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- ❖ **Significance of PRIs in Rural Development**
- ❖ **India's Emergence as Major Donor of Global South**
- ❖ **Critical Review of MOOCs as Educational Solutions**
- ❖ **Understanding Masculinities among Young Boys**
- ❖ **Challenges and Usefulness E-Governance in Rural India**
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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Political Empowerment of Women

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth) Amendment Bill, 2023 was finally adopted by the Lok Sabha on 20th September 2023 as *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam* to give it an emotional touch or accord a true respect to India's sizeable female population. It was adopted by the Special Session of Parliament with 454 votes in favour and only two against. Subsequently, the Bill was passed by Rajya Sabha unanimously on next day with 214 votes in favour and none against. It is being projected that it may come into force anytime after the job of delimitation commission is done as the seats of legislatures are frozen till 2026.

The Bill seeks to provide 33 percent reservation to women in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of States to kick-start democracy. Presently 15% of the total members of Lok Sabha are women and the figure is 13% for Rajya Sabha. Given the skewed gender representation, the idea was conceived in 1996 but could not be translated into reality for lack of consensus among political parties. The major hurdle was the sub-reservation within the reservation to women belonging to OBCs.

The present Bill facilitates sub-reservations to SC and ST women within 33 percent reservation but not to OBCs. Scramble for taking credit of the reservation for women in legislature has already begun and the blame games of different hues are doing rounds in media. Once again the issue of sub-reservation to OBC women is on the fore. The Bill provides for reservation of seats for women on rotation basis of constituencies within States and Union Territories. Reservation will be provided for 15 years, but the fact remains no political party in future would try to bring it down and loose the vote banks of women.

According to Inter-Parliamentary Union, India is on 141st position out of 193 countries so far as representation to women in legislatures is concerned. Even India's smaller neighbours like Pakistan and Bangladesh have 20% and 21% of the seats to women in their Parliament. UN Data reveals that African countries which have been politically and socially disturbed have more women in their Parliament; like Rwanda has 61%, Cuba has 53% and Nicaragua has 52% of parliamentary seats to women. Dream of gender equality and parity, undoubtedly makes it imperative to maintain the dynamism of the Constitution to keep it relevant and evolve with society which always happens to be in a state of flux.

However, this policy too remains contested. Politically it may be deciphered to have been orchestrated to woo the women voters. Socially it leaves no doubt that this long suppressed population has been craving for due representation in legislatures of the country and decision-making process within the polity. Gender equality has been on the agenda of most political parties of the country since independence. The Bill and the government are silent about the cycle of elections that will see its implementation to provide due share to women. Bill does not provide for reservation in Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils, belittling 'reservation to women' as an ideal. Undoubtedly, there are larger issues of electoral reforms to contain 'criminalization of politics' and 'inner party democracy' to purge the politics towards good governance; before the affirmative action to empower the women to improve the conditions of women becomes a reality. Meanwhile studies on Panchayats and reservations for women therein, have started revealing positive effects on empowerment of women through allocation of resources.

While ruling party is elated about its passage; opposition congregation of nearly 26 parties 'Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance' (INDIA) under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi has been strongly demanding sub-reservation for OBC women within the 33 percent reservation. Caste continues to be social infrastructure of Indian politics; hence the demand seems to be quite genuine. Only future knows the track on which 'political empowerment of women' would evolve.

—BK



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