WOMEN’S RESERVATION BILL IN INDIA

Collated by CEMCA
Women comprise at least 50% of the voting public in India

Phil Butler, Editor-in Chief of Everything PR
THE BILL: GENESIS & DEVELOPMENT
In the beginning

- September 12, 1996: Legislation for Women’s reservation *proposed*

- December 2009

- February 25, 2010
Recent Milestones

March 8, 2010

Reservation of Women: One-third of the total available seats at the national level: Lok Sabha/ Lower House
Implications of the Bill

181 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha/Lower House to be reserved for women.

In addition to the 22.5% reservation of SC & ST candidates, 1/3 for women.
What it amounts to...

- Reservation for Women: State and local legislatures/ governments

- 1,370 out of a total of 4,109 seats in the 28 State Assemblies
Demographics

- Total Population of India
  - 2001: 1027 million
  - 1991: 846 million
  - 2001: 531 million
  - 1991: 439 million
  - 2001: 496 million
  - 1991: 407 million
CENSUS DATA (2001): Profile of Children between 0-6 years

- Sex ratio: 927
- (2001): 15.42 per cent
- (1991): 17.94 per cent
Women’s reservation in parliament and state legislatures would change the “culture of the country because women today are still caught in a culture prison.

In the name of tradition, stereotypes are imposed and we have to fight these everyday”. 
SNAPSHOTS
About the Women’s Reservation Bill

- The Women’s Reservation Bill will ensure that women of scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, poor women and Muslim women would benefit from it.

  Brinda Karat

- AN ILO Study shows that “while women represent 50% of the world adult population and a third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive a tenth of world income and own less than one per cent of world property”. Therefore, reservation for women is not a bounty but only an honest recognition of their contribution to social development.

  Rajindar Sachar, PUCL Bulletin, July 2003, Women’s reservation bill - A social necessity, national obligation
PASSING THE BILL
■ The passing of the BILL will lead to:

■ Gender equality in Parliament
  – Impact: Empowerment of Women as a whole
  – Increase political participation of women
Janwadi Mahila Smiti Social Activists

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) President Lalu Prasad Yadav (R) and Samajwadi Party President Mulayam Singh Yadav (L)
Women’s Reservation In *Panchayat* Elections?
- 33.3 % Seats reserved for women at the local level/ Panchayats

- 100,000 women are elected to the Panchayats every five years

- Largest mobilization of women in public life in the world

- (Bill passed in 1992)
What Happened on March 9, 2010?

- March 9 2010
- Voting Pattern A majority vote of 186 members in favour and 1 against
- What Next?
- Way Forward
Supporters Forum

- Provisions of the Women’s Reservation Bill

Why Reservation?

- Reservation for women is to create a level playing field
MAIN POLITICAL OPPONENTS
Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) President Lalu Prasad Yadav (R) and Samajwadi Party President Mulayam Singh Yadav (L), against the proposed Women's Reservation Bill, speak to media outside parliament in New Delhi on March 8, 2010.
WHY OPPOSITION?
Politics at play

Male leaders may not get a chance to stand for elections

- Reservation will only help elite groups (women) gain seats
- Causing further discrimination and under-representation of the poor and backward classes
Patriarchy: Speaking for the Voiceless

- Women perpetuate unequal status
- Create reservation in political parties
- Rotation of reserved states?
Lalu Prasad Yadav

[The Bill] “would deny adequate representation to other sections of society”

Favours: 10 - 15 % reservation for women
Mulayam Singh Yadav:

- Mandatory for political parties to give 10% of election tickets to women;
Implications Of The Bill
I totally support the 33% reservation of women in the Indian parliament.

So you are feminine.

It's, 'feminist'.

Tomato-tomahto.

By Siddharth Singh

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Implications of the Bill

- Women to get the following:
- 33% reservation in Gram Panchayats (Village Assemblies/Local Self Government) and municipal elections
- Women get preferential treatment in education and jobs
- More women participation in politics and society
We girls still have a long way to go.
Implications of the Bill

- Reservation for women expected to create equal opportunity for both men and women
- Skewed sex ratios (1.06 males per female) may be checked as women get equal status in society
- Women might help curb/restrain the growth and spread of corruption
Possible Drawbacks Of The BILL
Indian women Members of Parliament (MPs) celebrate outside parliament in New Delhi late March 9, 2010 after the Women's Reservation Bill was passed in the upper house the Rajya Sabha.
Possible Drawbacks of the Women’s Reservation Bill

- Self esteem could take a beating
- Quality of leadership may become questionable
- Gender hatred could be encouraged
- Political parties may have to locate women candidates irrespective of the candidate’s vision mismatch with that of the party’s
Indian opposition leader Sushma Swaraj (R), Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader Brinda Karat (C) and fellow female Members of Parliament (MPs) celebrate outside parliament in New Delhi late March 9, 2010 after the Women's Reservation Bill was passed in the upper house the Rajya Sabha
Possible Drawbacks of the Women’s Reservation Bill

- Powerful male members might be tempted to ‘reserve’ seats for women relatives (and thereby for themselves)
- Only elite women might stand to gain from the passing of this Bill
- Further discriminating against the under-represented and the marginalized
Congress Party President and Leader of India's UPA government Sonia Gandhi (L) poses with supporters at her residence in New Delhi on March 10, 2010, a day after The Women's Reservation Bill was passed in the Upper House/ Rajya Sabha of the parliament.
QUESTIONS RAISED
QUESTIONS RAISED

- How far will women’s reservation empower women and the society?
- Can the Bill balance these concerns?
- Rotation of reserved seats?
- The “quota within the quota”
- Is being a woman enough to “represent” women?
In the absence of meaningful inner-party democracy and electoral reforms, is the bill just going to window-dress the republic?

Is it fair to expect everything from a Bill that merely seeks to let in more women?

The Women’s reservation Bill is being introduced for fifteen years.
Panchayati Raj & National Level Politics

- Panchayati Raj Bill: Reservation of Women passed in 1992

- National Level Women’s Reservation Bill faces troubled waters

- WHY???
Panchayats and Reservation

- Panchayats do not matter much;

- Out of the 134 countries surveyed in 2009 on a variety of human development indicators to measure Gender Gap: Indian women rank 127
- Only 15% women are re-elected once their seats are de-reserved
  - A C Nielsen ORG Marg Survey 2008
- In another survey:
- 89% of women Panchayat members interviewed in 2008 do not want to be re-elected
- Sarpanch Pati

- His authority and extra constitutional powers are acknowledged by all

- However, with time the woman will leverage her position as sarpanch and force the state to do her bidding
The Parliament Question

Why is there then so much uproar in the parliament about the Women’s Reservation Bill?
Will Women Parliamentarians be empowered???
- Women Parliamentarians on an equal footing
- She would be empowered
- It is a frightening phenomenon for those who welcomed women’s reservation in Panchayats
1) Will the Women’s Reservation Bill be different?

2) Will this also be a veil?

3) Will a woman really be more sensitive than the men in the House?

What if this woman behaves like a man???

- Dipankar Gupta, Mail Today, March 17, 2010, p10