

Women's Political Representation in India: Evaluating the Impact of Reservation Policies

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Abstract—Everyone agrees that women's participation in political decision-making is essential to democratic governance and the progress of society. In India, women are still under-represented in positions of political leadership despite significant advancements in gender equality in many fields. Even if women's representation has increased, further changes and focused initiatives are still required to solve the obstacles to gender equality in politics. To increase women's involvement and influence in India's legislative processes, it is imperative to ensure that reservation policies are implemented effectively, overcome political opposition, and improve administrative assistance.

Index Terms—Women, Participation, Reservation and Challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly acknowledged that women's participation in political decision-making is essential to democratic governance and the advancement of society. Women are still under-represented in political leadership positions in India, despite notable advancements in gender equality across a number of areas. Reservation measures intended to increase women's involvement in political politics have been introduced as a result of this ongoing discrepancy. Although India, the largest democracy in the world, has made considerable efforts to empower women and advance gender equality, the under-representation of women in political bodies remains a major obstacle. Women in India have historically had structural obstacles to political engagement, such as ingrained patriarchal systems, cultural norms, and restricted access to resources.

The Indian government has implemented reservation regulations to guarantee a minimum degree of female representation in elected entities in

order to rectify this disparity. The Women's Reservation Bill, which aims to set aside one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women, is the most well-known of these proposals.

The Women's Reservation Bill was first proposed in 1996 with the goal of addressing the gender gap in political representation by allocating seats for women in state and federal legislatures. Nevertheless, the bill has encountered strong resistance and has not yet been passed into law despite numerous attempts to do so (Basu & Bhattacharya, 2020). Women's reservation policies are still controversial in India; proponents contend that they are necessary to attain gender parity in political representation, while opponents worry about how the bill might affect current power structures and electoral procedures (Desai & Temsah, 2014).

1.1 Historical Background of the Women's Reservation Bill

Before it finally became an act, the Women's Reservation Bill had a lengthy and turbulent history. The PRS Legislative Research Bureau said that "in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2008, bills amending the Constitution to reserve seats for women in Parliament and state legislative assemblies were introduced." When their respective Lok Sabhas were dissolved, the first three Bills expired. The Rajya Sabha introduced and approved the 2008 Bill, however it too expired when the 15th Lok Sabha was dissolved. A Joint Committee of Parliament assessed the 1996 Bill, while the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice analysed the 2008 Bill. The bill continued to meet obstacles despite multiple attempts to bring it back to life. The law, which sought to reserve 33% of parliamentary

seats for women, suffered its last setback in 2014 when it expired because of unresolved issues pertaining to sub-reservations for OBC and SC/ST categories.

Both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha nearly unanimously approved the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam" bill in 2023. One-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha, state legislatures, and Delhi (a union territory with an elected assembly) must be reserved for women, according to the law. Although many people applauded this move, its actual execution has been postponed until an indeterminate future, pending the conclusion of the decennial census and seat delimitation procedures. As mentioned in our editorial, most experts estimate that it is improbable that the women's quota will be implemented even by the 2029 Lok Sabha elections because the previous delimitation commission took almost five years to produce its report. Many people are wondering if this is an example of delayed empowerment because the bill's implementation is linked to these two long-term exercises: delimitation and census.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pegu (2009) Despite India's rapid economic and technological development, discrimination against women persists. "The status of women can reveal the state of the country." Jawaharlal Nehru Despite providing sufficient proof of their ability and administrative skills, Indian women have not yet attained the necessary degree of respect and involvement in the political sphere. Only a small number of women have broken free from social constraints to leave their imprint. Women continue to experience injustice and discrimination throughout their lives. Women must have sufficient representation in the country's legislative bodies in order to achieve this goal. Over the years, the Women's Reservation Bill has been introduced multiple times in Parliament, but it has not yet been passed. Since the bill's inception, there have been a lot of problems with it. 33% quotas for women's representation in local self-government institutions were established by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which were ratified in 1993. They were implemented without any persistent demands or pressure from women or any other group. All of the major national political parties pledged to expand the

33% women's quota to state legislatures and Parliament after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed with ease. To that purpose, the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB), also known as the 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill, was introduced in the Parliament in 1996. The Women's Reservation Bill's salient features 1. Women would be given as many as one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. 2. Seats designated for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) must also be reserved. 3. A draw of lots will be used to determine which seats will be reserved in rotation; a seat will only be reserved once every three successive general elections.

Archana et.al (2021) India, the greatest democracy in the world, is home to about half of all people, according to the author's analysis. Despite the constitution's provision of women's equality with males, women's involvement in politics is still very low. The purpose of this essay is to address women's reservations in India and investigate strategies for increasing their political participation. Women are under-represented in state assemblies, urban and rural municipal authorities, and Parliament. For example, the Women's Reservation Bill needs to be adopted by both houses of Parliament in order to increase women's involvement in politics. Although the law hasn't advanced much in recent months, there is hope that it may soon pass the Lok Sabha if the present administration prioritises it.

Saima (2024) examines the crucial topic of women's reservation in India, emphasising how it can help close the gender gap in political representation. The historical context, legislative developments, implementation challenges, and overall effects of women's reservations in the nation are all thoroughly examined in this research study. The study evaluates the efficacy of these reservation regulations and looks at societal perceptions of women in politics by using empirical data and previously published academic literature. Additionally, it suggests ways to improve gender equality in political decision-making.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine women's involvement in electoral politics, with a particular emphasis on their capacity to run for office and win under the reservation system.

2. To determine the difficulties and obstacles that prevent reserve provisions from being effectively enforced.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data gathered from a variety of sources, including articles and the Ministry of Lok Sabha. The data was gathered in 2024. The study makes use of statistical tools including data interpretation and percentages.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of women's Lok Sabha participation from 1952 to 2024 is shown in Table 1. At first, there were just 22 women elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952, making up barely 4.40% of the total seats. Although progress has been uneven, the proportion of

elected female members has gradually increased over the years. Women's representation varied in the early years, peaking at 6.70% in the Third Lok Sabha (1962) and 8.10% in the Eighth Lok Sabha (1984). Women's representation decreased and stagnated between 1967 and 1991, reaching a low of 3.40% in 1977. However, there was a more steady increasing trend starting with the Tenth Lok Sabha (1991). With 7.40% representation, the Eleventh Lok Sabha (1996) represented a notable improvement, and this upward trend persisted into the ensuing decades.

Women made up 10.90% of the members in the Fifteenth Lok Sabha (2009), and by the Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2014), that percentage has increased to 11.20%. Significant improvement was made when the Seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019) hit a high of 14.39%. Even though the Eighteenth Lok Sabha (2024) saw a minor drop to 13.65%, it is still a considerable improvement over previous decades.

Table 1: Distribution of Women participation in Lokh Sabha

Lok Sabha	Total no. of Seats	Elected women Member	% of Total
First(1952)	489	22	4.40
Second(1957)	494	27	5.40
Third(1962)	494	34	6.70
Fourth(1967)	523	31	5.90
Fifth(1971)	521	22	4.20
Sixth(1977)	544	19	3.40
Seventh(1980)	544	28	5.10
Eighth(1984)	544	44	8.10
Ninth(1989)	529	28	5.30
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.00
Eleventh(1996)	541	40	7.40
Twelfth(1998)	545	44	8.00
Thirteenth(1999)	543	48	8.80
Fourteenth(2004)	543	45	8.10
Fifteenth(2009)	543	59	10.90
Sixteenth(2014)	543	61	11.20
Seventeenth (2019)	542	78	14.39
Eighteenth (2024)	542	74	13.65

Source: Ministry of Lokh Sabha

Table 2 shows how women's representation in the Rajya Sabha changed over time, from 1952 to 2022. Women were comparatively under-represented in the Rajya Sabha's early years; in 1952, 15 women made up 6.90% of all members. By 1960, this percentage had risen steadily to 10.20%. Women's

representation fluctuated between periods of development and fall during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, women's representation fell to 5.80% in 1970 after reaching a peak of 12.00% in 1980. Throughout the 1980s, representation remained between 10% and 12%, with slight swings.

Significantly, representation fell in the early 1990s, reaching 7.20% in 1992.

Women's participation did, however, rebound in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with percentages ranging from 9.00% to 11.40%. The percentage of women reached 12.70% in 2014 as the trend continued favorably throughout the 2010s. Women's representation increased most significantly between

2020 and 2022, reaching 16.00% in 2022. The data set's highest percentage of women in the Rajya Sabha is represented by this peak. The long-term trend indicates a rising trajectory in women's representation in the Rajya Sabha, culminating in a considerable gain in recent years, despite periods of stagnation and loss.

Table 1.2: Participation women's in Rajya Sabha

Year	Women	%
1952	15	6.90
1954	17	7.80
1956	20	8.60
1958	22	9.50
1960	24	10.20
1962	28	7.20
1964	21	8.90
1966	23	9.80
1968	22	9.60
1970	14	5.80
1972	18	7.40
1974	18	7.50
1976	24	10.10
1978	25	10.20
1980	29	12.00
1982	24	10.10
1984	24	10.30
1986	28	11.50
1988	25	10.60
1990	24	10.30
1992	17	7.20
1994	20	8.30
1996	19	7.80
1998	19	7.70
2000	22	9.00
2002	25	10.20
2004	28	11.40
2006	25	10.20
2008	24	9.80
2010	27	11.00
2012	26	10.60
2014	31	12.70
2016	27	11.00
2018	28	11.40
2020	25	10.20
2022	36	16.00

Source: Ministry of Lokh Sabha

VI. IMPLEMENTING WOMEN'S RESERVATION IN INDIA: OBSTACLES AND RESTRICTIONS

- ❖ Political Opposition and Resistance: A major obstacle to women's reservation implementation in India is opposition and resistance from a variety of political stakeholders.
 - ❖ Intra-Party Dynamics: Women's reservations are frequently opposed within political parties because of worries about changes in the balance of power and the possible effects on internal party structures. Women's reservations may be seen by some party members as a challenge to established power structures and leadership positions.
 - ❖ Inter-Party Politics: For political reasons, such as concerns about losing their electoral edge or the possibility of upsetting coalition dynamics, opposition parties may oppose women's reservations. The electoral process may be made more difficult by divisive arguments over the distribution of reserved seats and the rotation of constituencies.
 - ❖ Lack of Political Will: Despite outspoken support for gender equality, political leaders might not be truly committed to putting women's reservations into practice. Long-term objectives of increasing women's representation are sometimes subordinated to short-term electoral concerns and political pragmatism.
 - ❖ Administrative Obstacles and Capacity Limitations: The proper implementation of women's reservation policies may be hampered by administrative obstacles and capacity limitations at different levels of government.
 - ❖ Logistical Challenges: Identifying reserved constituencies, educating voters, and guaranteeing sufficient resources for female candidates are just a few of the logistical challenges that come with implementing reservation legislation.
 - ❖ Building Capacity: It's possible that the administrative organisations in charge of holding elections and upholding reservation rules lack the skills and resources needed to properly assist female candidates and guarantee that reservation rules are followed.
- ❖ Mechanisms for Enforcement: In spite of legal directives, the implementation of reservation clauses.

VII. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1 Findings of the Study

- ❖ At first, there were just 22 women elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952, making up barely 4.40% of the total seats. Although progress has been uneven, the proportion of elected female members has gradually increased over the years.
- ❖ Women's representation varied in the early years, peaking at 6.70% in the Third Lok Sabha (1962) and 8.10% in the Eighth Lok Sabha (1984).
- ❖ Women's representation decreased and stagnated between 1967 and 1991, reaching a low of 3.40% in 1977.
- ❖ However, there was a more steady increasing trend starting with the Tenth Lok Sabha (1991). With 7.40% representation, the Eleventh Lok Sabha (1996) represented a notable improvement, and this upward trend persisted into the ensuing decades.
- ❖ Women made up 10.90% of the members in the Fifteenth Lok Sabha (2009), and by the Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2014), that percentage has increased to 11.20%.
- ❖ Significant improvement was made when the Seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019) hit a high of 14.39%. Even though the Eighteenth Lok Sabha (2024) saw a minor drop to 13.65%, it is still a considerable improvement over previous decade.
- ❖ Women were comparatively under-represented in the Rajya Sabha's early years; in 1952, 15 women made up 6.90% of all members. By 1960, this percentage had risen steadily to 10.20%.
- ❖ Women's representation fluctuated between periods of development and fall during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, women's representation fell to 5.80% in 1970 after reaching a peak of 12.00% in 1980.
- ❖ Throughout the 1980s, representation remained between 10% and 12%, with slight swings. Significantly, representation fell in the early 1990s, reaching 7.20% in 1992.

- ❖ Women's participation did, however, rebound in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with percentages ranging from 9.00% to 11.40%.
- ❖ The percentage of women reached 12.70% in 2014 as the trend continued favorably throughout the 2010s.
- ❖ Women's representation increased most significantly between 2020 and 2022, reaching 16.00% in 2022. The data set's highest percentage of women in the Rajya Sabha is represented by this peak.

7.2 Suggestions

- ❖ The gradual rise in representation highlights progress, but it remains insufficient. The timely and effective implementation of the Women's Reservation policy (33% or more) in Parliament can significantly improve gender balance.
- ❖ Political parties should voluntarily allocate more tickets to women candidates. Internal party quotas and transparent candidate selection processes can help increase women's participation in elections.
- ❖ Women candidates need structured training in leadership, governance, and public policy to enhance their effectiveness and confidence in parliamentary roles.
- ❖ Persistent gender norms and societal restrictions limit women's political entry. Awareness programs and education campaigns should be conducted to change public attitudes toward women in leadership.
- ❖ High election costs often discourage women from contesting. Financial assistance, campaign funding support, and institutional backing can encourage more women to participate.
- ❖ Regular assessment of women's representation trends in both Houses of Parliament is essential. This will help in identifying gaps and designing targeted interventions to sustain and improve progress

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of women's representation in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha shows a complicated but steadily improving situation. Women's representation in the Lok Sabha has gradually increased throughout the years,

interspersed by periods of decrease and stagnation. Despite these swings, there has been a distinct increasing trend that culminated in a noteworthy rise to 14.39% in 2019 and a minor decline to 13.65% in 2024. This shows continued development and emphasises the necessity of persistent efforts to attain greater gender parity.

In a similar vein, there have been notable changes in the representation of women in the Rajya Sabha. With representation reaching 16.00% in 2022 the highest percentage in the dataset the first low numbers have given way to a more noticeable rise. This increase highlights a positive trend and implies that the significance of gender diversity in legislative bodies is becoming more widely acknowledged.

Even if women's representation has increased, further changes and focused initiatives are still required to solve the obstacles to gender equality in politics. To increase women's involvement and influence in India's legislative processes, it is imperative to ensure that reservation policies are implemented effectively, overcome political opposition, and improve administrative assistance.

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