



Importence Of Information And Technology In Indian Panchayati Raj System

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Abstract: The panchayats represent democratic decentralized governance in India. The lowest tier of the panchayats – the gram panchayats – were envisioned to provide opportunities to the rural grassroots for participation in the governing process from taking decisions to preparation, implementation and supervision of various development programs. To strengthen the grassroots democratic process gram sabhas (under the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, 1992) were formed as nodal bodies for approval and sanction of work done by the gram panchayats. The gram sabha provides a platform to the villagers to meet and discuss their problems and also ensure accountability of gram panchayats. The functioning of these gram sabhas has, however, not been smooth and they have come under much flak due to lack of regularity and transparency. There have been various suggestions and efforts to improve the participation of the grassroots in the panchayat process but conventional methods have not been very successful. The concept of e-Panchayats and the endeavor to use information and communication technologies to allow for e-Governance at the grassroots level has been gaining ground in these circumstances. The objective of this paper is to explore the use of Information and Communication technology (ICT) tools in the panchayats especially at the elementary level for better governance, participation and development. The paper will investigate the tools that are being used for the invoking of digital panchayats, their effectiveness and will also suggest alternative tools that can be used for the above purpose.

Key words: panchayat, gram panchayats, ICT, e-Panchayats, grassroots, democratic process.

Introduction: Local self-governments in India has a chequered history starting from self-sufficient and self-governing village communities that survived the rise and fall of empires in the past to the three-tier institutions of governance set-up with Constitutional support in modern times. In the ancient times self-governing village bodies that gradually became a council of five persons or panchayat were functional at the grassroots level in all villages. There was gradual decline of the autonomy of the panchayat system during the medieval period. The main reasons were casteism and feudalism and a rise of a new class of feudal chiefs who acted as intermediates between the rulers and the people. The British colonial rulers did not give panchayats priority as units of democratic decentralization and the feudal chiefs (the zamindars and their officials) continued their strangulation over the rural masses. After independence the emphasis of the Father of the Nation on self-governing panchayats could not ensure their constitutional validity at the initial stages. It took several decades for panchayati raj to blossom from a nonjusticiable part of the Constitution (under the Directive Principles of State Policy) to a legally binding institution. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of India, 1992 was a landmark Act that enabled decentralized and participative governance through Panchayats in the rural areas. The focus of panchayats shifted from mere executioners of development projects to policy makers on various issues of local development. The panchayats are capable of ensuring good governance through a decentralized administrative set-up and an equitable societal system by the way of distributed resources. But despite the good intentions the operation of the panchayats has been much criticized. While the development work achieved by the panchayats has been varied, the participation of the rural masses in the panchayat activities has been non-committal. The convention of universal adult franchise in modern representative democracies is adopted here too but what follows is stoic inaction on the part of the voters. The process of empowerment of the masses through the panchayat system remains a far cry. There has been limited thrust by the central and the state governments to utilize the panchayat system for the participation of the rural masses in the governing process. The active and effective participation of the masses require comprehensive knowledge and information on the panchayat system. This is a challenging task when one considers the representative structure of the panchayat system. Even the lowest tier of the panchayat system – the gram panchayat comprises of 7 to 20 members (depending upon the population of the village) representing around 750 to 25000 of villagers. There is provision for the institution of a gram sabha comprising of all the adult voters of the village. The gram sabha is compulsorily scheduled to meet twice a year if not more and is empowered to contribute

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