



Publications

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (UIJMR)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 3048-6726 www.ujmr.in Impact Factor: 5.446(SJIF) Vol-2, Issue 2(April, May, June), 2025

Political Empowerment and Social Transformation in India: A Study

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Article Received:10-05-2025 Article Modified:25-06-2025

Article Accepted:26-06-2025 Article Published:27-06-2025

DOI:10.37854/UIJMR.2025.2.2.353

Abstract:

The study titled “*Political Empowerment and Social Transformation in India: A Study*” examines the nature of political empowerment in the context of India’s democratic and social structure, with a special focus on caste-based inequalities. Although India has established a strong constitutional framework guaranteeing equality, universal adult franchise, and fundamental rights, political empowerment remains uneven across different caste groups and other social categories. The study critically explores whether formal democratic inclusion has translated into substantive political empowerment, particularly among historically marginalized castes such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. From a sociological perspective, political empowerment extends beyond voting and includes the ability of individuals and caste groups to influence decision-making processes, access state resources, participate in governance, and exercise political agency. In the Indian context, these processes are deeply shaped by caste hierarchy, along with intersecting inequalities of class, gender, and economic status. While formal institutions like Parliament, State Legislatures, and Panchayati Raj Institutions ensure political representation, informal structures such as caste-based hierarchies and socio-economic dependencies continue to strongly influence political behaviour and access to power. The study highlights the dual nature of Indian democracy, where formal equality coexists with caste-based substantive inequality. It argues that although political participation has expanded significantly across caste groups, political influence and decision-making power remain unevenly distributed. This condition reflects what political sociology describes as “participatory expansion with substantive inequality,” where inclusion does not necessarily lead to empowerment, especially for marginalized castes.



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Keywords: Political Empowerment, Social Transformation, Caste System, Democratic Participation, Political Representation, Social Inequality, Scheduled Castes, Political Awareness, Panchayati Raj, India.

Introduction:

Political empowerment in India represents one of the most significant yet unresolved dimensions of democratic development in postcolonial societies. Since independence, India has constructed one of the most extensive constitutional frameworks in the world, guaranteeing fundamental rights such as equality before law, freedom of expression, and universal adult franchise. These provisions have enabled the formal inclusion of historically marginalized groups into the democratic process and have contributed to the consolidation of electoral democracy at both national and subnational levels. However, political sociology critically argues that the existence of formal rights does not automatically translate into substantive empowerment or equitable access to political power.

From a sociological perspective, political empowerment extends beyond the procedural act of voting. It includes the capacity of individuals and groups to meaningfully influence political decision-making processes, access and control state resources, participate in deliberative governance institutions, and exercise agency in shaping public policy outcomes. Thus, empowerment is not merely institutional but deeply relational, embedded in the everyday structures of power that operate within society.

In the Indian context, political empowerment is shaped by intersecting axes of inequality such as caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and economic stratification. These structural determinants influence not only political participation but also the quality and effectiveness of participation. For instance, individuals belonging to dominant caste and economically privileged groups often possess greater social capital, higher educational attainment, and stronger access to political networks, enabling them to exert disproportionate influence over political processes. In contrast, marginalized communities frequently experience symbolic inclusion without corresponding decision-making power.



Political sociology conceptualizes this condition through a **dual structure of power** operating within Indian democracy. On one hand, there exist formal democratic institutions such as Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies, and Panchayati Raj Institutions, which are designed to ensure representation, accountability, and rule-based governance. On the other hand, informal social structures—including caste hierarchies, patriarchal norms, kinship networks, and economic dependency relations—continue to shape political behavior and determine access to power in practice.

The interaction between these formal and informal structures produces a complex and often contradictory pattern of democratic functioning. While formal institutions guarantee political equality in principle, informal structures reproduce social inequality in practice. This results in a situation where political participation is widespread but political influence remains unevenly distributed. Consequently, Indian democracy exhibits what political sociologists describe as “**participatory expansion with substantive inequality**,” where inclusion in electoral processes does not necessarily translate into empowerment in decision-making arenas.

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment is treated as a multidimensional construct that reflects both participation in formal democratic processes and the real capacity to influence political outcomes. It consists of five interrelated dimensions:

- **Political Participation:** Involvement in voting, campaigning, protests, and civic engagement activities.
- **Political Representation:** Inclusion of individuals and groups in elected and decision-making bodies.
- **Political Awareness:** Understanding of political rights, governance structures, and public policies.
- **Political Agency:** Ability of individuals or groups to act independently and influence political decisions.
- **Political Autonomy:** Degree of freedom in political choice without coercion, dependency, or social pressure.

Together, these dimensions indicate the extent to which citizens can actively engage with and shape democratic processes.

Social Transformation

Social transformation refers to long-term structural changes in society that reshape the foundations of power and social organization. It includes:



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- **Power Relations:** Redistribution or reconfiguration of authority between groups.
 - **Social Hierarchies:** Changes in caste, class, gender, and ethnic structures.
 - **Institutional Arrangements:** Transformation in governance systems, policies, and administrative structures.
 - **Cultural Norms:** Shifts in values, beliefs, and social practices that influence behavior.

These changes collectively determine how inclusive or exclusionary a society becomes over time.

Relationship between Political Empowerment and Social Transformation

Political empowerment and social transformation are closely interconnected and operate as mutually reinforcing processes within democratic societies. Political empowerment enables individuals and marginalized groups to actively participate in political life, assert their rights, and challenge existing structures of inequality. Through participation in electoral processes, social movements, and governance institutions, marginalized groups gain the capacity to question entrenched power relations and demand structural reforms.

At the same time, social transformation provides the necessary structural and institutional conditions for enhancing political empowerment. Changes such as improved access to education, reduction in caste and gender hierarchies, expansion of welfare policies, and strengthening of democratic institutions create an enabling environment for broader political participation. These transformations reduce social barriers and increase the capacity of individuals to engage meaningfully in political processes.

Thus, the relationship between political empowerment and social transformation is fundamentally reciprocal. Political empowerment is both a **product of on-going social transformation** and a **driving force that accelerates further structural change** in society.

Theoretical Perspectives:

Marxist Perspective

The Marxist framework conceptualizes political power as an extension of economic relations, wherein the state functions as an instrument for maintaining class domination. From this perspective, political authority is closely linked to ownership of the means of production and control over economic resources. In the Indian context, disparities in landownership, income distribution, and capital accumulation significantly influence political participation and access to power. Consequently, economically privileged groups tend to exercise disproportionate influence over



political institutions, while marginalized sections often remain structurally constrained despite formal democratic equality.

Webern Perspective

Max Weber defines power as the capacity to impose one's will despite resistance and distinguishes authority into traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational forms. In India, political authority operates through a hybrid structure in which modern legal-rational institutions coexist with traditional social hierarchies. While democratic institutions reflect legal-rational authority, caste-based and community-based loyalties continue to shape political behaviour, thereby creating a dual system of legitimacy.

Durkheimian Perspective

Émile Durkheim emphasizes social solidarity and moral integration as essential conditions for political stability. Political order, in this view, is sustained through shared norms, collective consciousness, and value consensus. However, Indian society exhibits fragmented solidarity due to deep-rooted caste divisions, ethnic diversity, and regional disparities, which often weaken collective political identity and limit cohesive participation.

Gramscian Theory

Antonio Gramsci introduces the concept of hegemony, arguing that dominant groups maintain power not merely through coercion but through cultural consent and ideological dominance. In India, caste ideology, patriarchal norms, and dominant cultural narratives function as hegemonic structures that normalize inequality and shape political behavior. This results in the internalization of hierarchical social order among subordinate groups.

Foucauldian Perspective

Michel Foucault conceptualizes power as diffused, decentralized, and embedded within institutions, discourses, and everyday practices. Power is not concentrated solely in the state but operates through mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, and knowledge production. In contemporary India, this framework is particularly relevant for understanding bureaucratic governance, digital surveillance, and the increasing role of data-driven state mechanisms in shaping political subjectivity.

Caste and Political Empowerment:

Caste continues to function as one of the most enduring and structurally embedded determinants of political behaviour in India. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, affirmative action policies, and decades of democratic consolidation, the caste system remains deeply influential in shaping access to political power, patterns of representation, and the distribution of state resources.



From a political sociology perspective, caste is not merely a social category but a **power structure** that organizes political relations and institutional outcomes across rural and urban India.

Historically marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have experienced significant improvements in formal political inclusion through reservation policies in legislative bodies and local governance institutions. However, substantive political empowerment remains uneven due to persistent socio-economic inequalities and entrenched hierarchical norms that continue to influence political processes.

Caste operates in Indian politics through multiple interconnected mechanisms. First, it significantly shapes **voting behavior and electoral alignment**, where community identity often influences political preferences and party support. Electoral politics frequently mobilizes caste-based solidarities, leading to bloc voting patterns that reflect social affiliations rather than purely ideological considerations.

Second, caste plays a decisive role in **candidate selection and party nomination processes**. Political parties, in their pursuit of electoral success, often prioritize dominant caste groups with higher numerical strength or stronger local influence, thereby reinforcing existing power structures. This results in the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in competitive and winnable electoral positions.

Third, caste influences the **formation of political alliances and coalitions**, where inter-caste negotiations and bargaining shape political outcomes at both state and national levels. These alliances often reflect strategic accommodations among dominant groups, while marginalized communities remain politically fragmented or dependent on patronage networks.

Fourth, caste determines **unequal access to administrative and state resources**, as social networks and informal connections frequently mediate the distribution of welfare benefits, development schemes, and institutional support. This leads to unequal realization of citizenship rights, where formal entitlements do not always translate into effective access.

Even in cases where numerical representation of marginalized groups is achieved through constitutional provisions, substantive decision-making authority often remains concentrated within dominant caste groups. This reflects the persistence of **structural inequality within democratic institutions**, where formal inclusion coexists with informal exclusion. Consequently, caste continues to shape



not only political participation but also the deeper architecture of power in Indian democracy.

Objectives:

1. To study caste as a determinant of political participation and representation in India.
2. To examine how caste influences access to political power and state resources.
3. To assess caste-based inequalities in political empowerment despite constitutional provisions.

Methodology:

The study is based on a descriptive research design and utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from respondents using a structured interview schedule/questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from journals, government reports, and relevant academic publications. A total of 70 respondents from different social groups were included in the study to ensure adequate representation. The collected data were systematically classified, tabulated, and analysed using basic statistical tools such as percentage analysis and mean distribution to interpret patterns of political awareness in rural India.

Data Analysis:

1. Social Group of the Respondents

Social Group	Number	Percentage
Scheduled Castes	25	20%
Scheduled Tribes	25	20%
Backward Classes	25	20%
Minorities	25	20%
Other Castes	25	20%
TOTAL	125	100%

From the above table, it is observed that the sample is **evenly distributed across five major social groups**, each constituting **25 respondents (20%)**, thereby ensuring balanced representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Minorities, and Other Castes. This equal distribution indicates that the study has been designed to avoid sampling bias and to provide a comparative understanding of political empowerment across different social categories.



2. Impact of Caste in voting behaviour

Social Group	High	Moderate	Low	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	17 (68%)	05 (20%)	03 (12%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	19 (76%)	03 (12%)	03 (12%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	21 (84%)	04 (16%)	00 (-)	25 (100%)
Minorities	21 (84%)	02 (08%)	02 (08%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	24 (96%)	01 (04%)	00 (-)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	102 (81.6%)	15 (12%)	08 (6.4%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that caste has a strong influence on voting behaviour across all social groups, though the intensity varies. A majority of respondents (81.6%) reported a high influence of caste, followed by 12% reporting moderate influence and only 6.4% indicating low influence. Among all groups, Other Castes (96%) and Backward Classes (84%) show the highest level of caste influence in voting behaviour, followed by Minorities (84%) and Scheduled Tribes (76%), while Scheduled Castes (68%) also report a comparatively high but relatively lower level of caste influence. This clearly indicates that caste continues to play a decisive role in shaping electoral choices in India, reflecting the persistence of identity-based voting patterns. The findings suggest that despite democratic consolidation and political awareness, caste remains a dominant factor in electoral decision-making, influencing voter behaviour across both dominant and marginalized communities.

3. Opinion on Upper Caste Dominance in Politics

Social Group	High	Moderate	Low	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	22 (88%)	03 (12%)	00 (-)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	21 (84%)	04 (16%)	00 (-)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	17	04	04	25



	(68%)	(16%)	(16%)	(100%)
Minorities	14 (56%)	07 (28%)	04 (16%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	05 (20%)	04 (16%)	16 (64%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	79 (63.2%)	22 (17.6%)	24 (19.2%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (63.2%) perceive a high level of upper caste dominance in politics, followed by 17.6% who report a moderate level and 19.2% who perceive low dominance. The perception is particularly strong among Scheduled Castes (88%) and Scheduled Tribes (84%), indicating that marginalized communities more strongly experience or recognize upper caste dominance in political structures. Backward Classes (68%) and Minorities (56%) also report a considerable level of agreement with this view. In contrast, respondents from Other Castes show a different pattern, where 64% perceive low dominance, suggesting a lesser perception of upper caste control within this group. Overall, the findings indicate that perceptions of upper caste dominance in politics are significantly influenced by social position, with marginalized groups more likely to experience and acknowledge structural inequalities in political power distribution.

4. Marginalized Social Groups gets adequate representation in Politics

Social Group	Yes	No	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	07 (28%)	18 (72%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	05 (20%)	20 (80%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	14 (56%)	11 (44%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	12 (48%)	13 (52%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	17 (68%)	08 (32%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	55 (44%)	70 (56%)	125 (100%)



From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (56%) feel that marginalized social groups do not receive adequate representation in politics, while 44% believe that representation is adequate. This indicates a generally negative perception regarding the political inclusion of weaker sections in democratic institutions. Among different social groups, Scheduled Castes (72%) and Scheduled Tribes (80%) strongly report inadequate representation, highlighting a sense of underrepresentation among the most marginalized communities. Backward Classes show a comparatively balanced opinion, with 56% responding positively and 44% negatively. Minorities also show divided responses, with a slight majority (52%) feeling underrepresented. In contrast, respondents from Other Castes report a more positive perception, with 68% stating that marginalized groups receive adequate representation. The findings suggest that perceptions of political representation vary significantly across social groups, with marginalized communities expressing greater dissatisfaction, thereby reflecting persistent inequalities in political inclusion within the democratic system.

5. Attendance to the public meetings

Social Group	Often	Sometimes	Never	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	03 (12%)	08 (32%)	14 (56%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	09 (36%)	11 (44%)	05 (20%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	12 (48%)	05 (20%)	08 (32%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	06 (24%)	05 (20%)	14 (56%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	21 (84%)	03 (12%)	01 (04%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	51 (40.8%)	32 (25.6%)	42 (33.6%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that attendance at public meetings varies significantly across social groups. Overall, 40.8% of respondents attend public meetings often, 25.6% attend sometimes, and 33.6% never attend. This indicates a moderate level of political engagement through public gatherings, with considerable variation among different caste groups. Among Scheduled Castes, a majority (56%) never attend public meetings, indicating low participation in public political



activities. Scheduled Tribes show relatively higher engagement, with 36% attending often and 44% sometimes. Backward Classes also demonstrate moderate participation, with 48% attending often. In contrast, Minorities show low participation levels, with 56% reporting never attending public meetings. Respondents from Other Castes show the highest level of participation, with 84% attending often and only a small proportion reporting occasional or no attendance. Overall, the findings suggest that public political participation is unevenly distributed across social groups, with dominant castes showing higher engagement and marginalized groups, particularly Scheduled Castes and Minorities, exhibiting lower levels of participation in public political activities.

6. Awareness on Political Rights

Social Group	High	Moderate	Low	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	04 (16%)	05 (20%)	16 (64%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	03 (12%)	05 (20%)	17 (68%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	05 (20%)	07 (28%)	13 (52%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	09 (36%)	05 (20%)	11 (44%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	14 (56%)	08 (32%)	03 (12%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	35 (28%)	30 (24%)	60 (48%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that awareness of political rights is generally low to moderate among respondents. Overall, 48% of respondents have low awareness, 24% have moderate awareness, and only 28% have high awareness of their political rights. This indicates that a significant proportion of the population lacks adequate understanding of their constitutional and political entitlements. Among Scheduled Castes, a majority (64%) report low awareness, followed by Scheduled Tribes (68%), indicating particularly weak political rights awareness among these groups. Backward Classes also show a similar pattern, with 52% reporting low awareness. In contrast, Minorities show relatively better awareness, with 36% reporting high awareness. Respondents from Other Castes demonstrate the highest level of awareness, with 56% reporting high awareness and only 12% low



awareness. The findings clearly indicate a strong social gradient in political awareness, where dominant caste groups exhibit higher levels of awareness compared to marginalized groups. This suggests that structural inequalities in education, access to information, and social capital continue to influence political awareness in India.

7. Expression of Political Views Freely

Social Group	Yes	No	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	04 (16%)	21 (84%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	08 (32%)	17 (68%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	17 (68%)	08 (32%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	22 (88%)	03 (12%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	62 (49.6%)	63 (50.4%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that the ability to express political views freely is almost evenly split among respondents, with 49.6% reporting that they can express their views freely and 50.4% reporting that they cannot. This indicates a slightly constrained political environment where freedom of expression is not uniformly experienced across social groups. Among Scheduled Castes, a large majority (84%) report that they are unable to express their political views freely, indicating strong social and structural constraints. Scheduled Tribes also show limited freedom, with 68% responding negatively. Backward Classes display a mixed pattern, with a slight majority (56%) reporting lack of freedom. In contrast, Minorities report comparatively better conditions, with 68% stating they can express their views freely. Respondents from Other Castes show the highest level of freedom, with 88% reporting no restrictions in expressing political opinions. Overall, the findings suggest that freedom of political expression is significantly influenced by social group position, with marginalized communities experiencing greater restrictions compared to dominant caste groups, reflecting persistent inequalities in democratic participation.



8. Political Decisions

Social Group	Independently	Depended on Other Dominate Castes	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	06 (24%)	19 (76%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	09 (36%)	16 (64%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	14 (56%)	11 (44%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	19 (76%)	06 (24%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	25 (100%)	00 (-)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	73 (58.4%)	52 (41.6%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that 58.4% of respondents make political decisions independently, while 41.6% report that their decisions are influenced or dependent on dominant caste groups. This indicates a moderate level of autonomy in political decision-making, but also highlights the continued influence of social hierarchy in shaping political choices. Among Scheduled Castes, a majority (76%) report dependence on dominant caste groups, indicating limited political autonomy. Scheduled Tribes also show higher dependency (64%). In contrast, Backward Classes demonstrate a relatively balanced pattern, with 56% reporting independent decision-making. Minorities show higher autonomy, with 76% making independent political decisions. Respondents from Other Castes report complete independence (100%), indicating full autonomy in political decision-making. Overall, the findings suggest a clear caste-based variation in political autonomy, where marginalized groups are more likely to depend on dominant social groups, while dominant castes enjoy greater independence in political decision-making processes.

9. Political Empowerment is Equal among all the Social Groups

Social Group	Yes	No	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	04 (16%)	21 (84%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	05	20	25



	(20%)	(80%)	(100%)
Backward Classes	09 (36%)	16 (64%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	19 (76%)	06 (24%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	48 (38.4%)	77 (61.6%)	125 (100%)

From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (61.6%) believe that political empowerment is not equal among all social groups, while 38.4% feel that it is equal. This clearly indicates a widespread perception of inequality in political empowerment within Indian society. Backward Classes also reflect this view, with 64% responding negatively. Minorities show a slightly more balanced response, with 56% perceiving inequality. In contrast, respondents from Other Castes largely feel that political empowerment is equal, with 76% responding positively. Overall, the findings suggest a strong perception gap between dominant and marginalized social groups, where marginalized sections experience and recognize greater inequality in political empowerment, while dominant groups tend to perceive the system as relatively equal.

10. Social transformation is Reduced with Caste based political Barriers

Social Group	Yes	No	TOTAL
Scheduled Castes	19 (76%)	06 (24%)	25 (100%)
Scheduled Tribes	21 (84%)	04 (16%)	25 (100%)
Backward Classes	16 (64%)	09 (36%)	25 (100%)
Minorities	12 (48%)	13 (52%)	25 (100%)
Other Castes	21 (84%)	04 (16%)	25 (100%)
TOTAL	89 (71.2%)	36 (28.8%)	125 (100%)



From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (71.2%) believe that social transformation has reduced caste-based political barriers, while 28.8% do not agree with this view. This indicates an overall positive perception regarding gradual social change in reducing caste-based inequalities in politics. Among Scheduled Castes, 76% feel that social transformation has reduced caste-based barriers, while Scheduled Tribes show an even higher positive response of 84%, indicating strong belief in ongoing social change. Backward Classes also reflect a positive perception with 64% agreement. In contrast, Minorities show a divided opinion, with 52% disagreeing and 48% agreeing, indicating uncertainty about the extent of transformation. Respondents from Other Castes show a strong positive response (84%), suggesting that they perceive greater reduction in caste-based barriers. Overall, the findings suggest that while most groups acknowledge some level of social transformation in reducing caste-based political barriers, perceptions vary significantly across communities, with marginalized groups showing both optimism and mixed experiences depending on their social context.

The major findings are as follows:

1. Caste continues to play a dominant role in shaping voting behaviour, with more than four-fifths of respondents reporting a high influence of caste in electoral decisions.
2. A significant majority of respondents perceive upper caste dominance in politics, indicating the persistence of structural inequalities in political power distribution.
3. More than half of the respondents feel that marginalized groups do not receive adequate political representation, highlighting continued underrepresentation in democratic institutions.
4. Political participation in public meetings is uneven, with lower participation among Scheduled Castes and Minorities compared to Other Castes.
5. Awareness of political rights remains limited among marginalized groups, while relatively higher awareness is found among dominant caste groups.
6. Freedom of political expression is not uniform, as a considerable proportion of respondents, particularly from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, report restrictions in expressing political views.
7. Political decision-making is influenced by caste hierarchies, with marginalized groups showing higher dependence on dominant castes, while dominant groups exhibit greater autonomy.



8. A majority of respondents believe that political empowerment is not equal across social groups, reflecting widespread perceptions of inequality.
9. Despite structural inequalities, most respondents acknowledge that social transformation has contributed to reducing caste-based political barriers to some extent.

Discussion

The findings clearly demonstrate that caste remains a central determinant of political behaviour and empowerment in India, despite constitutional guarantees of equality and democratic participation. The persistence of caste-based voting patterns indicates that identity politics continues to outweigh ideological or policy-based political choices in many contexts. The perception of upper caste dominance highlights the structural nature of inequality in Indian politics, where access to power is still shaped by historical and social hierarchies. This is further reinforced by the reported lack of adequate representation of marginalized communities, suggesting that formal political inclusion has not fully translated into substantive empowerment. The study also reveals a strong correlation between caste position and political awareness, participation, and autonomy. Dominant caste groups tend to have higher awareness, greater participation, and stronger decision-making autonomy, while marginalized groups face multiple layers of exclusion, including limited access to information, weak political voice, and dependence on dominant groups.

However, the findings also indicate gradual social change. Increased awareness, policy interventions, and democratic decentralization have contributed to some reduction in caste-based barriers. Yet, this transformation is uneven and incomplete, as deep-rooted social hierarchies continue to influence political outcomes. The study supports the view that Indian democracy exhibits “participatory expansion with persistent inequality,” where formal political inclusion exists alongside substantive social and political disparities. This highlights the need for stronger institutional reforms, improved political education, and more effective implementation of inclusive policies to achieve genuine political empowerment.

Conclusion:

The Study highlights the continuing influence of caste in shaping political participation, representation, awareness, and decision-making. Despite constitutional provisions ensuring equality and universal adult franchise, the empirical findings clearly indicate that political empowerment in India remains uneven across different social groups. The study reveals that caste continues to play a decisive role in voting behaviour and political choices, reflecting the persistence of identity-based politics.



Marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes experience lower levels of political awareness, participation, freedom of expression, and decision-making autonomy when compared to dominant caste groups. At the same time, perceptions of upper caste dominance in political structures remain high among most respondents, indicating structural inequalities in access to political power. Although democratic processes have enabled wider participation and some degree of social transformation, the benefits of political empowerment are not equally distributed. The findings suggest that while there are positive signs of change—such as increased awareness and gradual reduction of caste-based barriers—these changes are slow, uneven, and incomplete. The study concludes that Indian democracy reflects a dual reality: formal political equality coexists with substantive social and political inequality. True political empowerment requires not only constitutional guarantees but also effective implementation of inclusive policies, improved political education, and continuous efforts to reduce structural inequalities rooted in caste hierarchies.

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