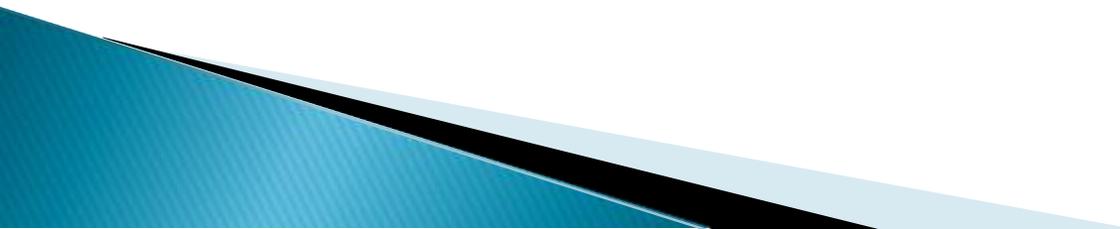


# Meaning, Definition and Significance of Local Government

BA Part-3(Sem.5)  
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# Introduction

In a democratic set up, Local government is considered an important and vital issue of governance irrespective of any political philosophy. It exists at lowest tier of state administration and thus brings administration close to people. Today it is viewed as one of the key element of a state, which promotes the relations between a state and its citizens.

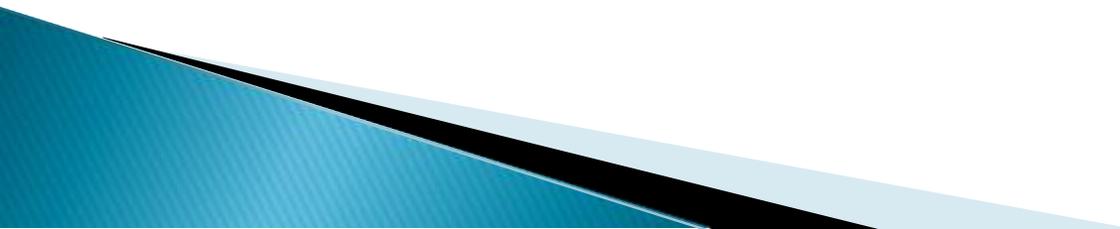


# Meaning

Today democracy prevails almost all over the world. Attempts have been made to create some kind of democratic institutions at the local level, involving local people to solve their local problems and thus be a part of governance. These governing or administrative bodies are set up for specific purposes and for a defined area—be it a village or a town, better known as Local Government. Thus to be precise, Local Government is the management of local affairs by local people themselves.



# Definitions

- L. Golding has defined Local Government in the simplest way. To him, “Local Government is the management of their own affairs by the people of a locality.”
  - V. Venkata Rao points out that “Local Government is the part of government which deals mainly with local affairs, administered by authorities to the state government but elected independently of the state authority by the qualified residents.”
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However looking into the views of these scholars, it seems the concept of local government is clearly associated with the autonomous institutions created at lower levels of the state to manage and regulate the affairs of a locality. It is, thus, the transfer of powers and resources from higher to lower levels in a political system. To be more specific local government refers to democratically elected bodies at the local level i.e. a village or a town to look after the affairs of that respective area.



# Local Government and Local Self-Government–A Distinction

The terms Local Government and Local Self-Government seem to be similar and synonymous, i.e. the administration of a locality, some writers distinguish between them. According to them Local Government refers to state or central government activities and policies, whereas Local Self-Government refers to the elected government at the local level, set up in accordance to the law of the land. It performs the assigned functions which are generally local in nature.

*The difference may be discussed as under:-*

1. The Local Self-Government is based on the principle of decentralisation whereas Local Government is based on deconcentration.
2. Local Government represents higher tiers of state and union administration whereas; Local Self-Government represents local bodies elected by the local inhabitants such as panchayats, samitis or municipalities.
3. Local Self-Government enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy in decision making. These institutions are set up according to the constitutional provisions and as such enjoy sufficient administrative, legislative and financial powers but, Local Governments do not enjoy local freedom. To be more specific, local discretion is of very restrictive nature

# Significance of Local Government

The real worth of Local Government can be very aptly summed up in the words of Sh. Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India who opined that “India is poor because the villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Panchayats should be given greater power; for we want the villagers to have a greater measure of real swaraj (Self-Government) in their own villages.”

It is stated that the first sign of any healthy democracy is the presence and strengthening of the institutions of Local Government. The roots of Local Self-Government lie in decentralization by ‘taking power to the people’.

***The significance of local government can be brought out in the following manner:***

- 1.Nursery of democracy
  - 2.Strengthening of democracy
  - 3.An important element of welfare state
  - 4.Ensure People's Participation
  - 5.Nursery for future Leadership
  - 6.School of civil education
  - 7.Share the burden of State Government
  - 8.Enhances Efficiency
  - 9.Provider of civil services
  - 10.Effective solution of Local Problems
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11. Better use of local Resources
  12. Channel of communication
  13. Involves sense of belongingness
  14. Promotes spirit of Liberty and Equality
  15. Responsible to Public Opinion
  16. Bulwark against bureaucratic abuses
  17. Laboratories of Social Research
  18. Counter balance of Local Powers
  19. Fulfillment of Local Needs
  20. It removes the evils of Party System
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21.It helps for the success of Development Plans

22.Decentralization of Political Powers

23.Lessens the burden of Central Governments

24.Adequate use of Manpower

25.Economical

To conclude the Significance of Local Government has been emphasized by scholars, academicians and political thinkers of all ages. The virtues of local government led the political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Mill, Laski and many others to believe that local government happens to be best form of government. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.”