



Congress-led opposition crosses the rubicon



KARUNA GOPAL VARTAKAVI

The opposition parties led by Congress did cross the Rubicon this time. This point of no return, leading to a dark alley, will cause irreversible damage to southern states and to the women of India. By stalling the 131st Amendment to the Constitution, these opposition parties were thumping their chests, arrogating victory to themselves, but anyone with a modicum of knowledge will call it a self-goal-a serious self-inflicted injury that the opposition has caused itself.

Priyanka Gandhi said that it was a victory for democracy. It was the NDA's conspiracy to stay at the Centre for longer. But now, thanks to their stubborn, incurable hatred for anything called reform, the women of the country will not get the 33 per cent reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The Congress and its

allies have not only cut but ensured that the wound will not heal any time soon.

At the heart of the controversy lies the structure of the Bill itself. It was not a stand-alone women's reservation measure, but part of a larger package linked to delimitation. The proposed amendment sought to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to a maximum of 815 seats. The 33 per cent reservation for women was tied to this expanded House, to be implemented after a fresh delimitation exercise based on updated population data. Parties such as the Congress, DMK, and Trinamool Congress argued that delimitation based on population would disproportionately affect southern states, which have seen slower population growth compared to the Hindi heartland.

Did they even know that the NDA's proposal was a sincere effort to preserve the federal balance, protect the voice of southern, north-eastern, and smaller states, and ensure 33 per cent representation for women? And that it recognised that states which have performed well on key development indicators should not be penalised in the democratic structure? The Government proposed a 50 per cent increase model. Total seats to increase from 543 to 815. Every state's seats would grow by 50 per cent pro rata. The predicted rise of seats for Karnataka is from 28 to 42, Andhra Pradesh from 25 to 38, Telangana from 17 to 26, Tamil Nadu from 39 to 59, and Kerala from 20 to 30. Thanks to Rahul Gandhi and his supporters, without the "50 per cent pro rata" guarantee, we move to a strict population model after the 2026 Census results come. See its implications. Based on current data, the South is projected to lose actual seats-Tamil Nadu -10; Kerala -7; Andhra -5. The North/Central belt will see a massive power surge because their population has exploded since 1971. Uttar Pradesh +12; Bihar +10; Rajasthan +7; and Madhya Pradesh +5 seats.

The irony is that southern leaders like M.K. Stalin and Rahul Gandhi led the charge against the Bill. But by doing so, they have lost the only legal prop that was keeping southern seat counts high. Because the Delimitation Bill was linked to the Women's Reservation Bill, the 33 per cent quota for women is now likely to be pushed from 2029 to 2034 or later. Will the women of India, who have been waiting patiently for decades, forgive the opposition?

So, what's next?

The 2026 Census will proceed and, by law (Article 82), delimitation must follow. Without a new political consensus, the North will gain enough seats to potentially decide the Union Government without needing a single seat from the South.



Was the opposition flying blind?

The Women's Reservation Bill, which was passed in 2023, is linked to Article 334A. Article 334A states that the reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, including Delhi, will come into effect only after a fresh Census is published and a fresh delimitation exercise is completed. Why? Because new constituencies have to be redrawn and allocated so that seats reserved for women can be distributed across states and regions. The Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, repeatedly states that the reservation cannot be applied in the current Lok Sabha of 543 seats until after delimitation redraws constituencies and allocates reserved seats for women across states.

Historical roots and role of Congress

The actual problem started with the 1976 constitutional amendment carried out by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, who announced the Emergency. This amendment was carried out without any discussion, as she jailed all the opposition leaders. Ms Gandhi, who was focused on population control, connected population with delimitation. In other words, she wanted population control through delimitation. The Constitution mandates that delimitation and the Census take place every 10 years. This principle was violated by Indira Gandhi when she froze the process for 25 long years.

That is why the Constitution's framework emphasises that delimitation has to take place every 10 years based on a decennial Census. It is indeed a fact that delimitation helped Karnataka and Kerala increase their parliamentary seats by two members-Karnataka from 26 to 28, and Kerala from 18 to 20. This was in 1961.

Today, the country is misled by the Opposition into believing that southern states are being discriminated against. Then whose idea was population control?

But regional parties like TMC, DMK, SP, and BRS have an incentive to instigate this type of regional feeling to gain power. So they did just that.

According to the BJP, this 131st Constitutional Amendment is a battle of "neeyat" (intent). That is why PM Modi said, "We don't want credit. I give you a blank cheque for claiming credit on the passage of the women's quota Bill. If you want me to use the word 'guarantee', I will use the word 'guarantee'. If you want me to make a promise, I will use the word 'promise'. Because if the intention is clear, there is no need to play games with words." It is now clear that the BJP backed a Bill that would eventually ensure 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures, while opposition parties blocked it.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the opposition parties achieved a self-goal, as they stand to lose not only Lok Sabha seats but also the goodwill of the women of India.

This narrative war will continue until such time as the voters of India understand the constitutional framework, the nuances of governance, and the past performance of Congress completely.

The writer is the BJP National In-charge for Women Policies and Research, an internationally acclaimed thought leader and futurist, and has served on the Board of Engineers India Ltd

dailypioneer

@KarunaGopal1

The Pioneer