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Transforming Representation into Real Change By 2029

Context

- India is approaching a historic milestone in its democratic journey with the implementation of the **Women's Reservation Act**, which will reserve **one-third of Lok Sabha seats** for women beginning in 2029.
- This reform is expected to create the most **gender-representative Parliament** in India's history and marks the largest expansion of political representation ever legislated.
- One of the most urgent yet overlooked concerns is the absence of a comprehensive **elder care policy**, particularly one that recognizes the realities of ageing women.

Representation Without a Policy Agenda

- Expanding women's representation has the potential to reshape **policy priorities** and broaden the scope of national debates.
- Yet **representation without agenda** risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.
- If newly elected representatives enter Parliament without a clear mandate to address **gender-specific issues**, the historic opportunity created by reservation may fail to produce structural reform.

- The groundwork must therefore begin before the 2029 elections.
- Political parties, civil society, and policymakers must identify and advocate issues affecting women across their entire life cycle.
- These priorities should appear in **party manifestos**, public debates, and **electoral campaigns**.

The Personal Reality of Elder Care

- Many elderly parents live alone while daughters and daughters-in-law balance caregiving responsibilities with their own professional and personal commitments.
- This creates emotional stress, logistical challenges, and long-term uncertainty about the future.
- For many families, elder care is treated as a **private burden** rather than a matter of **public infrastructure**.
- Women frequently shoulder the responsibility of caring for ageing relatives while simultaneously worrying about their own future security.
- The absence of reliable support systems raises concerns about **dignified ageing**, financial independence, and access to essential services.

India's Rapidly Ageing Population

- More than **100 million Indians above 60** currently live in the country, and this number is projected to exceed **250 million by 2040**.
- As life expectancy increases, ageing will become one of the defining social and economic challenges of the coming decades.
- Women face distinctive disadvantages within this demographic shift.
- They tend to live **four to five years longer** than men, yet their later years are often marked by **financial insecurity**, limited savings, and reduced access to property or assets.
- Many women experience **broken employment histories** due to caregiving responsibilities, leaving them dependent on family members during old age.

Policy Gaps and Institutional Invisibility

- The **National Policy for Older Persons (1999)** and the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme** primarily focus on poverty relief and healthcare without incorporating a gender perspective.
- As a result, ageing women are not treated as a distinct policy category within the national welfare system.
- This institutional oversight results in **policy invisibility**, where the specific needs of elderly women remain largely unrecognized.
- Parliamentary discussions rarely address the issue, and there is limited legislative attention toward developing comprehensive elder-care strategies.
- Without gender-sensitive frameworks, problems such as **social isolation**, lack of caregivers, and economic vulnerability continue to persist.

Evidence of the Growing Crisis

- According to a 2023 study published in **Alzheimer's & Dementia**, around **8 million elderly Indians** currently live with dementia, and the number is expected to nearly **double by 2036**.
- Women are disproportionately affected due to their longer life expectancy and higher likelihood of living alone in old age.
- Without structured support systems, cognitive decline and other age-related conditions can expose elderly women to neglect, poor healthcare access, and emotional isolation.

Preparing for the 2029 Parliament

- As political parties prepare candidate pipelines for reserved seats, it is essential to ensure that future representatives understand the full **arc of women's lives**.
- Effective representation must include issues beyond employment and childcare, extending to **ageing, healthcare access, and economic security**.
- Several steps can strengthen policymaking. Future **census data** should include **age- and gender-disaggregated statistics** to improve policy design.
- Governments should also ensure **transparent budgeting** for elder-care programs. Most importantly, dignified ageing must become a visible political commitment before the election rather than an afterthought.

Conclusion

- The **Women's Reservation Act** offers India a historic opportunity to reshape both **representation and policy priorities**.
- However, the true measure of this reform will lie in whether it addresses issues affecting women across all stages of life.
- If policymakers act now to recognise the realities of ageing women and build supportive institutions, the most **gender-representative Parliament** in India's history could also become one of its most **transformative**.

Transforming Representation into Real Change By 2029 FAQs

Q1. What change will the Women's Reservation Act bring in 2029?

Ans. The Women's Reservation Act will reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha for women, creating the most gender-representative Parliament in India's history.

Q2. Why is representation alone not enough for meaningful change?

Ans. Representation alone is insufficient because women representatives must also bring policy agendas that address gender-specific issues such as elder care and social security.

Q3. Why is elder care an urgent issue in India?

Ans. Elder care is urgent because India's ageing population is rapidly increasing, and many elderly women face financial insecurity and lack of support systems.

Q4. How are ageing women particularly vulnerable?

Ans. Ageing women often live longer than men but experience lower savings, broken employment histories, and limited asset ownership, making them more vulnerable in old age.

Q5. What should political parties do before the 2029 elections?

Ans. Political parties should include dignified ageing, elder-care policies, and gender-sensitive welfare measures in their manifestos and political agendas.

Source: **The Hindu**

Protecting Women's Rights Amid Conflict and Instability

Context

- International Women's Day, observed globally on March 8, is a significant occasion for reflecting on the status of women's rights and the progress of gender equality.
- Originating from early twentieth-century labour movements, it has grown into a global platform for recognising women's achievements while advocating **social justice, political equality, and economic empowerment**.
- Since its recognition by the United Nations in 1977, the day has symbolised both celebration and a call for meaningful change.
- The 2026 theme, **Rights, Justice, Action: For All Women and Girls**, stresses the urgent need to transform commitments into practical outcomes.
- However, global realities marked by **armed conflicts, political instability, and economic uncertainty** make the pursuit of these ideals increasingly challenging.

The Global Context: Conflict and Instability

- The contemporary international landscape is marked by rising **geopolitical tensions** and persistent wars across several regions.
- These conflicts have led to massive **humanitarian crises**, widespread destruction, and large-scale displacement of civilian populations.
- Women and children remain the most vulnerable groups in such circumstances.
- Continuous **military confrontations** destroy critical infrastructure, disrupt livelihoods, and create conditions of extreme insecurity.
- The absence of effective **diplomatic de-escalation** in many conflicts further intensifies human suffering and undermines efforts to protect human rights.

Disproportionate Impact of War on Women

- Armed conflicts impose severe and unequal burdens on women and girls. Increased **gender-based violence**, food insecurity, forced displacement, and restricted mobility become common realities in war-affected regions.
- Women often face the collapse of families and communities as **social support systems**
- Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities declines sharply during conflicts.

- Sexual violence, including **rape** and **sexual exploitation**, has historically been used as a deliberate weapon of war to humiliate communities and weaken opponents.
- These experiences produce long-term psychological consequences. Many survivors suffer from depression, anxiety, and **post-traumatic stress disorder**, making recovery even more difficult in unstable environments.

The Problem of Women's Exclusion from Peace Processes

- Despite their direct experiences of conflict, women remain largely excluded from **peace negotiations** and **reconstruction efforts**.
- This exclusion limits the ability of peace agreements to address the specific needs of women and communities.
- The absence of women in decision-making also reinforces broader **structural inequalities**.
- Policies designed without women's participation often overlook issues such as community rehabilitation, family welfare, and social recovery.
- Ensuring women's inclusion in political and diplomatic processes is therefore essential for achieving **sustainable peace**.

International Efforts and Policy Commitments

- Recognising the disproportionate impact of conflict on women, the United Nations Security Council adopted **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** in 2000.
- This landmark resolution emphasised protection, participation, and the integration of gender perspectives in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- Although many countries have introduced **national action plans** to implement these commitments, progress on the ground has been limited.
- Recent international reports indicate that the world is currently experiencing the highest number of conflicts since the mid-twentieth century.
- Millions of women live close to active conflict zones, facing increased risks of violence and displacement.
- At the same time, women remain significantly underrepresented in **peace processes**, despite evidence that their participation strengthens the durability of peace agreements.

The Importance of Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

- Inclusive peacebuilding requires the active involvement of women as **negotiators, mediators**, and leaders in post-conflict recovery.
- Women frequently bring perspectives focused on **community welfare**, reconciliation, and long-term **social stability**.
- Research demonstrates that peace agreements involving women are more likely to result in **durable peace** and effective **conflict resolution**.
- Their participation strengthens democratic institutions and promotes **inclusive governance**, ensuring that the needs of affected communities are properly addressed.

The Way Forward: Moving from Promises to Action

- Governments, international organisations, and civil society must prioritise the protection and empowerment of women in conflict zones.
- Essential measures include access to **humanitarian aid, education, health services, and financial assistance**.
- Women must also be recognised as key stakeholders in negotiations and **post-conflict reconstruction**.
- Strengthening women's organisations and supporting **grassroots initiatives** can significantly improve resilience within war-affected communities.

Conclusion

- International Women's Day highlights the continuing struggle for **gender equality, justice, and universal human rights**.
- In a world shaped by conflict and instability, women and girls face profound challenges that threaten their safety, dignity, and opportunities.
- Ensuring the protection of women in conflict zones and promoting their participation in peacebuilding are essential steps toward a more **equitable, inclusive, and peaceful societies**.
- The commitment to **rights, justice, and action** must therefore extend beyond symbolic observance, becoming a shared responsibility for governments, institutions, and global communities.

Protecting Women's Rights Amid Conflict and Instability FAQs

Q1. What is the significance of International Women's Day?

Ans. International Women's Day is significant because it promotes gender equality, celebrates women's achievements, and calls for action to protect women's rights globally.

Q2. Why do women suffer more during armed conflicts?

Ans. Women suffer more during conflicts because they face higher risks of gender-based violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and limited access to healthcare and education.

Q3. What is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 about?

Ans. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 focuses on protecting women during conflicts and ensuring their participation in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.

Q4. Why is women's participation in peace processes important?

Ans. Women's participation is important because it contributes to sustainable peace, strengthens community welfare, and helps address the needs of affected populations.

Q5. What actions are needed to improve the condition of women in conflict zones?

Ans. Improving conditions requires humanitarian aid, access to education and healthcare, financial support, and greater inclusion of women in peace negotiations and reconstruction efforts.

Source: **The Hindu**