

Women in Parliament

October 31, 2022

Manifest Pedagogy:

New Zealand has become one of the few countries where the majority of the lawmakers are women. But things are not the same around the world. With 50 percent of the population having a meagre 26 percent representation. In India it is even more appalling with just 14 percent. Equal representation of women in legislation can significantly improve the quality of decision-making and empower both women and the nation. Hence this calls for concrete steps to ensure gender equality in the legislative bodies around the world.

In News: New Zealand women lawmakers outnumber men for the first time.

Placing it in the Syllabus: Polity

Static Dimensions

- Situation in India

Current Dimensions

- More on News
- Significance of Women Participation
- Reasons for low Participation of Women in Parliament

Content

Quote- "Political power is the key to all social progress" B.R. Ambedkar

More on News

- For the first time in New Zealand's history, a majority of lawmakers are women.
- Soraya Peke-Mason from the liberal Labour Party was

sworn in to Parliament on Tuesday, replacing former Speaker Trevor Mallard, who left to become ambassador to Ireland.

- With the resignation of another male lawmaker, it has tipped the balance in Parliament to 60 women and 59 men.
- The milestone places New Zealand among a half-dozen nations in the world that this year can claim at least **50% female** representation in their parliaments, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
- Other nations include **Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates.**
- Globally, about **26% of lawmakers are women**, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
- **Success of New Zealand**
 - New Zealand has a history of strong female representation.
 - In 1893, it became the first nation to allow women to vote.
 - Current Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is the nation's third female leader, and women currently also hold a number of other top roles including chief justice of New Zealand's Supreme Court and governor-general

Situation in India

- Women comprised only **4.4% of the first Lok Sabha, constituted in 1952**, which was risen to merely **12.15% after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.**
- Seats are not reserved for females and males in Indian Parliament.
- Total number of women in the present **Lok Sabha is 78.**
- Total number of women in the present **Rajya Sabha is 24.**
- According to an Inter-Parliamentary Union study, **India ranks 149th out of 193** countries in terms of female

representation in the lower or single house of Parliament.

- It is inexcusable that in a country where women account for half of the population, they have an abysmally low **14% representation in the Lok Sabha and 11% in the Rajya Sabha**.
- When compared to our neighbours in the Gender Gap Report 2022, Bangladesh ranks 71st, China 102nd and Sri Lanka 111th.
 - Pakistan (145th) and Afghanistan (146th) are among only 11 countries which rank worse than India (135th).

Significance of Women Participation

- **Efficiency:** Germany, New Zealand, and Taiwan were some of the few countries which effectively controlled the pandemic quickly. The common thing between them is, all are governed by women as state heads.
 - Even in the USA, the state with female governors outperformed their male counterparts.
 - They are found highly efficient in taking decisive decisions like lockdowns.
- **Women-centric approach:** The female legislators or state heads are observed to be more women-centric. This can be observed in the Indian Panchayati system where female pradhans have concentrated more on issues like public toilets, self-help groups, domestic violence, etc.
- **The contrast between suffrage and political presence:** Women vote equally as men but yet we only have one female Chief Minister currently. We have witnessed charismatic women leaders like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, and Sushma Swaraj but their quantum is minimal.
- **International relationship:** Recently UK's special envoy Ms. Roper visited India for advocating the greater role of women in conflict resolution and long-lasting peace.

She quoted “women account for 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators, 5% of witnesses to the peace process.

- But they ensure **real success as 60%** of negotiations involving women are likely to fail, and 35% last at least 15 years.
- **Recording effect:** Increase in the responsiveness of the official towards the pleas of disadvantaged groups. For example, greater police responsiveness towards crimes against women in constituencies where women were part of the political leadership
- **To break the Vicious cycle:** Socio-economic disadvantages lead to reduced opportunities for women to participate in the political process, leading to weakened representation which, in turn, retards the process of addressing socio-economic disadvantages

Reasons for low Participation of Women in Parliament

- **Illiteracy**-It is one of the main hurdles in making women politically empowered. Women candidates have less education and experience, on average, compared to male candidates.
 - In India literacy among women is **65% as compared to men -82%**.
- **Lack of political will:** Multiple times there was lapse of the bill providing reservation of one-third of women participation depicts the lack of political will among the parliamentarians. The bill is yet part of all parties' manifesto but has never been implemented.
- **Masking of the identity:** In the 2019 elections 206 women participated independently and only one of them won. This indicates the influence of political parties and the family background in ensuring their political victory. The party and family identity masks her identity
- **Patriarchy:** Women although hold the power but they do not experience it as the decisions are influenced by

male partners or other family members. This is much visible in Panchayati in the form of creation of Sarpanchpati.

- **Gender Disparities**-Gender inequalities in terms of education, ownership of resources and continual biased attitudes still act as barriers for women leaders.
- **Lack of confidence and finance**- They were the other major deterring factors that prevented women from entering politics.
- **Sexual division of labour**-A system in which all work inside the home is either done by the women of the family or organised by them through the domestic helpers. It means that women spend far more time than men in the home- and child-care.
- **Slander and abuse**-This is one of the main reasons that women stay away from contesting elections which they face during campaigns. The other reason cited is lack of safety.

Wayforward

- **Zipper system** is a practice followed in countries like Rwanda where every third seat in the party is reserved for women. Such changes can be adopted for better results.
- **Deconstruct the stereotype in women** of confining them to family and household tasks
- **Passage of reservation of one-third of seats** is of prime importance to the current situation. INC and BJP are major parties in parliament. They suo moto can reserve one-third of seats in their party that can lead to enactment of reservation for women when substantial women are seen in such parties.
 - Studies have shown that the gender quota introduced in local administration through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts has increased the presence of women and enabled them to enter

mainstream politics.

- **Promoting Inner party democracy:** A truly democratic political party in which the various positions like president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer etc are filled by the election process, will give a fair chance to all female members of the party
- Fulfilling FR and DPSP-**Article 14** of the Constitution, which establishes the right to equality as a fundamental right.
 - **Article 46** imposes a duty on the state to protect weaker sections from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Mould your thoughts

Q. Political power is the key to all social progress. Critically analyse the statement in light of low representation of women legislators around the world with special focus on India. Also suggest the measures to correct the anomaly. (250 words)

Approach to the answer.

- Introduction about Newzealand achievement
- Status of women legislators around the world- positive and negative.
- Status in India
- Significance of Women Participation
- Reasons for low Participation of Women in Parliament
- Suggestions
- Wayforward and Conclusion.