Polity & Governance · GS - II

To what extent, in your opinion, has the decentralisation of power in India changed the governance landscape at the grassroots?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2022	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments institutionalised rural and urban local self-government, strengthening democratic participation, representation and local planning. However, incomplete devolution of functions, finances and functionaries, alongside administrative dependence and capacity constraints, limits their transformative potential.

Model Answer

Introduction

Decentralisation transfers decision-making powers from higher levels of government to local institutions. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments gave constitutional recognition to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies.

Body

Positive Changes

1. Participatory Democracy: Gram Sabhas and local bodies provide citizens with opportunities to participate in development planning and monitor public expenditure.

2. Social Inclusion: Reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women have broadened political representation.

3. Localised Development: Local institutions can identify community-specific needs relating to sanitation, drinking water, roads and primary services.

4. Accountability: Greater proximity between elected representatives and citizens can improve responsiveness.

Limitations

Many local bodies lack adequate financial resources, trained personnel and genuine administrative autonomy. State governments often retain control over important functions. Elite capture and irregular Gram Sabha participation further weaken accountability.

Conclusion

Decentralisation has deepened grassroots democracy, but its impact remains uneven. Effective devolution of the three Fs—functions, funds and functionaries—along with capacity-building and social audits, is essential for meaningful local self-government.