Article

Defining Women's Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France

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Abstract
In 1999, after a heated debate on gender parity in political representation, the French constitution was amended to include the principle of "equal representation" of both sexes. This paved the way for the introduction of gender quotas. In the same period, a bill providing reservations for women at the national level provoked a political crisis in India. The objective of this article is to compare both debates, looking in particular at the way women's representation was framed. In France, the main argument against quotas was that republican representation should be unitary and transcend social differences, but at the end of the 1990s, women in mainstream politics were seen as one element of the dual nature of human kind, different from other categories such as class or race. In India, the specific representation of certain groups (Dalits, lower castes, tribal groups) had been the traditional framework for political representation since independence in 1947. But when the bill proposed to extend reservations to women, opponents of the project claimed that women did not constitute a category in themselves, and that sex should be intersected with caste and religion for the attribution of quotas. Looking at parliamentary debates, articles, and tribunes supporting or opposing quotas in both countries, we show that the arguments mobilized reveal different conceptions of the political representation of gender difference, which are partly transversal and partly specific to each country.

1. Introduction

In the 1970s, women represented 1.6% of the Assemblée Nationale, or the lower house of the French Parliament (1973) and 3.5% of the representatives elected to the Lok Sabha in India (1977). Although French women seemed to be in a better position than Indian women (if one compares indicators such as level of education, workforce participation or sexual and reproductive rights), their political representation was very low, and even lower than

in India. There was little progress in this area until 1999 when, after a heated debate on parity, the French constitution was amended to include the principle of "equal representation" of both sexes, which paved the way to the introduction of a system of gender quotas at all levels of government. During the same period, in 1996, the Women's reservation bill was introduced in the lower house of the Indian Parliament to "reserve" 33% of the legislative constituencies for women (i.e., men would not be allowed to stand in those constituencies). Although

officially supported by parties across the political spectrum, this bill was never adopted (it was passed in the upper house in 2010, but not by the lower house). Three decades later, the situation has changed dramatically in France, where the 2018 legislature includes 39.7% of women, but less impressively in India, where the share of female MPs rose to a record 14% after the 2019 elections. This result is intriguing, because quotas were completely absent from French political culture, whereas they had a long history in India and had been introduced for women at the local level without much controversy in 1992 (Ghosh & Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2005). One could argue that the greater inclusion of women in the French representative system reflects their overall better position in this society, but this was already the case in the 1970s, and comparative numbers at the global level show that there is no systematic connection between women's emancipation in society and their presence in parliaments (Achin, 2005).

The objective of this article is not to provide an encompassing response as to why the policy of equal representation was adopted in France and rejected in India. To answer this question, one would need not only to examine the debates on the subject, but also the sociology of the different stakeholders, as well as their interactions in the political field (Achin, 2005; Dutoya, 2014). Similarly, we will not enter into a detailed analysis of the implementation of quotas or their outcomes in terms of public policies, which have been studied quite extensively in both countries (Achin & Lévêque, 2014; Bereni, 2015; Bhavnani, 2009; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). In this article, we will underline a more specific factor: the ideological frames that contributed to this story, focusing on the 1990s. Indeed, in spite of striking differences, the debates in each country focused on whether what Hannah Pitkin (1967) has called "descriptive representation" should apply to women, and whether what Anne Phillips (1995) has named "politics of presence" should enable an increase in women's voices and concerns. While this issue has been addressed both for France and India (Dudley Jenkins, 1999; John, 2000; Lépinard, 2007), this article aims to bring together and compare the debates in these two countries.

As such, India and France may seem to be two disparate cases in a wide "quota wave" that went from Latin America to Asia and Europe (Krook, 2009). While this is not the first time we find such a comparison, previous attempts have been largely restricted to descriptions, focusing on the mechanisms of institutional innovation rather than on their framing (Krook, 2005); or relayed on the basis of a superficial understanding, to support one of the case studies (Menon, 2004, pp. 182–194). But comparing these two countries is particularly interesting for our study, which focuses on the ideological frames of women quotas. First, France and India constructed their representative systems in opposition to the two most widespread types of regime that existed prior to representative government, the Old Regime in the case of the

French Republic, the colonial system in the case of the Indian Union. Due to the political significance of both countries, their frames can be viewed as two of the most important for the Global North and the Global South respectively. France and India also illustrate the two major systems for introducing gender quotas at the world level: these are the "candidate quota system", which requires parties to present a certain percentage of female candidates in elections, dominant in Europe, America, East- and South-East Asia and some African countries, and the "reserved seat system", which sets aside a certain number of seats for female representatives, more common in Africa, the Middle-East and South Asia (Hinojosa & Piscopo, 2013). In both countries, the projected reform was adopted as a constitutional amendment that encouraged a specific and sophisticated form of argumentation, in which positions were formulated in relation to the fundamental values of the Republic in France, and the Union in India. Thus, in both countries, the debate on quotas revealed underlying conceptions of citizenry, political representation, and gender difference. Comparing these two cases helps us understand how these conceptions contributed to the acceptability of quotas for women, but also the specific shape they took in each country. Lastly, India and France are interesting cases to show both the global connections established around quotas, as well as the local ruptures. Indeed, the debates about quotas in France and India contribute to the construction of a global rationale for women's quotas that has involved conflicting definitions of political representation and produced one of the most impressive series of institutional political innovations in the world. In this regard, connected history (Subrahmanyam, 1997) helps us cut "across chronological and institutional divides shaped by Eurocentrism" (Douki & Minard, 2007). Connecting the French and Indian cases disturbs the "Grand Narrative of Modernization" (Subrahmanyam, 1997, p. 145) that generally centres democratic innovation in Europe and the North, and illustrates the transfers that have been crucial at the transnational level to explain the gender quota wave.

In order to understand the differences and similarities between the French and Indian framing of the political representation of gender difference, we will first localize the emergence of women's quotas in these two countries within the global movement towards quotas for women, paying attention to the specificities of the type of quotas adopted in each country. In the second part, we will stress the fact that both India and France had developed strong so-called "universalistic" conceptions of political representation, which were challenged when the representative claim (Saward, 2006) to increase the women's share in parliaments gained legitimacy. We will carry out a detailed study of the different reinterpretations of these "universalistic" frames, when confronted with gender difference, and their impact on the fate of women's quotas. To do this, we combine and reassess two independent studies. One looks at the de-

bates about reservations in India, while the other analyses the issue of parity in France. Both surveys relied on the discursive analysis of parliamentary debates (which were systematically analysed and coded), and a study of the local press, on which the present article will focus. The surveys also include interviews (about 40 in India and 25 in France) with stakeholders involved in the debate (MPs, party office bearers and feminists) and, in France, participant observation in feminist debates (see the Methodological Appendix).

2. The Connected Histories of Indian and French Quotas

2.1. A Global Shift towards Quotas

The need for a global understanding of women's quotas has been convincingly defended by numerous authors (Waylen, 2015), including in the cases of France and India (Dutoya, 2016; Krook, 2009; Lépinard, 2007; Murray, 2012; Scott, 2005). Although it is not within the scope of this article to reiterate this argument, it is important to briefly highlight its main features. The global discussion on women's political representation began during the United Nations Decade for women, launched after the first World Conference on Women in Mexico, in 1975. It took place at different forums, for instance with the discussions around the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; United Nations, 1979). Adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, the CEDAW encouraged measures to ensure women's political participation (Art. 3), including "temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women" (Art. 4). However, the real shift occurred when the Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing (1995) recommended the introduction of a minimum quota of 30% of women in parliaments. In the decade prior to the Beijing Conference, only ten countries had introduced a women's quota, starting with Argentina in 1991 (Hinojosa & Piscopo, 2013). Ten years later, more than 100 countries had adopted this policy. At the European level, a rationale for "equality of results" or "substantive equality" was developed to replace the traditional liberal and republican "equality of opportunities" and "formal equality". The Council of Europe, a looser but geographically broader institution than the European Union, played a major role in promoting women's representation after 1989, adopting the keyword parity and making it a part of the public debate by organizing numerous conferences and publishing reports (among others Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997, 1999). These global discussions had a local impact. They contributed to the emergence of substantive equality as the dominant paradigm and the legitimation of quotas to ensure women's political representation. Experiments travelled and countries could draw from achievements elsewhere. Global arenas were also sites of learning, socialization and networking

for feminists, who used them to strengthen their local legitimacy (Lépinard, 2007, pp. 35–76).

France and India are good examples of the local impact of global discourses. Although transfers did not occur directly between these two countries, indirect connections played a certain role, through the actions of transnational actors and during the World Women's conferences. In India, the discussion around quotas began during the preparations for the 1975 Mexico conference when the Indian government nominated a special committee to examine the issue. The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) concluded that, while the 1950 Constitution gave women equal status as citizens, this formal equality had not translated into substantive equality (CSWI, 1974). Though the report rejected quotas, it re-ignited the debate within the women's movement, as it showed the failure of the strategy of formal equality. The government also took up the issue and, in 1992, two constitutional amendments granted women 33% reservations in local level institutions. In France, although the idea of quotas for women can also be traced back to the 1970s (Bereni, 2015, p. 37), the campaign for parity only started in the early 1990s, and became part of the mainstream even later, in the mid-1990s. One of its starting points was the common declaration adopted in Athens in 1992 in the context of a conference organized by the European Commission, calling for an egalitarian distribution of political power between men and women (Lépinard, 2007, p. 46). In 1999, a constitutional amendment introduced the objective of equality between men and women in political representation. In the following years, various laws made it mandatory to present an equal number of men and women for elections under the proportional system (European, regional and municipal), and reduced public funding for political parties participating in legislative elections that do not present the same number of male and female candidates under the majority rule system (the presidential election was not affected). In fact, as the international literature on quotas predicted (Hinojosa & Piscopo, 2013), this has worked quite well for the former but far less for the latter, and other laws, together with the evolution of mentalities, have been necessary to move towards a more balanced parliament, 18 years after the constitutional amendment.

2.2. Women's Representation as a Marker of Modernity and Modernization

The way the debates unfolded in India and France shows that in the 1990s, women's representation became a global marker of political modernity or of the modernization of political life. Nevertheless, it was embedded in different kinds of rhetoric. In India, this connection was particularly explicit during the discussions about the Women's reservation bill in Parliament. Many MPs insisted that women's reservations would bring about a historical change and create the "India of tomorrow" in the "world of the 21st century" (Lok Sabha Secretariate,

1996). The modernity that India was supposed to achieve through women's representation was also understood in terms of the nation's position in the international arena. Just as the "women's question" was one of the sites of the colonial encounter in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Mani, 1987), it is now a global issue (Cîrstocea, Lacombe, & Marteu, 2018). In this context, those in support of women's quotas made numerous references to international standards in the press (Bhagat, 1997; Times of India, 2009) and in Parliament. For instance, a Communist MP argued that "the developmental degree of a nation is judged by the status of women. If that is the principle by which we are going to judge India, then we are far behind" (A. K. Premajan, as cited in Lok Sabha Secretariate, 2000, p. 706).

In France as well, those who defended quotas insisted on the fact that the "land of human rights" could not further delay increasing the presence of women in politics (Bereni, 2015). But while in India, because of the (post)colonial context, the country's position in international rankings was seen as critical, this was less so in France where the main argument centered on the internal necessity to modernize the political system. After the consecutive defeats of both the Socialist and Rightwing governments in 1993 and 1997, all parties were weakened and faced a deep crisis of legitimacy. Opinion polls showed the French citizens' growing distrust in political life and political leadership. The corruption scandals that affected both the Left and the Right were the most visible symptom of the gap between ordinary people and the political "class". In this context, both the Right and Left became advocates of a "modernization of political life" that was supposed to reduce this gap. As the word parity had been popularized at the European level, many politicians suddenly saw it as a necessary part of the modernization process (Bereni, 2015), illustrating a more general potential relationship between democratic crises and the potential for engendering politics (Waylen, 2015). A further advantage in a time of economic recession was that it involved no financial cost.

2.3. The "Vernacularization" of Quotas

In both cases, the call for democratic modernity, or the modernization of political life, was made in reference to global arenas. Nevertheless, the need to increase women's representation was also re-inscribed in local histories, particularly the nationalist struggle in India, and republicanism in France. This phenomenon can be read as a sort of "vernacularization", to use the Indian notion that designates not only the process of translation but also the appropriation and re-signification of a general concept or idea in local cognitive contexts. Interestingly, in both countries, the universalist conception of representation, based on individuals rather than groups, was not framed as liberal, as in the majority of international literature, but as republican in the French case and as the guarantee of national unity in India (Bajpai, 2016). In

both countries, the term "quota", which was the most widespread at the international level, was conspicuously absent and replaced by "reservations" (or *aarakshan* in Hindi) in India and "parity" (*parité*) in France. In India, the global discussion on quotas reactivated an older debate, as women's representation had been discussed from the 1920s onwards (Forbes, 1979). Moreover, political reservations to ensure the representation of scheduled castes (also known as *Dalits* and "untouchables") and tribes existed since independence, and had been later extended to lower castes (Jaffrelot, 2003). Thus, the discussions around women's reservations that began in the 1970s, and unfolded in the following decades, referred not only to global debates on women's representation, but also to the local history of quota and group representation.

In France, there was no pre-existing instrument that could accommodate the demand for women's representation. On the contrary, the French republican tradition was averse to the specific representation of social groups. The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (which has Constitutional value) states:

> As all citizens are equal in the eye of the law, positions of high rank, public office and employment are open to all on an equal basis according to ability and without any distinction other than that based on their merit or skill. (National Assembly of France, 1789)

Moreover, article three of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (Government of the French Republic, 1958) adds that "no group (*section*) of people, nor any individual, may lay claim to the exercise" of National Sovereignty. In 1982, the National Assembly almost unanimously passed a bill stating that no party list in municipal elections shall consist of more than 75% of candidates of the same sex, but the French equivalent of the Supreme Court (*Conseil Constitutionnel*) over-ruled the law as unconstitutional.

When the Council of Europe popularized the term parity, it tended to present it as a 50% quota, more radical than the 30% quotas defended at the international level after the Beijing conference. Europe had to be at the forefront of the path for gender equality. When the word parity was adopted in France, however, its meaning was defined quite differently to suit the republican narrative. It was defended as the sign of a "national exception" (Lépinard, 2007, p. 129) regarding the gender order. Parity was presented by mainstream politicians and a large group of intellectuals and feminists as very different from "quotas", which were seen as belonging to the North American tradition. While quotas were defined as a tool for "group" or "minority" representation parity claimed to be "universal in nature", or related to the universal and natural division of mankind between men and women (Bereni, 2015, p. 189). On the contrary, in India, women's quotas had to be adjusted within a reservation system that already recognized groups on the basis of caste and tribal status.

3. Two Forms of Universalistic Representation and Their Challenges

3.1. Only Paradoxes to Offer

Joan Scott (1996) has coined the dilemma and paradoxes faced by French women—especially feminists—in the so-called universalistic republican frame. French republicanism has imposed its universalistic frame on groups that have legally or de facto been excluded from political representation. Therefore, members of these groups have faced a paradox. They have often contested their exclusion and demanded to be represented as a group—but this is nearly impossible because the republican frame and the very notion of universal rights seem inhospitable to the idea of group representation. But when opting to claim recognition only as individuals, most have remained powerless in this universalistic structure, which has de facto deprived them of representation precisely as members of a subaltern group. Women had been excluded or marginalized in political representation because of their sexual difference, which was supposed to establish them in the realm of nature (vs. politics), of the private (vs. the public), of feelings and emotions (vs. reason)—all of which are opposed to the universal, disembedded, rational and autonomous citizen. Hence they either had to vindicate themselves as women, as sexually different, relying on a category constructed specifically to exclude them; or they had to try to gain full citizenship by identifying themselves with the other side of the dichotomy, the unencumbered, rational and autonomous citizen, i.e., with a figure constructed for men as distinct from women.

At first glance, the political field may seem more conducive to women's group representation in India, as femininity was recognized early on as a political resource; be it symbolically or practically. Not only did the national struggle draw heavily on the imagination of the motherland, Hinduism (the religion of about 80% of Indians) offers a vast array of powerful goddesses, which contradict the idea of a passive and helpless femininity (Basu, 1996). In particular, women were crucial actors in the nationalist struggles (Thapar-Björkert, 2006). Then, the Government of India Act of 1935, a *de facto* constitution, provided for reserved seats for women, long before the 1990s, which makes India the first country in which such a measure was implemented. Third, other groups (religious minorities and so-called "depressed" or "backward" castes) were also granted reservations, and in some cases separate electorates. Thus, group representation does not constitute the same taboo in India as in France.

However, Indian women also had to face a paradox. Although group representation seemed available and women could use cultural and historical resources to impose themselves in politics, they chose not to do so. Given their origins, reservations were associated with the colonial strategy of "divide and rule". And

they indeed divided India. In the 1930s, the Congress Party, led by a majority of upper caste and class Hindus, wanted to break with separate electorates and reservations and rely solely on the principle of "one person, one vote". Minority groups, especially those deemed particularly vulnerable or having distinctive interests (notably "backward castes" and religious minorities), claimed the perpetuation of separate electorates or at least reservations. This was a classical dilemma in the former British colonies (Mamdani, 2012) and it contributed to the partition between India and Pakistan. Among Indian nationalists, the debate was also tense. Some, like B. R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Constitutional Committee and the main porte-parole of the Dalits (around 15% of Indian population), wanted the abolition of castes but believed in affirmative action and therefore proposed separate elections for the different castes during a transitory period. Others, like Gandhi, opposed this perspective and defended a position similar to the French traditional Republicans. In this context, women became the champion of a universalist definition of citizenship, refusing a division of women along communal lines, and defending adult franchise without privileges (Forbes, 1979). According to Mrilani Sinha (2007), the major all-India women's organizations of the 1930s proposed women as the model for the "universal citizen" of independent India. Though this position had not prevented the division of the women's movement (and of the subcontinent), the women in the Constituent Assembly maintained it. They refused any form of quota, arguing that they trusted that "all women who are equally capable…as men will be considered irrespective of sex" (Renuka Ray, as cited in Lok Sabha Secretariate, 1947, p. 668). Thus, while the representatives of scheduled tribes and castes put forth their difference and the need for special political rights, the women's representatives (who claimed this status and were recognized as such) refused such distinctions. For the leadership of the ruling party, it was considered:

> A matter for congratulation that women have come forward to say that they do not want any special treatment. But at the same time, it is a matter of regret that men have not yet come up to that standard." (Vallabhbhai Patel as cited in Lok Sabha Secretariate, 1947, p. 674)

In this regard, while the Indian conception of representation accepted the idea of quotas, women chose to reject them, preferring to be recognized as equal by the party leadership and the elite to which they belonged.

3.2. Political Representation and the Debate on Parity

In France, the mapping of the debate in the second half of the 1990s shows a peculiar configuration (Sintomer, 2007). The existing literature has rightly shown that the dual concept of gender has played a role (Lépinard, 2007;

Murray, 2012), but it has overlooked the fact that this duality was not universally defended and the meaning of gender difference was interpreted from quite different perspectives. Three groups fought against the parity reform (see Table 1). The first consisted of the *classical sexists* who consider women less capable than men, and less motivated to become representatives. Philippe de Gaulle, son of the former French President, was quite isolated when he said in 2000:

> Since the world is the world, woman does something great, and the reason why she exists on earth is to have children! All the world's discoveries have been made by man, because it is he who possesses creative imagination. (Le Monde, 2000)

Despite the number of classical sexists that still exist, this position is unacceptable in public discourse, and is rarely heard today.

The second position opposed to parity is that expressed by the *classical republicans* (Amar, 1999, pp. 15–22, 35–39). Political representation, they say, radically transcends any social or natural differences. A Right-wing MP quoting the French philosopher Alain Renaut said:

> One of the greatest achievements of the Republic…is that the subject of rights is neither a man nor a woman, neither a Jew nor a White or a Black, neither young nor old, neither landowner nor the opposite, neither rich nor poor: it is the human as such.
> Deputies represent the nation as such, and not any particular group….Any proportional representation of diversity, any parity or quota principle, refers to a perspective more reminiscent of Nuremberg's laws during the Nazi regime than any democratic idea….There are other minorities…: quotas for the most disadvantaged, for Muslims, for those who live in poor neighbourhoods will be necessary….This is the cycle that will be induced by the weakening of republican equality". (D. Julia, as cited in Assemblée Nationale, 1998)

To introduce a difference among the Sovereign people would therefore open a Pandora's box of communitarian divisions; it would import notions of identity politics and affirmative action into the French Republic, i.e., typically American products that have failed even in the US. It would ultimately destroy the Republic through the 'balkanization' of the public sphere. This discourse, a hegemonic one in the past, is still widespread among politicians and academics, but it has lost most of its appeal for the public.

Radical Marxists and deconstructionists make up the third group. While this position held little appeal for politicians or the electorate, it nonetheless had a certain influence among the feminists in the 1970s (Amar, 1999, pp. 11–14), and the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998/2001) held a similar position. Their argument was that women cannot claim equal representation using the concept of parity, which is ultimately based on the dualism that was constructed to exclude them. "Women, no more than men, are as such a homogeneous social category", wrote feminist intellectuals in a manifesto:

> Human kind is multiple, and so are social antagonisms. To claim political parity between men and women within the framework of rules and codes that have excluded women and benefited some, although not all men, is…to nourish the illusion of real representation…and risks legitimising the social and political sexual difference, which has been socially constructed….It reproduces the masculine model." (Hirata, Kergoat, Riot-Sarcey, & Varikas, 1999)

The problem was therefore not only to reverse the hierarchy in the duality between men and women, but also to contest all the oppressive categories that force individuals to respect gender roles. Furthermore, parity would only replace male politicians by a parity political class while abolishing or deconstructing representative democracy.

The supporters of parity were equally divided (see Table 1). According to *differentialist feminists* (Kristeva, 1999), women and men are different by nature. She wrote:

> As soon as the One becomes embodied and metaphysics diffidently tries to become concerned with a humanity which is living because plural, it begins to recognize differences, and the first difference is the sexual difference, which is irreducible to the other differences because it is the foundation of the political life of the human species. When supporters of parity place the focus on the vocation of maternity, in

Table 1. A conceptual map of the French debate.

Types of argument concerning the relation between the social and the political	Parity opponents	Parity supporters
Essentialist	Classical sexists	Differentialist feminists
Transcendental/"universalist"	Classical republicans	Parity republicans
Constructivist	Radical Marxists and Deconstructionists	Pragmatist egalitarians

Source: the authors.

the long run, they are promising a political destiny to the large majority of women and mothers who would wish to become involved. (Kristeva, 1999)

Women have different values, concerns, behaviours, interests and experiences than men, which have been marginalized in the public sphere and in political representation. Thus, an increase in the political presence of women would improve political representation: because of their potential maternity, women care for others whereas men care for power. Though this argument constituted a specific position for a minority of older generation feminists, it was widespread as a secondary argument among other women (and even some men), be they politicians, young feminists, or ordinary citizens.

Parity republicans composed the second group (Halimi, 1997). They also relied on the duality between men and women, and considered it a social construct built on sexual difference. "Neither women nor men are "categories''….They are the two sexual components of humanity". The opponents:

> Raise the false spectre of communitarianism. Today women. Tomorrow Jews, Blacks, homosexuals? A simple but uncompromising answer: women are not a community and do not share a community relationship, as defined by sociologists. They are neither a class, nor an ethnic group, nor a category. They are present in all these groups. Sexual difference is the original parameter. Before being a member of a class, a corporation, and so on, humans are first of all masculine and feminine." (Halimi, 1994)

But contrary to the claim made by the differentialist feminists, while the dual structure of gender identity is universal, the content of gender roles differs in history and between civilizations. The universalism of former French republicanism was abstract because it was blind to sexual difference, which led to the monopolization of political representation by men. Earlier feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, misled women when encouraging them to participate in a political life designed for men, without seeking to modify the rules of the political game. Parity means that universality has to be envisaged as a duality. Political parity between women and men would not open the Pandora's box of communitarianism as women are neither a category nor a community but one half of humanity. Women's demand for parity has nothing to do with claims for ethnic, regional, social, or group representation. This position was very specific to French political discourse. It was influential among academics, feminists and ordinary citizens, and crucial among politicians. All the political groups in parliament used this argument to officially justify their position in favour of parity (although it was strongly nuanced by the Communists and the Greens). This reshaped republicanism was decisive in explaining why the constitutional law on parity was approved by 94% of the representatives in a Parliament dominated by 92% of men. The specific representation of women was gaining popularity at a time when the idea of the representation of the working class was fading and the claim for specific ethnic group representation was only raised by a tiny minority.

The third group supporting parity was composed of *pragmatist egalitarians*. They saw parity more as a tool than a principle. The hierarchy between the sexes had been historically constructed, and affirmative action in politics was necessary to rectify past and present discriminations. This claim "is a stage, necessary, but possibly provisory—towards equality", and therefore "a strategy that aims to overcome masculine domination" (Gaspard, 1998). For Geneviève Fraisse, a philosopher who was responsible for women's rights under the government of the time, parity was "philosophically false" (Bachelot & Fraisse, 1999, p. 177), because it was based on an essentialist dualism, but it was "true in practice" (quoted in Tasca, 1998), because it was popular: "Parity is a tool for equality. There is no need to justify it philosophically, because it is only a means. The principle is equality between men and women" (Bachelot & Fraisse, 1999, p. 177). Pragmatic egalitarians thought that the fight for parity was positive only if combined with a struggle against other forms of discrimination (Collective, 1999). They supported homosexual marriage when most differentialist feminists and a number of parity republicans strongly opposed it in the name of the "symbolic order" of mankind. Pragmatic egalitarians were influential among ordinary citizens and probably a majority among academics and feminists. Although they were in the minority among politicians, they could prevent the notion of parity from being introduced in the Constitution, which mentioned only the word "equality".

It is important to stress that the arguments concerning the relationship between the social and the political cut across the opponents, and advocates of parity. Essentialist, transcendental (or so-called "universalist") and constructivist visions were mobilized on both sides. In addition, although all the advocates of parity referred to the dichotomy between men and women, they defined it differently. Differentialist feminists had an essentialist vision of the dichotomy, and of sexual difference, based on a complementarity between two equal groups constitutive of humanity. Parity republicans put forth a structuralist vision of sexual dualism and difference: the complementarity was inevitable but its meaning depended on the historical and social context. Republicans who supported parity were sceptical of sexual difference, viewing dualism as a historical construct that could lose its significance in the future due to affirmative action and a progressive equalisation of the social and political situation between men and women. Therefore, they tended to oppose the claim of complementarity. This complexity explains why the word equality, rather than parity, was included in the constitution. It also helps us understand that, although in the short term, newly-elected women were largely confined to classical "women's position" (in

the social, health care and related fields), especially at the local level (Lépinard, 2007), this has changed over time, and a number of strong female politicians have managed to occupy leading positions, including in the defence or finance ministries. The same dynamic has also favoured the discussion of the representation of ethnic groups under the label "diversity". Less than two decades after the constitutional amendment, the dualist position of the republicans who support parity has been weakened and pragmatist egalitarians occupy centre stage.

3.3. Conflicting Claims for Group Representation in India

Many of the arguments developed in the debate around parity in France were also used in India, but they were connected and hierarchized in a wide range of ways. As was the case in France, the idea that women were not competent enough was rarely expressed, or only as an off the record joke (Dutoya, 2016). While in the 1970s and 1980s there were debates within the women's movement regarding the nature of gender difference and the meaning of equality (Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2004), such issues were little discussed in the 1990s and the idea of gender quotas became fairly consensual (despite some dissenting voices, see for instance Dhanda, 2000; Kishwar, 1996). The absence of a debate on these major issues in France is largely due to the fact that the women's movement's support for women's quotas was mainly justified in pragmatic terms (Dutoya, 2014). As a member of the communist women's organization AIDWA explains; "we saw after 1975 that formal equality was not working, and we asked for quotas" (Interview in New Delhi, 2010). Thus, while many feminists were not convinced by arguments regarding the specific "nature" of women, or their "better heart", they strategically chose not to oppose those who used them, especially when parliamentary debates became particularly heated.

In the Indian Parliament, the idea of the duality of mankind was latent in many discourses. Many of the stakeholders in the debate emphasised the specificity of the gender regime in India, which relied on complementarity and mutual respect, in contrast to the "war between men and women" that was deemed to exist in the West. Hence, the objective of reservations for women was often designated as "*bhagidari*", meaning partnership or equal participation (the term was also used in the same period to designate a local participatory scheme in New Delhi) (Ghertner, 2011). In parliamentary debates, the term "*bhagidari*" was used to justify the need for reservations as a consequence of men and women's complementarity and partnership, rather than as a measure to counter gender discrimination and patriarchy as it had been expressed by the women's movement in the 1990s (Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2004). Many stakeholders insisted on the specificity (and superiority) of India in this respect. For instance, according to a Member of Parliament belonging to the Congress Party:

India is an ancient land that has acknowledged the feminine divinity and the divinity in the feminine. Western civilization is still in its formative years, as far as these concepts are concerned…the Indian model of preserving the space for women in the society by providing her respect instead of rights is the singular distinction between our society and the western society." (V. Maitreyan, as cited in Rajya Sabha Debates, 2010)

Here, both the idea of equality between men and women (marked by universal adult franchise) and complementarity between the sexes are used to justify quotas. This intertwining of two registers of argumentation in favour of gender quotas (based on difference and equality) was found to be a common justification for women's group representation worldwide (Mcdonagh, 2002). In India as well, the gender regime is viewed as different, superior, and implicitly more modern (as the West is deemed to be in its formative years). Ironically, the claim for exceptionality is a common trope that can be found around the world.

However, the issue of the nature of gender difference, as such, was not central to the debate in India, as the main point of contention was the articulation between women's representation and group representation. While it was considered highly problematic in France, the latter already existed in India, and the question was how to combine it with the new representative claims made by women. Indeed, although many in the Congress Party did not support quotas at independence, they had to work with those who did, particularly Ambedkar, who played a key role in the writing of the constitution. As a compromise, separate electorates were rejected, but political reservations (as well as reservations for government jobs and education) were maintained to ensure the representation of "scheduled castes" (the Dalits) and "tribes" (Bajpai, 2016). Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, the lower castes, officially called "Other Backward Classes" (OBC) (around 40% of the Indian population), also claimed reservations in educational institutions and the civil services. Political reservations were however not a strong claim, and in reality the number of OBC elected representatives, both at the State and federal level climbed steadily (with important variations depending on the State), leading to what can be considered a social democratization of Indian politics in the 1990s, when the Women's reservation bill was introduced in Parliament (Jaffrelot, 2003).

In 1992, in the wave of decentralization and constitution of autonomous local governments (*Panchayats*), 33% of local government seats were reserved for women (the number was later raised to 50% in some states) (Ghosh & Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2005). The difficulty arose when deciding how to implement women's reservations at the state and federal levels. The crucial debate concerned the manner in which women's reservations should be combined with other forms of reservations, or "quotas within quotas".

Indeed, the majority of those opposing the bill belonged to parties claiming to defend OBCs and Muslims (and often belonged to these social groups). They asked for specific quotas for Muslim and OBC women, claiming that "their women" (the possessive was frequently employed) could not be represented by Hindu upper caste women (see Table 2). Their main argument was that the category "women" was without substance because of socio-economic, caste, and religious differences, which give rise to radically opposed interests. Interestingly enough, this argument was symmetrically opposed to the claims of French pro-parity republicans: it stressed the difference between women and other social depressed groups, but concluded against women's quotas if not combined with other dimensions. Male representatives emphasized the differences between women in terms of values, behaviour, and even physical appearance, describing women of high caste and class as "sophisticated" and Westernized. To quote Sharad Yadav, OBC MP of the Janata Dal in 1997: "You want to crush the rights of our women. About which women are you talking here. We do not want to restrict ourselves for the uplifment [sic] of sophisticated women only" (Sharad Yadav, as cited in Lok Sabha Secretariate, 1997, p. 384).

Partisans of the bill contested their opponents' right to speak in the name of women. Some, especially women, occasionally rehashed the old argument of women's unity beyond caste and religion, but in India, as elsewhere, most feminist activists and some female politicians recognized the plurality of situations and the intersectional dimension of domination. In this completely different context, they combined the constructivist arguments of both radical Marxists and deconstructionists with the viewpoint of pragmatic egalitarians in France. However, it was impossible to find a compromise between those who defended reserved seats for women and those who proposed "quotas within quotas". Some feminists suggested beating the opponents of the bill at their own game, or "calling their bluff" and accepting quotas within quotas (Interview with a feminist researcher, New Delhi, 2010), but they remained a minority. Most of the positions expressed by feminists in interviews or publications showed that while they were "open" to specific measures for backward class and

Muslim women, they could not align with those who defended them in Parliament (Dhanda, 2000), deeming them dishonest and sexist. For instance, commenting on one of the opponents to the bill, a feminist and head of an NGO lashed out: "Look at this man, and what he does to women, he produces 14 children, that's what he did. That's what he thinks about women" (Interview in New Delhi, 2010).

In any case, major political parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress Party opposed quotas within quotas (particularly for Muslim women in the case of the BJP) and no compromise could be found. Many feminists claim that everyone found this deadlock convenient, as no man wanted the bill to be passed (Dutoya, 2014). However, the continuous debate over women's quota probably reinforced women's legitimacy in politics. Interestingly, although the bill was never passed, the number of women candidates and elected representatives has increased steadily since 1996, though it remains quite low, with 77 women (14%) elected in the 2019 general elections.

4. Conclusion

In many ways, the issues of parity in France and women's reservations in India have followed opposing paths. While in France, parity seemed to gain acceptance surprisingly quickly, given the resistance of the republican doxa to group representation, in India, the apparent consensus around reservations met with unexpected resistance. Yet, together, the two cases highlight the key role played by women's representation in the construction of what representation is and should be in a global, yet localized discourse on political modernity and modernization. Many factors explain the failure to impose reservations in India, from the logics of coalition to the resistance of the male leadership within parties officially supporting the bill (Dutoya, 2014). Conversely, in France, the inner logic of politicians' strategies in a context of a crisis of legitimacy has been crucial to explaining the success story of the parity motto. In both cases, however, our article shows that ideas matter. Arguments are not manipulated at will. The framings have their own rationales and constraints, and they imply some path dependency.

Table 2. The main positions in the debate on women's reservation in India in the 1990s and 2000s.

Nature of the argument	Partisans of quotas within quotas	Supporters of quotas for women as an encompassing category
Cultural	Upper caste women are Westernized/different	Women constitute a group in themselves and have distinctive qualities-
Constructivist	The intersection of caste, gender and religious discriminations produces distinctive experiences and interests Discrimination based on caste and religion is a more urgent issue	In a patriarchal society, women have distinctive interests and men cannot speak for women, even in the lower castes

Source: the authors.

In India, the inability to modify the claim for women's representation to fit into the existing system of group representation was a key factor. In particular, in a rhetoric reminiscent of the 1930s and 40s, the category "women" was opposed to other categories based on caste and religion. Women's quotas were rejected, not because the nationalist universalist frame would have been inhospitable to group representation, but because gender was not perceived as a criterion fine enough to identify a group requiring special representation. Feminists and women's organization themselves were not willing to fully abandon the idea of woman as a universal citizen, unmarked by caste and religion, in a context where such identities were once again, becoming central to Indian politics.

In France, the slogan parity was efficient because it could reconcile essentialist, transcendental and constructivist arguments related to women's representation. The reframing of "republican universalism" in terms of the dualism that parity was supposed to embody was a key moment in this process that enabled the adoption of gender quotas and it contrasted strongly with the social or ethnic group representation familiar to Indian politics. Nevertheless, two decades later, this new republicanism has nearly disappeared and the universalist frame is weakening. Women tend increasingly to adopt non-traditionally "female" roles in politics, and gender difference is no longer at the forefront. Constructivist frames have won legitimacy. Group representation and the equal participation of various groups in politics are increasingly discussed, beyond an exclusive focus on gender difference. And the claim for a different kind of politics of presence—social, gender-related and ethnic—is growing in "the land of human rights".

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Methodological Appendix: Corpus of the Research

- Indian parliamentary debates between September 1996 and March 2010 (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha): consulted at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and when not available there, through the online verbatim made available on the institutions' website (in these cases, the translations was done by the author). A research was carried out on the basis of key words to identify relevant debates.
- French parliamentary debates between 1998 and 2000 (available online at the French Assembly and Senate websites).
- Indian Press: Systematic analysis of two English language newspapers between 1996 and 2010 (*The Hindu* and *Times of India*), and research by keywords in the news database Factiva.
- French Press: systematic analysis of the sixty most quoted tribunes on the parity issue between 1990 and 2002.
- Interviews in India with MPs (32), feminists (8) and other stakeholders (4) (party office bearers, civil servants and journalists). Interviews in France with feminists and intellectuals (20).
- Participant observation in the feminist debates in France (1998–2000).