
Political Socialization of College Students in India: A Comprehensive Systematic Review

Nishant Bhardwaj* Somu Singh**

1. Introduction

Political socialization, which refers to how individuals develop political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours, is essential in democratic societies (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). In India, a nation marked by extensive cultural, linguistic, and political diversity, the political socialization of college students is vital. The college phase is pivotal in forming students' political identities, as they encounter various social influences, including family, peer groups, media, and, notably, their educational institutions (Reidy et al., 2015). This systematic review investigates the diverse factors that affect college students' political socialization in India and thoroughly analyzes how these factors enhance their overall political engagement. Education has long been acknowledged as a significant instrument of political socialization. Universities, in particular, provide environments that encourage students to engage with political concepts, debate societal issues and cultivate critical thinking abilities. Numerous studies underscore the importance of education in promoting political awareness among students in India, asserting that the university environment is instrumental in shaping their political viewpoints. As noted by Gorodova and Pachina (2023), the political socialization process within educational contexts is increasingly shaped by Internet technologies, which grant students access to a vast array of political information and discussions. In India, where exposure to a variety of political ideologies is vital, universities act as platforms for students to investigate and interact with differing political perspectives. The emergence of digital media has significantly altered conventional methods of political socialization, introducing innovative avenues for political involvement and education in the process. For example, social media platforms enable students to engage with political content, participate in online discussions, and follow political leaders. Cazorla-Martín et al. (2023) underscores the impact of digital media in transforming the political socialization landscape, highlighting that these platforms equip students with the means to interact with political material in a more engaging and tailored way. This transition towards digital media is especially pertinent in India, where the youth increasingly depend on social media for information and political news, thus shaping their political perspectives and actions.

In addition to the effects of education and digital media, family and peer groups continue to play vital roles as agents of political socialization in the Philippines. Furman et al. (2022) examined the influence of family and peers on molding political

* Research Scholar, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University

** Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University.

Corresponding Author Email : nbde@bhu.ac.in

attitudes, asserting that these socialization agents profoundly affect the political engagement of young individuals. In the Indian context, characterized by strong familial structures and community connections, the family's impact on political socialization is particularly significant. Political discussions within families often serve as students' initial exposure to various political ideas and ideologies. Similarly, interactions with peers, especially in a university environment, facilitate political debates that shape students' beliefs and promote active involvement in political activities.

Aim of the study

This comprehensive review of the political socialization of college students in India reveals the process's complex nature. It encompasses a dynamic interplay between formal and informal socialization agents, such as educational institutions, family, peers, and media, each playing a crucial role in the formation of students' political identities. The growing impact of digital media has introduced a novel aspect of political socialization, offering students new opportunities for political involvement. Grasping these elements is crucial for understanding the formation of political beliefs and behaviors among the youth in India, as well as for identifying ways to enhance political participation and democratic engagement in the future.

2. Theoretical Framework

Political socialization encompasses the process through which individuals develop their political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, primarily influenced by their interactions with various social institutions and environments. Numerous foundational theories have been proposed to elucidate this phenomenon, particularly in diverse social contexts, including the educational framework in India.

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, initially articulated by Albert Bandura in 1977, asserts that individuals acquire behaviors by observing others. Within the realm of political socialization, students frequently assimilate political attitudes by observing key figures in their surroundings, such as parents, peers, educators, and media personalities. This theory holds particular significance in the Indian context, where strong familial bonds and community dynamics profoundly shape youth political perspectives. Research conducted by Furman et al. (2022) highlight that family continues to be a pivotal agent of political socialization, even in modern contexts. In Indian households, especially those with deep-rooted political affiliations, children are often introduced to political discourse early on, thereby molding their political perspectives through observation. Consequently, the intergenerational transfer of political values is crucial, as political ideologies are frequently conveyed from parents to offspring and reinforced by prevailing community standards (Furman et al., 2022).

Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive Development Theory, articulated by Jean Piaget, emphasizes the progression of political thought through various developmental stages as children advance in age. This theory posits that as individuals mature and encounter more intricate political concepts, their political opinions become more sophisticated. For college students, this evolution typically occurs during their time at university, where they are

introduced to a range of political ideologies and begin cultivating their independent political perspectives (Grasso & Giugni, 2021). In the context of Indian students, university life is often a pivotal phase in political maturation. During this period, engagement with political discussions, demonstrations, and student activism prompted students to assess their political views and critically explore new ideologies. A comparative analysis conducted by Binder et al. (2021) indicates that cognitive development in adolescence and early adulthood significantly influences political involvement, as students actively seek complex political information and establish their ideological identities as they grow.

Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory, established in 1979, posits that individuals significantly shape their identities through their affiliations with various social groups. In the context of politics, students may identify with particular political parties, student organizations, or social movements, thereby developing political identities rooted in these connections. For Indian students, factors such as caste, religion, and regional identity play a pivotal role in influencing their political socialization, leading to associations with specific political ideologies. Research conducted by Ahmad (2022) indicates that the political socialization of Indian students is profoundly affected by caste-related identities. For instance, Dalit students frequently align with political movements that champion social justice and equality, such as those inspired by Ambedkar, whereas students from upper-caste backgrounds may gravitate towards right-leaning ideologies. These social identities play a crucial role in fostering political divisions on university campuses, where various student groups embody distinct political factions based on caste, religion and regional identity.

Political Efficacy Theory

Political Efficacy Theory examines individuals' beliefs regarding their ability to influence political affairs. A higher degree of political efficacy correlates with increased political engagement, as those who are confident in their capacity to effect change are more inclined to participate in political activities. Within the framework of political socialization, educational institutions are pivotal in nurturing political efficacy among students. In India, universities serve as vital arenas for student political involvement, offering opportunities such as student unions, political debates and protests. Research conducted by Myoung and Liou (2022) indicate that students who participate in political activities within university environments are likely to cultivate a heightened sense of political efficacy, which subsequently encourages further participation. This theory is especially pertinent in analyzing the influence of universities such as JNU and Delhi University, where a legacy of political activism has historically fostered significant levels of political efficacy among the student body.

Media and Communication Theories

The growing significance of digital media in political socialization has rendered media and communication theories increasingly pertinent. Agenda-setting and framing theories assert that the media significantly influence public perceptions of political matters by selecting and presenting specific topics in particular ways. In India, where platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have gained popularity among students, these theories elucidate the impact of digital media on political attitudes of students. Cazorla-

Martín et al. (2023) underscores the influence of digital media on the political socialization of youth. Social media platforms enable students to engage in political discourse, follow political figures, and participate in online movements, thereby profoundly affecting their political beliefs. Additionally, Tyler and Iyengar (2022) indicate that media consumption, especially on digital platforms, fosters political polarization as students encounter politically biased content that reinforces their existing ideologies.

Table 1: Key Theories in Political Socialization

Political Socialization in the Digital Age

In recent years, theories exploring the influence of digital platforms on political socialization have increased. Networked Public Sphere Theory posits that the Internet has revolutionized political discourse, transitioning from traditional hierarchical frameworks to more decentralized and interconnected forms of interaction. Social media provides students with the opportunity to circumvent conventional media outlets and engage directly with political content, movements and leaders (Gorodova & Pachina, 2023). In India, the extensive use of mobile devices and Internet access has rendered

Theories	Key concepts	Application in Indian Context
Social Learning Theory	Observational learning from family, peers, and media	Indian families and communities play a key role in passing down political beliefs
Cognitive Development Theory	Political thinking develops with age and exposure to complex ideas	University years are critical for forming political beliefs in Indian students
Social Identity Theory	Political identity is shaped by group affiliations	Caste, religion, and regional identity influence political group affiliations
Political Efficacy Theory	Belief in the ability to influence political outcomes drives engagement	Indian universities provide platforms for political activism, fostering efficacy
Media and Communication Theories	Media frames and shapes political perceptions	Digital media platforms influence political attitudes and contribute to polarization

social media a crucial instrument for political participation. Students often use platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to coordinate political events, express their political views, and rally support. The Networked Public Sphere Theory elucidates how this transformation has democratized access to political information, enabling a broader spectrum of students to engage in political discourse irrespective of their socio-economic status (Chen & Stilinovic, 2020).

3. Design and Methods

This section describes the research method applied for the systematic review of the political socialization of Indian college students. Specifically, this review synthesizes the existing literature to understand the impact of various factors, such as education, family, peer groups, and digital media, on college students' attitudes towards and behavior regarding politics. A systematic review methodology was followed to ensure an effective, balanced, and reproducible literature review.

Research Design

To gather and analyze existing studies on Indian colleges' political socialization, a systematic review design was adopted in this study. This will enable an overall understanding of diverse views and results, thereby providing a comprehensive view of the socialization processes involved. This study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure full transparency and methodological rigor in the research process (Moher et al., 2015).

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on several academic search platforms, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed, using a set of keywords associated with political socialization, college students, and India. The key terms included "political socialization," "college students," "India," "higher education," "digital media," "family influence," and "peer groups." The date range of the search was set to 2010-2023 to ensure that only the newest and most relevant research in the field was included. Moreover, grey literature, such as conference papers and governmental reports, were also included to cover more research on political socialization that may not be otherwise accessible via traditional academic databases. Research directly relevant to the Indian context or comparative evaluations involving university students was especially targeted.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Family and Peer Influence

Role of Family

The family unit frequently serves as the primary agent of political socialization in China. In India, the values, traditions, and political affiliations of families significantly influence the political ideologies of their children. Research indicates that individuals from politically engaged families are more inclined to participate in political discussions and develop strong political opinions early in life. A study by Furman et al. (2022), focusing on young adults in Poland underscores the enduring impact of family on political participation. Likewise, in India, particularly in rural regions where access to alternative political information may be restricted, family influence is pronounced. Traditional political beliefs transmitted through generations often shape students' political behaviors and voting choices.

Influence of Peers

Peers also play a crucial role in the development of political ideologies, especially in university environments, where students participate in political debates and activities. Indian campuses, recognized for their dynamic political cultures, offer platforms for students to engage with peers from diverse backgrounds, thereby affecting their political perspectives. Numerous international studies have highlighted the significance of peer groups in shaping political ideology. Tyler and Iyengar (2022) revealed that peer influence is particularly pronounced in politically polarized settings, as students often adopt the political views of their peer groups to achieve social acceptance. Indian universities, characterized by active student unions and political factions, frequently exhibit similar patterns, wherein peer groups are instrumental in either reinforcing or challenging political ideologies.

B. Role of Educational Institutions

Public vs. Private Institutions

In India, educational institutions have historically been significant catalysts for political socialization. Public universities, including Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Banaras Hindu University, Hyderabad University, Allahabad University, Jadavpur University, and Delhi University, and many others have been prominent in fostering political activism and student-led movements. These institutions frequently act as centres for student political organizations, facilitating their active participation in political discourse. The political atmosphere within these universities is largely shaped by national political parties, with students engaging in rallies, protests, and discussions on pressing political issues (Batham, 2021). Conversely, private institutions typically impose limitations on political activities on their campuses, guided by administrative policies that prioritize academic performance and institutional reputation over political involvement. This aligns with Raaper's (2020) observations regarding how market-driven higher education environments tend to diminish political engagement by viewing students primarily as consumers rather than as active political participants. In India, private institutions are in the same role

Curriculum and Civic Education

The academic curriculum plays a vital role in cultivating political awareness and civic responsibility among Indian students. Mandatory civic education courses, which cover topics such as democratic processes, human rights, and political theory, are designed to familiarize students with the workings of political institutions and the significance of active citizenship in a democracy. However, the impact of these courses can differ significantly among institutions, with some placing greater emphasis on civic engagement than others. Furman et al. (2022) highlighted the capacity of educational environments to shape youth political beliefs. In India, public universities, which have a legacy of student activism, typically provide greater opportunities for substantial political participation than private universities, where such activities are often suppressed. Ahmad (2022) argues that student involvement in political processes is crucial for enhancing democracy and should be encouraged to foster a politically informed citizenry.

C. Impact of Social Media and Technology

Social Media as a Mechanism for Political Involvement

The emergence of digital and social media has significantly transformed the political involvement of Indian college students. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp offer innovative channels for political dialogue and activism. Students in India, especially those residing in urban centres, increasingly utilize social media to articulate their political views, engage in online campaigns, and interact with political figures. Gorodova and Pachina (2023) highlight the significant role of Internet technologies in shaping political socialization, demonstrating that these digital platforms serve as novel arenas for political education. In an environment where conventional media can be influenced by political partiality, social media provides students with the opportunity to engage with a broader spectrum of political opinions, thus promoting a

nuanced understanding of political issues (Chen & Stilinovic, 2020). Cazorla-Martín et al. (2023) observes that social media enables students to follow political leaders, engage in online discussions, and partake in political movements without the limitations of physical venues. This transition towards digital engagement has been particularly notable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person gatherings were curtailed, yet political discussions flourished online. Furthermore, the immediacy and extensive reach of social media platforms amplify student voices, allowing them to present political issues to a broader audience (Xiuwen and Razali, 2021).

Echo Chambers and Political Polarization

Notwithstanding the democratizing potential of social media, there are concerns regarding its contribution to heightened political polarization. The algorithms employed by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter frequently create echo chambers, wherein users predominantly encounter content that aligns with their existing beliefs, thereby reinforcing their political biases. This phenomenon can result in increased political polarization among students as they become less exposed to a variety of political perspectives (Tyler & Iyengar, 2022). Binder et al. (2021) contend that although social media has enhanced political participation among young individuals, it has simultaneously led to a fragmentation of political dialogue, resulting in students frequently participating in politically polarized online environments. This phenomenon is particularly observable in India, where a widening chasm exists between left-leaning and right-leaning student factions, especially within politically vibrant institutions such as the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the Hyderabad Central University.

D. Class, Caste, and Regional Differences

Social Class and Political Engagement

The influence of social class on the political socialization of college students in India is significant. The hierarchical structure of Indian society, divided into various social classes, markedly affects students' political involvement. Individuals from affluent backgrounds generally enjoy enhanced access to political discourse, resources, and participation. Students from wealthier families are often enrolled in prestigious public institutions characterized by a vibrant culture of political activism, thereby increasing their propensity to engage in political endeavors (Grasso and Giugni, 2021). Conversely, students from lower socioeconomic strata, especially those attending private educational institutions, frequently encounter obstacles to political participation. These challenges may include financial limitations, time constraints due to employment obligations, and diminished opportunities to engage in political conversations. Research conducted in European contexts indicates a correlation between political inequality and social class, with more affluent youth exhibiting higher levels of political engagement (Giugni & Grasso, 2021). A parallel phenomenon is observable in India, where students from upper-middle-class backgrounds are more inclined to participate in organized political activities and affiliate with formal political parties. In contrast, students from lower-class backgrounds may gravitate towards grassroots or community-oriented forms of activism, such as protest movements that address issues such as economic inequality or educational access.

Table 2: Social Class and Political Engagement

Caste and Political Socialization

Caste remains a significant factor in the political socialization process in India. Students belonging to marginalized castes, including Dalits and Adivasis, frequently encounter discrimination and exclusion in political arenas. The caste system continues to influence the political environment, fostering divisions among student groups and shaping political affiliations. For instance, Dalit students have played a pivotal role in movements advocating social justice, affirmative action, and equal rights. The Ambedkarite student movements, named in honor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent Dalit figure, has gained considerable momentum in various universities. These movements are particularly robust in states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh, where they actively contest the dominance of upper caste groups in student politics (Ahmad, 2022).

Regional Differences in Political Engagement

Social Class	Political Engagement	Common Forms of Participation
Upper Class	High	Formal party membership, rallies, campaigns
Middle Class	Moderate	Volunteering, issue-based activism
Lower Class	Low	Protests, grassroots movements

The political landscape of India exhibits significant regional disparities, with certain states demonstrating a strong tradition of political activism while others show comparatively lower levels of political engagement. In states such as Kerala and West Bengal, students are recognized for their vigorous involvement in politics, often aligning themselves with leftist ideologies. These regions boast a rich history of political movements that have fostered a politically active student body. Conversely, northern Indian regions, particularly rural areas, tend to exhibit lower levels of political engagement among students. In these locales, political awareness is often shaped by local concerns such as land rights or caste-related issues rather than broader national political movements. As a result, the differences in political socialization across regions are pronounced, with students from politically vibrant states being more inclined to engage in national movements (Batham 2021).

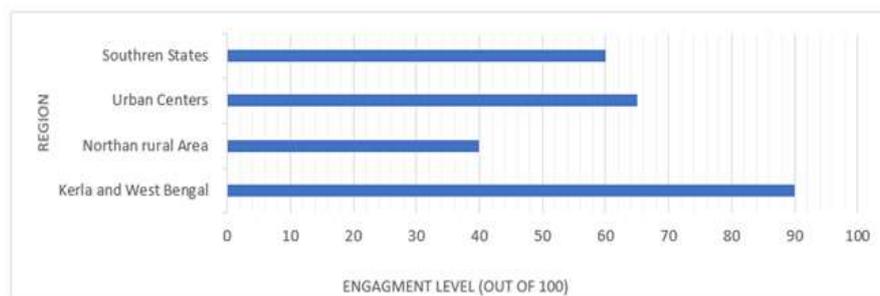
Figure 2 Regional Engagement Levels in Political Socialization

Political Polarization and Student Movements

Escalation of Polarization

Political polarization has emerged as a significant issue in India, particularly among younger demographics. The rise of social media has facilitated greater exposure to partisan political narratives, exacerbating ideological rifts between left-wing and right-wing groups. This polarization is increasingly evident in campus environments, where

confrontations among various student factions, often linked to national political parties, have become commonplace (Tyler & Iyengar, 2022). Within Indian universities, the ideological schism is particularly noticeable between left- and right-leaning student organizations. Groups such as the Students' Federation of India (SFI) and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) epitomize the opposing ends of the political spectrum. The SFI is rooted in socialist and communist principles, whereas the ABVP is associated with the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The ideological distinctions between these factions are becoming increasingly stark, with both sides leveraging social



media to garner support and orchestrate protests and demonstrations (Gorodova & Pachina, 2023).

Student Movements

The tradition of student-led movements in India is well established (Saurabh, 2023), with significant events such as the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) occurring between 2019 and 2020. These protests witnessed substantial student involvement at institutions such as Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Characterized by their extensive participation, the CAA protests attracted students from diverse socioeconomic and political backgrounds, underscoring the influence of student activism in shaping the national political landscape. In addition, movements advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, including the Dalit rights movement, have gained traction in recent years. Student-led organizations have played a pivotal role in these protests, employing both conventional activism methods and digital platforms to mobilize support and raise awareness (Ahmad 2022).

Table 3: Major Student Movements in India (2010-2023)

Discussion

The classroom is the socialization ground for the youngest group of political adults, who acquire their basic values. Through conversations with teachers and classmates, watching politicians speak to them on a common platform, and following news reports provided by school newspapers, students acquire the basic values that set the direction of their political leanings. Although students cite family and peer relationships as some of the most influential factors on their political beliefs, the rising influence of social media is starting to show. The rise of the digital realm has, to some extent, levelled out political participation, allowing students from all walks of life to

participate in a conversation. However, social media is also a contributing factor in political perspective polarization, as echo chambers work towards limiting the reach of diverse opinions and enforcing existing beliefs. This has resulted in a splintered student population and growing animosity between right- and left-wing factions on campuses throughout the nation (Ahmed, 2024). Simultaneously, the effects of class and caste continue to cast a long shadow on how students view political engagement. While students from rich families prefer to participate in more formal political activities, their

Movement	Year	Main Issues	Universities Involved
Anti-CAA Protests	2019-2020	Citizenship Rights, religious discrimination	Jamia Millia Islamia, JNU
Ambedkarite Movement	Ongoing	Dalit rights, affirmative action	Various, led by Dalit students
Farmers' Protest	2020-2021	Solidarity, Agricultural Law, Land rights	Punjab University, Delhi University
Rohith Vemula Protests	2016	Social justice, caste discrimination	University of Hyderabad
FTII Student Protests	2015	Academic Freedom, Censorship	Film and Television Institute of India (FTII)
Anti-Reservation Protests	2015	Reservation policies, meritocracy	Various, notably in Delhi
JNU Student Protests	2016	Nationalism, Freedom of Expression	Jawaharlal Nehru University
MeToo Movement	2018	Gender equality, sexual harassment	Various universities across India
Climate Strike	2019	Climate Change, Environmental Justice Various,	with significant participation from JNU and DU
LGBTQ+ Rights Movement	Ongoing	Legal Recognition and Rights for LGBTQ+ Community	Various, led by university student organizations

counterparts from low socio-economic status are drawn towards grassroots initiatives. More recently, student politics has become a new address to assert social justice and equality for marginalized caste groups (Batham, 2021).

5. Recommendations

Tertiary education disciplines need to strengthen civic education and foster critical debate on democratic values, as such undertakings cultivate engaged and educated citizenship (Furman et al., 2022; Myoung & Liou, 2022).

Campuses need to create open and safe spaces for participation in which marginalized communities, such as Dalits and Adivasis, can engage, with diverse perspectives being included (Batham, 2021; Ahmad, 2022). Start education programs to acknowledge the role of social media algorithms, echo chambers, and polarization; teach students how to engage with opposing views in the online world (Cazorla-Martín et al., 2023; Chen & Stilinovic, 2020).

Reconcile Political Divisions Encourage classroom discussions and group work to overcome campus polarization and foster mutual understanding (Tyler & Iyengar, 2022; Saurabh, 2023). Support student-initiated activities that promote social justice, especially those benefiting marginalized groups, by providing mentorship and institutional backing (Batham, 2021; Ahmad, 2022).

Scholars must examine how the changing impact of digital platforms and social/regional identities influences students' participation and perception, watching for long-term consequences (Gorodova & Pachina, 2023; Cazorla-Martín et al., 2023). The integrated recommendations correspond with academic research and consider the diverse social, technological, and institutional factors that influence students' political socialization in India.

6. Conclusion

The political socialization of college students in India represents a complex interplay of various social determinants, including family dynamics, peer influences, educational environments, social media, and the implications of class, caste, and regional political contexts. While familial and peer relationships remain pivotal in shaping students' political beliefs, the burgeoning impact of social media is becoming increasingly significant. The advent of digital platforms has, to a degree, democratized political participation, enabling students from a wide array of backgrounds to engage in political discourse. However, social media has also exacerbated the polarization of political perspectives, fostering echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforce existing beliefs (Cazorla-Martín et al., 2023). This phenomenon has resulted in a more fragmented student body, with heightened tensions between left- and right-leaning student factions becoming increasingly common on campuses nationwide. Moreover, the influence of class and caste persists in determining the modes of political engagement among students. Students from upper-class backgrounds are more inclined to participate in formal political activities, whereas those from lower socio-economic strata often gravitate towards grassroots initiatives. Additionally, marginalized caste groups, particularly Dalits, are leveraging student politics to champion social justice and equality (Batham, 2021). This evolution presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in an era marked by increasing political polarization. Additionally, the interplay of class, caste, and regional disparities further complicates the political landscape, often hindering the participation of marginalized communities. Nevertheless, student movements have proven to be a formidable force in shaping the national political narrative, as evidenced by recent protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Future research should investigate the enduring effects of social media on political socialization and delve deeper into the implications of caste and regional disparities.

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