

## **Female Leadership**

### **What is the issue?**

- Germany, Taiwan and New Zealand have women heading their governments.
- The three countries, located in different continents, have managed the pandemic much better than their neighbours.

### **What does the US study reveal?**

- A recent study in the United States reports that States which have female governors had fewer COVID-19 related deaths.
- They say this is partly because female governors acted more decisively by issuing earlier stay-at-home orders.
- The authors of the study conclude that women leaders are more effective than their male counterparts in times of crises.

### **What does the study about India's gram panchayats reveal?**

- Female leaders perform significantly better than men in implementing policies that promote the interests of women.
- This was demonstrated in another study conducted by Nobel Laureate Esther Duflo and co-author Raghavendra Chattopadhyay.
- They used the system of mandated reservations of one-third seats of pradhans for women in gram panchayats to test the effectiveness of female leadership.
- Villages chosen for the mandated reservations were randomly selected.
- The differences in investment decisions made by gram panchayats could be attributed to the differences in gender of the pradhans.
- In addition to the importance of promoting more space for women in public policy, this is an important goal from the perspective of gender equality.

### **What is the importance of these studies?**

- Some critics will question the reliability of these conclusions by pointing out deficiencies in the data or the econometric rigour of the analysis.
- Many will also point out that it is dangerous to make sweeping generalisations based on one study.
- The important take away from such studies is the necessity of getting rid of biases and perceptions about female effectiveness in leadership roles.

## **What about women's suffrage?**

- The right to vote is arguably the most important dimension of participation in public life.
- Independent India can be proud of its achievement in so far as women's suffrage is concerned.
- Women were allowed to vote from 1950 onwards.
- They could participate on an equal footing with men from the first general election of 1951-52.
- This is in striking contrast to the experience in the so-called "mature democracies" of Western Europe and the United States.

## **What is the proportion of female representation in India?**

- India had and has charismatic female leaders like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee among several others.
- Apart from these stalwarts, the overall figures are depressing.
- In the current Central government, the female members make up only about 10% of the total ministerial strength.
- The underrepresentation of female Ministers in India is also reflected in the fact that Ms. Banerjee is currently the only female Chief Minister.
- The underrepresentation of women in Indian legislatures is even more striking.
- The 2019 election sent the largest number of women to the Lok Sabha.
- Despite this, women constitute just over 14% of the total strength of the Lok Sabha.
- This gives India a dismal rank of 143 out of 192 countries for which data are reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

## **Why does the women's Bill languish?**

- The establishment of quotas for women would create a level-playing field.
- Mandated reservation for women in gram panchayats was established in all major States since the mid-1990s.
- Attempts have also been made to extend quotas for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies through a Women's Reservation Bill.
- Unfortunately, the fate of this Bill represents a blot on the functioning of the Indian Parliament.
- The Bill was first presented to the Lok Sabha in 1996.
- Male members from several parties opposed the Bill on various pretexts.
- Both the NDA and UPA governments have reintroduced the Bill in successive Parliaments, but without any success.

## What steps could be taken to reduce prejudice?

- The major party constituents of India can sidestep the logjam in Parliament by reserving say a third of party nominations for women.
- This will result in increasing numbers of women in legislatures and subsequently in cabinets.
- Increased female representation in policy making will improve perceptions about female effectiveness in leadership roles.
- This decreases the bias among voters against women candidates.
- This also results in a subsequent increase in the percentage of female politicians contesting and winning elections.
- So, such quotas have both a short-term and long-term impact.

**Source: The Hindu**

