuri Barve, an organ transplant coordinator from DY Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Centre in Pune, said that in the last 15 years that she has been working in this field, only once did a husband come forward to donate his organ to his wife. Usually, wives, mothers and even fathers donate, she added. She said mothers and fathers are happy donors to their children. When both are unavailable, wives come forward. Often, if the daughter is unmarried, she becomes the donor. However, if a wife needs an organ, then it is most likely that she would be put on a waiting list.

“If the recipient is a man and the breadwinner, then the wife or the parents feel the responsibility of donating the organ. Women who are recipients feel guilty if their family members have to donate their organs and they refuse to take them from their families,” she added. Data from 1995 to 2021 in India shows that for every woman who received an organ transplant, four men got transplants.

Experts attribute this stark difference to economic and financial responsibilities, societal pressures, and ingrained preferences.

TALKING THERAPY: ASHA WORKERS OFFER HOPE IN RURAL MADHYA PRADESH

Maitri Porecha & Varghese George | *The Hindu* | Nov 22, 2023

Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the State government of Madhya Pradesh with non-profit Sangath, project Empower, now in its third year, has been implemented to train ASHAs to become the first point of contact for people in mental distress. Over the last two years, 462 trained ASHAs have screened 18,000 people for depression, enrolled up to 2,200 patients for counselling, and delivered over 13,000 sessions of therapy across

three districts: Raisen, Vidisha, and Narmadapuram.

Vandana Vishwakarma, 37, is one of them. She ‘home delivers’ treatment to 6,000 people, both women and men, and has learnt to differentiate depression from being dukhi (sad) or nirash (despondent). “Every day, for about four hours, 20 days a month, I visit five or six homes, asking about the health of the family,” she says.



Photo Credit: A.M. Faruqui

WOMEN FARMERS SHINE AS ‘SUPER-HEROES’ IN INDIA’S CLIMATE FIGHT

Roli Srivastava | *context.new*, Thomas Reuters Foundation | NOV 22, 2023



“(Men) farmers didn’t listen to us when we started, as they felt we didn’t know anything,” said Devi, sitting cross-legged at a farmers’ support centre, showing a colourful chart documenting her project’s performance in Chevaturu village. She and others are trying to shift gender norms by building a movement of rural women’s collectives that are helping non-profits and local governments promote crops and methods to combat climate pressures and cut planet-heating farm emissions.

For five years, members of Devi’s group have

demonstrated how to make manure and screened videos about “natural farming” which avoids synthetic pesticides and fertilisers and instead utilises cow dung mixed with other ingredients.

They have managed to get 312 of 786 farmers in their village to adopt natural practices on cotton, paddy and mango farms.

“Men can’t do this kind of awareness. They only look at earning money. Women have a lot more patience. I feel happy doing this work,” Devi told Context.

LMAAGS 2025 – AT A GLANCE

On International Women’s Day, March 8th, 2025, Laadli invited entries for the 15th edition of Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity. Applications were invited from journalists from across the country, from print, electronic and web media in 14 languages.

The edition received 715 entries, of which 630 were shortlisted. In all, 63 journalists won in the Regional Awards, while 33 received Jury Appreciation Citations. The National edition marked the culmination of the year-long process to identify winners, and those from other streams of media and change makers. Entries were invited from publishers for books, while multiple panels of experts collaborated to shortlist gender-nuanced work from advertisements, films, documentaries and OTT platforms.

A total of 28 jury meetings were conducted to identify the winners. The juries comprised 57 eminent personalities including academics, media professionals, journalists, social activists, change makers, business strategists, authors and more from across the country, who decided on the winners. Building on the partnership of several years, the initiative was once again supported by UNFPA India.



Special Awardees



MAHABANOO MODY-KOTWAL
Lifetime Achievement Award



JYOTI MHAPSEKAR Laadli
Gender Champion Award



INDAVI TULPULE Laadli Rural
Feminist Award



NAMRATA RAO Laadli
Woman Behind The Screen
Award

The special awards once again saluted the noteworthy work of stellar women and recognised their tremendous contribution to their chosen fields. Theatre legend Sarita Joshi, through over six decades of performance, was feted for embodying women’s strength and grace on stage. Theatreperson-activist Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal was honoured for her lifelong commitment to women’s voices and for transforming art into a force for dialogue and

change.

Feminist thinker Jyoti Mhapsekar, founder of Stree Mukti Sanghatana, was awarded for fusing art and activism to give voice to working-class women. Community organiser Indavi Tulpule was celebrated for dedicating her life to empowering rural and tribal women in Thane.

View the full [2025 report](#) here.

2025 WINNERS - EXCERPTS

GOA ISN'T JUST A PARTY CAPITAL, IT IS A START-UP HUB TOO. AND WOMEN ARE DRIVING IT

Manasi Phadke | [theprint.in](#) | 15 July 2024

“It was never a conscious decision to have a certain number of women entrepreneurs here. We didn’t even realise that we had organically drawn so many of them until the state government came out with its numbers. About a third of our incubatees are women-led businesses,” said Joseph, who moved from Hyderabad to Goa to be with his wife, a non-Goan dentist practicing in the coastal state.

Goa has 225 startups registered with the state government for availing incentives, of which 76, or over 33 per cent, are led by women entrepreneurs. Overall, the state is home to 445 startups certified by the central government’s Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

“Even if you look at the 445 companies from Goa certified as startups by the Centre, the proportion of women is about the same – 30



Goa-based entrepreneurs Snigdha Manchanda, Sunaya Shirodkar, Sapna Shahani, and Siya Shaikh | Illustration by Prajna Ghosh

per cent,” said Prashant DS, chief executive of Goa’s startup and IT promotion cell.

While female-led startups have taken advantage of these schemes, none are exclusive to

women. That may soon change. Building on its accidental success, Prashant said the state government is now considering rolling out two women-focused schemes: a fellowship for startups and a skill upgrade programme.

HOMES FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE | A SAFE SPACE, THREATENED

Satvika Mahajan & Ashna Butani | *The Hindu* | 1 December 2024

The homes continue to thrive as the community members put their heart and soul into building a safe space. The days still begin and end on a positive note, punctuated with activities such as make-up classes from 2 pm to 4 pm, and book reading from 11 am to 12 noon.

Survival in the world for many transpeople is a battle. While the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 prohibits discrimination against transpeople in areas such as employment, education, health care, access to public facilities, and housing, the on-ground reality is different. Many are still unable to get access to TG cards, with reasons ranging from missing or lost documents to a lack of sensitivity among officials.

For many, the homes are the only solace they have as employment, education, and housing are still difficult to access due to stigmatisation. Many of the homes receive more than 25 applications a year, but have to



Photo Credit: Shashi Shekhar Kashyap

turn people away. Chettri says since they cannot take everyone in, they help them in other capacities such as securing jobs and scholarships. "This is the least we can do. All they are asking for is equal rights and dignity to live and work," she says.

IN KORAPUT'S VILLAGES, WOMEN ARE CHARTING A MAP FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Aishwarya Mohanty | *behanbox.com* | 11 July, 2024

Over 20 days of exhaustive mapping, the women, some as old as 90, drew from their memories to document the changes, covering the length and breadth of their village boundaries.

The exercise was a depiction of local knowledge, perspectives, and expertise, ensuring that the map reflects the nuanced understanding that community members have about their environment.

Apart from just mapping their commons, the women are also encouraging each other to think of ways to sustain the commons.

"We knew about these changes but when we translated them on paper we could understand the magnitude of it all," says Damyanti Gabada, 47.

The term 'tragedy of commons' was first posited by American ecologist Garret Hardin in 1968, and it meant "a situation where shared environmental resources are overused and exploited and eventually depleted, posing risks to everyone involved". Hardin argued that to prevent this, there should be restrictions on its usage. This is what the women of Koraput are doing.



TAUNTED FOR HER FEATURES AS A CHILD, DEEPTHI JEEVANJI, BACKED BY GOPICHAND, STRIKES GOLD AT WORLD ATHLETICS PARA CHAMPIONSHIP

Nitin Sharma | *The Indian Express* | 19 November, 2025

When Deepthi Jeevanji won India's first gold medal at the World Athletics Para Championship in Kobe, Japan, her parents recalled how her unusual features at birth had prompted relatives and acquaintances to advise her parents to give up the child.

It was only later that Jeevanji Yadhagiri and Jeevanji Dhanalaxmi found out that their eldest child was born with intellectual disability, a cognitive disease hampering communication as well as adaptive skills.

But there was only a feeling of pride on Monday morning, when the 20-year-old set a world record timing of 55.07 seconds in the women's T20 400m final, also qualifying for the Paris Paralympics.

Deepthi broke the earlier world record of 55.12 seconds set by USA's Breanna Clark. Aysel Onder of Turkey won the silver (55.19) while Lizanshela Angulo of Ecuador (56.68) won the bronze.

"She was born during the solar eclipse and her head was very small at birth along with the lips and nose being a bit unusual. Every villager who saw her and some of our relatives would call Deepthi pichi (mental) and kothi (monkey) and tell us to send her to an orphanage. Today, seeing her become the world champion in a far-off country proves that she is indeed a special girl," an emotional Dhanalaxmi told *The Indian Express* from village Kalleda in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh.

LANGUAGE IN NEWSROOMS CONTINUES TO REMAIN FLAWED AND LESS INCLUSIVE



My story on women being denied basic vaginal tests on account of their marital status was a consequence of my own experience, as well as several women

I know. The practice of asking women whether they're married before getting such tests done, unfortunately, is one that persists in many hospitals even today. Most women are forced to lie about their marital status, or walk home without access to basic healthcare. But this is not to say that things have not improved: there are gynaecology networks today that focus on providing inclusive, accessible care to not just women, but also gender minorities.

This also prompted me to explore more stories about how gender minorities, especially trans men and trans masculine people, struggle to access healthcare. With a focus on the State of Tamil Nadu, which has 12 gender clinics that offer free surgeries to trans people, I wrote, early this year, on how woefully inadequate the healthcare system is, when it comes to trans men. This is especially significant in light of the Transgender Amendment Act, 2026.

Besides the efforts that Laadli is already

undertaking, such as the Laadli Media Awards, fellowships for journalists, and frequent workshops, it can create a comprehensive guide for gender-sensitive reporting for journalists, as language in newsrooms – while evolving in some respects – continues to remain flawed and less inclusive of gender minorities. ■

The author is Principal Correspondent with The Hindu. Her story 'Unmarried women denied basic vaginal Tests: Will SC ruling end discrimination?' in The Quint won at the Laadli Media Awards 2023.

“Laadli can create a comprehensive guide for gender-sensitive reporting for journalists.”

- Meenakshy Sasikumar

SENSITIVITY, AN ONGOING JOURNEY



I got to know about the Laadli Media Awards in 2011, when the award function was organized here in Bhubaneswar. Senior journalist Manipadma Jena, who was then coordinator for the award, visited our office and sensitized us about it. During the discussion, she emphasized that if the stories are written through the gender lens, we should apply for this award. I decided that I would first try to understand the gender lens and applied the next year. I received my first Laddli Media Award in the year 2012 and then consecutively twice in two other mediums – print and digital. I feel happy that I am the first journalist from Odisha to receive the award three times consecutively.

I was happy and equally brushing up my knowledge on gender lens by reading others' stories, attending different workshops and seminars, and reading various books and reports including "Missing : Half the Story – Journalism as if Gender Matters". It helped me understand and incorporate the gender lens and intersectionality in my stories. Through the years, I have received quite a number of media fellowships and awards for my stories.

Though I contribute to national digital platforms, in Odisha, gender is still not a familiar word. While depicting violence against women in stories, one can easily notice the insensitivity in both script and visuals. In 2017, Oxfam India conducted a media sensitivity programme, which I was a part of. They invited a number of journalists (both entry and middle level) to discuss how to integrate gender lens into stories – by adding women's voices, women's issues, sensitive language and visuals. This continued for two to three programmes and it has had a positive impact on the media and

newsroom ecosystem.

Over the years many journalists from Odisha have received the Laddli Media Award and it has helped in improving their understanding and that of the media houses they are working for. Though many things have changed, I wish in news content as well as in newsrooms, women aren't projected as a product but rather get equal respect like men. ■

The author is an independent journalist based in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and a recipient of multiple Laadli Media Awards.

“In news content as well as in newsrooms, I wish women aren't projected as a product but rather get equal respect like men.”

- Rakhi Ghosh

LAADLI NUDGED ME TO LOOK AT RURAL STORIES FROM A GENDER LENS

Journalist **Nidhi Jamwal** says her reporting evolved with lessons from rural women seen as disempowered, weak and lacking independence – a perception far removed from reality.

Nidhi Jamwal's story, 'The Village Classroom: Rural Indian Women Can Teach About Climate Resilience, Fight for Survival,' opens with Soni Murmu, a madhu palak (bee keeper). The Santhal Adivasi woman who had never been to school was running a flourishing honey business from her village in Banka district of Bihar and through an all-women FPO (farmer producer organisation). The honey she produces goes to clients as far as Mumbai.

Jamwal's story revealed how Murmu had learnt all about bee-keeping and the business of honey from YouTube during the pandemic, when her husband had no work. Besides Murmu, the feature captured eye-opening stories of rural women who have a lot to offer in the space of climate resilience, be it growing flood-compatible paddy or turning their villages organic.

The story that went live on SabrangIndia.in on International Women's Day 2024 did not just strike a chord with the Laadli Media Awards jury, but also with her peers, academicians and common citizens. Since then, she has been invited to several colleges and public platforms to speak on rural women and climate resilience, including a joint event organised by NDMA and UN Women.

The journalist places on record that the story was a deeply personal narrative of how her interactions with rural women during years of grassroots reporting had made her a better environmental and climate journalist.

"First and foremost, the impact has been on me because my reporting evolved because of the lessons I learnt from rural women who are mostly seen as disempowered, weak, illiterate and lacking independence. Most reporters do not think it important to speak to and document the voices of rural women because, it is believed, these women do not understand 'climate change' and hence climate resilience. However, my repeated interactions with rural



women across the country taught me how they are already practising climate resilience and are champions of environmental protection," explains Jamwal.

"There is a shift in narrative in the media around rural women who are now being increasingly viewed as empowered and as a repository of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and not just passive recipients of doles and government programmes."

She is also a mentor of a couple of media fellowships where she sees a lot of young journalists taking up related stories as part of their fellowship. Jamwal also trains rural reporters and takes pride in informing us that many male rural reporters now make an extra effort to record voices of rural women in their stories, which were ignored earlier.

"There is a shift in narrative in the media around rural women who are now being increasingly viewed as empowered and as a repository of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and not just passive recipients of doles and government programmes," underlines Jamwal.

Jamwal, who covers environment, climate, and rural issues, notes that all her reporting is through a gender lens. She traveled to Tripura in November 2025 and did ground reports on rural women and springs in the Himalayan state. She has recently launched ON AIR, billed as India's only bilingual webzine on air quality which focuses on rural women.

She acknowledges Laadli's work and believes there is more that could be done, and needs to be done.

"Laadli has done brilliant work as far as mainstreaming gender-sensitive reporting is concerned. I have no qualms in admitting that it is Laadli that nudged me and pushed me to look at rural stories from a gender lens," she notes.

Jamwal surmises, "Organisations like Laadli can co-host some related film festivals, or organise events which pass on the mic to rural women – where those women speak directly than through journalists like me. Also, Laadli could work a lot more with rural reporters and content creators in villages and small towns and train them. They are often very good at creating content but sometimes unknowingly promote certain gender biases."

There's room to do more. ■

THAT WINNING MOMENT SHAPED MY JOURNEY

Neetu Singh, Founder, Shades of Rural India, reflects on the first of her 13 Laadli Media & Advertising Awards, and more.

“We proudly celebrate Neetu Singh’s unwavering resolve to use her platform and organization as a tool for deep social impact and community advocacy,” read the citation of her most recent Laadli Media Award (2025). It was not the first time she graced the stage that celebrates gender sensitivity in journalism and media.

Her introduction to the Laadli Media Awards happened through Alka Pandey, a senior journalist from Lucknow who was associated with the awards at the regional level. At that time, Singh was working in community radio and had applied with the series “Ghar ki Lutiya Khet na Jaihai.” It received the Laadli award a couple of years before she would win one in her name, in 2017.

“It was a very early stage in my career, and the recognition meant a lot to me. Being acknowledged on a platform where senior journalists from across the country were also being honoured was both encouraging and motivating. It made me realise that my work had value, but also that I needed to go deeper and be more consistent. That moment shaped my journey. Since then, I have continued working on gender issues, and over the years, I have received 13 Laadli Media Awards at regional and national levels,” says Singh.

She notes that a lot has changed between the time she received her first Laadli award and the last.

“When I first received the award, there were very few journalists consistently reporting on gender issues. The reach of such stories was limited, and even within the awards, the number of entries and awardees was relatively small. Today, in 2026, I see a clear shift. Many more journalists are writing and reporting on gender issues, and there is greater awareness and sensitivity in storytelling across media, including digital platforms. The number of people engaging with these issues has increased significantly. While



I would not say that the change is dramatic or complete, it is definitely a positive shift,” she avers.

And adds, “Platforms like the Laadli Media Awards have played an important role in this. Recognition encourages journalists to take up



“More journalists, including young and independent reporters, are now engaging with gender issues. There is a growing understanding that these stories matter and need to be told with responsibility.”

- Neetu Singh



such themes seriously, knowing that their work will be valued.”

The shift that is witnessed is on scale and awareness, according to Singh: “More journalists, including young and independent reporters, are now engaging with gender issues. There is a growing understanding that these stories matter and need to be told with responsibility.”

Yet, she underlines the need to expand inclusion. She explains, “Journalists from small towns, rural areas, and independent or alternative media platforms often do important work but do not always get enough visibility or recognition. I would like to see more efforts to ensure that such voices are included and encouraged.”

“Increasing access to platforms like Laadli for journalists from remote areas can make a big difference. It will not only support those journalists but also bring forward stories from regions that are often underreported, especially rural areas where gender issues are deeply rooted and need more attention,” surmises Singh. ■

CHALLENGES OF PATRIARCHY, DISCRIMINATION AND SILENCE ARE DEEPLY INTERCONNECTED ACROSS BORDERS

I have never worked for awards. It never even crossed my mind that I needed to earn recognition. And yet, over the past two decades of journalism, and especially through the last 12 years of activism, writing and documentary work focused on women, an invaluable reward has found its way into my life. That reward is the genuine love of people, particularly women.

Women from different ages, professions, and walks of life have reached out to me over the years. Some have sought advice and support; others have simply written to express their affection and solidarity. I have received countless messages and letters – some of them deeply personal—saying, “Your writing has changed my life.” I do not believe there is any award greater than this.

And yet, today I want to write about one particular award: the South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Award.

In 2023, I had the honour of receiving the 3rd South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity, representing Bangladesh. The award ceremony was held in Mumbai, bringing together journalists, media professionals, activists and storytellers from across South Asia who are committed to advancing gender justice through their work.

Receiving this recognition was both humbling and deeply meaningful. For me, it was not just an individual achievement, but a reflection of the collective efforts of many people, communities and voices who continue to challenge gender stereotypes, question injustice and push for a more equal and inclusive society.

My work has always been rooted in exploring gender through a critical and intersectional lens, whether through writing, editing or building platforms that centre women's experiences and narratives. In South Asia, where gender inequality is still deeply embedded in social, cultural and institutional structures, media plays a powerful role. It can either reinforce harmful norms or actively dismantle them. I have always believed in using media as a tool



“This award is also a reminder of responsibility. It strengthens my resolve to keep questioning dominant narratives, to keep amplifying marginalised voices, and to keep building spaces where gender-sensitive storytelling is not an exception but a norm.”

- Sharmin Shams

for resistance, awareness and transformation.

The Laadli Award is especially significant because it recognises not only excellence in media, but also sensitivity towards gender representation. It encourages journalists and content creators to reflect on how stories are framed, whose voices are amplified, and whose realities are often erased or ignored. To be acknowledged in this space reaffirmed my commitment to responsible storytelling.

Attending the award ceremony in Mumbai was an inspiring experience. I had the opportunity to meet fellow awardees from different countries, each working in their own context but connected by a shared purpose: to create a more just and equitable world. Listening to their stories reminded me that while our struggles may differ in form, the underlying challenges of patriarchy, discrimination and silence are deeply interconnected across borders.

This award is also a reminder of responsibility. Recognition is not an endpoint, it is a continuation. It strengthens my resolve to keep questioning dominant narratives, to keep amplifying marginalised voices, and to keep building spaces where gender-sensitive storytelling is not an exception but a norm.

I dedicate this achievement to everyone who has supported, challenged, and inspired my journey, especially the women whose stories often go unheard but continue to shape our realities in powerful ways. ■

The author is Publisher and Editor, Feminist Factor; and Co-founder & Executive Director, Shantibari. She is based in Dhaka.

GENDER SENSITIVITY IS NOT A GENRE

Sohini Sengupta's story "Trans voices in campuses: The need for safe spaces beyond electoral lip service" won the Laadli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity in 2023. We asked her to reflect on the impact of the story, the recognition, and more.

Impact on readers, peers and self...

The most immediate impact was a conversation. The story opened dialogue in campuses that had previously avoided the subject, including, notably, a more conservative campus in Ahmedabad that I joined after receiving the award. But the deeper impact was on me. As a messenger, I felt the weight of responsibility to direct light toward the darkest corners of public discourse. I took my work more seriously and made gender and social justice reporting my mainstay. Years later, I carry that commitment into an international media organization, working in a local language, with the same intent – to make this work matter where it is most needed.

Follow-ups & Inspiration...

I continued with queer-focused reporting, particularly on the gap between policy and practice. *Stories like State Against Trans Women: Selective Silence of an Outraged Nation, From Policy to Practice: Combating Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence with Community-Led Solidarity, and ICC Bans Trans Women from International Women's Cricket* followed from that same commitment.

Whether my work has inspired others to take up such reporting, I cannot say with any veracity. What I do know is that I receive messages from people who say these stories give them hope and embolden them to speak. I also fight daily within my own team to be more careful about how we frame and position stories, not only when we report on queer subjects explicitly, but in every story. Gender sensitivity is not a genre. It should be embedded in how we phrase, focus, and tell any story. The impact of that advocacy is not mine to measure. I can only hope it registers, even as a whisper.

More From Laadli...

Laadli is already doing something rare and

Trans Voices In Campuses: The Need For Safe Spaces Beyond Electoral Lip Service

From safe hostel accommodations to toilet accessibility, our campuses are still struggling to provide basic infrastructure for the trans community.

By Sohini Sengupta • Jun 30, 2022 • 6 min read

Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Email, Print, Share



Source: feminisminindia.com



“Laadli has the strength to actively promote and amplify voices, not just recognize them after the fact.”

- Sohini Sengupta

necessary with its fellowship: it gives journalists the window and the funding to pursue stories that the daily news cycle simply cannot afford. That structural support is invaluable.

What I would add: a larger, sustained publication, not limited to award or fellowship winners, but a curated document of milestone gender-sensitive reporting over the years. This would serve as a living archive and a resource for younger reporters navigating newsrooms that still resist this framing.

I would also encourage Laadli to extend financial support to gender-focused audiovisual work, including documentary. The written word reaches some, the image reaches further. The credibility and platform that Laadli has earned over years is now significant enough to do more than validate. It has the strength to actively promote and amplify voices, not just recognize them after the fact.

I am deeply grateful to Laadli for the support and strength it provided me and so many other reporters. It will always be a turning point in my story. I hope I can live up to the responsibility. ■

Sohini Sengupta is currently associated with Deutsche Welle.

EMPATHETIC, IMMERSIVE STORYTELLING

Chitra Rangarajan's story "Reclaiming the Night: A Woman's Journey Through Chennai After Dark" won at the Laadli Media Awards 2025. Here, she recounts the impact of the story, scope for Laadli, and more.



It opened up a deeply personal experience! Almost every woman who read it felt, "This is my story too." That sense of collective recognition was incredibly powerful.

For readers and viewers, it sparked important conversations about how we report on gender, not as isolated incidents, but as lived realities shaped by urban design and societal attitudes.

For me as a journalist, it reaffirmed the importance of empathetic, immersive storytelling, of walking through an issue rather than observing it from a distance. It strengthened my belief that journalism must not only inform, but also question, challenge, and reimagine how our public spaces often fail women through a gendered lens.

Follow-up & Influence...

The story has become a starting point for many ongoing conversations. As a group, we are now engaging more deeply with questions around urban infrastructure, public transport systems at night, and the lived experiences of women who work nocturnal shifts.

Through visual storytelling – especially on our YouTube channel – and community-led narratives

“Organisations like Laadli already play a crucial role in recognition and advocacy, and its mentorship programmes have been especially impactful. There is great potential to deepen this further.”

- Chitra Rangarajan

in public spaces such as government museums, we are listening to and amplifying more voices of women and their perspectives. I do believe the story has contributed to a growing momentum, where more people are willing to engage with social and gender issues in meaningful ways.

Role of Laadli...

I would strongly encourage more collaborations. Bringing together journalists, filmmakers, advertisers and activists to co-create narratives that move beyond stereotypes. Such collective efforts can help embed gender sensitivity not as an exception, but as a standard across media and storytelling. ■

(Chitra Rangarajan is an architect and an independent journalist exploring the intersection of space, gender and everyday life. Associated with Herstories, a women-led publication that amplifies voices writing for women, by women.)

CHANGE MUST BEGIN INSIDE OUR OWN NEWSROOMS



I first got the prestigious Laadli Award in 2015-'16. But I had known about Laadli long before 2010, through eminent guests who came to my panel discussion on my popular

program RAHA: Paving the Way, which I produce and anchor. They always asked me, "Why aren't you applying for Laadli?"

I always hesitated to apply for an award. But in 2016 I felt that recognition is needed for encouragement. So I applied for the first time that year – and got the award.

That same year, I was asked to submit a transcribed version of this subject for the National Award, but due to some unavoidable situation, I could not submit it on time.

Over the years, my long association with Population First has transformed into an important part of my life. Through this journey, I discovered that I am not just a teleprompter-reading anchor or newscaster. I realized I am a journalist who can see the 360-degree perspective of every story.

Receiving four Laadli Awards became a defining milestone for me. It encouraged me to produce and anchor more progressive topics through a gender lens. I now choose my words carefully to convey each story with responsibility and empathy. I also guide my colleagues on the do's and don'ts of gender-sensitive reporting, because change must begin inside our own newsrooms.

We are witnessing some change, but a lot is still left to be done. Media houses are still not inclusive by nature. They carry stereotypes that need to change. Women are rarely in decision-making positions, so the stories, the language and the perspectives often reflect that gap. The Covid19 period is the clearest example – we did not properly represent women's voices during

“Women are rarely in decision-making positions, so the stories, the language and the perspectives often reflect that gap”

- Supriya Dash

that unprecedented crisis.

Yet, I remain hopeful that slowly but surely we will witness a gender-responsive media in the near future. The dialogue has begun, and many of us are committed to pushing it forward.

Personally, Population First and Laadli helped me discover a better version of myself. I now treat my stories with empathy and have opened my mind and thought process to much more. I am sincerely obliged to the team at Population First and feel privileged to have had the chance to connect with them. ■

MUCH MORE MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER ISSUES IS NEEDED IN ALL MEDIA

In my three-plus decades in journalism in India, I find that while a lot has changed in positive terms with regard to gender sensitivity in reporting by news media, we still have a long way to go. No longer are gender issues, and by this I mean issues/concerns related to women, relegated to weekend supplements, women's magazines, and only to soft feature stories on beauty, celebrities, and domestic/household issues. We now see women featured as sources and main characters increasingly in news stories related to health, education, employment, and also environment, sports, politics and business. Mainly, however, we see them in crime stories, primarily as victims of sexual violence.

Since the 2012 Jyoti Singh Pandey gang rape case, news media has become more sensitive and careful in the ways it covers crimes against women (print more than broadcast) but it still often falls prey to old stereotypes relating to women's behaviour, morality etc. in its reporting, editing (headlines/straplines etc.) and in use of images. Media is trying to feel its way around the idea of intersectionality, and while some gender-sensitive journalists understand that better, others fumble around it. This is, for example, the need to look at gender along with other relevant lenses such as with caste or disability etc., especially in relation to violence where it often gets missed.

So yes, the picture is better, more in English-language media (though not consistently so), but still has a long way to go particularly in regional/Indian language media – the problem there is that there are still fewer women in comparison to men as reporters/editors etc. In the English-language media, there are now many more women working as reporters and sub-editors. That helps. But here too we find that at the higher levels of authority, there are few women.

I feel while things have improved, there are many more changes we need to see, much more mainstreaming of gender issues is needed in all media. Still, the default mode is that these are women's issues and they have to be separated from mainstream coverage of news. We still

need to hear more voices of women/queer folk/trans community in mainstream news coverage. More of them need to be sources and main characters in general stories on economics, politics, climate change, elections, education, agricultural issues etc. And we need to work on intersectionality with regard to gender issues.

Laadli has done some absolutely amazing work to mainstream gender – in terms of training, re-training, workshops, reiterating this for journalists in the field and also media students. Giving the Laadli awards has led to a big boost in gender coverage across regions and languages, and I now see even male journalists want to



“I now see even male journalists want to do a few gender-based stories every year so that they can apply for the awards. So, Laadli has succeeded in drawing attention to the issue.”

- Sameera Khan



“I started my journey as a research assistant before I became an actor and I worked on a gender and public space

project which was headed by three lovely ladies, one of whom is here today and I really want to thank her. Sameera Khan, thank you so much for your work at the NYMI, and also for giving me tools to look at things with a gender sensitivity lens. I hope that I've taken that knowledge to the work I do today.”

- Rasika Dugal, Actor, at the 3rd South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (2023). More on page 51.

do a few gender-based stories every year so that they can apply for the awards. So, it has succeeded in drawing attention to the issue.

But it needs to sustain this with continued and amplified training in media schools and in newsrooms – not just training to reporters/feature writers but also the desk and editors. Train them in how to spot stories, the variety of themes available for stories, the appropriate language and jargon to use, the law, why these are fundamental issues etc. I see this as very important at a time when in many areas we are seeing a backlash on women's issues with male activists trying to seize the mainstream in journalism, film, on social media etc. The recent newly amended Trans Act also makes it clear that rights of certain vulnerable gender groups are being rescinded in 2026. The importance of what Laadli is doing cannot be underestimated. It is very crucial and needs to continue. ■

The author is a veteran journalist, writer and feminist researcher.

'THE LAADLI AWARDS NEED TO BE AMPLIFIED EVEN MORE'

While LMAAGS has embraced advertising as a key category since its inception, there's a lot more to Laadli's association with the advertising industry, with due cognisance to the fact that advertising has the power to shape perception and society as much as it is shaped by it.

One of the early interventions that preceded the introduction of a category for gender sensitive advertising at the prestigious Abby Awards of The AAAI and The Advertising Club in 2016, was the creation of gender sensitivity scores for ads in Campaign India magazine. Alongside reviews by advertising professionals of the latest Indian ads, then Programme Director of Laadli Dr.AL Sharada reflected on them through a gender lens. The move ushered in a hitherto unexplored critical perspective. The person who introduced Laadli and Campaign India to each other was incidentally an ad veteran and friend of both —Ramesh Narayan of Canco Advertising. He recalls the time when he was introduced to Dr.Sharada.

"I still remember the time Bobby Sista, a dear friend, walked into my office and introduced me to Dr.Sharada who was with him. I cannot recall the date but it was the beginning of another great relationship," recalls Narayan.

Laadli has also engaged ad professionals through several events over the years, many of which have been through partnerships for the common cause forged with industry associations. Among such bodies is the International Advertising Association (IAA) India Chapter. Narayan recalls how gender became a focus issue for IAA, and Laadli, a partner.

"I heard too many people talking rather disdainfully about how advertising and the entertainment industry were the cause of the sad state of gender as a class, in our country. Something needed to be done. So we at the IAA decided on a whole-day seminar where we would provide a common platform to NGOs in the related area and top creative people in the advertising and entertainment industry," he notes.

Narayan adds that the proposal did not sail through smoothly at first: "I proposed this at a

Managing Committee meeting of the IAA that was held at the GoaFest. While Mr. Srinivasan Swamy (current President of the Advertising Agencies Association of India) backed the idea, some senior people spoke out strongly against it. After I explained the need for such a thing on the sidelines of the meeting, (late) Pradeep Guha threw his weight behind the idea and then it happened."



"I heard too many people talking rather disdainfully about how advertising and the entertainment industry were the cause of the sad state of gender as a class, in our country. Something needed to be done. So we at the IAA decided on a whole-day seminar where we would provide a common platform to NGOs in the related area and top creative people in the advertising and entertainment industry."

- Ramesh Narayan

The resultant positive media response led to making the event a consistent item on the IAA agenda.

"I think Laadli and the IAA have had a great innings together. The initial beginning then evolved into what is now called the 'Voice of Change' and is being spearheaded by Megha Tata and Nina Jaipuria," adds Narayan.

On the need for industry bodies to take up social issues and causes, his view is that industry bodies must do what is good for the industry and adds that IAA has had the privilege of taking a strong position on gender, climate (through the Olive Crown Awards) and so on.

Social cause-based initiatives and awards are not without controversy or criticism. Among issues is work that is created for awards and instances of greenwashing. Can consumers tell the difference? We asked him how award juries must guard against the same.

"Clients are aware that the younger generation is very keen to know whether the brand is an equal-opportunity employer, whether it is serious about the nuances of gender and whether it is investing in the concept of a sustainable planet, and so on. Greenwashing would be punished by the market. I can speak for the IAA/AFAA Olive Crown Awards and stress that sufficient care goes into ensuring that no ads that are indulging in greenwashing are ever awarded. This helps the winners and the IAA," he points out.

Besides the Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, fellowships, capacity building for current and future media professionals, and on-ground empowerment through sister initiatives like Aamchi, we asked Narayan what the focus areas for Laadli should be going forward. What more can it do to ensure more gender-sensitive, equal and empowering portrayals in advertising, media and entertainment?

He surmises, "The Laadli awards need to be amplified even more. After all, media can truly help shape the narrative in terms of gender sensitivity and I am very happy that these awards have been supported and run consistently." ■

THE ONES THAT CUT THROUGH WITH SUBSTANCE & SENSITIVITY

Laadli Advertising Awards Winners

2023



Dove | The Beauty Report Card
#StopTheBeautyTest
Agency Ogilvy
Runner-up

Continuing with its global 'Real Beauty' mission, Unilever brand Dove has customized it for the Indian market with multiple manifestations over the years. Its 'Beauty Report Card' ad shed light on the unfortunate societal pressures young Indian school girls face, diverting their attention from education to wanton 'beauty tests'. Through a heartfelt poem based on real experiences, the commercial skillfully conveyed the emotional toll of subjecting girls to beauty tests, grooming them for marriage preparedness. It urged parents and others not to judge young girls by looks and let them be.



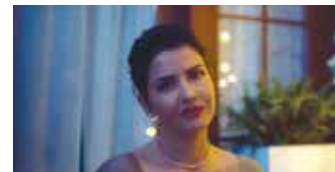
Josh | Safe Swipe
Agency Leo Burnett
Winner

#SafeSwipe campaign for Josh app launched on Women's Day sought to empower women during night commutes. By seamlessly integrating short, semi-interactive videos into users' social media routines, Josh tactfully addressed the safety concerns of women travelling alone at night. The commuter could pretend to be on a video call, which was carefully curated to dissuade drivers from misbehaving with her. The campaign's focus on over 50 real-life scenarios ensured a comprehensive understanding of potential risks, making it both relatable and impactful.

Sabhyata | Diwali '22 |
#RedefiningCelebration
Agency P Se Picture
Runner-up

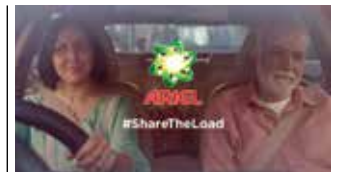


Sabhyata arrived on the scene with a bang with its Diwali ad in 2022. The contemporary women's ethnicwear brand launched in 2003 stood out with a long-format film of under 4 minutes. The story was about a pregnant young woman attending a job interview during her notice period at her current job. She doesn't realise that the person conversing with her is her interviewer, and hesitantly reveals that she is pregnant. Stellar performances by Sheeba Chaddha as the CEO and Ayesha Kaduskar as candidate elevate the plot. In a heartwarming twist, she gets the job and a gift of Sabhyata attire. The ad highlighted biases pregnant women face and brought to fore the importance of having inclusive organisations and women in senior positions.



Tanishq | The Super Woman
Agency Talented
Winner

The campaign featured a transgender model as a customer to champion inclusion and respect for gender identity – whether it is Arpit or Arpita. The acceptance of her identity by her father is revealed when he gives her name at the counter as Arpita. By focusing on personal names and identities, the spot effectively promoted diversity and set the tone for starting conversations about the topic.



Ariel | See The Signs
#ShareTheLoad
Agency BBDO India
Grand Prix

Urban Company confronted false perceptions around female massage therapists, through a young masseuse's pushback against attempts to stigmatise her work. The narrative features the protagonist's younger brother being bullied by his friends about his sister buying a car. She clears her brother's misconceptions. She also delivers a powerful message about not paying heed to the world and doing her work with dignity.

2024

Luminous India |
#WomenInEnergy
Agency AutumnGrey
Winner



A young boy reveals that his mom has a lot of work on the terrace. We see someone drying clothes, cleaning grains and knitting in different homes but it isn't the mother. It's the others at home including the fathers. The reveal tells us that the boy's mother is working on solar panels, even as Luminous announces that it is training women across India become solar technicians.

Ariel | Home Teams
#ShareTheLoad
Agency BBDO India
Winner

How strong is your home team? That was the question posed by the brand that has championed sharing of household chores since 2015 with its #ShareTheLoad campaign. In this edition, it featured a young woman about to forgo an opportunity at work because she feels her "home team" may not be able to manage without her. Her home team decides to #ShareTheLoad.



Starbucks | It Starts With Your Name
Agency Edelman India
Winner



The campaign featured a transgender model as a customer to champion inclusion and respect for gender identity – whether it is Arpit or Arpita. The acceptance of her identity by her father is revealed when he gives her name at the counter as Arpita. By focusing on personal names and identities, the spot effectively promoted diversity and set the tone for starting conversations about the topic.

Urban Company | Choti Soch?
Agency Talented
Winner

Urban Company confronted false perceptions around female massage therapists, through a young masseuse's pushback against attempts to stigmatise her work. The narrative features the protagonist's younger brother being bullied by his friends about his sister buying a car. She clears her brother's misconceptions. She also delivers a powerful message about not paying heed to the world and doing her work with dignity.



Whisper | Keep Girls In School | Period Song

Agency Leo Burnett India

Winner



How do you make a taboo topic fun? Making a song and dance about it with two popular singers would be one way to do it, as Whisper demonstrated with its 'Period Song'. The song-led campaign featuring Shreya Ghosal highlighted the impact of poor menstrual health and hygiene awareness on the girl child and her prospects. It addressed menstrual health and hygiene using little girls' voices to convey the message that 'Period ka matlab, healthy hain aap.'

Shaadi.com | Udayan Care | The

#Revolutionaaris

Winner

#Revolutionaaris is a stated mission to bring women back to the workforce. A teacher explains how and when women drop out of the workforce in a manner that students understand and awaken to. This campaign highlighted the urgent need to increase women's participation in India's workforce on the occasion of Independence Day. Addressing this critical issue aligns with Nobel



Laureate Claudia Goldin's research on women's labour market challenges, driving impactful change.

Dabur Vatika | #WomenOfSubstance

Green Chutney Films

Winner



The Vatika Enriched Coconut Hair Oil campaign for International Women's Day highlighted the achievements of women in their workforce. The ad celebrated women driving excellence in a factory run entirely by women, showcasing their journey and leadership. It emphasised breaking barriers, promoting inclusion and inspiring women to lead across various fields.

2025

Star Sports | Jersey Wahi, Jazba Wahi

Agency Bubblewrap Films

Winner



Jersey Wahi Toh Jazba Wahi celebrated women's cricket by featuring female cricketers' names on India team jerseys, championing equal recognition, inspiring fans and highlighting the talent, dedication and spirit of women athletes across the country.

Titan Company | Aage Badhegi

Agency Ogilvy

Winner

Titan's CSR initiative extended its mission of educating underprivileged girls to also empower mothers, celebrating the transformative power of maternal support. The campaign combined the warmth of a mother's love with the timeless Titan tune to inspire and uplift communities.



Nanhi Kali | Lessons From A Football

Agency Ogilvy

Winner



Nanhi Kali's campaign in this edition went beyond classroom education for underprivileged girls, using sports to teach resilience, teamwork and self-belief. Through the story of a simple football, the initiative conveyed that the most important lesson for every girl was discovering her own strength.

Sabhyata | #CelebratingMotherhood

Agency P se Picture

Winner

Sabhyata's campaign highlighted the often-overlooked challenges women face around childbirth and maternity leave, calling attention to the urgent need for maternity rooms and supportive workplaces. The film continued the brand's commitment to celebrating women at work and fostering gender-sensitive workplace practices.



Vinsmera Jewels | Truly Irresistible

Agency Nirvana Films

Winner



This campaign broke stereotypes by celebrating joy, self-expression and inclusivity, featuring Malayalam superstar Mohanlal trying on women's jewellery that go 'missing' from the set. It challenges conventional gender norms while making the case that elegance and desire transcend traditional boundaries.

Myntra | #FashionKiAdalat

Agency IdeazFarm

Winner

This Myntra campaign celebrated individuality by challenging judgment of personal fashion choices. Written in the language of youth and enlivened by Archana Puran Singh as the judge, it delivered a bold, fun and empowering message about self-expression.



Tanishq (The Titan Company) Consistent Gender Advocate



From celebrating her decisions in 'Rivaah | Everything Changes? Some Yours, Some Ours' to highlighting shared responsibilities in marriage, and promoting gender-equal inheritance in 'Brothers, Written By Sisters | Raksha Bandhan,' the brand has consistently celebrated women's agency with sensitivity and creativity.

Stayfree | #BetaStayfreeLeAana

Agency DDB Mudra Group

Grand Prix

Stayfree's campaign takes a bold step in normalising conversations around menstruation, encouraging families - especially boys - to support girls in managing periods. By promoting awareness, empathy and behavioural change, it drives a meaningful cultural shift in attitudes toward menstruation.



'IS LAUNDRY ONLY A WOMAN'S JOB?'

The question that sparked a global conversation and launched Ariel's lauded ad campaign continues to remain relevant. The next edition of the #ShareTheLoad franchise is in the works, reveals **Josy Paul**, Chairman and CCO of creative agency BBDO India that conceptualised the movement for equality at home, in conversation with *Gokul Krishnamoorthy*. He recalls how it all began.

Every edition of detergent brand Ariel's globally awarded and ongoing #ShareTheLoad ad campaign for India, which launched in 2015, was born of listening. With listening, came an internal awakening. The advertising followed and evolved into a continuing crusade, refreshed with new insights in each edition. The campaign continues to resonate because its creators have stayed the course, tuning into harsh realities of gender imbalance in households that the world needed to wake up to.



It was a young strategic planner who picked up some data from a news report while the team mulled over how Ariel could create a conversation around laundry. The report stated that while women spent over five hours doing household chores, the corresponding share of men was 18 minutes. It was a shocking data point that was quite believable because it was all around. It didn't feel fair. Yet, no one was speaking about it. The team at BBDO India sensed that they were onto something.

The agency's Chairman and CCO Josy Paul asked a question that became the launch campaign and ignited a conversation across the world: "Is laundry only a woman's job?"

Equality At Home

"Nothing really starts from nothing," underlines Paul, reminding us that both client and agency partner had been curious about a new style of work focused on conversations going beyond advertising. The approach had been tested successfully with campaigns like 'Women Against Lazy Stubble' for Gillette (circa 2010) and 'Touch The Pickle' for Whisper (2014).

"We realised that the new world was about conversations. Brands need to ignite, join or build a conversation," he adds, crediting client P&G for sharing that vision and seeing the potential in urging men to #ShareTheLoad. To the client's

credit, it wasn't the only creative approach presented by the agency.

"Everyone was talking about inequality outside the home. We ourselves presented other ideas. One of them was about the cost attached to homemakers, for instance. It was the genius of Sharat (Sharat Verma, then Associate Brand Director, Fabric Care, P&G India) that isolated this idea, saw its potential, and believed that the brand could stand for something bigger – equality at home. Questioning if laundry is only a woman's job became a cultural provocation. And #ShareTheLoad answered that question," explains Paul.

He recalls, "As a marketer or advertiser, to see an idea spark a positive conversation is the greatest joy. Because of the consumer response and positive stories from around the world, we realised that we couldn't let it go. It wasn't a campaign anymore. It became a movement. People were moving the conversation forward. Our job was to lead it with them because they wanted the campaign to continue."

The teams went back to listening, again, to what the CCO terms 'confessions' that churn our insights.

Dads Share The Load

The response did not just encourage the teams,

it propelled them to build on the #ShareTheLoad platform that was evidently striking a chord not just in India but across the globe. Back home, it lifted the brand's awareness and sales, reiterating that relevant purpose championed with authenticity can indeed be good for business. In Ariel's case, the cause has been driven home in numerous ways since launch, delving into different facets of domestic inequality and its manifestations.

Arguably the most powerful film of the series was the one in 2016, going by how it broke the internet stirring intense emotions. Armed with the insight that two in three children in India felt that household chores was a mother's job, the film featured a working woman bearing the brunt of also running her home all by herself. Her pained father apologises to her for setting a bad example. He commits to sharing the load, even if it's late in the day, with his wife.

Paul reveals that he stopped a pre-production meeting for some other films (which were also good ideas), when the idea for #DadsShareTheLoad hit.

Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity

2016 Dads Share The Load
Grand Prix

2020 Sons Share The Load
Runner Up

2022 When We #SeeEqual,
We Share The Load **Runner Up**

2023 See The Signs &
#ShareTheLoad **Grand Prix**

2024 HomeTeams #ShareTheLoad
Winner

"It came from my personal story. My father never apologised for everything that happened. I wondered, what if a dad says sorry? What if we could rescript society? What if we could rescript homes? What if patriarchy gets vulnerable?" pondered the creative head.

The client asked for a day. Paul asked his creative colleague Hemant Shringy to write that letter from the dad to the daughter. He wrote it in 15 minutes and they read it out to Sharat Verma at the client's end. Shimit Amin directed the film. The then Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg was among the many voices who amplified it online. A senior P&G executive who was about to resign, is said to have stayed back with the company after seeing this advert.

From Fathers to Sons

"The first ad was a provocation. The second was a breakthrough. If the first spoke about a condition, the second was about our conditioning. We felt that maybe there are layers of conditioning we can dig out as emotional archeologists. There were a lot of hidden truths that the world wasn't talking about," notes Paul.

The next big question that arose from listening, led to the next campaign. The hard truth was questioned once more: 'Are we teaching our sons what we are teaching our daughters?' It was time for sons to share the load.

"When you do the third one, it seals the deal that it's no longer an ad campaign. It was a movement.

"Laadli has been doing fantastic work by recognising voices and rewarding responsible storytellers. It perhaps needs more voices talking about it. There is scope for Laadli to create toolkits for brands and agencies. In advertising, Laadli Awards are identifying the industry benchmarks for us. That's a very good thing and Laadli has to stay the course. Its mission is more relevant than ever. We hoped that in 10 years the #ShareTheLoad campaign would have done its job. There's a lot more to be done."



See The Signs & #ShareTheLoad

People started telling us about their stories – and the comments section is where we get some of those stories. The rest are from 'confessions,'" reveals the adman.

One such confession-story from a colleague in the agency's admin team led to the next campaign. She said, "I sleep less than my husband." It would have been hard to sleep peacefully without addressing that uncomfortable truth.

"We checked on others. That was the truth for a lot of people," confesses Paul.

Real Angst, Reflected

The campaign then took an admitted slant to reflect the mood of women who had been through the Covid pandemic. In their listening, the teams sensed a little aggression – the women felt that they were doing more work than ever before.

"Women were generally angry. Till then we had a balanced campaign, but at that point, for the first time, we felt we needed a little aggression. The film we made was an outburst – a reflection of the time when women felt radical impatience," reminisces Paul.

The campaign captured another telling facet of domestic inequality, featuring a husband who used to share the load in a hostel with his mates, but has relegated household chores to the wife post marriage. She had every reason to be enraged and that came through strongly in the film.

"The world was going through change. And because we shifted the tone, it got a lot of traction," he adds. The validation of that campaign too was profound on social media.

Seeing The Signs

A film about an old couple's 'Silent Separation' tugged at the heartstrings once more. Like #DadsShareTheLoad, this was perhaps rendered more emotional because of the element of regret born of delayed realisation and attendant regret.

"Post the pandemic, we started having conversations with psychologists, marriage therapists and the like. These were very different from the typical focused group discussions with consumers. They told us about this 'Silent Separation,'" notes Paul. It was another opportunity for the brand to play a healing role and one that aids course correction.

"My father never apologised for everything that happened. I wondered, what if a dad says sorry? What if we could rescript society? What if we could rescript homes? What if patriarchy gets vulnerable?"

'How strong is your home team?' was yet another edition of #ShareTheLoad. When men learn to share the domestic load, women can pursue their careers without compromise. An obvious truth, not often discussed by brands, was evocatively expressed to make a compelling point.

Along the path, the teams have continuously tried to listen in to human voices and sentiments about equality at home, especially with household chores. Among such efforts was a focused group discussion featuring over a 100 domestic helpers, who were engaged in conversation about what they witnessed in the homes they worked in.

Several truths came tumbling out. As they reflected on what they saw, some of them also sensed that it was no different from what was happening in their own homes and lives. Some ended up crying, recalls Paul.

Perhaps an awakening for men in their homes too, to #ShareTheLoad. ■

THE TITAN COMPANY STANDING THE TEST OF TIME ON GENDER



Tanishq 'Remarriage' (2013)

The Titan Company has donned a progressive and sensitive stance on gender ever since one can remember. Across Titan watches, youth brand Fastrack and jewellery behemoth Tanishq, the company's advertising has stood out consistently with its messaging, nuance, sensitivity and creativity. The brand has understandably been recognised on the Laadli Awards stage more than once. It was awarded for being a 'Consistent Gender Advocate' in both 2024 and 2025.

One of the earliest standout campaigns for Tanishq has been an example cited by Population First at its sensitisation workshops often – the 'Remarriage' film from 2013. Conceptualised by agency Lowe Lintas & Partners, the idea was to normalise and celebrate the remarriage of a woman with a young child. Adman-turned-filmmaker Balki birthed the idea and the creative team comprising Arun Iyer, Rajesh Ramaswamy, Ujjwal Kabra, Rexena Devraj, Indrasish Mukherjee and Adarsh Atal scripted the film directed by Gauri Shinde.

"Tanishq did have a women empowerment stance even before the 'Remarriage' film, with campaigns like 'New Tales of Tradition' (2005).

"The whole thought then was that we aren't just about differentiated jewellery, but jewellery for a differentiated mindset. That approach got cemented with 'Remarriage', when Tanishq defined its audience as one having a differentiated, more progressive, modern mindset including in their approach to relationships. That opened up a whole avenue out there."

- Rajesh Ramaswamy

But it was 'Remarriage' that really took off for the brand. It got them extraordinary recognition," says Ramaswamy, Independent Filmmaker and Creative Director, who was part of the agency team.

He adds, "Tanishq was about distinct jewellery. But there's a limit to how much you can showcase that distinctiveness. So the whole thought then was that we aren't just about differentiated jewellery, but jewellery for a differentiated mindset. That approach got cemented with

'Remarriage', when Tanishq defined its audience as one having a differentiated, more progressive, modern mindset including in their approach to relationships. That opened up a whole avenue out there."

The brand has stayed the course to earn recognition. Laadli's citation notes: "Tanishq has continually championed gender-sensitive advertising, bringing nuanced conversations about women's choices, individuality, and equality into public consciousness."

Here are some of the winning campaigns from The Titan Company's brands over the years.



LMA 2013-14

Titan Raga #HerLifeHerChoices

Agency Ogilvy & Mather

'The Tum Nahi Badle' advert spotlighted and challenged the mindset that views work and career as a man's prerogative – and a woman's work and career as secondary. The female protagonist is assertive and independent enough to walk out of a marriage where her aspirations were not respected. Yet, her character is etched sensitively, depicting her as confident and unapologetic about her choice. The creative team managed to tell a great story in a short time and established the stance of the brand amongst women with agency and choice.



LMA 2014-15

Titan Raga #BreakTheBias

Agency Ogilvy & Mather

'Break the Bias' was a subtle yet powerful narrative about how the world still viewed a woman's success at work, with prejudices – as one determined by her ability to influence her male bosses through charm and guile. It drove home the point that we are clouded by preconceived notions and gender biases; and that of all the things attributed to a woman's success, hard work is last on the list. The film challenged gender stereotypes at workplaces and called for change.



LMA 2020

Titan Raga #FlauntYourFlaw

Agency Ogilvy & Mather

Titan Raga beseeched women to accept themselves as complete human beings, scars included, in this campaign. The ad reiterated to women that they are a lot more than their physical appearance and that they should feel comfortable in their own skin. It broke stereotypes of beauty and assuaged women's insecurities associated with appearance.



LMA 2022

Tanishq | Marriage Conversations

Agency Dentsu Webchutney

'This wedding season, let's talk about marriage,' said Tanishq, in this ad campaign for its engagement rings. The 'Marriage Conversations' spotlighted real-life issues that brands seldom talk about. This was a marked shift from glamorizing weddings to talking about real issues thereafter. The campaign continued into more editions (more on page 7).



LMA 2023

Tanishq | The Superwoman

Agency Talented

The Superwoman ad, while portraying a protagonist juggling various roles seamlessly, takes a bold turn by acknowledging the internal struggles, weariness and vulnerability beneath the facade of perfection. The narrative skilfully addressed unrealistic expectations from women and underlined the importance of acknowledging their humanity.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF MEDIA

Even before the formal launch of the Laadli initiative by Population First in 2005 with the tagline 'Celebrate Her Life', programmes were conducted on the issue of the 'missing girls' across 10 Mumbai colleges to spread awareness on falling sex ratios. Laadli's second stated objective was to work closely with the media to promote a positive image of the girl child in society through sensitive portrayal of gender issues in the media, including print and electronic news media as well as in advertising, entertainment and films. Youth were a key audience identified

by Laadli from day zero. The engagement with youth was aimed at transforming young people into leaders and influencers. If they were future professionals set to enter the media ecosystem, it was even more important to engage them as that would allow them to be sensitised early before conditioning could set in.

It was appropriate then that Laadli's formal launch had a performance by students on the theme of gender discrimination and pre-birth sex selection titled 'Laadli', as an

outcome of a theatre workshop organized for college students Manjul Bhardwaj of Experimental Theatre Foundation. The play was subsequently performed by his theatre group across the country. And Laadli has since engaged students on campuses across Indian cities.

Since launch, Laadli has engaged thousands of students directly, with the twin focus on their role as influencers, and more critically, as students of media who would shape perceptions in future through their work.

CAPACITY CONNECTS - 2023

Capacity Building of Journalism Students on Gender-Sensitive Reporting

Jaipur - 10th & 11th August 2023

Students: 35

Covering: Gender-related matters, gender-based discrimination and violence.

The workshop aimed to equip participants with the ability to report through the lenses of gender and human rights. The event also marked the launch of a project 'Gender Sensitive Reportage'.

Facilitators: Dr. AL Sharada;



retired professor from IDS Shobhita Rajagopal; Govind Chaturvedi; Prof. Himanshu Vyas; Shalini Agarwal; Mukesh Mathur; UNFPA Rajasthan Youth Trisha; and Lok Samvaad Sansthan Secretary Kalyan Kothari.

Partners: HJU, UNFPA Rajasthan, CECOEDCON and Lok Samvad Sansthan, gender and media.

Capacity Building of Journalism Students on Gender-Sensitive Reporting

Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication, Bhopal

5th & 6th September 2023

Students: 47

Covering: Gender-related issues, gender-based discrimination and violence.

The workshop explored themes like 'Gender and Patriarchy', 'Gender and Social Norms', 'Reporting through the Gender Lens', and 'Gender Integration in Media Institutions'. The workshop



not only fostered a deeper understanding of gender issues but also instilled in the students the importance of responsible journalism in addressing these issues.

Facilitators: Sunil Jacob, Dr Mani Nair, Dr AL Sharada, Prof. Dr. Sasikala Dean, Suresh Tomar, Prof. (Dr.) KG Suresh and Kumud Singh.

Capacity Building of Mass Media Students on Gender-Sensitivity

Vidyalankar Educational Campus, Mumbai - 14th December 2023

Students: 45

Covering: Using a gender lens to look at advertisements, Using a gender lens to look at cinema

Explaining how one could use a gender lens to view advertising, Dr. Sharada explained that gender is a social construct that defines the roles and images of men and women and the power equations between them. Dissecting cinema through a gender

lens, Yogesh Pawar underlined the role of patriarchy. Students were divided into five groups to work on projecting gender roles in cinema using a film of their choice.

Facilitators: Dr AL Sharada, Yogesh Pawar, facilitated by Dr Anindita Banerjee, Assistant Professor & HOD BAMMC, Vidyalankar College.



Training of Trainers (TOT) in Facilitation Skills

Byke Suraj Plaza, Thane - 26th and 27th June, 2023.

Participants: 15 from across India

Objective: Create a pool of trained facilitators to undertake gender sensitisation programmes for various stakeholders.

The workshop focused on interactive processes that create a non-threatening and judgment-free space for participants. It aimed to provide a basic understanding of gender,



patriarchy and their impact on institutions and individuals. It also emphasised the fundamental principles of facilitation skills and offered hands-on experience conducting engaging and interactive sessions.

Facilitators: Dr. AL Sharada, Anuja Gulati

CAPACITY CONNECTS - 2024



**Gender Sensitive Reporting Workshop
Patna University, 13th March, 2024**

Students: 45

Covering: Gender Dynamics, Gender-based Violence (GBV), Influence of Advertising and Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act.

Organised by: Population First, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (Hindi Section, Patna University), UNFPA.

Dr. Sharada emphasized gender as a social construct shaping roles, power dynamics and access to resources. Anuja Gulati defined GBV, outlined sexual harassment, its legal definitions and workplace implications, and explained provisions of the POSH Act.

Facilitators: Dr. A.L. Sharada and Anuja Gulati.

Programme coordinators: Pooja Nagdev, Gautam Kumar, Mudasir Siddiqui, Dr. Tarun Kumar and Prashant Ranjan.

Capacity Building on Gender Sensitivity for Journalism Students

Vidyalankar Campus, **Mumbai** - 16th July, 2024

Students: 35

Covering: Gender representation in media and advertising.

The workshop helped students understand gender sensitivity in media. Through discussions and activities, they learned to identify biases and promote gender equality in their work. The event ended with participants expressing their commitment to creating inclusive content.

Facilitators: Yogesh Pawar, Ankita Keshri, Navan Shetty and Dr Anindita Banerjee.



Capacity Building Workshop on Gender Sensitivity of Media Students

Manipal Institute of Communication (MIC), **Manipal** - 2nd August, 2024

Students: 67

Covering: Gender representation, biases and societal norms.

Diving into gender roles and cis-heteronormative perceptions, Yogesh Pawar unpacked how language and advertising reinforce stereotypes - from women as caregivers or objects of desire to narratives shaped by the male gaze. Students critically examined ads, shared insights, and confronted their own biases.

Facilitators: Yogesh Pawar, Navan Shetty, Dr.Padmakumar K, Dr.Padma Rani, Principal, MIC

Organised by: Population First (PF) in collaboration with Department of Media, MIC

CAPACITY CONNECTS - 2025



Capacity-building Training on Gender Sensitization

Guru Nanak College, **Mumbai** - 8th March, 2025

Participants: 76

Covering: Digital Media as a Pedagogical Tool for Advancing Gender Equality

Key speakers Dr. Pushpinder Bhatia and gender media scholar Ankita Bhatkande highlighted how digital platforms can challenge stereotypes, democratize education, and create inclusive learning spaces. Highlights included the launch of Population First's podcast series on gender intersections, an interactive Q&A, a collaborative action plan for inclusive pedagogy, and the launch of the 15th Laadli Media Awards.

Facilitators: Dr.Pushpinder Bhatia and Ankita Bhatkande.

Organised by: Population First

Masterclass on Gender-Sensitive Reporting

Mumbai Press Club - 11th July 2025

Participants: 45 including students, activists and young journalists.

Theme: Laadli's Lens: Media with Meaning

The sessions highlighted how media shapes gender perceptions, the importance of ethical reporting and the need to avoid sensationalism, victim-blaming or identity disclosure when covering violence against women. Drawing from global human rights frameworks and practical best practices, experts urged participants to use media as a tool to challenge inequality and amplify women's voices responsibly.

Facilitators: Dr. AL Sharada and Anuja Gulati



Masterclass on 'Legally Compliant Reporting with a Gender Perspective'

Online, 13th September, 2025

Participants: 28

Covering: Strengthening understanding of gender-responsive and legally sound reporting.



The session covered key laws related to sexual harassment, domestic violence, crimes against Children and digital and reproductive rights, with particular emphasis on confidentiality, informed consent, and survivor dignity. Drawing on frameworks such as the POSH Act, POCSO Act and Domestic Violence Act, Adv. Singh highlighted how accurate, ethical, and sensitive reporting is essential to both justice delivery and public trust.

Facilitators: Advocate Abha Singh

THE GAP BETWEEN SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION AND REAL EQUALITY STILL REMAINS LARGE

My first brush with Laadli was about seven or eight years ago when I was asked to be on the LMAAGS jury. It was an intense and enriching experience. Though I was broadly aware about the awards, being involved in the jury process made me far more conscious of the depth and diversity of reporting on gender issues in contemporary media. For me as a creative person, it helped in deepening my understanding of gender as a fundamental category in the multiple aspects of socio-economic activities in the country and provided me with a wide range of perspectives on the significant issues confronting our society. In that sense, reading dozens of pieces on different facets of gender-related challenges at one go made me a more sensitive professional and human being.

Over the past decade and ever since I started being on the Laadli jury, I have noticed major changes in the representation of gender in Indian media, advertising, cinema and digital platforms. While stereotypes and inequalities certainly persist, there is little doubt that the landscape today is far more diverse, inclusive and self-aware than it was even 15 years ago. The shift reflects larger social changes ranging from growing urbanisation, feminist movements, visibility of LGBTQ issues, social media activism and the rise of OTT platforms that have expanded storytelling beyond traditional formulas.

In addition, social media is playing a key role in deepening gender conversations. Campaigns like #MeToo, body positivity movements, LGBTQ+ advocacy, discussions on toxic masculinity, etc. are transforming public discourse. Audiences now openly criticise sexist portrayals, objectification and misogynistic dialogues. These recent changes in Indian media, advertising and cinema reflect a society gradually renegotiating its understanding of gender. While this shift is neither complete nor uniform, it is undeniably significant.

Change We See, Change We Seek

A lot of positive change is now obvious as the representation of gender issues today is unquestionably broader and more progressive



“Recent changes in Indian media, advertising, and cinema reflect a society gradually renegotiating its understanding of gender.”

- Prof. Rajan Mahan

than before. Women and LGBTQ+ individuals are more visible and more central to storytelling than at any previous point in Indian media history.

Contemporary Indian cinema often features women as central protagonists with agency, ambition and complexity. Films and series now depict women as journalists, police officers, entrepreneurs, athletes, politicians and independent decision-makers. The rise of women-led narratives in films and OTT content reflects this shift wherein women are no longer portrayed only through relationships with men. Themes like workplace discrimination, mental health, sexuality and personal ambition are now openly explored.

Indian advertising too is undergoing major changes. Older advertisements often played on rigid gender roles like women in kitchens and men making financial decisions. But now, many brands consciously try to challenge these stereotypes. Advertisements often depict fathers sharing domestic responsibilities, women in leadership roles and men discussing emotions and caregiving, etc. This shift reflects both social awareness and market realities. Brands increasingly recognise that younger audiences value inclusivity and authenticity. Yet serious problems remain.

Many films still objectify women through “item songs” and hypersexualised portrayals. Masculinity is often associated with aggression and dominance. Queer representation sometimes remains tokenistic or urban-centric. Many television serials also reinforce regressive stereotypes about women and family structures. Also, representation often improves faster in urban, English-language or OTT spaces than in mass-market media.

The gap between symbolic representation and real equality still remains large. In my view, representation needs to become more ordinary and humanised. Women and queer individuals should not appear only in “special” stories about gender. Rather, they should exist naturally in mainstream narratives as doctors, politicians, athletes, workers, parents and flawed human beings. I would also want an increase in diversity within gender representation. Much of Indian media still reflects urban, upper-middle-class experiences.

I believe we need to see far greater representation of rural women, Dalit and Adivasi women, disabled persons, transgender people outside metropolitan spaces, queer individuals from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Gender is shaped by caste, class, religion, region and language. It’s time Indian media reflects this complexity instead of presenting just one standardised version of empowerment. ■

Prof. Mahajan is Director and Dean, Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jaipur

THE WORKSHOP MADE THE INVISIBLE, VISIBLE

Analysing content and ads with experts at a capacity building workshop by Laadli created an awakening on gender sensitivity that will stay with students forever, writes **Prof. Padmakumar**

The workshop was an immersive, reflective experience that went far beyond theory that we are generally used to. It pushed us to examine our own unconscious biases before equipping us to challenge those of others. The most significant learning for my students and I was understanding gender sensitivity not as a checklist of dos and don'ts, but as an evolving lens and the one that requires continuous self-examination," explains Prof. Padmakumar.

Sixty seven students were engaged through the workshop. The biggest takeaways for attendees, in his view, was the awakening it enabled.

"Many students admitted that they had never consciously noticed gender stereotyping in content they consumed daily in their films, ads, reels and news or whatever. The workshop made the invisible, visible. Students understood that word choices, camera angles, and story selection are not neutral and can carry gendered assumptions," he notes.

From sensitivity in consuming content to sensitivity in creating it, which parts of the arc did the workshop address best? We asked the professor about the change he witnessed in his wards.

He explains, "We spent a lot of time in the workshop watching and analysing content together like ads, film clips and news stories. The idea was simple: before you can tell a story responsibly, you need to be able to see what's wrong with the stories already out there."

"And that part worked really well. Students were genuinely surprised and some even unsettled by how much they had been absorbing without questioning. That moment of recognition is powerful, and I think it stays with you. I do believe that once you learn to see something, you can't unsee it. When a student spots a lazy stereotype or a one-dimensional female character in a film, that same eye kicks in when they sit down to write their own script or report their own story," he adds.

We asked him to reflect on the areas in which he sees gender empowering and sensitive

portrayals, and ones we need more work in.

Advertisements: There has been meaningful progress in some campaigns around menstrual hygiene, male caregiving, and women's financial independence, which have broken ground. However, much advertising still relies on gender-coded roles, set beauty standards, and the association of women with domestic products.

Journalism and News Media: "One could see some progress in newsroom representation and in reporting on gender-based violence with greater sensitivity. However, gaps remain in how women in public life are covered, with disproportionate focus on appearance, family roles, and credibility questioning.



I do believe that once you learn to see something, you can't unsee it. When a student spots a lazy stereotype or a one-dimensional female character in a film, that same eye kicks in when they sit down to write their own script or report their own story."
- Prof. Padmakumar

Cinema and OTT: OTT platforms have opened up space for nuanced, more complex female characters and LGBTQ+ narratives that mainstream cinema rarely explored. This is arguably the sector showing the most dynamic change. However, commercial cinema still defaults to male-centric narratives, item numbers, and the "strong woman" trope that is still ultimately defined by her relationship to male characters.

Social Media and Influencer Content: "This is the most urgent area of concern. The sheer volume and speed of content production mean gender stereotypes are amplified at scale with little editorial accountability. Body image pressure, the sexualisation of women creators, and toxic masculinity content are rampant. At the same time, social media has also empowered grassroots feminist voices and survivor communities, which cannot be denied, too."

And what more would he wish from an initiative like Laadli, to shape gender sensitive media professionals for the future?

"I would look at resources and many such meaningful workshops that help institutions formally include gender sensitivity into journalism and media education syllabi, not just one-off workshops," he notes.

Prof. Padmakumar also makes the case for a Laadli award category or recognition specifically for student media work, to incentivise young creators to produce gender-sensitive content early in their careers.

He signs off addressing what he has already indicated is the area that needs maximum attention: "We could use dedicated modules on gender responsibility in the context of social media content creation, given that most media students will work in or alongside digital media platforms." ■

Dr K Padmakumar, Professor & Head of Communication Management, Manipal Institute of Communication, inaugurated the workshop on gender sensitivity in August 2024, at the institute in MAHE.

EMPATHY AND SENSITIVITY IS FUNDAMENTAL TO STORYTELLING

*Whistling Woods International (WWI) has been an active collaborator with Population First, hosting a three-day gender film festival, a roundtable with heads of media and film institutes and workshops for students. The film, communication and creative arts school's students even created communication during Covid on male participation in household tasks. WWI President **Meghna Ghai Puri** underlines the importance of inculcating sensitivity in future media and film professionals, the changes she sees, the ones she seeks, and Laadli's role.*

Media and entertainment professionals shape public perception, and with that comes the responsibility to portray people, identities, and lived experiences with honesty and sincerity.

WWI's engagement with Laadli has given students an opportunity to understand gender representation beyond theory. Through workshops and collaborative initiatives, students have learned to engage with communities in a meaningful way. Scholarship programs have helped students engage with people from diverse backgrounds.

These experiences and initiatives make young creators more conscious, inclusive, and socially responsible – qualities that are essential for the future of the media and entertainment industry.

Layered, Authentic Characterisation

One encouraging shift has been the emergence of more layered and authentic female characters across OTT, cinema, television and advertising. Women today are increasingly portrayed as decision-makers, professionals and individuals with agency, moving beyond traditional stereotypes. We are also beginning to see more nuanced representations of masculinity – narratives that embrace caregiving, emotional openness, and vulnerability.

At the same time, there is still significant progress to be made in challenging deeply ingrained societal perceptions around the roles of men and women. Storytelling has the power to reshape these narratives, and the industry must continue creating representations that encourage equality, break stereotypes,

and reflect the evolving realities of modern relationships, identities, and responsibilities.



“My strongest wish is for gender sensitivity to become an integral part of creative education rather than a separate conversation. Students should learn early that storytelling is not only about craft, but also about responsibility.”
- Meghna Ghai Puri

Laadli's Role...

Laadli has played an important role in starting conversations around gender sensitivity, and its continued relevance lies in evolving with changing media landscapes. Today, the focus should shift toward sustained engagement with creators at an earlier stage, particularly students and emerging professionals who are shaping tomorrow's narratives. More partnerships with film schools, media institutes and industry bodies can create long-term impact by shaping perspectives before professionals enter the workforce.

The aim should be that sensitisation must become part of the creative process itself – embedded not only in conversations, but in how stories are developed, cast, written, produced and distributed.

My strongest wish is for gender sensitivity to become an integral part of creative education rather than a separate conversation. Students should learn early that storytelling is not only about craft, but also about responsibility.

Film schools and media institutions can nurture this by creating spaces for dialogue, exposure and lived experiences. Interactions with NGOs like Laadli, community engagement, workshops and socially driven projects help students understand perspectives different from their own.

If young creators learn to approach storytelling with empathy, curiosity and awareness, they will naturally create more balanced and inclusive narratives. That is how meaningful change becomes sustainable across the entertainment industry. ■

LAADLI MEDIA AWARDS: SETTING HIGH STANDARDS

It has been two decades since I have been associated with the prestigious Laadli Media Awards. I still remember writing a small piece on LMAAGS back in 2015 to commemorate its completion of 10 years on a suggestion from Dr. AL Sharada, then Director, Population First and currently a Trustee on its Board. What a journey of steadfastness, dedication and commitment to the cause of gender justice!

I am aware that things have been difficult at times for those at the helm of affairs in



“The Laadli Awards, over a long period of time, has maintained its quality, impartiality and meaningfulness, which make winning one a unique recognition of its kind in the whole country. Starting awards with gusto is common but maintaining its quality and purpose is difficult.”

- Sunny Sebastian



Shailesh Nayak (Winner), Jaydeep Biswas, Chief - Policy, Advocacy & Partnership, @UNFPA India, Dolly Thakore, National Coordinator, Laadli Media Awards and Sunny Sebastian at LMA 2023 (Jaipur)

Population First to carry on with the noble mission of sensitizing the media, and thereby the public at large, on gender equity and equality. But the show, as it must, went on.

I remember the initial days of the awards when the team from Laadli, led by Dr. Sharada, would travel to Jaipur, and other cities, for a day-long discussion and final selection of the winning entries from the shortlisted ones forwarded (then by post or courier). The meeting and interaction were occasions one looked forward to as it provided larger insights into the trends in reporting gender issues specifically, and human rights in general.

Over a period, emails with PDF copies of the reports/articles and edit pieces, along with videos and audios, have replaced hard copies of the entries. The approach and methodology too have changed as per the changing times. The topics as well as the issues talked or written about more or less remain the same though some areas, like LGBTQIA, are getting more media attention even as the issues of early marriages, denial of proper education to the female child, lack of opportunities as well as discrimination at the workplace, sexual harassment, dowry matters, marital cruelty and others continue to plague our society.

The Laadli Awards, over a long period of time, has maintained its quality, impartiality and

meaningfulness, which make winning one a unique recognition of its kind in the whole country. Starting awards with gusto is common but maintaining its quality and purpose is difficult. LMAAGS has achieved this.

Laadli Awards, I have no hesitation to say, have surely promoted more purposeful writing on gender issues. The very fact that there is someone evaluating the good work towards women empowerment and removal of inequalities through talking and writing in the media is encouraging to scores of young writers to step into the area and delve on the issues involved. In fact even as a jury member, I had come across many aspects hitherto left unnoticed by me. That way, being a jury member of LMAAGS has been a rewarding experience all through.

Over the past two decades, Laadli Media Awards have been a trailblazer both in the print and electronic media and it has been growing from strength to strength igniting minds and recognizing works of excellence. The Awards, surely, have set standards and proved a benchmark for purposeful as well as quality writing. My best wishes. ■

Sunny Sebastian is a senior journalist and former Vice-Chancellor, Haridev Joshi University of Journalism, Jaipur.

WHEN THEY WAKE UP TO GENDER, THEY REALISE THE IMPACT OF SO MANY MORE ISSUES IN SOCIETY

Sensitising students to gender issues and representation opens students up to the many social issues around us, says Dr. Amrin Moger, Incharge and Assistant Professor of Multimedia and Mass Communication at Guru Nanak College, Mumbai.

Of the 76 participants at a day-long capacity-building workshop on gender sensitization hosted on 8th March at the college to commemorate International Women's Day 2025, most were students and of them, a majority from the undergraduate mass media program. There was no dearth of enthusiasm and that explained the participation. There was also a lot of awakening.

"When they were exposed to a scenario, they realise all of a sudden that this is all around them, and happening all across the globe," notes Moger.

The theme of the programme curated by Population First was 'Digital Media as a Pedagogical Tool for Advancing Gender Equality'.

Key speakers such as Dr. Pushpinder Bhatia and gender media scholar Ankita Bhatkande highlighted how digital platforms can challenge stereotypes, democratize education, and create inclusive learning spaces. Highlights included the launch of Population First's podcast series on gender intersections, an interactive Q&A, a collaborative action plan for inclusive pedagogy, and the launch of the 15th Laadli Media Awards.

She explains that while sensitisation doesn't happen in a two or three-hour workshop, it's where the conversation begins. Social



responsibility programs including those on gender and field projects therein are part of the mainstay. Even before they were mandated by the new NEP, they were in practice at Guru Nanak College, she adds.

Moger notes that students of their Masters programme in Journalism and Mass Communication don't just go through case study videos but are also encouraged to visit victims of gender violence and other ills that prevail. While there is no dearth of social issues, the exposure to several of them leads them to

think about one critical question: "What is the one issue we can work on?" With this intent, the exposure starts right from the first year of college even for the UG students.

"They realise with practice that one script can change the course of society. When they write and enact a play themselves, it is game-changing," notes Moger.

With Laadli, the workshop was the first time the initiative was on campus. The students of Guru Nanak College were no strangers to Laadli though, having worked on the Laadli Awards and such over the years.

Dr. Moger sees a larger role that organisations like Population First can play, synergising institutions' thrust on social causes and the energy of the student community.

"We have over 150 students doing Mass Media (UG) alone. It would be a great value addition if we find partners in like-minded organisations to orient each one of them towards social responsibility," notes the educator.

Her emphasis on social causes comes from a deep understanding of the intersectionality between media and social impact. It comes as no surprise that her qualifications include M.A. (Communication and Journalism), M.A. (Sociology), P.G.D. (Media and Disability Communications) and P.G.D. (Human Rights).

She underlines that NGOs that can not just sensitise students on issues but also guide them into real life projects will be more than welcome on campus, over and over again. ■

"The programme was organised for the BBA final year students and it was extremely well received. The themes were very meticulously designed and engaging. Students got to understand various nuances of gender sensitisation. Sessions on gender discrimination in films and ads was very insightful and thought provoking. Looking forward to many such sessions in future."

- Dr. Hima Bindu, Dept. of Business Management, RBVRR Women's College, Hyderabad, where Laadli conducted a day-long workshop

STORYTELLING IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL TOOLS WE HAVE TO SHIFT CULTURE

My association with Laadli has been both meaningful and aligned with the core of my work as a Creative Activist. Over the years, I have engaged with the platform as a filmmaker whose work often explores gender, identity, and the invisible emotional landscapes that shape human behaviour.

As an international filmmaker with 34 awards across fiction, documentary, and advertising, my work has consistently attempted to challenge dominant narratives and bring more nuanced, humanised portrayals to the screen. Through my film screenings and masterclass sessions I've had the opportunity to interact with emerging storytellers/non-profits and contribute to conversations around responsible and impactful storytelling.

What stands out about Laadli is its commitment to not just celebrating content, but actively shaping discourse. My association with it reflects a shared belief that storytelling is one of the most powerful tools we have to shift culture.

Representation of genders in screened entertainment

When I entered the industry nearly two decades ago, gender representation was far more binary, predictable, and often reductive. Women were largely written in relation to men, their arcs defined by romance, sacrifice, or suffering. There was very little room for complexity, contradiction, or agency.

What has changed for the better is visibility and intent. We are now seeing more women-led narratives, more layered female characters, and a conscious effort, at least in certain sectors to move beyond stereotypes. There is also a growing space for conversations around masculinity, which is equally important.

However, much of this progress still feels surface-level or trend-driven. True change will come when diversity in representation is not seen as a "category" or "genre," but as a natural reflection of reality. Going forward, I would like to see:

- More women and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making roles, not just on screen, but behind it
- Stories that move beyond trauma as the primary lens for female narratives
- A deeper exploration of intersectionality – class, caste, sexuality, and geography shaping gender experiences
- And most importantly, storytelling that is rooted in truth rather than tokenism

Beyond the content on screens...

Beyond the screen, there has been a noticeable shift in awareness. Conversations around workplace safety, inclusivity, and equity have become more visible and harder to ignore. There is also a growing acknowledgment of the

emotional and psychological realities of working in creative industries.

The rise of digital platforms has democratized storytelling to some extent, allowing newer voices to emerge outside traditional gatekeeping structures.

That said, the industry still has a long way to go. What needs to change:

- Structural inequities in hiring, pay, and leadership opportunities
- Safer and more accountable work environments across all levels of production
- The tendency to reward formula over authenticity
- And the lack of sustained support for independent and alternative voices

Real change will require not just conversation, but consistent action backed by policy, accountability, and intent.

Role of Laadli...

Laadli's impact can deepen further by expanding from recognition to incubation. Some directions that could be powerful:

- Creating mentorship pipelines that connect emerging storytellers with experienced practitioners
- Offering development grants or labs for gender-sensitive storytelling projects
- Building stronger bridges with educational institutions to influence young creators early
- Facilitating ongoing dialogue between industry stakeholders – writers, producers, brands, and platforms ■

Insia Dariwala is an award-winning filmmaker, and a survivor-centered leader working at the intersection of gender-based violence, community healing and systems change. She has founded and led organizations like Sahiyo and The Hands of Hope Foundation that work on child rights issues like female genital mutilation and child sexual abuse. As a Certified Therapist today, she believes that there is no justice without deep healing.



“We are now seeing more women-led narratives, more layered female characters, and a conscious effort, at least in certain sectors to move beyond stereotypes.”

- Insia Dariwala

IS CONTENT GENDER SENSITIVE AND EMPOWERING ON OTT? WHERE ARE WE?

OTT had well and truly arrived and Laadli had recognised its significance when it started awarding gender sensitive and championing content on the medium at LMAAGS. Keeping with its approach of listening to and collaborating with stakeholders from every sphere of communication that influences the larger gender discourse in society, Laadli hosted a OTT-focused roundtable in Mumbai on 20th December 2023. Hosted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India and Population First, the theme was 'Empowering women on OTT: Gender inclusion and intersectionality in content creation'.

The stated purpose of the discussion was to:

1. Gather multiple perspectives from content creators and producers on how sensitive / insensitive and empowering / disempowering Indian OTT content is specific to gender and what can be done to make portrayals more empowering.
2. Understand how bodies like UNFPA and initiatives like Laadli can collaborate / intervene to aid content creators in their sensitisation journeys.

The panel comprised

- **Jyoti Kapoor** Screenwriter
- **Insia Dariwala** Scriptwriter, Filmmaker, Activist
- **Mrinalini Khanna** Content head, Lionsgate Films
- **Karn Gupta** Disney Hotstar
- **Dipika Kalra** Film Editor, Splice Studioz
- **Nimisha Pandey** Content Head, Zee5
- **Arjun Mogre** Producer, Director, Editor, Applause Entertainment
- **Radhikkaa Joshii** Executive Producer
- **Maira Doshi** Actor, Model
- **Nishant Roy Bombarde** Filmmaker, Screenwriter
- **Divya Unny** Actor, Filmmaker
- **Pubali Choudhuri** Scriptwriter
- **Svetlana Sharma** Turquoiz Mediaworkz Global Film Marketing
- **Dr. AL Sharada** Host and CEO of Population First
- **Yogesh Pawar** Director, Population First and
- **Gokul Krishnamoorthy** Independent Content



Consultant (Moderator)

THE QUESTIONS: Is Indian OTT content sensitive and empowering in its portrayal of genders? Is it capturing the different layers and strata of women or representative of only the cream? Where does it stand on diversity and inclusivity? And more.

Dipika Kalra, whose work in Bollywood includes *Sherni* (2021), said that while “things had gotten relatively better” with OTT platforms from a gender perspective, “we still have a long way to go.” She voiced the need for more narratives to move from the suffering of women to those which spoke of emancipation of men.

Arjun Mogre echoed her view, but attributed the

positive changes to the lack of pressures of a theatrical release. “When that (pressure) happens we don’t know how things might pan out,” he said.

The change was being driven by the fact that several OTT platforms were headed by women, said **Nimisha Pandey**, the youngest national awardee – who bagged the honour for her short *Cradle* (2005). She noted that more women-led narratives were now being commissioned and there is more nuanced portrayal of women.

She admitted how mindset changes can be an uphill task, and said, “When we announced *Jaanbaaz* everyone automatically assumed it’ll be about a braveheart man. They were all surprised when we had a *Jaanbaaz* woman as





our lead." She expressed happiness that "women who are not playing the main protagonists are also now doing meaningful, authentic stuff."

Nishant Roy Bombarde, Executive Producer on commercially successful and critically acclaimed films like *Sairat*, *Killa*, *Elizabeth Ekadashi* and *Fandry*, highlighted how merely talking of gender-just, gender-equal relationships within the upper caste and upper class framework would not really work.

The filmmaker whose debut film *Daaravtha* (2016) won the National Award and multiple global awards spoke of his experience of getting chatgpt to rewrite the Shakespearean classic *Romeo and Juliet*, set first in contemporary rural India in the year 3000. "It came up with upper caste names for both characters both times," he said, underlining the multi-layered caste intersectionality caste-gender intersectionality.

Concurring with Nishant, **Insia Dariwala** lamented at how long we still have to go as a people. "Women are still made to feel like demanding a right is a privilege," she said, recounting the time she was asked about who would care for her child if she went on a shoot. "Do men get asked this question?" she wanted to know. She also underlined that the content still does not reflect the common, everyday woman. "For a woman's story to be told, she still has to be a hero or downtrodden and suffering."

The scriptwriter of *Kai Po Che*, *Rock On* and *Rock On 2*, **Pubali Choudhuri** noted that it was unfair to expect content creators to herald change without state patronage like in Europe.

"Much of the forced, new-fangled feminism we see in today's content is superficial," she opined and cited the 1974 Basu Chatterjee classic *Rajanigandha* calling it "real and far ahead of its time."

She admired it for showing a real working woman, who goes to an actual office to work and "articulates her transgressive desire."

This Filmfare awardee warned against falling for pedestalisation which she called "patriarchy's oldest trick". While admitting creating strong



women characters is positive, she said, "Content shouldn't become slave to structural constructs or woke buzzwords."

Ex-journalist **Jyoti Kapoor** who has *Kaccha Limboo*, *Good Newwz* and *Badhaai Ho* to her credit continued that train of thought. She said filmmakers "concerned about being woke/ politically correct" often come to her asking her to check if all those elements were included and called it "a game of selling whatever sells." She emphasised: "I want to be known as a good scriptwriter and not only a good woman scriptwriter."

Lamenting at how misunderstood feminism is, **Mrinalini Khanna** expressed surprise that this happens in an era when Taylor Swift kept the entertainment industry in the US afloat through the recent tough times.

Khanna, who has *The Test Case*, *M.O.M*, *Bombay Begums* and *Aarya* to her credit from her stint at Endemol Shine, reminded the gathering how the entertainment industry can't be seen as singlehandedly in-charge of changing gendered mindsets. "Till men are left out of the narrative, there can't be any real change," she said.

Emmy-nominated filmmaker Karn Gupta reminded the gathering that the discussion should not take the men-vs-women route, and said: "If a Zoya Akhtar wants a good and talented DoP she will insist on a good and talented one

without considering whether it is a man or woman."

While praising the likes of *Taali* and *Aarya*, Gupta – who has directed, produced, and marketed content for theatre, TV, digital and OTT platforms – lamented: "Overall, our standards on gender sensitivity have been falling for over a decade." According to him, while we expect nearly 30pc change in the way gender-sensitive content is created, in actuality it is only 2pc.

Nimisha Pande, whose platform has shows like *Humsafars*, *Qubool Hai*, *Arjun*, *Shapath*, *Havan*, *Jyoti*, *Grihasti*, *Sapna Se Bhare Naina*, *Amber Dhara* and *Salaam Zindagi*, rued how we don't have exacting data on gender-sensitive content given how the OTT platforms in India are still such a nascent medium.

She also pointed out, "Not only is there no defining metric on this in place, but audiences also don't go by this when deciding which content to watch. Since a creator or commissioner of work is also completely in the dark over what works, you can't blindly say women-centric films don't work." She emphasised, "Actually, only bad films don't work!"

Khanna concurred: "We are often stopped from creating such content saying we don't have such an evolved audience. The discouragement also comes from the position that no one will choose women-centric content." ■

EVOCATIVE EVANGELISTS IN SCREENED ENTERTAINMENT

LMAAGS Film & Web Series Winners (Glimpses)

Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity went beyond the scope defined by its name in its 2013-14 edition, when it awarded Vikas Bahl directorial *Queen* starring an irrepressible Kangana Ranaut. It embraced films on OTT just as filmmakers and audiences did, awarding *Soni* on Netflix in 2020. In the same edition, web series started getting recognised on the LMAAGS stage, starting with *Made In Heaven*

on Prime Video helmed by Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti.

These relatively nascent additions to LMAAGS' canvas were critical given the impact of screened entertainment on society, its expansion beyond the silver screen, and the blurring of lines between screens for consumers. As experts opine elsewhere in this report, there is a lot of positive change

in the content we see in films and OTT with relative democratisation of content, while a lot remains to be done, still.

It was imperative that the Laadli Awards expanded its scope to embrace all forms of screened entertainment and as with media awards, winners have been picked across languages carefully in consultation with industry observers viewing the world with a gender lens.

2023

FEATURE FILM (OTT) | ZEE5
SIRF EK BANDAA KAAFI HAI
HINDI | BHANUSHALI STUDIOS



Sirf Ek Banda Kaafi Hai, based on the story of a self-proclaimed God man, convicted

in a case involving the rape of a minor girl is a powerful reminder of how pervasive sexual offences against children are in society and the role of law in bringing the perpetrators to account.

FEATURE FILM
BLUE SUNSHINE
TAMIL | SAMYUKTHA VIJAYAN

Blue Sunshine sits on the cusp of gender, sexuality, and class intersectionality. It follows Aravind, a high school teacher in a South Indian small town transitioning from male to female, holding a mirror to society's bigotry. Written, directed, produced and acted in by transwoman Samyuktha, *Blue Sunshine* talks about the daily struggles of a member of the community pitted against a conservative ecosystem.



WEB SERIES | AMAZON PRIME
SWEET KAARAM COFFEE
TAMIL | RESHMA GHATALA



Sweet Kaaram Coffee centres on the journey of three generations of women who

decide to take an unexpected road trip to break up the monotony of their daily lives. This touching, cross-generational investigation of friendships, relationships, and personal development highlights the challenges women encounter daily. The values of self-discovery, second chances, and forgiveness are emphasised throughout the series, which addresses social taboos and promotes candid discussions about subjects deemed delicate.

2024

FILM (THEATRICAL)
LAAPATAA LADIES
HINDI | KIRAN RAO



Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies* uses its narrative premise of two brides in face-covered finery who are unintentionally switched while travelling by train in 2001, to great effect.

The film offers proof that social commentary and a crusade for change can be driven by humour. Taking the tasteful satire route, the feature shines the spotlight on the state of women's empowerment and gender equality in rural India.

MOST SIGNIFICANT FILM OF THE YEAR
ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT
Malayalam-Hindi | PAYAL KAPADIA

Payal Kapadia's Malayalam-Hindi Indo-French production *All We Imagine As Light* became the first Indian film ever to win the prestigious Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. Starring Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, the film's gender-sensitive narrative focuses on women navigating their lives in Mumbai and the challenges that come along.



FILM (OTT) | AMAZON PRIME
KAATHAL - THE CORE
MALAYALAM | JEO BABY



Kaathal - The Core breaks down the exteriors of a loveless marriage to hold a mirror to society's denial of diverse sexual orientations. Without getting hateful or angry, this Jeo Baby film non-judgementally tells the

audience it's never too late to let more colours enter their lives. It masterfully tackles a topic still largely taboo in both the film industry and society by employing a traditional family drama.

WEB SERIES | JIO CINEMA

TAALI

Hindi | RAVI JADHAV

Taali's journey immerses us in the world of transgender activist Shree Gauri Sawant. The biographical series directed by Ravi Jadhav has Sushmita Sen playing the protagonist. It unfolds like a tapestry of courage tracing Sawant's estrangement from her policeman-father, her psycho-emotional struggle given her conservative milieu and her eventual transformation into someone who resolutely stands up to the system with dignity.



2025

REGIONAL FILM

STHAL

MARATHI | JAYANT SOMALKAR



Set in rural Maharashtra, *Sthal* lays bare the ritualised commodification of young women through the practice of bride-viewing. Through the eyes of 16-year-old Savita, the film captures the quiet violence of patriarchy that renders girls voiceless, valued only as objects of barter under the guise of custom. With restraint and empathy, Jayant Somalkar crafts a deeply unsettling narrative that transforms an everyday ritual into a mirror reflecting systemic gender inequality.

LGBTQIA+ FILM

KUCH SAPNEY APNE

HINDI | SRIDHAR RANGAYAN & SAAGAR GUPTA

Kuch Sapney Apne is a tender but quietly powerful exploration of love, identity, and acceptance within the LGBTQIA+ community. Set in everyday India, it portrays queer lives with honesty and warmth – eschewing melodrama for authenticity. With gentle storytelling and deep empathy, the film celebrates the courage to dream, love, and live on one's own terms.



WEB SERIES | AMAZON PRIME

DUPAHIYA

HINDI | SONAM NAIR



Dupahiya turns the disappearance of a motorbike into a sharp, darkly humorous lens on patriarchy in rural India. The vehicle's dowry-like symbolism exposes how women continue to be bound by transactional marriages. The series also deftly interrogates colourism. Witty yet empathetic, it dissects the everyday absurdities of patriarchy while affirming women's resilience and agency.

LMAAGS WINNERS - BOOKS (GLIMPSES)

2023

BOOK | ENGLISH | NON-FICTION

NILANJANA BHOWMICK

LIES OUR MOTHERS TOLD US THE INDIAN WOMAN'S BURDEN

ALEPH BOOK COMPANY

The book portrays the societal pressure on women to embody a 'superwoman' persona, often at the expense of their mental and physical well-being. Drawing from exhaustive research and interviews with over 200 women, Bhowmick exposes the harsh realities faced by Indian women, revealing the toll of pursuing an ideal of 'having it all.'



2024

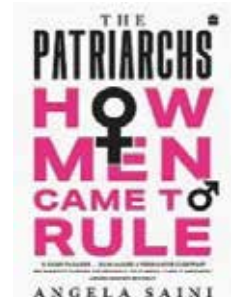
BOOK | ENGLISH | NON-FICTION

ANGELA SAINI

THE PATRIARCHS: HOW MEN CAME TO RULE

HARPER COLLINS PUBLISHERS INDIA

The book explores the origins of patriarchy, challenging the notion that cavemen were simply stronger. This thought-provoking book effectively examines the historical power struggles between genders.



2025

BOOK | ENGLISH | MEMOIR

DEVIKA VR

'RUKMINI DEVI ARUNDALE: ARTS REVIVALIST AND INSTITUTION BUILDER'

NIYOGI BOOKS

The book offers a compelling portrait of the visionary who transformed India's cultural landscape. Tracing her role in reviving Bharatanatyam and founding Kalakshetra, the book celebrates Rukmini Devi's enduring legacy as an artiste, educator and institution builder.



2025

BOOK | ENGLISH | NON-FICTION

NEHA BHAT

UNASHAMED: NOTES FROM THE DIARY OF A SEX THERAPIST

HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS INDIA

Neha Bhat offers a candid, compassionate exploration of sexuality, healing and self-acceptance. Drawing from her work as a therapist, she dismantles stigma and shame with warmth and insight, inviting readers to embrace their bodies, desires, and stories without apology.



Click on the year to view all LMAAGS winners across categories in [2023](#), [2024](#) and [2025](#)

WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD ON OTT

Study on gender representation in Indian OTT films and series released in 2023 revealed noticeable strides, with stories and characters that challenged stereotypes and celebrated diversity. However, work remains to be done, according to CMS Delhi's research commissioned by Population First and UNFPA.



The study analysed 20 films and series picked from four OTT platforms (three paid, one free) chosen on the basis of paid subscribers and viewership: Amazon Prime, Hotstar, Netflix and MxPlayer. Filtering on the basis of IMDB ratings and relevance helped pick five from each platform, adding up to 10 films and an equal number of series. The content spanned Hindi (16), Telugu (2), Tamil and Bengali.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis was done on:

- Representation of gender identities and expressions, including transgender and non-binary characters, centrality of characters to the plot, relationships between different characters.
- Costume and language used to see if they reinforce narrow beauty standards or

promote body positivity, whether language reinforces or breaks the stereotype.

- Occupational diversity and leadership of characters and roles assigned to different genders.
- Roles and agency of male and female characters within the storyline.
- How gender issues intersect with other identities such as religion, caste, and socioeconomic status; depiction of gender-based violence, discrimination and gender equality.

Key Findings

THE POSITIVES	THE CHALLENGES
According to the study, in 2023, Indian OTT platforms made noticeable strides in gender representation, offering stories that challenged stereotypes and celebrated diversity.	While progress is evident, consistent inclusion remains key, concluded the report. Suggested strategies to improve include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Women in Focus:</i> Shows like <i>Dahaad</i> and <i>Scoop</i> brought complex, ambitious women to the forefront. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diverse Creators:</i> Empower women, LGBTQIA+, and marginalized creators to bring authentic perspectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Redefining Masculinity:</i> Characters in <i>Farzi</i> and <i>Kohrra</i> moved beyond toxic stereotypes, embracing vulnerability and empathy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thoughtful Storytelling:</i> Use sensitivity readers and workshops to avoid stereotypes and ensure inclusivity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>LGBTQIA+ Representation:</i> Sensitive stories like <i>Made in Heaven 2</i> and <i>Taali</i> normalized queer narratives, celebrating authenticity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Inclusive Casting:</i> Reflect authenticity by casting actors from represented communities, e.g., trans actors for trans roles (<i>Taali</i>).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Intersectionality:</i> Stories like <i>Scoop</i> and <i>Jubilee</i> explored gender alongside caste, class, and regional identities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Balanced Portrayals:</i> Avoid over-sexualization and invest in stories that celebrate equality (<i>Gullak</i>).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Audience Awareness:</i> Promote diversity and inclusion through campaigns and inspiring examples.



“Always place your own happiness over and above the world’s happiness.”
GULMOHAR



“At this age, people expect me to sit at home and take care of grandchildren, but why should I? I want to live for myself, do things I never could before. Why should being a woman or being old stop me?”

“Masculinity isn’t about controlling women or proving your dominance. It’s about being comfortable with who you are and treating everyone equally.”



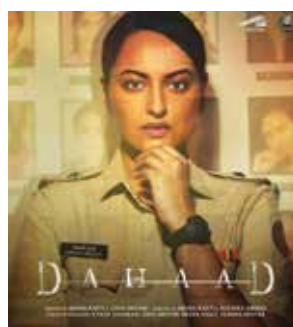
“Why not? We can dream too, and we can make those dreams come true.”
DHAK DHAK



“What did you think? Just because we wear bangles, we can’t pick up a sword?”
SAAS BAHU AUR FLAMINGO



“Marriage might be your solution, but it’s not mine. I have dreams that don’t include a wedding dress.”



“A uniform doesn’t come with a gender. Whether you like it or not, I’m the one in charge here. If you have a problem with that, you’re welcome to leave.”

Dialogues from the shows that reflect progress.

Key Points

- Eleven of the 20 films and series had female central characters.
- *Made in Heaven Season 2* (Tara), *Dhak Dhak* (Sky and Mahi), *Dahaad* (Anjali), and *Aarya Season 2* (Aarya) all centred on strong, independent female leads.
- Srimathi in *Kumari Srimathi*, three

generations of women – Sundari, Kaveri and Niveditha in *Sweet Karam Coffee*, and Maya D’ Souza in *Jaane Jaan* where women are the central characters around whom the stories revolve.

- The eponymous lead in *Apurva* is portrayed as a strong, courageous and fiercely independent young woman.
- Four of the shows included LGBTQIA+

characters in their storylines: *Made in Heaven*, *Guns and Gulabs*, *Saas Bahu Flamingo* and *The Door*.

- *The Door*, *Miss Shetty* and *Mr. Polishetty, Mast Mein Rehne Ka* and *Jaane Jaan* had equally important male and female characters as integral parts of the narratives with a slight bent towards the female characters.

Read the full research report here.

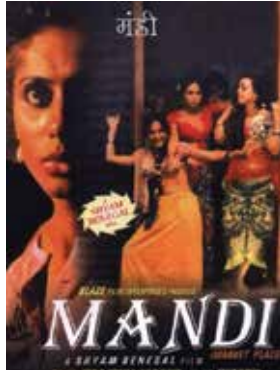
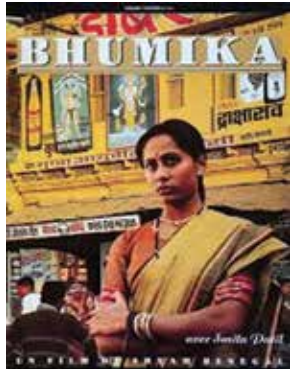
CHARGING THE NARRATIVE WITH CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Ode to Shyam Benegal, Women in Indian Cinema

Population First continued with its series of podcasts on special days to bring public attention to gender issues in 2025.

'Decoding Gender in Science' was released on the UN International Day of Women and Girls in Science (February 11) spotlighted the experiences, breakthroughs and barriers faced by women in STEM fields.

In tribute to legendary filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who passed away on December 23, 2024, a podcast titled 'Gender Lens on Shyam Benegal's Films' explored his powerful portrayal of women through landmark films like *Ankur* (1974), *Bhumika* (1977) and *Mandi* (1983). It featured film critic, author and journalist Maithili Rao, film journalist Nandini Ramnath and author-journalist Nandita Puri.



From pedestals to props to the space between, a podcast delved into where Indian women were in Indian cinema. This was released to coincide with Navratri. It featured a conversation on how Indian cinema oscillates between reifying and deifying women, and why recognising women as equal, complex, and fully human is an act of true shakti. The conversation featured film journalist Nandini Ramnath and Dr. Sneha Samaddar from the School of Media and Communication Studies, Galgotias University.

THE GIRL I AM, THE CHANGE I LEAD



Manjiri Gokhale Joshi Ranjana Banerji

Podcast 'Reimagining the Girl Child' featuring author Manjiri Gokhale Joshi and journalist Ranjana Banerji was produced to mark the International Day of the Girl Child, October 11, 2025. It examined how societies that value the girl child are not only more just but also more prosperous, performing better across key development indicators.

Decoding Gender: Insights from Thought Leaders

In 2024, Population First participated in the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign with a podcast series titled 'Decoding Gender: Insights from Thought Leaders' to spark conversations about the intersectionalities of gender and inspire collective action against



gender-based violence. From 25th November to 10th December 2024, podcasts were released on YouTube lasting around 30 minutes each. The initiative was supported by UNFPA.

Decoding FGM with 'The Beginning'

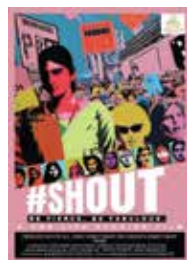
The Beginning, a 15-minute fiction film by Insia Dariwala, was screened in collaboration with Sahiyo and Equality Now in Mumbai on 19th July 2024 and in Delhi on 6th December to



commemorate the campaign against Gender-Based Violence. While 45 industry professionals attended the Mumbai event, 52 (30 in-person, 22 online) development professionals and UN representatives made it to the Delhi event. Both the events were followed by panel discussions that reinforced the urgent need for awareness, survivor-centered advocacy and legal recognition of FGM/C in India.

#Shout

On 9th March, 2023, to celebrate International Women's Day 2023, Population First and UNFPA, in partnership with Cine and TV Artistes Association (CINTAA) and One Life Studios, held a preview of One Life's documentary #Shout directed by Vinta Nanda and produced by Gayatri Gill, Rahul Kumar Tewary and Siddharth



Kumar Tewary. The preview was held at Sunny Super Sound, Juhu.

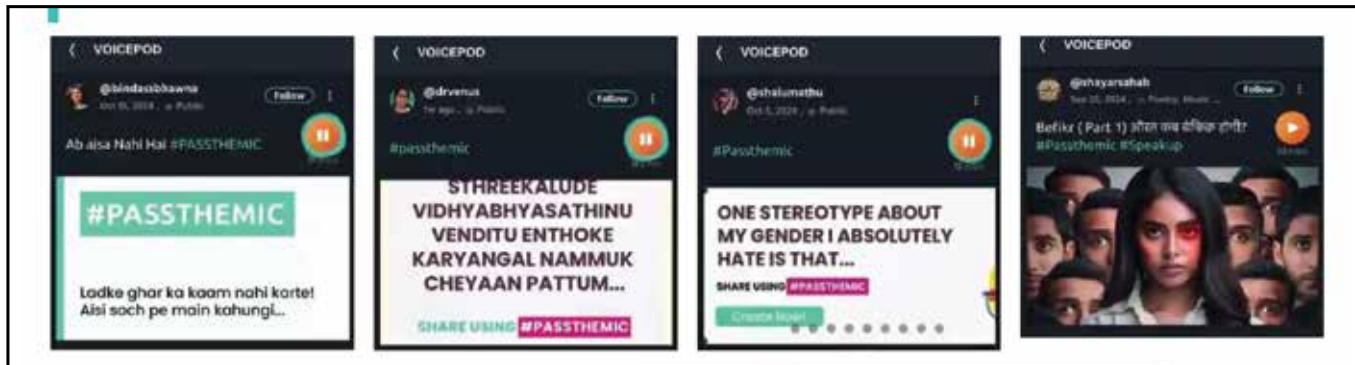
#Shout is a feature-length documentary that explores the #MeToo movement and the history of feminism in India. The film examines patriarchy through stories of the past and present, including the self-immolation of Roop Kanwar, the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi and the brutal murder of 8-year-old Asifa. The film also features feminist art, literature, music and performances that place these issues in context.

The preview was followed by a panel discussion and audience interaction.



Sapna Bhavnani and Kitu Gidwani.

LAADLI GOES SOCIAL WITH #PASSTHEMIC



The trend #PassTheMic shot to the limelight when celebrities like Julia Roberts, Penelope Cruz, Hugh Jackman and Sarah Jessica Parker handed over their social media accounts to healthcare specialists during the Covid19 pandemic, as part of a campaign by non-profit ONE to share facts and promote a science-driven approach during the crisis. Since then, the hashtag has been used in multiple ways across the world to invite people to share their views on specific themes. It became the common rallying cry to invite women to open up on gender issues in India, in 2024.

Laadli, whose approach to gender sensitisation has been guided by the mantra 'influence the influencers', decided to spark conversations

Stories That Struck a Chord: Top Performing Instagram Reels



through social media influencers with #PassTheMic. The campaign, in partnership with UNFPA and driven by Arre app, was seeded by 24 curated creators across their social media handles.

The creators opened up about their experiences with honest conversations, eliciting authentic dialogue where topics ranging from personal journeys to challenging societal expectations found supportive voices on social media.

Creators extended their discussions to Voicepods and Voicepools on the Arre Voice app, creating intimate spaces for audiences to reflect, relate, and respond. These audio conversations became bridges connecting diverse experiences, encouraging more women to step forward and share their stories without hesitation.

With a reach of 12,02,095 and sparking 33,055 meaningful engagements, the campaign's message inspired over 200 stories from women across India, with voices in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and English.

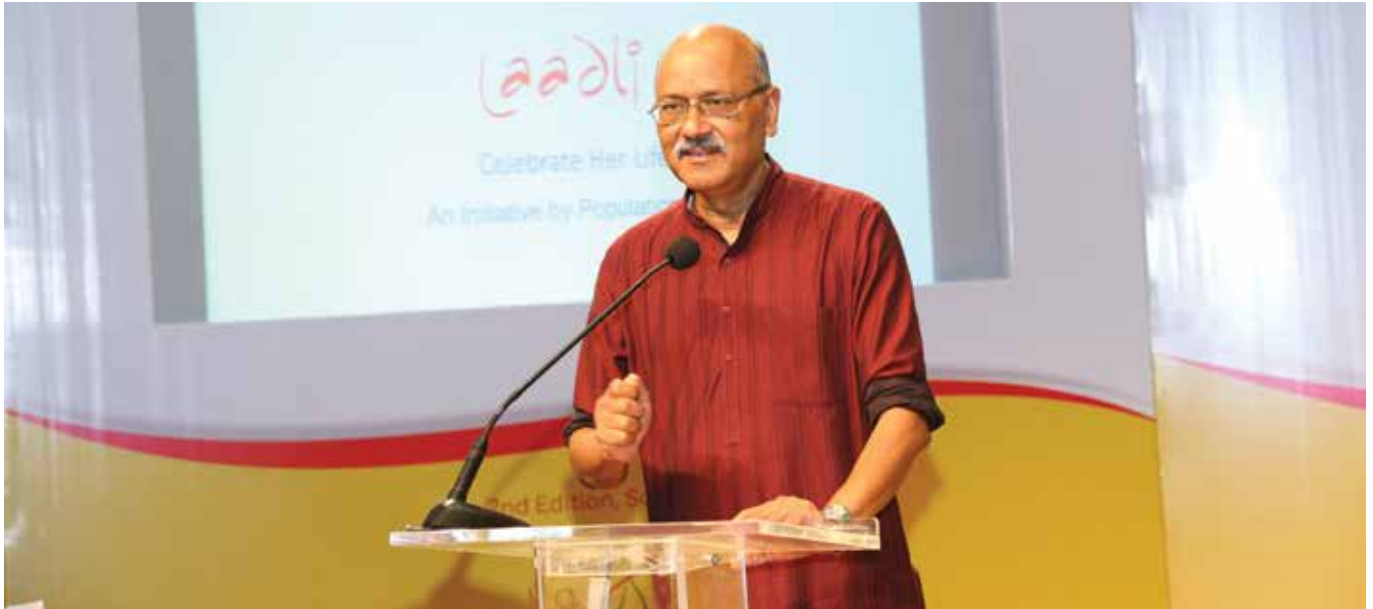


THEMES TRIGGERED

- Objectifying Women
- Sons and daughters should be the same
- Women's opinion on money matters
- Sharing the load
- Husbands sharing the workload
- Equal pay
- Gender Myths
- Permissions Please
- Women's Appearance
- Dowry
- Good girl syndrome
- How I look and dress is my choice
- Emotional abuse
- Marriage and family is a choice
- Normalising periods
- Respecting women
- Girls for girls

LMAAGS VOICES

'WHEN YOU BRING IN SENSITIVITY, YOU BRING ABOUT REAL CHANGE'



I was at the event some 15 or 16 years ago when Bobby Sista launched Population First. Like most journalists, I am also skeptical about things. I thought it would run for some time and fade off. It has not just gone on, but also emerged much stronger. As a common friend said when I told him I'm headed for these awards in Mumbai, he said, "Bobby carries on forever." Bobby truly does.

Population First (Laadli) is a wonderful idea. You can always say you did something for women, like provide education, set up a shelter, and so on. But when you bring in sensitivity, then you bring about real change. All of us have seen more sensitivity come in, but we are far from perfect.

I became a journalist in 1977. In those days there were very few women in journalism. The women we used to see in the media were mostly newsreaders on Doordarshan. Some were on radio, doing western music programmes and such, but they were not strictly 'journalists'. When I was a journalism student, there were a handful of women journalists at The Statesman, like Tavleen Singh, Madhur Jain and Usha Rai. Today, I have a hard time hiring men. Currently we are hiring eight women to two men. Sometimes, we are looking for balance. I have young women in my office saying it's such a boring place. That's

"We do a hundred things to attract talent. If word spreads that a place is not safe for women or a particular boss or department head or chief executive is a predator, chances are that good female talent will not come and work there."

the big change that's come around in the media.

There were prejudices earlier. When we spoke of hiring women, some men used to say they won't be able to come to work for a week each month — and people believed it. That's now proven to be a complete fallacy.

I know that we have #MeToo going on, and it is very important that it is going on. What happens between two adults is something that happens between two adults. But when it comes to a workplace (or industry in the case of cinema) and there is a power differential, it's a crime. When someone has power over the other's life, career, over whether you get an opportunity, the

size of that opportunity... to leverage that power, is a crime.

If we have workplaces where our women do not feel safe, our businesses will come to a standstill. Can you run a newspaper, a TV channel or an ad agency or make cinema without women today?

We do a hundred things to attract talent. If word spreads that a place is not safe for women or a particular boss or department head or chief executive is a predator, chances are that good female talent will not come and work there.

The second big change — which is coming in the media faster than elsewhere — is that women have to become bosses. About 15 to 20 years ago, a new generation of Indian women started to come to work. Now the third generation of such women are coming to work, and the women who started it are at the top or near the top. Three of my six editors today are women. By December 1, four of seven will be women. Are they there because they are women? Most certainly not. They are the best and I would go to their homes to plead with them to come and work for us. ■

- Excerpts from the address by Shekhar Gupta, Editor in Chief of ThePrint, at the 2nd Edition of South Asia Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (2017)

LMAAGS VOICES

'IT'S IS VERY IMPORTANT TO EXPAND OUR EXPERIENCES SO THAT WE CAN CHECK OUR EXPERIENCES EVERYDAY'

This is a really, really big day for me. I never thought I would meet a legend like Ms. Bhanwari Devi in my life. Everybody here is so much more accomplished than I am. Thank you for having me.

I first heard about the Laadli Awards when we were huddled backstage before one of the shows of *The Vagina Monologues*. Every once in a while, Dolly (Thakore) aunty would say, "Darling, can you recommend someone for my Laadli Awards?" I'm so happy aunty that you've chosen to call me this year.

It is very important that these awards happen. It is very important to celebrate the tremendously wonderful work that all of you do. I am really inspired.

In my work as an actor, I am stumped by how easily we fall into a gendered mindset. We start out with the best intentions. Often, the script is great but the visual is sexualised. It is very important to check ourselves. It is very important to expand our experiences so that we can check



our experiences everyday.

I started my journey as a research assistant before I became an actor and I worked on a gender and public space project which was headed by three lovely ladies, one of whom is here today and I really want to thank her. Sameera Khan, thank you so much for your work at the NYMI, and also for giving me tools to look at things with a gender sensitivity lens. I hope that

I've taken that knowledge to the work I do today. And thank you Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal, my director for nine years at *The Vagina Monologues* which I performed on stage. I have to say that it was very empowering to talk about your vagina every week.

- Rasika Dugal, Actor, at the 3rd South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (2023)

'WE NEED MORE IDEAS AND MORE WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD'

I was really taken aback seeing work that has been done and is being celebrated today. This is the tip of the iceberg. There are many more like you all over the country, many young people (wanting to make a change).

I am amazed by the variety of subjects picked up, across formats and across media. At the way in which expression is being extended in all kinds of directions. At the kind of people driving this, the new faces. In particular, I'm delighted to see our neighbours from the sub-continent, our neighbours, who have come here today to join us in this celebration of what we can do – if we only want to, if we only have the will to.

Thank you for inviting me. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to see what I have missed or did not know enough of.



I have only one comment to make. Let's not only talk about the girls. Let's also talk about the boys. That's an area we really are not focusing on.

We need more ideas and more ways of looking at

the world.

- Rathna Pathak Shah, Actor and Director, at the 4th South Asia Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (2024)

ONE **FILM** CAN DELIVER THE MESSAGE THAT WHEN A WOMAN SAYS NO, IT'S A NO.

ONE **ADVERTISING** CAMPAIGN CAN MAKE MORE MEN SHARE THE LOAD AT HOME.

ONE **WEB SERIES** CAN LIBERATE MORE WOMEN TO CHASE BOTTLED-UP DREAMS.

ONE **NEWS STORY** CAN MAKE THE WORLD A MORE EQUAL PLACE FOR ALL GENDERS.

ONE **SOCIAL MEDIA** CAMPAIGN CAN MAKE SEXUAL PREDATORS AT WORK BEHAVE.

*The award that believes that messaging in media can shape a more gender-equal world,
is now accepting entries.*



Categories

- Advertising (Print/ TV /Radio /OOH/ Digital/ Direct)
- Print Media (News, Articles, Features, ColumnsOp-Ed, Investigative Stories, etc.)
- Electronic Media (Documentaries, Topical or Issue-Based Programmes, News Features etc.)
- Radio (Community & University, Jingles, Campaigns, Radio Plays and Commentary)
- Web (E-magazines, Blogs, Social Media Campaigns, Features, Podcasts, News Reports, etc.)

Languages: English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Chhattisgarhi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese, Odia, Gujarati and Marathi.

Entries will be awarded by region: North, South, East and West.
Juries will comprise thought leaders from academia, media, advertising and more.
Regional leg winners will be considered for national awards.

NO ENTRY FEE. LAST DATE: 31st JULY 2026.

Eligibility: Work published / released between 1st January and 31st December 2025.



Entry Form at www.populationfirst.org
Email: laadlimediaawards@populationfirst.org
Contact: +91 91679 02776



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