BEYOND THE BALLOT: REIMAGINING ELECTORAL INCLUSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the electoral rights of persons with disabilities in India by tracing the distance between formal legal equality and substantive electoral inclusion. Using political participation theory as an interpretive frame, the article argues that low electoral participation among persons with disabilities does not stem from a lack of civic interest but from structural conditions, inaccessible infrastructure, unreliable digital systems, and administrative design, that were never built around disabled voters in the first place. It examines India's constitutional and statutory framework alongside its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and identifies recurring barriers affecting voters with locomotor, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial, and institutional forms of disability. Drawing on recent developments, including the Election Commission's expanding home-voting programme and a significant 2025-26 Madras High Court intervention on polling-station and digital accessibility, the article contends that Indian electoral democracy must move beyond symbolic accommodation toward enforceable, audited, and rights-based inclusion.

Keywords: Electoral Democracy, Political Participation Theory, Substantive Inclusion, Disability Rights, Structural Barriers, Election Commission of India.

I. INTRODUCTION

In most democratic systems, voting is the most direct way for citizens to take part in political life. But democratic legitimacy is not exhausted merely by holding regular elections; it rests on the active and equal involvement of every citizen in that process. When citizens participate in elections, they influence public policy, shape governance, and hold institutions accountable. Where access to this process is obstructed, democracy weakens and representation suffers. It is therefore essential that every citizen be able to vote freely and effectively for democracy to remain genuine.

The recognition of electoral participation as a basic human right flows from foundational international legal instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 together lay the groundwork for the right to take part in public affairs, including the right to vote and to contest elections.[1] This position is reinforced by guidance such as the United Nations Human Rights Committee's materials on elections, which stress that electoral processes must be inclusive, accessible, and fair as a matter of course, not as a discretionary courtesy extended to some citizens and withheld from others.

The scale of the issue is considerable. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately fifteen percent of the global population lives with some form of disability, with nearly eighty percent concentrated in developing countries.[2] In India, this translates into a very large population whose relationship with the ballot box has historically been shaped less by personal disinclination and more by structural neglect: inaccessible polling infrastructure, exclusionary legal presumptions, and administrative processes designed around a non-disabled default voter.

This article reviews existing accessibility measures in the Indian electoral system, evaluates newer interventions such as assistive technology and alternative voting modalities, and situates these developments against the broader principle of electoral integrity. Its purpose is to advance an understanding of democratic participation that moves beyond formal equality, the fact that no law explicitly bars a disabled citizen from voting, toward substantive equality,

[1]Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 21, G.A. Res. 217A (III) (Dec. 10, 1948); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 25, adopted Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171.
[2]World Health Organization, World Report on Disability (2011).

in which that citizen can actually exercise the right without depending on discretionary goodwill at the level of an individual polling booth.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Scholars have proposed several theories to explain differences in political participation across societies. While these theories vary, they generally converge on three interacting factors: resources, mobilisation, and instrumental motivation.[3] Resources include the personal assets individuals bring to political involvement, such as time, financial means, and political knowledge; those with more of these resources are generally better positioned to participate. Mobilisation describes how political parties, civil society groups, and media encourage and support participation, sharpening political awareness and reinforcing the belief that civic engagement matters. Instrumental motivation refers to the belief that individual participation, particularly when exercised collectively, can meaningfully influence public policy or electoral outcomes.

Among these approaches, resource-based theories have received the most scholarly attention, treating high voter turnout as a proxy for a healthier, more resourced citizenry. Yet this framing carries a significant blind spot once applied to disabled voters: it locates the cause of low participation in what a voter personally lacks rather than in what the electoral system itself fails to provide. Participation is also conditioned by whether a citizen can physically reach a polling station, comply with identification requirements built around non-disabled bodies, and complete administrative steps that quietly assume literacy, mobility, and sensory capacity as default conditions. This structural emphasis excludes significant segments of the population, including persons with disabilities, older adults, and those with restricted mobility, not because they lack the desire to vote but because the system was not designed with them in view.

When participation is understood to depend on accessibility, institutional design, and legal accommodation rather than on individual willingness, the responsibility for inclusion shifts from the voter to the state. This shift matters directly for persons with disabilities, whose historical exclusion from Indian electoral life has arisen not from disinterest in political life but from structural and legal barriers embedded within the electoral system itself, a distinction this

[3]Mark N. Franklin, Electoral Participation, in Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective ch. 8 (Laurence LeDuc, Richard G. Niemi & Pippa Norris eds., Sage Publ'ns 1996).

article treats as central to the analysis that follows.

III. CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

According to the 2011 Census, India has approximately 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, amounting to around 2.28 percent of the population.[4] More recent Election Commission figures put the number of registered persons with disabilities electors at over 90 lakh nationally, with an estimated eligible pool considerably larger still, illustrating a persistent gap between eligibility and actual registration.[5] Despite these numbers, persons with disabilities have largely remained peripheral to mainstream political life, a marginalisation shaped by intersecting social stigma, physical exclusion, and economic disadvantage.

In recent years, the Election Commission has undertaken visible efforts to narrow this gap: identifying and registering disabled voters, improving physical accessibility at polling stations, deploying assistive technologies, strengthening communication formats, and offering alternative voting arrangements such as postal ballots, transport assistance, home voting, and mobile polling stations for voters with restricted mobility.

The Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme, through its Accessible Elections initiative, focuses on identifying and registering voters with disabilities and flagging them within electoral rolls so that support measures can be triggered. Tools such as wheelchairs at polling stations, Braille-enabled electronic voting machines, priority entry, and dedicated transport services have incrementally lowered physical barriers.[6] Home voting through postal ballots, extended to voters with benchmark disabilities of forty percent or more and to citizens above eighty-five years of age, demonstrates a further acknowledgment that mobility itself should not be a precondition for the exercise of franchise.

The reach of this facility during the 2026 general election cycle is illustrative. In Churu, Rajasthan, eight persons with disabilities from a single family exercised their right to vote from the comfort of their home under this scheme, in a process involving a dedicated polling team,

[4]Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Census of India 2011: Data on Disability, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
[5]Election Commission of India, ECI Walks the Extra Mile to Reach at the Doorstep of Elderly and PwD Voters (Press Information Bureau, 2026), https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2017764.
[6]Election Commission of India, Voter Guide: Towards Making Elections Accessible for Persons with Disabilities & Senior Citizens, https://ceojk.nic.in/pdf/Latest_Notifications/Voter_Guide_for_PwDs_and_Sr.Citizens.pdf.

security personnel, and videography to preserve transparency and the secrecy of the ballot.[7] Instances of this kind, drawn from an initiative that has now facilitated home voting for a very substantial number of eligible electors nationally, demonstrate that accessibility measures, where genuinely implemented down to the level of an individual household, can produce real and not merely symbolic participation gains. The challenge, examined in the sections that follow, is that this level of implementation remains the exception rather than the rule across the wider electoral system.

IV. STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

The ability of persons with disabilities to engage meaningfully in elections rests not only on physical access but on the underlying legal framework governing disability rights and electoral processes. It is necessary, therefore, to examine electoral participation through the lens of constitutional guarantee, statutory protection, and international obligation.

Internationally, the foundation lies in general human rights instruments. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.[8] Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms that citizens have the right to vote, to contest elections, and to access public service without unreasonable restriction.[9] The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) addresses the specific structural barriers faced by disabled citizens. Article 29 mandates that states ensure full and effective political participation on an equal basis with others, including accessible voting procedures, materials, and facilities, the protection of ballot secrecy, provision of assistive technologies, and assistance from a person of the voter's own choosing where required.[10] Article 9 addresses accessibility and reasonable accommodation more broadly, while Article 12 affirms legal capacity on an equal basis with others and rejects exclusion premised on assumed incapacity. The CRPD Committee has stated in unambiguous terms that denying voting rights on the basis of actual or perceived mental or intellectual disability constitutes a form of discrimination.

[7]Home Voting Facility for Elderly and PwD Voters, DD News (2026), https://ddnews.gov.in/en/election-commission-introduces-home-voting-for-elderly-and-persons-with-disabilities/.
[8]Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 21.
[9]International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 25, adopted Dec. 16, 1966.
[10]International Disability Alliance, IDA's Compilation of CRPD Committee's Concluding Observations: Article 29 CRPD (Participation in Political and Public Life) (Sept. 2023), https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/article_29_crpd_1.pdf.

India's domestic legal architecture largely mirrors these international commitments, at least in text. Article 326 of the Constitution establishes universal adult suffrage. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 confirms that a diagnosis of mental illness does not, by itself, strip a person of legal capacity, guarding against automatic disenfranchisement on psychosocial grounds. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, disqualification is narrowly framed: Section 16(1)(b) applies only where a competent court has specifically declared an individual to be of unsound mind. Section 62 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 confirms that every person on the electoral roll has the right to vote, while Section 169 empowers the Election Commission to frame rules accommodating illiterate voters and those with physical or other disabilities, supplying the legal basis for the administrative accommodations described above. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 further obliges the Election Commission to render polling stations and electoral materials accessible and comprehensible. The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 permits assistance for illiterate or physically disabled voters and allows a visually impaired voter to be accompanied by an adult companion within the voting area.

The legality of electronic voting itself has a somewhat contested history worth recalling here. In A.C. Jose v. Sivan Pillai, the Supreme Court held that the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, as they then stood, contemplated only paper ballots and did not authorise the use of electronic voting machines absent express statutory sanction.[11] Parliament subsequently amended Section 61 of the 1951 Act in 1988 to expressly permit electronic voting, a position later upheld by the courts.[12] This history is relevant to the accessibility debate because it illustrates that voting technology in India has always required specific legislative authorisation, meaning that accessibility features embedded in that technology, Braille labelling, audio ballots, and similar accommodations, are themselves a matter of statutory design rather than an incidental feature that can be improved through administrative circular alone.

V. LEGAL AND PRACTICAL BARRIERS TO ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Despite these formal assurances of universal suffrage, persons with disabilities encounter a range of legal and practical obstacles that limit their ability to participate in

[11]A.C. Jose v. Sivan Pillai & Ors., AIR 1984 SC 921.
[12]All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam v. Chief Election Commissioner (1994).

elections. These barriers arise across physical infrastructure, access to information, institutional arrangements, and routine administrative procedure.

A. Physical and Transportation Barriers

For individuals with locomotor disabilities, exclusion often begins before the polling station is even reached. Even where polling booths are formally marked "accessible," conditions such as uneven walkways, unramped curbs, and poorly maintained approach roads create cumulative obstacles that make entry difficult or impossible.[13] Because polling stations are typically located in existing public buildings, schools, community halls, government offices, that were not originally designed with universal access in mind, retrofitted solutions tend to be partial. Temporary ramps installed for election day frequently fail to meet basic gradient standards and require assistance to climb rather than enabling independent access, while narrow doorways, high thresholds, and cramped booth layouts continue to restrict wheelchair movement even after entry. Transportation compounds the difficulty: the lack of wheelchair-accessible public transport forces many voters to depend on family members to reach the polling station, which raises a further concern about undue influence over how, or whether, that vote is ultimately cast. App-based transport assistance schemes exist in some areas, but remain irregular and often fail precisely on the day they are most needed.

B. Sensory Disabilities

Voting remains, at nearly every stage, a visually mediated activity, placing blind and partially sighted voters at a structural disadvantage. Although Electronic Voting Machines carry Braille labelling, this accommodation assumes Braille literacy, an assumption that fails many visually impaired voters, particularly those who lose their sight later in life and never acquire Braille fluency. Even Braille-literate voters face reduced independence at the point of voting, since reliance on a companion or election official to confirm a choice compromises the secrecy the Constitution otherwise guarantees. This problem extends upstream to electoral rolls themselves, which are frequently published as scanned image files rather than machine-readable, searchable text, a format incompatible with screen-reading software. A voter using assistive technology may consequently be unable to independently verify her own registration status or assigned polling location, with enrolment errors sometimes surfacing only once she

[13]Election Commission of India, International Conference on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Electoral Processes (Jan. 24, 2018), https://www.eci.gov.in/voicenet/data/ConferenceReader-PwDs.pdf.

has physically arrived at the booth.

A documented account from the Disability Justice Project captures this problem concretely: a wheelchair-using voter in Lucknow found the button she needed on the EVM placed higher than accessibility norms recommend, and, unwilling to compromise her voting privacy by seeking assistance, pressed the button she could reach instead, casting a vote for a different candidate than the one she had intended.[14] Such an account illustrates precisely the gap this article is concerned with: a facially accessible accommodation that fails the substantive-equality test because it was not designed around the full range of disabled voters' actual needs.

For persons with hearing impairments, exclusion centres less on the physical act of voting than on access to the political communication that precedes it. Sign language interpretation and real-time captioning remain rare during election campaigns, televised debates, and voter awareness programmes, leaving Deaf voters without equal access to the information needed to make an informed electoral choice. A similar pattern of exclusion historically appeared in electoral eligibility law itself: until relatively recently, the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994 disqualified individuals labelled "deaf-mute" from contesting local elections, a provision grounded in an outdated equation of sensory impairment with incapacity and illustrative of a bias that recurs, in less explicit form, elsewhere in electoral administration.

C. Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities as those with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.[15] Persons with intellectual disabilities may experience particular difficulty with communication, social interaction, or self-care, difficulties that are compounded rather than caused by environmental barriers. Psychosocial disability, distinct from intellectual disability, encompasses individuals who face discrimination on account of actual or perceived mental health conditions, regardless of formal diagnosis; outdated terminology such as "mental illness" or "psychiatric disorder" continues to appear across parts of India's domestic legal and

[14]Disability Justice Project, cited in Pragati Agarwal & Harsh Kumar Jha, Electoral Rights of Persons with Disability, LiveLaw (Sept. 14, 2026), https://www.livelaw.in/lawschool/articles/electoral-rights-person-with-disability-549915.
[15]Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities art. 1, adopted Dec. 13, 2006, G.A. Res. 61/106.

administrative vocabulary despite more precise alternatives being available. Individuals under legal guardianship, or resident in long-term institutional care, vote at markedly lower rates than the general population, a gap attributable to overlapping structural exclusion, discriminatory residual provisions in law, social stigma, and practical barriers to accessing the electoral process, rather than to any diminished interest in political participation.

D. Elderly, Hospitalised, and Institutionalised Persons

The combination of advanced age and institutional residence produces a distinct form of political marginalisation. Residents of psychiatric hospitals, long-term care facilities, and nursing homes are often missing from voter registration lists altogether. Even where registration does occur, the institutional environment carries a serious risk of coercion: a pronounced power imbalance exists between residents who depend on caregiving staff for daily needs and the individuals providing that support. This dependency can produce what the Election Commission has itself termed "group voting," in which the preferences of elderly or institutionalised voters are shaped, subtly or overtly, by their caregivers. Few institutions host on-site mobile polling stations, and ordinary polling places rarely offer the priority queuing, seating, or shade that would materially assist frail or hospitalised voters. For a considerable number of elderly, hospitalised, and institutionalised citizens, the ballot functions less as an instrument of empowerment than as a recurring reminder of political exclusion.

E. Documentation and Biometric Barriers

The growing reliance on biometric identity systems such as Aadhaar for voter registration and verification creates a barrier for many persons with disabilities. Fingerprint mismatch is a recurring problem for individuals with certain mobility disabilities, dermatological conditions such as leprosy, or fingerprint ridges worn down by decades of manual labour. While the Unique Identification Authority of India formally permits "biometric exceptions" for such cases, implementation on the ground frequently fails.[16] While marking oneself as a person with disability on the Electors Photo Identity Card is intended to trigger "Assured Minimum Facilities" such as transportation and priority queues, the underlying registration process under Form 6 often requires digital skills or physical trips to government offices that may not be readily accessible. Where these databases are not properly

[16]Unique Identification Authority of India, How Will the Biometric of the Differently Abled and People with No Fingerprints or Rugged Hands Be Captured?, https://uidai.gov.in/.

synchronised, a voter may arrive at the booth only to discover that her priority status has not been recorded.

F. Digital Divide and Electronic Voting

The digital-first orientation of contemporary electoral administration compounds, rather than resolves, existing exclusion for many disabled voters. Applications such as the Saksham ECI App, introduced to simplify registration and home-voting requests, presuppose access to a personal device and reliable internet connectivity that remains inconsistent across rural and low-income households.[17] This access gap is reinforced by a parallel skills gap, as limited digital literacy prevents many disabled citizens from independently navigating registration interfaces or checking their status on electoral rolls.[18] Government websites and allied platforms frequently fall short of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines standards, relying on visual CAPTCHAs and lacking screen-reader compatibility, which effectively excludes the very users such digital tools were meant to serve. This is not a hypothetical concern: it is precisely the deficiency that has recently drawn direct judicial scrutiny, discussed below.

VI. THE MADRAS HIGH COURT INTERVENTION: A RECENT TURNING POINT

A significant recent development illustrates both the persistence of these barriers and the growing willingness of constitutional courts to intervene. In Vaishnavi Jayakumar v. The Election Commission of India & Ors., a writ petition was filed before the Madras High Court seeking systemic reform of electoral accessibility, specifically that the Commission designate only polling stations equipped with the "Assured Minimum Facilities" it had itself prescribed, publish complete polling-booth accessibility data, make electoral documents available in accessible formats, and introduce multi-modal CAPTCHA systems, incorporating audio, text, logic, and OTP-based verification, on its websites in place of the single image-based CAPTCHA then in use.[19] The petition pointed to the ECI's own websites, including its voter-

[17]Tiina Pajuste, The Digital Divide: Reinforcing Vulnerabilities, in Human Rights in the Digital Domain (Cambridge Univ. Press 2025).
[18]Oxfam India, Digital Divide: India Inequality Report 2022, https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/digital-divide-india-inequality-report-2022/.
[19]Vaishnavi Jayakumar v. The Election Commission of India & Ors., W.P. No. 34815 of 2025 (Madras High Court); see also Election Commission Duty Bound to Make Polling Booths, ECI Website Accessible for Persons with Disabilities: Madras High Court, LiveLaw (Sept. 16, 2025), https://www.livelaw.in/high-court/madras-high-court/madras-high-court-eci-response-ensure-polling-station-accesible-304100.

search and electoral-roll portals, as relying exclusively on image-based verification inaccessible to visually impaired users, in apparent tension with the Guidelines for Indian Government Websites.

On 16 September 2025, a Division Bench of the Madras High Court, comprising the Chief Justice and Justice G. Arul Murugan, directed the Election Commission to respond within four weeks, observing orally that because polling booths were under the Commission's control, it bore a corresponding duty to ensure their accessibility.[20] The matter progressed further, and on 30 April 2026 the Court directed the construction of permanent ramps, rather than temporary election-day arrangements, at routinely notified polling booths, particularly those located in educational institutions and other public buildings, and directed the Commission to take expeditious steps toward making its digital platforms accessible.[21] The Bench recorded the Commission's own submission that it was in the process of complying with applicable accessibility guidelines across its digital platforms on a priority basis.

The significance of this litigation lies less in any single direction issued than in what it reveals about the gap this article has traced throughout: statutory obligations under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India, 2021 had existed for years before this petition was filed, yet temporary, non-compliant arrangements persisted at the level of individual polling booths until judicial intervention compelled a shift toward permanent infrastructure. This sequence, statutory obligation, years of partial or absent implementation, and eventual correction only through litigation, is not unique to this case, and offers a cautionary template for how many of the other gaps documented in this article are likely to be closed absent more proactive administrative enforcement.

VII. WAY FORWARD

Ensuring meaningful participation in elections for persons with disabilities requires both practical accessibility measures and structural changes addressing legal, institutional, and

[20]Madras HC Demands ECI's Response to Petition Seeking Accessible Website, Polling Stations, The News Minute (Sept. 17, 2025), https://www.thenewsminute.com/tamil-nadu/madras-hc-demands-ecis-response-to-petition-seeking-accessible-website-polling-stations.

[21]Madras High Court Directs Construction of Permanent Ramps in Routinely Notified Polling Booths for Persons with Disabilities, Verdictum (2026), Neutral Citation 2026:MHC:1751, https://www.verdictum.in/madras-high-court/vaishnavi-jayakumar-v-the-election-commission-of-india-ors-2026mhc1751-1615236.

informational barriers together.

Polling infrastructure must treat accessibility as a basic requirement rather than an optional feature. Polling stations should, where feasible, be located on the ground floor and should include disability-friendly arrangements consistent with Assured Minimum Facilities, such as properly gradiented ramps with handrails, priority entry, dedicated poll volunteers trained to assist disabled voters, transportation on polling day, and available wheelchairs. The path to the voting booth should be wide, level, and free of obstacles, and, following the Madras High Court's direction, permanent rather than temporary in construction.

Voter information slips and Electors Photo Identity Cards should be issued in Braille, accompanied by magnifying sheets for individuals with reduced vision. The home-voting option available to persons with benchmark disabilities and to seniors above eighty-five years of age, exercised through the postal ballot mechanism under Form 12D, should be more actively publicised and its administrative processing made consistent across constituencies, building on the demonstrated success of initiatives such as the one seen in Churu, Rajasthan.

Guardianship laws require particular reform attention. In many instances, when a family member seeks guardianship to assist with financial or legal decisions, the individual's right to vote may be revoked automatically or with little independent oversight. Reforming guardianship and disqualification law is essential, alongside public awareness of its effect on voting rights, so that capacity to manage property and capacity to exercise the franchise are treated as the analytically distinct questions they are.

Elections should offer multiple accessible voting methods as standard practice, including in-person voting, curbside voting, postal ballots, and home-based voting, each incorporating accessible ballot-marking systems and well-trained poll workers. Uniform national accessibility standards for polling stations, voting equipment, and digital platforms, together with pre-election accessibility audits and public compliance reporting, are essential to converting currently discretionary accommodations into enforceable and verifiable entitlements.

Accessible information is a further vital component of inclusion. All voter education material and candidate communication should be available in Braille, audio, sign language, and Plain Language formats, the last benefiting not only voters with cognitive or intellectual

disabilities but the electorate more broadly. Disability issues should be addressed in campaigns through detailed proposals rather than vague assurances, and debate organisers should treat disability policy as a standing agenda item rather than an occasional addition.

Finally, systematic data collection is necessary to understand political participation patterns among persons with disabilities. The Election Commission's repeated invocation of "disproportionate burden" as a reason for not compiling disaggregated data on disabled electors is a significant obstacle to designing and evaluating future accessibility interventions. Adding disability-related questions to pre-election surveys and exit polls would generate the evidence base currently missing, allowing policymakers to identify specific implementation gaps and respond with targeted, rather than piecemeal, reform.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The promise of universal adult suffrage remains incomplete for persons with disabilities in India. Even with constitutional guarantees and a reasonably developed statutory framework, participation continues to be constrained by polling infrastructure that is difficult to access, barriers to information, digital exclusion, and residual legal provisions that equate disability with diminished capacity. These challenges illustrate a recurring truth in disability rights scholarship: equality in law does not automatically translate into equality in practice. The state bears responsibility for closing this gap, since its institutional design ultimately determines whether formal access becomes actual access. Recent developments, the Election Commission's expanding home-voting programme and the Madras High Court's intervention in Vaishnavi Jayakumar, indicate that meaningful progress is possible, but also that such progress has so far depended heavily on litigation and individual administrative initiative rather than on systemic, self-enforcing design. Durable inclusion will require consistent accessibility standards, legal protection of capacity, a genuine plurality of accessible voting methods, and sustained institutional accountability. Moving beyond the ballot box means treating accessibility as central to electoral integrity itself; a democracy's strength depends not only on the rights it formally guarantees but on the depth to which those rights are actually realised by every citizen entitled to them.