

Antecedents and Impact: Mapping the Trajectory of the Women's Reservation Bill 2023 in the Broader Socio-Political Landscape

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ABSTRACT

In September 2023, Women's Reservation Bill, officially named as the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*¹, was passed in the Indian Parliament. This landmark legislation mandates a 33 percent reservation for women in crucial political spheres, encompassing the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the NCT of Delhi Assembly. Despite its enactment transpiring 76 years subsequent to India's attainment of independence, the matter of women's reservation rights has persistently occupied a pivotal position in the nation's political and social discourse since the inception of the Constitution. From the very genesis of the Constitution, deliberations pertaining to women's reservation rights in India have constituted a substantive component of the national dialogue. The primary emphasis of these deliberations has perpetually centred on investigating whether the allocation of seats for women will authentically empower them or, conversely, engender their heightened exclusion from the mainstream political milieu. The present study endeavours to furnish a comprehensive exploration of the historical antecedents, underlying objectives, and the legitimacy of concerns associated with the Women's Reservation Bill of 2023.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, Reservation, Constitution, Politics, Elections, Parliament, Representation, Political Economy

INTRODUCTION

On 21st September 2023, the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill was passed in the Indian Parliament, i.e., in Lok Sabha and subsequently in the Rajya Sabha, the two houses of the Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha being the Upper House and Lok Sabha, the Lower House. This amendment bill guarantees 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and in all the State Legislative Assemblies of the country.

In the Rajya Sabha, the bill garnered unanimous support with a majority vote of 215 in favor and none against. Similarly, in the Lok Sabha, the voting ratio stood at 454 in favor to 2 against, signifying minimal opposition to the bill among Members of Parliament (MPs).

These two dissenting voices in the Lok Sabha bring attention to two notable contentious issues related to the bill, outlined below:

Firstly, a key contention revolves around the provision that the reservation guaranteed by this bill will not be applicable to the upcoming Parliamentary Elections in May 2024. This stipulation is based on the understanding that the implementation of the reservation will only occur post the delimitation exercise, to be conducted by the Government of India. Delimitation involves the restructuring and amendment of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, adjusting their boundaries in accordance with the latest census data.

In India, census was scheduled to be conducted in 2021 but the Government of India could not do so, initially due to COVID Pandemic, and later due to miscellaneous administrative reasons. Therefore, it is estimated that the implementation of this bill can only be done by 2029 or 2031.

¹ Trans. Woman Power Salutation Act

Numerous opposition parties have questioned the necessity of waiting for the completion of the census and delimitation. They argue that the bill should take effect immediately, with the 33 percent reservation guaranteed under this legislation being implemented in the Parliamentary Elections of May 2024, scheduled approximately nine months after the bill's enactment.

Moreover, the leaders of the opposition vehemently oppose the argument that the implementation of the bill has been deferred indefinitely. Ms. Sonia Gandhi, a Member of the Lok Sabha and the longest-serving president of the Indian National Congress party, raised this concern in Parliament, questioning,

"How many years? 2 years, 4 years, 6 years, 8 years?"

Former Law Minister Mr. Kapil Sibal noted,

"The earliest the Women's Reservation can come into effect is in the 2034 Lok Sabha Elections."

The second point of contention regarding this bill revolves around its omission of specific reservation provisions for women belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). While the legislation does allocate reservation for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, it does not extend this provision to women of the Other Backward Classes. Representatives from political entities such as the Bahujan Samaj Party², and the Samajwadi Party³ assert that this exclusion of the OBC community is perceived as an 'insult' towards them. They go on to allege that policymakers harbor intentions of shaping a Parliament dominated exclusively by the upper class. (Mandal, 2023)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the context of this study, the research methodology adopted is characterized by a dual approach, encompassing both descriptive and analytical methodologies. The descriptive component seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of the Women's Reservation Bill, elucidating its intricacies and meticulously tracing the distinct stages of its evolution.

Furthermore, the research methodology relies extensively on a curated selection of secondary data sources. These sources, including newspaper articles, documentaries, and parliamentary debates, have been systematically consulted to augment the scholarly foundation of the study. This methodological framework ensures a thorough investigation into the legislative landscape surrounding the Women's Reservation Bill, fostering a nuanced understanding of its development.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN'S RESERVATION POLICY

The debate on women's reservation in Parliament dates back to December 1946, when a constituent assembly was convened to draft the country's constitution. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar chaired the drafting committee of the Constitution. Out of the 299 members in this constituent assembly, only 15 were women, including some notable figures such as Sarojini Naidu⁴, Sucheta Kriplani⁵, Vijayalakshmi Pandit⁶, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur⁷, and Ammu Swaminathan⁸. However, when the issue of women's reservation rights was being debated in the constituent assembly, the female members of the constituent assembly opposed it. It was not that these women believed that women were not fit to be politicians. In fact, their argument was that women did not need any special consideration in the Indian Political System.

In December 1946, while discussing another matter, Ms. Hansa Mehta⁹ remarked:

"The women's organisation... has never asked for reserved seats, for quotas, or for separate electorates. What we have asked for is social justice, economic justice, and political justice. We have asked for equality." (Poddar, 2021)

The only Dalit woman member of this Constituent Assembly was Ms. Dakshayani Velayudhan¹⁰. She also asserted that she was not in favour of reservation. Later, in July 1947, Ms. Renuka Ray¹¹ also said that women will get better chances when they are elected on the basis of ability and not reservation. In the current situation, the arguments of the members

²Political party in India that represents the interests of repressed classes like Scheduled Castes (or Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

³Regional political party in India, primarily of Uttar Pradesh

⁴Freedom Fighter, Member of Constituent Assembly, First woman Governor of an Indian State

⁵First woman Chief Minister of a State

⁶Indian freedom fighter and former Governor of Maharashtra

⁷First woman cabinet minister in India and Health Minister (1947)

⁸Member of Rajya Sabha from Madras State (1952)

⁹First women Vice Chancellor in India

¹⁰first and only Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly

¹¹Freedom Fighter and Member of Parliament

of the Constituent Assembly decades ago, now seem too idealistic and impractical. A mere mention of the term 'equality' in the constitution, does not mandate equality to prevail on the ground automatically.

In the present day, many of the political leaders have been infamous for their misogynist remarks, including the common practice of making lewd or sexist remarks on female members of the Parliament in the ongoing sessions or debates.

Similar remarks were made by Mr. Mohan Bhagwat¹² in 2013:

'It is the husbands' job to earn money and women's job is to take care of the house' (Times News Network, 2013)

Mr. Mohan Bhagwat is the Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). RSS is the ideological parent organization of BJP, the ruling party in India.

The RSS today, has intensified its campaign to impose dress and moral codes on women in the name of 'Indian culture', especially its offensive against love marriages and inter-caste, inter-community marriages.

The Present Prime Minister also has been pointed out for his chauvinist remarks. For instance, in June 2015, during a speech in Dhaka (Bangladesh) while praising Bangladesh's prime minister, Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, he made a patently sexist observation:

"I am very pleased that Bangladesh's prime minister, 'despite being a woman', is openly saying that she has zero tolerance of terrorism." (Economic Times Bureau, 2015)

The phrase used by him, 'despite being a woman' drew great criticism from world over and he was thoroughly accused of being demeaning, chauvinist, gender stereotypical and sexist. Yet again he was signal out for crude sexism when he referred to Mr. Rahul Gandhi¹³ as the *'Hybrid Calf of a Jersey Cow'* (Anandan, 2009) because of his Italian mother and to Late Mrs. Sunanda Pushkar Tharoor¹⁴ as *'50 Crore Girlfriend'* (Yadav, 2012) and, that *"If pickle is packaged in a nice bottle and put in the hands of a girl for advertisement, one can get more money in lieu of that."* (Press Trust of India, 2021)

In line with the same patriarchal notion of political leadership, in 2005, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Mr. Giriraj Kishor, had praised Indira Gandhi¹⁵ by saying,

"She divided Pakistan into two. She was the only man in her cabinet. She acted like a He-Man." (Gupta, 2022)

Both these remarks of appreciation, i.e., Prime Minister Modi's for Sheikh Hasina and Giriraj Kishor's for Indira Gandhi, indeed display the same spirit of sexism, that believes political leaders must be *'He-Man'*, and that a woman can be a good leader only if she is manly.

In 2010, a similar bill, which proposed reservation for women in the parliament, was introduced in Lok Sabha and a BJP politician Mr. Adityanath Yogi¹⁶ had protested against it and said that:

'If men develop feminine traits, they become God, but if women develop masculine traits, they become demons.' (Tiwary, 2023)

Therefore, in such a misogynist scenario, the equality which is promised by the Constitution to women to contest elections, remains to be merely a theoretical reality.

Even after almost seven and a half decades there are millions of households in India, where it is still believed that women's job, is to remain at home and cook meals, wash dishes, do the cleaning jobs, etc.

IN THE POPULAR CULTURE

In popular culture, this narrative has been consistently reinforced, accompanied by a notable paradigm shift in the modes of popular culture. Beyond conventional cinema, television dramas, soap operas, audio or video songs, and literature, new forms of media have gained immense popularity in recent years. One such form is reels, typically comprising voice-over short videos lasting from 15 seconds to 1 minute. These have garnered widespread attention through social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, etc. The content disseminated via these platforms exerts a profound impact on viewers.

¹² Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), A Hindu nationalist, right-wing organization

¹³ Member of Parliament and former President, Indian National Congress

¹⁴ Late wife of Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament

¹⁵ First woman Prime Minister of India

¹⁶ Present Chief Minister of the State of Uttar Pradesh,

In a particular TikTok video that achieved viral status, to the extent that at least several hundred men created voice-over videos, a man makes a remark about a woman:

'Who will cook? Will 'we' cook? Us men? Look, you don't have to think too much, girls. Anyway, there isn't enough brainpower in you.'

Such trending innuendoes might seem to be ephemeral, and hence insignificant, but they leave a strategic impact on the mindset of the youth.

Apart from this, there are multiplicity of audio songs in the Indian Cinema which objectify women and yet set soaring records.

IN THE POLITICAL REALM

The political reality of the day is that if a woman competes against a man in elections, then many people's sexist way of thinking will not be able to accept that a woman is eligible to be a politician. They may never vote for a woman, thinking that a woman's job is only to take care of the house. This might be the reason that even though the Indian female population is 48.4 per cent according to the 2022 estimates, but the current representation in the Lok Sabha, the percentage of women is only around 15 per cent. At state level, it is even worse. Only 8-9 per cent of the legislators are women.

If we compare these figures with other developing countries like Rwanda (Africa), there are 61 per cent women in the Parliament of Rwanda. In Cuba (South America), 55 per cent of the parliament members are women. If we make a list of 185 countries, India's rank is at 141. This is why the government needs to push for equality at the ground level. This is called Positive Discrimination. It is also called Protective Discrimination or Affirmative Action in many countries. Many people raise the argument that under the Indian Constitution how is it possible to enact Positive Discrimination.

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination in India based on religion, race, caste, and sex.

But it is noteworthy that 'Positive Discrimination' has also been mentioned in the various articles of the Indian Constitution like Article 15(3), Article 15(5) and Article 16(4).

According to Article 15(3), the government has the right to make special provisions for women and children. So, it is incorrect to say that reservation is against equality. When in fact, reservation aims at achieving social equality in the ground reality.

It is rather an adequate measure to demonstrate why true equality can be brought by bridging gaps. Where there is a wider gap, it would require more efforts to bring equality. One of such measures to bridge these gaps is through education.

The year 1975 was celebrated as International Women's Year. In 1971, the United Nations directed the governments all over the world to make reports on the status of women. In India, the Union Ministry of Education and Social Welfare established a committee on this issue. This committee's report was published in December 1974. Its title was "Towards Equality". This report showed how the gender ratio was declining in the country. Women were facing difficulties in accessing education, literacy, and livelihood. In Chapter 7 of this Report, it was mentioned that in the Indian Parliament, from 1952 to that time, the average proportion of women was only 4 per cent.

In India, political parties often hesitate from sponsoring women candidates. When this committee toured the country, many women's groups and scholars demanded a 30 per cent reservation for women. But when they went to the political parties with this suggestion, they faced a lot of opposition from the political parties. It was said that women cannot be compared to socially backward communities. Although women have their own problems, they share their problems with men in their groups, locality, and community. The committee concluded their report saying that there was no rational basis for women's reservation.

Nevertheless, this report had a big impact on the country's politics. In 1983, the Janta Party formed the government in Karnataka which introduced the Nyaay Panchayats Act and gave 25 per cent reservation to women in local bodies. Mainly, two people are credited for this. First, Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde and second Mr Abdul Nazir Sab, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.

Even though women got this reservation in the Panchayats of Karnataka so many years ago, in the state assemblies of Karnataka, the representation of women is still quite poor. Out of 224 MLAs, only 10 are women. In the cabinet of 34 members, there is only one woman minister presently. However, after Karnataka positive developments were observed

in Andhra Pradesh as well, where in 1987, 9 per cent reservation was granted to women in Gram Panchayats. Subsequently, in Odisha, in 1991, 33 per cent reservation was granted to women in Panchayats.

At the national level, in 1987, Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi constituted a committee of 14 members under Union Minister, Margaret Alva. In the subsequent year, this committee presented a national perspective plan for women for the succeeding 12 years. More than 350 recommendations were recorded, one of which was that there should be seats reserved for women. That is why in May 1989, Rajiv Gandhi's government introduced a Constitution Amendment Bill, which guaranteed a one-third reservation to women in all rural and urban local bodies in India. This bill was passed in Lok Sabha, but it could not be passed in Rajya Sabha.

The succeeding Prime Minister, Mr. PV Narasimha Rao, tried to complete this task. In 1992 and 1993, the 73rd and 74th Constitution amendments were introduced, to provide this 33 per cent reservations in Panchayats and Municipalities. And these bills were successfully passed.

The law that was earlier enforced only in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Orissa at the time, was subsequently implemented at the national level. In all the Panchayats and Municipalities of the country, women were now entitled to 33 per cent reservation.

But the next dilemma that the Indian Political System faced was that was, should the same be done in the State Assemblies and the Parliament. In September 1996, when the Prime Minister was Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, he introduced the 81st Amendment Bill. It provided for one-third reservation for women in the Parliament. In comparison to the previous two decades, things had changed a lot. Many politicians and political parties were now supporting the bill. However, many members protested to demand the reservation for OBC (Other Backward Class) women. Uma Bharti was an MP¹⁷ from Khajuraho at that time. She demanded that the reservation be given to backward class women as well. Prime Minister Deve Gowda called a meeting of the leaders of all the parties of the country. After that, the bill is sent to a Select Committee. Many big names were included in this committee including Mr. Sharad Pawar¹⁸, Mr. Nitish Kumar¹⁹, Ms. Mamata Banerjee²⁰, Ms. Uma Bharti²¹ and late Ms. Sushma Swaraj²² all Members of Parliament. This committee was headed by CPI²³ leader Ms. Geeta Mukherjee²⁴, which is why it is also called 'Geeta Mukherjee Report.' This committee claimed that under the Schedule Caste (SC) quota and Schedule Tribe (ST) quota, seats have been reserved for women, but not for the women from the OBC category. This is because there is no constitutional provision for OBC reservation. It recommended that the government should extend the reservation for OBC women at an appropriate time, so that OBC women could also benefit from the reservation.

In December 1996, yet again, efforts to pass the bill were made but it could not be passed. At that time also, majority of the members were against this.

In May 1997, Prime Minister Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral tried to introduce this bill again, but once again the bill could not be passed due to the OBC issue. Majority of members still opposed it. The succeeding Prime Minister was Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee from the BJP²⁵ party and he too tried to pass this bill. In July 1998. However, yet again, RJD²⁶, SP, and BJP's OBC MPs opposed this bill and this attempt failed too.

Meanwhile, another objection that surfaced with regards to the bill, was that certain political representatives from the Muslim community, like Iliyas Azmi²⁷ from BSP and Mr. G.M. Banatwala²⁸ from All India Muslim Personal Law Board, demanded that Muslim women should be given representation too.

Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee attempted to pass the bill twice more, in 1999 and 2004 but both the attempts failed.

However, around this time, little progress was observed at the state level. In 2006, Bihar became the first state in the country under Chief Minister Mr. Nitish Kumar, to give 50 per cent reservation to women in local bodies and

¹⁷ Member of Parliament

¹⁸ Former Chief Minister of Maharashtra

¹⁹ Chief Minister of Bihar

²⁰ Chief Minister of West Bengal

²¹ Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh

²² Former Chief Minister of Delhi (1998)

²³ Communist Party of India

²⁴ Member of Parliament from West Bengal

²⁵ Bhartiya Janta Party (The current ruling party in India)

²⁶ Rashtriya Janta Dal

²⁷ Late Member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh

²⁸ Late Member of Parliament from Maharashtra

panchayats. Consecutive year, Sikkim did the same and then some other states also followed, viz. Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. Since then, the legislation has been passed in 20 states to give 50 per cent reservation to women in local bodies. This is the reason why today, in the panchayats and municipalities across the country, there are more than almost 1.5 million elected women representatives. The total number is around 3.1 million. Therefore, at the level of local bodies women already have a decent representation.

A research based in London School of Economics has shown that as a result of enhanced participation of women in the local bodies, there has been a better focus on issues like water, education and road connectivity. (Besley et al., 2005)

However, at national level, the scenario remained unchanged. In the year 2005, the Prime Minister of that time, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Ms. Sonia Gandhi consulted leaders of different political parties regarding the issue of reservation for women. And now, proposal not just did they propose 33 per cent reservation for women, but they also discussed the MS Gill Formula²⁹, Chief Election Commission. According to this formula, it would be made mandatory for political parties to field a minimum percentage of women among the total number of candidates for the election. How many women become MLAs after winning an election is a different issue. Before that, it is important to understand how many women are fielded as candidates for the election. Ground reality in this regard was reflected in the ADR³⁰ Report published in March 2019.

In all the states, the percentage of women candidates fielded by the political parties in the Parliamentary or Assembly elections was less than 10.5 per cent. This percentage was the highest in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Delhi at around 10 per cent. In 2010, the bill for women's reservation was introduced under PM Manmohan Singh and finally, it was passed in the Rajya Sabha. With respect to the OBC⁹ matter in question, the Law Minister at that time, Mr. Veerappa Moily, explained that to ascertain that who is OBC and who is not, is a state subject, and so it depends on the state. Since 1931, caste census has not been conducted in the country. No census has been done at the national level for the caste and that is why it is difficult to ascertain or demarcate as to which all communities qualify as OBC. This was the reason why OBC was not included in this bill.

With regards to the apprehensions on the OBC reservation, Ms. Sonia Gandhi had replied that no political party was being stopped from giving a seat to a Muslim woman or an OBC woman out of the 33 per cent reserved seats. She exclaimed:

"I would say, who prevents you from giving to Muslim women, to OBC women, a seat in the reserved 33 per cent?"

But for the concern of the alliance partners of the UPA³¹ government, i.e., Samajwadi Party (SP) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the issue regarding OBC was still significant. Therefore, for this reason, the bill was not brought to the Lok Sabha.

Thereafter, in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 and 2019, BJP succeeded with a clear majority and Mr. Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister. At the time of both of these general elections, BJP's election manifesto connoted that the BJP supports the women's reservation. However, nearly 9 years after coming to power, the bill was introduced only in 2023 during a special session. By now, all the political parties had now given their assent to the bill. The OBC issue was raised once again but the bill was not stopped because of that. And finally, there was progress on this issue after many decades. Here, it is noteworthy that this time the opposition parties were not informed about the agenda of the Parliamentary session in which this bill was passed. This drew a humongous criticism from the academia of the nation. It is believed that opposition parties were simply asked to come and attend the session were not prepared enough beforehand to oppose the bill, in order to ensure that the bill could be introduced without any further impediments. Critics also contend that all this was done as the Prime Minister did not want to share the credit with anyone else and so that this bill could be augmented as another of his 'Masterstrokes' (Dasgupta, 2023).

The bill has indeed ensued a great battle to claim the credits for the enactment of this bill. Ms. Sonia Gandhi alleged that the bill was a brainchild of the Indian National Congress (INC), and was her husband, Former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi's dream. Congress politician Mr. Jairam Ramesh³² posted a letter by Mr. Rahul Gandhi¹⁶ from July 2018 in which he had requested Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi to pass the bill. In that letter, Mr. Rahul Gandhi had written:

'Women would be able to participate more meaningfully in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the women's reservation bill is passed and implemented before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.'

So, both parties have attempted to take the credit for the enactment of this bill.

²⁹ Proposal of Election Commission to mandate recognised political parties to field a minimum agreed percentage of women in elections to State Assemblies and Parliament.

³⁰ Association for Democratic Reforms

³¹ United Progressive Alliance; It was centre-left alliance of political parties in India, led by the Indian National Congress, formed after the 2004 general election

³² Member of Rajya Sabha from Karnataka

DEMAND FOR SUB-QUOTAS ON COMMUNAL GROUNDS

Amidst the above debates, there were still two Members of Parliament of AIMIM³³ Partyviz., Mr. Asaduddin Owaisi³⁴ and Mr. Imtiaz Jaleel³⁵ who opposed the bill in the Lok Sabha. They claimed that they opposed the bill as they are fighting for the inclusion of Muslim and OBC women. However, Further bifurcation of the reservation based on religion is communally or politically not a sound decision because if a proportion of the reserved seats are further reserved for Muslim women, then it would imply that Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, and Parsi women would also be entitled to special reservation. Such kind of reservation based on religion, was also discussed in the Constituent Assembly in the late 1940s. During this discussion, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel³⁶ observed that:

“The British had introduced the policy of separate electorates for a diabolic purpose. However, we cannot repeat such a thing.”

Mr. Tajamul Hussain³⁷ stated that:

“Muslims neither want reservations nor separate electorates. Muslims want to merge with the country.”

Furthermore, the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had observed that:

“It would not be good for any small group or minority to show the world and the majority that they want to segregate themselves, that they do not trust others. And so, they want safeguards and other privileges. Such a reservation would mean getting a small protection at the cost of significant privileges.”

Begum Aizaz Rasul³⁸ also said the same thing that:

“Giving reservations based on religion would mean that it will become a self-destructive weapon. In the future, it will always separate the majority and minorities.”

Apart from this, there were many other members of the Constituent Assembly, who opposed religious reservations, like the great leaders Hasrat Mohani, Ismail Khan, BH Zaidi, and Naziruddin Ahmed. Their arguments are valid even today.

‘The belief system only that only a Muslim M.P. can represent Muslim interests, and only a Christian M.P. can represent Christian interests, then in my opinion, this is not just fallacious, but also extremely dangerous. This would imply that there would be no secular Member of Parliament left in the country. This would be a direct threat to the secularism of India.’

Secondly, the way to end communalism cannot be by introducing communal reservation. Owaisi of AIMIM Party proclaimed that one day he wants to see a Muslim girl as India's Prime Minister. However, in a Hindu-majority country, a Muslim woman can become Prime Minister only when secularism is viewed in the right sense, in politics and in public life.

Here again, a great disparity can be observed between the promulgations and practice as within AIMIM, according to ADR³⁹ report of 2018, one Member of Parliament and six Members of Legislative Assembly of the party had given hate speeches. They could have been expelled from the party to set an example that the party embraces a secular ideology. With regards to AIMIM's concern for the political representation of Muslim women, no Muslim woman has ever been given any designated post in the AIMIM party. They can take the first step by appointing a female as an office bearer in the party, like general secretary, spokesperson, state president, etc. And the same can be suggested for other political parties as well.

DEMAND FOR RESERVATION TO OBC WOMEN

On the other hand, with regards to the reservation for OBC women, after the enactment of the bill, social media got flooded with trending hashtags like ‘Modi neglecting OBC’. Whereas in 2010, when Indian National Congress had introduced the bill, it was being accused of neglecting OBC. However, none of the ruling parties can be entirely blamed for neglecting the rights of the OBC women. It is a structural problem. There is no quota for OBC in Parliament and Assembly seats and there is no constitutional provision for this. At the central level, due to the absence of caste census post-independence, backward status of various castes is not clearly ascertained. This warrants for the need to conduct caste census at the national level. Opposition parties also been repeatedly demand for the caste census, especially after the enactment of the women's reservation bill. Indian National Congress and its leaders are also pushing

³³ All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen

³⁴ Current President of AIMIM; Member of Parliament from Hyderabad Lok Sabha Constituency

³⁵ Member of Parliament from Aurangabad (Lok Sabha Constituency), Maharashtra

³⁶ First deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India

³⁷ Member of constituent Assembly and late member of Rajya Sabha

³⁸ The only Muslim woman member in the Constituent Assembly; Member of Parliament (1952-54)

³⁹ Association for Democratic Reforms

the demand for the pan-India caste census as they point out that out of the 90 secretaries of the government, only 3 are OBCs.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

Although legislations and constitutional provisions like the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 are indeed progressive measures to uplift the stature of women in the Indian Political System. However, mere enactment of the bill cannot be considered as a magic wand. These legislative steps would not automatically bring equality as since the year 1992, women have been entitled to one-third reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, it is a common practice that often the male relatives of the elected women run the office as their proxy. Here the women are reduced to merely a token head. This phenomenon is known as *Sarpanch Pati*⁴⁰. (Kumar, 2023)

Here, the elected woman is the nominal head and the husband is the real head. Also, husband's photograph is added to the election campaign posters. Women's place in the political spectrum falls back to square one.

Therefore, it cannot be simply assumed that things will change suddenly due to political reservation. Apart from this, many proactive steps are necessary in the matters of education, health, and employment to help women get to the same level. When this happens at the ground level and discrimination against women shall gradually end. Only then can it be said that equality has truly prevailed.

CONCLUSION

The Women's Reservation Bill represents a pivotal milestone in the ongoing journey towards gender equality and political empowerment in India. Delving into its historical antecedents, we traced the roots of the debate back to the formative years of the nation, highlighting the limited representation of women in the constituent assembly. The passage of time has witnessed a persistent discourse surrounding the efficacy of women's reservation in parliamentary bodies.

Analyzing the legislation's evolution through descriptive and analytical lenses, the present study examines its multifaceted dimensions and the intricate stages of development. Despite the commendable progress made, it is evident that challenges persist in achieving equitable representation. The limited presence of women in the constituent assembly serves as a stark reminder of the historical gender disparities that the Women's Reservation Bill seeks to address.

It is crucial to comprehend the significance of ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and gender parity in the political arena. The Women's Reservation Bill, while a significant stride, necessitates continuous scrutiny and commitment to ensure its effective implementation and realization of its intended goals. In fostering an environment where women can actively participate in shaping the nation's destiny, we take a collective step towards a more equitable and representative democracy.

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