

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XI · CODE 323

Local Governments

CUET unit: Indian Constitution at Work — Local Governments / Federalism & Decentralisation

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Snapshot

- Establishes why a third tier of elected government (village and municipal) is essential to a functioning Indian democracy — accountability, participation and proximity to citizens.
- Traces the evolution of local government from ancient sabhas and Lord Rippon's 1882 local boards, through the 1952 Community Development Programme, to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992, in force 1993).
- Details the structural backbone of the 73rd Amendment: three-tier Panchayati Raj (Gram Panchayat–Mandal/Block/Taluka–Zilla Panchayat), mandatory Gram Sabha, direct elections, five-year terms and reservations (1/3 women, SC/ST in proportion, OBC optional).
- Explains the 74th Amendment for urban areas (Nagarpalikas), the 11th and 12th Schedules (29 rural + urban functions), the State Election Commissioner and the State Finance Commission.
- Evaluates implementation gaps: limited transfer of subjects, poor own-revenue (rural local bodies raise only 0.24% of total revenue but spend 4%), and tensions around inclusion of women, SCs/STs and OBCs.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Democracy requires elected bodies not only at the Centre and the State but also at the local level. Local government is "government closest to the common people" — the layer of administration that touches everyday life, where local knowledge enables efficient and people-friendly governance (NCERT §Why Local Governments?, p. 178). Two stories illustrate this. **Geeta Rathore of Jamonia Talab (Sehore district, Madhya Pradesh)** is a re-elected Sarpanch whose committed participation has visibly transformed village life — schools, water, roads — and whose re-election shows that an alert village electorate can hold elected leaders to account. **The Vengaivasal Gram Panchayat in Tamil Nadu** refused to endorse a Tamil Nadu government order allotting two hectares of village common land to 71 government employees, took the matter to the Madras High Court, and won — the Division Bench held that the Government Order was a "gross violation of the constitutional status of the Panchayats." Together these stories demonstrate the two virtues of strong local government — **accountability** to local

citizens and **protection of local interests** against higher-tier overreach (NCERT pp. 177–178).

Strengthening local government strengthens democracy (NCERT pp. 178–179).

Tasks that can be performed locally should be left to local people and their representatives; ordinary citizens are far more familiar with — and affected by — the working of local government than they are with the State or Union government. Decentralisation also encourages bottom-up participation and surfaces women, Dalits and Adivasis into public life.

The historical roots of Indian local self-government are deep. Self-governing village communities, in the form of **sabhas**, existed since the earliest times; these evolved into **Panchayats** (literally, "an assembly of five persons") (NCERT §Growth of Local Government in India, p. 179). The modern **elected** local body, however, dates from **1882** — the year Viceroy **Lord Rippon** issued his famous local self-government resolution and established "local boards." Village panchayats were established in several provinces under the **Government of India Act 1919** and reaffirmed under the **Government of India Act 1935**. During the freedom movement, **Mahatma Gandhi strongly pleaded for decentralisation of economic and political power** and argued that "**every village will be a republic**" — a pyramid built from the bottom up.

When the Constitution was drafted, local government was a divisive subject. It was eventually **assigned to the States** and mentioned only in the **Directive Principles of State Policy** — therefore **non-justiciable and merely advisory**. The relative weakness of the original constitutional treatment by two factors (NCERT p. 180). First, the Partition-era pressure to build a strong unitary centre and **Nehru's fear of "extreme localism"** as a threat to national unity. Second, **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concern** that a faction- and caste-ridden rural society would defeat the very purpose of decentralisation. The result was a constitutional silence that lasted four decades.

Post-independence steps before 1992 were modest. The **Community Development Programme of 1952** was the first major push for participatory rural development; expert committees recommended a three-tier Panchayati Raj system; **Gujarat and Maharashtra adopted elected local bodies around 1960**; but most States kept their local bodies weak, dependent and frequently dissolved (NCERT pp. 181–182). The **P.K. Thungon Committee (1989)** finally recommended constitutional recognition for local government bodies — a recommendation that eventually crystallised in the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992**, which came into force in **1993**.

The **73rd Amendment** established a **uniform three-tier Panchayati Raj structure** across all States (NCERT §73rd Amendment — Three Tier Structure, pp. 183–184). The base is the **Gram Panchayat**, covering a village or group of villages; the intermediary is the **Mandal/Block/Taluka Panchayat** (need not be constituted in smaller States); the apex is the **Zilla Panchayat**, covering the entire rural area of the District. Below the Gram Panchayat lies the constitutionally mandated **Gram Sabha**, comprising **all adult**

registered voters of the Panchayat area; its role and functions are to be decided by State legislation.

Elections under the 73rd Amendment have three distinctive features. All three tiers are **directly elected by the people**; the **term is five years**; and if a Panchayat is dissolved before its term, **fresh elections must be held within six months** of dissolution (NCERT §Elections, p. 184). Equally important are the **reservations: one-third of seats** in all panchayat institutions are reserved for **women**, including chairperson/Adhyaksha posts and within SC/ST/OBC reserved seats; **SC and ST reservation in proportion to population** at all three levels; and States may also provide **OBC reservation** if they so choose. A single Sarpanch seat may therefore simultaneously be reserved for, say, a Dalit woman or an Adivasi woman (NCERT §Reservations, p. 184).

The substantive devolution comes through the **transfer of subjects in the 11th Schedule — 29 subjects** drawn from the State List that are to be transferred to PRIs (NCERT §Transfer of Subjects, pp. 184–185; **Article 243G**). These include agriculture, minor irrigation, small-scale industries, rural housing, drinking water, roads, rural electrification, poverty alleviation, education, libraries, markets, health and sanitation, family welfare, women and child development, and the public distribution system. The actual transfer of subjects, however, depends on **State legislation** — and herein lies one's central critiques. The **PESA-type Act of 1996** extended Panchayat provisions to **Adivasi-inhabited areas**, giving greater powers to Gram Sabhas and protecting traditional self-government over forest and water resources.

Two institutional safeguards reinforce local autonomy. The **State Election Commissioner** is appointed by the State government to conduct elections to PRIs; the office is **autonomous like the ECI but independent of and NOT under the control of the Election Commission of India** (NCERT §State Election Commissioners, p. 186). The **State Finance Commission**, appointed by the State **once in five years**, examines local-body finances and reviews the distribution of revenues between State and local governments — ensuring allocation is not left to political whim (NCERT §State Finance Commission, p. 186).

The **74th Amendment** mirrors the 73rd for urban areas (NCERT §74th Amendment, p. 187). The Census definition of an urban area combines three thresholds: a **minimum population of 5,000**, **at least 75 per cent of the male working population in non-agricultural occupations**, and a **population density of at least 400 per sq km**. As per the 2011 Census, about **31 per cent of India's population is urban**. Direct elections, reservations, the State Election Commission, the State Finance Commission and a list of functions in the **Twelfth Schedule** all apply.

The **implementation scorecard** is mixed but impressive (NCERT pp. 187–188). By 2004, most States had held at least two rounds of local elections (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and a few others, three). India now has 600-plus Zilla Panchayats, around 6,000 block panchayats, and **2,40,000 Gram Panchayats**; over 100 city Corporations,

1,400 town Municipalities and 2,000-plus Nagar Panchayats. Together, these bodies have brought **more than 32 lakh elected representatives** into public office, of whom **at least 13 lakh are women**. Inclusion outcomes are striking: at least **200 women Adhyakshas** in Zilla Panchayats, **2,000 women presidents** of block/taluka panchayats and **80,000-plus women Sarpanchas** in Gram Panchayats; **over 30 women Mayors**; and **6.6 lakh elected members from SC/ST communities**. Persistent problems remain (NCERT §Conclusion, pp. 191–192). Many States have not transferred most of the 29 subjects; rural local bodies raise only **0.24 per cent of total revenues** but account for **4 per cent of total government expenditure**, leaving them heavily dependent on State and Union grants. The true test of democracy, NCERT concludes, is not legal provisions but their practice.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Gram Sabha	Body comprising all adult members registered as voters in the Panchayat area; mandated by the 73rd Amendment; role/functions decided by State legislation.	183
Gram Panchayat	Base tier of the three-tier Panchayati Raj structure, covering a village or group of villages.	183
Mandal/Block/Taluka Panchayat	Intermediary tier of PRIs; need not be constituted in smaller States.	183
Zilla Panchayat	Apex tier of PRIs, covering the entire rural area of a District.	183
Nagarpalika	Urban local body created under the 74th Amendment.	182
11th Schedule	Schedule listing 29 subjects (e.g., agriculture, minor irrigation, education, rural housing) to be transferred from State List to Panchayats.	184
12th Schedule	Schedule listing functions to be transferred from State governments to urban local bodies under the 74th Amendment.	187
State Election Commissioner	Autonomous officer appointed by the State government to conduct PRI/Nagarpalika elections; independent of the ECI.	186
State Finance Commission	Body appointed by the State once in five years to review finances of local bodies and revenue distribution between State and local bodies.	186
Urban area (Census)	Place with minimum population 5,000; $\geq 75\%$ male working population in non-agricultural occupations; density of at least 400/sq. km.	187
PESA-type Act 1996	1996 Act extending Panchayat provisions to Adivasi areas with enhanced powers for Gram Sabhas to protect traditional resource-management.	186

Term	Definition	Page
Community Development Programme	1952 programme to promote people's participation in local development; first major post-independence push for local government.	181
P.K. Thungon Committee	1989 committee that recommended constitutional recognition for local government bodies with periodic elections, functions and funds.	182
Article 243G	Constitutional basis for State legislatures to endow Panchayats with powers and authority over 11th Schedule matters.	185
Sarpanch	Elected head of a Gram Panchayat.	184
Adhyaksha	Elected chairperson of a Zilla Panchayat.	188
Lord Rippon's Resolution (1882)	Origin of modern elected local self-government in India.	179
Government of India Act 1919	Established village panchayats in several provinces.	179
Government of India Act 1935	Reaffirmed local self-government provisions.	179
Six-month rule	Fresh elections after dissolution of a Panchayat must occur within six months.	184
Directive Principles of State Policy	Original constitutional location of local government — non-justiciable, advisory.	180
73rd Amendment (1992)	Constitutional amendment establishing PRIs across India.	183
74th Amendment (1992)	Constitutional amendment establishing Nagarpalikas across India.	187
Bolivia 1994 Popular Participation Law	Comparative example — 314 municipalities receiving 20% of national tax.	191

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Three-tier PRI structure** (Gram Panchayat → Mandal/Block/Taluka Panchayat → Zilla Panchayat) with Gram Sabha as the democratic base of every Panchayat — p. 183.
- **Flag image** captioned "We are the government here in the village!" symbolising people's expectation of genuine implementation of local-government laws — p. 188.
- **"Read an Image" photograph** showing a "local Sarkar sitting out in the sun," used to prompt reflection on the social composition and informal style of village government — p. 190.

- **Article 243G text box** showing the constitutional basis for State legislatures endowing Panchayats with powers and authority over matters in the Eleventh Schedule — p. 185.
- **Box on Brazil** (States, Federal Districts, Municipal Councils with independent jurisdiction) and **Box on Bolivia** (1994 Popular Participation Law, 314 municipalities, 20% of national tax to municipalities) as comparative models of decentralisation — pp. 182, 191–192.
- **Process map** — Why local government (§Why Local Governments?) → Historical roots (§Growth) → Pre-1992 reforms (§Local Governments in Independent India) → 73rd Amendment structure, elections, reservations (§73rd Amendment) → Transfer of subjects + PESA (§Transfer of Subjects) → SEC + SFC (§State institutions) → 74th Amendment (§74th Amendment) → Implementation scorecard (§Implementation) → Conclusion (§Conclusion).

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Lord Rippon's Resolution (1882)	Origin of modern elected local self-government in India	p. 179
Government of India Act 1919	Established village panchayats in several provinces	p. 179
Government of India Act 1935	Reaffirmed local self-government	p. 179
Community Development Programme (1952)	First major post-independence push for local government	p. 181
P.K. Thungon Committee (1989)	Recommended constitutional recognition for local bodies	p. 182
73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992)	Rural local government — PRIs, in force 1993	p. 183
74th Constitutional Amendment (1992)	Urban local government — Nagarpalikas, in force 1993	p. 187
Article 243G	Powers of Panchayats over 11th Schedule subjects	p. 185
11th Schedule	29 rural-development subjects transferred to PRIs	p. 184
12th Schedule	List of urban functions transferred to Nagarpalikas	p. 187
PESA-type Act, 1996	Extension of Panchayat provisions to Adivasi areas	p. 186
Census 2011	Defines 31% of India as urban	p. 187

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Bolivia Popular Participation Law (1994)	314 municipalities; 20% national tax to municipalities	p. 191
Vengaiwasal Gram Panchayat case (Madras HC)	"Gross violation of the constitutional status of the Panchayats"	p. 178
Gandhi's "every village will be a republic"	Decentralisation argument in the freedom movement	pp. 179–180

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **73rd vs 74th Amendment:** 73rd = rural/Panchayati Raj/11th Schedule; 74th = urban/Nagarpalikas/12th Schedule. Both passed in **1992** and came into force in **1993**.
- **State Election Commissioner is NOT under the Election Commission of India** — students often assume a hierarchical link; it is autonomous and independent of the ECI (p. 186).
- **Reservation arithmetic:** women's reservation (1/3) applies inside SC/ST/OBC reserved seats too — leading to seats reserved simultaneously for, e.g., a Dalit woman; it also covers chairperson posts, not only ordinary members.
- **11th Schedule has 29 subjects** (not 18, not 30); they are drawn from the **State List** (not Union List) — the NCERT margin question explicitly raises why subjects come only from the State List.
- **Intermediate tier is optional in smaller States** — a frequent trap. The three-tier structure is uniform, but the Mandal/Block/Taluka tier need not be constituted in smaller States.
- **Pre-1992 status:** local government was a State subject and figured in the **Directive Principles** (non-justiciable, advisory) — distractors often claim it was a Fundamental Right or in the Concurrent List.
- **Six-month rule:** after dissolution before the five-year term, fresh elections must be held within **six months** (not three, not one year).
- **Lord Rippon (1882)** is the origin of modern elected local self-government; trap items credit Lord Curzon or Lord Mayo.
- **Rural local bodies raise only 0.24% of total revenues** but spend 4%; distractors flip these or invent intermediate figures.
- **State Finance Commission convenes once in FIVE years** — not three, not annually.
- **Urban area definition** requires ALL THREE thresholds (5,000 population, 75% non-agricultural male workforce, 400/sq km density) — trap items drop one.

- **PESA-type Act is 1996**, not 1992 or 1993 — it came AFTER the 73rd Amendment to extend its provisions to Adivasi areas.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield CUET chapter — questions on the 73rd/74th Amendments, the 11th and 12th Schedules, the three-tier PRI structure, reservations (especially the 1/3 women + SC/ST in proportion combination), and the autonomy of the State Election Commissioner appear almost every year in CUET Political Science. Expect 5–6 direct factual MCQs plus 1–2 statement-based or assertion–reason items per CUET paper, typically pegged to (i) numerical facts (29 subjects, one-third reservation, six-month re-election rule, 5,000/75%/400-density urban definition) and (ii) constitutional placement (Directive Principles, Article 243G, 11th vs 12th Schedule).

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