

Why does India still face challenges in addressing national development issues despite nearly seven decades of democratization?

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Abstract

India's seven-decade-long democratic journey has sustained political stability yet struggled to resolve persistent governance challenges, including economic disparities and gender inequality. This study employs a postcolonial framework and mixed-methods analysis to interrogate why democracy—despite enabling post-1991 market reforms and economic growth—fails to address systemic issues. Findings reveal that pre-reform stagnation stemmed from protectionist policies and bureaucratic inefficiencies, not democracy itself, while post-liberalization progress highlights the system's adaptability. However, entrenched gender discrimination, rooted in patriarchal norms and low female political representation, exposes democracy's inability to counter horizontal social oppression. Colonial legacies, socio-cultural fragmentation, and institutional inertia further constrain governance efficacy. The research concludes that India's democratic system operates within bounded limitations, requiring complementary reforms in economic inclusivity, social justice, and participatory governance to bridge the gap between procedural democracy and equitable development.

Keywords

Indian democracy, governance challenges, economic liberalization, gender inequality, postcolonialism, institutional reform.

1. Introduction

In political science, a political system is defined as the institutional framework governing the exercise of political authority within a state. It includes government structures, decision-making processes, legal frameworks, and mechanisms for civic participation [1]. Among these, the democratic system is widely regarded as a cornerstone of modern governance, embodying principles such as political equality, individual liberty, and popular sovereignty (Ibid, 2014).

India's adoption of a representative democracy in 1947 marked a deliberate effort to safeguard individual freedoms and social justice. While many postcolonial nations embraced democracy after WWII, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a second wave of democratic regression globally, leading to the collapse of nascent democracies in countries such as Pakistan, Brazil, and Greece. Notably, India's democracy has persisted with remarkable resilience, interrupted only by a 21-month emergency period (1975–1977).

Scholarly debates on the conditions for democratic sustenance highlight factors such as societal cohesion [2], Political neutrality and checks on power [3], and fiscal transparency [4]. However, India's historical context challenges these theoretical frameworks. At independence, India had a literacy rate of only 18.3% [5,6], a small middle class (10% of the population), and a deeply fragmented society marked by linguistic, religious, and caste diversity [7]. Despite these

obstacles, India's democracy has endured, underscoring its capacity to preserve democratic principles in adverse conditions.

Yet, democratic resilience does not equate to effective governance. India continues to face significant governance challenges despite decades of democratic institutions. Economically, India lags behind China, with its 2018 per capita GDP at \$2010 compared to China's \$9771 [8]. Infrastructure deficiencies, such as overcrowded transportation systems and delayed sanitation improvements, highlight governance inefficiencies. Public service quality also remains a critical concern, with India's 2019 infant mortality rate at 30 per 1000 births compared to China's 7, and a life expectancy gap of 8 years [9]. Additionally, political challenges persist, including the prevalence of criminal charges among parliamentarians—233 out of 539 winning members in the 2019 elections faced such charges, marking a 44% increase since 2009 [10].

These issues raise a critical question: Why has India's seven-decade-old democracy failed to overcome persistent governance challenges? Does its democratic framework inherently limit its capacity to address these dilemmas? This paper examines India's governance challenges, focusing on economic progress and gender equality as key metrics. It explores the limitations of India's democratic system in addressing these challenges and evaluates the broader implications for democratic governance, see [Figure 1](#).



Figure 1: Electoral democracy (Devasahayam,2022)

2. Organization of the Text

The relationship between democracy and national development has long been a central topic in political science and economics. While India's democratic system is often criticized for its perceived negative impact on national development, the literature review reveals that democracy is not the sole determinant of a nation's progress. Instead, national development is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including economic policies and gender dynamics. Overemphasizing the role of India's democratic system in its developmental challenges risks oversimplification.

Scholars offer diverse perspectives on democracy. Rawls (2020) defines it as an institutional framework ensuring individual liberties, fair cooperation, and improving conditions for the disadvantaged [11]. Stout (2003), however, emphasizes its cultural dimensions, particularly the role of public reason [12]. For this study, democracy is conceptualized as a political system. National development is equally multifaceted. Smith (2010) underscores the significance of economic development in achieving national prosperity and strength [13], while Peet and

Hartwick (2015) argue for a broader view encompassing socio-economic transformations such as gender equality and political systems [14]. Sen (2001) further expands this framework by introducing goals like political freedom, economic opportunity, social security, and rights protection, which have gained significant traction in contemporary discourse [15].

Given these theoretical divergences, this paper adopts economic development and gender equality as key metrics for evaluating India's national development. It examines whether deficiencies within India's democratic system contribute to its developmental challenges, thereby exploring the limitations of democratic governance in addressing these issues.

2.1. Does democracy necessarily lead to national development?

Does democracy necessarily lead to national development? India, the world's most populous democracy with over 1.3 billion people, serves as a critical case study [16]. Since independence in 1947, India has maintained a Western-style democratic system rooted in British traditions, despite periods of authoritarian rule (e.g., the 1975–1977 Emergency). Scholars remain divided on whether this democratic framework has advanced national development.

Proponents of democracy highlight its positive correlation with development. Hadenius (1992) argues that democratic systems foster social modernization, legitimacy, and governmental accountability, creating favorable conditions for national progress [17]. Sen (1999) further emphasizes that democracy enhances human development by expanding individual freedoms and capabilities, thereby elevating societal well-being [15].

Critics, however, identify significant limitations. Przeworski et al. (2000) contend that democratic systems alone may not suffice to drive economic progress, often leading to political fragmentation, policy inconsistency, and governance inefficiencies [2]. Additionally, democratic processes can intensify political competition, increase discord, and raise fiscal pressures [18]. Furthermore, the universal application of democratic models sometimes overlooks contextual specificities, overly emphasizing Western values at the expense of local circumstances [19]. Thus, democracy may not inherently guarantee prosperity and can exacerbate social divisions. While a robust political system is essential for stability and prosperity, overemphasizing its role can obscure the contributions of diverse political actors within governance structures. This paper examines whether India's democratic framework has hindered national development, focusing on economic progress and gender equality as key metrics.

2.2. The role of political systems is not limitless

The role of political systems is not limitless. A nation's political authority is structured according to its objectives and functions, ultimately shaping its political system [20]. Huntington (1993) describes a political system as the framework for organizing and operating power within a nation [21], while Easton (1957) breaks it down into inputs, outputs, environment, feedback, and conversion processes. Based on these perspectives, a political system should not be seen as the sole determinant of governance efficiency, as its outcomes are influenced by multiple factors [22].

Fukuyama (2014) introduces the concept of the "limited state," emphasizing that all political systems, democratic or otherwise, have inherent limitations [1]. Liu (2022) further explores this idea, noting that democratic systems rely on the active participation of political actors [7]. When these actors are disengaged, democracy does not automatically ensure better governance. Thus, the influence of political systems is bounded, and democratic systems merely serve as mechanisms to facilitate diverse political activities.

The impact of political systems on national development is therefore subject to limitations and uncertainty. It results from the interaction of various factors, including policy choices, continuity, public expenditure, education, human rights, trade, and foreign direct investment [23]. This paper focuses on India's post-independence economic policies and gender inequality

issues. Historical economic policies reveal the trajectory of national development, highlighting factors that drive or hinder growth. Gender equality, being a human rights concern, is also crucial for democratic systems. Examining these two aspects enhances our understanding of how India's democratic system influences national development and the challenges it faces.

2.3. The Role of Economic Policies in Democratic Performance

When India faces economic challenges, its democratic political system often comes under scrutiny. Bhagwati (1993) criticizes India's democratic system for its complexity, which hinders efficient economic reforms and impedes progress [24]. Conversely, Dreze and Sen (2002) argue that India's democracy has provided the necessary institutional framework for economic development and reform [25]. However, these perspectives may overstate the political system's role while neglecting historical and economic structures. In reality, misguided economic policies have been the primary obstacle to India's economic development [26]. Drawing from Easton's (1957) theory, ill-suited economic policies introduced into India's democratic system have failed to yield favorable outputs. Thus, the political system is not the sole determinant of economic development; the discord between India's democratic system and inappropriate policies has caused economic stagnation.

Since 1947, India's economic policies have evolved from a planned economy to a mixed strategy. Often misaligned with socio-economic conditions and the political system, these policies resulted in slow growth until the 1991 Rao reforms, which shifted India toward market-oriented policies and spurred growth [7]. Specifically, India's economic growth rate increased from 5.6% (1980–1990) to 6.6% (1990–2010), making it one of the world's fastest-growing economies [27]. Notably, India has experienced consistent growth since 1947, with no prolonged periods of negative growth, and significant progress has been achieved when rational policies were implemented.

Inclusive political systems like democracy can promote inclusive economic systems, such as free markets, thereby driving growth [28]. The Rao reforms, enacted within a democratic framework, included industrial and trade liberalization, partial privatization, and increased globalization [29]. These measures, characterized by market economy features, suggest that India's democratic system provided the political foundation and social support necessary for economic reforms. Through electoral mechanisms, the Rao government gained popular support and political legitimacy [30]. In conclusion, characterizing India's democratic system as an impediment to economic development is inaccurate; instead, democratic politics may have facilitated economic progress to a certain extent.

2.4. Gender discrimination and democratic dysfunction

In addition to economic development, gender equality is a critical measure of national progress. Examining the interplay between India's gender discrimination issues and its democratic system reveals insights into democratic governance's impact on national development. Gender equality is not only central to democratic politics but also intertwined with human rights and social equity, which underpin democratic ideals. India's democratic framework, established at independence, enshrines equal rights for all individuals, irrespective of background [31]. Women's political participation is vital for advancing gender equality. It focuses on both individual women's rights and systemic gender equity [32]. While democratic systems and gender equality generally exhibit a positive relationship, this link is mediated by historical and political contexts [33]. India's democracy has blended social equity movements with liberal democracy and indigenous norms [34].

Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains severe in India. The 2022 Global Gender Gap Report ranked India 135th among 146 countries, with a Gender Inequality Index of 0.629 [35]. Deep-rooted socio-cultural traditions and patriarchal systems perpetuate gender inequality by

reinforcing male superiority and female subordination [36]. These norms, enforced through non-political means, represent a pervasive form of social oppression [37], contradicting democratic ideals and undermining India's democratic politics.

In summary, scholarly work on democracy and national development highlights both the potential benefits and limitations of democratic systems. India's democratic governance faces challenges and opportunities, particularly in addressing gender discrimination, which poses significant obstacles to democratic implementation. A comprehensive understanding of India's democratic governance requires examining these multifaceted interactions.

2.5. Research Gap

Existing research on Indian democracy often examines governance challenges—such as economic stagnation, gender inequality, and institutional flaws—in isolation, overlooking the systematic integration of colonial socio-historical legacies. Few studies explore how colonial structures, such as bureaucratic centralization and caste hierarchies, continue to shape governance, or how horizontal social oppression, like patriarchal norms, interacts with democratic processes.

This study addresses these gaps by applying a postcolonial lens to India's democracy, linking economic policies and gender inequality to colonial continuities. Methodologically, it combines qualitative critiques with quantitative data, offering a holistic perspective absent in prior works. By contextualizing governance challenges within colonial legacies and demonstrating how social oppression undermines democratic ideals, this study advances a novel understanding of democracy's bounded agency in postcolonial settings. Furthermore, comparative analysis with Pakistan challenges deterministic views on authoritarianism and development, enriching debates on democratic governance and intersectional inequality. These insights provide policymakers with a nuanced roadmap for reform.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed research design grounded in postcolonial theory to examine the influence of India's democratic political system on national development. Postcolonialism, as a critical theoretical framework, interrogates the enduring legacy of colonialism and its impact on power dynamics, identity politics, and cultural elements in formerly colonized nations [38]. Given that India's democratic system emerged post-1947 following British colonial rule, this perspective offers a particularly salient analytical lens for understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape India's democratic institutions, governance structures, and developmental trajectory.

The postcolonial framework further illuminates power imbalances inherited from colonial rule and their persistence in contemporary governance, economic policymaking, and development outcomes. Additionally, it underscores the interplay between cultural diversity, identity construction, and democratic processes, particularly in a nation characterized by multiple identities and cultural pluralism. This methodology provides a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing the complexities of India's democratic development and its ongoing challenges, revealing how colonial legacies and cultural dynamics intersect to influence India's trajectory toward gender equality and democratic consolidation.

3.1. Data collection

Given time constraints and the challenges of obtaining primary data, this study adopts a secondary data collection methodology. This approach leverages existing literature, reports, and statistical data to examine the challenges and opportunities of India's democratic system in practice. The method is selected for its ability to provide comprehensive historical and

contemporary insights into the evolution of India's democratic system, its influencing factors, and its role in national development.

To achieve the research objectives, this study will collect diverse forms of secondary data, including academic articles, reports, and statistics. A keyword search strategy will be employed to retrieve relevant literature from databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus. Keywords will include terms like "political system," "India," "national development," "democracy," and "governance," ensuring alignment with the research theme.

For an in-depth analysis of India's economic policies within its democratic framework, this study will gather historical economic policy data and development statistics. Particular emphasis will be placed on data linking economic policies to India's democratic system. Additionally, to examine gender inequality and its relationship with democracy, the study will utilize data on female political participation, employment rates, and gender disparities. Key sources include international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Economic Forum, and the World Bank.

This extensive data collection approach ensures comprehensive coverage of governance-related themes in India, enhancing the depth and scope of the study. By integrating these datasets, the research substantiates its analyses and provides a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

3.2. Data analysis

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to address the research objectives. Qualitative methods excel in providing nuanced insights into social phenomena, capturing their complexity [39], while quantitative methods offer precision in analyzing structured research questions, particularly in evaluating policy effectiveness [40]. By combining these approaches, this study maximizes the strengths of both methodologies, enhancing the reliability and scientific validity of the findings while enabling deeper exploration of the research questions.

Data analysis involves thematic categorization, systematic integration, and critical evaluation of information to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in existing knowledge. This methodological framework supports theory-building by uncovering correlations and trends, thereby providing a robust foundation for subsequent inquiry.

To examine the impact of democratic political systems on national development, this study employs qualitative methods, relying on literature reviews and theoretical analyses of political systems. Easton's (1957) framework on political system analysis and Fukuyama's (2014) critique of institutional limitations serve as foundational theoretical references [1,22].

In exploring India's democratic system and its influence on economic policies, this research focuses on historical analyses of India's development trajectory, supported by statistical data from authoritative sources such as the World Bank and United Nations. A case study of India's economic reforms pre- and post-1991 Rao reforms is conducted to illustrate the interplay between democratic governance and economic policy.

Additionally, this study investigates gender inequality and its implications for India's democratic system. Data from the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* and the United Nations' *Country Fact Sheet: UN Women Data Hub (2023)* are analyzed to assess gender discrimination and its impact on governance [41]. The research draws on academic articles, reports, and empirical findings to evaluate how gender bias intersects with democratic processes in India.

3.3. Limitation

While secondary data offer advantages such as diverse sources and cost-effectiveness, their use in analyzing complex social and political issues—such as the impact of India's democratic

system on national development—presents notable limitations. First, the quality and reliability of secondary data may be compromised due to potential incompleteness or interpretative errors introduced by external researchers or institutions, which could affect research accuracy. Second, existing secondary data may fail to meet specific research requirements, often lacking the depth or specificity needed for nuanced analysis. Additionally, for intricate subjects, secondary data may lack sufficient contextual or background information, limiting the comprehensiveness and depth of findings.

To address these limitations, this study supplements secondary data with complementary data collection and fieldwork. This approach mitigates the constraints of relying solely on secondary sources and enhances the credibility and persuasiveness of the findings. By integrating these methods, the research achieves a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research questions, thereby providing a robust foundation for analysis.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. The Impact of Colonialism on India's Democratic System

The enduring legacy of British colonial rule has profoundly influenced India's democratic system, shaping its political, social, and cultural dimensions. This study adopts a postcolonial perspective to examine how colonial legacies continue to impact India's democratic framework. India's diversity, marked by over 22 official languages, six major religions, and 2,000 communities [7], necessitated a centralized administrative system during British rule. Post-independence, India retained this structure while introducing federalism to accommodate its pluralistic reality. Colonial institutions, such as legal frameworks, courts, and police systems [42], provided a foundation for democratic governance, ensuring justice and order. Additionally, colonial rule introduced modern political organizations and party systems [43], exemplified by the Indian National Congress, which influenced post-independence political participation and institutional development.

Colonialism also fostered political consciousness in India. The recognition of free speech and media freedom during British rule was codified in India's post-independence constitution, enabling public discourse and information dissemination. Furthermore, the establishment of a modern education system cultivated an intellectual elite instrumental in shaping democratic institutions and driving socio-political change. These experiences contributed to India's political awakening, fueling the independence movement and eventual sovereignty in 1947.

However, colonialism's negative impacts persist. The reinforcement of the caste system and economic exploitation during colonial rule created enduring challenges for democratic governance. Resource extraction and disruption of traditional economic structures further complicated India's post-independence development trajectory. Thus, colonialism's legacy is multifaceted, offering both opportunities and obstacles for India's democratic system.

In conclusion, British colonialism left a complex imprint on India's democracy. While it provided institutional frameworks and political consciousness, it also entrenched social and economic challenges. Despite these hurdles, India has established a diverse, secular democracy grounded in the rule of law and fundamental rights, influenced by Western democratic ideals and nonviolent resistance. Yet, India's democracy continues to grapple with developmental and gender equality issues, underscoring the need for ongoing reform and adaptation.

4.2. Has India's economy truly failed to bring economic development?

4.2.1. India's historical economic policies and their efficacy

India's post-independence economic trajectory reflects its adoption of a Soviet-style planned economy, characterized by centralized control and extensive state intervention. From its constitution's inception, India pursued a socialist secular state model, implementing five-year

plans until 2014 [44]. This approach, akin to China's pre-reform model, centralized economic power, leading to monopolies and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Government intervention, often through licensing and regulatory approvals [7], diverted business focus from market competition to securing state favor, fostering corruption. Transparency International's 1995 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked India 35th out of 41 nations [45], highlighting the democratic system's challenges in ensuring accountability.

India's initial economic policies prioritized self-reliance and protectionism, with high tariffs averaging 113% on industrial goods in 1990–1991 [46]. This inward-looking strategy stifled growth, resulting in an average annual GDP growth rate of 3.5% from the 1950s to the 1990s [47], far below the Asian Tigers. Poverty rates remained around 60% during this period (ibid), underscoring the democratic system's limitations in addressing economic challenges.

The 1991 economic reforms marked a shift toward liberalization, privatization, and globalization, mirroring China's reform trajectory. Tariffs were reduced from 150% to approximately 10% [7], and GDP growth surged to an average of 5.5% post-reform, compared to 1.1% pre-reform [47]. Trade volumes increased significantly, with merchandise trade rising from USD 41.549 billion in 1990 to USD 839.242 billion in 2018 [48], and exports growing at an average annual rate of 10.9% (ibid). Poverty rates declined sharply, with 270 million people lifted out of poverty between 2006 and 2016 [47]. Under Modi's leadership since 2014, India's economic growth outpaced China's, averaging 7.5% from 2014 to 2018 (ibid).

These developments raise questions about the democratic system's role in India's economic turnaround. While the reforms were driven by democratic decision-making, their success underscores the system's adaptability. However, whether this reflects inherent strengths of India's democracy or its capacity to respond to crises remains open to interpretation. Thus, whether India's post-1991 economic success reflects the strengths of its democratic system remains a subject of debate, see Figure 2.

India's economic data across different periods reveal that prior to the 1990s reforms, its economic development was constrained by protectionist policies and bureaucratic inefficiencies. However, the 1990s marked a turning point with the introduction of market-oriented reforms and economic liberalization, which opened India to foreign investment and trade. During this decade, India achieved significant economic growth, even outpacing China at certain points.

Notably, India has maintained its democratic system consistently since independence, demonstrating its compatibility with economic development. The pre-reform stagnation and post-reform surge highlight that India's democratic framework is not inherently an obstacle to progress but can, under appropriate policies, serve as a catalyst for economic advancement.

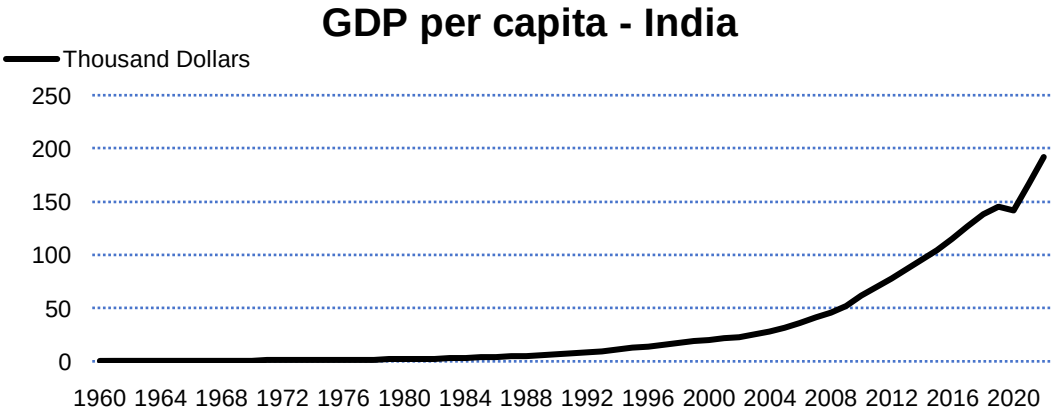


Figure 2: GDP per capita (World Bank, 2022)

4.2.2. Analysis of India's Democratic System and Economic Policies

India's constitutional preamble explicitly outlines its commitment to building a socialist secular state, a goal deeply embedded in its democratic framework. This system provides the institutional mechanism for formulating and implementing economic policies, including decisions on economic models. India's adoption of a socialist-style planned economy reflects the distinctive role of its political system, where government intervention in economic and societal affairs is extensive. Whether through pre-liberalization five-year plans or post-reform policies, India's economic trajectory has been shaped within its democratic framework, underscoring the interplay between democratic governance and economic development.

India has maintained its democratic system consistently since independence, challenging claims that pre-1990s economic stagnation stemmed from democratic failures. The significant economic growth following 1990s reforms demonstrates that India's democratic system does not inherently hinder development. While comparisons with China, another populous developing nation, highlight divergent political and cultural trajectories, both countries have achieved poverty reduction through distinct liberalization strategies. Such comparisons, however, may lack comprehensiveness due to differences in historical and social contexts. A more appropriate comparison could involve Pakistan, which shares India's colonial history and geographic proximity but has experienced prolonged authoritarian rule.

Pakistan's economy has undergone four political transitions over seven decades, with much of this period marked by authoritarian governance. World Bank data (2023) shows that in 2018, India's GDP per capita (\$2,016) surpassed Pakistan's (\$1,472). Similarly, WHO data (2023) indicates that India's life expectancy (70.8 years in 2019) exceeded Pakistan's (65.6 years). These disparities suggest that authoritarianism has not translated into superior economic outcomes in Pakistan.

In conclusion, India's economic challenges stem primarily from policy missteps rather than democratic governance. While infrastructure gaps, public service deficiencies, and interest group conflicts persist, India's democratic system facilitates diverse inputs in policymaking, yielding multifaceted outcomes. Such pluralism underscores the resilience of democratic frameworks in addressing developmental complexities.

4.3. Has India Addressed Gender Discrimination in its Economy?

4.3.1. Gender Discrimination and Its Impact on Democratic Development

India's democratic system, while effective in certain domains, has demonstrated limitations in addressing gender discrimination, a challenge that persists despite constitutional guarantees and legal reforms. Despite enshrining gender equality in its democratic framework, India's mechanisms for achieving this goal remain constrained by entrenched social, cultural, and institutional barriers.

Legally, India has criminalized gender discrimination, including sexual violence and rape, and has enacted policies such as the Women's Reservation Bill, which reserves approximately one-third of political seats for women [49]. According to the United Nations Women's Division (2023), India has implemented legal frameworks addressing gender equality at an 83.3% rate, with 72.8% of women in the reproductive age group (15–49 years) meeting their family planning needs through modern methods (ibid.) [41]. These measures reflect India's commitment to advancing gender equality.

However, progress in political representation remains uneven. While India ranks 18th globally in women's political empowerment, largely due to historical female leadership [35], only 14.4% of parliamentary seats were held by women as of February 2021 [35]. This disparity underscores the persistence of gender inequality and highlights systemic limitations in India's democratic system, often characterized as "male dominated." Research by Evans et al. (2022),

surveying nearly 30,000 Indian adults, identifies social, cultural, and religious norms as significant barriers to women's political participation [50].

Beyond political representation, ensuring women's basic rights and personal security remains a critical challenge. Despite legal protections, women in India face pervasive violence, including domestic abuse, caste-based discrimination, dowry-related deaths, honor killings, and sexual violence. As of 2018, 18.4% of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the preceding year [35]. Additionally, India's maternal mortality rate stands at 145 deaths per 100,000 live births, with only 41.6% of mothers receiving postnatal financial support (*ibid.*). These statistics reveal systemic gaps in safeguarding women's dignity and rights, despite legal and policy frameworks aimed at addressing these issues.

In conclusion, while India has made strides in legal and policy reforms to combat gender discrimination, persistent social and cultural barriers, coupled with inadequate implementation, continue to hinder progress. The democratic system's capacity to address these challenges remains constrained, underscoring the need for deeper institutional and societal reforms, see Figure 3.

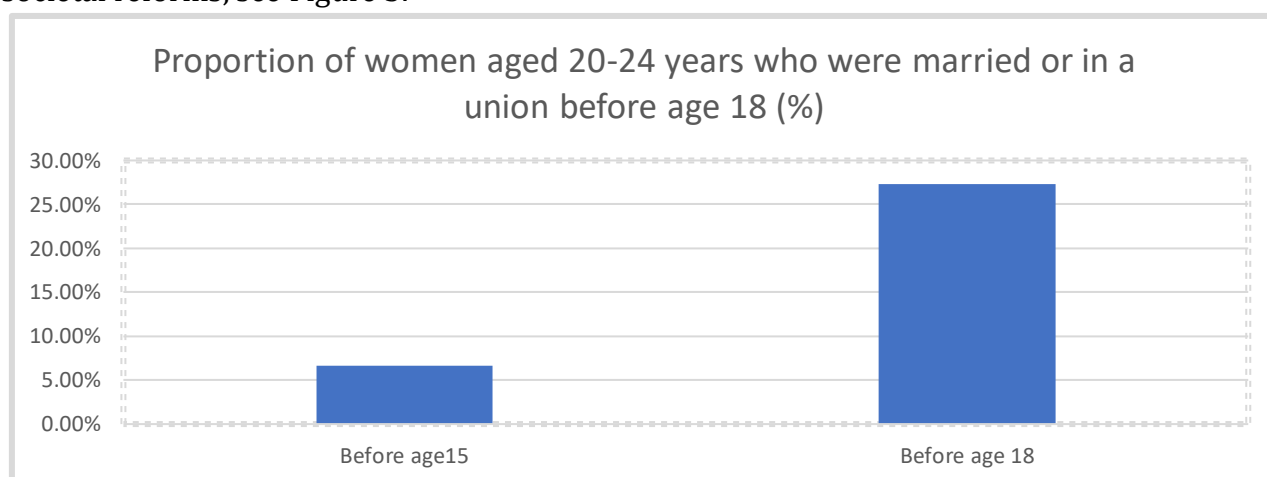


Figure 3: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 19 (UN women, 2023)

Therefore, although the Indian government has proactively engaged in various areas to protect women's rights and achieve gender equality, making some progress, complex factors such as societal and religious beliefs continue to negatively impact Indian women's rights to some extent, further underscoring the complexity of gender equality issues. These difficulties give rise to feelings of insecurity and a dearth of respect for women within society, serving as a clear manifestation of India's gender inequality issues. It is worth noting that the stability of democratic systems often hinges on social harmony and inclusivity. If women's basic rights are not effectively safeguarded, society may experience tension and instability, potentially exerting adverse effects on the overall development and governance of the nation. Therefore, securing gender equality and safeguarding the rights of women is not just a moral duty; it also stands as a pivotal component in upholding the stability of the democratic system and fostering sustainable national progress.

4.3.2. Analysis of India's Democratic System and Gender Discrimination

In India, the democratic system has struggled to effectively address gender discrimination, which has emerged as a significant factor influencing democratic governance. Unlike economic development issues, which are often addressed at the national government level, gender inequality in democratic societies like India is deeply rooted in societal norms and cultural traditions, constituting a pervasive form of social oppression [52]. While government

oppression typically relies on state coercion, gender inequality stems from horizontal social structures that shape norms and values, often proving more resistant to change. Addressing government oppression can be approached through protests, demonstrations, and legislative reforms, but tackling oppression rooted in dispersed societal practices is far more challenging due to the vast number of individuals involved.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) describe gender inequality as a "cage of norms," a self-sustaining social structure where norms are enforced through social sanctions, limiting individual freedoms and innovation [28]. In India, this normative cage profoundly affects women's career choices, personal safety, and social status, thereby undermining democratic governance. Traditional beliefs, often based on religion and destiny, have historically perpetuated male dominance and female subordination. Despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality, legal protections for women have eroded pre-existing male privileges, fueling resentment and gender tensions. Male-dominated power structures further hinder women's political participation, resulting in underrepresentation in policymaking and biased decision-making. As of February 2021, only 14.4% of parliamentary seats were held by women [35], reflecting systemic gender bias and undermining the representativeness of India's democratic system.

Gender inequality also distorts India's electoral system by prioritizing identity logic over rational logic [53]. Men's historical advantage in political participation perpetuates identity-based decision-making, weakening the democratic competitive system. When identity logic overrides rational logic, democratic processes lose their effectiveness, exacerbating gender disparities.

In conclusion, India's democratic system faces significant challenges in addressing gender inequality, which manifests in low political participation, biased decision-making, and constrained social development. To strengthen democratic governance, India must prioritize measures to eliminate gender discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities and status for women across political, social, and economic spheres. This is not only a moral imperative but also critical for democratic stability and sustainable national progress.

5. Conclusion

Up to this point, this study has primarily focused on delving into whether India's democratic political system, established after its independence, has positively impacted the nation's overall development. This chapter integrates the discussions and analyses of the interactions between India's economic policies, gender discrimination issues, and the democratic system, as presented in the previous chapters, with the aim of providing a comprehensive and structured overview of this subject. Finally, a comprehensive summary and assessment of these analyses and viewpoints will be presented.

5.1. Economic Policy in Relation to Indian Democracy

India's economic development cannot be simplistically attributed to its democratic political system. Although India adopted a series of protectionist economic policies in its early years of independence, leading to economic stagnation, significant economic growth was achieved after the initiation of economic liberalization policies in 1991. This suggests that the democratic system did not impede India's economic development. However, India's economic issues primarily stem from long-term accumulations of economic policy errors, including excessive government intervention, complex approval processes, and issues related to corruption. These problems have, to some extent, undermined economic efficiency and development. In comparison with other countries such as China, India experienced relatively slower economic

growth for a period, but this is closely linked to its unique colonial history, culture, and social structure, factors that cannot be overlooked.

Lastly, it's worth noting that India's democratic political system provides a platform for a diversified policy formulation process, resulting in diverse policy outcomes. Despite facing various challenges, the existence of a democratic system allows for extensive debates and reflections on different policies and reform directions, contributing to the gradual resolution of economic issues. Therefore, India's economic development issues are more associated with specific economic policies and their implementation rather than the democratic political system itself. India has made significant progress following the implementation of economic liberalization policies, but relentless efforts are still required to address internal issues in order to achieve more sustainable and comprehensive economic growth.

5.2. Gender Equality in the Context of Indian Democracy

India's democratic political system faces complex and severe challenges in addressing gender discrimination. Despite numerous legal and policy measures adopted by the Indian government aimed at improving the social status of women and protecting women's rights, gender inequality issues persist widely, exerting adverse effects on the democratic system. Firstly, India's political system exhibits apparent shortcomings concerning gender equality. Although female leaders have emerged, the representation of women in parliament remains relatively low, reflecting deeply rooted gender inequality issues in the political arena, sometimes even described as a "male-dominated" democratic system. Social and cultural traditions, as well as religious beliefs, have also been identified as major impediments to women's political participation, revealing profound societal and cultural root problems that pose serious barriers to gender equality.

Secondly, gender discrimination, as a widely prevalent form of social oppression, poses a threat to the fundamental social rights and personal safety of women. In comparison to government oppression, this social oppression is more challenging to change, as it involves millions, tens of millions, or even hundreds of millions of dispersed individuals. Meanwhile, long-standing gender inequality maintains the advantageous position of men in political participation, potentially weakening India's democratic competitive system. Securing gender equality and safeguarding the rights of women is not just a matter of moral duty; it also constitutes a vital factor in preserving the stability of the democratic system and advancing sustainable national development. If the basic rights of women are not effectively safeguarded, society may experience tension and instability, which could have adverse effects on the overall development and governance of the democratic society.

5.3. The role of democracy is limited

In assessing a nation's success or failure, there often exists a bias that overemphasizes the impact of its political system on its functioning while overlooking the roles played by other political actors. There seems to be a prevailing notion that a nation's democratization inevitably leads to economic prosperity, clean politics, and improvements in public services, steering everything towards a better direction. However, reality often deviates from this ideal. A nation's genuine development is typically influenced by the collaborative efforts of various political actors, including the capabilities of government leaders and the level of support from the populace, among other factors. Therefore, the role of a democratic system should be viewed as a mechanism to address issues of governance and abuse of power, effectively returning power to the people by granting them institutionalized speech rights. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee that all issues will be fully resolved. Hence, India does not automatically achieve development simply by opting for a democratic system.

India's democratic system appears to exhibit limited effectiveness in terms of national governance, which can be largely attributed to problematic elements introduced into the democratic framework since its inception and the influence of historical issues inherent to the nation, including but not limited to the economic policy and gender discrimination issues discussed in this paper. In summary, India's political system is just one among several factors affecting the performance of national governance, often playing a secondary role in many instances. In fact, some nations, regardless of whether they adopt democratic or non-democratic political systems, seem to face challenges in effectively pursuing nation-building. Iraq serves as a typical example, as these countries have undergone continuous political system changes over the past few decades, experimenting with various forms of political systems but failing to achieve substantive accomplishments.

Nonetheless, it's crucial to emphasize that having a constrained viewpoint regarding the effectiveness of political systems doesn't mean believing they are ineffective. In other words, it does not imply that democracy cannot enhance governance performance, but rather that the impact of democracy on governance performance is subject to various conditions. In essence, democracy is viewed as a decision-making process rather than the decisions themselves. While this process inherently holds value by respecting the values of the people, its outcomes depend entirely on the content input into the process. Therefore, as a procedural framework, democracy carries the potential to reflect respect for the will of the people. However, the quality of a democratic political system is primarily influenced by the judgment and collaborative abilities of political participants. Once these capabilities are lacking or constrained, there is no reason to believe that democracy will inevitably lead to better governance performance.

5.4. Democratization as an Ongoing Trial-and-Error Process

Democratization is a continuous experimental process and not a one-size-fits-all solution, with its establishment not guaranteeing the attainment of all positive outcomes. Realizing the potential benefits of a democratic system requires sound economic policies, active participation of citizen groups, and a range of other conditions, some of which have not been extensively discussed in this paper. Although some political systems and structures may appear better suited to embody human-centric characteristics, in reality, no political system can ensure the permanent resolution of all problems.

Market economies have liberating social consequences, and as India's market economy develops, its economic policies and gender inequality issues are gradually improving. However, this process requires time and patience because democratic systems typically achieve progress through trial and error, which takes time. Although the pace of India's transformation in this process may be frustrating, it also reflects the characteristics of a democratic system, which prioritizes gradual improvement over mandatory change. Therefore, while India's democratic system provides citizens with a certain degree of participation and rights, addressing the limitations of the political system itself and the challenges faced by the nation is crucial to advancing the country's progress and development.

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