

Women Reservation in Local Government

Why in news?

The passage of the 106th amendment act to provide 33% reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies comes on the 30th anniversary of the constitutional reforms that reserved 1/3rd of seats for women in local government.

How the government enacted women reservation in the local government?

- **Constitutional amendment**- Parliament enacted the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 that to make panchayats and municipalities “institutions of self-government”.
- It mandated a minimum of one-third of seats and office of chairpersons in panchayats and municipalities to be reserved for women.
- It also mandated reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on their % population and enabled States to reserve seats for Backward Classes.
- This has created a system with over 3 million elected panchayat representatives, out of which almost half are women.
- **State initiatives**- In 2006, Bihar became the 1st State to provide 50% reservation for women in panchayat bodies.
- At present, more than 20 States have 50% reservation for women at the panchayat level.
- Presently in panchayats and municipalities, there is,
 - Vertical reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs and
 - Horizontal reservation for women that applies across all categories — general, SC, ST, and OBC



What are the impact of women reservations?

Positive impact

- **Political empowerment** - It is rightly perceived as a powerful and indispensable tool for eliminating gender inequality and discrimination.
- **Productive investment**- A 2004 paper by Esther Duflo and Raghavendra Chattopadhyay on panchayats in West Bengal and Rajasthan found that women leaders invest more in public goods and ensure increased women’s participation in panchayat meetings.
- **Gandhian ideology**- The act gave impetus to decentralisation and resulted in wider representation.
- **Develop society**- Experience of women in family life as a leader, will help the society at large.

- **Decentralisation-** The Act fostered inclusive growth and active citizenship.

Negative impact

- **No improvement-** A 2010 study found that women's reservation worsened targeting of welfare programmes for SC/ST households and provided no improvement for female-headed households.
- **Proxy-** Women were used as a dummy candidate by their politically strong husbands and relatives and work behind them indirectly, which dissolves the true spirit of the Act.
- **Delhi case study-** In 2020 Delhi reservations were examined, it found that constituencies reserved for women are less likely to elect OBC women and more likely to elect upper caste women.

What are the major missing in 106th Amendment Act?

- **OBC women-** Unlike the case of the 73rd and 74th amendments, the present law does not enable reservation for OBC women.
- **Ambiguous-** The design of women's reservations in Parliament and State Assemblies should have ideally been informed by its 30-year experience in panchayats and municipalities.
- **Lack of discussion-** The amendment should have been introduced after widespread discussion and analysis of its experience, instead of being introduced in a hastily organised Parliament session.
- **Delayed access-** The present women's reservation law has tied its implementation with the conduct of delimitation and census, neither of which have a definite date.
- The constitutional freeze for delimitation that has been in place since 1976 will end in 2026.
- **Population basis-** If the reallocation of seats between States is purely based on population, the southern States' share in the Parliament will drastically reduce.
- **Federal impact-** The next delimitation exercise is likely to open up the fault lines of India's delicate federal relations.

Related links - [Women Reservation Bill, 2023](#)

References

1. [The Hindu- Women quota Panchayat to Parliament](#)
2. [Indian Express- Opinion on local government](#)
3. [SouthFirst | Image](#)