# Horizontal Reservation for Women - The Bihar Way

## Why in news?

The Bihar government recently announced 33% horizontal reservation for women in State engineering and medical colleges.

## What does horizontal reservation mean?

- Reservation for SCs, STs, OBCs and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) is referred to as vertical reservation.
- Horizontal reservation refers to the equal opportunity provided to other categories of beneficiariescutting through the vertical categories.
- The beneficiaries may include women, veterans, the transgender community, and individuals with disabilities.

## What is Bihar's recent decision?

- Bihar at present has 60% reservation in the State higher educational institutions along the six vertical categories (SCs, STs, EWS and so on).
- The newly announced reservation for women in engineering and medical seats will not be in addition to this.
- It will instead be distributed across all these vertical categories, including the non-reserved 40% seats open to all.
- E.g., if an engineering college has 100 reserved seats for STs, 33 of those seats will have to be filled with ST women.
- This is based on Article 15(3) of the Constitution that allows governments to make special provisions for women and children.

- **Need** - India's female labour force participation (FLFP) rate is consistently declining and is worryingly low.
- World Bank data shows that the FLFP came down to 21% in 2019 from 31.79% in 2005.
- As per the Bihar Economic Survey 2019-20, only 6.4% and 3.9% women were employed in the urban and rural areas respectively.
- This is abysmally low compared to theall-India figures of 20.4% and 24.6% respectively.

## What were the earlier measures?

- In 1992, the State had announced two consecutive days of menstrual leave for women employees in government services.
- In 2006, Bihar became the first State to reserve 50% seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions.
- [The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, which came into force in 1993, mandated only one-third seats for them.]
- In 2013, the Bihar government made a provision for 50% reservation for women in cooperative societies.
- It also reserved 35% seats for them in police recruitment.
- This led to an increase in women officers in the police department to 25.3% in 2020 (more than double the national average of 10.3%) from 3.3% in 2015.
- In 2016, the government extended the 35% reservation for women to all government jobs in Bihar for which direct recruitment is made.
- In 2006, a scheme called the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana was launched for Class 9 and 10 girl students.
- The enrolment of girl students went up after this scheme.
- Under the Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana, the Bihar government provides Rs. 50,000 in instalments to girl students to support their studies and other needs till graduation.
- This is an incentive-based scheme to encourage girls to complete education and delay marriage.
- The schemes have contributed positively to the State's literacy rate among girl children.

## What are the other issues to be addressed?

- The FLFP rate doesnot take into account unpaid work as well as the role played by social barriers like caste in blocking employment opportunities for women.
- State welfare schemes should go a long way in challenging the patriarchal control of women and systemic gender discrimination.
- The Bihar government needs to work towards reducing the female and male school dropout rate and ensure quality education at the primary and secondary levels.
- A major reason for the low FLFP rate is the lack of employment opportunities for women after matriculation and graduation.
- The State should thus ensure that women do not fall out of the labour market as they become more educationally qualified.
- In this regard, in line with the 35% reservation, the pending vacancies in the health sector, police force, teaching and other government departments can be filled.
- The government should also do away with hiring workers on contract and

make all the current contractual workers permanent.

- It should also extend the engineering and medical quota for women to all institutions of higher education, including private colleges and universities.
- Further, the quota allotted to them can be increased to 40-45%, if not 50%, and the category can be renamed as ‘women and transgender persons’.
- Taking lead from Bihar, other State governments and the Union government should consider introducing horizontal quota for women (and in addition, for transgender persons.)

**Source: The Hindu**

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