

LEGISLATING CHANGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE PASSAGE OF THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL IN THE LOK SABHA

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The [passage of the women's reservation bill in the Lok Sabha](#) almost three decades after it was first tabled in Parliament is a welcome move that can finally shatter a political glass ceiling. With women Members of Parliament comprising only about 15% of the strength of the Lok Sabha, the gender inequality in political representation is stark and disturbing. The [128th Constitution Amendment Bill, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam](#), seeks to amend this by reserving a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and legislative Assemblies for women. It has a 15-year sunset clause for the quota, that can be extended. Considering the fraught history of the struggle for women's reservation, and several false starts despite the Rajya Sabha passing it in 2010, it is laudatory that the first Bill to be introduced in the new Sansad Bhavan has been passed in the Lok Sabha. But its implementation will be delayed as it has been tied to two factors, delimitation and the Census, and therein lies the rub. It is unfortunate that implementation is being linked to delimitation, for the principle of having a third of seats reserved for women has nothing to do with the territorial limits of constituencies or the number of Assembly or Lok Sabha constituencies in each State.

Women will thus not have access to 33% reservation in the 2024 general election. The Bill also mandates that as nearly as one-third of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be set aside for women. The Opposition is demanding an internal quota for women of Other Backward Classes, but this should not be used as a ruse to delay implementation. In the meantime, proposals should be fine tuned to ensure that when it becomes an Act, it is not mere tokenism for women's political representation. It is a fact that local bodies are better represented, with the share of women in panchayati raj institutions well above 50% in several States. Lessons must be imbibed on how women at the grassroots level have broken all sorts of barriers, from patriarchal mindsets at home to not being taken seriously in their official duties, and made a difference. Women struggle on so many other counts: they have uneven access to health, nutrition and education, there is a lack of safe places, women are also falling out of the workforce — among the G-20 countries, India's female labour force participation is the lowest at 24%. India, which gave women voting rights at the very outset, should not falter when it comes to ensuring better political representation for women. For growth, and instituting change in key areas, women need to have their say.

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