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Women's Reservation in India: From Constituent Assembly Debate to the Defeat of the Nari Shakti Amendment Bill

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The debate on women's reservation in India began during the making of the Constitution and continues even today.

Interestingly, some of the strongest opposition to reservation for women in legislatures came from women leaders themselves, especially Hansa Mehta and Renuka Ray in the Constituent Assembly.

Why They Opposed Reservation

Their main argument was based on equality, not special privilege.

Hansa Mehta's View

She believed women should be treated as equal citizens, not as a separate group needing protection. According to her, asking for reservation meant accepting that women were not equal to men. She felt reservation would make women appear weaker.

Renuka Ray's View

She also opposed reservation and believed women should enter politics on merit, not through reserved seats. She felt reservation could become a sign of inferiority and an obstacle to women's real progress.

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Their Expectation

Both believed that after independence, Indian democracy would naturally ensure fair political representation for women because of their major role in the freedom struggle.

What Happened Later

However, women's representation in Parliament remained low for decades, around 14–15%. This led to continued demand for reservation.

The Women's Reservation law aims to provide 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Nari Shakti Amendment Bill, 2026

To implement this before 2029, the government introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, also called the Nari Shakti Amendment Bill.

It proposed increasing Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816 through delimitation based on the 2011 Census.

Why the Bill Failed

As a Constitutional Amendment Bill, it required a two-thirds special majority.

Out of 528 MPs:

298 supported it

230 opposed it

352 votes were needed

Since the required majority was not reached, the bill was defeated in Lok Sabha on 17 April 2026.

This became the first defeat of a government Bill in Parliament since 2014.

Aftermath

The government also withdrew the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, which were needed for implementing reservation in Delhi, Puducherry, and Jamm& Kashmir.

The Opposition argued that women's reservation should be implemented immediately without linking it to delimitation.

Conclusion

The journey of women's reservation shows how India moved from the idea of equality without reservation to the demand for guaranteed political representation.

The debate continues, but the goal remains the same—greater participation of women in politics.

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