

## 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 need to undergo a change since it hinders women from pursuing politics as a career.

### **References**

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2. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/representation-of-women-in-17th-lok-sabha/article28769003.ece>

