



Visualizing the relationship between caste, gender, and political representation in India

Aditya Kumar^{1*}

1. PhD Scholar, Sona Devi University, Ghatshila, Jharkhand, India
aditya72910@gmail.com

Abstract: In the current paper, the relationship between caste, gender, and political representation in India is critically examined through a combination of the visual and the political science approach. It transcends a purely data-driven approach in its attempt to comprehend how the existing social orders, institutional structures and cultural practices dictate who gains access to political power. Within the framework of intersectionality, the research points to the fact that persons being at the cross-section of marginalized caste identities and gender face both additional and structurally entrenched obstacles to participation and leadership. Although affirmative action policies, such as reservations, have enhanced descriptive representation in different political institutions, it has not always been accompanied by substantive empowerment or policy impact. The paper also highlights the drawbacks of depending only on quantitative visualization in the sense that it should engage more analytically with the issue of power relations, agency, and democratic inclusion. The study highlights the importance of more inclusive, intersectional, and institutionally responsive methodologies by locating the empirical patterns in the larger socio-political contexts. Finally, it demands a reconsideration of the nature of representation in the context of equity, voice, and meaningful representation to enhance democratic legitimacy in India.

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Political Representation, Intersectionality, Democracy, India, Social Inequality

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INTRODUCTION

Political representation is an essential element of the democratic governing process as it defines who makes the decisions and whose interests should eventually be implemented in the form of public policy. The problem of representation is not 100 percent comprehensible in an extremely stratified society like India without questioning the ongoing role of caste and gender structures. They are not simply social classifications; they are entrenched in political institutions and still define access to leadership positions, involvement in political activities, and the wielding of influence.

Even with the introduction of constitutional protections and affirmative action policies, there still remain large disparities in the past. Representation cannot, then, be understood merely in the light of numerical representation or formal representation. It should also be considered regarding the capacity of individuals and groups to actively engage in the act of decision-making. This would require breaking out of the notion of descriptive representation and a more thorough account of the structural and institutional restrictions that constrain meaningful political participation.

In this regard, the current paper will take a political science approach to analyze the interplay of caste and gender in terms of political representation. It moves the analysis off of the technical or data-driven modes of analysis and places more emphasis on theoretical and interpretative frameworks. The study attempts to give more critical and in-depth insights into the issue of representation in modern India by preempting the

problems of power relations, social exclusion, and democratic inclusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersectionality and Political Representation

Intersectionality is a critical analytical concept that was first formulated by Kimberle Crenshaw and can be used to analyze how a combination of several social identities, including caste, gender, class, and ethnicity, interacts to create complex and layered forms of disadvantage. Instead of describing caste and gender as two distinct axes of inequality, intersectionality emphasizes that these two categories are mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing in either way, in the lived experience and access to power (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Intersectionality is especially applicable in the Indian context because of a highly rooted caste system and patriarchal society. Women who are of disadvantaged caste groups, i.e., Scheduled castes (SCs), Scheduled tribes (STs), tend to bear a dual or even multiple discrimination. At the same time, they experience gender ostracization in a patriarchal society and are also marginalized due to their caste as a result of historical and structural disparities (Rege, 1998; Paik, 2014). This disadvantage is compounded because it influences their access to education, economic opportunities, and social mobility, which are essential to political participation.

In terms of political representation, intersectionality points out to the fact that the limitations experienced by the marginalized women are not merely additive, but they are structurally intertwined. One case in point is that policies on reservations may assist individuals in getting into political institutions, however, not necessarily address the issue of intra-group disparities or power inequities within marginalized communities per se. This means that the dominant sub-groups would have a few women benefiting disproportionately at the expense of the marginalized (Duflo, 2005). Furthermore, intersectionality eliminates the idea that the representation of either the caste identity group or the gender identity group will suffice in order to render the representation reflective enough. It demands a more subtle conceptualization of the representation that takes into consideration diversity within social groups and the particular needs of people who are placed at the overlap of numerous disadvantages. This is the critical view to analyze political participation and leadership in a stratified society such as India.

Social Stratification and Power

Social stratification, especially based on caste and gender, is an aspect that characterizes the Indian society and which still influences political power and representation. Caste is still a formidable force that dictates access to resources, social status, and political power, even though there are constitutional provisions that seek to eradicate discrimination based on caste. The idea of caste being not a social institution but a system of graded inequality organizing opportunities and life chances has long been stressed by various scholars (B. R. Ambedkar). Caste plays a role in the election politics, the party politics, and voting patterns. Political parties are known to organize caste-based political support, which strengthens politics based on identity. The dominant castes are more likely to access the financial resources, social networks, and institutional power that help them to have a strong representation in the political institutions (Jaffrelot, 2003).

On the other hand, the marginal castes are structurally disadvantaged such that they cannot be politically

empowered. Another dimension of stratification that is critical is gender. Patriarchal cultures limit the access of women to education, property, and even space, hence limiting their political participation. Political leadership, as well as decision-making organs, usually contain fewer females, which is a manifestation of general gender inequalities within society (Phillips, 1995).

Caste-gender interaction results in a hierarchical structure of political representation itself. At the top of this hierarchy are usually the upper caste men, who control the political institutions and decision-making. On the contrary, women of lower castes take the lowest ranks, and they are not only socially excluded but also lack political agency. Such a stratification of ranks highlights the necessity to examine the issue of representation in the prism of power and inequality, and not in the prism of numerical presence.

Democratic Inclusion and Representation

The democratic theory pays a lot of attention to the idea of inclusive representation, which is critical in achieving legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness in governance. Other scholars like Hanna Pitkin have differentiated among types of representation, especially descriptive (the existence of representatives who have similarities to their constituents) and substantive (the degree to which representatives represent the interests of their constituency). In a society with high social disparities, meaningful representation cannot be done by simple numerical inclusion. Even though the rise of marginalized groups within the political institutions is a desirable move, it does not necessarily mean that their interests will be adequately represented and met. The representatives may be constrained in the process of making decisions by structural inequalities, which may include unequal access to resources, education, and institutional power (Young, 2000).

Furthermore, even democratic institutions can recreate the existing hierarchies in case they are not constructed to mitigate the underlying inequalities. As a case in point, political parties, laws, and government systems can be biased towards existing elites, thus limiting the inclusion of marginalized communities. In that regard, the process of representation will be a disputed scenario influenced by power relations instead of an unbiased inclusion mechanism. The complete nature of democratic representation should thus extend beyond the quantitative aspect and include the qualitative aspect of voice, agency, and influence. Voice is the capability of individuals and groups to express their interests; agency is the capability of acting on their own and making decisions; and influence is the capability of influencing the policy outcomes. In the absence of these, representation can easily be symbolic, rather than transformative. To sum up, the intersectionality, social stratification, and democratic theory theoretical framework offer a solid basis for the study of caste and gender in political representation. It reiterates how inequality is a multifaceted phenomenon that needs to be approached on a multidimensional level that puts into consideration both structural and institutional forces.

CASTE AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

One of the most dramatic and persistent influences of political participation and representation in India has been caste. It is historically constructed on the basis of the hierarchical social order and the caste system structures the relationships between the various social classes, and the access to power, resources, and the decision-making, significantly. Caste continues to dominate the electoral processes, the choices of the

candidates and the overall political competition in general in the democratic politics arena. Electoral politics There are different axes of mobilization that can be taken into consideration under caste. Caste based politics is normally adopted by the political parties to form vote banks where candidates who can appeal to big or dominant caste groups in a constituency are picked by the party. It has resulted in the creation of caste-based political formations, in which identity has become a determinant in political inclinations. Although in certain instances, such mobilization has helped historically marginalized groups to establish their political space, caste identities have been strengthened in the democratic process, as opposed to eroding them.

The introduction of reservation policies to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is one of the key institutional attempts to solve historical exclusion. Through the reservation of seats in legislative bodies, such policies have guaranteed the marginalized groups a minimum degree of descriptive representation. Consequently, people in underprivileged groups have acquired official entry into political spaces, which used to be closed or restricted by systematic discrimination. The augmentation of numerical representation, though, may not be directly proportional to substantive empowerment. A number of researchers state the fact that the participation of SC and ST representatives in the legislative bodies is usually limited by greater structural and institutional reasons. Among the main constraints is the party hierarchies whereby the powers of making decisions lie with political elites, who in most cases are members of the dominant social groups. The people representing marginalized backgrounds might not have much influence in party structures; hence, they might not argue in the best interest of their communities.

In addition, socio-economic dependence is an important factor in determining the independence of these representatives. The elected officials in the marginalized groups also depend on the parties, financial support, and the power structures at the local level, which may limit their autonomy. The dependency can force them to be in line with party instructions instead of being more interested in the constituency's needs. This, in other instances, even leads to some kind of symbolic or token representation, in which the existence of marginalized people does not translate into any actionable policy change. The other problem that is notable is the persistence of the social inequalities beyond the formal political institutions. Caste hierarchies that are deeply rooted in society have persisted to affect the daily interactions, education, economic opportunities, and social mobility. These, in their turn, influence the ability of the representatives of the marginalized population to exercise political power effectively. Where institutional mechanisms are available to participate and provide an opportunity to do so, more societal constraints can mitigate their effect.

Simultaneously, it should be noted that the caste-based political mobilization has also played a role in the democratization of Indian politics in some ways. The development of regional parties and movements that have involved backward and marginalized castes has put into question the leadership of traditional elites and broadened the area of political participation. These developments suggest that caste can be used as a means of inequality as well as politics and collective action.

Table 1: Representation of Social Groups in Indian Legislatures

Social Group	Constitutional Provision	Level of Representation	Key Limitation
Scheduled Castes (SC)	Reserved seats in Parliament & State Assemblies	Moderate numerical inclusion	Limited policy influence due to party control
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	Reserved seats	Regionally concentrated representation	Marginal voice in national politics
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	No direct reservation in Parliament (but political mobilization)	Increasing political presence	Uneven distribution of power
Upper Castes	No reservation	Dominant representation	Continued structural advantage

GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Gender is still a critical dimension of inequality in the political representation process, and even though there has been a remarkable improvement over the last few decades, a wide gap still exists in the political representation of women. In India and in most other societies, political institutions have traditionally been dominated by men, and this is a larger expression of patriarchy, which has an enshrinement in social, economic, and cultural frameworks. Even though democratic systems provide equal political rights, the practical implementation of these rights is usually limited by gendered limitations that restrict the access of women to political power. The structural and socio-cultural factors interact to influence the participation of women in politics. Education is important because the more women are literate and educated, the more they can involve themselves in political processes, know their rights, and be able to participate. Still on the same point, economic independence is the main factor that defines political participation. When women have access to financial resources and employment opportunities, they are more likely to be involved in politics because they do not rely on the family and community structures, which might inhibit their autonomy.

Nonetheless, the strong-rooted social norms and patriarchal values are still one of the significant barriers. The conventional gender roles tend to imprison the female gender within the home circle, which is related to the household chores and nurturing, where politics is perceived as a male-dominated sphere of society. Not only do these norms deter women from pursuing politics, but they also influence the attitude of society towards women's leadership and usually result in doubt about women's abilities and their right to be a political leader. These obstacles are strengthened by institutional barriers. The political parties that are the main gatekeepers to electoral participation are usually biased towards the candidates' selection in the sense

that they prefer male candidates because of their perceived electability, access to resources, and also because of their networks. Consequently, women do not only have limited representation in elected office but also in party leadership and decision-making processes. One of the major progressions in dealing with gender inequality in political representation in India has been the introduction of women's reservations in the local government institutions, especially the Panchayati Raj system. These interventions have seen the numerical representation of women in grassroots political organizations rise significantly. This has, in most instances, helped women to become visible, acquire leadership skills, and to be involved in the process of local governance.

However, over the years, the growth of descriptive representation has not necessarily achieved substantive empowerment. The phenomenon of proxy representation (election of women representatives is often under the influence or control of male members of the family, also known as sarpanch pati or other informal power holders) is one of the most significant issues. This limits the independence of women leaders and their capacity to make independent decisions. Moreover, female politicians are often confronted with the issues of institutional support deficit, substance of training and resource access, and marginalization in decision-making. Deliberative spaces can continue to marginalize women even when women have formal authority, whereby their voices are not as heard or listened to as those of their male counterparts.

There is also the social resistance as a major obstacle. It is possible that, when women enter politics, they will face hostility, discrimination, and even harassment, not only in the political institutions but also in the community as a whole. Such experiences may demoralize long-term involvement and support gender-based power dynamics. Nevertheless, in spite of those difficulties, more and more evidence is emerging that more women's involvement in politics can result in constructive consequences, such as more focus on such issues as health, education, sanitation, and social welfare. The women leaders tend to have different opinions and priorities, which would give a more inclusive and responsive administration.

Table 2: Gender Representation in Indian Political Institutions

Institution Level	Women's Representation (Approx.)	Policy Mechanism	Key Challenge
Parliament (Lok Sabha)	~14–15%	No full reservation (yet)	Underrepresentation
State Assemblies	~8–12%	No uniform quota	Low participation
Panchayati Raj Institutions	33%–50% (reserved)	Constitutional reservation	Proxy representation
Political Parties	Very low leadership share	Internal party policies	Gender bias in candidate selection

INTERSECTION OF CASTE AND GENDER

This interaction of caste and gender demonstrates the most deep-rooted and most complex forms of social and political exclusion in India. Caste and gender influence the access to power and opportunities separately, but their interaction causes the stratified disadvantages not possible to be described in the one axis approach. Women who reside in discriminated caste groups, both Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), are likely to experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination that grossly limit their access to participation in political processes. At the structural level, caste hierarchies are subject to patriarchal structures in order to produce an additional marginalization. The disadvantages of the lower caste women are not just gender-oriented, but also caste-oriented as they are also kept out of the system. This dual marginalization affects their education, employment, social mobility and political participation. In case, the example is that reduced education level and financial insecurity serve to reduce their potential in effective political participation or contested elections. The other critical problem where intersectional inequalities emerge is access to political networks and resources. Political involvement is usually a matter of networks, funding and social capital, which is more prevalent among upper-caste and male elites. Women of disadvantaged castes are often excluded in these networks, which restricts their visibility and access in political parties and institutions. Their power to maneuver the institutional systems and impose themselves is typically limited, even when they enter politics using reservation systems.

These barriers are further enforced by social norms and cultural practices. In most societies, women belonging to marginalized castes are subjected to more restraints and limited mobility than women of dominant castes. They can also face discrimination and stigma both in their respective communities and the general society. This may cause a lack of confidence, political awareness, and less involvement in the decision-making of the populace. Intersectionality is a useful model that can be used to examine these intersecting inequalities. It lays stress on the fact that social identities like caste and gender do not act independently but are interconnected to influence the experience of power and disadvantage in individuals. In this light, caste or gender-specific policies might not consider the unique issues of those who are at the intersection. As an illustration, although the caste-based reservations can enhance the representation of marginalized groups, it does not necessarily imply that they can overcome gender-related obstacles within those groups. On the same note, gender-specific programs can be beneficial mostly to women who have comparatively advantaged social statuses, and caste women who have been marginalized.

The weakness of the existing policy frameworks underscores the need to have more specific and encompassing solutions. Interventions should be effective and must recognize the diversity of the marginalized groups and be able to meet the individual needs of the people who are faced with a combination of disadvantages. This does not merely imply representation alone but also capacity, autonomy and access to resources of women leaders of color of a marginalized group. The institutional reforms, training initiatives, and monetary provision can have a great role to play in meaningful participation. Moreover, the co-existence of caste and gender has significant consequences on the quality of democratic representation. In the event that some groups are systematically marginalized or underrepresented, their interests and views will not be incorporated in the policy decisions to a large extent.

This is a setback to the value of equality and inclusiveness that are a core aspect of democratic governance. It is then necessary to empower women of marginalized castes to have a say in the political processes in order to have fair and responsive governance.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Policies, like affirmative action and the reservation system, have been a significant factor in redressing past historical disparities in political representation in India. These measures are aimed at redressing historic trends of marginalization and have introduced more inclusive democratic processes and practices by implementing reserved seats in different levels of governance in the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women. Specifically, legislative representation and local governance institutions have considerably elevated the numerical representation of the marginalized groups, which is a significant step towards democratization. Nevertheless, these mechanisms have been successful in improving the descriptive representation, i.e., the presence of people of marginalized groups in political institutions, but they are often not effective in substantive empowerment, i.e. ability to affect decisions, influence policies, and represent the interests of the disadvantaged groups. This dissonance between representation and empowerment points to the shortcomings of the institutional quotas as a means of social change. The organization and operation of political parties is one of the major limitations. Political parties become the gatekeepers to the electoral arena and they control the choice of the candidate, allocation of resources and policy agenda. Decisions in party structures are often entrusted to senior leaders who in most instances, represent the socially and economically dominant groups. Therefore, the representatives of a fringe background may not possess autonomy or may have to obey the commandments of the party rather than voice the interests of his or her constituencies individually. This kind of dynamism undermines the potential to transform representation and reinforce institutionalized power networks of politics.

The other significant weakness is that political training and capacity building is lacking among newly elected representatives of marginalized groups. Most of the people who join politics via reservation systems might have no previous experience of the governing processes, legislative procedures, or formulation of policies. They also may find it hard to navigate through the complex political environment, and execute their functions satisfactorily without institutional support, training, and mentorship. It can prevent their independence on bureaucratic actors or party leadership, which only restricts their agency. Socio-cultural factors also play a major role in taming the efficiency of institutional mechanisms. The ingrained caste and gender norms are still present and affect communication in the political arena. The representatives of marginalized groups, especially women, can be discriminated against, may not be a part of informal decision-making circles, and their authority can be challenged. Such social barriers may subvert their confidence and limit their involvement in constructive deliberation and leadership. Besides, the so-called symbolic or token representation phenomenon usually occurs in such situations. The fact that the marginalized persons are present in the political institutions may satisfy the formal needs of inclusion but it may not provide a change in the governance or policy outcomes. These can either be situations where the representatives have no authority to affect the major decisions, leading to a lack of connection between the representatives and the real needs of the marginalized groups.

Another issue is that higher representation does not necessarily lead to the enactment of policies that would

help in mitigating social and economic disparities. There are various factors affecting policy formulation, among them being political priorities, economic constraints, and institutional interests. Although marginalized representatives might bring a certain case to the fore, their ideas might not find enough support in the general political context. The gains of representation can, therefore, be restricted in terms of practical improvements in the lives of the underprivileged groups. Moreover, institutional processes usually transcend a wider socio-economic environment that perpetuates inequality. Poverty, lack of access to education, and unequal distribution of resources among marginalized communities are issues that influence the capacity of marginalized communities to take advantage of the opportunities that affirmative action policies have created to the fullest. Institutional reforms alone may not be effective without being coupled with changes in the underlying structural conditions. Irrespective of these constraints, it is critical to note that affirmative action policies have provided significant avenues of entry to the marginalized communities and have contributed to the slow change of the political spaces. They have made themselves more visible, they have promoted political participation, and created leadership opportunities. Nonetheless, these mechanisms need to be complemented with more general reforms to facilitate institutional inclusivity, capacity-building efforts, and overcome socio-cultural obstacles.

REFRAMING THE APPROACH: FROM DATA TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Over the recent years, quantitative methods like data analytics, statistical modeling and visualization have received more saliency in political representation studies. These tools may offer a lot of information on the trends of participation, electoral trends and demographic representation, but when applied when they are overused, there is a danger of obscuring in the socio-political reality that shapes these trends. Numbers, charts, datasets may inform us about what is happening but it is often unhelpful to understand why these patterns are long-lasting and how they are embedded in even greater structures of power and inequality. A rigorously data-driven approach has a higher likelihood to emphasize those measures that may be quantified, such as the number of the representatives of some social groups or the turnout rates. Although these indicators are important; they partially explain political representation. They may not possess the qualitative dimensions of power such as influencing the direction, a decision, the policy agenda, or struggle with the well-established hierarchies. As a result, due to the limited scope of the technical analysis, the threat of a superficial approach to the discussion of the concept of representation, where inclusion may be limited to numerical presence and not the meaning participation, exists.

The only means of overcoming such limitations is adherence to a political science approach that would put empirical findings in a larger theoretical and contextual heuristic. This approach is why it is necessary to analyze information in the context of the underlying social patterns, historic developments, and institutional regimes. Data is not an end in itself, rather it is a method to facilitate more profound analytical enquiry. One of the main concerns of political analysis is an analysis of structural inequality and the relations of power.

Political representation is concerned not only with where power is and who is the one holding the power, but about how power can be distributed and utilized in institutions. The arrangement of inequality goes based on caste, gender, and classes among other social factors that determine access to political opportunity and outcome. Political science approach tries to find answers on these aspects of power by

critically questioning how formal equality can be present, alongside substantive inequality. Another important dimension is the importance of historical background and institutional processes. Without stating their historical background, the contemporary tendencies of representation cannot be explained exhaustively.

At the Indian level, colonial legacies, post-independence reforms, and development of democratic institutions have been cumulative in influencing the development of the present political structures. It is in this context of history that political parties and electoral systems have been functioning and it is in this sense that governance structures are situated and the way representation is being organized and experienced. This kind of subtle analysis should therefore be informed by how such institutions grant and restrict participation.

It is also important to raise normative questions of justice and inclusion, which define the essence of inquiry in political science. Along with the empirical observation, political representation can also be determined as the evaluation of the current arrangements on the basis of standards of fairness, equity and inclusiveness. In this case, such concepts like social justice, opportunity equality, and democratic legitimacy need to be dealt with. Using the case of exclusionary groups, where it is suspected that they are being more represented, a normative perspective would increase the query on whether the minority groups could actually practice the actual decision making authority or their interests were actually being fairly reflected as to the result of the policymaking process. By reconstituting the manner, which was predominantly technical-oriented, the more interpretative and theoretic-oriented manner will present an insight concerning the manner in which political representation is more of an intermittent and controversial process. The representation process is not set and is associated with endless disagreements, negotiations and interactions between different social groups and political actors. It is influenced by conflicting interests, institutional limitations and changing relations of power. Further, the shift of attitude provokes the sharpening of attitude to the limitations of the existing frameworks and policies. It stresses the need to look beyond the symptoms and to examine the underlying mechanisms that are producing inequality. As the empirical facts and the understanding theory are synthesized, the researchers will be able to generate more complete and important analyses that provide a more accurate explanation of the political realities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Caste and gender based inequality in political representation has long term consequences on democratic governance in India. The active and substantive meaning of the concept of democracy is not about the regular elections, or formal equality before the law; it assumes significant integration, equal participation, and effective representation of other layers of the society in the process of the decision-making. The failure to represent, or to represent effectively, large groups of members in society, least historically privileged groups in particular, may make the democratic process seem advertising when actually it is exclusionary. Policy priorities are among the greatest effects of unequal representation. The control of the socially beneficial institutions may not be entirely representative of the need, interests and life of the marginal groups. Issues such as social justice, access to education, medical care, land and anti-discriminatory action could not be given the necessary attention or addressed in a way that does not give a good picture at the ground level. Representative inclusion is also needed to ensure that policymaking practices are not taken up

to exclude a huge variety of opinions and make the products more equal and responsive.

Also, the lack of effectiveness of the representation may weaken it, undermining any authority of the democratic institutions. It may also lead to disillusionment, political disengagement and mistrust on the institutions of government considering that they do not feel that they are represented and that the interests of such specific groups of people are disregarded in an organized manner. This erosion of trust poses a severe obstacle to the idea of democratic stability since it undermines the sense of ownership and collective in this business and engagement that runs a working democracy.

The solution to these concerns is a shift of focus to a more substantive mode of representation as opposed to the numerical inclusion. Enhancing substantive representation also suggests the capacity, autonomy, and institutional capacities that elected members, and in particular those who have an underrepresented background can adequately represent their constituencies. This will involve an increased participation in the legislative processes, an increased inclusion in the key decision processes, and the capacity to influence the policy outputs substantially. The second priority requirement is the need to break down structural barriers to political engagement. Socio-economic inequities, lack of access to education, financial resources, and social norms entrenched to curb the involvement of marginalized populations, particularly women and members of lower castes, form these barriers. The above barriers can only be overcome when there are programs that encompass the entire policy spectrum and are not just limited to the political arena, such as investing in education, economic empowerment, and social reforms. There is also a need to have institutional reforms in political parties, including the inclusion of more people in the selection of their candidates and the internal democratization of their parties so as to have a more level playing field.

The importance of political awareness and education promotion is also in place. Educating people on their rights, political procedures, and means of involvement is the best way of empowering citizens to enhance democratic participation. Political education would assist the disadvantaged groups to build the confidence and skills to be actively involved in the governance system, either as voters, activists, or representatives. It is also relevant in questioning discriminatory thinking and inculcating a culture of inclusivity and equality in society. Besides, inclusive democratic governance demands sustained dialogue with issues of accountability and responsiveness. The institutions should be structured and redefined to provide transparency, minimize power lapses, and establish methods to enable citizens to stop their representatives. This involves enhancing local institutions of governance, encouraging participatory governance, and making sure that marginalized voices are not just being heard but also being realized. Moreover, any attempt to check the caste and gender gap in political representation can bring a shift in the overall political landscape of democracy. Inclusion will also allow for more diverse leadership with more innovative solutions to problems, describing policy, and a more competent government apparatus to solve complex social problems. It can also help in the enhancement of democracy by broadening the range of participation as well as strengthening the tenets of equality and justice.

CONCLUSION

Caste and gender in the political representation in India portray the permeation of social hierarchies that have firmly taken root in democratic institutions. Although affirmative action and reservation policies have led to a dramatic enhancement in the numerical inclusion, they have not succeeded in achieving substantive

representation and real empowerment of the marginalized groups. The discussion has shown that formal institutional structures only have a role to play in shaping political participation, but structural inequalities, socio-cultural norms, and power relations also restrict the exercise of agency and influence. The intersectional approach points out that the barriers faced by women of marginalized castes are doubled, and new and more inclusive policy methods are necessary. The enhancement of democratic governance, therefore, is more of moving beyond the symbolic embodiment of democracy to the real participation of voice, autonomy, and power to make decisions are division of labor. The key point is that to attain fair political representation, there should be uninterrupted institutional change, social change, and adherence to justice, inclusion, and democratic accountability.

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