

Influence of Inclusion Policies on Women's Parliamentary Representation in Nepal

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the status of women's involvement in the Nepalese Parliament, particularly before and after the implementation of inclusion policies as the legal provision has been made through the constitutions of Nepal. It has covered the historical context, policy framework, and statistical data concerning female participation in parliament. The issue of women's political engagement in Nepal has gained prominence following the significant revolution in 2006. Statistical evidence has indicated a marked positive impact from the introduction of quota systems, which have been found as a part of broader inclusive policies aimed at increasing female representation in Nepal's parliament. Through document analysis and observation of electoral outcomes, the presence of women in the House of Representatives has been found to be notably increased. However, relying solely on quota systems cannot be sufficed to achieve gender equality in the inclusiveness and participation of the women in the parliamentary system in Nepal. The inclusion policy must continue to evolve, taking more effective measures to further enhance women's inclusivity and pave the way towards a gender-equitable society. The ways of improving the condition of the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal have been identified as the traditional gender roles, political culture, educational barriers, legal and institutional constraints, cultural and social norms, violence, party politics, legal reforms and enforcement, capacity building, addressing cultural and social norms, support services, and the educational awareness to be improved for the active participation and inclusion of women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Keywords: Equality, inclusion, parliament, participation, violence

Introduction

The issue of women's involvement in Nepalese politics has fluctuated in importance over time, despite their active participation in numerous movements and struggles for rights. Questions about women's representation at decision-making levels have persisted since Nepal first became a democratic nation in 1950. Over the past seventy years, Nepal has experienced various political ups and downs, characterized by periods of instability and numerous political experiments (Upreti, 2020). Nepal has faced challenges spanning more than seventy years in the process of drafting its constitution. During this period, the country has established various constitutions to accommodate different political systems, each with distinct characteristics and objectives. The constitutional provisions play a crucial role in shaping Nepal's political landscape and influencing women's participation in politics. As Nepal's political system has undergone significant transformations, there have been observable changes in the extent of women's involvement in Nepalese politics.

The issue of women's representation holds global significance and is particularly crucial in developing nations such as Nepal, where the status of women remains precarious despite their numerical majority over men. Nepal, classified as one of the least developed countries, has seen the issue of women's inclusion prominently raised during various revolutions and movements. Currently, Nepal operates under a multiparty parliamentary system, where female representatives in the highest legislative body can wield significant influence in shaping policies that benefit women. The parliament plays a pivotal role in Nepal, responsible for electing the Prime Minister, enacting laws, and overseeing critical rights and responsibilities that serve as checks on the executive and judiciary. This article aims to assess the impact of inclusion policies on women's involvement in the Nepalese House of Representatives. It will examine trends in female participation both before and after the implementation of inclusive measures. Initially, it will explore the legislative frameworks pertaining to parliament during various political epochs. Subsequently, it will analyze statistical data from secondary sources to compare election outcomes before and after the adoption of inclusive policies. The study will culminate in a critical evaluation of existing

literature and electoral statistics to ascertain the effects of inclusive policies on enhancing women's representation in parliament.

Several scholars and researchers have explored the influence of inclusion policies on women's parliamentary representation in Nepal. Thapa (2014, 2015) has written extensively on Nepalese politics and gender issues. His works often analyze the effectiveness of inclusion policies in enhancing women's representation in parliament and their impact on gender equality. Likewise, Upreti's (2018, 2020) research focuses on governance, democratization, and gender issues in Nepal. His writings discuss the implementation of inclusion policies and their implications for women's participation in political processes.

Similarly, Kandel (2014) has examined the practical challenges and achievements of Nepal's quota system for women in parliament. His work critiques the outcomes of these policies and their impact on gender dynamics within political institutions. In the same way, Lal's (2014) studies delve into the political ramifications of quota allocations and the controversies surrounding their implementation. His research highlights issues such as nepotism and the misuse of quotas by influential figures. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Program [UNDP] (2014a) has published reports assessing the effectiveness of gender inclusion policies in Nepal. These reports typically provide statistical analysis and policy recommendations aimed at improving women's representation in parliament.

These scholars and organizations have contributed significantly to understanding how inclusion policies have shaped women's parliamentary representation in Nepal. Their works vary from empirical studies and statistical analyses to critical evaluations of policy implementation and outcomes. However, they have not explored the way of better inclusion and enhancing as well as the empowerment of the women through the parliamentary representation in Nepal. So, the research has fulfilled the remaining gap by answering the following research questions.

Research Questions

The research has explored the ways of exploring the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal and it has sought how to enhance the women's inclusion in the

parliamentary system in Nepal. The following research questions have been answered by the research:

- a. What are the existing obstacles of women's inclusion in parliamentary system in Nepal?
- b. How can it be improved the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal?

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of the research have been explored the various huddles of the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal and it has identified the ways of improving the women's inclusion system in the parliamentary in Nepal and drawing the better position of women in Nepal. The specific objectives of the research are:

- a. To explore the existing obstacles of women's inclusion in parliamentary system in Nepal.
- b. To identify how it can be improved the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Parliamentary Policies: Comparative Analysis Pre-2007

On September 14, 1846, known as 'Kot Parva' or the Kot massacre, Jang Bahadur and his associates orchestrated the killings of nearly all senior officials. This significant and horrifying event propelled Jang Bahadur into a position of undeniable influence, leading to his inevitable ascension to the post of Mukhtiyar (prime minister) the following day, September 15, 1846 (Pandey, 1973). This bloody episode marked the beginning of the hereditary 'Rana rule' in Nepal, where subsequent to Jang Bahadur, his brothers and sons would succeed to the position of prime minister. During the 104-year-long autocratic rule of the Rana family in Nepal, members of the Rana family held not only the position of prime minister but also occupied other significant positions within the state apparatus. This political system rendered the Shah kings as nominal heads of state while the Rana prime ministers wielded de facto power (Singh, 2004). Over time, the monarchy gradually lost its authority, becoming a mere figurehead as the Rana prime ministers monopolized control over state affairs. The kings were effectively isolated from direct involvement in governance and prohibited from engaging directly with the populace. During the Rana regime, which lasted for nearly a century, the monarchy was reduced to a symbolic role while the Rana prime ministers held absolute

power, controlling every aspect of governance. King's movement even within the Royal Palace required permission from the prime minister, illustrating the strict autocracy and centralization under the Rana rule. Amidst this authoritarian environment, there were minimal opportunities to enhance women's participation in Nepalese politics.

Prime Minister Padma Shamsher made efforts to introduce some elected municipalities to increase local participation three years before the end of the Rana regime. In 1948, he introduced Nepal's first written constitution, the "Government of Nepal Act, 1948," which guaranteed voting rights to specified age groups of Nepalese citizens. However, due to Padma Shamsher's sudden resignation, this constitution was not implemented, and his successor Mohan Shamsher did not prioritize advancing these initial steps. Throughout the century-long Rana rule, there was scant space for ordinary people to participate in Nepal's political system, let alone women holding key positions within the state structure.

During King Tribhuvan's reign, discontentment towards the autocratic Rana regime grew, leading to organized efforts to oppose it. Various actors and newly formed organizations within Nepal actively fueled the anti-Rana movement. Domestic entities such as King Tribhuvan, secret societies like Prachanda Gorkha (established in 1931), Nagarik Adhikar Samiti, Praja Parishad (formed in 1935), and individuals aware of the oppressive nature of Rana rule played crucial roles in this movement.

Additionally, Nepalese youth and educated intellectuals residing in India contributed by publishing newspapers, pamphlets, and other materials distributed in Nepal to support the anti-Rana cause. Furthermore, the All-India Nepali National Congress and All India Gorkha Congress (established in January 1947 in India) were significant external organizations that actively supported and accelerated the movement against the Rana regime. These two groups eventually merged in June 1947 to form the mass-based political party Nepali National Congress, aiming to establish a constitutional monarchy and democratic system in Nepal. Both internal and external forces collaborated to pose a substantial threat to the longevity of Rana rule (Singh, 2004). It has been found to be detrimental for the legal provision for all.

In 1946, the formation of the All-Nepal Trade Union Congress (ANTUC), led by Manmohan Adhikari, marked a significant shift towards unionizing labor movements under the influence of communist ideology (Acharya, 2012). A year later, Girija Prasad Koirala established the Biratnagar Workers Union (BWU), driven by socialist political beliefs. Prior to their involvement in labor activism, both leaders had participated in the Indian independence movement.

The Biratnagar Jute Mill Labor demonstration, initiated by Girija Prasad Koirala on March 4, 1947, initially aimed to address labor rights issues but quickly evolved into a broader movement calling for political regime change. Support for this cause grew as B.P. Koirala, chairman of the Nepali Congress, lent his backing to the movement from India, advocating for democratic principles despite political prohibitions within Nepal. Simultaneously, Manmohan Adhikari garnered support from Indian communist leaders, further galvanizing the labor movement's political aspirations. This labor-led initiative expanded nationwide, catalyzing widespread support and involvement from domestic and external Nepalese groups based in India, all united in their pursuit of political transformation (Acharya, 2012). It has displayed that the effort has been found to be positive for the nation.

In November 1949, King Tribhuvan's decision to seek political asylum in the Indian embassy sparked significant unrest against the Rana regime in Nepal. Accompanied by almost all of his family members, the king arrived at the Indian embassy in Nepal by car, later flying to India with the assistance of the Indian government (Acharya, 2012). This move occurred amidst Prime Minister Mohan Shamsheer's persistent efforts to persuade the king to return to the Royal Palace, all of which proved unsuccessful. In response, Mohan Shamsheer declared Tribhuvan's four-year-old grandson, Gyanendra, as the new king of Nepal, replacing Tribhuvan. However, this unilateral action faced strong opposition from India, which refused to recognize Gyanendra as the legitimate king. Similarly, Britain and the United States did not support the appointment of the new king.

Meanwhile, the Nepali Congress initiated an armed revolution across the country, leading to intense clashes between the Rana Army and the Congress forces. This dual

pressure—from both domestic unrest and international disapproval—created an increasingly untenable situation for the Rana rule. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru exerted diplomatic pressure on Mohan Shamsher, emphasizing the urgency of resolving the crisis to avoid further deterioration. Ultimately, faced with mounting challenges, Mohan Shamsher saw no alternative but to negotiate with the revolutionary forces (Acharya, 2012). It has reflected that the negotiation has been found to be positive for the better forms of the politics in the country.

Since January 14, 1951, discussions between King Tribhuvan, the Prime Minister, and leaders of the Nepali Congress sought to address the political issues that had arisen. India played a crucial role as a mediator, facilitating communication among all parties involved. The final round of talks took place in Delhi on February 12, 1951, where an agreement was reached to establish a constitutional monarchy and democratic government in Nepal promptly. For the transitional phase, it was decided to form an interim government comprising an equal number of ministers from the Rana side and the Nepali Congress, led by Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher. This landmark agreement became known as the 'Delhi Agreement' in Nepalese history. Immediately following the agreement, King Tribhuvan returned to the palace and on February 18, 1951, made a historic announcement (Singh, 2004). With this royal declaration, Nepal transitioned into a democratic country, bringing an end to the over a century-long autocratic rule of the Ranas.

King Tribhuvan established an interim constitution and government to govern until the first parliamentary election in Nepal in 1959 (Upreti, 2020). The constitution aimed to pave the way for the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections to draft a new constitution for Nepal, although this objective ultimately remained unachieved (Lal, 2014). The interim constitution emphasized principles such as equality before the law, non-discrimination, and equal rights for men and women. However, it did not include specific policies aimed at achieving gender mainstreaming (Nepal Law Commission, 2018). It has been found to be weak provision of the participation of the women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1959, outlined the structure of parliament, specifically the House of Representatives (Lower House) comprising 109 members. In Nepal's inaugural parliamentary election held in 1959, only one female member was elected out of the total 109 representatives (Federal Parliament Secretariat, 2018). This has been found to be ineffective one for the legal provision of the women's participation in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Before the parliamentary term concluded, King Mahindra dissolved the elected government, which had secured a two-thirds majority, and imposed restrictions on all political parties (Gurung, 2011). Subsequently, a unitary, centralized monarchical system known as 'panchayat' was introduced, devoid of political parties (Khadka, 1986). In 1962, King Mahindra promulgated "The Constitution of Nepal, 1962," consolidating power under the monarchy. Although the constitution mentioned the establishment of national panchayats and elections, the electoral process under the party-less panchayat system was often perceived more as 'selection' than 'election' (Thapa, 2015). Throughout these political transitions, the struggle for women's rights and their participation regressed significantly (Upreti, 2020). The autocratic panchayat system governed Nepal for approximately thirty years until it was toppled by the civil revolution in 1990 (Srivastava, 2010). Following this, King Birendra announced the reinstatement of democracy. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990, was enacted to ensure democratic governance alongside a constitutional monarchy. The legislature consisted of the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. The House of Representatives comprised 205 members elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. Political parties were required to field at least five percent of their candidates as women in elections (Himalaya, 1991). This marked the first minimum threshold for women candidates, although it did not guarantee their representation in the House of Representatives.

The National Assembly consisted of 60 members, with a stipulation that at least three women must be elected (Himalaya, 1991), ensuring a minimum representation of women in the upper house. Three parliamentary elections were conducted based on the FPTP electoral

system in 1991, 1994, and 1999 (Thapa, 2015). Thapa has pleaded for the active participation of the women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Method

This research adopted descriptive and analytical method in which the secondary data were collected through the various research articles, reports, journals, published books and from the documents of the experts presented in the seminars officially. It has drawn the legal provisions managed by the constitutions of the country, Nepal from the past to the present. In this sense, historical documents were used for the exploration of the condition of the inclusion system of the women in parliamentary in Nepal. The various thematic categories were adopted and even the status of involvement of women in the House of Representative before 2007 and the status of women's participation in the House of a Representative after 2007 were used for the analysis of the data.

Results and Discussion

The analysis has been carried out on the basis of the historical legal provisions and the practices in the parliamentary history of Nepal.

Evolution of Parliamentary Policy Post-2007

The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007, marked the first constitutional document in Nepal to incorporate inclusive policies for women and other marginalized groups. It recognized women's rights as fundamental and emphasized their right to justice, along with ensuring proportional representation of marginalized groups in state mechanisms. The constitution also mandated that the state take responsibility for promoting inclusivity (UNDP, 2009). The Constituent Assembly (CA) provision was established to ensure that at least one-third of its members were women, marking a historic step towards enhancing women's participation in the CA, which also functioned as the parliament. The first significant CA election took place in 2008. However, the first CA was dissolved before completing its mandate of drafting a new constitution. Subsequently, a second CA election was held in 2013. The second Constituent Assembly successfully drafted Nepal's seventh constitution in 2015 (The Kathmandu Post, 2015). This new constitution transformed Nepal's political

system from a Unitary Nation into a Federal Democratic Republic, establishing three distinct levels of government: federal, provincial, and local (Constituent Assembly, 2015). This has been found to be ineffective for the legal provision for women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Within the legislature, both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly have adopted inclusive policies that ensure specific quotas for women. The House of Representatives mandates that at least one-third of its members from each political party must be women. Similarly, there are provisions requiring at least one female officeholder among the president, vice president, speaker, and vice-speaker of the parliament (Constituent Assembly, 2015). At this time the constitutional assembly has been found to have taken place.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal in 2007 initially introduced the policy of inclusion to increase women's representation in parliament through quotas, a policy that has been maintained and expanded upon by the Constitution of Nepal in 2015. This constitution of 2015 has not been found to have the better legal provision for women in the involvement of the party politics.

Women's Representation in the House of Representatives

The status of involvement of women in the House of Representative before 2007 is as shown in the table below:

Table 1

Status of Involvement of Women in the House of Representative before 2007

Year	Total seat	Male representatives		Female representatives		Constitutional Arrangement
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
1959	109	108	99.08%	1	0.92%	No special arrangement for women
1991	205	197	96.10%	8	3.90%	Each party must have atleast 5% of women candidates
1994	205	198	96.59%	7	3.41%	Each party must have atleast 5% of women candidates

1999 205 193 94.15% 12 5.85% Each party must have at least 5% of women candidates

(Source: Federal Parliament Secretariat, 2018)

Table 2

Women's Participation in the House of Representatives Since 2007

Year	Total seat	Male representatives		Female representatives		Constitutional Arrangement
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
2008	601	404	67.22%	197	32.78%	women's
2013	601	425	70.72%	176	29.28%	participation
2017	275	185	67.27%	90	32.73%	should be at least one-third of the total members

(Source: Federal Parliament Secretariat, 2018)

Analyzing Women's Participation Trends and Studies

The Inclusive policy was initially introduced by the Interim Constitution of Nepal in 2007. Prior to the implementation of quota systems, women's participation in government was minimal, averaging only 3.52% according to statistical data. However, with the introduction of inclusive policies, women's representation in government has significantly increased to nearly one-third of total members.

The effectiveness and impact of Nepal's inclusive policies have been a topic of debate among scholars. While some view these policies as a significant step towards achieving gender equality, others question their implementation, quality, and overall effectiveness. The introduction of the new election system has been noted as a crucial political innovation, leading to a more representative Constituent Assembly (Thapa, 2015). Thapa has pleaded for the legal provision for the participation of the women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

The guaranteed participation of women in politics has been largely attributed to favorable election provisions, enabling women to advocate for and secure important legal rights. The achievement of a one-third quota for women in parliament and other governmental

institutions is widely regarded as a substantial success for gender equality (Upreti, 2020). Nepal's commitment to gender equality is underscored by its ratification of CEDAW, highlighting the country's historical low levels of women's participation, which never exceeded 6% prior to the quota system. The introduction of percentage-based quotas has been pivotal in increasing women's representation (UNDP, 2014b). The UNDP has pointed out the facts of the condition of the women and their participation in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

Criticism has been directed at Nepal's quota system by various scholars regarding its practical application. Despite a significant presence of women in the 2008 Constituent Assembly, they often struggled to advance their agendas effectively. Issues arose as they failed to unite strongly on gender-related matters, and some even showed preference towards their male counterparts (Kandel, 2014). Additionally, disputes over the distribution of allocated quotas caused rifts within political parties, with some nearly splitting apart. There have also been allegations against influential political figures for misusing quota allocations to appoint their relatives, including spouses, in-laws, and close associates (Lal, 2014). The idea of Lal has advocated for the inclusion of the women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

The Constitution of Nepal has made significant provisions for the inclusive participation of all in shaping the nation's future. However, as discussed by Adhikari et al. (2020), this process has become as challenging as the complex nature of global politics highlighted in Adhikari et al. (2022). Furthermore, the global situation, as explained by Adhikari (2020) in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, has added to the seriousness of the situation. Despite these complexities, it remains essential for everyone to strive towards involving all in the nation's development.

Overall Findings

In Nepal, several obstacles hinder women's inclusion in the parliamentary system. These hindrances have been presented under different subtopics:

Traditional Gender Roles

Societal expectations often limit women's participation in politics, as they are typically assigned roles within the household rather than in public leadership.

Political Culture

Nepali politics has historically been male-dominated, making it challenging for women to break into existing power structures and networks.

Educational Barriers

Limited access to education, particularly higher education, restricts women from acquiring the skills and qualifications often required for political leadership roles.

Legal and Institutional Constraints

Despite legal provisions for gender equality, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain inconsistent, affecting women's ability to participate equally in politics.

Cultural and Social Norms

Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and practices undermine women's credibility and effectiveness as political leaders, discouraging their active involvement in decision-making processes.

Violence and Intimidation

Women politicians often face threats, harassment, and violence, both physical and psychological, which deters their participation and undermines their safety.

Party Politics

Women may encounter barriers within political parties, including lack of support for their candidacies, unequal access to party resources, and limited opportunities to hold leadership positions. Addressing these obstacles requires comprehensive efforts to promote gender equality, strengthen legal frameworks, enhance educational opportunities for women, and challenge discriminatory cultural norms and practices.

Improving Women's Inclusion in the Parliamentary System in Nepal

Improving women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal requires addressing multiple facets across societal, legal, political, and cultural dimensions. Here are

several strategies that can help enhance women's participation and they are presented in pointwise.

Legal Reforms and Enforcement

Strengthening and enforcing laws that promote gender equality and women's representation in politics. This includes implementing quotas or affirmative action measures to ensure a minimum level of women's representation in parliament and other elected bodies.

Political Party Reforms

Encouraging political parties to adopt internal policies that support women's candidacies, such as quota systems within party lists, training programs for women leaders, and allocating resources equitably.

Education and Awareness

Increasing access to education for girls and women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, to empower them with the knowledge and skills necessary for political participation.

Capacity Building

Providing training and mentoring programs specifically tailored for women aspiring to enter politics, including leadership skills, public speaking, and campaign strategies.

Addressing Cultural and Social Norms

Conducting awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards women in leadership roles. Engaging with community and religious leaders to advocate for gender equality and women's rights.

Support Services

Establishing support mechanisms for women politicians, including legal assistance in cases of harassment or violence, childcare facilities, and networks for peer support and mentorship.

Media and Communication

Promoting positive portrayals of women leaders in the media and ensuring fair coverage of women candidates during elections. Encouraging media outlets to adopt gender-sensitive reporting practices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regularly monitoring progress on women's inclusion in politics through data collection and analysis. Holding accountable institutions and stakeholders responsible for promoting gender equality in political representation.

By implementing these strategies comprehensively and collaboratively involving government, civil society, political parties, and international organizations, Nepal can make significant strides towards achieving gender parity and ensuring women's meaningful participation in the parliamentary system.

Conclusion

A comprehensive examination of existing literature and statistical analyses have been found to indicate that the implementation of inclusive policies has had a notably positive impact on increasing female participation in Nepal's parliament. While the adoption of a quota system has been identified to represent a significant milestone, it alone has not been found to be suffice to achieve complete gender equality, yet it has been known to have remained a crucial initial stride on a broader path. Critics of the Nepalese quota system have been found to have expressed concerns aimed at enhancing its effectiveness to ensure more qualitative and impactful representation. It has been identified that they have advocated for improvements while acknowledging the policy's potential but stop short of outright opposition.

In summary, empirical data and numerous previous studies have been revealed to have demonstrated the significant positive impact of Nepal's adoption of an inclusive policy aimed at increasing female participation in parliament. The quota system has been found to be proven to be a crucial and expedient method for fostering inclusivity within a relatively short timeframe. However, it has been identified that it has become important to recognize that the

quota system should be viewed as a means to an end rather than the end of the goal itself. Nepal's ultimate objective have been explored that it has become be essential to achieve gender equality comprehensively across all sectors.

Moreover, to achieve this overarching objective, it has been known that Nepal would benefit more from maintaining and strengthening its current strengths while addressing any challenges or criticisms associated with its inclusion policies. Moving forward, it has been revealed that it would be advantageous for Nepal to continue its journey towards establishing a gender-inclusive society by implementing more substantial and practical measures to enhance women's inclusiveness in the pigmentary system in Nepal.

Moreover, the research has been found various forms of the obstacles and the ways of improving the condition of the women's inclusion in the parliamentary system in Nepal and they have been explored and identified in the following forms as the traditional gender roles, political culture, educational barriers, legal and institutional constraints, cultural and social norms, violence and intimidation, party politics, legal reforms and enforcement, education and awareness, capacity building, addressing cultural and social norms, support services, media and communication, and monitoring and evaluation and these obstacles have been found to be addressed and the educational awareness has been found to be improved for the active participation and inclusion of women in the parliamentary system in Nepal.

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