



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

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Women under-represented in Politics and Bureaucracy

Syllabus: GS1/ Social Empowerment

In Context

- IMF has forecast **6.8 per cent growth for the Indian economy** in comparison to 1.6 percent for the US.
 - Despite its economic growth, **women's participation** in the country's **economy, polity** and **society** has not kept pace.

History of Women in decision-making roles in India

- **Women's suffrage:** Independent India can rightly be **proud of its achievement in so far as women's suffrage is concerned**. Women were allowed to vote from 1950 onwards and so could participate on an equal footing with men from the first general election of 1951-52.
 - In contrast, In the U.S., it took several decades of struggle before women were allowed to vote in 1920.
 - Most countries in Europe also achieved universal suffrage during the inter-war period.
- **Women leaders in Politics:** India had and has **charismatic female leaders** like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee among several others.
- **Women in Civil services in India: In 1951 the first woman joined** the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).
 - In 1970, women made up 9% of those entering the IAS; that proportion rose to 31% by 2020.
 - **Currently, 21% of serving IAS officers are women.**

Under-representation of women in Politics & bureaucracy

- **Participation in Politics:**
 - **Members of Parliament:** As per data compiled by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in India**, women make up 14.44 percent of the Lok Sabha.
 - A glance at the data in the latest available **report of the Election Commission of India (ECI)**, shows that women

represent **10.5 percent of all Members** of Parliament as of October 2021.

- **State assemblies:** For all the state assemblies, female MLAs' representation stands at an average of 9 percent.
- **Lower than global average:** India's ranking in this regard has fallen over the last few years. It is currently behind Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.
 - The data for May 2022 showed that women's representation in Pakistan was 20 percent, in Bangladesh 21 percent, and in Nepal was 34 percent.
- **Women in bureaucracy:**
 - **Low participation: Women's participation is low enough for several public services jobs** at the Centre and states to facilitate free applications for women candidates.
 - **Fewer women appear for the CSE** as compared to men across all categories. Additionally, women candidates are more likely than men to **seek voluntary retirement** from service.
 - Despite this, as per **Indian Administrative Services (IAS) data and the central government's employment census of 2011**, less than 11 percent of its total employees were women. In 2020, this reached 13 percent.
 - Out of a total of 11,569 IAS officers entering service between 1951 and 2020, only 1,527 were women.
 - Further, only 14 per cent of Secretaries in the IAS were women in 2022 — 13 out of 92 posts.
 - **Women secretaries:** There are **only three women chief secretaries** across Indian states and union territories.
 - India has **never had a woman cabinet secretary**.
 - There have been **no women Secretaries of Home, Finance, Defence and Personnel**, either.
- **Other sectors:**
 - Only 20.37 percent of **MSME** owners are women,
 - 10 percent of **start-ups** are founded by females, and
 - 23.3 percent of women are in the **labour force**.
 - Further, the measurement of the female labour force is difficult.
 - Most of the available statistics on **India's female labour rate** do not **incorporate the unpaid work that females do**.
 - Women themselves do not realise that their labour should be classified as work.

Challenges

- **Structural issues:**

- Structural impediments to women's empowerment, in general, are **the primary issues** that make it **difficult for them to be a part of the services**.
- Service conditions involving **postings in distant cadres, patriarchal conditioning** and balancing **family commitments** along with the requirements of this job are some of the social factors that lead women to opt out of the civil services.
- **Biased allotments:**
 - There is a general perception that **women should be preferred for "soft" ministries** like **Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development**.
 - Even within the IAS, it is implicitly assumed that **certain postings are not for women**.
 - Among civil servants in India, women are more likely than men to be overseeing cultural affairs, education, food, civil supplies and consumer affairs, industry and commerce, health, welfare and women and child development.
 - They are much less likely to be in charge of urban development, law and order, finance, general administration and energy.
- **Men's professions:**
 - Politics is often seen as a **male bastion**, and women are discouraged from entering it on the pretext that it is not a 'feminine' profession.
 - IAS officers often have to deal with politicians, who tend to **draw lines when dealing with women**.

Significance of women's participation in the growth

- **The flip side:**
 - **Female voter turnout has increased** in the country.
 - **Seven out of eight states that went to the polls in 2022** saw a **jump in female voter turnout**.
 - Though this sounds promising, the increasing proportion of women voters seen in local, state and general elections **has not translated into more women contesting elections**.
- **UN's 'Gender Equality In Public Administration':**
 - "Gender equality is at the core of an inclusive and accountable public administration", noted the 2021 report of the United Nations Development Program, 'Gender Equality In Public Administration'.
 - **Ensuring equal representation of women in bureaucracy and public administration** improves the functioning of the government, makes it more **responsive and accountable to diverse public interests**, enhances the **quality of services**

delivered and increases **trust and confidence** in public organisations, the report found.

Way ahead

- There is substantial evidence showing that increased female representation in policymaking goes a long way in improving perceptions about female effectiveness in leadership roles.
- The problem of the **under-representation** of women is **only superficial**.
- What lies underneath is the **problem of structural inequality**, wherein women are **marginalised at different levels**.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] Despite its economic growth, women's participation in India's economy, polity and society has not kept pace. Enumerate.