



Mains Practice Question

Q. Making it legally binding to have a fair proportion of women in the elected bodies can ensure political empowerment of women in India. Comment. (250 words)

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Approach

- Write an introduction highlighting the need for political empowerment of women by legally binding representation in elected bodies.
- Highlighting the issue of under representation and existing legislative measures, discuss the issues associated with legally binding representation of women.
- Conclude by summarising your answer and linking political empowerment of women with dimensions of development.

Introduction

Positive discrimination has been often seen as a remedy of under-representation. In the realm of political empowerment of women, legal reservation for women in elected bodies is a viable step that India still needs to embark upon.

Body

Issue Of Under-Representation

- **Disproportionate to population:** Although women are nearly half the population, they make up a mere
 - 11.6% of the total strength of Lok Sabha and 11% of the total strength of Rajya Sabha.

Existing legislative measures

- The 73rd and 74th Amendment Act of the Constitution reserves one-third of all seats in panchayats and urban local bodies for women.
- The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008, proposed to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The Rajya Sabha passed this bill in 2010, but it still hasn't received the Lok Sabha's assent.
 - A similar Bill was introduced in 1996, 1998 and 1999 but all of these lapsed after the dissolution of the respective Lok Sabhas.

Advantages Of Legally Binding Representation Of Women

- **Increased Efficiency:** According to a study conducted by UN,:
 - Assembly constituencies with women representatives show significantly higher economic growth than those under their male counterparts.

- Women legislators are significantly less likely than men to be carrying criminal charges.
- Women legislators are slightly younger on average and are less likely than men to exploit their office for personal financial gain.
- **Increase in gender sensitivity of legislatures:** Greater inclusion of women broadens perspective of debates.
 - It also facilitates law making to become more gender equitable.
- **More informed decision making:** Poor participation of women in Parliament has a direct impact on the priorities and assumptions of policies and legislation.
 - There won't be qualitative change in governance with the exclusion of women in decision-making processes.
- **Credibility Crisis:** Without women legislators, laws cannot reflect contemporary trends in women's education and excellence in varied fields.
 - It could decrease the development index ratings of India like gender equality index and Indexes related to inclusion.

Some Issues with Reservation of Women in Elected Bodies

- **Becoming a rubber stamp:** Like it has been seen in panchayats where the real power is still wielded by the husbands of the women sarpanches.
- **Disparity among women:** It is often seen that mostly the privileged women, generally from influential and politically powerful families occupy the women quotas in elected bodies.
 - It hinders gender inclusion to percolation to grassroots levels of polity and prevents political inclusion of women from backward sections of society.

Conclusion

Legally binding legislation is not a panacea for all gender inequalities but indeed an important step in empowering women politically. It could create role models, improve national leadership to bring positive influence on policy making, governance and make Indian polity more democratic.