

“Women Reservation Bill” 2023: A Way to Political Change in India

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘women’ encompasses both genders, as both men and women contribute to the standard of life and nation-building within a society; the political sphere serves as the foundation for any transformation. Women in the social sphere have consistently been sidelined from ancient times to the present. It is not solely about her social sphere; rather, it encompasses all aspects of her existence. It integrates the social, economic, and political frameworks affecting women, which necessitate fortification. Therefore, she must advocate for her community and assert her rights. In this setting, women must be empowered across all sectors, with political engagement and leadership being crucial for their progress. This article will discuss the necessity of a reservation bill for women, their political position in society, and their advocacy for the community. This paper primarily concerns the historical and contemporary standards women must achieve in India. The initiation of the Reservation Bill and its implications in India will be reviewed for the advancement of women. The advantages and disadvantages of this Bill will be elucidated through numerous reports.

Keywords: *Women, Reservation, Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION:

The Women Reservation Bill of 2023 signifies a crucial milestone in India’s persistent endeavors to attain gender equality, especially within the political domain. The objective of this innovative legislation is to enhance the representation of women in the making decisions at the national and state levels by making sure that women have a third of the places in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The objective is to empower women politically, providing them with a forum to influence policy, engage in governance, and significantly shape the nation’s political landscape. India has had an imbalance of power in its leadership for years because there aren’t enough women in political roles. Despite considerable advancements in sectors like education and employment, women’s involvement in politics has continued to be restricted. The Women Reservation Bill

is regarded as a significant measure in tackling this issue and advancing gender equality in politics. The Women Reservation Bill is not the inaugural attempt to

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15168976>

Article No - TVRV00077

Received	Reviewed	Accepted	Published
02-June-2024	27-Sept.-2024	22-Oct.-2024	10-Dec.-2024
Volume	Issue	December	ISSN
No. 6	No. 2	2024	2583-1852(P), 2584-0878(O)
How to Cite this Article: Maharana, Subhadra. Women Reservation Bill” 2023: A Way to Political Change in India. THE THIRD VOICE: REALITY AND VISION. 2024. Vol No-6. Issue No-2. December. Pp: 71-75, DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15168976			

implement gender-based reservations in India. Prior endeavors, like the 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill in 2008, encountered substantial resistance from diverse political factions and elicited apprehensions regarding potential disruptions to established political frameworks. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Women Reservation Bill of 2023 has rekindled significant discourse regarding the role of women in India's political and governance frameworks. This bill may be perceived not merely as a mechanism to enhance women's representation in politics, but also as a prospective catalyst for extensive political transformation. If enacted, it might alter India's political landscape by advancing more women into leadership positions, resulting in a more inclusive and diversified democratic framework.

This study will analyze the prospective implications of the Women Reservation Bill 2023, emphasizing its potential to transform India's political structure, the societal obstacles it may face, and its enduring consequences on gender parity in governance. As the bill progresses, it is essential to rigorously assess both its prospective benefits and its constraints, considering the intricacies of India's political landscape and the varied viewpoints on female quotas. This research aims to elucidate how the Women Reservation Bill may influence the future of political involvement and representation in India. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, officially referred to as the Women Reservation Bill, is a substantial legislative measure that is designed to enhance the representation of women in India's political sphere. The law, which was enacted by both chambers of the Indian Parliament in September 2023, supports the idea of reserving 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, which is the lower chamber of Parliament, as well as in State Legislative Assemblies. This action is regarded as a critical step toward the improvement of gender equality within the political framework of the nation.

This essay will examine the necessity of the reservation law for women, their political roles in society, and the significance of their voices within the community. The paper will examine the historical trajectory of women in India, emphasizing the obstacles they have encountered in attaining equality and acceptance. The analysis will also consider the introduction of the Reservation Bill and its prospective effects on enhancing the status of women in the nation. The essay will examine the advantages and disadvantages of the bill,

utilizing insights from diverse publications and research to offer a thorough grasp of its consequences.

PROVISIONS OF THE BILL

The proposition proposes a 33% reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to increase the opportunities for women to participate in electoral politics. It also includes provisions for sub-reservation within the 33% for women from vulnerable communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). This ensures that the reservation benefits women from these regions as well.

The law also includes a delimitation clause that mandates the reservation of a specific number of seats for women in each constituency. These designated seats may rotate frequently, providing various districts the opportunity to elect female MPs over time. This approach seeks to offer a range of options for women in different locations and communities.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The Women Reservation Bill has incited prolonged discourse for several years. Initially presented in Parliament in 1996, it did not obtain approval owing to resistance from multiple political factions. Over time, there have been multiple attempts to reintroduce the bill, but it continued to face significant challenges. Issues such as caste-based reservations, political will, and the representation of women in local governance have been major hurdles in advancing the bill. Despite these setbacks, the bill remains a central topic in the debate for greater gender equality in India's political landscape.

Ancient and Medieval Periods: In ancient India, women held certain political authority, as seen in historical figures like Rani Durgavati of Gondwana and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who led their armies into battle. Nevertheless, as Indian civilization progressed, the participation of women in public life became increasingly constrained. The rise of patriarchal systems, coupled with the influence of colonial rule, further diminished women's opportunities in leadership and governance. During the medieval period, women's political presence shrank even further, as practices like purdah (veiling), child marriage, and other gender-based restrictions took hold. Cultural and societal constraints markedly diminished women's visibility and their capacity to participate in politics and public life.

British Colonial Era: The British colonial era saw the introduction of reforms intended to promote legal equality for women, such as the abolition of sati and the encouragement of widow remarriage. However, these reforms were often framed within the context of ‘civilizing’ Indian society from a Western perspective, rather than genuinely empowering women.

During this time, notable Indian women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamini Roy, and Kasturba Gandhi became actively involved in the independence movement. Despite their significant contributions, their roles in leadership positions remained restricted, and their political representation continued to be minimal. Their involvement marked an important step, but the broader political space for women remained limited during the colonial period.

Historical Underrepresentation: Women in India have historically been underrepresented in political decision-making roles. Despite making up nearly half of the population, their presence in legislative bodies remains limited. For example, in the 16th Lok Sabha, women represented only 14% of the total Members of Parliament, which is far below the global average of 25%. This disparity highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality in political representation, underscoring the need for reforms to ensure women have a stronger voice in shaping the country’s future.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND BREAKING STEREOTYPES:

Role Models: The inclusion of women in political spaces challenges the traditional belief that leadership is primarily a male domain. Women Members of Parliament and legislators can serve as role models, inspiring younger generations to follow in their footsteps and pursue careers in politics, leadership, and public service. Their presence in these roles sends a powerful message about the potential of women to lead and shape society.

Shifting Gender Norms: The bill plays a key role in shifting societal views by normalizing the perception of women as leaders and decision-makers. By ensuring greater female representation in governance, it helps challenge and break down patriarchal norms that have historically limited women’s roles and opportunities. This progressive move not only opens doors for women but also promotes a more equal and inclusive society.

ENCOURAGING WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Breaking Barriers: Women have long faced significant challenges when trying to enter the political arena. The Women Reservation Bill in India shows a major phase forward in addressing the longstanding underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making roles. Throughout history, from ancient times to the present, women have encountered numerous social, cultural, and political barriers that have limited their involvement in governance and leadership. The introduction of the Women Reservation Bill aims to directly address these inequalities. This document will explore the historical context that highlights the need for the bill, and it will also consider the further steps required to achieve true gender equality in political representation.

There is clear potential to uplift women in the political sphere, which is essential for their overall development. However, this struggle for representation has been ongoing since ancient times, with progress occurring in phases. Despite rigorous efforts by women over the years, it is only now, through legislation like the Women Reservation Bill, that significant changes are being made in the political landscape, creating opportunities for greater inclusion and equality.

The Women’s Reservation Bill suggests the incorporation of three new Articles and one clause into the Constitution:

On Tuesday, the Women’s Reservation Bill, also known as the 128th Amendment Bill, was introduced during the inaugural session of the newly inaugurated Parliament building. This initiative represents a substantial advancement in the ongoing endeavor to improve and guarantee women’s representation in the political arena. The primary goal of the proposed amendment is to enhance the involvement of women in decision-making processes, thereby granting them a more significant and influential role in the development of the nation’s political landscape..

Three new Articles and a new clause will be incorporated into the Constitution by the forthcoming legislation.

A significant provision in Article 239AA will guarantee that a specific number of seats in the Delhi Legislative Assembly are reserved for women. In particular, female candidates will be allocated one-third of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. Additionally, the legislation granted by Parliament will reserve one-third

of the total seats to be filled through direct elections for women. The objective of this initiative is to increase the representation of women in politics and to guarantee their increased participation in governance.

New Article – 330A: A new provision has been introduced to reserve one-third of the seats currently allocated to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for women in the Lok Sabha. Furthermore, women will be allocated one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha that are filled through direct elections. The purpose of this action is to guarantee that women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are afforded a more significant and engaged role in the legislative processes of the country, thereby fostering a more equitable gender distribution in political representation.

New Article – 332A: This provision requires that each state legislative assembly have designated seats for women. In particular, female candidates will be allocated one-third of the seats that are designated for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Furthermore, women will be allocated one-third of the total number of seats to be filled through direct elections in the legislative assemblies. This endeavors to guarantee increased female representation at the state level, thereby fostering gender equality in regional governance.

New Article – 334A: The implementation of these reservations will begin once the delimitation process is completed, which will occur after the release of data from the first census. Following this, the reserved seats for women will rotate after each subsequent delimitation exercise. This system ensures that women have the opportunity to represent different constituencies over time, promoting broader participation and diversity in political representation.

The Women's Reservation Bill establishes a groundbreaking 33% quota for women in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies, with the objective of diminishing the long-standing obstacles to women's political engagement and fostering a more representative and diverse legislative process. The measure includes a clause that mandates the rotation of reserved seats among various constituencies during general elections. This ensures that the constituencies designated for women are periodically updated and that there is a fair distribution. A critical transition period for women to enhance their political influence will be provided by the reservation, which will remain in effect for 15 years following the Act's initiation.

The measure also maintains the principle of reserving seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), thereby guaranteeing that marginalized women are incorporated into the political process. Furthermore, in accordance with parliamentary law, the allocated seats for women will be rotated following each delimitation exercise. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the measure does not include any provisions for the reservation of seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Addressing Gender Imbalance: The reservation law aims to rectify the gender disparity in political representation by guaranteeing that a specific percentage of seats in legislative bodies are allocated to women. This initiative is vital for fostering a more equitable political environment, especially for women who often face systemic barriers in politics due to deeply rooted patriarchal structures. By guaranteeing women a more prominent presence, the bill aims to level the playing field and create opportunities for women to actively participate in decision-making processes.

ENSURING WOMEN'S VOICES IN POLICY-MAKING:

Women's Issues Representation: Women face unique challenges that demand specific attention in public policy, such as healthcare, education, safety, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence. By increasing the number of women in political roles, we ensure that these important issues are prioritized and addressed effectively in legislative processes. Greater female representation in politics brings diverse perspectives to the table, allowing for more comprehensive and inclusive solutions to the problems women face.

Diverse Perspectives: More inclusive and well-rounded legislation is the product of legislatures that reflect the diversity of their constituents. By incorporating women into the legislative process, the reservation bill will help ensure that laws reflect the needs and aspirations of all genders. This broader representation promotes more balanced policymaking, addressing issues from multiple viewpoints and fostering a more equitable society for everyone.

IMPACT ON POLITICAL CHANGE:

Enhanced Female Representation: The primary outcome of the bill will be a significant increase in women's representation within legislative bodies, helping to address the ongoing gender disparity. Currently, women make up around 14% of the Lok

Sabha, which is much lower than the global average of 25%. This legislation aims to amplify the voices of women in India’s legislative processes, ensuring that their perspectives are better reflected in the decision-making that shapes the country’s future.

Empowerment of Women: This bill acts as a powerful tool for empowering women, both in policy formulation and in inspiring them to take on leadership roles in politics. By ensuring that one-third of all seats are reserved for women, it aims to gradually challenge and transform traditional gender roles in Indian politics, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment. This change will help dismantle long-established gender barriers and inspire more women to take an active role in creating the future of the country.

Heightened Political Awareness: The bill is expected to inspire more women to actively engage in the political arena. As they see more women candidates contesting elections, female voters may feel more motivated to participate in the electoral process. This increased representation could also encourage political parties to nominate a greater number of women candidates, helping to create a more inclusive and balanced political environment. Ultimately, this shift could lead to a stronger presence of women in politics, influencing policies that better reflect the needs of all citizens.

Social Change and Gender Equality:

In the long run, this bill could play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality within Indian society. By putting more women in positions of decision-making, it holds the potential to drive meaningful social change, addressing issues that disproportionately affect women and ensuring their voices are heard in key policy decisions.

In 2023, the bill was finally enacted, marking a significant turning point in the political commitment to enhancing gender equality within India’s political framework. This significant achievement shows a rising commitment to establishing a more equal and inclusive political climate for all citizens.

LOOKING FORWARD

It is a big step forward that the Women Reservation Bill was signed into law, but its full potential will require continued advocacy and effective implementation strategies. As more women occupy seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, A change could happen in the way policies are made, with more attention paid to

problems that directly affect women. But it’s important for political groups to choose women candidates based on their political skills and qualifications, not just because they’re women.

In conclusion, the Women Reservation Bill 2023 represents a crucial initiative with the potential to bring about substantial political change in India. The short-term effects might not happen right away, but the long-term effects could lead to a more open, diverse, and fair political system that helps everyone.

Acknowledgements

Not applicable

Funding

No funding received for this study

Availability of data and materials

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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