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WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

This article covers "Daily current events" and the topic is about 'Women's Reservation Bill' which is in news, it covers "Society" In GS-1, the following content has relevance for UPSC.

For Prelims: Women's Reservation Bill

For Mains: GS-1, Society

Why in news: In New Delhi, the head of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) started a day-long hunger strike to press for the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB).

About Women's Reservation Bill (WRB):

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women.
- One-third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies will be reserved for women from those categories.
- Reserved state or union territory seats in state or union territory may be assigned through rotation to various districts.
- Seat reservations for women will be phased out 15 years following the passage of this Amendment Act.

Timeline of the Bill:

- **1996:** The WRB was first introduced in 1996 and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee; however, due to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the Bill lapsed and had to be reintroduced.
- **1998:** The Bill was reintroduced, but it once again failed to win support and lapsed.
- **1999:** The Bill was reintroduced in the 13th Lok Sabha by the NDA administration and was subsequently introduced twice in 2003.
- **2004:** The UPA government incorporated it in its Common Minimum Plan and ultimately tabled it in Rajya Sabha in 2008 to prevent it from lapse again.
 - Only a few of the recommendations made by the Geeta Mukherjee Committee in 1996 were included in this version of the Bill.
- **2010:** The Bill was enacted in the Rajya Sabha but lapsed in the Lok Sabha; since then, there has been a call for women's reservation in legislative bodies.

Key Issues:

- Opponents claim that it would perpetuate women's unequal status since they would not be perceived as competing on merit.
- Opponents also argue that this policy diverts focus away from greater challenges of electoral reform, such as political criminalization and intra-party democracy.
- The rotation of reserved constituencies in each election may limit an MP's incentive to work for his area because he may be ineligible to run for re-election from that constituency.
- The report examining the 1996 women's reservation Bill recommended that reservation be provided for women of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) once the Constitution was amended to allow for reservation for OBCs.
- It also recommended extending reservation to the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils. Both of these recommendations have yet to be incorporated into the Bill.

Women in Parliament: India and the Rest of the World:

- Presently, women make up only 14% of Lok Sabha Members (78 in total) and around 11% of the Rajya Sabha.
- While the figure has increased dramatically since the first Lok Sabha, when women made up approximately 5% of total MPs, it remains far lower than in many other countries.
- According to PRS data, Rwanda (61%), South Africa (43%), and even Bangladesh (21%), are ahead of India in this regard.
- According to the current Inter-Parliamentary Union report, India ranks 144th out of 193 countries regarding women's parliamentary representation.
- According to an American Economic Association study, countries with a more significant proportion of women in national legislatures are more likely to approve and implement gender-sensitive legislation.
- A Harvard Kennedy School study published in 2010 found that female representation on village councils enhanced female participation and responsiveness to issues such as drinking water, infrastructure, sanitation, and roadways.

Way Forward:

- Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been instrumental in bringing women representation to the grassroots level. Numerous states have implemented a 50% reservation for women candidates in elections.
- Substantial party reforms will be essential to complement the Women's Reservation Bill. Making internal systems more welcoming to women entering politics.
- There is a need for institutional, social, and behavioural transformation among the people of India. Gender equality is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Source: The Indian Express; Prsindia.org

saurabh kaushik