

{ JUSTICE SUNANDA BHANDARE LECTURE }

'No proof quota in politics leads to incompetence'

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NEW DELHI: There is no evidence that reservation for women, scheduled castes and tribes in politics leads to incompetence, said Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee on Friday, adding that independent women legislators are emerging because of it.

Delivering the 27th Justice Sunanda Bhandare Memorial Lecture on the topic "Democracy on the Ground: What works, what doesn't and why", Banerjee countered the criticism that reservation is anti-merit.

"While there are often claims that somehow this (reservation) will lead to massive incompetence, you see no evidence of it. What you see, over a period of time is independent women legislators emerging as a result..." he said. "There is very compelling evidence that reservation, both for SC/ST and women, has had a salutary effect."

Banerjee also termed reservation implementation as a "failure by design". Due to reservation in local bodies, he said, "A lot of people elected to local self-government bodies do not get a second run due to rotation of seats to accommodate reservation. So



Abhijit Banerjee

we want local democracy but we also want reservation. That's a failure by design."

Banerjee said an average constituency in India is quite large compared to electoral constituencies abroad. This impacts elections as voters hardly get information about their representatives. "When constituencies are large, it is hard to get information about legislators... We do not have a direct mechanism for rewarding legislators. Whatever they do, affects a little segment. This breeds indifference among people..." he said.

The lecture was given in honour of former Delhi high court judge, justice Sunanda Bhandare who died at the age of 52 in 1994. The event was presided by Supreme Court judge, justice Hima Kohli, and attended by justice Sidharth Mridul of the Delhi high court and former SC judge, justice Madan B Lokur.