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GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY

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TOPIC: PANCHAYAT RAJ

Overview of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

Introduction to Panchayati Raj

- Enacted by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) aim to establish decentralized governance at the grassroots level.
- This system is rooted in the principle of democratic decentralization, granting power to local self-governments in rural areas.
- Its foundation is traced back to ancient India, officially recommended by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957, which proposed a three-tier structure: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad.

Purpose and Structure

- PRIs are designed to promote participatory democracy, empower rural communities, and ensure effective local administration.
- They are given constitutional status under Article 243, with mandatory elections every five years to enforce accountability.
- States have flexibility in structuring PRIs, leading to variations in their implementation across India.

Achievements of Panchayati Raj

- Enhanced local governance and increased political participation at the grassroots.
- Significant empowerment of women, with nearly 14 lakh elected women representatives.
- Effective implementation of various social sector programs, especially in rural development.

Challenges Facing Panchayati Raj

- **Stagnation in Administrative Decentralization:** Despite initial successes, less than 20% of states have fully devolved the 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution to local bodies.
- **Erosion of Fiscal Autonomy:** Dependence on centrally sponsored schemes has increased, with a reduction in untied grants from 85% to 60%, diminishing local decision-making power.



- **Changing Nature of Welfare Delivery:** Shift towards direct cash transfers using platforms like JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile), sidelining PRIs in beneficiary selection and grievance redressal.
- **Impact of Urbanization:** As the rural population decreases due to urban migration, focus and resources shift towards urban areas, marginalizing rural development and PRIs.

Strategies for Revitalizing Panchayati Raj

- **Strengthen Administrative and Fiscal Decentralization:** Full devolution of administrative powers and resources is essential for PRIs to function effectively.
- **Leverage Technology for Engagement:** Adoption of digital tools in planning, monitoring, and accountability can enhance transparency and efficiency in local governance.
- **Reimagine Role in Rural Development:** PRIs should tackle modern challenges like water conservation, renewable energy, and disaster risk management by integrating scientific practices with traditional knowledge.
- **Revive Public Participation:** Increase community involvement in decision-making processes and ensure transparent, accountable governance to rebuild trust in PRIs.

Conclusion

The Panchayati Raj system is a cornerstone of India's democratic framework, aimed at bringing governance closer to the rural populace and empowering local communities. Despite facing systemic constraints and evolving challenges, a renewed focus on administrative and fiscal decentralization, technological integration, and community engagement is crucial. Revitalizing PRIs is imperative to ensuring inclusive governance and sustainable development in India's rural sectors, where a significant portion of the population still resides.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-panchayati-raj-movement-is-in-distress/article69227007.ece>

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MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Examine the current challenges faced by Panchayati Raj Institutions in India and propose strategies for strengthening their role in decentralized governance.(15MARKS / 250 WORDS)

Key Points

- **Current Challenges:**
 - Lack of full administrative and financial devolution to PRIs.
 - Decreased fiscal autonomy due to reliance on centrally sponsored schemes and reduced untied grants.
 - Marginalization of PRIs in the face of direct cash transfer schemes like PM-KISAN.
 - The demographic shift towards urbanization, leading to reduced focus on rural governance.
- **Proposed Strategies:**
 - Ensure complete transfer of the 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule to PRIs for true decentralization.
 - Increase untied grants to enhance fiscal autonomy and enable PRIs to address local needs effectively.
 - Integrate PRIs more effectively in the implementation and monitoring of welfare schemes to ensure local accountability.
 - Develop specific rural development policies that counteract the effects of urbanization and strengthen rural governance frameworks.