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**REPRESENTATION AND REPRESENTATIVENESS - A POLITICO-PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY**

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*The difference between representation and representativeness is much in terms of quality and texture and not so much in terms of quantity. However this thin veil of difference makes a colossal difference in practical politics. There is an ocean of literature available to make this difference known but that is in the form of philosophical discourses. This paper is an attempt to understand this in its theoretical/philosophical dimension to throw light on the much abused term of representation that is central to Political Science in general and Democracy in particular so as to bring to the fore the meaning of representation in the context of representativeness.*

*The paper is not without limitations and runs to about 2750 words. It raises many relevant questions and begs for answers too. This is a descriptive paper and is analytical in content.*

**KEYWORDS:** *representation, philosophical discourses***INTRODUCTION:**

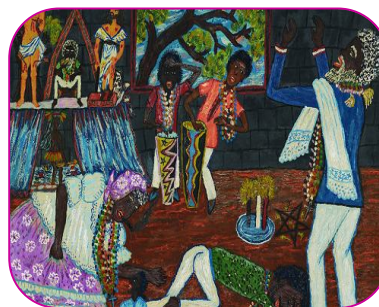
The origin of the concept of representation in western political theory dates to the later centuries of Rome, when the prince was regarded as the representative of the Roman people as a collective (Dunning cited in Fairlie, 1940 a). In the medieval period, both the

monarch – that is, the King, the Emperor, the Pope and such bodies as the Cardinals in the Church – and assemblies and councils of qualified citizens in organized communities, were attributed the character of representatives. This meant that representatives were conceived in terms of single rulers and largely hereditary or propertied (qualified) groups. The monarch was the trustee of the people. To a large extent, the trustees/representatives were free to act in a manner they deemed served the national interest.

In this early conception, representation did not necessarily entail election of the representative. Neither was it so in the appointment, in the case of a public officer; nor inheritance, with a single ruler acting on behalf of all the people and not particular constituencies constituted it. However, the nature of the idea of political representation has changed fundamentally over the centuries.

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION DEFINED**

Like most concepts in the social sciences, there is no single definition of political representation. Political representation is a contested concept. There is, however, a consensus on the importance of political representation to democracy. It is seen 'as a key activity, a lifeline or linchpin or hallmark that connects the citizenry to the government' (democracy) (Chamberlin and Courant 1983) (Zappala 1999). Representation is generally recognized as a necessary condition for democracy. Thus, J.S. Mill points out: "The only government which



can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate... But since all cannot, in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in all but minor portions of the public business; it follows that the ideal type of perfect government must be representative" (Mill 1862: 80).

To a considerable extent, the different conceptualizations of political representation are based on the different interpretations of the relationship between the representative and his/her constituents, as well as the functions of an elected representative.

### THE SETTING

In this paper representation, is used to mean 'Political Representation' and there shall be no doubt about it. Miller and Stokes (Constituency Influence in Congress 1963) saw representation as responsiveness (using it interchangeably-as synonym). They identified four components of this concept: policy, service, allocation, and symbolic responsiveness. However this is not the theme of this paper and hence it will not be dealt here. And by Political Representation the following are taken for consideration in this paper;

- a) Relationship between a principal (representative) and an agent (Represented)
- b) An object (interests, opinions, etc)
- c) And a (particular) setting (the political democracy)
- d) A context (defined through elections in institutionalized form with Political responsibility) (legislature and parliament)

Each of these (different uses) provides a different view of the concept of representation and a different approach for examining representation (Hanna Pitkin in "The Concept of Representation" 1967). Some of them most commonly accepted forms include;

- a) Formal Representation (This has two components in it - conferral of the authority by which he/she gets his/her status-authorization and responsibility to represent-accountability (he/she is vulnerable in this and may lose in the next election )
- b) Substantive Representation (actions of the representative/s in the interest Of the represented-way of acting)
- c) Descriptive Representation (mirroring/ reproducing the interests of the represented as they desire it to be-acting for)
- d) Symbolic Representation/Politics of Presence (Philips 1995) (Haider2000) (the meaning a representative provides for the represented-way of being/standing for)

### THE DISCUSSION

The above categories of representation for the sake of discussion may be pooled into two broad approaches:

- a) The trustee/independence approach (Edmund Burke 1790)
- b) The delegate/mandate approach (James Madison 1787-88)

The first school known as the *trustee/independence* conception of representation places greater emphasis on (elite) competence of the representative. The central thrust of this school is that the representative must exercise independent initiative and discretionary judgment about the public good without necessarily following the expressed wishes of constituents. This is closer to the classical definition of political representation by Esmein (French Jurist) (cited in Fairlie 1940), who defined a representative;

"As one whom within the limits of his/her constitutional power has been chosen to act freely and independently in the name of the people. He/She must have full independence of judgment and action in order to fulfill his/her mission." (*Africa Development*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, 2006).

The central argument of this school is that the electorate must elect their representatives and allow him/her to act freely in accordance with what he thinks is in the best interest of the society.

In this conception, mass or popular participation is subordinated to elite rule, who are considered to be more competent on issues of governance. The role of the mass of citizenry is confined to periodic endorsement of the elites.

In his early writings, J.S.Mill, one of the world's prominent political theorists, was a leading proponent of this conservative and elitist school had written I quote;

[It] is not that the people themselves exercise political judgment, either directly or through the agency of instructed delegates, but that they assign this responsibility to the wisest and most virtuous among themselves, who will then serve as independent trustees of the public interest. The many must exercise their judgment 'rather upon the characters and talents of the persons whom they appoint to decide questions for them than upon the questions themselves' (cited in Krouse 1982: 524).

But Fairlie who is more generous in this regard adds that the nature of political representation also usually involves extensive discussion (p.457). In his words this is conceived as a secondary government in which citizens share in the deliberations indirectly, through the medium of their representatives (Deliberative democracy/representation). Earnest Barker 1906 elaborated on the relationship between the representative and the voter as follows (I quote):

"The representative is elected on the ground of general policy which he/she supports. The elector expresses his/her attitude towards that policy, not towards individual measures. Apart from such particular pledges as he/she may give, the representative is bound by a cause, a movement, a party, not to a whole series of individual projects. So long as he/she is faithful to the cause, he/she exercises his/her own judgment."

**In the above paragraph Barker places clearly three conditions of/for representation;**

- a) That the representative must act as the collective conscience of the constituency giving expressions to their will (in matters of policy choices)
- b) That the representative under the confines of a cause/movement/party (which ever has helped him to win) must represent that
- c) That the representative being faithful to the cause (that made his/her choice) can make independent judgments

In all the three cases as above, it goes out to suggest that the representative whenever or wherever goes out of these bounds is likely to face the wrath of the voters.

This also suggests that in a representative democracy the principal form of political activity is voting (Krouse 1982: 529).

By implication, the role of citizens is not merely confined primarily to choosing political representatives in free and fair elections but extends beyond as Jefferson suggested that "eternal vigilance is the price of Liberty". In this perspective, because the tenure of the representative is limited, elections become the key mechanism of holding the representative accountable by the electorate. In between elections, the representative can act on his/her judgment.

The second school known as the *delegate or mandate* conception of political representation counters the above arguments. The core position of this school is that the representative must act/vote as his/her constituents would vote if consulted, and therefore the representative serves as the mouthpiece of the constituents (Hilaire Belloc and Cecil Chesterton).

Underlying this is the 'Instructive Principle' from the electorate to the representative (In fact, some political theorists, see this as the only democratic theory of representation). This conceptualization was criticized by McIver (1926) who argued that delegation is not synonymous with representation. He therefore made a distinction on the basis of tenure, accountability and purpose of representation. According to him, delegation involves the choice of men, but representation involves also the choice of measures.

"Delegation in its complete form... assigns no limitation of tenure and no conditions of the exercise of power. Representation implies both direction and control. Delegation requires the consent of the governed, whereas Representation requires the fulfillment of their will" (McIver, 1926) (as cited in Fairlie

1940: 463). Unfortunately in everyday practices, these dichotomies hardly exist. A representative cannot practically obtain direct instructions on every matter to be decided. Consequently, it is quite impossible to draw a hard and fast line between...agents with definite instructions or Mandates empowering representatives. This difficulty of discharging their responsibilities is illustrated (quoted) by Lord Bryce for an analysis;

**According to him a representative has;**

- a) To work for the local demands of his constituency (mandated),
- b) To consult with other representatives on public affairs, while working in tandem with the general views of his constituents (legislating), and
- c) As a spokesman of his party which holds a majority of the Constituency must articulate the party ideology. (Member of a party)(Fairlie 1940: 462)

In this sense we need to understand the plight of a representative as an individual representing a constituency, of a party (if he/she is one) and of the Legislative body that he/she represents. In all these cases representatives have to act as;

- a) An agent chosen by different interest groups (constituency)
- b) And as a representative group determining the common interest (legislature).
- c) And the party he represents (the ideological interests)

As a result he combines the mandate/delegate terms in theory, but in actual practice act he acts as per the trustee/independence thesis. In contemporary times, most legislative bodies act in this contradictory manner, which partly underlines greater voter dissatisfaction across the globe, contributing to the apathy with respect to traditional institutions of political representation.

**THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE**

In the above discussions two things are clear;

- a) That the representatives under normal circumstance act Independently and do not always act in the interest of the constituents once they are elected
- b) That if and when they act, they act in their capacity as the representatives of the constituency or the party or the legislature

However what is not clear in the above discussion is do they represent the different interests and groups within the constituency/electorate? Because it is possible that a representative in a constituency may not have won all the votes (especially in a First Past Post System/Multi Member Constituency as in India). In this case there is an assumed trust that he acts on behalf of all (those who voted for him and those who did not). To fill this void in Knowledge, Phillips (1995) has introduced a useful concept the *politics of presence* or what Pitkin (1967) Shilpa Jain (1998) and Haider et al (2000), call *symbolic representation*.

In this case the proponents of the *politics of presence* or *symbolic representation* believe that the quotas dismantle the status quo and let the unrepresented (women/ other categories) feel, and *be seen as*, represented in the formal decision-making process. This not only gives legitimacy to government policy and outcome but is also a more efficient and reliable means of achieving representation.

The critics however are not happy with this plausible, hypothetical explanation. Further inquiry in to this question reveals that this 'Politics of Presence or Symbolic Representation' has mixed response.

In a study done in Africa it has shown that women representatives have done this job better (gender dimension) since they are more sensitive/responsive to issues (of concern to women constituents) (Zappala,1999, Omano Edigheji 2006). In Asia the studies have shown that there has been a short fall and dilution of interests (lack of structures and information) (Shilpa Jain, 1998).

This variation in fact calls for further research in the area but also prescribes in a way certain pre conditions for the success of this 'Politics of Presence'.

**I would recognize the following preconditions as needed;**

- a) To represent particular interests (Minorities/marginalized/women) Sufficient numbers of empowered representatives are required (in both cases)
- b) The nature of electoral system needs revamping to represent constituencies above party interests (research needed) (inclusive representation)
- c) There is need for clarity regarding the role the representatives will have to play in the party, in the constituency and in the legislature/parliament since the interest of these may overlap, contradict and converge depending on the issue/s
- d) Research is needed to understand if the quota systems resolve the issues of Symbolism/politics of presence meaningfully and help realise the fullest potential of representation and strengthen them

**RECENT CHALLENGES**

With the Identity Politics in a globalised economic, social, cultural and political order being a reality, political representation is facing the challenge of realizing its worthiness

In its early conception, representatives represented the territorial constituencies with physical limits. This however has changed as globalisation has reinforced alternative identities. Citizens do not see themselves only in terms of their geographical location but identify themselves as belonging to a region with multiple identities. This is particularly reinforced by cultural globalisation including culture, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, race and disabilities if any (which were previously discounted)

The consequence of this is their constant search for channels of political representation. These developments thus lead us to question how constituencies are being delineated (demarcated) and how representation is interpreted. In some legislatures (Africa/India) seats are set aside (33% for women)(reserving constituencies) (nomination for the Anglo-Indians) for specific sections of the population based on certain criteria to give representation to such identities regarding it as necessary to nourish democracy.

Many thinkers like Robert Dahl, Jawaharlal Nehru (1961) who is votaries of liberal conception of representative democracy placing greater emphasis on elections were also pessimistic about the success of democracy and reservations in a country like India (Africa).

Dahl had opined that he was doubtful that India 'could sustain democratic institutions (seems), on the face of it, highly improbable,' adding: 'It lacks all the favorable conditions,'

Nehru on the other hand had expressed that he 'dislike(s) any kind of reservations ... I react strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency and second-rate standards. I want my country to be a first class country...

Despite such negative expressions among intellectuals, the paradigm shifts and innovations in 'representation' such as reservation in a democracy to make it more inclusive and complete in terms of both participation and representation.

A multiparty system in my opinion is thus a defining variable and also central to democracy if there has to be a serious discourse on representation.

**CONCLUSION**

To me to represent is simply to "make present again" (Hanna 1967). Political representation is thus the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives "present" in the public policy making. Political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on the behalf of others in the political arena. The show must go on and we must work to allow that to happen until the LAST MAN in the society is represented