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"People still think women should only do household work. They are still mistreated, discriminated against and insulted," When Bidhya Devi Bhandari

was just a child, she witnessed an angry mob in her remote village in eastern Nepal beating and torturing an elderly woman accused of being a witch. The scene horrified Bhandari, but also inspired her to enter politics and fight for the rights of women in her impoverished country, where deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes have led to widespread gender abuse and discrimination. Almost 50 years later, Bhandari was Nepal's first female head of



state and a women's rights advocate who has made progress towards creating equal opportunities for women in politics. Nepal's first female president, in office from 2015-2023, has paved the way for future female leaders of this nation.

Women face a multitude of challenges in Nepal, largely due to their lower status in a male-dominated society which sees them as home makers and child bearers. Crimes such as human trafficking, domestic violence and rape are common but rarely reported, as victims are afraid of being blamed and ostracised by their family or community. Women also face discrimination in accessing healthcare, education and employment and in establishing their rights to things like property and land. Bhandari, who has long campaigned for women's rights, hit the headlines when parliament elected her as Nepal's second president - seven years after it abolished the monarchy and became a republic.

But a close ally of Prime Minister K.P. Oli said her journey to the presidency was not easy because *she was a woman*.

Bhandari is credited with a policy of ensuring that one-third of Nepali parliamentarians are women. She says her work on strengthening the political voice of Nepali women is not over yet: "Now efforts should be made for increasing the number of women to 50 percent in parliament and all other government bodies. We must ensure that women have increased access to economic activities, jobs and education."

Her fights for democracy bringing about the end of a 240-year Hindu monarchy, Nepal has been trying to shift from a male-dominated society, where women are mostly limited to working at homes or on farms, to one in which women have equal opportunities and legal rights.

Ms Bhandari said her election marked a first step toward assuring the new constitutional “guarantees of equality” are fulfilled. From 2015-2017, Onsari Gharti Magar was elected as the parliament’s first female Speaker. Ms Bhandari took up politics in her teens and has been a leading political figure since 1993. She led demonstrations against the former King Gyanendra in 2006, ending his authoritarian rule and restoring democracy.

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0SZ11Q/>

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Who is a person you know, either in your life or someone you have seen, who has showcased qualities of Girls Independence?

