

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

Do you think that despite having significant limitations the Panchayati Raj Institutions have strengthened the process of democratic decentralization? Give your views.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 define democratic decentralisation (functions + resources to elected local reps for direct participation) → stake verdict: strengthened, but unfinished

R2 start from the concession in the question (limitations granted) → argue the third tier has still struck real democratic roots → same spine

Body flow

73rd Amendment constitutional base (Gram Sabha, three-tier, regular elections, State Election Commission, reservations) → Art. 243G + Eleventh Schedule (economic development + social justice) → **George Mathew**: democratic base broadened → women / SCs / STs enter elected office + Gram Sabha as participatory watchdog → **Esther Duflo**: women-headed Panchayats invest more in drinking water → *who governs shapes outcomes*

Counter-view

3Fs devolved unevenly, real power stays with states → parallel schemes + bureaucratic dominance → World Bank: high political but low administrative decentralisation → **Jaffrelot**: decentralisation can also harden local dominance

Conclusion routes

R1 citizens gained voice, choice, decision-making space → strengthening genuine but incomplete

R2 political decentralisation achieved; completing it needs real devolution of funds, functions, functionaries

Democratic decentralisation means the transfer of functions and resources to elected representatives at lower levels so that citizens share directly in governance.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions have strengthened the process, even though the work stays unfinished. The 73rd amendment gave panchayats a constitutional base - Gram Sabhas, a 3-tier structure, regular elections, a state election commission and reservations. Article 243G and the 11th Schedule linked them to local economic development and social justice.

George Mathew sees this as a major broadening of the country's democratic base. Lakhs of women, SCs & STs entered elected office, and the Gram Sabha grew into a participatory watchdog over local works. According to Esther Duflo, women-headed Panchayats invests more in drinking water, showing that who governs actually shapes outcomes.

The limitations are real. Funds, functions and functionaries are developed unevenly and real power often stays with the states. Parallel schemes and bureaucratic dominance further weaken Panchayat authority. World Bank findings place India high in political but low in administrative decentralisation. Christophe Jaffrelot cautions that decentralisation can demoralise but may also harden local dominance.

On balance, Panchayats have given ordinary citizens voice, choice and a real place in decision-making. The strengthening is genuine, though clearly incomplete.