



Sarpanch-patism

For Prelims: [Supreme Court of India](#) , [panchayat system](#), [73rd Constitutional Amendment Act](#)

For Mains: sarpanch-patism and its implications in the panchayat system, Challenges involved in tackling sarpanch-patism

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Why in News?

Recently, the [Supreme Court of India](#) was approached by the Mundona Rural Development Foundation, an NGO, regarding the issue of "sarpanch-patism" in the [panchayat system](#).

- However, the Supreme Court clarified that it is **not within its jurisdiction to directly address the issue**. Instead, the court advised the NGO to **approach the Ministry of Panchayati Raj** and urged the **government to take appropriate action to empower women and implement reservation objectives**.

What is Sarpanch-patism ?

- Sarpanch-patism is a term used to describe the **situation where men act as “sarpanch-pati, sarpanch-devar, pradhan-pati” etc.** while wielding the actual **political and decision-making power behind women** who are **elected as sarpanchs or pradhans** in the panchayat system.
- Sarpanch-patism **undermines the spirit and purpose of women’s reservation** in panchayats, which was introduced by the [73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 to empower women](#) at the grassroots level and improve their socio-economic conditions through representative democracy.
- Sarpanch-patism also violates the constitutional rights and dignity of women, who are reduced to **“faceless wives and daughters-in-law” in grassroots politics**.
- It deprives them of their agency, autonomy, and voice in public affairs.
- Sarpanch-patism also affects the **quality and effectiveness of governance and service delivery at the local level**, as it creates a gap between the elected representatives and the people. It also leads to corruption, and misuse of funds.

What are the Challenges in Tackling Sarpanch-patism?

- Overcoming [patriarchal norms](#), **attitudes and practices** that hinder women’s participation and empowerment in public life.
- Resisting **political interference, pressure, and violence from dominant groups** or parties that seek to control or influence panchayats.
- Socio-economic barriers such as **poverty, illiteracy, lack of mobility, etc.**, that limit women’s access to resources and opportunities.
- Balancing **domestic responsibilities and public roles for women** without compromising their health or well-being.

What are the Constitutional Provisions for Women Representation in PRIs?

- The **Article 243D of the Constitution of India**, inserted through the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992**, mandates a **reservation of not less than one-third for women** in PRIs nationwide.
 - This has been increased to **50% reservation** in several states like Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar etc in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.
- Article 243D also provides that **one-third of the total number of seats and offices of the Chairpersons in PRIs** at each level shall be reserved for women to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
 - Such reservations of seats and offices of the chairpersons for women are also within the reservations for SCs and STs in all three tiers of PRIs.

What are the Efforts by Government to Promote Women in PRIs?

- **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA):**
 - **RGSA** launched in 2018 to enhance PRIs' capacities for responsive rural governance, leveraging technology and resources for sustainable solutions aligned with **SDGs**. It also incentivized women's participation in PRIs.
- **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP):**
 - **GPDP guidelines that are relevant to Women Empowerment include** proactive participation of women in budgeting, planning, implementation and monitoring of GPDP and convening Mahila Sabhas prior to the general Gram Sabhas and their inclusion in Gram Sabhas and GPDP.

Way Forward

- Providing **capacity building and leadership development programs** for women representatives.
- Strengthening the **role and functioning of gram sabhas (village assemblies)** to ensure participation and accountability of women representatives.
- Creating **awareness and sensitization campaigns among men and women** on gender equality and democracy.
- Ensuring **adequate financial and administrative support for women representatives**.
- Enacting **laws and policies to prevent and punish sarpanch-patism** and other forms of proxy politics.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Q. Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (2017)

- (a) Federalism
- (b) Democratic decentralisation
- (c) Administrative delegation
- (d) Direct democracy

Ans: (b)

Q. The fundamental object of Panchayati Raj system is to ensure which among the following? (2015)

1. People's participation in development
2. Political accountability
3. Democratic decentralization
4. Financial mobilization

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- (a)** 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b)** 2 and 4 only
- (c)** 1 and 3 only
- (d)** 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

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