ARTICLE ON
WOMEN RESERVATION BILL

WHY IN NEWS

• 108th Amendment Bill to reserve for women one-third of seats in Parliament and the State legislatures.

• **REAL STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE BILL:**

  • The existing patriarchal mind-set within the very same parties that have affirmed support to it (Congress & BJP; uniformly and strongly chauvinistic)

  • According to the 2011 census, India has 586.4 million women out of a total population of 1.21 billion.

  • A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in Lok Sabha elections in 2014 according to the Election Commission of India, which gives any women’s party potentially the largest base among political parties.

  • For a country with a female population that is larger than that of the United States and a thriving democracy that prides itself on being robust and
responsive, India has done rather poorly when it comes to 
**female representation in national politics.**

- The 16th Lok Sabha has only 64 women among its 542 members, a mere 11.8 per cent. Afghanistan (27.7 per cent), Pakistan (20.6 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (19.9 per cent) do better.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILL:**

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies.

- The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.

- One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the 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.

**WHY DO WE NEED WOMEN IN POWER?**

- As representatives, we need women.
• To eliminate the systemic biases and structural barriers that keep our girls out of the tech industry, our victims of gender-based violence in fear and our women’s sports teams under-funded.

• To dismantle structural barriers, the responsibility falls on working women who have successfully overcome constraints to open the gates for other women.

• To design laws that encourage better education for girls.

• To secure financial independence and formal employment for women.

• To push up our abysmal female labour force participation rates.

• To ensure that female hygiene products are not taxed as luxury goods.

• In addressing systemic biases, exposure to women in office weakens stereotypes about gender roles.

• Watching women in leadership positions reduces the negative perceptions men have about their effectiveness as leaders. It also induces men to dream better dreams for their daughters, and that is no mean feat.

• Over the past few decades, women have made their mark as effective managers, bankers, professors, corporate leaders, lawyers, doctors and civil servants.

• These are women who know how to solve problems, get things done and manage multiple responsibilities. Electing able women professionals will help us simultaneously achieve better representation and expertise.
• **AGAINST RESERVATIONS:**

• The government has instituted quotas for women political candidates at the local level 33 per cent of seats are reserved for them. These quotas have been successful.

• Yet, there is resistance to implementing them at the national level. Critics allege that these quotas are neither meritocratic nor useful because women in politics are simply representatives of the men who would have been in politics wives and daughters of male proxies.

• Never mind the fact that these quotas at the local level have improved the quality of local policymaking, as women have tended to invest significantly more (Harvard research by Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande and Petia Topalova) than their male counterparts on the provision of public goods health, education, and roads.

• **STATING THEIR FINDINGS IN THE PRINT, HERE ARE WHAT THE RESEARCHERS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY SAY:**

• Women legislators in India raise the economic performance in their constituencies by about 1.8 percentage points per year more than male legislators.

• Women are more effective at completing road projects and hence creating infrastructure.

● Women legislators are significantly less likely than men to be carrying criminal charges. They are also slightly younger on average.

● Evidence suggests that women legislators are less likely than men to exploit their office for personal financial gain.

● On the subject of economic growth, women legislators do a lot better than men in constituencies located in less-developed states, thus making their contribution more valuable. In fact, another United Nations study illustrates that women-led panchayats have delivered 62% higher drinking water projects than in those led by men.

● **WHAT IS THE PROBLEM EXACTLY?**

● First, political parties in India tend not to follow provisions in their constitutions reserving seats for women in different committees. In several instances, when women are offered party tickets, it’s a case of the Lalu Prasad syndrome the woman being a de facto stand-in for a male relative rather than exercising power in her own right.

● The second barrier is the lack of education and leadership training. K. Gajwani and X.

● Zhang surveyed 144 villages across Tamil Nadu and found female panchayat heads to be less acquainted with the functioning of the panchayati system than their male counterparts. Similar research focusing on Andhra Pradesh revealed that hamlets with women leaders are underprepared for efficient implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

● Additionally, since women are not integrated in any local political process initially, and, unlike men, are not part of the relevant social and power networks, women leaders are prone to inefficiencies.
• Given these concerns, there is a pressing need for education and leadership training to familiarize them with the local government functioning and instil in them a sense of agency.

• These two problems create a vicious cycle where socio-economic disadvantages lead to reduced opportunities for women to participate in the political process, leading to weakened representation which, in turn, retards the process of addressing those socio-economic disadvantages.

• It’s a cycle that has been perpetuated for seven decades. It must be broken.

• **WAY AHEAD:**

  • Pass the Women’s Reservation Bill without delays and revisions.

  • Recognise that the absence of sub-quotas calls for measures to attract candidates and support representatives from lower caste and class groups.

  • Tailor training and support programmes for elected representatives to help women from lower caste and class overcome their disadvantage.

  • Reasons to delay and revise the bill simply do not hold in light of the crude gender imbalance at state and central level.

  • Evidence from the reservation at local level must brush aside remaining resistances.