

Reservation for Women in Parliament

Synopsis: In spite of much constitutional provision for protection women, Indian society suffers from deep rooted gender-bias. Women have no proper representation in decision-making and so 33% reservation for them in the Parliament and State legislatures was proposed but it has been hanging fire for a long time for lack of political will and gender bias among the political leader. They suffer from superiority complex and patriarchal culture. The detractors of the reservation bill put forward the arguments against it which hardly sound solid. Some political leaders want reservation within reservation for minorities, OBCs etc. Other suggests dilution in quantum of reservation for women and the impasse continues.

Many laws, rules and regulations have been enacted to protect the rights and privileges of women in India. Indian Constitution is full of Acts which ensure equality of women and protect them against discrimination and gender bias but in practice ours is still a male-dominated society. Their gender bias is widespread and deep rooted. The women are victims of prejudices, discrimination and social injustice. Right from inception to the death they have to pass through many man-made travails, trials and ordeals. A girl child is terminated in many cases at the very initial stage through abortion.

Women hold only 7.2 per cent seats in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) and 7.8 per cent in the Upper House (Rajya Sabha) at present. In order to empower women, to make them partner in the decision-making process, to promote and safeguard their interests it was contemplated to pass a Bill in the Parliament granting them 33 per cent reservation in the Parliament and State Legislatures. But the matter has been pending for a long time only because men are not prepared to accommodate women and strengthen the social justice and democratic tradition. They are still subject to patriarchal and anti-female political culture and tradition.

Some other politicians feel that grant of reservation of seats in Parliament and legislature is not going to solve the problems of women; it will not make any qualitative difference in the condition of the women and, therefore, the solution to improving the lot of women lies elsewhere and not in their presence in greater number in legislatures. On the other hand women dub it as a clever ploy to keep them out of the decision-making process.

The Prime Minister, L.K. Gujral, induced four women ministers in his cabinet during its expansion in July, 1997, but Mrs. Geeta Mukherjee chose not to

join the Cabinet as a minister and said that she would not join the Government till the women's reservation bill was passed in the Parliament. Mr. Gujral is genuinely interested in the empowerment of women and sharing with them in the process of decision-making but finds he helpless as the Junta Dale is divided on the issue.

The different parties have divergent views over the issue. Some demand a separate within reservation. The issue has become contentious. Samajwadi party President, Mulayam Singh Yadav, suggests that instead the Representation of Peoples Act (RPA) be amended to make it mandatory of political parties to give tickets for a certain number of seats to women candidates, but the proposal does not find favor from women MPs who feel that while paying lip service to the commitment, party leaders would resort to giving tickets only for losing seats to women candidates. Left parties want to see the bill passed at the earliest as they think that it is a major progressive legislation. They are ready even for dilution in quantum of reservation for women in Parliament and State legislatures. So, the impasse on the crucial bill goes on of time being. The supporters and opponents of the bill continue to stick to their guns. However, it seems the bill has been prepared in haste without taking the various parties and leaders into confidence. It will be proper if some more time is given for thorough discussion and exchange of ideas on the crucial issue between professed anti-reservationist and others to arrive at a consensus.