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Q3

In the absence of well - educated and organised local level government system, Panchayats and Samitis have remained mainly political institutions and not effective instrument of governance. Critically Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS II · 12 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

- Critically discuss the view that, without a well-educated and organised local government system, panchayats and samitis remain mainly political institutions and not effective instruments of governance

Revision summary

The 73rd Amendment created panchayats; many still work as patronage and party offices.

Low literacy, weak gram sabhas and short training make elected bodies dependent on the bureaucracy.

- **Article 243G and the three Fs are the larger constraint:** an educated sarpanch cannot govern a function the State has not given.

Finance Commission grants and examples such as Kerala show organisation and money can improve service.

Education is necessary; devolution and a local cadre make panchayats governments.

Introduction

The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, gave panchayats constitutional status, five-year terms, reservations, and the **Eleventh Schedule** of 29 subjects. Many gram panchayats and panchayat samitis still work as election machines and patronage desks. A critical discussion must test whether education and organisation are the missing pieces, or whether funds, functions and functionaries are the deeper gap.

Body

Why they often look like political institutions

- Reservations for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have brought new faces into office; party and caste brokers still sit behind many chairs, so the ward meeting can look like a booth committee rather than a local cabinet.
- Where the sarpanch cannot read a budget or a scheme guideline, the secretary and the block officer write the agenda, and the elected body only stamps it.
- Panchayat samitis and zila parishads are used to distribute MGNREGA lists, housing cards and party tickets; that is politics with a statutory seal, not planning of water, roads and schools as a

government.

- Parallel bodies, user committees and State missions often spend the money that the **Eleventh Schedule** names as a panchayat function, so the elected council has a flag and no file.

Education and organisation are real constraints

- Low functional literacy among many first-generation elected members makes audit, procurement and the Right to Information a specialist craft, not a councillor's daily tool.
- Gram sabhas are poorly convened, poorly minuted, and poorly attended; without that organised base, the panchayat cannot claim a mandate for hard choices on tax or on targeting.
- Training under State institutes of rural development is short, irregular, and lecture-heavy; it does not create a standing local civil service around the elected body.
- Without organised records, GIS maps, and a professional accountant, a panchayat cannot run as a government even if every member has a degree.

The statement is incomplete if it stops at education

- **Article 243G** leaves devolution of the 29 subjects to the State legislature; an educated sarpanch still cannot run drinking water if the pipe and the engineer belong to a State parastatal.
- **State Finance Commissions** are late; own taxes are thin; tied Union and State schemes arrive with guidelines. Governance fails for want of the three Fs, not only for want of a graduate chairperson.
- The **Fourteenth Finance Commission's** basic grants to gram panchayats show that money plus simple accounting can improve service even where education is modest, if the State does not claw the grant back.
- Kerala's People's Plan and some southern and north-eastern practices show that organisation, staff devolution and a real gram sabha matter as much as formal schooling of members.
- Proxy leadership of women and SC/ST seats is a social power problem; literacy classes help, but police and election officers must also stop illegal proxies.

How they can become instruments of governance

- Devolve a clear basket of **Eleventh Schedule** functions with matching staff and an untied share of State tax, then train members on that basket, not on general civics alone.
- Make the gram sabha statutory calendar public, webcast or wall-paint the budget, and punish non-convening as a disqualification risk.
- **Build a local cadre:** accounts, engineering and data at cluster level, so samitis are organised offices, not weekly durbars.
- A critical view therefore agrees that weak education and weak organisation keep many panchayats political, and it adds that without functions and money they cannot become governments even if every member is well schooled.

Flow diagram

Weak education organisation -> Panchayat as political machine

Functions funds functionaries held by State -> Panchayat as political machine

Training gram sabha staff -> Local government

Article 243G real devolution -> Local government

Conclusion

Panchayats and samitis often remain political institutions because members are under-trained, gram sabhas are weak, and parties capture the chair. Education and organisation are necessary. They are not sufficient until States transfer the **Eleventh Schedule** with funds and functionaries so that the elected body actually governs.

Facts & figures

Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992

Inserted Part IX, periodic elections, reservations, and the **Eleventh Schedule** of 29 subjects.

Article 243G

Leaves it to the State legislature to endow panchayats with powers to function as institutions of self-government.

Eleventh Schedule

Lists 29 matters, including water, sanitation, rural housing, poverty alleviation and primary education, for possible devolution.

State Finance Commission (Article 243-I)

Must review panchayat finances; late or ignored awards keep local bodies politically visible and fiscally hollow.

Fourteenth Finance Commission

Recommended substantial basic grants to gram panchayats to support local service delivery.

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