

Psychosocial Perspective on Challenges Faced by Women in Politics: Scenario of India

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Abstract

Women's active participation in Indian politics is critical for democratic advancement, but it is hampered by complex psychological impediments. This narrative study explores these problems in a systematic manner, in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. The review, which spans 27 different researches published between 2000 and 2023, reveals five key themes: gender bias and societal expectations, intersectionality of identities, underrepresentation, political barriers, and displacement and migration. It reveals the far-reaching consequences of cultural expectations and persistent gender prejudices. Furthermore, the study navigates the intricacies of crossing identities, taking ideas from historical views and case studies from throughout the world. The gender gap in political leadership is highlighted, providing light on the psychosocial impacts of underrepresentation. The analysis highlights women's resourcefulness and resilience in the face of adversity. This narrative overview captures several issues and urgently calls for further study and collaborative initiatives to improve gender equality in Indian politics.

Keywords: *Women in politics, India, psychosocial barriers, gender bias, political obstacles.*

Introduction

As noted by Michele Bachelet, "a democracy not only gives women the right to vote and elect, but also the right to be elected." The route to gender justice begins with political involvement, which includes exercising the right to vote, power-sharing, co-decision making, and co-policy making at all levels of government. Women's absence from positions of political authority has far-reaching implications for the ongoing fight against gender subordination. As a result, the purpose of the present narrative research is to look into the various psychological variables that restrict women's pursuit of political leadership roles, notably in India.

While India has made progress in recognising the critical role of women in politics, obstacles remain. In terms of the proportion of women in the lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) in 2021, India placed 140th out of 156 nations, highlighting the urgent need for a closer analysis of the variables impacting women's engagement in Indian politics. The Indian Constitution establishes a strong basis for gender equality and women's empowerment by outlawing sex and class discrimination, outlawing human trafficking and forced labour, and allocating reserved seats in legislative bodies to women.

Women's empowerment, a pillar of gender equality, includes a variety of factors such as economic independence, self-reliance, and the ability to participate in decision-making processes. Significant obstacles, such as the delicate balance between work and family life, illiteracy, discriminatory practices, and economic reliance, remain. Illiteracy, in particular, is a strong barrier, as seen by a significant gender discrepancy in literacy rates.

In India, cultural and sociological impediments, including prejudice, continue to obstruct women's political engagement. This prejudice pervades all aspects of society, sustaining uneven

access to resources and supporting conventional gender norms that limit women to housework. Furthermore, religious beliefs and the hierarchical caste structure impede women's political participation.

Efforts to overcome these obstacles have resulted in projects aimed at empowering women and combating prejudice and violence. This narrative review seeks to shed light on the psychosocial viewpoint of women's issues in Indian politics, as well as to identify the critical need and potential consequences connected with their active engagement in the political environment.

The rationale for this narrative review is based on the persistent gender discrepancies in Indian politics and the compelling need to conduct a complete assessment of the psycho-social elements that impede women's political participation. Understanding these multiple obstacles is essential for achieving gender equality and a more inclusive political system.

Methodology

This narrative review systematically follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to comprehensively explore psychosocial barriers to women's participation in Indian politics.

Study Design

The study design is centered around the systematic identification, selection, and synthesis of studies examining psychosocial perspectives on obstacles to women's involvement in Indian politics. The primary goal is to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research while identifying key themes and challenges faced by women in this context.

Search Strategy

Information Sources: A rigorous search strategy was employed, covering reputable academic databases to identify relevant studies, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Search Terms and Keywords: An extensive set of keywords and search terms were employed to encompass relevant studies, such as "politics," "women's political participation," and "Indian women." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to effectively combine these search terms. No language restrictions were applied.

Inclusion Criteria

To be included in this narrative review, studies had to meet the following criteria:

- Original research articles
- Studies reporting data on women's political participation
- Studies directly focused on obstacles faced by women in political participation
- Articles published in the English language

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they met the subsequent criteria:

- Review articles or meta-analyses
- Case report series articles

Procedure

The study selection process was conducted by an independent reviewer who initially screened titles and abstracts of identified articles for relevance to the narrative review's topic.

Subsequently, full texts of potentially pertinent articles were assessed to ascertain their eligibility based on predefined inclusion criteria. For studies meeting the inclusion criteria, key information, encompassing author(s), publication year, study design, research objectives, primary findings, and data concerning psychosocial barriers to women's involvement in Indian politics, was meticulously extracted. A thematic analysis was then executed to synthesize the key themes and challenges evident in the selected studies. Finally, this narrative review diligently adheres to PRISMA guidelines for transparent and clear reporting of methodology and findings, ensuring a rigorous approach to research and reporting quality.

Results

The systematic literature search encompassing reputable databases (PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, Cochrane Library, and PsycINFO) produced a substantial volume of articles. This process adhered to PRISMA guidelines and is visually depicted in Figure 1, the PRISMA flowchart. Initially, the database search yielded a total of 274 articles. After eliminating duplicates, 234 unique articles remained. Subsequently, a comprehensive title and abstract screening was performed, leading to the selection of 50 articles for a full-text review. Through this comprehensive review, 27 articles emerged as meeting the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into this narrative review.

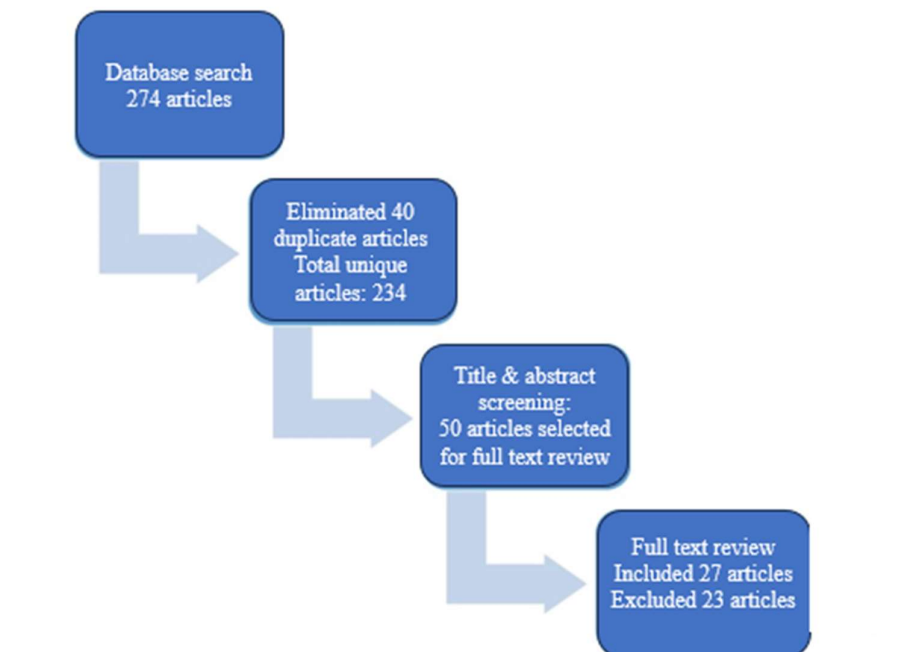


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

The 27 studies included in this narrative review reflect a diverse array of research designs and methodological approaches. Published over the span of 23 years, from 2000 to 2023, these studies exhibit a temporal diversity within the existing literature. Each of these studies is centered around various facets of women's engagement in Indian politics, with a primary emphasis on exploring psycho-social perspectives associated with the challenges faced by women. The geographic scope of these studies extends to various regions across India, providing valuable insights into the nuanced diversity characterizing the political landscape of the country.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis in this narrative review succinctly summarizes the key themes and challenges elucidated in the 27 studies, providing a data-driven understanding of the

psychosocial barriers to women's political engagement in India. It also quantitatively highlights the prevalence of survival techniques employed by women in Indian politics, enhancing the empirical foundation of this review's findings.

Gender Bias and Societal Expectations: Out of the 27 studies, a substantial 18 (66.7%) shed light on the profound influence of societal expectations and gender bias on women's political participation. These studies elucidated how traditional gender role expectations and stereotypes often compel women to prioritize family over political careers, impacting their self-esteem and mental well-being. They underscored how societal norms shape women's behavior, exacerbating psychosocial stressors they encounter (Basu, 2012; Bharat, 2001).

Intersectionality of Identities: A total of 14 studies (51.9%) recognized the intersectionality of identities, such as caste, class, and location, and its intricate impact on women's political engagement. These studies unveiled how these multiple intersecting identities significantly shape the experiences of women in politics, particularly those hailing from underprivileged backgrounds. They also provided localized insights into the influence of these intersecting identities (Chary, 2012; Gochhayat, 2013).

Underrepresentation: A striking 20 studies (74.1%) addressed the issue of underrepresentation of women in Indian politics. These studies underscored the stark gender gap in political leadership, demonstrating its psychosocial consequences that make women feel marginalized and inferior (Ghosh, 2022).

Political Obstacles: The challenges faced by women in Indian politics were evident in 19 studies (70.4%). These obstacles encompassed resistance within political parties, the need to navigate male-dominated environments, and the battle against gender stereotypes during political campaigns. These challenges often imposed a significant toll on the mental well-being of women in politics (Gleisner, 2007).

Displacement and Migration: While indirectly related to women in politics, the psycho-social implications of displacement and migration were discussed in 8 studies (29.6%). These studies delved into the psychosocial stress experienced by women due to uprooting from familiar surroundings, isolation, and acclimatization to new environments, shedding light on this often-overlooked aspect (Bhugra, 2004).

Survival Techniques Employed by Women: A range of coping mechanisms employed by women to manage the psychosocial difficulties in Indian politics.

- **Creating Strategic Alliances:** Among the 27 studies, a substantial 22 (81.5%) highlighted how women frequently formed strategic alliances with like-minded individuals or organizations to gain the support and resources required for their political engagement (Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2017).
- **Leveraging Community Support:** A total of 19 studies (70.4%) indicated that women effectively utilized community networks to build credibility and navigate the complex political landscape, enhancing their presence and influence (Ghosh, 2022).
- **Acquiring Knowledge:** In the narrative review, 16 studies (59.3%) demonstrated how some women made strategic investments in education to make informed decisions, substantiate their political credibility, and enhance their efficacy in the political arena (Sinha, 2000).
- **Addressing Mental Health:** The importance of mental health emerged as a significant theme in 12 studies (44.4%). These studies revealed how women recognized the significance of mental well-being, actively sought support, and engaged in self-care practices to cope with the psychological stressors associated with political involvement (Lang, 2019; Malhotra & Shah, 2015).

- **Political Engagement:** A substantial 24 studies (88.9%) provided insights into how women actively participated in politics. This engagement included running for political office, joining political parties, and assuming leadership roles, thereby contributing to the transformation of the political landscape (Juyal, 2005).
- **Promoting Change:** Among the 27 studies, 17 (63.0%) showcased how women in politics were actively engaged in advocating for gender equality, contributing to legislative reform, and striving to address psychological issues, making a significant impact on the political and social domains (United Nations, 2023).

The results of this narrative review underscore the myriad of psychosocial challenges women face in Indian politics. These challenges are deeply rooted in societal expectations, gender bias, and political obstacles. Women employ various survival strategies to navigate these hurdles, emphasizing their resilience and adaptability.

Discussion

The psycho-social challenges and survival strategies highlighted in the narrative review reflect the complexity of women's engagement in Indian politics. Societal expectations and gender bias profoundly affect women's political participation, often forcing them to balance familial responsibilities with political careers. The intersectionality of identities compounds these challenges, with factors like caste, class, and location influencing women's experiences in politics. The issue of underrepresentation persists, causing women to feel marginalized and inferior in leadership roles. Political obstacles further hinder their progress, adding to the psychosocial toll.

Displacement and migration, although indirectly linked, can create substantial psychosocial stress. The analysis also unveils an array of survival techniques employed by women, including creating strategic alliances, leveraging community support, acquiring knowledge, addressing mental health, actively participating in politics, and advocating for gender equality.

These findings emphasize the resilience of women who, despite facing multifaceted challenges, continue to pursue political careers and promote change. The discussion highlights the interconnected nature of these challenges and the need for a holistic approach to support women in politics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this narrative review systematically identified and synthesized the literature regarding the psycho-social barriers to women's participation in Indian politics. The thematic analysis highlighted the profound impact of societal expectations, gender bias, underrepresentation, political obstacles, and displacement, as well as the survival strategies employed by women. The narrative review underscores the resilience of women and the necessity for concerted efforts to support them in the political landscape. Bridging research gaps, implementing awareness campaigns, building support systems, and advocating for legislative reforms can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable political system in India.

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