

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

