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**DAILY EDITORIAL  
ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**Women Representation in  
Politics**

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## WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

### In Context

- The year 2024 is being hailed as the biggest year for democracy, with 45% of the global population preparing to exercise their voting rights.
  - ♦ And, it has become imperative to assess how women are represented in politics and leadership roles.

### Women's Political Participation

- Women's representation in political spheres improved in the latter half of the 20th century, with significant progress made in many nations in securing voting rights and parliamentary seats, and in climbing to the highest political offices.
  - ♦ New Zealand extended universal suffrage to women in 1893.
  - ♦ Norway first saw women enter parliament in 1907
- As of 10 January 2024, there are 26 countries where 28 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government .
  - ♦ 15 countries have a woman Head of State, and 16 countries have a woman Head of Government
- First-time compiled data by UN Women show that **women represent 22.8 percent of Cabinet members heading Ministries**, leading a policy area as of 1 January 2023 .

### Status in India

- India has a history of marginalisation and exploitation of women framed by patriarchal social structures and mindsets.
- Beginning in the 19th century, **social reform movements** succeeded in pushing for women's well-being and empowerment.
- The Indian freedom movement, starting with the **swadeshi in Bengal (1905-08)** also witnessed the impressive participation of women,] who organised political demonstrations and mobilised resources, as well as occupied leadership positions in those movements.
- Women representation in Lok Sabha has increased from 5% in the first Lok Sabha to 15% in the current Lok Sabha.
  - ♦ Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway, and South Africa have more than 45% women representation **in their national legislatures.**
  - ♦ **Currently, 15% of Lok Sabha MPs and 13% of Rajya Sabha MPs are women.**

### Importance

- Women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.**
- Women's representation in the national parliament is a key indicator of the extent of **gender equality in parliamentary politics.**
- It will ensure that women form a strong lobby in Parliament to **fight for issues that are often ignored.**
- There is now evidence that women as panchayat leaders have **shattered social myths**, been more accessible than men, controlled the stranglehold of liquor, invested substantially in public goods such as drinking water, helped other women express themselves better, reduced corruption, prioritised nutrition outcomes, and changed the development agenda at the grassroots level.
- India has a high percentage of crimes against women, low participation of women in the workforce, low nutrition levels and a skewed sex ratio.
  - ♦ To address all these challenges, it is argued, we need more women in decision-making.
  - ♦ The rate at which women accumulate assets while in office is 10 percentage points lower, per year than among men.

## Challenges in Women's Representation in National and State Legislatures

- **Societal prejudices**, a male-dominated political party structure, family obligations, resource scarcity, and various structural hindrances all impede greater participation among women as contestants and winners in parliamentary or state assembly elections.
- **Election campaigns in India are extremely demanding** and time-consuming. Women politicians, with family commitments and the responsibilities of child care, often find it difficult to fully participate.
- Women politicians have been constantly subjected to humiliation, inappropriate comments, abuse and threats of abuse, making participation and contesting elections extremely challenging. Financing is also an obstacle as many women are financially dependent on their families.
- There is a general perception that women should be preferred for **“soft” ministries** like Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development.

## Related Efforts

- After India attained independence, its Constitution guaranteed equal status for men and women in all political, social and economic spheres.
- **Part III of the Constitution** guarantees the fundamental rights of men and women.
  - ♦ The Directive Principles of State Policy ensure economic empowerment by providing for equal pay for equal work by both men and women, humane conditions of work, and maternity relief
- At the same time, India has taken a number of steps towards women's empowerment in other domains, such as marriage and employment.
  - ♦ For example, the Supreme Court has conferred daughters the equal status of a coparcener in Hindu families, providing them inheritance rights.
  - ♦ It has also ruled that “women officers in the army should be entitled to permanent commission and command postings in all services other than combat, and they have to be considered for it irrespective of their service length.
- In 1992, the **73rd and 74th amendments** to the Constitution provided for reservation of one-third of the total number of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and municipal bodies.
  - ♦ The amendment intended to improve women's participation in decision-making at the grassroots.

## Conclusion and Way Forward

- Given the deep structural constraints that impede progress in women's political participation, institutional transformation can usher in inclusive politics, albeit only to a certain degree.
- Another imperative is social transformation.
  - ♦ better educational opportunities for women, their financial stability, the relative erosion of social prejudices, coupled with greater media awareness have compelled political parties to create spaces for women's participation.
- As the movement for women's political emancipation gathers momentum, women's organisations and networks within political parties and civil society must continue to help them assert their presence within the larger political and social landscape.
- Women's political mobilisation can be ramped up to compel urgent institutional reform towards greater representation of women in India's Parliament and state assemblies.
- More women are needed in these platforms to transform the discourse on governance and policy-making, and bring India closer to becoming a truly inclusive and representative democracy.

### Mains Practice Question

**[Q]** Despite substantial developments, women continue to constitute a minority in most parliamentary bodies and are rarely seen in top political leadership positions. Comment

