General Studies – 1; Topic: Role of women and women’s organization.

Role of Women in Electoral Politics in India

1) Introduction
   • The Preamble begins with the words “WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA ...” which includes men and women of all castes, religions, etc.
   • It wishes to render “EQUALITY of status and of opportunity” to every man and woman.
   • However, Women are excluded from decision-making at every step of the ladder, starting from the household to the top layer of policy making.
   • Although the Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by enshrining fundamental rights for all citizens, women still have only de jure rather than de facto access to these rights.
   • India is ranked 87 out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap 2016, by the World Economic Forum which measures how women fare in economic participation, health, education and political representation.

2) State of women in Indian politics
   • Voting percentage for women have increased in assembly polls
   • Women's participation as candidates and the possibilities of their victory are substantially low
   • Irom Sharmila and Najima in Manipur, in the absence of funds, they are campaigning for elections on bicycles.
   • Most of the ‘winnable’ women candidates come from political families.
   • Many women who are made to file nominations from certain constituencies cannot even retain their deposits.
   • India ranks 103rd in the Women in Parliament study.
   • In the Lok Sabha, out of the 543 members, only 65 are women. In the Rajya Sabha, there are only 31 female MPs among 243 members,”

3) Why there is a need for Women's participation in Politics
   • The Constitution of India guarantees equality for both men and women
   • Their participation is crucial in the policy formulation and regulation as they represent nearly half of total population.
   • They could act as role model for women empowerment and could bring behavioural change in the society towards the women.
   • More focused policies relating to women safety, education, child care, MMR, child marriage, Domestic violence etc if women are involved in decision making owing to their emotional quotient towards these issues.
   • For building a nation where women thrive and feel safe and respected
   • Places with women representatives have seen less corruption and improved efficiency.
   • Various studies on panchayats have shown the positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women
   • Radha Devi, sarpanch of village in Rajasthan who tried to focus on education of children especially girl child.
   • Sushma Bhadu, sarpanch of Haryana village is popular for the "unveiling" of her 'ghunghat' in a largely patriarchal state is an excellent example
In the absence of gender equality and women empowerment, human rights remain in an inaccessible realm.

4) **Barriers**
   - **Patriarchal Society**
     a) Tendency of confining women to the four walls of domestic life, prohibiting them from decision making
     b) Recent Nagaland crisis over Urban Local Bodies reservation
     c) Lapsed women reservation bill, 2008
   - **Education**
     a) One of the key challenges faced by women is lack of education which hinders their political involvement.
   - **Representation**
     a) Lack of representation at Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and state legislative assemblies.
     b) Women’s representation in Parliament in India is lower than even that of much smaller nations like Nepal and Afghanistan.
     c) India ranks 20th from the bottom when it comes to women’s representation in the Parliament with merely 4% representation of women in Lok Sabha.
   - **Proxy politics**
     a) Women candidates who generally win elections are used as proxy by male members in their family
     b) In many villages of Uttar Pradesh, where women are village panchayat chiefs, their husbands introduce themselves as ‘pradhan pati’ (husband of the panchayat chief).
   - **Social Stigma**
     a) Women are seen as "home makers and care takers" and any deviance from this role is not acceptable by many.

5) **Way Forward**
   - Providing quality education to women in the country.
   - Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated.
   - Gender-based violence should be addressed on a priority basis to promote gender equality in the social and political arenas.
   - It is imperative to strengthen National Mission of Empowerment of Women functioning and implementation.
   - Capacity building of prospective women leaders by imparting leadership training to the female members of political parties.
   - A critical mass of women in power can bring about transformation in leadership.
   - Just like the recent success of women’s movement to enter the sanctum sanctorum of dargahs and temples, a similar movement needs to begin to increase women’s participation in electoral politics.
   - Passing Women’s Reservation Bill