Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the role of women in Indian society and politics. (150 words)

21 Mar, 2023   GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly introducing historical overview of women's participation in society.
- Discuss the role of women in Indian society and politics.
- Conclude by suggesting measures needed to be taken to promote gender inequality.

Introduction

- Women constitute around **half of India's population and play a significant role in the country's development and progress.** However, the status of women in India has been marked by various challenges, including gender discrimination, gender-based violence, and limited access to education and economic opportunities. Women's participation in politics has been a crucial factor in addressing these challenges and promoting their empowerment.

Body

- **Historical Overview:**
  - India has a long history of women's participation in social and cultural activities. Women played a **vital role in the Indian freedom struggle, participating in various non-violent protests and civil disobedience movements.**
    - However, their political representation remained minimal, with only a few women leaders, such as **Sarojini Naidu and Indira Gandhi, achieving significant positions.**
    - After independence, the **Indian Constitution** provided various rights and protections for women, including the **right to vote and the right to education.**
    - The government also introduced several policies and programs to promote women's development, such as the **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women and the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign.**
- **Role of Women in Indian Society and Politics:**
  - **Education:** The education sector is crucial for women's empowerment, as it provides them with knowledge, skills, and opportunities for economic and social mobility.
    - However, women's access to education in India has been limited due to various factors, including poverty, social norms, and gender-based discrimination. According to the latest report by oxfam, the **female literacy rate in India is around 65%, compared to 82% for males.**
    - However, the government has taken several initiatives to promote girls' education, such as the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program,** which aims to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14.
  - **Workforce:** The participation of women in the workforce is crucial for economic growth and development.
    - However, women's **workforce participation in India is relatively low, with only around 23% of women employed in formal sectors.**

- The informal sector employs a significant number of women, but they often face exploitation and low wages. Gender-based discrimination and bias also affect women's career growth and opportunities.
  - However, the government has introduced several policies and schemes to promote women's employment, such as **the Mahila e-Haat and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission.**
  - **Politics:** The political representation of women in India has been relatively low, with only around **14% of women holding seats in the parliament.**
    - However, several women leaders have achieved significant positions, including the **current President of India, Draupadi Murmu, and the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalithaa.**
      - The government has also introduced several measures to promote women's political participation, such as the Women's Reservation Bill, which aims to reserve 33% of seats in the parliament and state legislatures for women.
  - **Despite the progress made in promoting women's empowerment in India, various challenges persist:**
    - Women **face discrimination and bias** in various fields, including education, employment, and healthcare.
    - **Gender-based violence,** including domestic violence and sexual harassment, is also a prevalent issue, with many cases going unreported or unpunished.
    - The **cultural norms** and traditions in India also limit women's mobility and agency, particularly in rural areas.

Conclusion

- **Measures Needed to be Taken to Promote Gender Inequality:**
  - To promote gender equality and women's empowerment in India, several measures can be taken. These include:
    - **Strengthening the implementation of existing laws and policies:** The policies related to women's rights and empowerment, including the allocation of adequate resources and personnel for their effective enforcement, regular monitoring and evaluation, and incorporation of feedback from relevant stakeholders, such as women's groups and civil society organizations.
    - **Increasing women's participation in education:** Particularly in rural areas, through targeted programs and incentives, such as providing scholarships, building and equipping schools and classrooms, training and hiring female teachers, and addressing cultural and social barriers that prevent girls from attending school.
    - **Promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic participation:** Enhancing the provision of financial assistance, training, and market linkages, including targeting disadvantaged women, such as those living in poverty, rural areas, or with disabilities, and providing them with appropriate support and resources.
    - **Address Gender-Based Violence:** Through the implementation of stringent laws, sensitization programs, and support services for victims, including providing legal aid, medical assistance, shelter, counseling, and rehabilitation, and engaging men and boys as allies and advocates in the fight against gender-based violence.