



## Women's Reservation Bill

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### Why in News

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Recently, a political party has **raised the demand** of bringing the long-pending **Women's Reservation Bill to Parliament**, ahead of the **monsoon session**.

The Bill was introduced in the **Rajya Sabha** in **May 2008** and was referred to a **standing committee**. In 2010, it was passed in the House and transmitted finally to the **Lok Sabha**. However, the Bill **lapsed with the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha**.

### Key Points

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- **Origin:**
  - The **original idea** for this bill **originated from a constitutional amendment** which was passed back in **1993**.
  - The **constitutional amendment** stated that a random **one third of village council leader, or Sarpanch, positions in the gram panchayat** should be reserved for women.
  - The **Women's Reservation Bill** was launched as a long term plan to extend **this reservation to Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies**.
- **About the Bill:**
  - The bill seeks to **reserve 33% seats in Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies for women**.
  - 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.

- **Need:**
  - According to **Global Gender Gap Report 2021**, India has declined on the **political empowerment index** by **13.5 percentage points**, and a decline in the **number of women ministers**, from **23.1% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021**.
  - It is acknowledged even by the **government's Economic Surveys** that women's representatives in Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies are abysmally low.
  - The **various surveys** do indicate that **women representatives from Panchayati Raj have worked commendably in the development and overall well-being of society** in villages and many of them would definitely want to work on the larger scale, however, they **face various challenges** in the political structure prevalent in India.
    - **Challenges** include lack of proper political education, low financial power of women in society, sexual violence, manifestations of insecure patriarchy, uneven distribution of household work between men and women, etc.
    - The **phenomenon of Panchayat Patis – husbands** (or other male relatives) using women as proxies in PRIs and wielding the real power – is prevalent.
- **Significance:**
  - Women's political empowerment is premised on three **fundamental and non-negotiable principles**:
    - The **equality** between women and men.
    - Women's right to a **full development** of their potential.
    - Women's right to **self representation and self-determination**.
  - There is a **gender gap in political decision-making**, and women leaders need to come out more in numbers to **impact position decisions** and **inspire teenage girls to contribute to nation-building**.
- **Issues:**
  - It has been argued that it **would perpetuate the unequal status of women** since they would not be **perceived to be competing on merit**.
  - It is also contended that this policy **diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform** such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy.
  - It **restricts the choice of voters** to women candidates.
  - **Rotation of reserved constituencies in every election** may reduce the **incentive for an MP** to work for his constituency as he may be **ineligible to seek re-election from that constituency**.
    - Some experts have suggested the **adoption/promotion of alternative methods**, such as reservation in political parties and dual member constituencies.

## Way Forward

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- **Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs)** have played a significant role in bringing **women representatives at grass-root level**. Many States have granted **50% reservation for women candidates in elections**.
- **Fundamental reforms at the party level** will serve as a necessary and strategic compliment to the Women's Reservation Bill. Even if the bill is derailed further, it should not stop political parties from making internal structures more conducive to women entering politics.
- Here, it is important to underline and **differentiate the Indian perspective on quotas from that of the West**. Unlike the West, where quotas are almost a bad word, the Indian paradigm has seen such quotas emerge as invaluable tools for social leverage. They are **redistributive tools meant to ameliorate centuries of continued oppression**.
- Even once women are on the same table as men in politics, they may continue to face the challenges mentioned. There is a need to **bring about institutional, social and behavioral change** among India's populace. Gender equality is a part of **Sustainable Development Goals** as well.

**Source: TH**