Japan’s Struggle with Gender Parity

Why in news?

With a target of transforming India into a developed country by 2047, there are some lessons we should learn from Japan regarding gender parity.

What is the issue in Japan?

- According to recent data, Japan recorded the lowest total births in 2021 at just about 8,10,000.
- Japan ranked abysmally low (116 out of 146 countries) among the developed countries in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2022.
- This makes Japan the worst performer amongst the G7 group and lowest among the developed countries.
- **Education**- Japan has a perfect score on gender equality in educational attainment.
- **Health-** Health and survival of women including healthy life expectancy also stands near a perfect score of 0.97.
- **Leadership-** Japan ranks below 130 when it comes to women in Parliament and women as senior officials and managers.
- Women hold a mere 10% of Japan’s parliamentary seats (as of April 2022) as compared to around 30% or more in the G7 countries.
- Japan has not had a female head of the state in the past 50 years.
    - Percentage of women as company heads - 8%.
    - Percentage of women in middle management and senior management in the central government - less than 5%.
- Japanese women earn about 57% that of men, making this wage gap one of the worst among OECD countries.

What is the social mindset towards women in general?

- **Sexist remarks-** In 2021, the head of the Tokyo Olympics Committee was forced to resign for his sexist remarks about why women should not participate in board meetings as they talk too much.
- **Birth-giving machines**- In political speeches, women have been referred to as birth-giving machines and were told to bear at least three children.
- **Rigging the scores**- A few years ago, medical schools in Japan were reported to have rigged the entrance examination scores of female candidates as women tend to leave the profession later in life due to marriage and child-bearing responsibilities.
- **Socio-cultural norms**- Japanese society conforms to very strong gender norms of what men and women should do.

- It is common to refer to one's wife as *kanai* (the one inside the house).

What are the consequences of widening gender gaps?

- Decline in marriage rates
- Decline in fertility rates
- Childbearing is considered as a burden
- Fall in consumption and investment
- Decline in workforce
- Increased pension burden
- Suppresses domestic demand

Marriage rates in Japan have fallen by 50% since 1970 and fertility has fallen to 1.3 children per woman (2021).

What efforts have been taken by Japan in this aspect?

- **Womenomics**- Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe laid emphasis on 'womenomics' as one of his key policy measures to revive the stagnant Japanese economy.
- It aimed at boosting female labour participation, and increasing the percentage of women in leadership positions to 30% by 2020.
- The deadline was revised to 2030.
- **Lessons to be learnt**- Japan's struggle with gender parity teaches us that investing in women's education and health may have limited impact if the society is trapped in gender norms that restrict women from capitalising these investments.
- Policymakers must take note of such evidence as this can trap us into other economic problems as we chalk out the path for a developed India by 2047.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/japans-continuing-struggle-with-gender-parity/article65825076.ece

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