

## Women's Reservation Bill is 'discriminatory, undemocratic'

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**T**he Women's Reservation Bill was introduced amid much controversy in the Rajya Sabha a couple of weeks ago. The manner in which the proceedings unfolded, convey the sorry tale of democracy in our country and the practice thereof, wherein MPs get physical over disagreements over policy. But more importantly, it clearly highlighted, yet again, the degradation of what was once a noble and just cause of women empowerment, which has been reduced to a shameless greed for power in the name of one's gender.

Firstly, the policy of reservation as an elixir to uplift sections of society is flawed. Right from the birth of India as a republic, leaders have spoken out against the reservation system. This is what Nehru had to say in the letter to all Chief Ministers on June 27, 1961

"...I have referred above to efficiency and to our getting out of our traditional ruts. This necessitates our getting out of the old habit of reservations and particular privileges being given to this caste or that group...I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in services. I react strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency and second-rate standards....If we go in for reservations on communal and caste basis, we swamp the bright and able people and remain second-rate or third-rate. I want my country to be a first class country in everything. The moment we encourage the second-rate, we are lost. I am grieved to learn how far this business of reservation has gone based on communal considerations....This way lies not only folly but disaster."

Reservation systems sacrifice merit for mediocrity. Even celebrated women leaders like Sarojini Naidu were against preferential treatment to women. At the fourth session of India Women's conference held at Bombay in 1930, she said the following

"I think this conference is writing the history of women of the world. I will, however, confess to you one thing. I will whisper it into the loudspeaker. I am not a feminist. To be a feminist is to acknowledge that one's life has been regressed. The demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men in Council and in the fields of battle....

We must have no mutual conflict in our homes or abroad. We must transcend differences. We must rise above nationalism, above religion, above sex."

Sarojini Naidu was particularly vocal against reservation for women in Legislature.

On 16th Nov, 1931 a memorandum on the "Status of Women in the proposed new Constitution" jointly written by Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shah Nawaz was presented to the British Prime Minister.

The draft memorandum was circulated in May to various constituencies inviting their views on the "reservation" issue.

As noted in the 1931 annual report of All India Women's Conference, there was, at the time, only one constituency that favored reservation of seats in the Legislature - "But even this

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constituency has since completely changed its mind"

In their letter to the Premier and Chairman Minorities committee on the status of women in the proposed new Constitution (Government of India Act, 1935), the three organizations (All India Women's Conference, Women's Indian Association and the Central Committee for the National Council of Women in India) demanded complete and immediate recognition of women's equal political status. However, they insisted that no reservations be made for women in Legislature.

"We are ... enjoined to resist any plea that may be advanced by small individual groups of people of any kind of temporary concessions. Of adventitious methods of securing the adequate representation of Women in the legislatures in the shape of reservation of seats, nomination or co-option whether by status, convention or at the discretion of the provincial and central govern-

ments. To seek any form of preferential treatment would be to violate the Integrity of the universal demand of Indian women for absolute equality of political status."

What the great women leaders of yesteryears saw as a threat to the integrity to the cause of women, is something that the new brand of feminist leaders vehemently espouse.

The primary reason why the Women reservation Bill is a myopic piece of legislation that will further vested interests and ideologies is because it is undemocratic and might even be unconstitutional.

It is unconstitutional because Indian constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, religion or gender. The proposed Bill perpetuates gender discrimination. While it does allow for special provisions for the welfare of women, these provisions should not be permitted to infringe on the basic democratic rights of the rest of the population.

It is undemocratic because of two reasons - it disenfranchises about 33 percent of the electorate - or about 22 crore people as per the figures available from the Election Commission.

The basic tenet of democracy is that people should be able to choose their representatives. The state should not be allowed to limit the pool of representatives available to the public to choose from. Secondly, it violates the right of about about 11 crore people by preventing them from contesting in elections. This Bill discriminates against emerging male leaders who would not be able to contest in elections from their constituency and hence the nation loses out on the contributions of these people.

Unfortunately, very few political parties in India have the will power and determination to serve the best interests of the nation. The political parties have consistently sacrificed the nation's interest for their own political agendas. Reservation on caste and religion and caste politics to divide the nation was bad enough. Now, gender politics seems to be the new frontier.

The proposed Women's Reservation Bill is discriminatory, undemocratic and unconstitutional. This is yet another attempt by radical feminists to use their gender for furthering their own political interests, at the cost of the nation and ironically, other women.



# India Post

## Deliverance

**I**t will remain a wonder of political witchcraft that Haradanahalli Doddegowda Deve Gowda ever became Prime Minister of India in 1996. A former successful chief minister of Karnataka, of late he was showing little evidence of the dignity expected of a former Prime Minister. The self-proclaimed humble farmer was playing low level politics to keep his two sons in power in Karnataka, ditching in the process national parties like the Congress and the BJP, one by one. First he toppled the Congress government of Dharam Singh with the help of BJP in order to crown his son HD Kumaraswamy as chief minister. When, according to the time-bound understanding, he was to hand over the chief ministership to the BJP, he pulled the rug from under its feet by withdrawing support and necessitating a mid-term poll. And this betrayal became the cornerstone of the BJP campaign which brought them rich dividends last week. If the till recently a North-based party has breached the Vindhyas to take the prized southern state of Karnataka, it has to thank Deve Gowda and sons. The kingmaker and deal maker has been reduced to ineffectiveness by the perceptive electorate.

Deve Gowda also brought bad name to Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of India, by obstructing the infrastructure development of the city. The IT industry in the state has been complaining about inadequate infrastructure and the lack of political will to do something about it. Deve Gowda on the other hand, was questioning the rationale of the government's focus on urban areas. The roads of Bangalore are bad and many development projects such as the Bangalore Agenda Task Force and the Bangalore-Mysore Highway project ran into allegations of corruption and inactivity. Those in the know say the controversies were needless ploys to stall development.

Deve Gowda also got into a fracas with the globally-admired N R Narayana Murthy, heaping abuses on him. Murthy's company Infosys has shown how to create wealth, and more importantly how to distribute it to the people who actually generated it. And Deve Gowda did his best to undermine India's IT star. He refused to grant more land to his company and accused Narayana Murthy of land grab. Cussedly, he continued to scuttle Bangalore's development. At last, the Bangaloreans together with their brethren from the state have tired of his brand of politics and pulled him out of the way of Karnataka's development.

Karnataka has now given a chance to the BJP to run the state on its own for five years. The party focused on issues of real concern to the people, such as price rise, stability and power shortage. It also clearly projected its chief ministerial candidate and interestingly, shunned the Hindutva card. The new Chief Minister, BS Yeddyurappa, has promised his first priority is development and bringing power to Karnataka.

This electorate has also dealt a severe blow to the fortunes of the Sonia Gandhi led Congress party which expected, by pulling strings from distant Delhi, to retain the state which had voted Congress even after Indira Gandhi's Emergency. As is being pointed out, this is the Congress Party's 14th defeat in assembly elections since its return to power at the Center in 2004. The response of the Congress Central leadership to the crisis burgeoning around is to further withdraw into its shell. The price rise, the urgency to raise fuel prices and the Gujar community violence over the reservation issue are all demanding long term solutions. Instead, the Congress party, in a limbo, is just hoping to last out till election time early next year.