Performance of Women in Parliament

What is the issue?

There have been mounting debates on whether women can be true representatives of the people.

What is the status of women in politics?

> *The global average for the share of women parliamentarians stood at 24.6%. The share of women legislators in the Lok Sabha is 14.39% as of June 2019.*

- The 2019 general election 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.
- There is a decreased gap in voter turnout between men and women, a positive sign toward gender inclusivity in the political sphere.
- India has not had a single women's movement that challenged patriarchal and gender norms in the last two decades.
- Education and wealth have aided women in political participation.
- Studies suggest that more women have started to organise themselves into economic groups, and financial freedom has pushed them to be more politically active.

> *India ranks 141st out of 191 nations in the representation of women in Parliament.*

How about the performance of women?

- Women's performance during the Question Hour session becomes relevant as it is a space where legislators act free from party regulation.
- **Substantive representation**- Sadia Hussain's study reveals how descriptive representation transforms into substantive representation (representative acts on behalf of the represented group regardless of any membership or resemblance to that group).
- **Questions asked-** Though men asked more questions and participated in more debates than women, there has been a substantial increase in the number of questions women asked.
- **Factors**- Party affiliations, education, regional background, ethnicity, caste and the age of women members played a role in the number and content of questions asked in the lower house.

- **Breaking gender stereotypes**- Moreover, women representatives asked more questions on health and family welfare, human resource development, home affairs, finance, agriculture and railways than women's issues.
- Male legislators asked more questions on issues concerning women than their female counterparts.
- **Intersectionality of identities**- Intersectionality of identities became an important factor in the questioning capacity of representatives.
- Members from marginal States, irrespective of gender asked fewer questions.

The bill to reserve 33% seats for women in Parliament and state legislatures was passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2010, but it was never introduced in the Lok Sabha.

What can be inferred from the study?

- **Real issue**- The problem of under-representation of women is only superficial.
- What lies underneath is the problem of structural inequality, wherein women are marginalised at different levels.
- **Way forward**- The proportional representation will lead to a better representation of women's interests as seen in Latin American Parliaments.
- Moreover, representation becomes a phenomenon that cannot be isolated from society.
- Socio-economic and cultural conditions needs to undergo a change since it hinders women from pursuing politics as a career.

References

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