

Political Inclusiveness of Women in Indian Parliament- An Analysis

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Abstract

Parliament is considered as highest representative body in India. However in terms women representation Indian Parliament is not considered as truly representative or politically inclusive. Even though women turnout is increased dramatically from 47 per cent in 1962 to approximately 67 per cent in 2019, their representation in the Parliament is not increased proportionately. Furthermore those women with dynastic background are getting more preference over non dynastic backgrounds. Therefore this paper argues that procedural changes are required to ensure political inclusiveness of women in Indian Parliament. As gate keepers of power, political parties only can ensure procedural changes; unfortunately they are interested in pro women policies rather than procedural changes to accommodate women in to political strata.

Key Words: Political System, Political Inclusiveness, Political Recruitment, Representation, Political Participation

Parliament has significant role in representative democracy. In theory it represents the miniature of political system. However it all depends on the attitude of the system to be inclusive. India due to its population and plural nature is considered as the largest representative democracy in the world. The Parliament is considered as the highest representative body in India. However the question is in terms of the diverse population, to what extent it is really representative. In order to get an answer here I am analysing women representation in the Parliament from past to the present through multi-dimensional approach. There are number of studies has conducted in all over the world to understand the role of women at the decision making level. Donata Francescato and Minou Ella Mebane, has made a comprehensive picture of all theories in a brief manner in their analysis. According to them Structural, institutional, gate keeping, family and work balancing, gender differences and mass media and political personalization theories are prevalent in area of women representation at the political level. To them, 'Structural Approach supporters maintain that women's underrepresentation in politics might be related to their past lower social status, lower levels of education, lower control of financial capitals and fewer work

Page | 3075

occasions. The institutional approach focuses on the role of: party rules and electoral laws, and access to funds for campaigning, in hindering or favouring women's political participation. The gate keeping approach suggest that men systematically control all the most relevant political positions and literally keep the shut to women, by excluding them on purpose at the entry level and opposing their career progress. Alternatively, family and work balancing theories claim that it is harder for women to be elected and remain in high political offices since their family responsibilities limit their career opportunities. Gender differences theories maintain that many cultural and personal factors such as political empowerment, influence women's political experiences. Theorists of mass media and political personalization highlight the importance of successfully campaigning to be elected in political offices' (Francescato & Mebane, 2018).

Demands for women representation in decision making bodies is getting momentum in all over the world since 1990s. Several national and international organizations played a prominent role in making under representation as a major reform agenda. They were succeeding in presenting a data of actual representation of women in all over the world. 'Women are underrepresented in politics in most countries (on average in the world, 23.8% of women are in national parliaments)'ⁱ Inclusiveness is one of the commonly using words in recent years particularly in politics. In fact, the practice of social exclusion makes the word inclusion a necessity. Now a day the term inclusiveness is considered as an attribute for good governance. Merriam Webster dictionary explains the meaning of Inclusiveness as "covering or intended to cover all items, costs, or services". Generally this term is used at the policy level. And most of them advocated that while framing policies, the government should include all sections of the society. Here I am focussing on Political Inclusiveness by drawing an operational definition to this by taking inputs from the term Political Inclusion.

Political Inclusiveness- an operational Definition

The idea of Political inclusion has been much debated in USA. Political inclusion is the right to political participation and to political representation of migrants on the same legal basis as host populations thus developing a notion of membership to a city's population. This can be done by extending voting rights for local elections or creating advisory councils of diverse

migrant communitiesⁱⁱ. Here 'Political Inclusiveness represents the capacity of a political system to accommodate diverse sections of the society into Political Strata' (Arun, 2017). Religion, Caste, Class and Gender are the determinants of political inclusiveness. It has two dimensions i.e., *natural and procedural* (ibid). By natural, it means the political system naturally accommodates different sections of the people without any compulsions. The second one implies accommodating different sections of people through the introduction of procedural changes like reservation in the system. Even though the natural inclusiveness is found anywhere in the world in its original sense, it exists in different angles. Some kind of external pressure or factors compelled for political inclusiveness. For example in the wake of Dalit politics, the BJP has now placed Ram Nath Kovind as their Presidential candidate without any procedural change. In another example BJD and TMC has been given 33 and 41% seats respectively to women in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. This is also an example for natural inclusiveness. This is a political strategy in a natural setting to catch women voters. Reservations to SCs/STs, Women at the Local Self Government level are the examples for Procedural dimension (ibid). Here I am focusing on two things that are the following.

1. Due to external pressures political parties are compelled to give more seats women in elections (Natural dimension)
2. Procedural dimension needed to ensure political inclusiveness of women in Parliament.

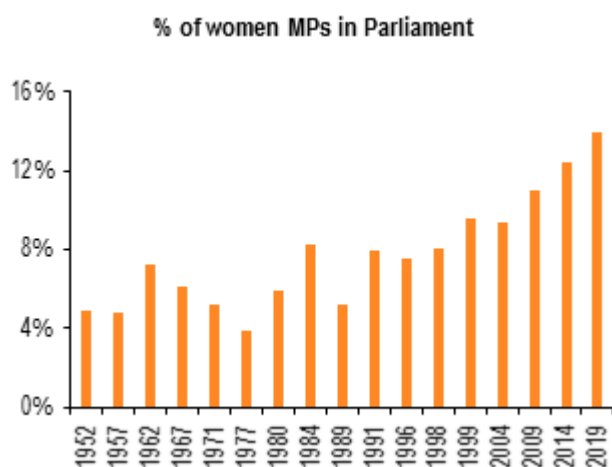
Women Representation in the Parliament Over the years

Participation of women in political affairs is an important attribute of political development. Mahatma Gandhi, Father of Nation played a prominent role in making them as a part of our national movement. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has made a comparative analysis of women's presence in the national movement and their role at the decision-making level with great importance. 'In the national movement for Indian independence, led by the Congress party, there were many more women in positions of importance than in the Russian and Chinese revolutionary movements put together. It is also perhaps worth noting that Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian women President of the Indian National Congress, was elected in 1925, fifty years earlier than the election of the first leader of a major British Political Party

(Margaret Thatcher in 1975)' (Sen, 2006) When it comes to post independent scenario, they were side-lined as mere vote bank in politics. Political Participation of women means participation in voting process rather than contesting in the elections. Now a day they will decides who will run the nation. In 1962, the turnout of women was only 47 per cent, yet by 2014, it had shot up to 66 per cent-up by nearly 19 percentage points. On the other hand, men's turnout grew by only 5 per cent over the same period(Roy & Sopariwala , 2019). Now it is almost commensurate to men voting turn out. Interestingly, the gap between male and female voters turning out to cast their vote is narrowing since 2009. In 2009, the gap was nine per cent, which went down to 1.4 per cent in 2014. It now tentatively stands at 0.4 per cent now¹ⁱⁱⁱ probably it will surpass men in the next general election. Prannoy Roy and Dorab R. Sopariwala described this trend as 'rise and rise of women voters',^{iv}. However it is also to be noted that their presence in the Parliament is not much increased in accordance with increase in their turn out and women reservation bill is still pending and now days it as a tool to catch the women voters during election days.

From an optimistic point of view, women presence is gradually increasing in the parliament over the years. And it is considered as a positive sign towards the decade's long demands for this. According to Parliament Legislative Research the representation of women MPs in Lok Sabha is slowly improving from 5 per cent in the first Lok Sabha to 14 per cent in the seventeenth Lok Sabha. Diagram 1. 1 clearly represents this trend.

Diagram 1.1



Source: <http://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/vital-stats/profile-newly-elected-17th-lok-sabha>

Women representation is also all time high in the 17th Lok Sabha. According to Parliamentary Research, 716 women candidates contested in the 17th General Election. Out of which, 78 women MPs have been elected to the 17th Lok Sabha. In other words, among. In 2014, out of 636 women candidates 62 women MPs were elected. Data reveals that there is a substantial increase in the number of women candidates in the election (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Details of Women Candidates and Elected Representatives since 2004

Year	Number of Women Candidates	Number of Elected Women	Per cent of Elected Women	Per cent in Parliament
2019	716	78	10.89 %	14.36 %
2014	636	61	9.74 %	11.23 %
2009	556	59	10.61 %	10.86 %
2004	355	45	12.67 %	9.02 %

*Table is created based on the inputs taken from Press Information Bureau Report, Down to Earth, Parliamentary Legislative Research. See Reference more details.

Political Parties and Leaders as gate keepers

Political Parties and Parliamentary system are corollary with each other. Political Parties are contesting in parliamentary election for either to attain power or to retain their power. For these they put their candidates in the election. So before the political recruitment there is a party recruitment in elections. So the political parties are gate keepers for power and they determine who should be represented in the particular constituency then by the people. At the party level who should take decisions to give tickets and on what criteria is a question, all the political parties irrespective of their ideological differences has given little interest to accommodate women in elections. For example, even though BJP and Congress battle for 33 per cent reservation women Parliament, both these parties were only given 12.6 seats to women in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. Indeed, there are interesting data are come out with regard to women representation. Women are the real beneficiaries of dynastic politics. 33 per cent of all dynastic main party candidates are women against 8 per cent of all non-dynastic candidates. It is also to be noted that SP, NCP, TDP, DMK, TRS when they

considered women candidates dynasty is considered as their criteria. Of all the women candidates have dynastic background (Verniers & Ammassari, 2019). As stated in the beginning, BJD and TMC have been given 33 and 41% seats respectively to women in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. Out of the 78 women representatives in the Parliament, only one woman had elected independently. Sumalatha is elected as MP from Mandya constituency. However, she is a famous actress and familiar more by the people as the wife of Ambareesh film star turned Member of Parliament. After his death, the Congress party denied tickets to Sumalatha. As a result she decided to contest independently, later BJP is also support her. Therefore she is not independent in the true sense or emerged as a leader from the grass root level. It also proves that, the Political Parties are the major player in candidates' selection and their support is essential in winning the election. Compare to China, the Indian women have the more options to join the party. It is also same in the case of man. In China membership in Communist Party is basic criteria to be elected both at the National and Provincial level. However in India, both the national and regional parties have strong support base in their own areas. It all depends on the attitude of political parties who are the gate keepers of power. In order to catch the women votes, political parties are advocating pro women welfare policies and concentrated on implement these while they are in power rather than passing women reservation bill.

Natural Dimension vs. Procedural Dimension

Since 1952, Political inclusiveness of women in Parliament is happening gradually as natural dimension. But it is not in proportion to their actual population as well as their voting per cent. Unless and until the passage of women reservation bill, women presence in the Parliament are minimal. The PRS research points out that though the percentage of women MPs has increased over the years, it is still lower in comparison to some countries. These include Rwanda (61%), South Africa (43%), UK (32%), USA (24%), and Bangladesh (21%). It demands a procedural change in the Parliament to become inclusive. It all depends on the attitude of political class of the present day India. In order to become Parliament is politically inclusive, the parliament itself to change. Even though, all the theories applied to understand and analyse the representation of women in India, only through one theory i.e. gatekeeping theory can overcome the issue of underrepresentation of women in Parliament. As gate keepers, political parties have major role in these. If they decided to support women

reservation Bill, it can easily pass in the Parliament in a time bound manner. Attitude of political parties are the back bone of Institutional change in India.

End Notes

ⁱ See Donata Francesca to and Minou Ella Mebane, 2018 How Italian Female Local and National Politicians Perceive and Cope with obstacles in a Gatekeeping Political Culture.

ⁱⁱ<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/urban-development/migrants-inclusion-in-cities/good-practices/political-inclusion/>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.news18.com/news/politics/at-67-11-voter-turnout-surpasses-all-past-records-in-2019-lok-sabha-elections-2148473.html>

^{iv} See ‘The Verdict Decoding India’s Elections’ Page 38

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