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GENDER QUOTAS - A CATALYST FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

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The issue of Political Empowerment of Women has always been a much debated and discussed topic in the world. On an average women continue to be highly underrepresented in the political decision making. Women's equal participation in political life plays an important role in the advancement of women. Without being properly represented in the political system, it becomes difficult for a group to influence in the policy-making. Greater the number, greater will be the power and influence. Hence the need of quota system arises. The implementation of quota system shows the general tendency of political parties to increase democracy and it illuminates those measure's limitations in the face of persisting gender bias. This ultimately reveals that a shift in culture and policy reforms should run parallel to maximize institutional productivity and elevate the overall status of women sustainably. Despite the fact that quota system is in place and women land up in power, still women's empowerment is not a guaranteed outcome. The paper tries to examine whether quotas act as a mechanism to increase, safeguard women's presence in the political arena, arguments for and against quotas, and the type of quotas that are most efficient and ultimately has it actually made a difference in the political system.

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INTRODUCTION

'Quotas are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they oblige men to think about including women in decision-making, since men must create spaces for women. On the other hand, since it is men who are opening up these spaces, they will seek out women who they will be able to manage—women who will more easily accept the hegemony of men'

- Anna Balletbo, former MP, Spain

Women's political empowerment is instrumental in stimulating the political and social empowerment and thereby aims at the overall development of the society. Women participants in decision making will help to revise and reconsider gender discriminatory policies and formulate laws favourable for women as well. And it is a known fact that without proportionate representation in the political system, a group will be inefficient in political decision making, policy making or rather the nature of the representative system is rather limited. Not involving half of the world's population in decision making is purely against the democratic framework. Democracy cannot be gender blind.

Since 1990s there has been a visibility of women in the political front. But to what extent they have been represented is still a question. According to the World Bank data of 2014, the percentage of women in parliaments across the world as a percentage of total seats has increased from 13% to 22% in 2014. Their advancement, across the world on the angle of political decision making seems to be highly underrepresented. To overcome the gender discriminatory behaviour still embedded within political institutions and processes, feminist movements have

pressed government heads and political parties to adopt “women friendly” policies. Legislation of gender quotas to secure women’s inclusion in electoral politics is one of such policies.

According to Young(1999) initiation and entry of women into political and legal structures are expected to transform the process and institutions of governance. An increasing number of countries are currently introducing various types of gender quotas for public elections. In fact, half of the countries of the world today use some type of electoral quota for their parliament.

Gender quotas are a type of equal opportunity measure that aims to ensure women’s inclusion in electoral politics by recommending, mandating, and/or reserving a certain number or percentage of positions within candidate lists or parliamentary seats for women (Dahlerup, 2002, 2006; Phillips, 1995). Gender quotas are meant to correct some of the obstacles that prevent women’s equal access to politics, particularly systemic and institutional barriers, and to ensure that minimum percentage of women and men are always present at the major electoral decision-making bodies. Hence these are measures to counter the discrimination and intended at recruiting enough women into the political arena and make them decision-makers rather than just token actors. Applied at the various stages of the electoral process, quotas work to ensure the nomination or selection of a minimum number of women for political positions (Dahlerup, 2006). Quotas are geared towards political parties because, as the ‘political gatekeepers’ they are responsible for nominating and selecting candidates for office (Matland, 2006). To radically increment the number of female candidates, political parties must voluntarily, or forcefully, adopt gender quotas to ensure women exercise their right to run for office. Primarily, the objective of quotas is to increase women’s representation by exceeding beyond socio-economic, cultural, and old party norms that tend to have discrimination against women in terms of recruitment and nomination as candidates in elections. The ability to represent in a substantive manner, although not guaranteed, is partly contingent upon the similarity existing between the representative and the represented.

Like any other affirmative actions, gender quotas normally have a temporary nature, with the objective of representation of both sexes equally and can also be referred as proportional representation or 50-50 representation. It may be in force until the barriers for women’s entry into politics are removed. Proportional representation of women refers to having a total amount of female representatives in legislative bodies that is proportional to the total number of women in the society. Hence, since women constitute half of the population, a proportional representation entails that about 50 percent of total representatives must be women. It is usually seen that initially, most states and institutions adopt a minimum 20 or 30 percent quota for either women candidates or politicians. Thirty percent, or roughly one-third of the total number of cabinet positions or seats of a legislative body is accepted as the “critical mass” of women needed to progress towards fair representation and to meaningfully address women’s issues and concerns.

Political theorists have defined and continue to redefine political representation in multiple and competing dimension. The three basic types of political representation are: (1) symbolic (2) descriptive and (3) substantial (Franceschet, 2001; Dovi, 2009; Peters & Suter, 2009). Symbolic representation refers to the perception and evaluation of representative by those whom he/she represents. Standards of evaluation rests on the degree of acceptance a representative has among the represented. Descriptive representation alludes to the degree of presence any given social group holds in legislative bodies. In this case, higher levels of representation are based on how closely the representative resemblances (based on ideas/experiences) the represented (Dovi, 2006). Finally, substantive representation entails the ability of the representative to promote the interests of the group he/she represents.

Though there are various types of quotas, the most important ones that are practised across the world are

1. *Candidate Quotas*

These specify the minimum percentage of women candidates who should be contesting for elections from various political parties which are further divided into

- a. Voluntary party quotas - adopted voluntarily by political parties, and are most common in centre–left-leaning parties, while liberal and conservative parties generally tend to be reluctant about or strongly opposed to adopting quotas
- b. Legislative quotas - laid down in the constitution in electoral laws or in political party laws.

This quota provision reserves a number of places on electoral lists for female candidates.

2. *Reserved seats*

Unlike legislative or voluntary party quotas, reserved seats guarantee women’s presence by exclusively allocating a specific number of parliamentary seats for women. Reserved seat legislation can be found in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and some Arab States .

3. *Political Party quotas*

These are voluntarily adopted than legally mandated and have been instituted for increasing the proportion of women among the party candidates. These tend to be non-controversial as they don't involve any governmental or legal oversight. These quotas often astute strategic moves which recognize that women has to be seen as a large political constituency, which can be an awareness formed due to decades of lobbying by women's movements and women working within party structures. Usually 25 to 50 percent of the total candidates in the list are proposed to be women. In scenarios where people vote for the party rather than the individual, this system can be implemented more at ease.

Quotas: The Two Sides

The Pros

- Quotas will ensure that both genders will be part of the political decision making
- Women will get rights as citizens for equal representation as always women's qualifications are undervalued when compared to men
- Elected Women Representatives in the political front will help in protecting the interests of women
- Quotas rule out the tendency of political parties to nominate just men – they are forced to include more women in their leadership roles
- Quotas counter discrimination and enhance democracy by increasing representation of marginalized sector

The Cons

- Women don't want to just get elected because they are women
- People who oppose this believes that election should be based on qualification and not on gender marginalisations- quotas give importance to the sex of politicians
- There are chances that unqualified women may be elected over qualified men
- Quotas are undemocratic – taking example of the 50% of reservation in local Self Government Institutions and 33.3% in Legislative assemblies, the voters have complete freedom to choose from the rest, which will normally be men

Research claims that incrementing the number of women in politics is more likely to increase in the attention given to gender-specific concerns (Goetz, 1998; United Nations, 1995). (Goetz, 1998)

International Scenario

More than 40 countries have introduced electoral quotas by amending the constitution or introducing different types of legislation. In more than 50 other countries, major political parties voluntarily have introduced quotas wanting women to comprise a certain percentage of the candidates they nominate for election. Thanks to the quota system, countries like Argentina, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa are now contending with the Nordic countries, nations which for many decades have topped the ranking in terms of women's representation in the Parliament. (Dahlerup, 2006)

Due in part to the Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing, the popularity of legislative quotas has risen since the early 1990s. Legislative quotas, or electoral quotas as they also referred, are more prevalent in Latin America and in post-conflict countries like Angola, Iraq and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Quota Project, 2010). Research accredits legislative quotas to be an effective equal opportunity measure that aims to achieve equality of result (Dahlerup, 2003, 2006). The demand for 30% reservations for women in electoral bodies has escalated in the last decade and has produced significant increases in women legislators in many countries. Those campaigning for quotas anticipated a change in government policies and priorities and an increased influence of women in decision-making. Such a shift in power depends both on the types of party systems and of electoral systems, issues widely overlooked. Utilizing proportional representation (PR) with a fixed party list system will certainly increase the number of women elected; but women selected must be party loyalists. But, still many obstacles remain for women to be effective in all these male dominated chambers (Tinker, 2004)

A common assumption held by the proponents of suffragette movements and social commentators interested in women's equality was that women's right to political participation would automatically lead to increased representation as societies developed and modernized. Such an assumption, particularly in developing countries,

was rooted in the belief that modernization and democratization are pre-requisites for achieving gender balance in political representation. But the strongest and longest democracies and industrialised nations like UK, US and France doesn't display this neither support this for the reason that it doesn't change the level of political empowerment of women despite the fact that they have obtained political rights much early. (Paxton, Pamela. 2007)

Table 1 . Women in national parliaments, regional differences as of November 2010

Region	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic Countries	41.6%	-----	-----
Americas	23.1%	23.7%	23.2%
Europe – OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	20.1%	19.5%	19.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.0%	20.9%	19.2%
Asia	18.7%	17.0%	18.5%
Pacific	12.6%	15.4%	12.6%
Arab States	12.4%	8.4%	11.6%
World Average*	19.4%	18.2%	19.2%

Source: Adapted from Inter-Parliamentary Union as of 30 November 2010 <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

* The World average is as calculated by the international organization Inter-Parliamentary Union

Notes: Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the Lower or Single House. More emphasis is placed on the Single or Lower House, as these are the members often democratically elected, whereas in the Upper House, members are often appointed.

Enhancing the participation of women within democracies is seen as central to improving governance (World Bank, 2001). George Bush, for instance, said in a speech in March 2006 that democracies reach their potential when women are allowed to participate fully. (Washington Post, March 6, 2006).

Recent years have witnessed dramatic changes in women's access to elected office. Although women continue to constitute only 19% of all parliamentarians worldwide, a growing number of countries have seen the election of more gender-balanced national parliaments. In September 2008, most notably, Rwanda became the first state in the world to elect more women than men to its lower house (56%). Other countries in the world's top-10 include Sweden (47%), South Africa (45%), and Costa Rica (39%), revealing that these changes are a global trend. However, not every country has experienced major breakthroughs. Established democracies like France (19%) and the United States (17%) hover merely at or below the world average. The 2010 elections in the United Kingdom brought a record number of women to the House of Commons (22%), but this reflected only a modest increase over previous election results. (Krook, 2010)

National Scenario

In India, the 73rd and 74th Amendment requires that 33% of seats in local bodies should be reserved for women, which was later enhanced to 50% (110th and 112th Amendment Bill of Constitution) and has been implemented in few of the states in India.

In his speech in Mexico in 2008 as the opening remarks at the 'International Conference on Decentralisation, Local Power and Women's Rights', the former minister of Panchayati Raj Sri Mani Shankar Aiyar was beaming with pride with what the women in India could do with the 33% reservations for the Local Self Government Institutions.

The Indian states which have already implemented 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions are Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh. As of 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chatisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura also reserve 50% of their posts for women.

The lawmakers' panel, which examined the bill for raising women's quota in Panchayat to 50 percent, termed the 73rd amendment as "a landmark legislation" which gave "India the unique distinction of having more elected women representatives (EWRs) than the rest of the world together." (The Hindu, November 2010)

Moreover the 73rd Amendment has ensured election of over 10,48,148 elected women representatives out of total 28,51,739 representatives in country's three-tier rural panchayats and the 74th amendment to the constitution, has till 2002, ensured the election of 22,665 women out of total 67,990 representatives in urban local bodies.

The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2010, seeking to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in Parliament and legislative assemblies, has already been passed by Rajya Sabha during on March ,2010. More women MPs than ever before were elected to the lower house of the national parliament of India in the 2009 general election. According to The World Bank Statistics of 2014, the percentage of women in Parliament changed from 5% in 1990 to 11% in 2014. Yet, the increase in women's presence in the Lok Sabha cannot necessarily be attributed to the increased willingness of political parties to field more women candidates, despite rhetorical party political support for increasing women's participation in political institutions.

The political parties in India support proposals for reserved seats for women candidates in national and state legislatures .It has been found that parties are risk averse when it comes to nominating women and this can restrict the number of women candidates nominated for the election.(Spary,2014)

In India, women elected through quotas have been called 'proxy women' because they were stand-ins for their husbands, who might even participate in meetings. Whereas, women elected through quota system in other parts of the world are called 'token women'. Gender and Caste seems to be interwoven and gender oppression tend to unite women across caste, religion, ethnicity etc.

Political Empowerment and Quotas

Women have always been pulled in both directions – one by the political party that supported them and other the women's organisation .Political party's directives and discretion of women representatives often come to a clash. And moreover there are cases where they don't have support from the family. Research on women who have come to power through quotas have revealed so many things , like , just being a symbolic representation and having no power in their constituency, party and even in movements outside.However , there are also success stories of women who were so powerless and helpless initially, but gained confidence and influence eventually.

The UNDP Human Development Report identifies four basic forms of participation for empowerment of women.

1. Household Participation: Women's involvement in decision-making at home is the first step towards empowerment.
2. Economic Participation: Women's economic empowerment act as a base for political empowerment.
3. Social and Cultural Participation: Women preserve the culture of land and their presence can lead to effective solution of social problems.
4. Political Participation: Democracy becomes meaningful with effective participation of women in decision-making

The aim of quota system is to have an increase in the political participation of women . If the implementation of quota system is successful, it can lead to active recruitment of women by political parties. While studies have explored the impacts of political quotas for females at household level, differential effects on males and females and their evolution through time have received little attention. It has been found that while leader quality declines, gender quotas increase the level and quality of women's political participation, their ability to hold leaders to account, and their willingness to contribute to public goods. Key effects persist beyond the reserved period and impacts on females often materialise only with a lag.(Deininger,et.al.2014)

Quotas in themselves do not remove all the other barriers for women's full citizenship. But under certain conditions electoral gender quotas can lead to historical leaps in women's political representation.What happens after women are elected to office? Does an increase in women's descriptive presence yield substantial changes in policy? Have women's voices been able to be heard? What have women done *for* women? These are some of the questions being asked to assess the qualitative aspect of quotas.

Few concerns were expressed which highlighted quotas (A, 1995) as being mechanisms that "distort women capacity" since "women are chosen as candidates simply for being women and not for their competency". Not just rules are enough, there should be careful implementation procedures like more pressure from women organizations and also non sanctions for non-compliance with quota mandates.

Moreover, stigmatization of women still continues. The barriers of combining family life, work life, politics still remain a severe obstacle to women citizenship. Further, political representation needs to be complemented with necessary socio-economic changes in society at large.(Dahlerup,2005)

Conclusion

To sum up the quota adoption to be successful involves big research, networking and strategy planning. Even though gender norms appear to keep a balance on the values of women and men, the cultural attitudes, male centered practices etc continue to undermine the women empowerment. Moreover there should be proper continuous trainings to the elected women representatives by NGOs, political parties etc. There should be careful controlling and monitoring after the implementation of an effective quota system. This is applicable to whatever type of quota – be it voluntary political party quota, or legislative or reserved. Hence the implementation is the main part and it stays ineffective otherwise. For the purpose of transforming the decision-making process into a more socially diverse institution, protecting women's interests, there should arise progressive initiatives which challenges the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of power along with the quota system.

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