

Women's Reservation Bill

March 11, 2023

In news— Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha has recently began a day-long hunger strike in New Delhi, demanding passage of the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB).

Timeline of the Women's Reservation Bill-

- **The WRB was first introduced in 1996 by the HD Deve Gowda government.** After the Bill failed to get approval in Lok Sabha, it was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee chaired by Geeta Mukherjee, which presented its report in December 1996.
- However, the **Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and had to be reintroduced.**
- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA government reintroduced the Bill in the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998.** Yet again, **it failed to get support and lapsed.**
- **In 1999, the NDA government reintroduced it in the 13th Lok Sabha.** Subsequently, the Bill was introduced twice in Parliament in 2003.
- **In 2004, the UPA government included it in its Common Minimum Programme and finally tabled it,** this time in Rajya Sabha to prevent it from lapsing again, in 2008.
- Five of the seven recommendations made by the 1996 Geeta Mukherjee Committee were included in this version of the Bill. These were-
 - Reservation for a period of 15 years.
 - Including sub-reservation for Anglo Indians.
 - Including reservation in cases where the state has less than three seats in Lok Sabha (or less than three seats for SCs/STs).
 - Including reservation for the Delhi assembly.
 - changing not less than one-third to as nearly as may be, one-third.
- Notably, two of the excluded recommendations (regarding

reservation for OBC women as well as reservation for women in the Rajya Sabha and legislative council) became major sticking points.

- On March 9, **2010, the Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha with 186-1 votes after immense debate**, creating history.
- **The Bill, then, reached the Lok Sabha where it never saw the light of day.** When the House was dissolved in 2014, it lapsed once again.
- It is seen as a **logical extension of the 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendments (1992,1993)**, which reserved one third of all seats and chairperson posts for women in rural and urban local governments.
- However, **historically, there has never been political consensus on the issue.** The previous two NDA governments have not even introduced the Bill in Parliament.
- The Bill seeks reserve one-third of the total number of seats in state Assemblies and Parliament for women.

Opposition to WRB-

- But there has also been **more substantive opposition to the WRB.** This has come from **parties such as SP, RJD and JD(U).**
- A crucial sticking point for them has been the **issue of providing quotas to OBC women within the ambit of the Bill.**
- While the 1996 committee recommendations included instituting reservation for OBC women within the one-third reservation for women that the Bill proposed, this demand has never been incorporated.
- This has led to opponents saying that the WRB will not benefit their women.

Women in Parliament: India and the rest of the world-

- Currently, just **14 per cent of Lok Sabha MPs are women (78 in total).** Women make roughly 11 per cent of the

Rajya Sabha.

- While the number has increased significantly since the **first Lok Sabha, where women made about 5 per cent** of the total MPs, it is still far lower than many countries.
- According to data from PRS, **Rwanda (61 per cent), South Africa (43 per cent) and even Bangladesh (21 per cent), are ahead of India** in this matter.
- According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's latest report, **India ranks 144 out of 193 countries in the representation of women in Parliament.**
- As a study by the American Economic Association showed, countries with higher share of women in national parliament are more likely to pass and implement gender sensitive laws.
- A 2010 study by the Harvard Kennedy School showed that female representation in village councils increased female participation and responsiveness to concerns such as drinking water, infrastructure, sanitation and roads.
- Moreover, political participation itself is a human right – regardless of the instrumental value of women's representation in legislatures.