ICT in Grama Panchayat: A Boon to Rural Development

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Abstract*: The 73rd amendment of the constitution of India gave much importance to the development of panchayth raj institutions particularly Grama Sabha. The main purpose of Grama Panchyat is to maximize the welfare of the rural poor through various development programmes. However, the performance of Grama Panchyat is not up to the expectation of rural people and hence, in recent years, government of India implanted information and communication technology at all levels of governments including Grama Panchayats to maintain transparency and efficiency in public management. In this context the paper makes an attempt to analyse how the implantation of ICT in Grama Panchayat administration act as boon to rural development with special reference to KoteshwaraGrama Panchayat in Udupi district, Karnataka. The opinion of respondents comprising citizens, administrators and politicians reveals that low digital literacy rate, inadequate digital infrastructure, problem of unscientific method of E-waste management and digital addiction are the challenges for E-Panchayat development in India. Thus, this research paper suggest government to arrange common contact counters in village panchayat to assist digitally illiterate sections of society and also take necessary measures to increase digital literacy rate by integrating digital education (computer training related course curriculum) to solve problem of digital divide in future days. The development e-panchayat supportive system reduces regional inequality and environment pollution. One should borne in mind, complete digitisation of public administration including Grama Panchayat bridges link between citizens, administrators and politician which reduce room for corruption there by, strengthen cooperative federalism through participatory democracy.*

Keywords: *Boon, Challenges ICT, Public administration, Panchayat raj institution.*

I. Introduction

The concept of local self-governance is not new as it has its roots in ancient time even before the era of Mauryan emperors. Panchayat raj institution was the oldest system of local self government in India. It is the most integral layer of decentralisation which formed link between government and the mass . The word panchayat means assembly of five and raj means rule. Therefore, it strengthens democratic institutions at the grassroots level by encouraging local people to participate in administration process of decentralisation. The direct involvement of people in administration helps local people in finding solution to local problems. The British enacted this act in 1919 and 1935 to provide power to local self governing bodies and thus, the local self government functioned in Karnataka since thee pre independence period. Post independence, the panchayat raj act was introduced in 1983 which led to the creation of three tier administration structure whose representatives were elected through direct election. Later in 1993, the panchayat raj act was amended to make provisions for the creation of Grama sabha keeping in pace with these development the government passed Karnataka panchayat raj act in conformity of the constitution act of 1992.

The panchayat raj system has three tire structure such as Grama Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat. Among these three tire structures, The Grama Panchyats are most significant institution which has direct link with the citizens of nation. However most of the Grama Panchayats are encountered with financial constraints and hence, they have to achieve maximum social welfare with minimum cost on development activities. The lack of digitalisation of panchayat raj institution particularly Grama Panchayat reduced transparency in administration. Consequently, the cost incurred to execute various project is very expensive and therefore, the cost burden of panchayath administration is set back to promote wellbeing of rural poor. Beside to it, lack of proper communication between local self government, state government and central government is the biggest challenge to cooperative federalism in India and therefore, most of the rural poor totally escaped from various development schemes introduced by various levels of government. Poor infrastructure and delay in services like issue of license is major hurdle to entrepreneurship development. Low revenue and fund mobilisation resulted low efficiency in implementation of development scheme in village. Further, the centralized planning, lack of coordination amongst multiple agencies, poor capacity and corruption

within bureaucracy, and weak monitoring system caused wastage of resource and delay in implementation of development schemes. Thus, panchayat raj institutions have to be strengthen in the process of allocation of resource and to execute programs more efficiently through implantation of ICT in administration at all levels of government. Hence, government of India implanted ICT in public administration in recent years and also suggested state government to implant ICt in public administration at all layers of the panchayat raj institutions to improve transparency and efficiency in administration. Thus, various state governments were taken necessary measures to implant ICT in public administration in local self government including grama panchayats. Bearing this in mind, various sub national level governments developed and introduced various software applications device (Panchatantra in Karnataka and recently E Swaraj application launched by central government) to assist rural poor in accessing various services like finances, accounts, procurement, land records, agriculture marketing etc through on line mode.

The practice of E Governance in panchayat administration promotes digital literacy in rural area. However, low rate of literacy and the government initiation towards digital education in the rural area not substantial in country like India leading to create problem of digitally literates and digitally illiterates classes in the society. Experts argued that the benefits of digitalisation of administration enjoyed by those class which has digital literacy. Further, the gap between digital process and implementation reduces effectiveness of financial and political relationship between various levels of government. Therefore, the proposed study aims to high light how implantation of ICT in Grama Panchayat administration serves as a innovative tool of rural development. It also discusses pains of ICT in grama panchayth institution. In addition to it, paper identifies challenges for implantation of ICT in Grama Panchayat.

II. About Back Ground of Panchatantra:

The government of Karnataka decided to introduce an accrual basis double entry accounting system in grama panchayat and replace the Karnataka panchayat raj (grama panchayat accounts and budget) rules 1995 with Karnataka with panchayat raj (Grama panchayat budgeting and accounting) rules 20066, came into effect from 1.4.2007. It prescribes the maintenance of double entry and books of accounts and forms, accrual basis accounting, and the accounting procedures, formates of financial statements and budget. This rule is applicable to all GPS in the state.

On this background the rural development and panchayat raj department requested the national informatics centre (NIC) to develop web based application for implementing double entry accounting system in GPS. As result, NIC developed panchatantra application as further requirements. The panchatantra is a web based application with three tier architecture and it a comprehensive application that needs the basic requirements of the GPS. It facilitates maintaining double entry accounting while carrying out the regular functionalities/activities. This system is developed, keeping in mind the understanding and knowledge of panchayat staff in performing the operation on the computer system. Also, financial statement generated by panchatantra application shows whether GP has earned sufficient income during year to meat development and other expenditures, assets held and its obligation. The financial statements information can be used by the GP, Government, Funding Agencies and or public in decision making and in public interest. It helps in reducing cost burden on training of 5628 GP staff members in maintaining double entry system. Further, it guides the officer to carry out the GP activities as per the rules. This application helps you to submit the details of various properties, beneficiaries, works and generate various forms as required and to view various reports maintained by the department.

III. About Koteshwar Grama Panchayat

It is a village in the Indian state of Karnataka. It is located in Kundapura Taluk of Udupi District. The total population 14697 as per 2011 senses. Elevation is 36.447 m. Agriculture is the main occupation of people and around 95% of people are literate. It is known place for micro and small scale entrepreneurship. This Grama has good net work facilities. The Grama Panchayat is partially digitised and most of the transaction are done through it.

IV. Literature Review

In recent years, the government of India tress more on Electronic Governance Program (EGP) and keeping in this mind, various types of applications were designed by central as well as state governments to strengthening of three tires of panchayat raj institution. Subhash Chandra Bhatnagar (2009) discussed possible strategies to increase the access to technology in PRIs and also the utilization of ICTs to achieve the desired outcomes. The strategy proposes a coordinated approach to many different initiatives undertaken by different agencies to promote computerization of panchayats. Subhash Chandra Bhatnagar (2011) describes the status of ICT deployment in the local governments at the village and district levels in India. Puneet Kumar (2014) studies throws some light on necessity of ICT in self-governance along with some case studies. Jhumur Ghosh

(2014) investigated 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 Minakshi (2019) the use of ICT by Panchayati Raj Institutions in providing effective public service delivery to the rural masses.

V. ICT in Grama Panchayat: a Boon to Rural Development

The discussion with the employees, members of panchayath and citizens of grama panchayath Koteshwara highlighted the following advantages approved from e-governance in panchayath raj institutions.

5.1 Quick accessibility of Development Schemes: panchayat development officers expressed opinion that the accessibility of data is comparatively simple after implantation of ICT in administration. It is clearly evidenced that the people can be quickly accessed various development project through online application system. For example: The government of Karnataka launch panchatantra application in 2006. The main advantage of it is the people can easily access various development schemes relating to poverty alleviation like which use some packaged applications are: Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Sampoorna Gram in Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY), Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) and Watershed Development Scheme sponsored by Ministry of Rural Development (MRD). So digitisation of grama panchayat saves time and money of beneficiaries.

5.2 Efficiency in tax revenue collection: Information and communication technology enhance transparency in tax administration. So, the possibility of tax evasion by the residence of panchayat is very low.

5.3 **Improves Transparency and Accountability in administration:** The MMP focuses on e-delivery of services to citizens and to functionaries of the panchayat raj institutions. Services to citizens will include issue of certificates and licenses and sharing of information on voting agenda, receipt of funds, progress reports, and beneficiaries for individual schemes to bring in transparency in the working of panchayat raj institution, budget allocation, fund utilisation and revenue mobilisation, copy of proceedings of Gram Sabha and "Action Taken Report" will increase transparency in local self government. Use of accounting software and computerisation of list of BPL card holders will bring accountability and transparency in Grama Panchyat.

5.4 Reduce extra expenditure: The revenue expenditure particularly salary expenses will be decreased. The operation cost of various development projects also decreased.

5.5 Promote digital literacy: The practice of e-governance in panchayat level ultimately creates awareness on digital literacy amongst citizens. So, the people can access the services from online. For example:, in recent years, people access services like Mulwala Yojana, Housing and drinking water scheme, MNAREGA scheme by submitting application through on line.

5.6 Reduces Rural – Urban Divide: Digitalisation of local self government ultimately promotes telly education and telly medicine etc. The accessibility of basic social infrastructure reduces regional disparity.

5.7 Promotes Research and Development: Filing reports of meetings of Grama Sabha Progress of Water supply work Construction of community latrines Collection and revision of rate taxes and feePayment electricity bills Enrolement of children in schools Progress of immunisation Maintain Statistical records on population, poverty, crop, cattle ect. Are helps researchers to under take on research activities on various real issues.

5.8 Establishes bridge between Local, State and National Government: The implantation of ICt in Panchayat Raj institution helps rural poor to access various development schemes introduced by state and national government like education, health nutrition, Drinking water, Sanitation marketing of agriculture products and other infrastructure development schemes. Thus, it increases standard of life of people and there by, reduces problem of income inequalities in rural area.

5.9 Social and Economic Inclusiveness: The digitalisation of Grama Panchayat promotes on line education and training, and e-medical facilities. So it enables rural poor to access various training which relates development of employability. The digitalisation of planchet raj institution simplified submission of application for various scheme. For example, today, the people can apply for housing scheme under indira avash yojana through on line. Hence, it reduces time consumption and saves money. Similarly, the various software applications like Arogya Setu enabled rural people to access various medical services during kovid 19.

5.10 **Provides Strong base to RTI:** Each and every gramma panchayat institutions must publish various development schemes and their status, collected tax revenue and nontax revenue, grants received from state and central government and other information in its web site. So people can review published information and take information on any matter through RTI if they find fraud or corruption by panchayat administration.

5.11 **Simplifies Grama Sabha:** In India, most of the Grama Sabha ends up with dirty politics. Thus, conducting Grama Sabha through on line by using Skipe, Google meat software will reduces unwanted discussion and makes grama saba more effective. In addition to direct discussion, inviting queries from local people and send it to standing committee will enhance transparency and efficiency in administration. The MMP suggested all grama panchayat to make video and audio recording of gram sabha meeting proceedings and action report to bring transparency and accountability in public administration.

5.12 **E-agriculture Market Development:** The most important and urgent requirement of digitalisation of grama panchayat is to provide information relating price and marketing of agri product through on line. To make this efficiently and protect farmers from middle man, each and every panchayat must incorporate e agriculture marketing application as a part of digitalisation process. The development of E-agric marketing helps farmers to get faire price for their products.

5.13 **Strengthens Participatory Democracy:** Recently, national panchayat portal developed by NIc establishes communication link between citizen and Grama Panchyat. This will increase citizen participation and engagement in panchayat and therefore, use of information technology help in the process of building community. However, except Gujarat, other states politician used one way video communication.

VI. Challenges for digitisation of Grama Panchayat

6.1 Duplications of work: Many Panchayat Development Officers opinion reveals that practice of manual and ICT administration cause to duplications of work. Therefore, the cost burden of administration will be increased. Thus, this finding reveals that government should take necessary measure to build paper less office.

6.2 **Differentiates Digitally Literate class from Digitally Illiterate class:** In rural area 60% of the populations are digitally illiterates. They are totally escaped from the development scheme of the government. The study suggests government to provide alternative ways or plat form like establishment of common contact centre to render service to digitally illiterate section of the society.

6.3 **Cause exploitation of rural poor:** Most of the rural poor are digitally illiterates. Hence, they depend on the cyber centres to place application for getting different kind of services. This leads to over exploitation of rural poor by digitally literates. Therefore, the study recommends gramma panchayat to set up separate counter to assist digitally illiterates so that over exploitation of digital illiterate section society can be protected from over exploitation of siber centres.

6.4 **Reduces Employment Opportunities:** Digitalisation of panchayat raj administration replaces manual work to machinery. So employment opportunities will be gradually decreased and consequently, rural urban migration will be increased. Therefore, the study suggests sub national and local self governments to reduce procedural hurdles to promote business start up.

6.5 **Lack of digital infrastructure:** In the rural area weak network and less number of computer technology and related infrastructure is a main hurdle to increase efficiency of administration of panchayth raj institution.

6.6 **Language Barriers:** The conflict between regional and global languages set back to digitalise panchayat raj institution in the early stage of development of information technology. However, now days, attention paid towards various software applications development in regional languages and therefore, the constraint of usage of ICT in Grama Panchayat level reduced.

6.7 **Inefficient Bureaucracy:** Most of the secretary and other servants are not accustomed with information technology particularly at Grama Panchyat. This result weak performance of administrative machineries. Thus, government organised digital literacy training to those bureaucrats do not have computer knowledge.

6.8 **Low Digital Literacy Rate:** In India, 1/3 of population digitally literate. Thus, it requires integration of digital literacy training with in the course curriculum at primary education.

6.9 **E Waste Management:** In rural area, there is no scientific way to dispose e wastage. Thus, excess use of ICT technology leads to create solid and liquid wastage and finally environment pollution.

6.10 **Problem of Digital Addiction:** There are lot of confusion regarding on line teaching. Experts argued that the use electronic device like mobile cause to psychological disorder and digital addiction. The digital addiction cause to reduce efficiency of 1/3 of youth. Thus, use of telly education to bridge gap between rural and urban area may threat to mental health of rural youth.

VII.   Major Findings and Concluding observations:

Implantation of ICT in Grama Panchayat establishes two way communications between citizens, administrators and politicians. Thus, it promotes citizen centric decentralised democracy which helps to build community. In addition to it, the ICT in Grama Panchayat will reduce inequalities by helping needy people to access various kinds of development schemes at lowest fee or cost. The linkage between central government, state government and local self government through ICt strengthens top down and bottom up approach in public administration and therefore, it serves as a basic tools to achieve social and financial inclusion in country. However, lack of digital literacy in rural area led to create digitally richer and digitally poorer sections in the society. Consequently, the poorer section of the society totally escaped from the benefits of various development schemes implemented by various levels of government. Lack of infrastructure to create conducive atmosphere to E-panchayat raj administration in rural area widens rural-urban divide and regional disparity. Even after the digitisation of Grama Panchayat, the traditional way of office work (paper work) still practiced in most of the

panchayat resulted duplication of work burden on the employees and reduces efficiency of administrative machineries. The unscientific method of e wastage management has adverse impact on environment. Thus, government should arrange common contact counters in village panchayat to assist digitally illiterate sections of society and also take necessary measures to increase digital literacy rate by integrating digital education (computer training related course curriculum) to solve problem of digital divide. The development e-panchayat supportive system reduces regional inequality and environment pollution. One should borne in mind, complete digitisation of public administration including Grama Panchayat bridges link between citizens, administrators and politician which reduce room for corruption there by, strengthen cooperative federalism through participatory democracy.

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