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Q13

"The reservation of seats for women in the institutions of local self- government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian Political Process." Comment.(15).

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- "The reservation of seats for women in the institutions of local self- government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian Political Process." Comment

Revision summary

The 73rd and 74th Amendments reserve at least one-third of local seats and chairperson offices for women.

Presence and some local agenda change are real; millions of women have held office.

Patriarchy continues through proxy **sarpanch-pati** practice, party nomination, finance and violence.

In 2019 there was still no constitutional reservation in Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, so the pipeline stopped at the third tier.

The comment is true as a limit on the political process, not as a verdict that local reservation was pointless.

Introduction

Articles 243D and 243T reserve not less than one-third of seats, and of offices of chairpersons, for women in Panchayats and municipalities, including seats within the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe quotas. That is the largest affirmative political experiment in the world. The patriarchal character of the Indian political process - party tickets, money, violence, and the household as the real office - has only partly bent. The statement is therefore largely true, with important local exceptions.

Body**What reservation did change**

- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 1992, created a constitutional third tier and a guaranteed presence of women in gram panchayats, panchayat samitis, zila parishads, and urban local bodies.
- Many States later raised the reservation to 50 per cent. Millions of women have been elected; a first generation of sarpanches and councillors now exists who would not have received a party ticket for the Assembly.

- **Presence has shifted some agendas:** drinking water, anganwadis, toilets, and school attendance appear more often where women sit, which the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and several State studies have recorded.
- Rotation of reserved seats, though disruptive, forced parties to find women candidates rather than recycle only male incumbents in those wards.

Why the impact on patriarchy remains limited

- **Sarpanch-pati and proxy chairpersons remain common:** the husband or a male kin attends the block office, signs, and bargains, while the elected woman is the name on the form. This is patriarchy using the reserved seat, not yielding it.
- Political process above the third tier is still male-dominated. In 2019 the Lok Sabha and most Assemblies had no constitutional women's reservation; the Women's Reservation Bill (then the 108th Amendment proposal) had not become law. Local reservation therefore did not automatically become a pipeline into State and national law-making.
- Parties control nomination, campaign finance, and booth violence. Reservation at the ward does not rewrite those gates; it often parks women in the reserved seat and keeps general seats for men.
- **Caste and class cut the category "women":** a reserved woman chairperson may still face dominant-caste panchas, or may herself reproduce caste exclusion.
- Training, mobility, and safety are thin. Without childcare, transport, and protection against booth-level intimidation, formal office does not become effective office.
- Rotation can prevent a woman from building a second-term record, which patriarchy then cites as "inexperience".

Committees and the unfinished political process

- The Balwantrai Mehta (1957) and **Ashok Mehta (1978)** committee lineage argued for democratic local bodies; the 73rd Amendment wrote gender into that design.
- The **National Commission for Women** and several State commissions have documented proxy representation and demanded training and two-child-norm reviews that otherwise hit women harder.
- The statement is a comment on the political process as a whole - parties, legislatures, campaigns - not only on the gram sabha. Local reservation changed the third tier more than it changed that whole process.

A fair comment

- Agree that impact is limited if the test is patriarchy in parties and Assemblies.
- **Do not agree that reservation failed:** presence, some issue-shift, and a leadership pool are real. The limit is design (rotation, no Assembly reservation in 2019) and social structure, not the constitutional idea of **Articles 243D and 243T**.

Flow diagram

Arts 243D 243T -> Women in local bodies
 Women in local bodies -> Some agenda shift
 Women in local bodies -> Sarpanch-pati proxies
 Party tickets money tickets money -> Limited effect on patriarchy
 Sarpanch-pati proxies -> Limited effect on patriarchy
 No Assembly reservation 2019 -> Limited effect on patriarchy

Conclusion

Women's reservation in local self-government created presence and a leadership school, but **sarpanch-pati**, party gatekeeping, and the absence in 2019 of Assembly and Lok Sabha reservation kept the wider political process patriarchal. The statement is a fair comment on limited impact, not a case for repealing **Articles 243D and 243T**.

Facts & figures

Articles 243D and 243T

Constitutional reservation of seats and chairperson offices for women in Panchayats and municipalities, including within SC/ST quotas.

Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Acts, 1992

Gave local bodies constitutional status and wrote gender reservation into the third tier.

Sarpanch-pati

Practice in which a male relative exercises the elected woman's office; the main evidence of limited patriarchal change.

National Commission for Women

Statutory body that has repeatedly flagged proxy representation and the need to train elected women.

Women's Reservation Bill (108th Amendment proposal)

Long-pending bill in 2019 to reserve seats in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies; showed that local reservation had not yet been matched at higher tiers.

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