

Jnana Prabodhini Competitive Examinations Centre, Pune.

Celebrating journey of its alumnus on account of Tridashakpurti Varsha 2025-26 (30 years of establishment)

Smt. Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

- Presently working as Bureau Chief, Maharashtra for The Hindu
- JPCEC Batch 2007-08
- B.A & M.A (Political Science) - Batch of 2004
- Diploma in Journalism, Asian College of Journalism - Batch of 2010
- Chevening Scholar - Batch of 2022
- Previously worked at The Sunday Guardian, CNN News18, The Times of India and few other media groups.



Vinaya Deshpande is a JPCEC alumnus of 2007-08 batch and a well-known media personality in Maharashtra and India at large. Currently, she holds the distinguished position of Chief of Bureau for Maharashtra at The Hindu newspaper.

Early Life, Education, and Formative Years

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit's educational and personal journey laid a robust foundation for her career trajectory, marked by diverse academic pursuits and geographical transitions. She completed her Post-Graduation in Political Science and International Relations from Pune University (now known as Savitribai Phule University), having also undertaken subjects such as Public Administration and Political Sociology. Born in Rasayani, her childhood predominantly unfolded in smaller cities, including Nanded and Aurangabad (now known as Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar). From her seventh standard, she relocated to Pune, where she completed her graduation at Fergusson College, and continued her post-graduate education in the city. She topped the State in Hindi in Grade 10th. She topped the State in Political Science in Grade 12th and was a gold medalist in her college. Beyond her formal academic degrees, she further specialized by pursuing a journalism course at the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) in Chennai. ACJ is recognised as a prestigious institution in Asia, notably featuring direct instruction in video journalism provided by the BBC, offering students a distinct BBC certificate upon completion. She was awarded full scholarship to study at the ACJ,

making her only one of the two students from the country to get it. Each year, ACJ awards scholarships to students from SAARC countries. One boy and one girl are eligible for fully-funded scholarship with a stipend.

Before going to ACJ, she worked with Vidyavani (then Pune University's community radio channel), All India Radio and The Times of India in Pune.

Vinaya has dabbled into various fields including research, teaching, radio-based educational entertainment, before settling to do journalism in Mumbai. She has taught Political Sociology at Fergusson College, Geopolitics and International Relations for the Post Graduate Diploma course offered by the Deccan Education Society, Political Science at St Mira's Junior College. She has assisted international scholars in their research projects, helped organise international conferences at Pune University (now Savitribai Phule University). As a student, she was an enthusiastic orator who won elocution and debate competitions. She also participated in theatre, acting in college plays. Hosting and moderating shows strung together in school and college, was one of her hobbies. She continues to host important national and international events. She has trekked in the Western Ghats, the Himalayas. In short, she has been a multifaceted person who excelled in academics and cultivated diverse interests and hobbies.

Landmarks in professional journey

From covering terror attacks to reporting on issues of climate change and gender discrimination; from doing investigative stories about corruption to covering defence; from reporting on community-led developments to covering key crime cases; Vinaya has undertaken several challenging assignments in her career spanning almost two decades. She has covered three Lok Sabha elections, and three Vidhan Sabha elections, tracked the political developments of India's second largest State. She has won several awards and international fellowships in recognition of her contribution to journalism. She is in a key leadership role at present, leading The Hindu in Maharashtra and expanding its presence on digital and video platforms.

Last year, Kotak Life featured Vinaya in their coffee table book 'Shevolution' on women leaders.

In 2022, Vinaya was awarded the Chevening Fellowship, one of the most well-coveted fellowships for journalists in South Asia. She resided in London for a few months. She was awarded the fellowship by the University of Westminster, after she worked on issues related to climate change and urban development. In 2018, she was the only Indian to be chosen by the US government for a multi-regional programme on women in leadership roles. The International Visitors' Leadership Programme took her to the US for several weeks, to be introduced to their democratic structures, differences in legislative and executive functioning, women leaders, grassroot organisations working for women's empowerment and against racial discrimination.

Over the years, she has been invited by the Australian government and the Finland government as a part of high level journalists' delegations to mark the furtherance of bilateral relations.

In 2020, she was chosen for Darpan Puraskar, which is given in the name of Darpankar Balshastri Jambhekar, the father of Marathi journalism. She has won the Laadli Media Award twice. One of

them was for her series on sexual harassment of women at workplace, the impact on women, the implications, the challenges stacked against them to raise the issue systemically. It had contributed to the national movement which ultimately resulted in the passage of the country's first legislation on the issue. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed in 2013.

Her work on gender justice, rural empowerment, inequitable distribution of resources in urban and rural areas has led to impactful journalism.

Learnings from international exposure

International exposure at a critical stage of professional development helped Vinaya with a comparative analysis of political and social cultures. It helped her understand India's polity and society from a different perspective. It led to clarity of thoughts, critical thinking and the ability to hold difficult conversations and ask uncomfortable questions.

She vividly remembers picking up a fight with a western professor at a renowned museum in London over the 'White Man's burden.' "I fought over the right to self-determination by what the west calls the 'third world countries'. And though there are dogmatic notions, a sense of superiority too, there is also an openness about having conversations. That is an important value. To agree to disagree, and to have the strength to listen to an opposing view point, is crucial for a healthy society," she says.

She remembers getting overwhelmed in the US Congress in Washington DC, where she saw the unfinished mural of women leaders. "Why would someone keep an incomplete mural as the centrepiece in a museum in the country's parliament, I wondered then. They told me that it was the country's way of acknowledging that they are still far away from gender equity in their democracy. They said that the incomplete mural will be completed when the US gets its first woman president. I had goosebumps when I heard this. While each country has its fallacies, to openly acknowledge them in the museum of your country's parliament is something else. The openness and the ability to look at oneself critically, is what I truly appreciated. Several experiences there also busted a myth that many hold, that the US society is a more liberal and gender-just society. You look at the contributions of your own social reformers, may it be Mahatma Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Justice M G Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, with a lot more gratitude," Vinaya says.

At the National Museum of Australia, the country has documented the unspeakable systemic torture of the indigenous tribes, who are now referred to as the 'first nation'. Now, before any meeting begins, they have an 'acknowledgement of country'. It is a respectful, inclusive statement to recognise the traditional owners of the land and their ongoing connection to it. "We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we work and pay our respects to Indigenous Elders past, present and emerging," the declaration goes typically. It was a new experience for her during her visit to Australia.

In several countries, the focus on transparent governance, the ability to look at larger human challenges and to think of systemic solutions which can be implemented on ground without any

red-tapism, the insistence on public hygiene and safety, also impressed her. Finland's digital governance as its commitment to welfarism, is impressive, she says. Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, promotes and finances the renewal of Finland. It promotes well-being and accelerates economic growth within the limits of nature's carrying capacity, it says. In short, it is a body which works on public funds, but doesn't report to the government. It identifies future problems, and works to find their solution in a sustainable manner. The focus on circular economy, addressing climate change are not mere tokenisms. "Such wonderful takeaways from some ageing economies of Europe!" she says.

Heartfelt conversations with academics, intellectuals, poets and leading personalities are a job advantage, she feels, and adds that these conversations have made her richer in life.

Recently, when Finland's President Alexander Stubb was in Mumbai, Vinaya had the exclusive opportunity to host and moderate a discussion with him.

Convergence era journalist

Vinaya entered journalism during a period of churn when global revenues of print journalism were dwindling and questions were being raised about the sustainability of print media and its future. It caused a rethinking about sustainable revenue models. The resultant churn led to innovations in the newsrooms. Meaningful and impactful journalism had to reinvent itself to appeal to readers across the spectrum. As newspapers tried to find solutions to change the revenue models which were heavily dependent on advertisements, this led to transformations within the newsrooms too. The ingrained thought behind this exercise was to see if revenue streams could be subscription-based. This led to more focus on offering in-depth stories which stood out as exclusive, solid pieces of work reflecting true journalistic ethics.

This meant that reporters told stories in different formats, and developed adequate skill-set for the same.

This led to convergence in the newsrooms where journalists were empowered to reimagine their stories. Vinaya's wide experience helped her transition through these expectations. It also gave her the opportunity to grow in a field which was perceived to be facing constant threats. Some even termed it an existential crisis.

When she started her journalism stint in Mumbai with The Hindu, she experienced changes in the newsroom as it geared towards capturing the social media attention that a strong and credible old news brand could command. From executing the redrawing of the content strategy to delivering stories real time, she was a part of the initial transformation that newsrooms experienced over a decade ago.

Thereafter, as the Resident Editor of The Sunday Guardian, she deep-dived into issues to write elaborate pieces, and also contributed to News X, marking her foray into TV journalism.

In her stint with TV, where she worked as the Mumbai Bureau Chief of CNN News18 for seven years, Vinaya looked at not just doing the big interviews of key politicians, diplomats, lawyers, etc., but also looked at YouTube coverage and long format journalism in TV.

In her current role as the Maharashtra Chief of Bureau of one of the oldest and credible newspapers like The Hindu, she draws from her experience of working in convergence newsrooms to diversify content and work across several formats to narrate impactful stories. This involves grooming the team to think differently and deliver stories in innovative formats.

From print to TV to print, digital and video

Vinaya started as a print journalist, with her stint with The Times of India in Pune. She also worked with the All India Radio then. She pursued a part-time diploma from Pune's Ranade institute. She was always a meritorious student, but she wasn't perceived as someone who was aggressive to aim for a challenging career like the one in TV journalism. She herself never really thought of it seriously during her student days. Luck brought her to Mumbai after she fell in love with a Mumbai boy who coaxed her into getting a strong educational degree to be able to stand on her feet in a highly competitive world in Mumbai.

In Mumbai, her first job was at The Hindu. This was through campus placement at the Asian College of Journalism. As per the rulebook there, one cannot sit for any other placement exams if one clears the first one. The Hindu was the first day first recruiter. She was offered a placement in Mumbai by N Ram. This was after she told him during a UPSC-like 13-member panel interview that as a newly wed, she wanted to settle in Mumbai with her husband. It was granted. Vinaya says, this was the closest she got to a UPSC-like experience, after having failed in her efforts to crack the national competitive exam. She had given one full year for preparing for UPSC, but she did not succeed.

Effectively, though Vinaya had received training as a TV journalist during her time at the Asian College of Journalism, and was trained by the BBC, she did not get a TV job. But the opportunity to work in TV came along nonetheless. She sees this as a matter of luck, hard work and her ability to seize opportunities as they came up.

“There was never a sense of fear to take up something which looked impossible,” she says. In fact, when she gave a job interview for the position of the Mumbai Bureau Chief of CNN News18, she was still a young mother. Several professional voices mocked her for thinking of moving from print to TV. A TV job is considered gruelling, hectic, physically challenging and unpredictable. But her husband stood by her, so did a senior woman journalist. “Had this senior woman journalist not called me one night to tell me that I was capable of taking up this challenge, I would have never applied for the job. I am still grateful for her confidence. This was an act of selflessness. She was to gain nothing in return. I was too low in the hierarchy. She was way up there. And yet, she called me and spoke with me, gave me the confidence to apply. As luck would have it, I was chosen for the job,” says Vinaya.

It marked the beginning of one of the most challenging and rewarding phases in her professional life which led to great opportunities for growth. “There were times when my learning curve was

vertical. It taught me many things beyond the craft of journalism. It gave me valuable lessons in soft skills, leadership capabilities,” she says.

It also gave her the confidence that she could take up a challenging role and perform well in it.

Vinaya has recently rejoined The Hindu as their Maharashtra Chief of Bureau, embarking on a new journey with a larger mandate. This involves drawing from the learnings of all her previous professional roles to lead a team. It involves creating the capability to expand digitally through not just the written word but also through videos. It involves the opportunity to think for harnessing the power of social media to reach a wider and younger audience.

The challenge is the ability to use the strengths of Artificial Intelligence to bolster good journalism.

Covering the underbelly – crime, terror, terror trials

As a journalist, Vinaya has covered the underbelly of Mumbai. She sat next to actor Salman Khan when he came for trial in the drunken driving case in Mumbai. One labourer was killed and four were injured after a Land Cruiser ran over the people sleeping on a pavement in Bandra in 2002. The trial continued till 2015. She has witnessed the cogs and wheels of the justice delivery systems while covering several terror cases from close quarters. May it be the Malegaon blasts case or the 1993 blasts case or the Ghatkopar blasts case, she attended the trials religiously, bringing out key details.

As a journalist, she witnessed first-hand, the destruction caused due to the 2011 terror attack in Mumbai. Three co-ordinated explosions killed 26 and injured 130 persons. Vinaya remembers how she visited Dadar soon after the blast, saw a few limbs strewn across, spoke to people, rushed to the hospitals to talk to the victims and their family members. She remembers how she requested a local PCO booth operator to open the public booth to call her office to dictate the story.

“I gave the PCO operator a Rs 100 note. He kept providing me one rupee coins as I kept dictating the story to office. That day, I returned home at 4 am. My husband and my father-in-law came to pick me up at KEM hospital in the dead of the night. My worried mother-in-law hadn’t slept. I was told that I should reconsider doing a job which involved taking so many risks. But I continued to take risky assignments. From covering floods, riots, living at the LOC with our jawans, going to the submarine to witness the hardships of our men in white, several stories came my way. When I was a few months pregnant, I remember getting stuck in the Azad maidan riots, with lathi and sword-wielding men running around me. During a social disturbance, Mumbai was shut and riot control police were deployed on the streets. I remember my toddler standing behind the camera as I continued to give lives in front of the camera during such tense moments. Some of these moments will stay with me for a lifetime,” she says.

During her days as a crime reporter, several Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad terror operatives were being arrested and sleeper cells were being busted. She saw the underbelly of Mumbai when underworld was linked to the broad daylight shooting of crime reporter J Dey.

As a political journalist

Maharashtra has faced political upheavals and drastic overnight political transitions in the last few years. Vinaya has been at the forefront of the coverage of all the nuances of a state which has deep implications for national politics due to the unique nature of its regional players.

Vinaya has interviewed all the key political figures from Sharad Pawar and Nitin Gadkari to Devendra Fadnavis, Uddhav Thackeray, Aaditya Thackeray, Eknath Shinde, Prithviraj Chavan, Ajit Pawar, Ashok Chavan, Praful Patel, Surpiya Sule, Sunetra Pawar, etc, travelling with them in their personal convoys and private jets during elections, bringing about hidden perspectives crucial for the political developments in the state at key junctures.

She remembers the late night visits to five star properties to check on MLAs, early morning shockers of political turmoil, governments being formed overnight and governments coming down within a few hours. She has been able to chronicle some of the most dramatic moments of Maharashtra's politics, seeing strange bedfellows come together for power, changing the political landscape of the State permanently. "It is one of the most challenging and interesting times to be a political journalist in Maharashtra. One NCP is in opposition, one is in the government. One Shiv Sena is in the opposition, one is in the government. Nothing seems permanent. Anything can happen anytime. You are constantly on your toes," she says.

Her exclusive interviews at crucial junctures in State politics have created impact in the political discourse in the State.

Tribals, farmers, women – the voiceless

Vinaya has found it heartbreaking to cover the tribals' and farmers' long marches in Maharashtra. Irrespective of the political aspects behind it, that thousands of voiceless people choose to walk hundreds of kilometres, barefeet, to seek land rights, to seek corrections in ration cards, to seek daily ration and employment opportunities, is painful, she says. "It is a reminder of the failure of our delivery mechanisms and the apathy of the systems which fail to work in tandem. When the ball is thrown from one court to another, often skirting long-term solutions, you see the fallacies of a large democracy and how the State discriminates against its own citizens," she says.

Particularly remembering the 2018 Kisan march when 50,000 farmers marched into Mumbai in the dead of the night for their demands. "Even in that pain, they did not want to inconvenience the city. Many of them bare-feet, they settled at Azad Maidan so the city could run as usual. Over the years, I have also seen how the police and the administrative machinery work flawlessly in Mumbai to handle such massive challenges which can disrupt any other city in the world," she says.

She remembers how, during the recent long march, the women farmers spoke of the need for equal land rights. "These women did not want to speak at first. When I was able to convince them, they raised such pertinent issues! 'The land records should have the name of the husband and the wife. We work together in the field. Why are we being denied our right then?' they asked me. As a journalist, my focus has always been to bring the marginalised voices to the forefront. Often, even

among the marginalised, the men speak the most. The women, the transgenders stay back. To get them to speak is difficult due to social pressure. But those voices matter a lot more,” she says.

Covering defence

From riding the waves on-board a warship, to navigating her way through the narrow ladders of a submarine; and from trekking in the dark jungles of the Himalayas in Jammu and Kashmir to reach a forward post on the LOC to live with our jawans, to witnessing joint military exercises; defence journalism has been one of the best experiences for Vinaya. She was chosen by the Ministry of Defence for the Defence Correspondents’ Course conducted over several weeks by the Government of India. She remembers fighting for the right to go and stay overnight at a forward post on the Line of Control. “There was concern for women’s safety, as much as there was discrimination. But we convinced the officials that we had come to experience the life of our armed forces, and that we needed no favours or concessions. ‘Aap circuit house mein aaraam karein, madam,’ an officer had said then. We had fought together, so we could walk up the path to the bunkers. To see through the night vision goggles and to understand the hardships they faced, was an important experience,” Vinaya says.

Gender justice

Gender justice, gender pay gap are very real, she feels, highlighting that women should not be given concessions for being women, but should also get equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work. “As much as men complain about women seeking favours, it is also true that men find strong and opinionated women uncomfortable to be with. There is need for equitable treatment, for working together,” she says.

Through all the leadership talks that she is invited to deliver, she highlights the issues.

Agriculture, rural distress

Over the years, Vinaya has reported on several stories related to agriculture and rural distress. The ravaging floods, the impact on crops, the burden on the women in the families, the impact of farmers’ collectives for the flourishing of farmers who sow cash crops, are some of the issues she has written on. The inequitable distribution of resources, the disproportionate burden of droughts on women in rural areas, are areas she has worked on extensively.

Journalism as the shining star of a healthy democracy

“While doubts are raised about the credibility of journalism these days, I believe that journalism and journalists are a mirror of the society. Nothing exists in a vacuum. Journalism emerges in the same ecosystem which accuses it,” she says.

“A society gets a king it deserves, goes the adage. So is it true about journalism too. There is no doubt that journalism is at a crossroads today. But the upholders of true journalism still exist. I have seen the impact ethical journalism has. I have seen how powers are wary of journalists with a spine. How such journalists choose to walk on the path of truth, calling a spade a spade,” she says. At a

time when India is booming to become the next superpower, when the economic growth looks promising and the demographic dividend is by our side, we will only flourish more with vibrant and strong institutions, she feels. Journalism, she believes, plays a significant role to uphold democratic values.

Experience with Jnana Prabodhini

For Vinaya, Prabodhini is a place associated with a quiet reading room, studious friends, encouraging environment, and most importantly, the presence of Viku Sir and Savita tai. They are the gems who mould lives, she feels. She spent almost one year at Jnana Prabodhini's competitive exams centre, before she cracked the exam for the State Institute for Administrative Careers in Mumbai. Her days at Prabodhini were marked with a sense of liberty and responsibility. The place cherished clarity, a questioning mind and rebellion that came out of it. The meditative environment during the weekly prayers was soothing to the mind. Vinaya did not pursue competitive exams as her career, after trying for over one year. Though the process led to failure, she sees it as a learning for her overall development.

Balance in life

Vinaya has always cherished a sense of balance in her life. She admits to have failed to network during her long years of career. "The job itself is so challenging! And the minute I finish my job, I want to rush back home to my husband and my kid. I love being a family person as much as I love my job. I love discharging my domestic duties as much as I am kicked about adventurous assignments. I love planning the menu daily, taking care of the nutritional requirements. One feeds into another. The joy of my little one's hug is bigger than anything else," she says. Supportive family is the key of her success, she feels. Especially speaking of her husband Nandan, she says, "Through all the challenging phases of our lives, I never remember either of us telling each other that we can't support them anymore. We married each other with a vow that we will support each other in everything that helps us find joy and meaning in life. We live that vow every day, through the small actions. The sacrifices have been big and many, but love triumphs over everything."

Photo Gallery



Vinaya with husband Mr. Nandan Pandit, son Vihaan & family members.



Vinaya along with parents.



Vinaya, a Chevening Scholar at the celebration of 40 years of Chevening Scholarship.



The coffee table book on women leaders featured Vinaya.



Vinaya with Finland's PM Alexander Stubb during his recent State Visit to India in 2026.



Vinaya with senior US Politician Ro Khanna



Vinaya on field with Hon. CM of Maharashtra, Shri. Devendra Fadnavis during an election campaign rally.



Vinaya being awarded by then Dy. CM of Maharashtra, Late. Shri Ajit Pawar for her excellent work in the field of Journalism.



Vinaya with the Metro woman of Maharashtra, senior IAS officer Ashwini Bhide.



Vinaya reporting on field during the challenging times of Covid 19.



Vinaya with former Australian Cricket Player Steve Waugh



Vinaya with India's Olympic Medallist Shooter - Manu Bhakar.



Vinaya in conversation with renowned historian William Dalrymple at the stairs of Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra.



With renowned lyricist Shri. Javed Akhtar



Vinaya reporting from the submarine.



With a fighter jet onboard in the aircraft carrier INS Viraat.



Vinaya at the iconic incomplete mural in Washington DC.



Vinaya at the northernmost point of Earth - The Arctic Circle.