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Q19

What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS I · 15 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- What are the continued challenges for women in India against time?
- What are the continued challenges for women in India against space?

Revision summary

Time-challenges are lasting patriarchy, unpaid care, low paid work, health gaps, and violence despite new laws.

Space-challenges are the home, street, field, office, digital sphere, and unequal regions.

Panchayat reservation, POSH, and SHGs opened institutional doors.

NCRB, NFHS, and Time Use data show the doors are not yet the daily map.

North-south, rural-urban, and conflict geographies change the intensity of the same constraints.

Way forward is public care, safe mobility, titles, and more women in police and legislatures.

Introduction

Women in India have gained votes, school enrolment, and panchayat seats, yet many constraints have only changed shape. Against time, patriarchy, unpaid care, and violence persist across decades. Against space, the home, the street, the field, the office, and different regions still ration women's safety and mobility.

Body

Challenges against time

- Legal time has moved from colonial codes to the Constitution, the Hindu Code reforms, the **73rd and 74th Amendments** (one-third panchayat seats), **POSH (2013)**, and the criminalisation of instant triple talaq, but practice lags the statute book.
- Female labour-force participation has stayed low or fallen in several NSSO-PLFS phases even as GDP rose, which is a development puzzle of unpaid care and missing jobs, not a solved modernisation story.
- NFHS rounds still show high anaemia, early marriage in pockets, and unmet contraception need; the body remains a long-duration site of inequality.
- **Nirbhaya (2012)** and the **Justice Verma Committee** changed law and public talk, yet NCRB data still show high cruelty, assault, and under-reporting as a continuing time-series, not a one-year shock.

- Property and inheritance rights on paper meet family pressure across generations; digital harassment is a new time-layer on an old control of women's speech.

Challenges against space: home and work

- Inside the household, unpaid cooking, care, and water-fuel trips take hours that the Time Use Survey makes visible; this is spatial confinement to the domestic.
- Marital violence and the incomplete criminalisation of marital rape show the home as a legally uneven space.
- Fields and brick kilns use women as flexible labour without equal land titles or equal pay; forests and commons are shrinking under the same extractive map that hits Adivasi women first.
- Offices and factories may offer pay, yet POSH committees are weak, night shifts unsafe, and the "marriage penalty" still pushes women out after childbirth.
- Online space is a new public where abuse follows women who speak; it is not a free extra geography.

Challenges against space: public and regional

- Streets, buses, and toilets decide whether a girl stays in secondary school; this is why Ujjwala, Swachh toilets, and safe transport are spatial gender policy.
- **North-south and rural-urban maps still differ:** child sex ratio and crime against women are not uniform; some southern and north-eastern literacy and mobility figures are stronger, while parts of the north-west show harsher son preference.
- Conflict and border belts, and urban slums without lighting, are high-risk spaces that national averages hide.
- Religious and caste geographies restrict temple, well, and cremation-ground access for Dalit and some minority women, which is space as hierarchy.
- Climate stress-drought walks for water, flood loss of home-hits women's time and space together in Bundelkhand, Sundarbans, and Himalayan springs.

What has improved, and what has not

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, Mission Shakti, Nirbhaya Fund, One Stop Centres, 108/181 helplines, and **NRLM self-help groups** are the republic's toolkit.
- Reserved seats in local bodies created millions of women representatives, yet sarpanch-pati and low presence in Parliament and state assemblies show the next ceiling.
- CEDAW commitments and NCW work set a rights frame; implementation still depends on thana, court delay, and family.

Way forward for policy

- Count unpaid care in budgets; expand childcare and elderly care as public infrastructure so time is not only a private female tax.
- Make streets, toilets, and buses the gender map of every city and block, with lighting and women conductors as standard, not a pilot.
- Equal land and house titles, equal farm wages, and full POSH coverage in the informal sector would change space at the source.
- Raise women's share in legislatures and in police investigation units so time-series violence is not only a statistic.

Flow diagram

Time patriarchy unpaid care -> Continued women challenges
Space home street region -> Continued women challenges
Law POSH panchayat quota -> Partial gains
Continued women challenges -> Care safety titles mobility
Partial gains -> Care safety titles mobility
SHG Mission Shakti Verma -> Care safety titles mobility

Conclusion

Against time, Indian women still face unpaid care, patchy jobs, anaemia, and violence that laws have not erased. Against space, the home, the street, the field, the office, and unequal regions still ration mobility and safety. Schemes and reservations have opened doors; the continued challenge is to make those doors usable in every hour and every place.

Facts & figures

73rd and 74th Amendments

Constitutional reservation of not less than one-third of seats for women in panchayats and municipalities.

Justice Verma Committee, 2013

Post-Nirbhaya panel that pushed criminal-law reform on sexual violence.

POSH Act, 2013

Law on sexual harassment at the workplace, still thin in the informal sector.

NFHS anaemia burden

Repeated survey finding of high anaemia among women, a long-run bodily challenge.

NRLM self-help groups

Livelihood mission that organises millions of women, a spatial and economic counter to isolation.