Odisha's Women Empowerment Model

What is the issue?

- The Odisha government is among the first to reserve 50% of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women.
- The other States could take a cue from Odisha, which has empowered women politically and financially.

How is women's political participation in India?

- Adequate representation of women in politics eventually results in an increase in the level of attention given to gender-specific policy and planning.
- However, the number of women taking leadership roles in India is rather small compared to the global average.
- The representation of women MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha has seen an improvement from 11% in 2014 to 14% in 2019.
- However, it is still lower than the world average of 24.3%.
- In 2019, 715 women candidates contested the Lok Sabha election, while the number of men who contested stood at 7,334.

What are Odisha's measures in this regard?

- Odisha may be seen as one of the underdeveloped states in the country and backward in terms of some human development indicators.
- However, Odisha government’s model for women’s empowerment has much to teach for other states.
- The Biju Janata Dal (BJD)-led Odisha government was among the first to reserve 50% of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women.
- Further, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik nominated women for one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha election.
- Thus, 7 candidates out of 21 fielded by the party for the 2019 election were women.
- The success rate among the women candidates was higher than for men, as 5 out of the 7 won the elections.
- Other sops include issuing of smartphones, the award of work contracts, and higher entitlements in the State’s health insurance scheme, arguably superior to the Ayushman Bharat.

- The State government has also announced an accident insurance scheme for all members of self-help groups.

How effective are women self-help groups there?

- Besides empowering women politically, the Odisha government has been organising women into self-help groups in the last two decades for their economic empowerment.
- As of now, Odisha has 6 lakh self-help groups with 7 million women under its flagship 'Mission Shakti' programme.
- The programme aims at empowering women by helping them start income-generating activities.
- The self-help groups are linked to the Odisha Livelihoods Mission and Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society.
- Members of the self-help groups are encouraged to sell products at fairs and exhibitions organised by the State round the year.
- This gives them an opportunity to travel across different parts of the State and gain greater exposure.
- The State government had also announced an interest-free loan of Rs. 3 lakh in January 2019 to each of the self-help groups.
- This amount was increased to Rs. 5 lakh just before the general election.
- The Women and Child Development Department have been rechristened as the 'Women and Child Development and Mission Shakti Department'.
- Mr Patnaik also nominated Ms Pramila Bisoi, a self-help group leader, as a candidate for a Lok Sabha constituency.
- This was a move to bring self-help group members to the forefront of public life.

What is the way forward?

- It is widely acknowledged that women's empowerment helps in the achievement of critical development goals.
- Given this, many of Odisha's women-centric initiatives are potential of being implemented in other states too.
- In effect, these could play an instrumental role in the political, economic and social empowerment of women in India.

Source: The Hindu



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