

1. **Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) are simultaneously a remarkable success and a staggering failure, depending on the goalposts against which they are evaluated. Discuss.**

Answer :

With the constitutional mandates deriving from the 73rd amendment the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are key pillars of democratic governance in India. In more than two decades of their existence the PRIs have some impressive achievements along with unrealized potential seen as their failure.

Success :

- **Number of elected Representatives :** with nearly 3 million elected representatives at the village, intermediate and district level, the PRIs have enhanced representation
- **Empowerment of women :** A constitutional mandate of 33% reservation for women has yielded excellent results. Many states have provided for 50 percent reservation for women. Female PRI leaders are more likely to focus on issues pertinent to women.
- **Political representation at the grassroots level for marginalized :** This is the only level of government, where SC/ST candidates have a genuine voice in governance. Reports suggest that SC Sarpanchs are more likely to invest in public goods in SC hamlets.

Failures :

- **Authority and functions :** State government, meant to transfer functions listed as per 73rd AA has undertaken very little devolution of authority and functions to PRIs. Core functions like water, sanitation, maintenance of community assets, etc. continue to be in the hands of State governments.
- **Finances :** The power to tax, even for subjects falling within the purview of PRIs, has to be specifically authorized by the state legislature. Though State Finance Commissions have advocated for greater devolution of funds, there has been little action by states.
- **Functionaries :** Many State Governments have not transferred the required staff to the PRIs after the devolution of powers. Government officers are not willing to work under the administrative control of elected PRIs and administrative personnel serving under Panchayats are accountable to state government and not local bodies.
- **District Planning Committee :** The mandate to establish a DPC to prepare a draft development plan has been violated and distorted in most States. Parallel bodies encroach upon the domain of Local Governments (LGs).
- **Capacity Building :** There haven't been adequate capacity building exercises for members of Panchayats belonging to weaker section. For example, women participation has been mired by challenges such as 'sarpanch patis'.
- **Parallel schemes and agencies** such as MPLAD and MLALAD continue to bypass local governments.

Hence for governance efficacy at grassroots level, the only long-term solution is to foster genuine fiscal federalism where PRIs have authority to levy, collect and appropriate taxes to augment their resources and there is adequate devolution of functions making PRIs well equipped to solve their problems.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) is more than just the keeper of our national accounts; it is also a conscience-keeper and a watchdog. Examine the statement in light of making the auditing process more effective.
(150 words)
2. The concern for transparency in political funding is at odds with the Electoral Bond Scheme notified by the government. Critically discuss.
(150 words)