

Women Reservation

The Women's Reservation Bill providing 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislatures has been a non-starter thorough eight Lok Sabah from 1996 onwards. Successive governments have placed it on the floor of the house, only to have it shelves. A hasty retreat is no solution. The political parties know that sooner or later, something will have to be done. It is for this reason that proposals and counter proposals are being suggested by the political leaders to show that at least publicly they are not hostile to the bill.

Some time ago the then home minister Shivraj Patil ignited the controversy on the WRB by insisting that the present bill can only be passed if double member constituencies are introduced in one third of all parliamentary seats. Basically this means that 182 seats in Parliament will be represented by two MPs, one of which has to be a woman. This principle will work by rotation with one third seats being changed after each general election.

According to them, double member constituencies will create inequality between a privileged MP will be seen to have been elected from a single member constituency and will represent it independently while those elected from double member constituencies will have to share it with a male member. The message going out will be that women are incapable of managing seat on their own and will end up being treated as little more than add-ons.

The Election Commission had also put up a proposal making it mandatory for political parties to nominate 33% women candidates with a state as a unit for the Lok Sabha and the district as a unit for the State Assemblies. This would mean that in a state where there are 40 Lok Sabha seats, the party would have to nominate at least 13 women candidates, and in the state assembly elections it would have to nominate one third women candidate at the district level.

While the struggle for women's empowerment goes on, one must, however not forget that though numbers and percentages are important, it is ultimately numbers coupled with the correct world view that can go a long way to strengthen the movement for women's liberation. Hence, it is to be realized by the Indian politicians that they can no longer ignore the justified demand of reservation for the women in Parliament and state legislature.