

The Evolution and Future of Women's Reservation in Indian Politics

Dr. Malati C Hiremath

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Government First Grade College,
Kalagatagi, Dist: Dharwad, Karnataka

ABSTRACT

Women's reservation in legislatures aims to enhance political representation, gender equality, and inclusive decision-making in governance. The Women's Reservation Bill reserves 33% of seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies. The core objectives this paper is social justice and dignity equal opportunities in education and employment reduction of systemic inequality and the equality between women and men. Women's reservation in legislatures aims to enhance political representation, gender equality, and inclusive decision-making in governance. It provides one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Keywords: reservation, political, representation, equality, participation and opportunities

INTRODUCTION

Women Reservation Delimitation India is set to transform political representation through seat expansion and delimitation. "Where the mind is without fear and the head held high. Into such heaven, My father, let my nation awake." A solemn prayer by a saint, a dream which he wished transforms into reality for his entire nation. His nation marched on to achieve independence and embarked on a mission of growth and prosperity. However, several heads continued to be obscured by veils of discrimination and fear held captive the minds. These were the 'women of his nation and our motherland still struggles to break such chains of social fragmentation. The Women's Reservation Bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 9 th March, 2010, is a pending bill in the Parliament of India which proposes to amend the Constitution of India to reserve 1/3rd of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The seats were proposed to be reserved in rotation and would have been determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections.

"Where women are prayed, God prefers to stay" (Mohan, Shantha, 44) So goes an old religious saying. In context of India, then how optimistic should we be about God's presence? How fair have we been, as an independent, democratic, sovereign nation, to ensure a parallel path for gender development? Is it not yet the time to bring forward the means the instrument to undo this unjust subjugation? Reservation may not be the panacea, but certainly an apt means to remedy this divide across the diversities of our nation.

Indian society has traditionally been a patriarchal society - A society where men turned the financial wheels and women were confined to drive the household wheels. The structure could adjust in the times. But times change and changing times bring their demands and limitations. The relevance and vitality of any structure is only justified by the ease with which it can adopt and remain dynamic. Alas, the Indian, society and the male dominated orientation could not overcome the inertia with ease. "In 1993, a constitutional amendment was passed in India that called for a random one third of village council leader, or Sarpanch, positions in gram panchayat to be reserved for women" (Vijayalakshmi, V, 166)

As members of the emerging economic giant, it becomes essential that both genders contribute and benefit from the growth of nation. However, women in India, continue to suffer from burden of social norms, traditions and definitions. It is an irony that globally considered as an epitome of strength, love and care women are still 'the weaker sex' in our society. Irony nevertheless, it is a shame as well. The Women's Reservation Bill, a pivotal legislative proposal in India, aims to enhance the political representation of women. Women's Reservation in legislative bodies ensures 33% seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

The Constitutional frames showed acumen by inserting positive discrimination to raise the participation of women. However, the male dominated politics of generations have yielded breathing space to women, ever so slowly. A revolution of sorts was thereby achieved when the historic 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, through Reservation ensured representation of women in grass root levels of democracy. These amendments aim to expand the Lok Sabha, modernize the delimitation

process, and accelerate the implementation of women's reservation. It is believed that a higher representation of women in the Parliament will ensure that women's issues are discussed more effectively.

Reservation as a tool is a means to ensure representation. It creates space. It may not be sufficient, but undoubtedly an essential step to bring forth a segment which has been socially subjugated for ages. Women reservation is a crying call of the society to empower women and make them partners in all spheres in true sense. From times of Sati and Jauhar to the need of being assertive and demanding, Indian women have seen a long journey - from an era of uplift and emancipation to the need for empowerment today. Reservation provides a solution to lend voice to women of the nation and can be removed once women achieve a position of coequals in society. Women's Reservation Bill opposes to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies for women. The Women's Reservation Act and delimitation debate gains momentum as the Centre considers Census 2011-based seat expansion.

Political empowerment of women has made a modest beginning at Panchayats and Municipality level. With a recent increase in reservation to half, women will achieve a better say in policy making and implementation. However, party politicking at the national level has not yet allowed the Women Reservation Bill to see the light of the day. Different theories are floated for its' opposition. While some argue that reservation should be on basis of constituency, others demand reservation in ticket distribution by the parties. The logjam has stupefied the voice of women, in the process. Women will be given one-third of the seats in state assemblies and parliament.

Political empowerment will radiate gender sensitiveness in policies and increase in awareness about rights at the grass root. Women's needs, problems and issues will be highlighted in forums and discussions, only when women in sufficient numbers manage to reach such forums. Reservation will provide the initial thrust to overcome the social barrier and resistance. Reservation in major employment schemes and in political bodies will enhance the earning capacity of households. Economic empowerment of women could drive houses away from evil grip of poverty on a sustainable basis. As a contributor, to the better standard of living of the family, the lady can then hold her head high.

Economic empowerment also provides a shield against ill treatment and abuse that women in both rural and urban India have grown habitual to. As an earning member, capable of sustaining herself, she will break the threads of traditional dependence on the male. On equal footing she can demand her rights, assert herself and be recognized. Several women in urban India have witnessed such empowerment in recent decades and reservation could further add to this growing strength in number. Affirmative action needed to improve women's condition in society. Representation needed to address various societal issues like, low participation of women in the workforce, low nutrition levels, and a skewed sex ratio.

The ability of the women to plan judiciously and run the house hold is recognized globally. The self help group (SHG) movement also relies on the uprightness of women and this judicious use for saving and productive purposes will enhance when they earn their own money. Reservation will compulsorily bring out women from their households to explore avenues of growth and utilization of their skills. A huge reserve of talent has been untapped. A skillful segment has remained untouched from being part of workforce of this nation. Reservation will help in aligning these energies for the progress of nation.

Empowered women will enrich the civil society of the nation and will drive the virtuous cycle to work for more disadvantaged lot. This social empowerment ' will help them take proactive part in aligning some distortions of the society. Women will then find a voice against eve-teasing and insensitivity in urban areas. They can better handle the crusade against female foeticide and thereby rectify the demographic imbalance.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament. One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies. Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory. Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act.

“Reservation in forces would not only tap talent of women in combat skills, but also generate healthy competition in male dominated arenas. This will auger well for sensitivity of forces an account of constant criticism in recent past. More gynecologists, specialists and medical practitioners will truly drive in a fair distribution of human resource of the nation” (Rout, Akshay, 176)

The aim to bring in reservation is to enthuse dynamism in Indian society. By active participation of women; nation building will be smoother, equities and more rapid. Reservation, however, should remain the vehicle and not the destination. The caution, in exercising this approach lies in protecting against usurping of this vehicle. In name of women representation, dummy figureheads are threats, which can derail the affectivity of this means. Male counterparts actively wielding power, in name of elected wives, have spoiled the spirit in several areas.

Another concern, due to inherent stratifications of Indian social mosaic is the cornering of benefits by influential, rich and dominant. It is here that other supplementary and equally crucial elements have to step in and support reservation. An efficient administration and high level of awareness driving people -participation should condemn and cremate such practices. Women empowerment is a journey the Indian bandwagon has begun, though slowly and hopefully steadily, to win the race. The fight has to be fought on several fronts but most critical is on the attitudinal front. Men must accept the strength and talent of women and provide that crucial space for harmonious existence.

Women's reservation in political and administrative spaces has emerged as a transformative step towards achieving gender equality. The position of women in Indian politics is becoming stronger day by day, with strong female political figures in our country. To increase the participation of women in the parliament, Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in the upper and lower house, but is still pending in Lok Sabha, despite its reintroduction. With a woman as the head of state and another as the speaker of People's House, India should set an example in empowering women. Women of this nation have brought laurels and global recognition in diverse fields. Be it Kalpana Chawla or Saina Nehwal, Kiran Desai or Indira Noori, Mrs Indira Gandhi or Lata Mangeshkar Idols galore for Indian women. The need of the times demands them to be proactive members of the changing times. They should utilize the ladder of reservation and shine beyond in all hues of their talent and enigma. The story of any nation is often judged by glancing at the standard of empowerment of its women. It is high time that governance in our nation accepts this and proactively involves the synergy from this segment. It is, thereby; time to project the 'better halves' as the 'better half on the national level.

CONCLUSION

The demand for reserving seats for women in elected bodies has been long-standing in India. Women's reservation has moved from representation at the grassroots to constitutional recognition at the highest legislative level. The most significant provision is the reservation of one-third of the seats for women in local bodies. The case for women's reservation emanates from their lack of representation in legislative bodies. Women's Reservation Act 2023 raises constitutional debates on implementation, delimitation, federal concerns, and political representation.

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