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**WOMEN RESERVATION: NOT A PRIVILEGE, IT'S A  
NECESSITY**

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# ABSTRACT

As Dr .B. R. Ambedkar said the only way of measuring the development and progress of a community in a country would be only the progress and growth of women in that community which is actually the real progress of country.

Women empowerment is a critical component in achieving gender equality and sustainable development in modern societies. This paper explores the multi-dimensional aspects of women empowerment, including social, economic, political, and educational domains. It examines the historical context, policy initiatives, and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that drive the empowerment agenda. The research highlights both the progress made and the persistent challenges, including gender-based violence, wage disparity, underrepresentation in leadership, and socio-cultural barriers. The paper also evaluates the effectiveness of current empowerment strategies and proposes a holistic approach that combines legal reforms, grassroots participation, and education to ensure inclusive and lasting change. The study concludes that true empowerment is not merely about access but also about agency, voice, and the ability to shape one's future.

# WOMEN RESERVATION : NOT A PRIVILEGE ,IT'S A NECESSITY

## INTRODUCTION

Indian history and mythology have given place of pride to women Sita ,Savitri and Draupadi are the women whose names strike The mind immediately.

In ancient India, women were held in high esteem, as documented in the Rig Veda and other sacred texts. Extensive volumes could be written about the esteemed position of women in that era. However, over time, due to shifts in social, political, and economic conditions, women 's status declined. Numerous harmful customs and traditions emerged, confining women to the domestic sphere and limiting their freedom.

Before independence, women had to face various problems like sati pratha, parda pratha, child marriage, women in education ,women exploited physically-mentally ,dowry death etc.

The government is approaching women empowerment, but still far away from the goals set up by the Constitution and Indian commitments to the International fora.

Women make up almost half of India's population, but many still face poor conditions due to illiteracy, poverty, and outdated social beliefs. To improve their situation, a reservation system was introduced to help free women from being limited to household work.

## Why do we need women's reservation ?

In India, the reservation system was established to uplift the people and give them their rights; it has been effective in promoting social equity and upward mobility. However, those from disadvantaged communities still face barriers to social mobility

. In plain English, it refers to granting underprivileged individuals access to educational schools, governmental positions, or the legislative branch. The reservation system in our nation was founded as a result of the long-standing social system. The system's primary goal is to elevate the populace and grant them their rights. This system's goal is to provide reservation for the development of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), as well as for any socially or educationally underprivileged classes or Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of our country. Articles 15(4), 15(5), and 15(6) of the Indian Constitution explicitly mention it. Additionally, Articles 16(4) and 16(6) of the Indian Constitution mention the need to give the economically disadvantaged or members of the lower classes sufficient representation, as well as the need to give everyone a level playing field regardless of caste

Despite women making nearly half of India's population they have been under-represented in social, economical political positions often. Despite progress in some areas, women continue to face significant barriers to full participation and leadership roles in these spheres.

We need women reservation to address historical and structural gender inequalities and to ensure fair and meaningful representation of women in political, educational, and employment spaces.

Here are the key reasons:

## 1. Correcting Historical Injustice

Women have been historically marginalized in social, economic, and political spheres. Reservation is a corrective measure to ensure they get equal opportunities.

## 2. Promoting Gender Equality

Despite constitutional guarantees, gender gaps persist in education, employment, leadership, and decision-making. Reservations help close these gaps.

## 3. Empowering Women Politically

In many countries, including India, women remain underrepresented in legislatures and local governance. Reservation ensures their voices are heard in policymaking.

## 4. Encouraging Participation

Due to patriarchal norms, many women hesitate to enter public life. Reserved seats motivate more women to participate in politics and governance.

## 5. Role Models for Future Generations

When women occupy leadership positions, they inspire younger girls and challenge traditional gender roles in society.

## 6. Inclusive Development

Women often bring different perspectives, especially on issues like education, health, sanitation, and social welfare. Their inclusion leads to more balanced and inclusive policies.

## 7. Constitutional and Legal Support

The Indian Constitution promotes equality (Article 14) and allows for affirmative action (Article 15(3), Article 243D). Women's reservation aligns with these principles.

## When looking at the Global Gender Gap Report 2024

### About:

The Global Gender Gap Index annually benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment)

### Key Findings of the report:

- The global gender gap score in 2024 is 68.5%, meaning 31.5% of the gap remains unaddressed. Progress has been extremely slow, with only a 0.1% point improvement from 2023.
- At the current rate, it will take 134 years to reach full gender parity globally far beyond the 2030 SDG target.
- The gender gaps remain largest in Political Empowerment (77.5% unaddressed) and Economic Participation & Opportunity (39.5% unaddressed).

## What is India's performance in the Global Gender Gap Index, report 2024

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 ranks India at 129th out of 146 countries, a two-spot drop from its 2023 ranking.

The report highlights a slight decline in India's performance, particularly in Educational Attainment and Political Empowerment, despite a minor improvement in Economic Participation and Opportunity.

- ECONOMIC PARITY: India is among the countries with the lowest levels of economic parity, similar to Bangladesh, Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, and Morocco, with less than 30% gender parity in estimated earned income.

- **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**: India showed the best gender parity in secondary education enrolment.
- **POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT**: India ranked 65th globally in political empowerment of women and 10th in parity of years with female/male heads of state over the past 50 years.
  - However, women's representation at the federal level, in Ministerial positions (6.9%), and in Parliament (17.2%) remains low.
- **GENDER GAP CLOSURE**: India has closed 64.1% of its gender gap as of 2024. The slip in ranking from 127th to 129th was primarily due to small declines in 'Educational Attainment' and 'Political Empowerment' parameters, although 'Economic Participation' and 'Opportunity' scores saw slight improvements.

## **India has made significant strides in women's reservation:-**

Here is a concise overview of India's progress in providing women reservation till now:

### **Women in Education and Employment:**

In India, the national government does not require gender-based reservations in education or jobs, unlike those for caste or tribe. However, some states have programs for women. They reserve 30–35% of state government jobs for women within existing quotas. In ancient India, women were respected, as shown in the Rig Veda and other sacred texts. Many books could be written about their high status at that time. But over time, their status fell due to changes in society, politics, and the economy. Many harmful customs and traditions appeared, keeping women at home and limiting their freedom.

### **Political representation for women :-**

The most significant gender- based reservation has been made in local governance

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) introduced significant provisions for women's reservation in rural and urban local governance.

These amendments mandated:

One-third reservation for women in all elected seats in local self-government institutions, including Panchayats and Municipalities.

One-third of the seats for the chairpersons at all levels of Panchayats are also reserved for women.

This move has led to millions of women participating in grassroots politics, especially in rural areas, allowing them to have a say in local governance and development issues. Several states, such as Bihar and Rajasthan, have even increased the percentage of reservation for women in local bodies to 50%.

### **The Women's Reservation Act, 2023**

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, including those reserved for SCs and STs.

The reservation will be effective after the publication of the census conducted following the Act's commencement and endures for a 15-year period, with potential extension determined by parliamentary action. The rotation of seats allocated for women will be governed by parliamentary legislation after each delimitation process.

Currently, around 15% of the total members of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) are women while in state legislative assemblies, women on average constitute 9% of the total members.

## Other gender initiatives :-

### Special reservation for women in higher education :-

Many universities and technical institutions like the IITs(Indian Institute of Technology), NITs(National Institutes of Technology) and other institutions reserve a percentage of seats for women to increase their participation in higher education

### Scholarship :-

A number of scholarship schemes are been provided , specifically target women, aimed to access to higher education , specifically economically backward areas.

### Reservation for women in employment :-

There are some states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand have passed and implemented 33% reservation for women in the state government jobs.

### Reservation in the judiciary :-

Some other states, such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, have formulated quota-based recruitment for women judges to increase representation of women in the legal system.

### Corporate sector initiatives:-

There are some companies who have introduced diversity hiring policies and gender quotas for leadership positions in order to promote workplace involvement.

### Transgender persons :-

IN 2014, The supreme court in the NALSA judgement recognized transgender people as a third gender and directed that they will be treated as a "socially and educationally backward"--effectively eligible for OBC type reservation Following this, some states (like Tamil Nadu )have designated transgender persons under most backward classes for quotas. The central government too allows transgender applicants to avail reservation under OBC category if they meet the criteria. This inclusion is an evolving aspect of gender based affirmative action, addressing those who have faced bias due to gender identity.

# Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023: Reserving Seats for Women in Parliament and State Assemblies

## A Step Towards Gender Equality in Parliament

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, reserves 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, including those reserved for SCs and STs. This initiative is designed to tackle the political barriers that women face in India. By ensuring a significant representation of women in politics, the amendment seeks to promote gender equality and empower women in decision-making roles.

### Key Provisions

The key features of the Women Reservation Act:

- One-third of seats reserved for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislatures, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi
- Sub-reservation for women from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
- Rotation of reserved seats among different constituencies.
- The reservation will remain in effect for 15 years from the date of commencement.

### Purpose

The Women Reservation Act aims to improve women's representation in Indian politics and participation in decision-making processes, which is a significant move towards gender equality in governance.

## Here's a brief timeline to understand the political journey of the women's reservation bill

1971

First committee for women (status of women in India )was formed

1989

Rajiv Gandhi first introduced the Constitution Amendment Bill (women's reservation )in panchayat, municipal corporation--it failed in Rajya Sabha

1992-93

Congress coalition re introduces Amendment Bill 72 and 73, reserving 1/3 seats for the women and rural and urban local bodies

1996

Women's Reservation Bill is first introduced by United front government in Lok Sabha

1998

Atal Bihari Vajpayee -led NDA government introduced the bill in 12th Lok Sabha -did not receive support

1999, 2002 ,2003

It was reintroduced by the Vajpayee government but failed again

2008

Bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha by Manmohan Singh -led UPA government; it was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee

2009

Standing Committee presents its report on December 17

2010

Bill receives Union Cabinet approval; Rajya Sabha passes it with 186-1 votes

2014

Lok sabha fails to take up the Bill and it lapses

2023

Union Cabinet approves the tabling of the Bill

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To some extent, women are being empowered.  
At the same time, their power is being manipulated and opposed by social forces, strongly and sometimes viciously.

Sadly, gender reservations at the local level have failed to become a platform for women to move into state and national politics and the number of women elected at the state and national level have barely improved. There are less than 15% women legislators in assemblies and Parliament.

Despite the effective implementation of the reservation for over two decades, gender inequalities still remain whether socially, educationally, economically or politically, and women continue to be kept out of key governance posts.

Hence the promise of a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality, and where all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed, remains unfulfilled.

Governments should establish mechanisms to accelerate women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the social, educational, economical and political process and public life in each community and society and enable women to articulate their concerns and needs and ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes in all spheres of life. Governments and civil society should take actions to eliminate attitudes and practices that discriminate against and subordinate girls and women and that reinforce gender inequality.

## **Here are some practical and impactful suggestions for better implementation of women's reservation in India, both in political and non-political spheres:**

*The fight for women's reservation is not just about numbers; it is about ensuring that women's voices are heard in the corridors of power.*

### 1 Extend Reservation to Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils

- Currently, the law applies to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

- Consider inclusion in Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils, which also play key roles in policymaking.

### 2 Promote Women in Political Parties

- Mandate political parties to give tickets to women in general (non-reserved) seats as well.

- Provide incentives or penalties based on party-level women's representation.

### 3 Strengthen Local Governance

- (Panchayats and Municipalities)

Continue and monitor 33% or 50% reservation in local bodies.

- Prevent misuse through proxy candidates (e.g., "Sarpanch Pati" syndrome) by enforcing stricter accountability and leadership autonomy.

(Within the ULBs, one witnesses the wide-spread tokenism that exist within gender-reserved seats, where wives of councillors have stepped into the shoes of husbands who have found themselves blocked by gender reservation. Husbands continue to control the wards as elected wives work as proxies for their husbands).

#### 4 Reserving 50% of government jobs for women in India:

The proposal for 50% reservation of government jobs for women in India holds the promise of significant societal transformation, echoing the need for gender equality in a country where such disparities are stark.

#### 5 Awareness and Sensitization

- Conduct public awareness campaigns about the importance of women's participation in governance.
- Sensitize male colleagues and bureaucrats to promote a gender-inclusive environment.

#### 6 Monitoring and Evaluation

- Set up independent watchdogs or commissions to oversee implementation.
- Publish annual gender audit reports at local and national levels.

Because what happens, Despite good administrative work, women leaders receive less favourable assessments from their constituents than men. They have expressed that administrative work in panchayats was unsuitable for women.

a number of surveys indicate that a majority of women representatives report facing gender-based discrimination and feeling ignored in the panchayat owing to their gender. Administrative roles, like that of panchayat secretary and other posts, are dominated by men. Most newly-elected women representatives find it difficult to deal with officials of block and district administration, line departments and police

#### 7 Use Technology to Bridge Gaps

- Use digital platforms to connect women leaders, provide e-training, and create support networks.
- Ensure rural women have access to these platforms.

#### 8 Capacity Building and Leadership Training

- Offer training programs for women in politics and governance.
- Encourage mentorship by experienced leaders.
- Provide access to campaign financing, legal aid, and media training.

#### 9 Promote Women in Political Parties

- Mandate political parties to give tickets to women in general (non-reserved) seats as well.
- Provide incentives or penalties based on party-level women's representation.

### 10 Intersectional Reservation

- Ensure that the reservation for women includes:
  - SC, ST, and OBC women
  - Minority and differently-abled women
- Helps avoid domination by only elite sections.

11 Awareness Campaigns: Educating the public about the importance of women's representation.

Training Programs: Providing training for women candidates to prepare them for political roles.

Monitoring Mechanisms: Establishing systems to monitor the implementation of the bill and its impact on elections.

### 12 Encourage Grassroots Mobilization

Support NGOs, SHGs, and civil society groups working with women.

Mobilize women voters to demand representation and hold leaders accountable.

### 13 EWS Quota

Create an EWS quota of 10% for the economically weaker section among unreserved categories women in the women reservation act.

## **Conclusion:**

Reservation and participation of women is considered as one of the most pivotal steps towards achieving the gender equality and women empowerment. While, representation and reservation policies have significantly brought significant success in various fields, particularly in local government systems, and education. Despite of these success, women still need to face different challenges and there are lot more to done for them. The government through proper legal advocacy, can limit and combat against these women issues at different levels and can fulfil the promise of women empowerment in India.

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