

## Women's Reservation Bill

### Why in news?

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader began a day-long hunger strike in New Delhi, demanding passage of the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB).

### What is the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB)?

- The *Constitution 108<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill, 2008* seeks to reserve *one-third (33%)* of all seats for women in the *Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies*.
- 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.

### What is the timeline of the bill?

- **1996** - The WRB was 1<sup>st</sup> introduced in 1996, and was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee, however, the Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and had to be reintroduced.
- **1998** - The Bill was reintroduced and yet again, it failed to get support and lapsed.
- **1999** - The Bill was reintroduced by the NDA government in the 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha and was subsequently introduced twice in the year 2003.
- **2004** - The UPA government included it in its Common Minimum Programme and finally tabled it, this time in Rajya Sabha to prevent it from lapsing again, in 2008.
- Few recommendations made by the *1996 Geeta Mukherjee Committee* were included in this version of the Bill.
- **2010** - The Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha and lapsed in the Lok Sabha, since then the demand for reservation for women in legislative bodies is not new.

*WRB is seen as a logical extension of the 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendments (1992, 1993), which reserved one third of all seats and chairperson posts for women in rural and urban local governments.*

### Why did the parliament fail to pass the WRB?

- **Heated debates & sexist taunts** - The WRB has seen some of the heated debates and a fair share of sexism.
- **Quota within quota** - The 1996 committee recommended reservation for *OBC women* within the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation for women of the Bill, however, this demand has never been incorporated.

- This has led to opponents saying that the WRB will not benefit their women.
- **Lack of political ability** - Only Odisha's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and West Bengal's Trinamool Congress (TMC) have reserved seats for women for election candidatures.
- **Diverts attention** - Opponents contend WRB diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy.

### What is the status of Women Reservation in India?

- **Gujarat** - It elected just 8% of women legislators in its 182-member assembly.
- **Himachal Pradesh** - Where every second voter is a female, has elected 67 men and only 1 woman.
- **National average** - The national average of women in all state assemblies remains around 8%.
- **Rankings** - India ranks 144 out of 193 countries in the representation of women in parliament according to *Inter-Parliamentary Union's report*.
- Among our immediate neighbours, India falls behind Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal.

### Why is WRB important?

- Women have historically suffered due to systemic inequality and barriers.
- **Caste groups** - Any scheme of women's reservation must be within the constitutional tenets and must also account for its representation across caste groups.
- **Gender quota** - Without a gender quota, women's representation will continue to remain marginal causing a massive deficit in our democracy.
- **Panchayats** - Some recent studies on panchayats have shown the positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women and on allocation of resources.
- **Vote share** - Though women's vote share has increased the number of women in positions of power has not increased.

### What is the way forward?

- With its massive women population, India has a huge reservoir of potential which, if unleashed, will take the country much ahead.
- Women's reservation will jump-start the democratic process, allowing significant majority to have a say in how their lives must be governed.

### References

1. [The Indian Express | Women's Reservation Bill: history, politics behind long-pending law](#)
2. [The Indian Express | Private Member's Bill for women's reservation](#)
3. [PRS | Women's Reservation Bill \[The Constitution \(108th Amendment\) Bill, 2008\]](#)



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