



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the reasons for underrepresentation of women in Indian political system. Also suggest some remedial measures to close this gender gap in politics. (250 words)

27 Mar, 2019 GS Paper 2 Polity & Governance

Approach

- Give brief account of women participation in politics in India
- Give reasons for their underrepresentation and also highlight the socio-economic and cultural forces behind these factors.
- Suggest remedial measures
- Give Conclusion.

Answer

Introduction:

- The average percentage of women's representation globally stands at about 22%, whereas in case of India it is a mere 11.8%. Even in the Rajya Sabha, the representation of women stands at a meagre 11.1%.
- Among its South Asian neighbors, India ranks fifth in women's political representation in parliament falling behind Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

Body:

Reasons for Underrepresentation:

- Politics is almost everywhere a male-oriented, male-dominated enterprise and female political participation is not as good as expected.
- Women which constitute fifty percent of global populations are underrepresented in decision-making processes at all governance levels around the world and even they are dominated and marginalized politically, socially, economically, physically and psychologically by their counterparts.

Socio-Cultural factors

- In many countries, traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and to restrict them to those roles.
- A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favors sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process.
- Indian Society is guided by an idea of 'a woman's place'. According to this idea, women should only play the role of 'working mother', which is generally low-paid and apolitical. Cultural values tend to emphasize role in private spheres of family and restrict or prohibit any role in public role where politics belongs.

Religion

- Exclusion of women from religious institutions and religious leadership may have a negative impact on women's status in Indian society and limit their opportunities in politics and public life.

Economic Factor

- Lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers in Indian societies.

Family work and time constraints

- Continuing uneven distribution of family care responsibilities means that women spend far more time than men in home- and child-care.
- Cultural expectation about mother role are defined as ideal and expected of all women, these expectation tends overburden women.

Lack of intra party democracy

- In India most political parties come to be dominated by political heirs which most of the times are males. Due to lack of Intra party democracy women are at disadvantage to enter politics at assembly and parliament level.

Remedial Measures

- **Gender Equality:** Women's should have equal rights with men in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres. Even though constitution guarantees women equal right in all spheres socio-cultural factors need to be adapted to modern ethos of equality. Institutions of Governance like courts , police ,administrative bodies etc. should focus on gender equality.
- **Affirmative Action:** by reserving certain percentage of seats at state legislature and parliament for women. Empowering women through education and equal health access. Both education and health are important for women to be able to play role in politics at local, state or central level.
- **Enforcing property rights:** Despite legal rights for women to inherit paternal property women are denied property rights and thus they lack economic resources. There is need to reinforce with in society and women about their right to property.
- **Social awareness campaigns:** Long held prejudices against women need to be dismantled through concerted social campaigns with help of educational institutions, media, religious leaders, celebrities ,political leaders etc
- **Reform in electoral politics:** Unlawful practices like use of money and muscle power reduce chances of women entering politics. Through electoral reforms by eliminating entry of criminals and blocking illegal funding women will have better opportunities as well as success rate in politics. Similarly there is need to promote intra party democracy.

Conclusion:

- Women's political participation is essential to bring legitimacy to government and establish democracy in its real and practical manner, as validity and trustworthiness of democracy can be in question if females, who are 50% of the population, stay marginalized or segregated from the political and public institutions in the Indian society.
- Also degree and level of women's representation in the government has considerable and significant impacts on the lives of the people as number of studies have shown better outcomes when women are in leadership position in politics.

