

Five of eight petitions, which led to a Supreme Court order directing the sedition law to be kept in "abeyance", were based on a sedition database project by **Article 14**. **'Decade of Darkness'**, a year-long study reveals how the 152-yr-old law is misused and misinterpreted by police and courts.

Article 14 won the [Human Rights and Religious Freedom Journalism Award 2022](#) for its coverage of human rights and religious freedoms instituted by The Indian American Muslim Council, a Washington-based advocacy group dedicated to safeguarding India's pluralist and tolerant ethos.

Independent journalist Mahima Jain's story published by **Article 14** in June 2021 – ['Silent pandemic of violence against Indian women'](#) was a finalist at the Society of Publishers in Asia Awards 2022 in Hong Kong. Linked to the death of a 22-year-old woman in Kerala after spousal abuse, the story revealed how domestic violence in India remains relatively ignored and normalised by the society.

Live History India launched a new fellowship for students in April 2022 to map India's heritage through Vlogs. This will also involve training students in research, fact-checking, writing, and filming.

The Caravan story titled ["Dirty design": Is India trying to create a Shia-Sunni divide in Kashmir?](#) won the Human Rights and Religious Freedom Journalism Award 2022 in the 'Best Video Story' category.

The Bastion launched 'The Bastion Academy', a platform that will offer live masterclasses and self-paced courses from leading experts and organisations to enact social change and social impact.

The News Minute's story ['Battling Hate and a Virus'](#) won Human Rights and Religious Freedom Journalism Award 2022 for the 'Best Video Story'.

The Probe's founder Prema Sridevi and Assistant Producer Himanshu Kala received the prestigious Asian College of Journalism Award for Social Impact Journalism in May 2022 for their documentary on the plight of manual scavengers in the country.



Women Entrepreneurs in Independent Journalism:

To the fore despite challenges

Women entrepreneurs in legacy media organisations are a rarity. In contrast, digital news media is marked by a host of women founders, who apart from steering the editorial direction are also responsible for sales, marketing and sustainability.



Top (Left to Right): Barkha Dutt (Mojo Story), Japleen Pasricha (Feminism in India), Kavita Devi (Khabar Lahariya), Prema Sridevi (The Probe).

Bottom (Right to Left): Padma Priya (Suno India), Smarinita Shetty (India Development Review), Dhanya Rajendran (The News Minute) and Mini Menon (Live History India).

The composition of IPSMF's grantees is a testament to the rise of women entrepreneurs in the independent media space – with a significant 26 per cent of the grantee founders being women.

This democratising and diversity in media ownership has been primarily on account of low entry-barriers in the online space. The lowered dykes and the relative ease with which media platforms can be birthed and built has motivated

women media practitioners to take the entrepreneurial plunge.

Mini Menon, Co-Founder of **Live History India (LHI)**, underlines this democratisation of media ownership through her effort in launching and growing a niche site on the history and heritage of India.

However, while gender does not intrude directly on the entrepreneurial mission, the grantees have faced subtle discrimination, as both Dhanya Rajendran, Co-Founder of **The News**

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Photo Credit: Khabar Lahariya

Khabar Lahariya's Kavita Devi (second from left) with her team recording a show

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Minute (TNM) and Padma Priya, Co-Founder of **Suno India** share a similar view that funders are more forthcoming to invest in ventures led by men.

Smarinita Shetty, Co-Founder, **India Development Review (IDR)** points to a mental barrier, among donors against big-ticket funding to women entrepreneurs because decision-makers at large foundations and corporates tend to be men and the sales narrative that many of them expect is “hype and gloss”. According to her what seems to get the attention is what is being ‘sold’ rather than the tangible outcomes that have or are being achieved.

Another issue that women media start-ups face is the assumption that ‘women’ organisations should confine themselves to women’s issues. Japleen Pasricha, Founder of **Feminism in India (FII)** asserts that everything is a women’s issue from the economy to politics, from business to sports, from domestic violence to rising oil prices. Hence, she says, FII attempts to “analyse the current socio-political and cultural affairs through a gender lens, instead of just saying that we only work on gender-related topics.”

Says Kavita Devi, Editor of **Khabar Lahariya (KL)**, as the world was going digital, with the mobile phone being ubiquitous, even among the women of the villages, KL decided to transition from print to digital in the way they covered and disseminated their stories – through the mobile phone.

Prema Sridevi, Founder of **The Probe**, points to ‘patriarchy’ as a more

entrenched bias in the raising of funds. “Women’s jobs are seen as a “second job,” the first jobs being seen as taking care of the family.

While being aware of their identity as women, the single-biggest thrust of these women entrepreneurs is to explore and create journalism that mainstream media is increasingly eschewing – covering and raising issues that are socially relevant, public-spirited and from the ground – going beyond the prevalent model of mindless and raucous talking-head shows in the media.

According to Prema, the root cause of most problems of mainstream media is the ownership structure. She feels digital media is the solution – it is inexpensive, there is no need for large offices or flashy studios, its reach is more and it supports the membership or subscription model of journalism. She believes that independent journalism can thrive through digital media platforms.

Challenge of fundraising

Fundraising for most of the grantees has been a perennial challenge. Barkha Dutt, the founder of **Mojo Story**, is of the view that gender does become an obstacle for the most successful of women. Women are mentally conditioned to not seek investments commensurate with their worth, while men on the other hand do not restrain from hustling for funds.

For Barkha, alongside securing grants, it was important to work towards building a successful self-sustaining model, which is not

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Grantee News & Recognition

➤ **Alt News** launched a new initiative **UnHate** to seek accountability from all stakeholders who are directly or indirectly responsible for the increase in hate speech, which includes individuals, tech platforms, advertisers, and media organisations.



➤ **TrueCopy Think's** Editor Manila C Mohan was awarded the Women’s Literary State Award in April 2022. Its Associate Editor T M Harshan won the KSEB Media award in June 2022 for the [story](#) on the Central Electricity Amendment Bill and its impact on the common man.



➤ **Democratic Charkha** commenced two new video shows titled ‘Anupriya Ka Nazariya’ and ‘Democratic Charkha aur Samuday Ki Kahaniya’ in June 2022.



NEW

GRANTEE



मैं भी भारत
THE ADIVASI QUESTION

www.mainbhibharat.co.in

Main Bhi Bharat was launched in 2020 as a portal to cover and report exclusively on tribal issues and the issues of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Founded by senior journalists Shyam Sunder, Smita Nair and Chitrita Sanyal, Main Bhi Bharat focuses on covering the stories and issues of the tribal population, to provide a voice to tribal India and take their stories and issues to the non-tribals, policy and lawmakers to create conditions for corrective interventions by the state. It also goes beyond the coverage of governance and policy issues to celebrate and mark tribal lifestyle, cooking and culture on ‘Tribal Kitchen’, which brings to the fore the issues, features and native wisdom of the tribal culture.

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dependent on investors. **Mojo Story** required to be conservative and to enable expansion aided by equity infusion.

For Padma Priya, fundraising for **Suno India** becomes an even more onerous task, in explaining to non-media focused donors why media advocacy work is important as most are used to funding conventional NGOs.

Smarinita feels that funders do not understand the key role that media and knowledge play in influencing and driving long-term sustainable change. Her venture **IDR** was required to first bootstrap and then attract those funders who had made an effort to study and understand the social sector. However, this pool being very limited, it has been a constant battle for them to educate the larger funding universe about the benefits of funding entities like IDR.

Attracting the right talent and building a strong team

And no successful organisation rests on the shoulders of the founders alone. Bringing together a group of passionate individuals who work tirelessly towards a common goal translates the entrepreneur's journey into reality.

Other than the task of generating revenues and funding, the founders also have the challenge of finding the right skill sets, especially people with "lived experiences". The challenge is also to motivate and inspire the team to align with the core values of the organisation.

Dhanya says that **TNM** other than using the network for recommendations for candidates, also casts its net wide, including blind applications. In order to keep the hunt for talent open and also keep the biases out, their mailboxes are open for blind pitches so that people who don't have any 'connections' but have something important to say can reach out to them, she adds.

However, **The Probe's** Prema thinks that while many people want to get employed, what she finds missing in candidates while hiring are the necessary skill sets. "And those with even a fraction don't have the patience to learn and work on their core function. They get easily swayed and



attracted to the negative sensational glamour side of the news."

Barkha believes that a team has to be diverse and there has to be a conscious attempt by the leadership and that does not happen on its own. At **Mojo Story**, the key leadership roles are all held by women and a conscious effort is made to be inclusive.

The challenges that Kavita faced when it came to building a team at **KL** was graduating women from the grassroots to become reporters, as they had not only to face social derision from the local community but also needed to train their 'new born' reporters.

Many a time, the families would not allow them to work and Kavita would have step in to counsel and persuade their daughters to become reporters. She adds that **KL** has striven to provide opportunities to women and young girls from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Growing and sustaining reach and traffic

As with any media organisation, one of the biggest struggles that digital media entrepreneurs face is of growing and sustaining their audiences on their websites and other media platforms.

According to Japleen, the sensitivity of **FII's** content has also affected their reach numbers as a lot of their content revolves around women's health, menstruation, gender violence, discrimination, etc. This has also had an adverse effect on the monetisation of content.

Smarinita suggests exploring non-traditional ways to grow traffic like exploring republishing of content which effectively worked for **IDR** whose content is republished by various mainstream media and digital websites.

It is essential to have the required skill set and knowledge of digital

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Grantee News & Recognition

➤ **Suno India's** The 'Science and Us'



podcast episode, "Gone to the dogs: Rabies control and street dog welfare in India", received a [special mention at the One World Media Awards](#) in the 'Podcasts and Radio' category.

Contributing Editor Menaka Rao of Suno India won the first edition of [Narendar Revelli National Media Fellowships 2021](#) instituted by the Turaga Foundation and the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad. She has also been selected for [GROW lab by root.ax](#) for a 5-day Virtual LAB focused on expanding nonfiction/long-form reportage into a specific new media outcome.

[Spotify](#) featured Suno India's contributor Sharada Balasubramanian for the episodes she contributed to the Climate Emergency podcast.

Suno India's Editor Padma Priya has received a grant from Thakur Foundation to co-produce a podcast on Indian Medical History led by Harvard academician Kiran Kumbhar.

➤ **Feminism in India (FII)** launched a new



editorial vertical, 'Being Feminist' - a fortnightly column entailing personal narratives on the conflicts of being a better feminist each day.

FII's Staff writer, Sudipta Das, won second place in the SCARF Media for Mental Health awards 2022 for the story, "Nobody Affirmed My Queerness": Experience of Childhood Counselling Sessions.

FII's founder Japleen Pasricha was selected for the Acumen India Fellowship 2022.

➤ **Mojo Story** won 9 awards at the 14th



edition of ENBA news and broadcasting awards in different categories, including best English digital channel and best anchor.

➤ **Imphal Free Press'** Staff Reporter Babie



Shirin was invited as a resource person to speak on crime against women in Manipur as part of a

programme - 'Rethinking the Status of Women and Children in Manipur', held in Imphal in May 2022.

➤ **Swarajya** launched and completed the



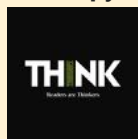
Swarajya Science and Technology Initiative (Swasti) 2022, from March to May.

Under Swasti 22, the entity put together educational articles on science and technology, written by and for students at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels.

GRANTEE

IMPACT

TrueCopy Think



This [report](#) on 45 tribal families living in extreme poverty in Jayam Colony at Karadipara in Kozhinjampara Panchayat of Palakkad District, led to the intervention of officials of the Kerala Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Department who have promised necessary action for the rehabilitation of these families.

Imphal Free Press



After the [report](#) on how a contractor withheld all the funds meant for the construction of a road in the Churachandpur district without completing the work, the Manipur Human Rights Commission took up the case *suo-moto*.

A [report](#) that highlighted the plight of women vegetable sellers of Mao, and the need for a proper market shed for them to sell their farm produce daily led to the opening of the long-awaited Mao-Imphal market at Kabo Leikai Nongchup in Imphal West.

Suno India



After the release of the [story](#) "Heat Waves: What can you and the government do to beat the heat?", Suno India was invited by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change and Climate Trends to attend a workshop titled "Heat Stress in India: Accelerating mitigation and adaptation efforts in the face of a changing climate" in Goa.

The Probe



Following a [story](#) that highlighted the problems faced by the Kashmir power contractors who were not paid by the government, the MD of the Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDCL) came on record and assured that the money would be released in a few months. The power contractors were engaged in

electrifying remote villages and far-flung areas in the valley.

Article 14



An ambitious writing project that took nearly a year to research seeks to explain why India is where it is today on civil liberties and what may lie ahead. This [article](#) chronicles the systematic targeting of critics and the erosion of the rule of law through surveillance, application of stringent sedition laws and the use of "national interest" as a convenient prop.

Live History India



A [story](#) on the pathetic state of Jogeshwari Caves of Mumbai, which dates back to the 6th Century CE, evoked a response from Maharashtra's then tourism minister, who said that the government is preparing a plan to restore the site.

The News Minute



Following the [story](#) on the anguish of families awaiting justice, seven years after the killing of 20 men from Tamil Nadu in an 'encounter' by the AP Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Special Task Force (RSASTF), CM MK Stalin responded and promised them legal assistance.

A [report](#) on the Chennai Police's bid to cover up a custodial death at the G5 Secretariat Colony police station led to the transfer of the case to the CB-CID and the suspension of three policemen.

Max Maharashtra



A series of [reports](#) on how no action had been taken in increasing the height of a bridge on the Yerela river in Sangli district of the state despite lives being lost during floods led to the sanction of Rs 7 crores for building a new

bridge, by the then Minister of State Vishwajit Kadam.

Democratic Charkha



A [report](#) on the plight of over 250 tribal children from Katihar in Bihar who had to drop out due to the closure of the primary school forced the State government to reopen the school.

[Investigation](#) on the callousness and negligence of a doctor conducting free eye operations as part of a free eye treatment camp, which led to 20 out of 60 operated patients losing their sight in Muzzafarpur in UP, resulted in administration acting swiftly to compensate the victims and also initiate action against the doctor.

HW News



A [report](#) on the six-month-long struggle and discrimination faced by a trans woman in securing a room at the hostel at Panjab University due to her sexual orientation, ensured the allotment of hostel room to her and also led the University to make a permanent block in the hostel for transgenders.

EastMojo



The [coverage](#) of the harassment faced by a Naga senior citizen at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati led to the administration apologising for their shocking behaviour.

Alt News



Alt News [reported](#) how its rigorous pursuit of accounts on Facebook and YouTube, which foment hate speech and instigate violence against communities, has led to the "de-platforming" of these dubious instigators.

**Hindi, Assamese, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam,
Marathi, Nepali, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu & English**



	Languages	Grantees
Exclusive	English	13
	Regional	6
	Hindi	7
Add-on	English & Regional	10
	English & Hindi	9
	Total	45

Ipsmf.org

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marketing and promotion for a media entrepreneur to successfully work on increasing reach.

Strong support system

For most of the women entrepreneurs, support from family and close networks has been a key factor in making their entrepreneurial journey successful.

Dhanya explains that it is not easy for a person in their mid-career to suddenly decide to begin an entrepreneurial venture. "It requires ideating, suggestions and a good dose of skepticism, which can be given by those in one's close circles."

For Kavita, the support from the Foundation has enabled **KL** to spread their coverage into the hinterlands, helping the organisation and its team to expand.

Barkha says, one of the biggest support systems has been the support of organisations like the IPSMF. The loyal viewer base that she has built over the years has also pitched in with their contributions to show their trust and support.

Networking with peers

A key asset in entrepreneurship is networking. It enables one to thrive in the ecosystem and provides access to a pool of support, resources, talent and guidance. The right network enables one to succeed and also has your back in times of need.

For Japleen, the strong network of fellow women media entrepreneurs, women groups, etc., provided vital support in terms of resources and guidance. While for Prema, being a part of the YouTube Creators programme provided her access to a pool of like-minded individuals who shared their learnings and challenges which helped her in her journey as a media entrepreneur.

Trolling and cyberbullying affecting the work

Trolling and cyberbullying are seemingly intensified if one is a woman entrepreneur – they are not only targeted for their work but also for their gender.

For Japleen, who faces constant trolling and hate on social media

platforms, she has had to curtail her presence. Mini Menon has a clear protocol for dealing with trolls where they do not react or respond to provocative commentary and ensuring that they do their jobs in the most balanced and thorough way. The goodwill **LHI** has been able to build ensures that their readers have in many instances backed them when they have been under pressure.

Kavita points out that she and **KL**'s reporters have faced trolling and bullying but they have stood firm.

For Barkha, death threats, abuse and slander online are a frequent affair and the online space is a "daily war zone". She addresses the issue by not engaging with what she thinks is below the belt or a comment borne out of malice.

Despite the many challenges – raising resources, fighting subtle and sometimes open patriarchy, building a skilled and committed team, facing trolling and intersectional discrimination – women entrepreneurs in the independent digital media space – as the grantees of the Foundation show – are increasingly making their presence felt. ●

