

## Political Participation of Women in Early India

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The opening up of the novel vistas in social history has resulted in the illumination of the dim corridors of women's history, hitherto a sphere of relative scholarly indifference in Indian context. The last few decades have witnessed a spurt in the literary productions, locating the contours of women's position in terms of specific political and economic formations. However, the dominant discourse of women in early India has been marked by stereotyping of women as adjuncts to social and political processes. This article seeks to investigate the participation of women in political arena in early India, adding a sequel to the emerging fresh perspectives portraying women as active agents of social change.

The reconstruction of the women's position in early Indian political life calls for certain cautions while handling the source materials. The literacy texts, particularly the *Dharmasāstras* being the brahmanical normative texts, are afflicted with patriarchal biases, sometimes representing the personal opinion of the author. The epigraphic sources are full of hyperbolic expressions. Moreover, the sweeping generalizations about the position of women in early India require qualification, which is best done by focusing on the perspectival, spatial and chronological location of the sources on which the author bases himself / herself. The saga of women's political participation in ancient India bears an evolutionary character unfolding over the spatial and temporal contexts. As far as functional aspects are concerned in the realm of polity, women's role extended over a vast range of activities. Not only women rulers but also there were many women administrators, governors, messengers and the spies. It can be attributed to the social, economic and political milieu as well as the prevailing cultural ethos of the respective periods.