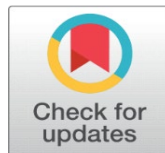


BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP: A CRITICAL STUDY OF WOMEN'S RESERVATION IN THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT

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ABSTRACT

The passage of the amendment bill to introduce 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies represents a significant advancement toward the political empowerment of women in India. The issue of women's reservation in India is unique because the Indian Constitution already provides reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backwards Classes (OBC). The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution ensure that women have 33% representation in local self-government. It is essential to address the social barriers that impede women's equal representation in Indian society, which is patriarchal in nature. (Rai & Sharma, 2000). Reserving seats for women will drive significant change. These reservations aim to establish an equal opportunity for all citizens. Gender inequality continues to permeate political decision-making, highlighting an urgent need for more women leaders to step forward. Women can significantly influence policies and shape a more equitable future by increasing representation. Let us empower women to rise and make their voices heard in the halls of power. This paper seeks to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of women's reservation from the government's perspective, explore the reasons behind the passage of this bill in parliament, and provide a comprehensive background on the Women's Reservation Bill. The author will present findings supported by secondary data to elucidate these points.

Keywords: Reservation, Constitution Amendment, Women, Political Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda says, "Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing only, a nation cannot march forward if the women are left behind. Men and women are two halves of a circle; each possesses qualities the other lacks, and together they complete one another. If they work united for the betterment of the country, it can succeed., whereas their separation may result in weakness. In the modern era, women have proved themselves experts in all fields. Historically, women were often considered suited only for domestic duties, relegated to household chores. However, despite these limitations, their political representation remains notably sparse, highlighting a significant gap in their participation at the political forefront. (Jain, 2002)

There has been considerable discussion regarding the need for women's reservations in the Indian legislatures. By enhancing women's political representation, this bill aims to create significant opportunities for addressing gender issues within the political arena and thus empower women (Chandan et al., 1999). If we are serious about reversing

these, almost seven decades of male domination of legislatures have ensured that women have been denied equal rights in land, property, access to education and jobs. In contrast, violence against women in myriad forms, from female foeticide and domestic violence to dowry and honour killings to sexual harassment, continues to be a part of our daily existence. Retrograde trends, we must accept the centrality of women's empowerment in all spheres - social, economic, cultural and political (Menon, 1996). The political one is crucial among the myriad discriminations against and the denial of equal rights to women (Kishwar, 1996). Patriarchy never has problems accepting a woman as a political leader, as the history of South Asia shows (Seema et al., 1998). However, the previous efforts have consistently failed to challenge the status quo, both in intent and action. In contrast, implementing a 33% reservation for women in legislatures could fundamentally transform the political landscape and disrupt existing power dynamics in remarkable ways. This potential shift is precisely why patriarchal resistance to a constitutionally mandated minimum of 33% representation in legislatures is so intense. Nonetheless, this opposition must be thoroughly overcome. (Bose, 2010).

The principle of social justice is established in the Indian Constitution through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Constitution ensures equality for women. However, also authorises the State to adopt affirmative action in favour of women to nullify the increasing socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages they face. The Constitution of India ensures that all women have the right to equality (Article 14), prohibits discrimination by state authorities (Article 15(1)), guarantees equality of opportunity (Article 16), and mandates equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). Furthermore, it empowers the state to implement special provisions for women and children (Article 15(3)), denounces practices that undermine the dignity of women (Article 51(A)(e)), and stipulates that working conditions and maternity provisions must be safe and humane across the nation (Article 42). (The Constitution of India)

The Constitution of India authorises the State to take action." adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women to assist them to overcome cumulative socio-economic educational and political oppression faced for centuries". However, in reality, women often become invisible in the national mainstream. They face harassment within their families, society, and workplace. This highlights the utter inadequacy of the laws that have been enacted to protect women's rights and to recognise these rights as fundamental human rights.

The Women's Reservation Bill is pivotal in pursuing gender equality within political systems globally. Women's participation in political processes is crucial for democratisation and challenging marginalisation and oppression. Despite global recognition of this need, despite significant progress in many areas, women still find themselves vastly underrepresented in high-level political decision-making. This ongoing disparity underscores a widespread challenge that calls for inclusive practices and policies to elevate women's voices and ensure equitable participation in governance (Mona et al., 2009). While reservations are proposed to enable women's participation in less competitive electoral seats, concerns regarding their democratic implications and potential reverse discrimination are evident. The opposition to the Bill reflects patriarchal attitudes ingrained within political systems, with male parliamentarians resisting the entry of women into high forums of decision-making. This resistance underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the patriarchal forces conditioning women's opportunities and aspirations. The discourse surrounding the Bill encapsulates broader societal complexities, including caste and communal dynamics, and necessitates a nuanced feminist perspective to address gender representation effectively.

1.1. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To analyse the historical context and evolution of India's Women's Reservation Bill.
- 2) To evaluate the impact of women's reservations on political empowerment and social justice.
- 3) to conduct a comparative analysis of women's representation in legislation across different countries.
- 4) To confidently outline the pros and cons of the Women's Reservation Bill as understood by various stakeholders.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the complexities of gender disparity in Indian legislatures. It involves a thorough literature review of existing academic articles, government reports, and case studies on women's political representation, gender inequality, and reservation policies. The research includes document

analysis of primary sources such as the Women's Reservation Bill, parliamentary debates, legislative documents, and secondary sources like news articles and expert commentaries. A comparative analysis of women's reservation models in Rwanda, Sweden, and Norway will be conducted to identify strengths and weaknesses. Secondary data from reliable sources such as government publications, research institutes, and international organisations will be collected and analysed to support arguments and provide a factual basis for the analysis.

2.1. WHY RESERVATION NOW?

Political parties have women's wings and detailed agendas for their development. Nevertheless, they are incredibly hesitant to field women candidates, nor have they acknowledged the capabilities of dedicated women by allowing them representation in party offices. Many women, however, have navigated familial patriarchy only to find themselves constrained by party dictates, which the male members of the party frequently influence. The patriarchal norms that prevail within political parties have not afforded women sufficient opportunities to advance their careers in politics, apart from those who are related to male party members (Rai, 2011). The relative invisibility of women in high-level political offices contrasts sharply with the participation levels of Indian women in politics, who outnumber their counterparts in more developed countries. Women are not merely passive voters; they actively participate in large numbers, narrowing the gender gap at the polls. As campaigners and candidates in national and state elections, they demonstrate remarkable success, as reflected in their electoral achievements (R. et al., 2004).

Women often lack the financial resources to run elections involving high costs or as independent candidates. In summary, "there is no correlation between the female population, their voting percentage and their numbers in the elected assemblies.

2.2. BILL IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION RATE IN BOTH TYPES OF COUNTRIES

Universally, women remain vastly underrepresented in local and national politics. About 26% of lawmakers are women. Data from the International Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm (IDEA), shows that many countries worldwide have introduced affirmative action for women in public office, such as countries that have mandated quotas for women. Major political parties in more than 50 countries have voluntarily set quota provisions in their statutes. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a global organisation of national parliaments, released its latest annual report on Women in Parliament. It states that the world is not yet on track to achieve gender equality in politics by 2030. The global average of women in parliamentary positions now sits at 25.5%, reaching over a quarter for the first time in history. As per the report published by IPU, Rwanda, an East African country, is leading the world with 61% of its parliamentary seats occupied by women. Rwanda's elected parliament was the first in the world to have gender parity. After the 1994 Genocide, Rwanda began a period of reconciliation where women played a prominent role in stabilising the country. Women now hold 49 out of 80, or 61% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, placing Rwanda at No.1 in the IPU's monthly women ranking in parliament. This country achieved gender equality through gender parity quotas by instituting female representation quotas across its bicameral parliament in 2003. By electoral law, women must hold at least 30% of posts in all decision-making bodies. Also, their 2005 constitutional amendment recognises political organisations' responsibility to educate citizens on politics, ensuring both men and women have access to elective office. With 53% of women taking parliamentary seats, Cuba remains second in the IPU Report. Art 44 of the Cuban Constitution states, "Women and men enjoy equal economic, political, cultural, social, and familial rights. The State guarantees that women will be offered the same opportunities and possibilities as men to achieve their full participation in the country's development."

In the Asian subcontinent, Pakistan is the first to reserve 60 out of the 342 seats in the National Assembly, i.e., 17.5 per cent are reserved for women. According to the electoral result, the seats are allocated to political parties proportionally from the provinces. In May 2004, Bangladesh passed a Constitutional amendment to reintroduce quotas for women. The number of seats in Parliament was raised to 345, and around 13 per cent of seats are reserved for women. Nepal is the third country in the Indian subcontinent to have 33 per cent reservations for women. China, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar do not have any reservations about the fairer sex, according to the IDEA data.

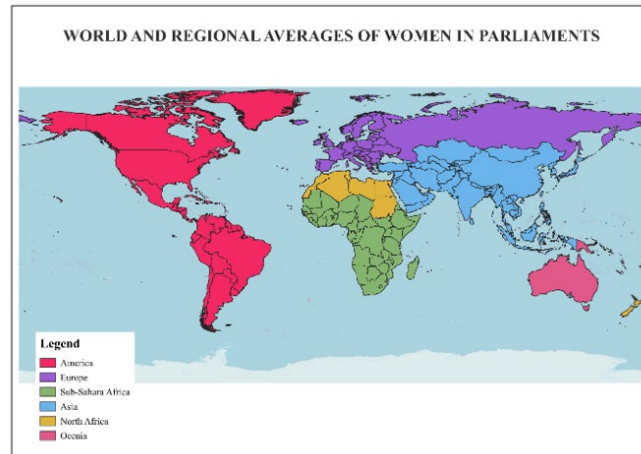


Figure 1

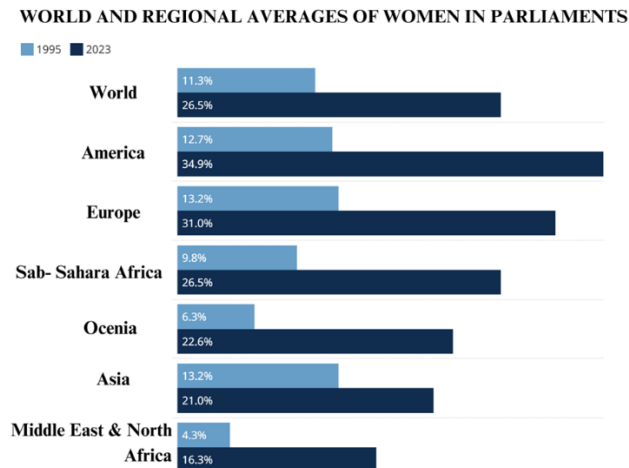


Figure 2

2.3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BILL IN INDIA

The initial phase of the women's movement coincided with the creation of three women's organisations: the Women's Indian Association in 1917, the All-India Women's Conference in 1927 and the Indian National Women's Council in 1925. In 1910, several local and regional women's organisations formed, which eventually fused into national organisations. The election campaign started in 1917 with Sarojini Naidu accompanying a female All-India delegate to Montague, the Indian Secretary of State, who came to address India's parliamentary participation demands (Dutoya, 2016). In 1924, a Reforms Enquiry Committee began recording facts and thoughts on whether Indian women still wished to be legislative members. After the moratorium had been removed in 1927, only a few weeks before the elections, the state legislature of the province of Madras opened its membership to women. The Indian Women's Movement's movement in support of political representation had two phases: first (1917-1928) women's rivalry and qualifications for legislative offices; second (1928-1937) liberalisation of the conditions of competition and expanded representation of women in the legislatures (Mary et al., 2000). The Simon Commission was boycotted by many women leaders, Congress and other nationalist parties when it arrived in India in 1928. Simon's Commission did not recommend reserving seats for parliamentarians and left those seats. However, another group in the movement of women came before the Commission, arguing for the extension of women's voting and the reservation of four female seats in

legislatures to enable women to participate in political matters and better represent women's role in education and social welfare. The Commission rejected the independent electoral system but proposed reserving seats for the oppressed classes. Everett called this group the 'women's uplifting team', embodied at the First Round Table Conference (November 1930-January 1931), which Congress had boycotted. Their commitment to increasing women's franchise was compatible with the government's position, as they supported the idea of women's credentials and limitations in statutory terms. The British Government nominated two women to help a woman's qualification and women's legislative seats at the first-round table conference, which Congress boycotted. The report they produced was based on a memorandum from British women. Conversely, the report sent on behalf of the three All India Women's organisations called for equality. Everett suggests that a division between those who identified with Congress and those women who did not partake in political practices emerged within the women's movement (Chaudhuri, 1993).

The Report of the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform (1934) brought out women's equality proposals and implemented them with minor changes to the 1935 Government of India Act. Females were allocated the critical instrument for the female franchise and 41 community seats. The primary tool was the qualifications for wifehood. With the formal passage of the 1935 Constitution, six million women and 29 million people became eligible to vote. While women could vote in any of the seats, seats were reserved for women on a group basis. Forty-three women contested, and 14 were elected in India's first free Lok Sabha (1952-57) (out of 489). The topic of political quotas in favour of women died out, or at least remained inactive, until the early 1970s (Panda, 2001).

The provision of reservation for women owes its origin to two crucial factors: one international, i.e., the worldwide stress on inclusion of women in political decision-making, and the other internal, i.e., the organised independent movements of women in India since the late 1970s not necessarily as a supplement of different movements but independently as visible · Autonomous groups projecting several problems facing women in the society, polity and the economy. These were the principal impetus underpinning the enhancement of the numerical representation of women in high-level policy-making structures to transform the traditional notions about gender roles in society, discrimination arising from such notions, injustice and violence. Indian women of the late 70s were diametrically changed human beings with immense capability to organise than their counterparts in the preceding period, when quite a few elite women were involved in the freedom struggle, or the Committee on Status of Women (CSW) deliberated on women's issues. Even though opportunities for gender emancipation have been restricted to urban elite women, a new awakening has transformed women's consciousness nationwide, boosting their confidence and demonstrating their abilities through involvement in several protest movements. Therefore, the Committee on the Status of Women recommended all-women panchayats. In 1978, the Committee on Panchayat Raj Institutions recommended reserving two seats for women in each panchayat. In the 80s and 90s, women's issues had a focus on empowerment as reflected in the Ninth Plan document, envisaging the creation of "an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both. within and outside home as equal partners · along with men" which is to be realised through the "National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPEW). The NPEW (1988-2000) underscored empowering women through the convergence of services, resources and infrastructure and outlined several priority areas, like economic empowerment, special support service, health, nutrition, prevention of atrocities and violence, natural resources and environment, media and advocacy and political participation of women by recommending 30 per cent of seats for women in all levels of legislation, i.e., panchayats to Parliament." Its recommendations were widely supported and were incorporated into the bill, raising reservations to 33.3 per cent in urban and rural local government institutions (Mazumdar, 1997). These reservations had an easy passage in the Lok Sabha in 1989, but were defeated in the Rajya Sabha. Later, in 1992, the Bills were reintroduced by P.V. Narasimha Rao and, upon their passage in the Parliament, were incorporated as the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution.

2.4. EXPERIENCE OF GRASSROOT LEVEL REPRESENTATION:

It has been widely experienced that governance structures that do not provide for the appropriate participation of women often suffer from state interventions that are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local governments, is essential to creating gender-equal opportunities and gender-sensitive policies. Since women have different needs and perspectives on social and political issues, it is essential to involve women in government to incorporate all societal viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes (Pal, Mahi, 2004). Women are actively involved in household and community work and, hence, well aware of the fundamental issues ordinary people face. This

gives them insight and perspective, which can be instrumental in sustainable overall development (Shanker, Richa, 2016).

The 73rd constitutional amendment provided mandatory reservation for women in the local self-governing bodies. This experiment began in 1995. Many researchers have studied the experience of elected women representatives (Thakur, 2010). With the available literature on the topic, some general observations have been made regarding the role of women in grassroots governance. It has come to the notice that the percentage of women participating in various levels of political activity has increased formally (Kumar S. et al., 2006). The general trend is that those in politics are women between 25 and 45. It is also revealed that women take up political careers as an extension of their domestic role. While women have been active in mass movements, their presence is not felt in decision-making. The influence of the husband and close relatives is found. This tendency is due to a lack of confidence. This dependency is a stumbling block in their empowerment.

In this context, examining the views, news, and ideas of women activists and development organisations with rich experience working with women at the grassroots level is worthwhile. One quality observed among women is their patience in hearing the problems of the public. They also work in adverse circumstances. Women possess the capacity to utilise potentials and resources hitherto unutilised. It has been observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issues to the decision-making bodies and authorities (Kannabiran et al., 1997).

This amendment had a persuasive influence on the demand for similar provisions in the state and Union legislatures. It was the immediate reason for the commitment of all political parties contesting in the 1996 general election to include reservations for women in their election manifestos. Even though political parties promised to sponsor one-third of women contestants in the 1996 election, in actual practice, this was not conceded, primarily because compromises on sharing political offices could hardly be made for the benefits of such office far outweigh any other benefit derived from any other source where women have been granted reservation. The failure of the political parties to adhere to their reservation commitments necessitated government intervention. The United Front government included the Reservation Bill in the standard minimum programme and introduced it as the 81st Amendment Bill in 1996, proposing 33 per cent reservation for women (Menon, 2000). There were as many opinions as the parties forming the United Front government, the most important being the demand for reservations within the reserved categories. In 1998, it was introduced as the 84th Amendment Bill by the BJP government, but its passage was stalled, given strong opposition on more or less similar grounds. Again, it was introduced as the 85th Amendment Bill in 1999, but a lack of consensus pushed it back to its earlier position. Most interesting was its introduction on the last day of the winter session of Parliament 2000, manifesting the lack of seriousness among the parliamentarians in their surrender on the Bill. In 2004, the new UPA government included the passing of the Bill as part of its Common Minimum Programme, the touchstone of the UPA coalition working with the outside support of the Left Parties. In May 2008, Congress again introduced the bill, which the Rajya Sabha adopted on 9 March 2010. However, the bill lapsed four years later in the Lok Sabha due to a lack of political consensus. The Lok Sabha did not vote on the legislation from 2010 to 2022. Neither a majority passed it nor was it signed by the president, making it pending. Delays and Lapses in the implementation of the bill have created a gender imbalance at the national level, which has not been addressed. In 2022, the Supreme Court received a Public Interest Litigation seeking to reintroduce the Women's Reservation Bill. The Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice JK Maheshwari said that "it is a pertinent matter" and has directed the Centre to file a response within six weeks.

2.5. NARI SHAKTI VANDAN ADHINIYAM

The BJP government tabled the Women's Reservation Bill as the first order of business in the new Parliament House on September 19. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the Bill a historic decision and said God had chosen him to give women rights. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha unanimously on September 21, a day after it received near-unanimous approval in the Lok Sabha. Per the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are proposed to be reserved for women. With 454 members of the Lok Sabha supporting the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth) Bill 2023, the constitutional requirement of a "two-thirds majority of the members present and voting" was easily met. Only two members, the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen's Asaduddin Owaisi and Syed Imtiyaz Jaleel, had opposed the Bill. When Mr Modi was present, the voting process took nearly two hours as members voted manually, using paper slips. (The Hindu, September 24, 2023.)

2.6. SOME KEY POINTS OF THE CONSTITUTION (ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH AMENDMENT) BILL.

- It aims to enhance women's political empowerment to eliminate gender inequality and discrimination.
- Seeks to reserve one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- Article 239AA(2)(b): Includes women in the reservation alongside the Scheduled Castes.
- New Article 330A: Reserves one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, including specific provisions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- New Article 332A: Reserves one-third of seats for women in the State Legislative Assemblies, with similar provisions for SCs and STs.
- New Article 334A: Specifies that the reservation provisions will cease to have effect 15 years after the commencement of the Act.
- Seats reserved for women, including those for SCs and STs, will be allotted by rotation.
- In cases where only one seat is reserved, it will be for women in the first election of every three-election cycle.

However, the amendment to the Constitution comes with a caveat that it can be implemented only after a delimitation exercise — scheduled to be held in 2026 — has been completed, using data from the latest Census conducted after the passage of the Bill. This effectively pushes the earliest year of implementation to the 2029 general election. The last Census was held in 2011. Centre initially attributed the COVID-19 pandemic to postponing the exercise to start in two phases in 2020 and conclude by March 31, 2021. The previous two notifications by the Registrar General of India (RGI) did not specify any reason for the delay. Delimitation means the act or process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country to represent population changes. The last delimitation exercise occurred in 1976, and the current boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies were drawn based on the 2001 Census. The number of seats has remained frozen based on the 1971 Census. A constitutional amendment 2002 placed a freeze on delimitation until the first census was conducted after 2026. (The Hindu, 2023.)

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, 'It is important we build consensus and prepare for economic and social empowerment of women. Leader of the opposition, Mallikarjun Kharge, says that women panchayats already have reservations. "Do it today. Why wait till 2029? We are all ready". (Pathak, Vikas, Roy, Asha, Tiwary, Deepatiman, September 21, The Indian Express)

DMK MP Kanimozhi had, in her speech in the Lok Sabha, expressed fears that the connection between the Census and delimitation, frozen till 2026, may lead to a reduction in representation of the southern States. "I refer to the statement by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on the matter of delimitation, where he says that India is the only country that has not conducted the decadal Census. If delimitation is going to be based on the population Census, it will deprive and reduce the representation of South Indian States. It will become like a sword hanging over our heads," she said.

She also expressed concerns that implementing the bill could cause an inordinate delay. She referred to Clause 5 of the current Bill under discussion, which stipulates that the reservation of seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies and the National Capital Region of Delhi will be implemented after delimitation takes place and after the Census provides figures for the same. All of it points to a situation where the Bill, even after turning into law, will not be applicable in the upcoming 2024 election or the State Assembly elections held around the same time, she said.

The eight-hour-long debate witnessed members and Opposition benches, led by the Congress, engage in a battle over who should get credit for the landmark Bill and on the question of having a separate quota for women belonging to other backwards classes (OBCs).

Home Minister Amit Shah assured the House that the government would rectify any shortcomings in the future. "You support the Bill, and the reservation will be guaranteed," Mr Shah told Opposition members.

The Congress made a U-turn from its own 2010 position, with its leader Sonia Gandhi, the first speaker in the debate, leading the demand for a separate quota within quota for OBCs after conducting a caste census. She also insisted that there was no need to delay the implementation of the Bill by linking it to a delimitation exercise that is frozen till 2026. "The Congress demands to implement the Bill immediately... However, along with that, a reservation should be made for SC, ST, and OBC women," she said.

Vigorously countering the demand for a separate quota for OBCs, the Home Minister asserted that the BJP had the highest number of OBC lawmakers across the political spectrum and a Prime Minister from the same community, referring to Mr Modi. Giving a detailed break-up, Mr Shah said that 85 BJP MPs, 29% of its total, were OBCs, adding that as many as 29 Ministers were also from backwards communities. (The Hindu, 2023.)

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal claimed that it was against the provisions of the Constitution to provide reservation immediately, noting that someone may challenge it in a court of law. "We will not allow the Bill to get stuck in some technicality," he said. As many as 60 members participated in the Lok Sabha debate for nearly eight hours; 27 were women MPs. However, the voting process took a long time; electronic voting was impossible as some political parties had not yet informed the Lok Sabha secretariat about the division number or the specific seats they would be allotted to individual members. The good thing is that the Women's Reservation Bill was finally passed after various difficulties and protests.

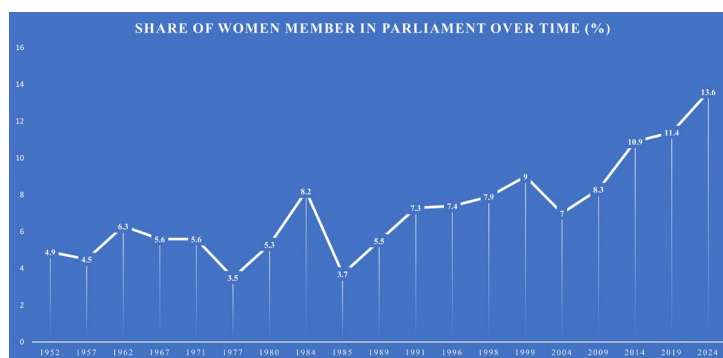


Figure 3

After implementation, at least 181 (approximately 33.3% of seats) women members should be in the Lower House. There are 82 women in the Lok Sabha, which is 15% of its members (Fig. No.3).

The share of women parliamentarians has never exceeded the 15% mark in over 75 years of India's electoral history. When considered as a share of the total candidates who participated in the 2019 general election, their share is even lower at 9%. The share of women candidates has never exceeded the 9% mark ever.

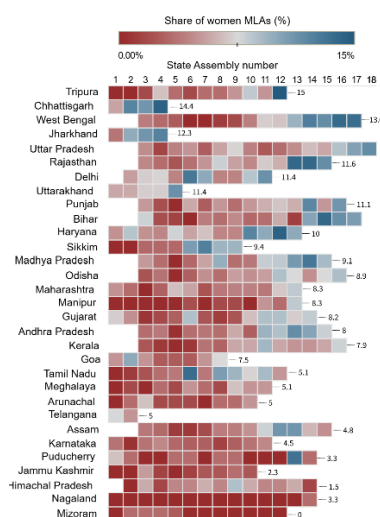


Figure 4

In the case of the sitting State Legislative Assemblies, the share of women MLAs is far lower, with just one State — Tripura— touching the 15% mark (Fig. No. 4). Women comprised less than 10% of Legislative Assemblies in 20 States and Union Territories. This includes States such as Gujarat (8.2%), Maharashtra (8.3%), Andhra Pradesh (8%), Kerala (7.9%), Tamil Nadu (5.1%), Telangana (5%) and Karnataka (4.5%).

In the 2023 election, Nagaland got its first two women MLAs. Mizoram has not had a woman MLA in the past seven assembly lines.

When seen across party lines, women form just 13.5% of sitting members of the largest party in the Lower House, the Bharatiya Janata Party (Chart 3). The highest share of women MPs in the Lok Sabha is from the Biju Janata Dal (41.7%), followed by the Trinamool Congress (40.9%). Similarly, a party-wise analysis of the State Legislative Assemblies shows that the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal had the highest share of women MLAs (15.3%), followed by the Congress in Chhattisgarh (14.7%). The Congress in Karnataka (3%), the Bharat Rashtra Samithi in Telangana (3.4%), and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu (4.5%) had among the lowest shares.

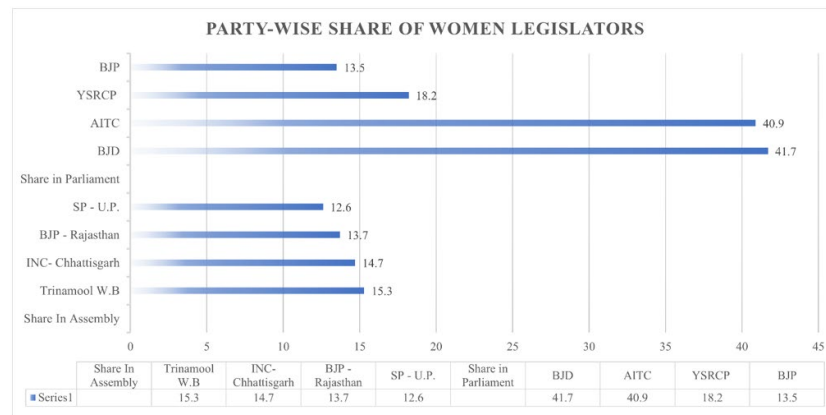


Figure 5

Share of Women in the Parliaments of Brics and Other Countries.

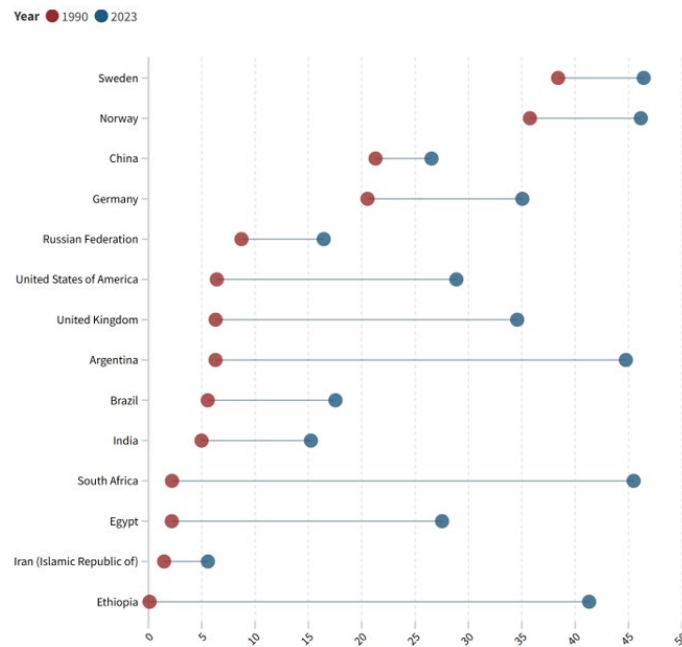


Figure 6

The share of women in India's Parliament is also among the lowest in the world. When compared with BRICS nations, including the new members, India has the second-lowest share (15%), just above Iran (6%) (Fig. No. 6). Over time, South Africa and Ethiopia have made giant strides in women's representation in their national legislatures.

3. THE PROBLEM WITH THE BILL

Foremost is the concern that the Bill will create divisions among women based on caste, religion, region, and class. Some parties have demanded that within the 33 per cent reservation for women, there should be a sub-quota for women from backwards classes and minorities. Without such a provision, the Bill will benefit only upper-caste and urban women at the expense of lower-caste and rural women. However, others have opposed this demand because it will further fragment society along communal lines and undermine unity and solidarity among women.

Another point of criticism is that it may reduce the merit and competence of legislators. By reserving seats for women based on gender alone, the Bill may compromise the quality and efficiency of governance. Sometimes, women may be nominated by male relatives or patrons who will influence their decisions. Women candidates may lack the necessary experience, education, skills, and vision to perform their duties effectively. It may also lead to perpetual inequality, as they would be perceived as not competing on merit. (Agnes, Flavia, "The inclusion test", The Indian Express, 2023.)

Reservation has proved to be a potent weapon in the hands of the ruling classes to control the political barometer and as a strategic tool to manipulate people. Our progressive automatons need to learn this basic fact. In its current form, the women's reservation bill can benefit significant political parties, with a larger feudal hold on the population, by getting their women elected to a disproportionately larger number of reserved seats and improving their tally.

The debate over the Women's Reservation Bill in India often centres around the appropriate percentage of reservation for women in legislative bodies. The current bill proposes a 33% reservation, less than the proportion of women, who constitute roughly 50%. Critics argue that the reservation should equal the population proportion, advocating for a 50% reservation.

However, some political parties propose a much lower figure, such as 15%, which has been criticised for being insufficient. These parties might acquiesce even to lower percentages or have no reservations due to concerns that a higher percentage would threaten the positions and prospects of male politicians within their ranks.

The fear among these parties is that increased political opportunities for women could diminish the dominance of male leaders. This tension highlights the broader challenges of achieving gender parity in political representation and the resistance that significant systemic changes can face.

4. SUGGESTIONS

- 1) Each party can choose where to nominate women candidates, duly considering local political and social factors.
- 2) Among seats reserved for SCs and STs, one-third of the candidates nominated by recognised parties shall be women.
- 3) To prevent a party from nominating women candidates only in states or constituencies where the party's chances of winning election are weak and to ensure an even spread of women candidates, the unit for consideration (the unit in which at least one out of three party candidates shall be a woman) for the Lok Sabha shall be a state or union territory; for the State Legislative Assembly, the unit shall be a cluster of three contiguous Lok Sabha constituencies.
- 4) P. Chidambaram says that women have waited over 30 years for reservations in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, and Kit Brooks has no more delay. Identification of constituencies that will be reserved for women does not require either a census or delimitation. It requires only updated voters' lists, which are presently used in all seats for researching seats in panchayat and municipal bodies. (The Indian Express, 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

The fact remains that no political party in India or elsewhere can claim to be free from the influences of patriarchy.

The implementation of women's reservations in legislative bodies is essential for dismantling the patriarchal influence in Indian politics, which explains the vigorous opposition to this bill. Those against it attempt to undermine its passage by pitting one marginalised group against another or proposing unrealistic measures for its improvement.. The bill culminates 28 years of examination and discussions conducted by two parliamentary committees. The fact that male parliamentarians may lose their "nurtured" seats does not serve as a valid argument against the legislation, as its primary objective is to disrupt the entrenched male dominance that has persisted for so long. The Bill seeks to significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of governance and policymaking in India. Research reveals that women legislators often demonstrate greater responsiveness, accountability, honesty, and collaboration than their male counterparts. They tend to emphasise critical issues such as health, education, welfare, environmental sustainability, and social justice, all essential for fostering human development. By increasing the representation of women in Parliament and state assemblies, the Bill envisions a future where policies and laws are not only more inclusive but also more reflective of the diverse needs and aspirations of the entire population., progressive and beneficial for all sections of society. The presence of more women in parliament would lead to a change in the direction of debates and policy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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