**Political Glass Ceilings: Gender Inequality and Breaking Barriers for Women's Political Engagement in Contemporary India**

**Abstract:**

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in political arenas globally, affecting the representation and participation of women. This research paper delves into the concept of "political glass ceilings" within the contemporary Indian context, examining the multifaceted barriers that hinder women from achieving equal political engagement and leadership roles. It explores historical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors contributing to these barriers, assesses the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives, and proposes strategies for overcoming these challenges. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at promoting gender parity and enhancing women's political empowerment in India.

**Keywords:** Representation, Participation, Gender Inequality, Barrier

1. **Introduction**

Gender inequality persists as a significant social issue globally, manifesting in various forms across different contexts and impacting individuals' opportunities and outcomes based on their gender. Gender inequality refers to disparities and discrimination between individuals based on their gender identity or perceived gender roles. It encompasses unequal access to resources, opportunities, rights, and decision-making power due to societal norms and structures that privilege one gender over another.

Women constitute slightly more than half of the world's population but are significantly underrepresented in political decision-making bodies. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's latest data, as of 2023, women hold only around 25% of parliamentary seats globally. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced in positions of executive power, such as heads of state and government. On June 1, 2024, there will be 28 women as heads of state and/or government in 27 countries. At the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will be achieved in only 130 years. Only 18 countries have a female head of state and 15 countries have a female head of state. Data collected by the organization UN Women show that on January 1, 2024, women will make up 23.3 percent of government members leading ministries and political fields. In only 15 countries do women hold 50 percent or more of senior ministerial positions in political fields. The five most common female ministerial portfolios are women and gender equality. Next come family and children's issues, social inclusion and development, social insurance and social security, and indigenous and minority issues. Only 26.9 percent of MPs are single. or there are women in the lower chambers, while in 1995 it was 11 percent. Only six countries have 50 percent or more women in individual or lower chambers: Rwanda (61 percent), Cuba (56 percent), Nicaragua (54 percent), Andorra (50 percent), Mexico (50 percent), New- Zealand (50 percent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 percent). 22 other countries reached or exceeded 40 percent, including 13 countries in Europe, five in Africa, four in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Asia and the Pacific. Globally, there are 21 states where women make up less than 10 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including two lower houses with no women. At the current pace of development, gender equality in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063.Women occupy 36 percent of parliamentary seats in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 33 percent of European and North American parliamentarians. Sub-Saharan Africa has 27 percent of lawmakers, East and Southeast Asia 23 percent, Oceania, Central and South Asia 20 percent, and North Africa and West Asia, where women make up 18 percent of female parliamentarians in both regions. Data from 141 countries show that more than 3 million (35.5 percent) of the elected members of local negotiations are women. Only three countries reached 50%, and another 22 countries have more than 40% women in local governments. Regional differences are also seen in women's representation in local negotiations in January 2023: Central and South Asia, 41 percent; 37 percent in Europe and North America; Oceania, 32 percent; East and Southeast Asia, 31 percent; Latin America and the Caribbean, 27 percent; Sub-Saharan Africa, 25 percent; West Asia and North Africa, 20 percent.

The sovereign republic of India has emancipated all its women after the initial general election in Although the right to vote has been given to all women since the constitution came into force, the state's representation of women in the Lok Sabha and as members of state legislatures has been far from satisfactory Until 2004, the percentage of women in the Lok Sabha was very low, at 5–10 percent. It rose slightly to 12% in 2014 and is currently at 14% in the 18th Lok Sabha. Representation in state legislatures is even lower, with a national average of about 9 percent. In 20 states and UTs, less than 10% of MLAs are women. The 73rd and 74th amendments in 1992 and 1993 included one-third reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities. Between 1996 and 2008, attempts to introduce similar reservations in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies failed. In April 2024, India was ranked 143rd in a list published by the Inter-Parliamentary Organization of Women in National Parliaments. Union, an organization of international parliaments. The Trinamool Congress has the highest percentage of women in the current Lok Sabha, at 38 percent. The ruling Bhartiya Janata Party, the largest opposition party, has about 13 percent. Tamil Nadu state party Naam Tamila Katchi followed a voluntary 50 percent quota for female candidates in the last three assembly elections. However, voluntary or legal quotas for political parties are unlikely to bring about the desired representation in our country. Therefore, parliament demanded one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies through the 106th Constitutional Amendment passed in September 2023. This would ensure fair representation of women in legislative bodies, which would increase gender sensitivity in parliamentary processes and legislation. It would also hopefully increase the number of women ministers at the Center and in the states. This provision takes effect on the basis of a limitation after the publication of the corresponding figures of the first census after the validity of this Law. Therefore, a late census of 2021 should be conducted without delay to ensure that this reservation is implemented from the 2029 general elections onwards.

Various factors contribute to the gender gap in political representation. These include socio-cultural norms and stereotypes that perpetuate traditional gender roles, economic disparities that limit women's access to resources for campaigning, and institutional biases within political parties and electoral systems. The underrepresentation of women in politics has tangible effects on policy outcomes. Research indicates that women legislators are more likely to prioritize policies related to health, education, social welfare, and gender equality. Therefore, their exclusion from decision-making processes can result in policy agendas that do not fully address the needs and interests of half the population. India, as the world's largest democracy, has made significant constitutional guarantees regarding gender equality. The Constitution of India ensures equal rights and opportunities for women in all spheres of life, including politics. Despite constitutional provisions and legislative measures, women's representation in Indian politics remains low. As of 2023, women hold only about 14% of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and 11% in the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), the two houses of India's Parliament. India's patriarchal society and deep-rooted cultural norms often restrict women's participation in public and political spheres. Stereotypes portraying women as primarily homemakers and caregivers, coupled with concerns over personal safety and societal expectations, deter many women from entering politics.

**2. Historical Context and Legislative Framework**

The evolution of women's political rights in India reflects a dynamic interplay of historical developments, constitutional provisions, and legislative reforms aimed at promoting gender equality and enhancing women's participation in political processes. During the pre-independence period, Indian women played pivotal roles in social and political movements despite limited formal participation in governance. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-08) marked the beginning of Indian female participation in nationalist activities and brought to the forefront the question of suffrage and voting rights. The movement for female suffrage in India in the early 20th century was initiated and replicated on the model in Great Britain and the work of British women reformers living in India. But eventually the suffrage movement came to terms with nationalist concerns and suffragist ideals had to be justified in Indian terms and linked to the nationalist issues of political rights and colonial status that dominated public discourse in the 1920s and 1930s in India. As a result of the movement, limited suffrage rights were extended to women in different provinces of India between 1920 and 1929. However, the suffrage rights granted were to a very narrow section of Indian women based on property qualifications. The Government of India Act 1935 provided a wider section of women suffrage rights but it was still limited and encumbered by qualifications like literacy, property ownership or marriage to propertied men. The Act enfranchised one woman for every five men enfranchised Leaders like Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant advocated for women's rights and contributed to the discourse on gender equality. The adoption of the Constitution of India in 1950 laid the foundation for democratic governance and enshrined fundamental rights and principles of equality for all citizens, including women. However, initial years post-independence saw limited political representation for women.The Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender, providing a fundamental framework for gender equality **(Article 14).** **Article 15 of Indian Constitution** prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, among other factors, ensuring equal opportunities in public employment and educational institutions. **Article 16** ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, irrespective of gender. **Article 19** guarantees certain fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech and expression, which are essential for political participation. **Article 39 d**irects the State to ensure equal pay for equal work and promote equal justice and free legal aid to ensure economic and political justice for women.

The Women's Reservation Bill, first introduced in 1996, seeks to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and state legislative assemblies for women. Despite several attempts, the bill has not yet been enacted into law. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in 1992 mandated reservation of seats for women (approximately one-third) in local governance bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities). These amendments significantly enhanced women's political participation at the grassroots level. Various legislative measures have been enacted to protect women's rights, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act (2013).

Apart from these legislative measures, the Government of India has launched many initiatives and plans to promote gender equality and empower women. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) program focuses on preventing gender selection, ensuring the survival and protection of the girl child and promoting her education. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) aims to empower rural women through skill development and employment opportunities. The Working Women's Hostel (WWH) provides safe accommodation and day facilities for working women, while the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) provides life skills training, nutrition, health education and vocational training for teenagers. Other initiatives include the Mahila Police Volunteers (MPV) program, which recruits women volunteers to act as a link between the police and the community, facilitating support for women in distress. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) provides microfinance for economic empowerment of women through self-help groups. The National Child Care Scheme for Children of Working Mothers provides day services to support working mothers, while the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandna Yojna provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers. Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability of urban poor households, including women, by providing opportunities for self-employment and skill development. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana provides access to clean cooking fuel (LPG) to rural households, empowering women and protecting their health. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna (SSY) is a small deposit scheme the girl child that aims to secure her future and promote economic empowerment. Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana provide skill development training and spinning equipment at subsidized cost, while The Prime Minister's Employment Program (PMEGP) provides financial assistance to self-employed for job opportunities. Stand-Up India program facilitates bank loans to SC/ST and women entrepreneurs to set up new businesses, promoting women entrepreneurship. Mahila e-Haat is an online marketing platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services. The One Stop Center (OSC) system provides integrated support to women affected by violence by providing medical, legal, psychological and counseling service under one roof. The Women's Helpline scheme provides 24/7 emergency help for women experiencing violence, as well as information and support services. The Women's Education and Employment Support Program (STEP) provides skills that enable women to become self-employed or entrepreneurs. The Women's Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) promotes women’s entrepreneurship by providing information, ecosystem support and practical assistance. Transgender initiatives include the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 and the SMILE scheme, which provides comprehensive resources for transgender welfare, including shelters, bursaries, skills development and health benefits. India’s legislative framework and various initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to address gender inequality and promote the socio-economic development of women. By implementing strong laws, policies, and plans, the Government of India wants to create a more equal society where women can realize their full potential and contribute to the country's development.

1. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:**

Traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and societal expectations continue to shape women's political participation in India and globally. By recognizing and addressing these influences through legislative reforms, cultural shifts, and supportive measures, societies can create more inclusive political environments that empower women to contribute fully to decision-making processes and promote gender equality in political representation. Some of these barriers discussed below:

* **Division of Labor:** Traditional gender roles assign women primarily to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while men are often expected to engage in public and political spheres. This division reinforces the perception that women's primary roles are within the household rather than in leadership or decision-making positions.
* **Perceptions of Leadership:** Stereotypes about leadership qualities often favor characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness and decisiveness. These stereotypes can deter women from pursuing political careers or seeking leadership roles within political parties.
* **Patriarchal Structures:** Many cultures, including India's, are characterized by patriarchal social structures that prioritize male authority and dominance in family and community affairs. This hierarchical system can marginalize women's voices and limit their influence in political arenas.
* **Modesty and Respectability:** Cultural expectations of female modesty and respectability may discourage women from engaging in assertive or confrontational political behaviors perceived as contrary to societal norms of feminine behavior.
* **Family and Marriage:** Societal expectations often place pressure on women to prioritize familial obligations over professional aspirations. Concerns about balancing political careers with family responsibilities may deter women from seeking or sustaining political positions.
* **Public Perception:** Women in politics may face scrutiny and criticism regarding their appearance, demeanor, and personal lives to a greater extent than their male counterparts. Negative media portrayal and public scrutiny can dissuade women from entering or remaining in political roles.
* **Stereotypes**: Indian society often associates leadership qualities with traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and toughness. Women who display these traits may be viewed as aggressive or overly ambitious, deviating from expected gender norms. Stereotypes portray women as less competent or capable than men in leadership roles, perpetuating the belief that men are inherently better suited for positions of authority and decision-making.
* **Double Standards:** Women in leadership positions may face heightened scrutiny and criticism compared to their male counterparts. Expectations regarding appearance, behavior, and emotional expression can create additional barriers for women seeking to assert their leadership.

**4. Institutional Barriers:**

Political parties play a pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes and governance. However, they often reflect and perpetuate societal gender biases, leading to significant challenges for women seeking political leadership roles.

* **Leadership Positions:** Political parties traditionally prioritize men for leadership roles, perpetuating the perception that men are more suitable and capable leaders. Women face barriers in gaining access to decision-making positions within party hierarchies.
* **Internal Dynamics:** Party structures and processes may be designed in ways that disadvantage women, such as informal networks that exclude women from key decision-making forums or informal expectations of loyalty and conformity that may be biased against women.
* **Campaign Resources:** Women candidates often have limited access to campaign resources such as funding, campaign staff, and media coverage compared to their male counterparts. This financial and logistical disadvantage hinders their electoral competitiveness.
* **Candidate Selection:** Political parties play a pivotal role in candidate selection, often favoring male candidates due to entrenched biases and perceptions of electability. Women may encounter resistance during the nomination process, where party leaders and decision-makers prioritize male candidates based on perceived viability.
* **Campaign Finance:** Women candidates frequently face financial barriers, as they may have limited access to campaign funding and resources compared to their male counterparts. Campaign finance regulations and practices may disadvantage women, who may struggle to mobilize adequate financial support for competitive electoral campaigns.
* **Electoral Systems:** The design of electoral systems, such as first-past-the-post (FPTP) or proportional representation (PR), can impact women's electoral success. In FPTP systems, where single-member constituencies often favor incumbents and established candidates, women may struggle to break into competitive electoral races.
* **Media and Visibility:** Media coverage and visibility play critical roles in shaping electoral outcomes. Women candidates often receive less media attention than men, contributing to lower name recognition and voter familiarity. Biased media portrayal and stereotypical representations of women in politics further hinder their electoral prospects.

**5. Impact of Gender Inequality on Women's Political Engagement**

Gender inequality often results in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, such as political leadership, public administration, and corporate governance. This lack of representation limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences brought to policy discussions and decision-making processes. Women's underrepresentation in decision-making roles can result in policies that inadequately address women's rights, needs, and interests. This can perpetuate gender inequalities in areas such as healthcare, education, economic empowerment, and violence prevention. Limited representation of women in policymaking can restrict the diversity of perspectives and experiences reflected in policy formulation. This may undermine the effectiveness and inclusivity of policies that impact diverse populations. Democracy is weakened when segments of the population, such as women, are systematically excluded from decision-making processes. Underrepresentation undermines the legitimacy and responsiveness of governance to the needs of all citizens. Policies and decisions formulated in environments dominated by men may fail to consider the needs, interests, and priorities of women and other marginalized groups. This exclusion perpetuates societal biases and reinforces inequalities in resource allocation and policy implementation. Gender inequality diminishes the prioritization of women's issues in governance agendas. Issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, healthcare access, and economic empowerment may receive inadequate attention and resources, leading to persistent disparities and barriers for women. Laws and policies may lack provisions that adequately protect and promote women's rights and address gender inequalities. This legislative gap reflects the limited influence of women in shaping policy frameworks that are inclusive and responsive to diverse societal needs.

**6. Strategies for Breaking Political Glass Ceilings**

Breaking political glass ceilings requires multifaceted strategies that encompass legislative reforms, political party initiatives, cultural shifts, media advocacy, and international cooperation. By dismantling systemic barriers and fostering inclusive political environments, societies can harness the full potential of women's leadership and ensure that political decision-making reflects the diversity and interests of all citizens. Emphasizing gender equality in political participation is essential for achieving sustainable development, promoting social justice, and strengthening democratic governance worldwide.Introducing legislative quotas or affirmative action policies that reserve a percentage of political seats for women can accelerate women's representation in legislatures. Countries like Rwanda and Bolivia have successfully implemented gender quotas to achieve significant increases in women's political participation. Strengthening legal frameworks to prohibit discrimination based on gender in political recruitment, promotion, and electoral processes. This includes enforcing equal opportunity laws and penalizing gender-based discrimination in political parties and electoral systems. Political parties can adopt internal policies that promote gender equality, such as setting targets for women's representation in leadership roles, establishing gender-sensitive recruitment practices, and ensuring equitable access to campaign resources and funding. Providing leadership training, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities specifically tailored for women aspiring to enter politics. These initiatives help build confidence, enhance political skills, and navigate the challenges women face in male-dominated political environments. Challenging traditional gender stereotypes and societal norms that limit women's roles in politics. Education and awareness campaigns can promote positive perceptions of women's leadership abilities and highlight the value of gender diversity in decision-making processes. Engaging civil society organizations and women's rights advocates in advocating for gender equality in politics. Mobilizing grassroots support and community outreach efforts to amplify women's voices and support their political aspirations. Highlighting successful women leaders as role models through media coverage and public recognition. Positive portrayals of women in politics can inspire young women and challenge negative stereotypes about women's political capabilities. Advocating for balanced and fair media coverage that avoids gender stereotypes and provides equitable visibility to women candidates and their policy agendas. Media can play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and support for women in politics. Learning from successful initiatives and experiences in other countries that have achieved greater gender parity in politics. International cooperation can facilitate knowledge exchange, technical assistance, and mutual support for advancing women's political participation globally. Civil society organizations, media outlets, and grassroots movements are indispensable allies in advocating for women's political rights and advancing gender equality in political participation. By leveraging their collective strengths, these stakeholders can drive transformative change, dismantle barriers to women's political empowerment, and create more inclusive and representative democracies that reflect the diversity and aspirations of all citizens. Empowering women in politics is not only a matter of human rights but also essential for achieving sustainable development and strengthening democratic governance worldwide.

**7. Challenges and Future Recommendations:**

Women continue to be underrepresented in Indian politics, with their participation in legislative bodies, local governance, and decision-making roles falling below critical mass. Structural barriers, including patriarchal norms, limited access to resources, and discrimination within political parties, hinder women's electoral success and leadership advancement. Women politicians often face threats, violence, and harassment, both online and offline, which deters many from entering or continuing in politics. Safety concerns and lack of institutional support further exacerbate these challenges, limiting women's ability to participate fully in political processes. Deep-rooted socio-cultural norms perpetuate gender stereotypes and traditional roles that constrain women's political aspirations and leadership ambitions. Expectations of women primarily as caregivers and homemakers marginalize their roles in decision-making and governance. Initiatives such as the Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve one-third of seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women, have gained traction. Although yet to be passed, such legislative reforms aim to enhance women's representation and influence in political decision-making. Increasing political mobilization among women, facilitated by grassroots movements, civil society organizations, and women's networks, has amplified voices and demands for gender equality in politics. Women-led movements and campaigns are advocating for policy reforms and institutional changes to promote women's participation and leadership. There is a growing trend of young women actively participating in politics, leveraging social media and digital platforms to engage with voters, advocate for policy issues, and challenge traditional barriers to entry. This youth-led activism is reshaping narratives around gender roles and leadership in Indian politics. Efforts to enhance women's political leadership through capacity-building programs, training workshops, and mentorship initiatives are expanding. These programs equip women with skills in campaigning, policy advocacy, and navigating political landscapes, enhancing their electoral viability and leadership potential. Governments and political parties are increasingly adopting gender-sensitive policies, including measures to address violence against women in politics, promote inclusive decision-making processes, and ensure equitable representation in party structures and electoral processes. Media platforms are playing a crucial role in promoting gender equality by providing visibility to women leaders, amplifying their voices, and challenging gender biases in political coverage. Balanced and inclusive media representation is essential for shaping public perceptions and supporting women's political aspirations. Resistance from entrenched political interests, reluctance to prioritize gender equality, and inadequate enforcement of existing laws and policies pose significant challenges to advancing women's rights in politics. Intersectional barriers, including caste, class, and regional disparities, intersect with gender inequalities, further marginalizing women from marginalized communities in political participation and leadership roles.

**7.1 Recommendations for Policymakers:**

* To expedite the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill to reserve one-third of seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women. Ensure effective implementation and enforcement to enhance women's representation in decision-making bodies.
* **To** Introduce legislation that prohibits discrimination based on gender in political recruitment, candidate selection, and party structures. Enforce stringent penalties for violations to ensure accountability and promote fair electoral processes.
* **To** incorporate gender equality and women's rights into educational curricula at all levels. Promote awareness among students about the importance of women's political participation and leadership.
* **To a**llocate adequate resources for capacity-building programs, leadership training, and mentorship initiatives targeting women aspiring to enter politics. Support initiatives that enhance women's skills in campaigning, policy formulation, and governance.

**7.2 Recommendations for Political Parties:**

* **To** adopt internal party quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of women candidates in elections. Establish clear guidelines and incentives for promoting women's leadership within party structures.
* **To** develop policies and mechanisms to address harassment and violence against women within party ranks. Provide support systems and grievance redressal mechanisms to protect women politicians from threats and intimidation.
* **To** facilitate leadership development programs and networking opportunities for women party members. Encourage mentorship relationships between senior leaders and aspiring women politicians to foster career progression.
* **To** demonstrate a commitment to gender equality through public statements, policy platforms, and inclusive party manifestos. Actively promote gender-sensitive policies and advocate for women's rights in legislative debates and policy formulation.

**7.3 Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Advocacy Groups:**

* **To** conduct research and produce evidence-based reports on gender disparities in political participation and representation. Advocate for policy reforms based on findings to promote gender equality in politics.
* **To** mobilize communities, particularly women and youth, to participate in advocacy campaigns and electoral processes. Raise awareness about the importance of women's political rights and encourage voter participation.
* **To** offer support services, such as legal aid, counseling, and security measures, to women politicians facing harassment or discrimination. Collaborate with legal experts and human rights organizations to ensure protection and justice for women in politics.
* **To** partner with media outlets to promote balanced and inclusive coverage of women politicians and their policy agendas. Highlight success stories and achievements of women leaders to inspire public confidence and support.

**7.4 Cross-cutting Recommendations:**

* **To** improve data collection methodologies to capture gender-disaggregated data on political participation, representation, and barriers faced by women. Use data-driven insights to inform policy decisions and monitor progress towards gender equality goals.
* **To** adopt intersectional approaches that recognize and address multiple dimensions of discrimination faced by women from marginalized communities, including caste, class, ethnicity, and disability status.
* **To** foster partnerships between policymakers, political parties, civil society, and international organizations to exchange best practices, resources, and technical assistance for advancing gender equality in politics.
* Addressing gender equality challenges in Indian politics requires concerted efforts from policymakers, political parties, civil society organizations, and advocates. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a more inclusive and representative political environment that empowers women leaders, promotes gender-sensitive policies, and strengthens democratic governance in India. Embracing gender equality in politics is essential for achieving sustainable development, social justice, and inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society.

**8. Conclusion:**

Political glass ceilings symbolize the enduring barriers that hinder women's full participation and leadership in Indian politics. This research paper has illuminated the historical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors contributing to these barriers, while also evaluating existing policies and initiatives aimed at breaking them down. Moving forward, concerted efforts by policymakers, political parties, civil society, and stakeholders are crucial to advancing gender parity, ensuring meaningful political engagement for women, and fostering inclusive and responsive governance in contemporary India. Throughout this study, we have explored the entrenched barriers that hinder women's advancement in political spheres, including structural biases, cultural norms, and systemic discrimination within political parties and electoral processes.

Despite these formidable challenges, the research has also illuminated critical strategies and emerging trends that offer hope for progress. Initiatives such as legislative reforms, advocacy campaigns led by civil society organizations, and increasing political mobilization among women are reshaping the landscape of Indian politics. These efforts are crucial in dismantling the political glass ceilings that have historically marginalized women from decision-making roles and leadership positions.

Moreover, the paper has highlighted the pivotal roles of policymakers, political parties, civil society organizations, and media in advancing gender equality agendas. Recommendations for implementing gender quotas, enhancing women's political empowerment through education and training, and fostering inclusive political environments are essential steps toward realizing substantive gender parity in Indian governance.

As we move forward, it is imperative for all stakeholders to sustain momentum and collective action in overcoming gender inequalities in politics. By promoting women's full and equal participation, addressing systemic biases, and ensuring robust support systems for women leaders, India can forge a path toward more inclusive, responsive, and representative democratic governance. Ultimately, achieving political gender equality is not only a matter of justice but also a fundamental prerequisite for realizing the aspirations of a truly equitable and democratic society in Contemporary India and beyond.

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