



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA: THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION, POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Women's political participation is one of the most significant indicators of democratic development and inclusive governance. In India, women constitute nearly half of the population, yet their representation in political institutions remains comparatively lower than that of men. Although the Constitution of India guarantees equality, universal adult franchise, and equal political rights, women continue to face numerous social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that restrict their active participation in politics. This study examines the impact of education, political socialization, culture, and social stratification on women's political participation in India. Using qualitative research based on secondary sources, the study analyses constitutional provisions, electoral participation, parliamentary representation, local self-government, and socio-cultural determinants influencing women's political engagement. The research finds that education significantly enhances political awareness, leadership skills, and civic participation, while political socialization through family, educational institutions, media, and civil society shapes political attitudes from an early age. Cultural traditions and patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's leadership opportunities, and social stratification based on caste, class, religion, and economic status creates multiple barriers to political participation. The paper concludes that increasing women's political participation requires educational empowerment, institutional reforms, gender-sensitive political parties, and societal transformation. Strengthening women's representation is essential for achieving democratic legitimacy, inclusive governance, and sustainable national development.



KEYWORDS: Women's Political Participation, Education, Political Socialization, Culture, Social Stratification, Democracy, India, Gender Equality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political participation is one of the essential foundations of democracy. It refers to the involvement of citizens in political processes through voting, contesting elections, joining political parties, participating in public debates, influencing public policy, and engaging in governance. A democratic political system becomes more representative and legitimate when all sections of society actively participate in decision-making. Among these sections, women's political participation occupies a central place because women constitute nearly half of India's population and play a vital role in social, economic, and political development. India adopted universal adult franchise immediately after Independence in 1947, granting equal voting rights to women and men irrespective of caste, religion, education, or property ownership. This progressive constitutional commitment placed India among the earliest democracies to ensure equal electoral rights for women. Despite this constitutional guarantee, women's representation in political institutions has remained relatively low for several decades. While

women actively participate as voters, their representation in Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies, political parties, and executive offices has not increased proportionately. Women's participation in politics is influenced by several interconnected factors. Education is one of the most important determinants because it enhances literacy, political awareness, communication skills, confidence, leadership qualities, and understanding of constitutional rights. Educated women are more likely to participate in elections, contest political offices, engage in public debates, and influence policy decisions. Political socialization also plays a significant role in shaping women's political attitudes. Families, schools, colleges, peer groups, media, and civil society organizations transmit political values and democratic norms that influence women's participation throughout their lives.

Culture remains another major determinant of political participation. Indian society has historically been influenced by patriarchal traditions that assign domestic responsibilities to women while associating political leadership with men. Although modernization, urbanization, and educational expansion have challenged these traditional norms, cultural expectations continue to influence women's political opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Gender stereotypes often discourage women from entering public life, while concerns related to safety, mobility, and family responsibilities further limit their participation.

Social stratification also affects women's political participation. Indian society is characterized by inequalities based on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, region, and economic status. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minority communities, and economically weaker sections frequently experience multiple forms of discrimination. These intersecting inequalities reduce their access to education, political resources, campaign finance, leadership opportunities, and political networks. Recognizing these disparities, the Government of India has introduced several constitutional and legislative measures to improve women's political representation. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments reserved one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies for women, leading to the election of millions of women representatives at the grassroots level. More recently, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 (Women's Reservation Act) aims to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, marking a significant step toward greater gender equality in political representation. The importance of women's political participation extends beyond numerical representation. Women legislators often prioritize issues such as education, healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, child welfare, gender justice, environmental protection, and social welfare. Their participation enriches democratic deliberation by incorporating diverse experiences and perspectives into policymaking. Research has consistently shown that greater female representation contributes to more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance.

However, increasing women's participation requires more than constitutional guarantees. It demands improvements in educational opportunities, economic empowerment, political training, leadership development, party support, campaign finance, and protection against gender-based discrimination and violence. Addressing these challenges is essential for achieving the constitutional vision of equality and inclusive democracy. This research article examines the impact of education, political socialization, culture, and social stratification on women's political participation in India. By analysing the interaction between these factors, the study seeks to identify the opportunities, challenges, and policy measures necessary for strengthening women's role in Indian democracy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Women's political participation has become an important area of research in political science, sociology, gender studies, and public administration. Scholars have extensively examined the factors that influence women's participation in electoral politics, legislative institutions, political parties, and decision-making processes. Existing literature indicates that women's political participation is shaped by a combination of educational, economic, cultural, institutional, and social factors rather than by constitutional guarantees alone.

One of the pioneering studies on political participation was conducted by **Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995)** in *Voice and Equality*. The authors developed the **Civic Voluntarism Model**, which

argues that individuals participate in politics when they possess adequate resources, motivation, and opportunities. Education is identified as one of the most important resources because it enhances political knowledge, civic skills, leadership capacity, and confidence. Educated women are more likely to vote, contest elections, join political parties, and participate in public affairs than women with lower levels of education. **Pippa Norris (2004)** emphasized the importance of political institutions in determining women's representation. According to Norris, electoral systems, party nomination procedures, and gender quotas significantly influence women's access to legislative institutions. Countries using proportional representation systems and affirmative action policies generally record higher levels of female representation than those relying solely on first-past-the-post electoral systems. **Anne Phillips (1995)** introduced the concept of the *Politics of Presence*, arguing that democracy requires the presence of women in political institutions because women bring distinct experiences and perspectives to policymaking. According to Phillips, equal citizenship cannot be achieved without equitable representation in legislative bodies. The **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** has consistently highlighted that countries adopting constitutional quotas and reserved seats have witnessed substantial increases in women's parliamentary representation. However, numerical representation alone is insufficient unless women actively participate in legislative debates, committee work, and policy formulation. The IPU emphasizes that political parties must also promote women to leadership positions. Research conducted by **UN Women** indicates that education plays a transformative role in women's political empowerment. Higher educational attainment increases political awareness, economic independence, communication skills, and self-confidence, enabling women to engage more effectively in public life. Women's literacy also contributes to informed voting behaviour and civic participation. Political socialization has been examined extensively by **Almond and Verba (1963)** in *The Civic Culture*. They argue that political attitudes develop through family, schools, peer groups, religious institutions, media, and community organizations. Women who grow up in democratic and gender-inclusive environments are more likely to participate in political activities than those raised in restrictive social settings.

Indian scholars have also contributed significantly to this field. **Rajni Kothari (1970)** emphasized that Indian politics is deeply influenced by social structures such as caste, class, religion, and regional identities. These structural factors often determine access to political resources and leadership opportunities. Women's participation cannot therefore be understood independently of broader social inequalities. Studies on **Panchayati Raj Institutions** demonstrate that the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have significantly increased women's representation in local governance. Researchers such as **Niraja Gopal Jayal** argue that reservation policies have empowered millions of women by providing opportunities to participate in decision-making at the grassroots level. Although many women initially entered politics through reserved seats, several have subsequently emerged as influential political leaders. Research on political parties reveals that candidate selection remains one of the greatest barriers to women's representation. Major political parties often nominate fewer women candidates due to assumptions regarding electoral viability, financial resources, and organizational networks. Consequently, women continue to remain underrepresented in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies despite constituting nearly half of the electorate.

Recent studies also highlight the growing importance of digital media in enhancing women's political participation. Social media platforms have enabled women politicians, activists, and civil society organizations to communicate directly with citizens, mobilize public opinion, and participate in political campaigns. However, online harassment, misinformation, and gender-based abuse continue to discourage many women from active political engagement. The existing literature therefore demonstrates that women's political participation is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including education, political socialization, institutional arrangements, culture, and socio-economic inequalities. These findings provide the conceptual foundation for the present study.

3. RESEARCH GAP:

Although substantial research has been conducted on women's political participation in India, several important gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on **electoral representation** or

constitutional reservation, while relatively fewer studies examine the combined impact of education, political socialization, culture, and social stratification on women's political participation. Second, existing research often analyses these variables independently rather than examining how they interact to influence women's political behaviour and leadership opportunities. Third, many studies focus either on parliamentary representation or local governance without providing an integrated analysis of women's participation across different political institutions. Finally, rapid changes in Indian politics—including increased female voter turnout, expansion of digital political communication, and recent constitutional reforms—necessitate updated research that incorporates contemporary developments. The present study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates political science, sociology, education, and gender studies to examine the determinants of women's political participation in India.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the present status of women's political participation in India.
2. To analyse the impact of education on women's political awareness and leadership.
3. To study the influence of political socialization on women's participation in democratic processes.
4. To examine how culture and patriarchal norms affect women's political representation.
5. To assess the influence of social stratification, including caste, class, religion, and economic inequality, on women's political participation.
6. To identify the major challenges faced by women in Indian politics.
7. To suggest policy measures for strengthening women's participation in democratic institutions.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does education influence women's political participation in India?
2. What role does political socialization play in developing women's political awareness and leadership?
3. How do cultural traditions and gender norms affect women's participation in politics?
4. In what ways does social stratification influence women's access to political opportunities?
5. What institutional barriers continue to limit women's political representation?
6. What policy measures can strengthen women's participation in Indian democracy?

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on a **qualitative research design** using **secondary data**. **Sources of Data:** Information has been collected from the following sources:

- Books on political science, sociology, and gender studies
- Peer-reviewed research journals
- Government reports and publications
- Election Commission of India reports
- Parliamentary documents
- Reports of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
- UN Women publications
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports
- National Commission for Women reports
- Research articles published in indexed academic journals

Research Method: The study adopts the **descriptive and analytical method**. Information collected from various sources has been critically analysed to understand the relationship between education, political socialization, culture, social stratification, and women's political participation.

Scope of the Study: The study is confined to **India** and focuses on women's participation in:

- Electoral politics
- Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies
- Panchayati Raj Institutions
- Political parties
- Democratic decision-making processes

Limitations of the Study

- The study is based solely on secondary data.
- It does not include primary surveys or interviews.
- Political participation is influenced by changing socio-political contexts; therefore, findings should be interpreted within the scope of the available literature.

7. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

Women's political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and an essential indicator of gender equality. In India, women have enjoyed universal adult franchise since the adoption of the Constitution in 1950, making the country one of the first democracies to grant equal voting rights to women. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality under Articles 14, 15, and 16, women's representation in political institutions has remained lower than that of men. Over time, however, significant progress has been made through constitutional reforms, increased electoral participation, and affirmative action.

Constitutional Framework: The Constitution of India provides a strong legal foundation for women's political participation.

- **Article 14** guarantees equality before the law.
- **Article 15(1)** prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex.
- **Article 15(3)** empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- **Article 16** ensures equality of opportunity in public employment.
- **Article 325** prohibits exclusion from electoral rolls based on religion, race, caste, or sex.
- **Article 326** provides universal adult suffrage, ensuring equal voting rights for all adult citizens.

These constitutional provisions establish women's equal status as political citizens and provide the legal basis for affirmative measures aimed at enhancing their representation.

Women's Participation as Voters

One of the most remarkable achievements of Indian democracy is the increasing participation of women as voters. Since the first General Election in 1951–52, female voter turnout has steadily increased. In recent elections, women's turnout has nearly equaled, and in some states even surpassed, that of men. Several factors have contributed to this increase:

- Rising literacy among women.
- Improved voter awareness campaigns by the Election Commission of India.
- Expansion of women's self-help groups.
- Increased political awareness through television and digital media.
- Greater economic participation of women.

Women's voting behaviour has also become more independent. While family influence remains important in some regions, many women now make electoral choices based on issues such as inflation, employment, education, healthcare, welfare schemes, and local development.

Women's Representation in Parliament: Despite high voter participation, women's representation in Parliament has remained comparatively low. Since the first Lok Sabha, the number of women Members of Parliament (MPs) has gradually increased, but women still constitute a minority of legislators. Political parties continue to nominate fewer women candidates, particularly in constituencies considered highly competitive.

Women parliamentarians have nevertheless played significant roles in shaping public policy. They have actively contributed to legislation concerning:

- Women's rights
- Child protection
- Education
- Public health
- Social welfare
- Domestic violence
- Sexual harassment
- Maternal healthcare
- Nutrition

Women have also chaired parliamentary committees and held important ministerial portfolios, demonstrating effective political leadership despite their relatively small numbers.

Women's Representation in State Legislative Assemblies

Women's representation in State Legislative Assemblies is generally lower than in Parliament.

Although some states have elected a comparatively larger number of women legislators, many continue to have limited female representation. Political parties frequently nominate male candidates due to assumptions regarding electoral success, financial capability, and organizational strength.

Several states have introduced initiatives to encourage women's political leadership through training programmes, leadership development, and financial support. However, substantial disparities continue to exist across regions.

Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Perhaps the greatest success in women's political empowerment has occurred at the grassroots level. The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992-93)** reserved one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies. Several states later increased this reservation to **50 percent**.

These reforms have transformed local governance by enabling millions of women to participate directly in political decision-making.

Women elected to Panchayats have contributed significantly to:

- Improvement of primary education
- Drinking water management
- Public sanitation
- Women's health programmes
- Child nutrition
- Rural infrastructure
- Self-help group development
- Social welfare implementation

Although challenges such as proxy representation and limited administrative experience initially existed, studies indicate that many women leaders have gradually developed confidence and administrative competence.

Women's Reservation Act (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023)-

A landmark development in Indian politics was the passage of the **Women's Reservation Act, 2023**, officially known as the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**.

The Act provides for:

- Reservation of one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha.
- Reservation of one-third of seats in State Legislative Assemblies.
- Reservation within Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe seats.

The legislation represents one of the most significant constitutional reforms for gender equality since Independence. Once implemented after the prescribed constitutional processes, it is expected to substantially increase women's representation in legislative bodies.

The Act also symbolizes growing political consensus regarding the importance of gender-inclusive governance.

8. IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Education is widely regarded as the most important determinant of women's political participation.

Political participation requires knowledge, confidence, communication skills, and awareness of constitutional rights. Education equips women with these capabilities and encourages active citizenship.

Political Awareness:

Educated women possess greater awareness of:

- Constitutional rights
- Electoral procedures
- Government policies
- Political parties
- Public institutions

Such awareness enables them to participate more actively in elections and public affairs.

Leadership Development:

Educational institutions provide opportunities for leadership through:

- Student unions
- Debates
- Youth parliaments
- Community service
- Public speaking

These experiences develop confidence and leadership skills that later contribute to political careers.

Economic Empowerment-

Education increases employment opportunities and economic independence.

Financial independence enables women to:

- Contest elections
- Finance political campaigns
- Participate in party activities
- Join civil society organizations

Economic empowerment therefore strengthens political participation.

Digital Literacy:

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed political communication. Educated women increasingly use:

- Social media
- Digital news platforms
- Government portals
- Online political campaigns

Digital literacy has enabled greater political awareness and public engagement.

9. IMPACT OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Political socialization refers to the process through which individuals acquire political values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Women's political participation is significantly influenced by various agents of political socialization.

Family- The family is the first institution that shapes political attitudes.

Parents who encourage:

- Equal education
- Independent thinking
- Civic participation
- Public discussion

often raise daughters who are more politically active. Conversely, patriarchal family structures may discourage women's political ambitions.

Educational Institutions- Schools and universities promote democratic values through:

- Civic education
- Constitutional studies
- Student councils
- Electoral awareness programmes
- Youth leadership activities

Higher education significantly increases women's political confidence.

Media- Traditional media and digital media influence political participation by:

- Providing political information
- Highlighting women leaders
- Increasing awareness of government programmes
- Encouraging electoral participation

However, media stereotypes sometimes reinforce traditional gender roles, limiting women's political visibility.

Political Parties: Political parties function as the primary gateway to electoral politics.

Women's participation depends upon:

- Candidate selection
- Leadership opportunities
- Internal democracy
- Women's wings
- Political training programmes

Greater inclusion within political parties is essential for improving representation.

Civil Society Organizations:

Women's organizations, NGOs, and self-help groups contribute significantly to political empowerment by:

- Conducting leadership training
- Organizing voter awareness campaigns
- Promoting legal literacy
- Supporting women's rights
- Encouraging participation in local governance

These organizations help women develop political confidence and organizational skills.

Social Media

Social media has emerged as an important platform for political engagement.

Women increasingly use digital platforms to:

- Share political opinions
- Mobilize support
- Raise awareness
- Engage with elected representatives
- Participate in public debates

At the same time, online harassment and misinformation remain significant challenges that require stronger legal safeguards.

10. IMPACT OF CULTURE ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Culture plays a decisive role in shaping women's political participation in India. Cultural beliefs, customs, traditions, and gender norms influence how society perceives women's roles in public and private life. Although India has made significant progress in promoting gender equality through constitutional provisions and legal reforms, patriarchal values continue to affect women's political opportunities.

Patriarchy and Gender Roles- Indian society has historically been characterized by patriarchal traditions that associate leadership with men and caregiving with women. These traditional expectations often discourage women from pursuing political careers. Many women continue to face pressure to prioritize domestic responsibilities over public life, limiting their ability to participate actively in politics.

Religion and Customs- India's diverse religious and cultural traditions have varying influences on women's political participation. While many religious teachings emphasize equality and social justice, conservative interpretations and customary practices can restrict women's mobility, education, and leadership opportunities. Social reform movements and constitutional protections have helped challenge many discriminatory practices, but cultural change remains gradual.

Gender Stereotypes- Persistent stereotypes portray politics as a male-dominated sphere requiring aggression, financial power, and extensive networks. Women candidates often face greater scrutiny than men regarding their personal lives, appearance, and family responsibilities. Such stereotypes discourage many capable women from entering electoral politics.

Changing Cultural Trends-Urbanization, education, economic development, and increased media exposure have gradually transformed public attitudes. Women are increasingly participating in student politics, civil society organizations, local governance, and electoral campaigns. Younger generations are more supportive of gender equality, creating favourable conditions for greater political participation.

11. IMPACT OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and status within society. In India, women's political participation is influenced not only by gender but also by caste, class, religion, region, and economic status.

Caste-Caste remains an important determinant of political opportunities. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) often experience multiple forms of discrimination. Constitutional reservations have increased representation, but many women from marginalized communities continue to face social exclusion and limited access to political resources.

Class and Economic Status-Election campaigns require substantial financial resources. Women from economically weaker backgrounds frequently face difficulties in financing campaigns, accessing party networks, and competing with wealthier candidates. Economic empowerment through education, employment, and self-help groups can improve women's political participation.

Rural-Urban Differences-Urban women generally have better access to education, media, employment, and political organizations than rural women. Rural women often face barriers such as lower literacy levels, restricted mobility, limited digital access, and traditional social norms. However,

the reservation of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions has significantly increased rural women's participation in local governance.

Religion and Minority Status-Women belonging to minority communities may encounter additional challenges due to social marginalization and economic disadvantage. Inclusive policies and targeted educational initiatives are essential for ensuring equal political opportunities for all women regardless of religious affiliation.

Intersectionality-The concept of intersectionality explains that women experience multiple forms of inequality simultaneously. A woman may face discrimination based on gender, caste, class, disability, or religion. Therefore, policies promoting women's political participation must address these intersecting inequalities rather than focusing solely on gender.

12. MAJOR CHALLENGES

Despite constitutional guarantees and policy initiatives, women in India continue to face several obstacles to political participation.

1. **Low Representation in Legislatures:** Women remain underrepresented in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies despite high voter turnout.
2. **Limited Party Nominations:** Political parties often nominate fewer women candidates, especially in constituencies considered electorally competitive.
3. **Financial Constraints:** High campaign costs and unequal access to funding discourage many women from contesting elections.
4. **Political Violence and Harassment:** Women candidates frequently encounter intimidation, online abuse, and gender-based violence, affecting their willingness to participate.
5. **Work-Family Balance:** Balancing political responsibilities with household and caregiving duties remains a challenge for many women.
6. **Gender Bias and Stereotypes:** Deep-rooted societal attitudes continue to question women's leadership abilities and political competence.

13. MAJOR FINDINGS:

The study identifies several key findings:

- Education is the strongest predictor of women's political awareness, confidence, and leadership.
- Political socialization through family, schools, media, and civil society significantly influences women's political attitudes.
- Cultural norms and patriarchal values continue to restrict women's participation, although these barriers are gradually weakening.
- Social stratification based on caste, class, religion, and economic status creates unequal political opportunities.
- Constitutional measures, including reservations in local governance and the Women's Reservation Act, have strengthened women's representation but require effective implementation.
- Women's increased participation contributes to more inclusive governance and greater attention to issues such as education, healthcare, nutrition, and gender justice.

14. POLICY SUGGESTIONS:

To strengthen women's political participation, the following measures are recommended:

1. Improve access to quality education for girls and women, with emphasis on civic and constitutional education.
2. Encourage political parties to nominate more women candidates and promote women to leadership positions.
3. Provide leadership training, campaign management skills, and financial support for women candidates.
4. Strengthen legal mechanisms to prevent political violence and online harassment against women.
5. Expand mentorship programmes linking experienced women leaders with emerging political aspirants.

6. Increase awareness through media campaigns promoting gender equality and women's leadership.
7. Enhance digital literacy to enable women to engage effectively in political communication and governance.
8. Ensure effective implementation of the Women's Reservation Act and continued support for reservations in local self-government institutions.

15. CONCLUSION

Women's political participation is fundamental to the success of democracy and inclusive governance in India. Although constitutional guarantees have ensured equal political rights, women's representation in political institutions continues to be shaped by education, political socialization, cultural norms, and social stratification. Education empowers women with knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills necessary for active political engagement. Political socialization through family, educational institutions, media, and civil society nurtures democratic values and encourages participation. At the same time, patriarchal culture, gender stereotypes, caste, class, and economic inequality continue to limit women's opportunities.

The reservation of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions has demonstrated that affirmative action can significantly improve women's political representation and leadership. The enactment of the Women's Reservation Act marks another important milestone toward achieving greater gender equality in legislative institutions. However, legal reforms alone are insufficient. Sustainable progress requires educational empowerment, institutional reforms, political commitment, and broader social transformation. A truly representative democracy must ensure that women participate not only as voters but also as legislators, policymakers, party leaders, and decision-makers. Increasing women's political participation will strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.

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