

# Intergenerational Impact of Women's Education on Socio-Political Engagement in Malda District

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**Abstract** - This study examines the intergenerational impact of women's education on socio-political engagement in Malda district, West Bengal. It explores how educational attainment among women influences not only their own participation in governance, decision-making, and civic activities but also shapes the attitudes and engagement patterns of subsequent generations. Using a mixed-method approach, the research highlights that educated women demonstrate higher political awareness, confidence in interacting with government institutions, and active involvement in local governance. Furthermore, their children—especially daughters—tend to exhibit greater educational aspirations and civic consciousness. The study underscores education as a transformative tool that fosters democratic participation and social empowerment across generations. It concludes that strengthening women's education can significantly enhance inclusive governance and long-term socio-political development in the region.

**Keywords:** Women's Education, Intergenerational Impact, Socio-Political Engagement, Empowerment, Civic Participation, Malda District, Gender Equality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as a powerful instrument of social transformation, particularly in the context of women's empowerment. In developing regions like Malda district of West Bengal, where socio-economic disparities and traditional gender norms continue to shape everyday life, women's access to education plays a decisive role in altering both individual and collective trajectories. Historically, women in rural and semi-urban parts of Malda have faced limited educational opportunities due to poverty, early marriage, and entrenched patriarchal structures. However, recent decades have witnessed gradual improvements in female literacy rates, supported by government initiatives, non-governmental organizations, and increasing social awareness.

The significance of women's education extends beyond personal development; it influences family structures, community dynamics, and political participation. Educated

women are more likely to engage with public institutions, understand their rights, and contribute to governance processes. More importantly, the benefits of education are not confined to a single generation. They are transmitted across generations, shaping the aspirations, attitudes, and socio-political behaviors of children. This study focuses on understanding how women's education in Malda district contributes to such intergenerational changes, particularly in the domain of socio-political engagement.

## Concept of Women's Education and Empowerment

Women's education is not merely about acquiring literacy or formal schooling; it encompasses the development of critical thinking, awareness of rights, and the capacity to participate actively in social and political processes. Education empowers women by enhancing their decision-making abilities, economic independence, and social mobility. It enables them to challenge traditional norms and assert their role in both private and public spheres.

Empowerment through education is multidimensional. Social empowerment involves increased participation in community activities and improved status within the family. Economic empowerment allows women to contribute financially, thereby gaining greater autonomy. Political empowerment, which is central to this study, refers to women's involvement in governance, voting behavior, leadership roles, and interaction with state institutions.

In Malda district, the relationship between education and empowerment is particularly significant due to the region's socio-cultural context. Women who attain even basic education often experience a noticeable shift in their confidence levels and awareness, which in turn influences their engagement in local governance institutions such as Panchayati Raj bodies.

## Understanding Intergenerational Impact

The concept of intergenerational impact refers to the transmission of values, behaviors, and opportunities from one generation to another. In the context of women's education,

this impact manifests in various ways. Educated mothers are more likely to prioritize the education of their children, especially daughters, thereby breaking cycles of illiteracy and marginalization.

Intergenerational effects are not limited to educational attainment; they also extend to socio-political attitudes. Children raised in households where women are educated and socially active tend to develop greater awareness of civic responsibilities, gender equality, and democratic participation. Such households often encourage open discussions, critical thinking, and active engagement with societal issues.

In Malda district, where traditional norms still influence gender roles, the intergenerational transmission of progressive values through women's education can serve as a catalyst for broader social change. This study seeks to explore how these dynamics operate within families and communities, and how they contribute to long-term socio-political development.

### **Socio-Political Engagement: Meaning and Dimensions**

Socio-political engagement refers to the active involvement of individuals in social and political processes that shape their communities and governance systems. It includes activities such as voting, participating in local governance, attending community meetings, engaging with government officials, and advocating for social issues.

For women, socio-political engagement is often influenced by factors such as education, socio-economic status, cultural norms, and access to information. In regions like Malda, where women's mobility and public participation have traditionally been restricted, education plays a crucial role in enabling them to overcome these barriers.

The dimensions of socio-political engagement include:

- **Political Awareness:** Understanding of rights, policies, and governance structures.
- **Participation:** Involvement in elections, local bodies, and decision-making processes.
- **Confidence and Agency:** Ability to express opinions and interact with authorities.
- **Collective Action:** Participation in community groups, self-help groups, and social movements.

This study emphasizes how women's education enhances these dimensions and how such enhancements influence subsequent generations.

### **Regional Context: Malda District**

Malda district, located in West Bengal, is characterized by a diverse socio-cultural landscape and a predominantly

rural population. The district faces several developmental challenges, including poverty, low literacy rates, and gender disparities. Despite these challenges, Malda has shown gradual progress in educational attainment, particularly among women.

The district's socio-political environment is shaped by local governance institutions, community networks, and cultural traditions. Women's participation in these spheres has historically been limited, but recent trends indicate increasing involvement, especially among educated women. Government programs aimed at promoting girls' education and women's empowerment have contributed to this shift.

However, disparities persist between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socio-economic groups. Understanding the role of women's education in bridging these gaps and fostering intergenerational change is crucial for designing effective policies and interventions.

### **Link between Education and Socio-Political Engagement**

The relationship between education and socio-political engagement is well-established in social science literature. Education enhances individuals' ability to access information, understand complex issues, and participate effectively in decision-making processes. For women, education serves as a gateway to public life, enabling them to move beyond traditional domestic roles.

In Malda district, educated women are more likely to:

- Exercise their voting rights independently.
- Participate in Gram Sabha meetings and local governance.
- Engage with government schemes and services.
- Advocate for community development issues such as education, health, and sanitation.

Moreover, educated women often act as role models within their families and communities, inspiring others to pursue education and participate in socio-political activities. This ripple effect contributes to the creation of a more informed and engaged citizenry.

### **Intergenerational Transmission of Socio-Political Values**

One of the most significant aspects of women's education is its ability to influence the next generation. Educated mothers tend to adopt progressive parenting practices, encouraging their children to think critically, question inequalities, and participate actively in society.

The intergenerational transmission of socio-political values occurs through:

- **Education and Awareness:** Mothers emphasize the importance of schooling and civic knowledge.
- **Behavioral Modeling:** Children observe and emulate their mothers' participation in social and political activities.
- **Value Formation:** Households become spaces where democratic values and gender equality are nurtured.

In Malda district, this transmission is particularly important in breaking traditional barriers and fostering a culture of participation and inclusivity. The study aims to capture these dynamics and highlight their implications for long-term development.

### Challenges and Barriers

Despite the positive impact of women's education, several challenges hinder its effectiveness in promoting socio-political engagement. These include:

- **Cultural Constraints:** Patriarchal norms that limit women's mobility and participation.
- **Economic Barriers:** Poverty and lack of resources that restrict access to education.
- **Institutional Limitations:** Inadequate infrastructure and support systems for women's participation.
- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to digital tools and information in rural areas.

Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the intergenerational benefits of women's education. The study considers these barriers while analyzing the relationship between education and socio-political engagement in Malda district.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the level of educational attainment among women in Malda district and its role in shaping their socio-political awareness.
2. To analyze the extent of women's participation in socio-political activities such as voting, local governance, and interaction with government institutions.
3. To assess the intergenerational impact of women's education on the educational aspirations and civic attitudes of their children.
4. To evaluate the relationship between women's education and their confidence, decision-making power, and engagement in community affairs.
5. To identify the key challenges and barriers that influence women's educational access and their socio-political participation in Malda district.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to explore the relationship between women's education and socio-political engagement, along with its intergenerational implications. A mixed-method approach has been employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The descriptive aspect helps in understanding existing patterns of education and participation, while the analytical component examines the relationships and underlying factors influencing intergenerational change. This design is appropriate as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of both measurable outcomes and lived experiences.

### Study Area

The study is conducted in **Malda district of West Bengal**, which represents a socio-economically diverse and predominantly rural region. The district has been selected due to its relatively low female literacy rates, gender disparities, and evolving socio-political participation of women. Both rural and semi-urban areas have been included to capture variations in educational access and socio-political engagement across different settings.

### Nature and Sources of Data

The study is based on both **primary and secondary data**:

- **Primary Data:** Collected directly from respondents through structured questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. This includes information on women's educational status, participation in socio-political activities, decision-making roles, and influence on their children.
- **Secondary Data:** Obtained from government reports, census data, academic journals, books, and relevant policy documents. These sources provide contextual background and support for analysis.

### Sampling Design

A **multistage sampling method** has been used for selecting respondents:

- **Stage 1:** Selection of blocks within Malda district based on socio-economic diversity.
- **Stage 2:** Selection of villages and wards from rural and semi-urban areas.

- **Stage 3:** Selection of households using random sampling techniques.

The study focuses on **women respondents from different educational backgrounds** (illiterate, primary, secondary, and higher education). In addition, where relevant, information about their children is also considered to understand intergenerational effects. The sample size has been chosen to ensure representation and reliability of findings.

### Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

The following tools have been used:

- **Structured Questionnaire:** To collect quantitative data on education level, political participation, and use of government services.
- **Interview Schedule:** To gather qualitative insights regarding attitudes, perceptions, and experiences.
- **Observation Method:** To understand behavioral patterns and community participation.

These tools ensure both reliability and depth in data collection.

### Variables of the Study

The study includes the following key variables:

- **Independent Variable:** Women’s educational level
- **Dependent Variables:**
  - Socio-political awareness
  - Participation in governance and civic activities
  - Confidence in dealing with institutions
- **Intervening Variable:** Intergenerational factors (children’s education, attitudes, and civic engagement)

### Data Analysis Methods

The collected data has been analyzed using both **quantitative and qualitative techniques:**

- **Quantitative Analysis:**
  - Tabulation and classification of data
  - Use of percentages and simple statistical tools
  - Graphical representation such as bar charts and pie charts
- **Qualitative Analysis:**
  - Thematic interpretation of interview responses
  - Comparative analysis of different educational groups

This combined approach helps in deriving meaningful conclusions.

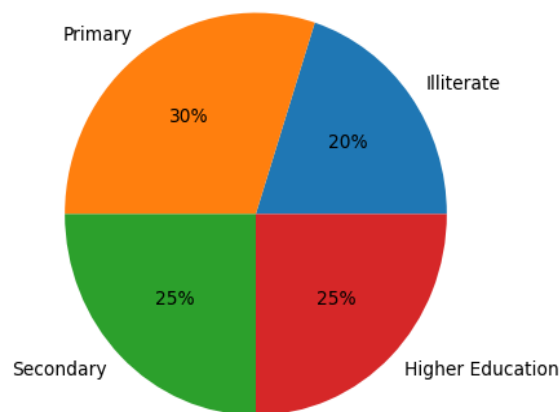
## IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Educational Status of Women Respondents

Educational Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	40	20%
Primary	60	30%
Secondary	50	25%
Higher Education	50	25%
Total	200	100%

**Interpretation:** The data presented in Table 1 reflects the educational distribution among women respondents in Malda district. A significant observation is that while a majority of women (80%) have received some form of education, a notable proportion (20%) remains illiterate. This indicates that despite progress in female literacy, structural challenges such as poverty, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to educational infrastructure continue to hinder universal educational attainment among women.

Educational Status of Women Respondents



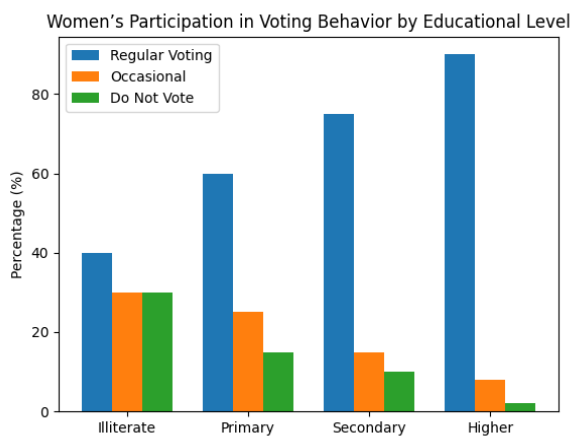
The presence of 25% women with higher education is particularly encouraging, as it signals a gradual transition toward improved educational outcomes in the district. This shift can be attributed to government initiatives, increased awareness, and changing societal attitudes toward girls’ education. However, the coexistence of illiteracy and higher education within the same population reflects uneven development and highlights intra-regional disparities. From an analytical perspective, educational status serves as the foundational variable influencing socio-political engagement. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to possess awareness about their rights, access information, and participate in decision-making processes. Furthermore, education has a profound intergenerational effect. Educated

mothers tend to prioritize the education of their children, particularly daughters, thereby breaking the cycle of illiteracy. Thus, the data suggests that improving women’s educational attainment can lead to sustained social transformation across generations.

Table 2: Women’s Participation in Voting Behavior

Educational Level	Regular Voting (%)	Occasional (%)	Do Not Vote (%)
Illiterate	40%	30%	30%
Primary	60%	25%	15%
Secondary	75%	15%	10%
Higher	90%	8%	2%

**Interpretation:** Table 2 clearly demonstrates a strong positive relationship between women’s educational attainment and their participation in electoral processes. The proportion of women who vote regularly increases consistently with education, from 40% among illiterate women to an impressive 90% among those with higher education. At the same time, the percentage of women who do not participate in voting declines sharply as education levels rise.



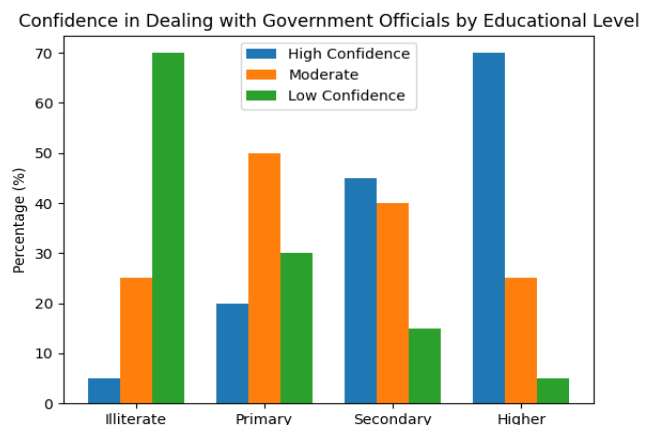
This trend highlights the crucial role of education in fostering political awareness and civic responsibility. Educated women are more likely to understand the significance of voting as a democratic right and duty. They are also better equipped to make informed choices, evaluate candidates and policies, and resist external pressures or manipulation during elections. In contrast, the relatively high percentage of non-voters among illiterate women suggests the persistence of political exclusion, often driven by lack of awareness, dependency on family members, and socio-cultural constraints. Such women may not fully recognize the importance of their participation in democratic processes. From an intergenerational perspective, the implications are substantial. Children growing up in households where mothers

actively participate in voting are more likely to internalize democratic values and civic responsibilities. This creates a ripple effect, ensuring that future generations are more politically aware and engaged. Therefore, the data reinforces the argument that women’s education plays a pivotal role in strengthening grassroots democracy.

Table 3: Confidence in Dealing with Government Officials

Educational Level	High Confidence	Moderate	Low Confidence
Illiterate	5%	25%	70%
Primary	20%	50%	30%
Secondary	45%	40%	15%
Higher	70%	25%	5%

**Interpretation:** The data in Table 3 reveals a significant correlation between education and women’s confidence in interacting with government officials. A majority of illiterate women (70%) report low confidence, whereas only 5% of women with higher education fall into this category. Conversely, the proportion of women with high confidence increases dramatically with education, reaching 70% among highly educated respondents.

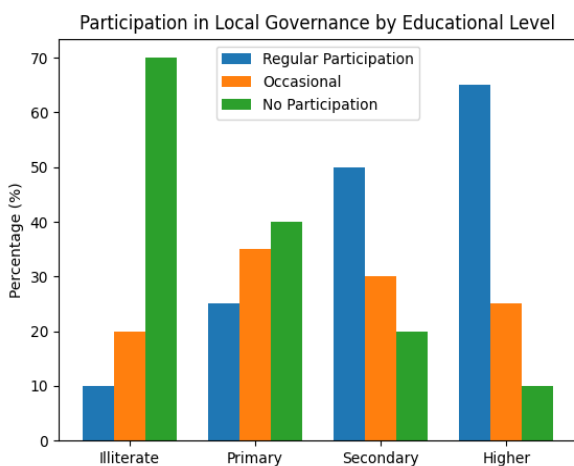


The low confidence levels among illiterate women highlight the barriers they face in accessing governance systems. Fear, lack of knowledge, and socio-cultural restrictions often prevent them from directly engaging with officials, thereby limiting their participation in public life. Intergenerationally, confident and empowered women influence their children’s attitudes toward authority and institutions. Children raised in such environments are more likely to develop self-assurance, problem-solving abilities, and a proactive approach to governance. Thus, the findings emphasize that education not only empowers women individually but also contributes to building a more confident and participatory society.

**Table 4: Participation in Local Governance (Gram Sabha/Panchayat Meetings)**

Educational Level	Regular Participation (%)	Occasional (%)	No Participation (%)
Illiterate	10%	20%	70%
Primary	25%	35%	40%
Secondary	50%	30%	20%
Higher	65%	25%	10%

**Interpretation (Detailed):** Table 4 illustrates the extent of women’s participation in local governance institutions. The data shows a clear upward trend in participation with increasing levels of education. While only 10% of illiterate women participate regularly in local governance, this figure rises to 65% among highly educated women.



This indicates that education plays a vital role in enabling women to engage in community decision-making processes. Educated women are more aware of the importance of local governance and are more confident in expressing their opinions and addressing community issues. Their participation contributes to more inclusive and representative decision-making. The high level of non-participation (70%) among illiterate women reflects the persistence of socio-cultural barriers, including restricted mobility, lack of awareness, and gender-based discrimination. These barriers limit their ability to engage in public forums and influence local governance.

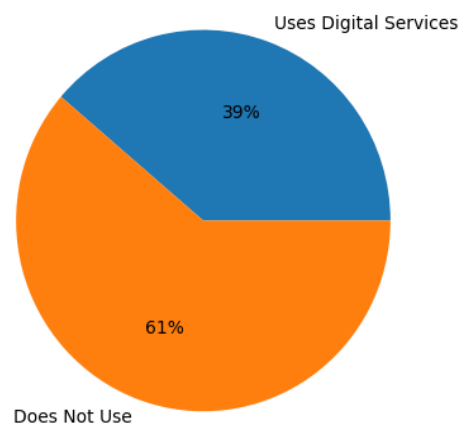
From an intergenerational perspective, women’s participation in community activities serves as a powerful model for younger generations. Children who observe their mothers actively involved in governance are more likely to develop leadership skills, civic awareness, and a sense of responsibility toward their community. Thus, the data highlights the transformative potential of women’s education in promoting participatory governance.

**Table 5: Use of Digital Government Services by Educational Status**

Educational Level	Uses Digital Services	Does Not Use
Illiterate	5%	95%
Primary	20%	80%
Secondary	50%	50%
Higher	80%	20%

**Interpretation:** Table 5 highlights the relationship between education and the use of digital government services. The data reveals a significant digital divide based on educational attainment. While only 5% of illiterate women use digital services, the proportion increases to 80% among women with higher education.

**Use of Digital Government Services**



This trend reflects the importance of education in developing digital literacy and access to information. Educated women are more likely to use online platforms for accessing government schemes, applying for services, and obtaining information. In contrast, illiterate women remain largely excluded from digital governance due to lack of skills, awareness, and access to technology. The implications of this divide are critical, especially in the context of increasing digitization of public services. Without adequate education, a large segment of women risks being marginalized from essential services and opportunities. Intergenerationally, educated mothers play a crucial role in introducing digital tools to their children, thereby enhancing their technological competence and future prospects. This not only improves access to information but also prepares the next generation for a digital society.

The detailed analysis across all tables consistently demonstrates that women’s education is a decisive factor in shaping socio-political engagement in Malda district. Higher education levels are associated with increased political participation, greater confidence, active involvement in

governance, and better access to digital services. More importantly, these benefits extend beyond individual women to influence their families and future generations. Educated women act as catalysts of change, fostering awareness, participation, and progressive values within their households. Thus, the intergenerational impact of women's education emerges as a key driver of sustainable socio-political development.

## V. RESULTS

The findings of the study clearly establish that women's education plays a central and transformative role in shaping socio-political engagement in Malda district. The data indicates that although a majority of women have attained some level of education, a notable proportion still remains illiterate, reflecting persistent structural inequalities. Educational attainment emerges as the most significant determinant influencing women's awareness, participation, confidence, and access to governance systems. Women with higher levels of education demonstrate greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities, which directly translates into more active involvement in socio-political processes.

One of the most prominent findings is the strong positive relationship between education and voting behavior. Educated women are far more likely to participate regularly in elections, exercise independent decision-making, and recognize voting as a civic duty. In contrast, illiterate women exhibit lower participation rates and are more susceptible to external influence or disengagement. This pattern highlights the role of education in strengthening democratic participation at the grassroots level. Alongside this, the study reveals that education significantly enhances women's confidence in dealing with government officials. Highly educated women show greater self-assurance, better communication skills, and a higher likelihood of directly accessing government services, whereas illiterate women often remain dependent on intermediaries and experience hesitation in institutional interactions.

The analysis further demonstrates that women's participation in local governance, such as Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings, increases consistently with educational attainment. Educated women are more active in community decision-making processes, raise issues related to development, and contribute to collective problem-solving. On the other hand, illiterate women largely remain excluded due to socio-cultural constraints, lack of awareness, and limited mobility. This disparity underscores the importance of education in promoting inclusive governance and empowering women to take part in public life.

Another significant finding is the existence of a substantial digital divide based on educational status. While educated women actively use digital government services and online platforms, illiterate women have minimal access to such resources. This gap not only limits their ability to benefit from government schemes but also increases their vulnerability to exclusion in an increasingly digitalized governance system. Education, therefore, emerges as a crucial factor in bridging this divide and enabling effective participation in modern administrative processes.

Importantly, the study highlights the strong intergenerational impact of women's education. Educated women tend to place a high value on their children's education, particularly that of daughters, thereby promoting higher enrollment and continuity in schooling. They also foster an environment of awareness, critical thinking, and civic responsibility within the household. Children raised in such environments are more likely to develop democratic values, participate in social and political activities, and aspire toward higher educational and professional achievements. This transmission of values and opportunities across generations plays a vital role in breaking cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and social marginalization.

Overall, the results of the study indicate that women's education is not only a means of individual empowerment but also a catalyst for broader social and political transformation. It enhances participation, reduces exclusion, strengthens democratic processes, and creates lasting intergenerational benefits. In the context of Malda district, promoting women's education can therefore be seen as a key strategy for achieving inclusive development and sustainable socio-political progress.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study invite a broader reflection on how women's education functions not merely as an individual asset but as a structural force that reshapes socio-political life across generations. The patterns observed in Malda district reveal that education operates at multiple levels—enhancing awareness, building confidence, enabling participation, and ultimately transforming family and community dynamics. This layered impact aligns with wider theoretical perspectives that view education as a catalyst for empowerment and social change, particularly in contexts marked by gender inequality and limited access to resources.

A key point emerging from the analysis is the strong association between education and political participation, especially in voting behavior. The significantly higher participation rates among educated women suggest that education fosters not only awareness of political rights but

also a sense of responsibility and agency. This supports the argument that democratic engagement is deeply tied to access to knowledge and information. However, the continued lower participation among illiterate women indicates that formal democratic rights alone are insufficient without the enabling capacity that education provides. In this sense, education becomes a prerequisite for meaningful participation rather than mere symbolic inclusion.

The issue of confidence in dealing with government officials further deepens this understanding. The sharp contrast between educated and illiterate women in terms of institutional confidence reflects how education reduces psychological and social barriers. It equips women with the language, awareness, and self-belief necessary to navigate bureaucratic systems. At the same time, the persistence of low confidence among less educated women points to entrenched inequalities that cannot be addressed by policy measures alone. Social norms, power hierarchies, and cultural expectations continue to shape women's interactions with institutions, suggesting that education must be complemented by broader social reforms.

Participation in local governance emerges as another critical dimension where education exerts a transformative influence. The increasing involvement of educated women in Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings indicates a gradual shift toward inclusive governance. Yet, the relatively low participation of illiterate women highlights the gap between formal opportunities and actual engagement. Even where institutional spaces are open to women, their effective participation depends on their capacity to understand issues, articulate concerns, and assert their presence. This reinforces the idea that empowerment is not simply about access but about capability.

The digital divide identified in the study introduces a contemporary dimension to the discussion. As governance increasingly shifts toward digital platforms, the exclusion of illiterate and less educated women from these systems raises concerns about new forms of inequality. Education, in this context, becomes essential not only for traditional forms of participation but also for accessing digital resources and services. The findings suggest that without targeted efforts to improve digital literacy, the benefits of technological advancement may remain unevenly distributed, further marginalizing already disadvantaged groups.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the study lies in its examination of the intergenerational impact of women's education. The evidence clearly indicates that educated women influence the aspirations, values, and behaviors of their children. This intergenerational transmission extends

beyond education to include civic awareness, gender equality, and social participation. Such findings resonate with broader developmental theories that emphasize the role of family environment in shaping long-term outcomes. In the context of Malda district, this implies that investments in women's education can yield sustained benefits, gradually transforming social structures and reducing inequalities over time.

At the same time, the discussion must acknowledge the limitations and complexities of this transformation. While education significantly enhances women's socio-political engagement, it does not operate in isolation. Economic constraints, cultural norms, and institutional barriers continue to influence outcomes. For instance, even educated women may face restrictions on mobility or decision-making within the household, which can limit their public participation. Therefore, while education is a necessary condition for empowerment, it is not always sufficient. A more holistic approach that addresses multiple dimensions of inequality is required.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that women's education in Malda district functions as a crucial catalyst for enhancing socio-political engagement and fostering long-term intergenerational transformation. It significantly improves women's awareness, confidence, participation in democratic processes, and access to institutional and digital resources, thereby reducing social and political exclusion. Educated women not only engage more actively in governance and civic life but also influence the educational aspirations, values, and participatory behavior of their children, creating a ripple effect across generations. However, the persistence of illiteracy, socio-cultural barriers, and digital inequality indicates that education alone is not sufficient and must be supported by inclusive policies and social reforms. Overall, strengthening women's education emerges as a key strategy for promoting gender equality, deepening democratic participation, and achieving sustainable socio-political development in the region.

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**Citation of this Article:**

Pampa Biswas, & Dr. Vivek Kumar Singh. (2026). Intergenerational Impact of Women's Education on Socio-Political Engagement in Malda District. *International Research Journal of Innovations in Engineering and Technology - IRJIET*, 10(5), 832-840. Article DOI <https://doi.org/10.47001/IRJIET/2026.105115>

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