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**Strategies for Enhancing Women's Representation in the Lok Sabha:
Analyzing the Impact and Implementation of the Women's Reservation
Bill.**

Abstract:-

The underrepresentation of women in India's Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, has been a longstanding issue that has drawn significant attention from scholars and policymakers alike. The Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women, has been a subject of intense debate and discussion since its introduction in the late 1990s.

The existing literature on the topic provides valuable insights into the impact and implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill. The study found that the reservation of local government seats for women in India led to a reduction in crimes against women, demonstrating the potential impact of increasing women's political representation.¹ Similarly, the analysis by the authors of the 'Gender Audit for Gender Mainstreaming of Coastal and Marine Fishing Community of India' highlights the low representation of fisherwomen in the legislative assemblies, emphasizing the need for more targeted efforts to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups in the political process.²

At the same time, the normative-empirical study on the political rights of women in the Indonesian constitution suggests that a shift from the quota system to a system of reserved legislative seats may be more effective in increasing women.

Therefore, different studies show the impact and implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, while at the same time, few studies show the growing area of concern where the bill needs to come into effect and work as a voice for women.

History:-

The advocacy for political reservation for women in India started in the early years of the 20th century with notable figures such as Begum Shah Nawaz and Sarojini Naidu championing political equity in 1931. It was brought to light by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in 1971 that women were not adequately represented in political positions. This prompted the 1988 National Perspective Plan for Women which

¹ Iyer, L. et al. (2011) *The power of Political Voice: Women's political representation and crime in India*, by Lakshmi Iyer, Anandi Mani, Prachi Mishra, Petia B. Topalova :: SSRN. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1780248> (Accessed: 13 June 2024).

² Devaraj Asir, R., M.V., B. and Nagarathinam, K. (2019) *Gender Audit for Gender Mainstreaming of Coastal and Marine Fishing Community of India*, *Api.openalex.org*. Available at: <https://api.openalex.org/works/doi:10.46298/DMTCS.8455> (Accessed: 13 June 2024).

proposed having seats reserved for women at every level of governance consequently resulting in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments.³

To reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women is the purpose of the Women's Reservation Bill introduced in 1996. Despite many attempts to make it into law, the Bill has received significant opposition as different administrations showed interest in passing this landmark legislation but could not do so because of political conflicts and fears over the effects on the existing reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).⁴

NDA Government (1998-2004): Many tries were made by the government to pass the bill but there was internal resistance and lack of agreement among leaders. UPA Government (2004-2014): Despite repeated trials, the government faced resistance from critical allies, leading to its failure in the House of People after having been successfully moved through the Rajya Sabha back in 2010.⁵

The advocacy for 2023 Hunger Strikes demands such protests as K. Kavitha's hunger strike that is meant to urge for the passage of the Bill, underscoring continuous political splits and controversies over its necessity. Especially, their way of achieving The Women's Reservation Bill vividly illustrates the intricacies of the political scene in India as unflagging endeavours are frustrated by political, social, and cultural factors of importance.

Women's Reservation Act, 2023:-

³ Standard, B. (2023) *The long journey of the Women's Reservation Bill in India explained*, Business Standard. Available at:

https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/the-long-journey-of-the-women-s-reservation-bill-in-india-explained-123091900371_1.html (Accessed: 14 June 2024).

⁴ Monika (2021) *Women's representation in India: Reservations and beyond, Feminism in India*. Available at: <https://feminisminindia.com/2021/09/16/womens-representation-in-india-in-reservations-and-beyond/> (Accessed: 14 June 2024).

⁵ *From history to the road ahead: Top 10 reads on the Women's Reservation bill (2023)* The Indian Express. Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/women-reservation-bill-top-10-reads-8951386/> (Accessed: 14 June 2024).

India has passed a law that guarantees women one-third of all their Lok Sabha seats; their State Legislative Assemblies' seats; or seats reserved for people from Scheduled Castes (SC) or Scheduled Tribes (ST); or any other such body where we have these scheduled categories represented like National Capital Territory of Delhi's Legislative Assembly which also have some quotas regarding these groups as mentioned above here under certain circumstances. By an amendment to the Constitution (Article 330 & c) these classes were recognized as castes by the government hence adding complexity to federal Indian politics such that these women must be elected/appointed into 1/3 of their houses without regard for social norms whatsoever. The reservation will start when demographic figures are released after conducting a census following the introduction of this law and it will continue until fifteen years unless parliament decides to extend it.

After every delimitation exercise, there will be a law made by the parliament on how the seats for women move around regarding this specific matter. Presently, with regards to the Lok Sabha number 17 that will be in session between 2019 and 2024, only 15% of elected representatives are females and when it comes to state houses this figure drops even lower up to 9% on average.⁶

The Indian Constitution does not allow women reservation in the public sector explicitly. In contrast, Paragraph 16(2) prohibits sexual orientation-based discrimination in the workplace. Therefore, as the Supreme Court observed in the Indra Sawhney case of 1992, women will only be granted lateral rather than vertical reservation.⁷

⁶ *Women's reservation bill 2023 [the Constitution (One Hundred twenty-eighth amendment) Bill, 2023]* (2024) PRS Legislative Research. Available at: <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-twenty-eighth-amendment-bill-2023> (Accessed: 15 June 2024).

⁷ Drishti IAS (2023) *Women reservation act, 2023 - women in politics*, Drishti IAS. Available at: <https://www.drishtiias.com/to-the-points/Paper2/women-reservation-act-2023-women-in-politics> (Accessed: 15 June 2024).

Reservation for women is a form of reservation where women are also provided with an equal opportunity just the way it happens in horizontal reservations. This type of reservation cuts across vertical categories specifically for women, disabled, transgender, and veterans. Each vertical category is treated differently as far as applying the horizontal quota is concerned. For instance, if women account for 50% of the horizontal quota, then in each vertical quota category, half of the elected representatives must be women.

Women's Participation in different sectors and Women's Job Quota in different States:-

Women's employment reservations have greatly advanced in some Indian states. In 2006, a 30% horizontal reservation for women who are domiciled in the state was ordered by the Uttarakhand government. Even though it was briefly lifted in 2022 by the High Court, the Supreme Court allowed its implementation after which an ordinance was issued reaffirming the government's intention towards this particular policy in 2023. This is a case of vertical reservations that are available to women from any other country and they are only valid during the period when such needs exist due to different conditions but not because one is being excluded based on gender alone Unlike this, Karnataka introduced 33%.⁸

In 2022, Tripura also became gender equal by declaring a 33% quota for women in state government jobs and institutes of higher learning. In 2020, Punjab also approved a 33% quota for women in direct recruitment into Punjab Civil Services, boards, and state-owned corporations. In 2016, Bihar moved a notch higher when they provided 35% reservation for females into all government employment positions including police constables.⁹

Women have made remarkable progress in different sectors, apart from the numbers given by each state government. In the field of politics, India has had one female Prime Minister and

⁸ Nihalani, J. (2023) *Women reservation bill: In 20 States & UTS less than 10% mlas are female: Data, The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/data/women-reservation-bill-in-20-states-uts-less-than-10-mlas-are-female-data/article67338512.ece> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

⁹ *Id.*

two female Presidents while Fifteen (15) women have served as Chief Ministers in various states. There is no Chief Justice of the Supreme Court yet but as of 2023, the apex court has three female judges and Hon. Justice BV Nagarathna is set to be its first female Chief Justice by 2027. Thousands of females work in the defense and police sectors, such as in the Army, Navy, and Air Force, where they represent 11.7% of the police force.¹⁰

15% of the world's female pilots are Indians in the aviation industry. 62.9% of women involved in agriculture are possessed with the workforce. This is followed closely by 11.2% in manufacturing areas. In NIFTY 500 companies' boardrooms, 18.2% are women, board representation is the highest in the life sciences sector at 24% female directors alone leading us to see how significant female contribution has become though not necessarily taking place at the highest corporate levels while only 3% is the representation of females who work in top management positions at ICT companies.¹¹

These efforts and achievements reflect a broader push towards gender equality in India's workforce.

Women's Reservation in Politics:-

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) stated that reservations should be made in higher legislative bodies.

In May 2013, a committee on the status of women was established by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to recommend that at least 50% of seats in local bodies, state Legislative Assembly, and Parliament should be reserved for women. This committee also suggested that the same amount should be set aside for females within ministerial ranks or any other decision-making organ in government.

¹⁰ Bhattarai, S. (2023) *Women at work: Numbers rising but not in all sectors*, *Deccan Herald*. Available at: <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/women-at-work-numbers-rising-but-not-in-all-sectors-2808275> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

¹¹ *Id.*

In the year 2015, it was observed by the Report on the Status of Women that the representation of females in the state assemblies as well as Parliament remains miserable. It suggested setting aside not less than 50% of the seats for females in the village councils, state legislative assemblies, Parliament, ministerial levels, and all government decision-making organs.

Arguments in Support of the Women's Reservation Act:-

Requirement: During the Lok Sabha, 82 women representatives are forming 15.2%, and in Rajya Sabha, 31 women are forming 13%. Not only has that number significantly increased from the first Lok Sabha, but also the case remains different from that of several nations as it is still far below average in international terms. Rwanda (61%), Cuba (53%), and Nicaragua (52%) are the top three countries in women representation according to recent UN Women data. Furthermore, when it comes to female representation, we are behind Bangladesh (21%) and Pakistan (20%).

Gender Equality: To ensure gender equality, it is important to have a higher level of participation by women in politics, but India occupies 48 out of 146 positions in Political Empowerment- Global Gender Gap Report 2022 has revealed. However, even though India is placed at such a rank it has a very low point of 0.267 as compared to some countries that excel in this area and have scores far much higher than that of India as it stands now; for example, Iceland takes first position with 0.874 points while Bangladesh obtains number 9 with 0.546 points.

Historical Underrepresentation: Women MPs have risen from 5% in the first Lok Sabha to 15% in the 17th Lok Sabha; however, it is still very low. In a 2003 study on the influence of panchayat reservations for females, it was revealed that under reserved elections, women invested more in public goods that are primarily associated with females. Members of the

Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2009) had observed that the reservation of seats for women in local bodies allowed them to contribute tangibly.

Representation and self-determination are among the rights attributed to members of the female gender group. The convention prohibits gender discrimination in political and public lives. Different surveys show that female Panchayati Raj representatives have been at the forefront of development and well-being in villages. Several of them would prefer to participate at a broader level, but political challenges entrenched in the social fabric hold them back.

Diverse Perspectives: A legislature that includes plenty of women members could bring more different ideas into decision-making processes – thus improving on making sounder policies and managing a state.

Women empowerment: The reservation of women in politics serves to empower women at different levels. Attracting more females to politics is one way and another is that it motivates other women to take leadership responsibilities in diverse sectors.

After analysing all the aspects of the current situation of women in this country, in my view, the Women's Reservation Act is extremely important as it will increase women's participation in the different sectors because if women's participation is increased in the political sector then eventually women political leaders will have a greater opportunity to improve the condition of women. I conclude that this move was very necessary but still many people in society oppose this act by saying that, unlike a caste group, women are not a homogenous community; hence, the arguments for having "caste-based reservations" would not apply to women. Here, I would like to point out that the concept of reservation is not based on which community gets it, the concept of reservation was made to uplift the community that has been deprived of basic amenities of life, in this case, if gender is deprived

of basic amenities then according to the concept of reservation, women should be provided with reservation. Those who go against reserving seats for ladies argue that it goes against Constitution-guaranteed equality. They believe that if there's a reservation specifically designed for them, women won't strive to use their abilities and hence could lag in terms of social recognition. Here, I would like to argue that for ages our society has been following a patriarchal society during that time the notion of equality was not raised, now when women are finally getting their respect, the notion of equality is completely worthless and this act will only enhance their participation in various sectors and fields.

Apart from Reservation what more can be done?

Empower independent decision-making: Set up an autonomous monitoring system or committees that completely prevent any influence from family members in their decision-making process. It is possible by diminishing the patriarchal mentality.

Building consciousness and providing instruction: Women must be aware not just of their rights but also of why they must engage themselves in the political arena. Against this backdrop, any education or enlightenment activities deserve credit since they go a long way in enhancing women's involvement in political processes.

Ending Gender-based Violence and Harassment: Gender-based violence and harassment impede women from participating actively in politics. However, they could be solved by implementing policies concerning the law to make it safer and more supportive for women who want to be politically active.

It is important to note that among the proposed **reforms in the electoral process** are the use of proportional representation and preferential voting systems which could enhance women's representation in politics by ensuring that a lot more women are elected. These are just but a few examples of how such kind of policies might help put more females in positions of power

in India. Such changes would not last unless they represent multiple facets of what women go through within this country, making it necessary for us to come up with comprehensive strategies.

In conclusion, after carefully analyzing all the aspects, I can safely say that the Women's Reservation Act was essential and necessary.

However, providing women with an extra one-third of parliamentary seats would check the power of voters in those constituencies where power has been limited by reserved seats. Such a proposal has been responded to by proposing for either implementation of a reservation system by political parties or having dual member constituencies whereas per the constitution, one of the members should be a female.¹²

¹² *Women's reservation bill: The issues to consider* (2023) *The Wire*. Available at: <https://thewire.in/government/womens-reservation-bill-the-issues-to-consider> (Accessed: 18 June 2024).