



## Parliamentary Participation of Women Representatives in the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha

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### ABSTRACT

Parliamentary form of government empowers people's representatives with an inherent right to elicit information from the government on any issue of grave public concern thereby enabling them to fulfill their duty towards their constituency or the nation at large. Members engage in debates and discussions on issues of national relevance. Asking questions is another significant parliamentary device to keep a watch over government. This helps in fixing the responsibility and accountability of government towards the people. Women parliamentarians in the legislature play the dual role of representing their respective constituency as well as representing the ascriptive identity of 'woman' on various legislative and policy issues, thus bringing about a gender balance in the male-dominated legislative arena. This research paper undertakes an analysis of some relevant debates engaged into and questions raised by women member of parliament during the question hour session, where law makers can act with much more discretion. It critically analyzes the performance of women MPs in parliament. The focus of this research paper will be the present Lok Sabha – 18th Lok Sabha.

### 1. Introduction

Legislation is the primary function of parliament. Members of Parliament participate in discussions and in turn raise issues in the form of questions, in order to acquire a wholesome view on



national issues. This churning of thoughts and opinion inside the legislative structure is ultimately responsible for the creation of better informed policies. The efficiency of a Member of Parliament (MP) is most of the times judged on their ability to speak up in parliament. The kind of questions they raise, the debates they participate in, knowledge, semantics of their speech, use of humor and finally the political will to raise difficult but pertinent issues. A representative's political graph can improve or degrade based on their performance in parliament.<sup>1</sup>

In this research paper, the parliamentary performance of women MPs in the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha is analyzed through their participation in debates and questions. Women MPs being a minority in the Lok Sabha, face an intrinsic power disparity which leads to their sidelining within the legislature, while at the same time placing them under public scrutiny because of their scarce numbers. This is known as 'burden of representation' (Puwar, 2004).<sup>2</sup> It is important to study the role played by women in parliament, so as to comprehend the plurality of perspectives, they bring on different issues. Parliament is the largest forum where women-centric matters are raised and discussed to find efficient solutions that is advantageous for almost half of the population and bestows women with equal decision-making power.

### **1. Representation Of Women In 18th Lok Sabha**

The present or 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (2024-2029), registered no significant change in the number of women elected to the lower house of parliament. Seventy Four MPs (14%) elected to the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha were woman. This figure is only slightly less than the 78 woman MPs elected to the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha in 2019. Out of these 74 MPs, 30 MPs have been the members of Lok Sabha in a previous term.<sup>3</sup> While this figure is definitely an improvement from the less than 5 percent representation in the first Lok Sabha of 1952, India still has a long way to go as far as women representation in legislature is concerned when compared with countries like South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America.<sup>4</sup>

### **2. Parliamentary Participation of Women MPs**

Parliamentary democracy thrives on the foundation of political parties. Political parties mirror the societal value structure by representing different hues of the diverse strata of society. Political parties contest elections on the promise of addressing the interest of the voters if they legitimately come to power. Once elected to legislature political parties attempt to capture the attention of the general public through their performance in debates and questions.



Participation of Members in Parliament ‘refers to all of those activities of MPs that are more or less aimed at influencing political decision-makers and/or the decisions they make’.<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Participation of legislatures can be ascertained through attendance, the number of debates participated, questions raised and private member’s bill introduced by the respective MP.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Participation of Women MPs in Debates in the 18th Lok Sabha

Parties are allotted speaking time in parliament in proportion to the number of seats they won in legislature. Intra-party dynamics decides who will speak on which issues, taking into account determinants like seniority, expertise, and lastly ascribed identity. Senior party leaders are given preference during debates, who are usually men.<sup>7</sup> The left over time is allotted to others including women MPs leading to insufficient time on their hands for a worthy parliamentary performance.

For the purpose of analysis this paper examines three debates in which women representatives participated in the 18th Lok Sabha.

**a). Motion of Thanks on President’s Address :-** Clause 1 of Article 87 provisions for special address by the President of India to both the houses of parliament, after each general election and at the beginning of first session of each year. The President’s address is drafted by the government of the day and is inclusive of the past accomplishments of the government and highlights broadly the legislative work the government plans to complete during the upcoming sessions.<sup>8</sup> Further, a copy of the address is laid on the table of each house of parliament so individual MPs may discuss the address. In this Lok Sabha debate undertaken on July 2nd, 2024, a total of 93 MPs participated, out of which only 15 women MPs participated.<sup>9</sup>

Women members used this platform of discussion on Presidential address to raise national and international issues distressing their respective constituency. Problems like farmer’s issues, use of drugs among youths, issues of minority community, river-water, health, rising prices of gas cylinders, drinking water, hospitals, better budget for their state, paper leaks, caste census, unemployment, and other issues were raised. Those who could speak with authority were chosen to highlight the government’s achievement in terms of infrastructure development projects, women empowerment schemes, appreciation of pandemic management and passage of bills like Naari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, etc.<sup>10</sup>



**b). WAQF Amendment Bill, 2025 AND MUSSALMAN WAKF Repeal Bill, 2024, on 2/04/2025:-** Total 63 MPs participated in this discussion, out of which 5 were women. One Member of Parliament belonging to minority community highlighted the issue of poor women losing their right to property due to the amendment brought out by this bill. Women’s issue was used by women MPs to argue both for and against this bill. Another women MP belonging to the minority community emphasized that present government was trying to harm the interest of minorities through these amendments.<sup>11</sup>

**c). Special Discussion on India’s Strong, Successful and Decisive ‘Operation Sindoor’ in Response To Terrorist Attack in Pahalgam, dated 28.07.2025:** Total 53 members participated in this debate, out of which 5 were women MPs. The discussion contained the following dynamics- petty personal remarks, questioning the military action, humbling the government, criticizing the government, offering support and praising the political will of the central government. It was observed that most women MPs toed the party line while speaking on this crucial issue of national interest.<sup>12</sup>

A tentative list of women MPs who frequently participated in debates in the 18th Lok Sabha during the period from 24/06/2024 to 21/08/2025 is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Participation of woman MPs in Parliamentary debates during the period from 24/06/2024 to 21/08/2025**

**(Data obtained from PRS Legislative Research Website)**

<b>Sr.No.</b>	<b>Name of the Member of Parliament</b>	<b>No. of Debates</b>	<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Term</b>
1.	Supriya Sule	53	Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar)	4 <sup>th</sup>
2.	T Sumathy Thamizhachi Thangapandian	52	Dravida Munnetra Kadagham	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3.	Smita Uday Wagh	34	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
4.	Gaikwad Varsha Eknath	32	Indian National Congress	1 <sup>st</sup>



5.	Malvika Devi	31	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
6.	Manju Sharma	30	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
7.	S. Jothimani	29	Indian National Congress	2 <sup>nd</sup>
8.	Praniti Sushil Kumar Shinde	27	Indian National Congress	1 <sup>st</sup>
9.	Shambhavi	27	Lok Jan Shakti Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
10.	Pratima Mondal	26	All India Trinamul Congress	3 <sup>rd</sup>
11.	Iqra Choudhary	25	Samajwadi Party	1 <sup>st</sup>

## 5. Participation of Women MPs through Questions in the 18th Lok Sabha

Raising questions during Question hour of parliament is considered along with debates as an important tool for gauging the parliamentary performance of an MP. The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is allotted for asking questions. Generally three different types of questions may be addressed to the respective minister of a concerned ministry. They are namely:

**a). Starred question:-** Recognizable by the asterisk mark, these questions require an oral answer and hence follow-up questions may be asked.

**b). Unstarred question:-** Only written answers are permissible for these kind of questions.

**c). Short notice question:-** A notice of less than ten days is given for these kind of questions. They are answered orally.<sup>13</sup>

Other than the above mentioned types, questions may also be asked to private members, to elicit information from them on any subject, or resolution for which that member may be responsible. It was observed that maximum questions asked were of unstarred type. Top ministries from which questions were asked: Health and family welfare, Railways, Agriculture, Education, Women and child



development, Jal Shakti, and Social justice and Empowerment. Constituency based questions on dams, health infrastructure, tourism, railway projects, highways and schools were generally asked by women MPs showing their true commitment and dedication towards the development of their respective constituency.<sup>14</sup>

A tentative list of women MPs who frequently asked questions in the 18th Lok Sabha during the period from 24/06/2024 to 21/08/2025 is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Participation of woman MPs in Question hour during the period from 24/06/2024 to 21/08/2025**

(Data Obtained From PRS Legislative Research Website)

Sr.No.	Name of the Member of Parliament	No. of Questions asked	Political Party	Term
1.	Smita Uday Wagh	184	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
2.	Gaikwad Varsha Eknath	152	Indian National Congress	1 <sup>st</sup>
3.	Supriya Sule	147	Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar)	4 <sup>th</sup>
4.	Delkar Kalaben Mohanbhai	143	Bharatiya Janata Party	2 <sup>nd</sup>
5.	Bharti Pardhi	138	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
6.	Shobhana Mahendrasinh Baraiya	128	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
7.	Kamaljeet Sehrawat	125	Bharatiya Janata Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
8.	Poonamben Hematbhai Maadam	116	Bharatiya Janata Party	3 <sup>rd</sup>
9.	Shambhavi	111	Lok Jan Shakti Party	1 <sup>st</sup>
10.	Aparajita Sarangi	109	Bharatiya Janata Party	2 <sup>nd</sup>



## 6. Analysis

The political infrastructures of our country, including Parliament and state legislatures are generally viewed as ‘male-dominated spaces’ where the male MPs enjoy a sense of supremacy due to their numerical strength (Puwar, 1997 and 2003).<sup>15</sup> Women legislators are looked upon as an anomaly, more or less as outsiders, underappreciated and over criticised due to their small numbers and therefore lack the same access to power in political spaces which men enjoy as their natural right. Thus, these rare women are seen challenging the patriarchal flow of power in our legislatures and may emerge as a source of contempt for the men.<sup>16</sup>

Though public speaking skills and good communication along with training sessions for parliamentarians and mentoring by senior leaders are the prerequisites for effective parliamentary performance.<sup>17</sup> It is observed that affluent and educated women, and women from civil services, law or academic field backgrounds are much more effective in getting their point heard and acknowledged across the political spectrum.

Further, women coming from political dynasty, which is more of a norm than an exception, are more outspoken, carry themselves confidently and therefore are seen more successful in shattering the patriarchal glass ceiling inside legislatures. Their political family upbringing can be credited for this level of empowerment. These women may act as a political surrogate for their male family members so that political power remains family centric always.

It is observed that women MPs toe the party line in relevant political debates. For instance, the Wakf amendment bill, where instead of acknowledging the benefits availed to women like endowing them with inheritance rights, improved role in governance, ensuring economic independence thereby improving the overall gender dynamics in the Muslim society at large due to the said amendment, was conveniently ignored by most women MP’s while debating on this issue.<sup>18</sup> Same was observed during the discussion on operation Sindhur, where instead of openly supporting the mission and providing constructive feedbacks on national security measures, the opposition women MPs questioned the name of the operation as well as the timing and intent of the government, proving that dirty inter-party politics wins over issues of national urgency. At the same, during the discussion on President’s address it was observed that women MPs approach to the discussion was intentional and they successfully raised all national and international issues of relevance with confidence. Again very few women MPs participated in these discussions.



It is observed that women MPs raised most questions related to soft issues like health, drinking water, education, etc. Women representatives generally asked questions related to their constituency areas. Hard issues like Science and technology, Defence, External affairs were raised less frequently by women MPs.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, it is observed that the parliamentary term of a woman representative has no relation to their parliamentary participation.

## 7. Conclusion

Overall, through this study, it is clear that women members draw attention of the house to relevant issues by appealing to the emotions of the legislatures. Unfortunately, intersectionality plays a bigger role in the parliamentary performance of women MPs as their priority is to identify with their political party, caste, constituency, religion, region and if some space is left then women-centric issues are taken into consideration. It is commendable that though women MPs are interrupted frequently during debates, they still hold their ground, undefeated by any manipulative tricks practiced on them inside the house. Women MPs have developed this ability to speak concisely and on point on several important issues due to the scarcity of time on their hands, which may restrict their parliamentary performance at times.

It is observed that just a token representation of women in Lok Sabha acts as a barrier in raising women's questions to the optimum. Political party allegiance is one important cause of this phenomena. The point of reflection is to see that once women achieve 'critical mass' in the Parliament, as passed by the Naari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam Bill, which is expected to be implemented once the delimitation exercise is undertaken after the next census, will it lead to a drastic change in the kind of discourse women MPs indulge in parliament? Will it in the long run lead to another perspective, on issues of relevance thus raising questions and problems concerning the other half of the population? Only time will tell whether the increase in number of women MPs in parliament will lead to the emergence of a different set of leadership dynamism as is assumed by many people, or will the same patriarchal dominance continue in parliamentary discourse like at present.

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