



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Time: 10 min

Date: 11-10-2023

Women want change, society needs change

Syllabus: GS1/ Social Empowerment

In News

- The Women's reservation Bill is the first step towards actualising gender parity.

Gender gap & the role of women in political leadership

- **Global Gender Gap Report:**
 - The **17th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report** of the World Economic Forum, based on data from 146 countries, has concluded that at the current rate of progress, **it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap**; it is **149 years** in populous **South Asian countries including India**.
- **Women Leaders in Politics:**
 - India had and has charismatic female leaders like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee among several others.
 - **The 2019 general election** was a historic moment for women's politics.
 - It saw **78 women elected** to the lower house of Parliament for the first time since independence where **only 22 women were present** in the 543-member Lok Sabha.
 - This number is **still not representative of the actual proportion** of women in the country.
 - While India's founding fathers ensured that India was early to adopt universal adult suffrage, the role of women in shaping the country's political future still remains minimal.

Challenges of Women's political leadership

- **Longer to assume leadership positions:**
 - The percentage of women legislators who have had university and higher education is almost cent percent, versus such a percentage of male legislators.

- Despite these privileges, women also take longer to assume leadership positions.
- **Non representation of 'on ground challenges':**
 - The deepest cut is that the handful of privileged women who assume leadership are not supportive or empathetic to the aspirations of those women who do not even have access to basic needs such as nutrition, education and financial independence.
 - They reel under the misconception that they have become leaders by virtue of their own efforts and sacrifices, ignoring the personal advantages they possess.
- **Regressive opinions on gender equality:**
 - Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles.
 - The biggest block is the regressive views on gender equality held by men and women.
- **Infrastructural barriers:**
 - Young women face severe infrastructural barriers to entering politics.
 - This includes a **lack of clean toilets and safe accommodation** during fieldwork.

Women's Reservation Bill highlights

- **Representation of women in India's legislatures:**
 - The Bill noted that though **women participate substantially in Panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies**, their representation in the State legislatures and in Parliament is still limited.
 - **Women MPs constitute a mere 15% of the Lok Sabha** and only account for about **10% of members in many State Assemblies.**
- **Reservation to women:**
 - **The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023** to provide **33 per cent reservation to women** in Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies.
 - According to The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Amendment) Bill 2023, "as nearly as may be, one-third (**including the seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election to the House of People shall be reserved for women".
 - The Bill proposes a similar provision for **Assemblies in the states and Delhi.**
- **Introduction of Articles:**

- It proposes to introduce new articles – **330A and 332A** – in the Constitution.
- These new provisions **will introduce the changes for Lok Sabha and Assemblies** respectively.
- **Need of Delimitation exercise:**
 - The Bill makes the implementation of women’s reservation contingent upon the delimitation process.
- **Sunset clause:**
 - The bill also has a sunset clause, mandating that the reservation will be for a period of 15 years from the date of commencement of the Act.

Challenges & criticisms

- **Delimitation process & delay:**
 - The upshot of these conditions is that women’s reservation **may not effectively be operationalised** in Lok Sabha before the **general elections of 2029**.
 - The **42nd Amendment** froze the delimitation exercise until the results of the first Census after 2000 was published. In 2001, this was further extended for 25 years. And now, delimitation would happen after the results of the first Census after 2026 is published.
- **Need of specifications:**
 - The Bill states that one-third of the seats in Parliament and state Assemblies will be reserved for women. However, it doesn’t specify how these seats will be identified.
- **Need of enactment of a law:**
 - This proposed constitution amendment is enabling in nature. In other words, it will grant the government the power to enact a law for its implementation.
 - Hence, it is expected that the determination of seats will be addressed by a separate law that the government will introduce.
 - **For Example, for delimitation** – which is a precondition for the implementation of reservation – **Articles 82 and 170(3)** of the Constitution would have to be amended.

Way ahead

- The basic premise of advocates against reservation is **that it will bring down competence**.
 - This is a completely misplaced notion as statistics show that women perform much better than men in academics, more women graduate from colleges than men, and more women enter the workforce than men.

- In contrast to this trend, the number of women sharply spirals downwards in leadership positions not because of their incompetence, but because of the hegemony of men.
- **What women want is a level playing field** where the factor of gender which is completely irrelevant but looms large, is **removed from the equation**.
- It is time to quickly set right historical wrongs. Society needs change. And there is no reason why it should be late.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] Reservation is the most effective form of affirmative action and equity is the first step to equality. Analyse in context of the recently passed Women's reservation bill.