E-Panchayats, Conceptual Ideas: A Study

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ABSTRACT

E-Panchayat a web-based dynamic digital interface designed for every Panchayat in India, which provides information about a particular Panchayat through a two-way flow of content. It aims to facilitate and improve the day-to-day functioning of the Panchayat through a two-way flow of information and content. The process of e-panchayat should be understood not only in terms of the analytical or technical dimensions, but also in terms of behavioral and organizational dimensions. The analytical aspects of the process revolve around the activities such as information. The behavioral aspects may be analyzed in terms of the abilities of the individuals to interpret the information and develop an understanding of the process of governance. Their motivation, commitment and behavior have a tremendous impact on efficient governance at panchayat level. The organizational aspects encompass the learning capabilities and responsiveness of an organization and the strategic orientation of its top officials. Consistency between the analytical, behavioural and organizational dimensions of process has a substantial impact on the implementation capabilities.

KEY WORDS

Local Government, E-panchayat, Public, E-governance, Democracy, Administration.

INTRODUCTION

E-Panchayat is a nationwide IT initiative under India's National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), aimed at transforming Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) into digitally empowered local self-Governments. It leverages technology to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the functioning of

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approximately 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country.

Key Objectives

- ➢ **Automation of Workflows:** Digitizing internal processes like budgeting, accounting, and asset management.
- ➢ **Enhanced Service Delivery:** Providing citizen-centric services such as online issuance of certificates (birth, death, marriage) and licenses.
- ➢ **Transparency and Accountability:** Strengthening social audits and making financial data accessible to the public in real-time.
- ➢ **Citizen Participation:** Empowering rural residents to engage in local decision.making and monitor development projects through digital tools.

Core Components and Applications

The initiative is primarily implemented through the Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES), which includes several specialized applications:

- ➢ **E-GramSwaraj:** A central portal for planning, budgeting, and work-based accounting. It is integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) for real-time payments to vendors.
- ➢ **Audit Online:** Facilitates the online auditing of Panchayat accounts to ensure financial integrity.
- ➢ **Gram Manchitra:** A GIS-based tool for spatial planning, allowing officials to visualize development work on digital maps.
- ➢ **Meri Panchayat App:** A mobile-based dashboard that provides citizens with instant access to their Panchayat's budget, progress reports, and elected representative details.
- ➢ **SabhaSaar:** Launched in August 2025, this AI tool creates real-time, multilingual summaries of Gram Sabha meetings to ensure accurate documentation.

Recent Progress (2025)

- ➢ **Internet Access:** As of mid-2025, over 6.26 lakh villages (out of 6.44 lakh) have 3G, 4G or 5G mobile network access.
- ➢ **Land Digitization:** Under the **SVAMITVA** scheme, drone surveys have been completed in 3.23 lakh villages as of July 2025, with 2.63 crore property cards prepared.
- ➢ **Awards:** The Meri Panchayat app received the WSIS Prizes 2025 Champion Award for its contribution to linguistic diversity and local content.

The world over, people are talking more about 'good governance' and 'public management' and less about 'public administration', per se. The new public management paradigm seems to have born out of the frustration of a common man, the citizen of a country, for not receiving the quality of service that he expects or pays for.

Under such circumstances, the foremost requirement for implementing the reform agenda is to shift approach from 'macro' to 'micro', from 'generalization' to 'organizational .specific' solution and implement these effects in each process of governance. This would need a fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of Government processes as marginal improvements here and there have not helped during the last five decades. The new agenda for governance should be to achieve dramatic improvement in critical and contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed of individual public management departments. In fact, the call for good governance, for strengthening civil society and for a more humane and transparent Government is becoming louder. Process of governance cannot remain unaffected by powerful winds of

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change and the thrust of IT revolution sweeping the globe. The direction we choose now would determine India's future status worldwide. Action in this regard will however mean a shift as follows:

From	To
Unwieldy paper files with tom Covers, Frayed covers and with Pins sticking out.	Computer based files.
Hierarchical authority	Networked Power
Wielding power through hiding Information	Empowerment through sharing.
Expenditure orientation	Performance Orientation
Individualistic	Organizational
Compliance/Inspection orientation	Achievement Orientation
Batch Processing	On-Line Processing
Delayed Access	Instant Access
Delayed Responses	Prompt Responses
Repeated manual data entry	EDI
Fear of unknown	IT savy
More time for routine repetitive work	More time for creative work
status quo	Continuous improvement

In March 2000, as mandated by the Commonwealth Programme "Towards a New Public Administration", the Management and Training services Divisions of the Common-wealth Secretariat launched a special focus center. The Center was to be recognized as a focal point in the use of the new information and communication technologies as tools for reinventing good governance. Based on similar objectives on August 15th, 2000, Pramod Mahajan, the then Union Minister of Information Technology, inaugurated the Centre for E-Governance based at New Delhi.

Indeed, the days when governance and Government were associated with rigid bureaucratic controls and cumbersome files and paperwork leading to delays, corruption etc. seem to be almost over now. The 1990s witnessed a strengthening of conviction that governance can be reinforced through intensive application of IT and New Public Management.

In the 80s, there had been a realization in some quarters about the crucial role that IT can play in the overall development of a country. Development is a complicated process, which involves not only economic aspects, but also social, economic, political, scientific and commercial activities. The major challenge facing the bureaucracy and official sys tems is not to permit any change over the period of time in IT.

They fear new technology on account of three main factors:

i. With the introduction of e-panchayat, the bureaucratic set up and other allied systems will become more transparent.

ii. The hierarchical organizational structure will be replaced by a more flattened one. The rule of the day or "Yes Boss" culture will no longer survive the way it is today.

iii. The implementation of new technology will render some important human resource element unemployed.

Of late, there has been a popular approach in politics to talk about decentralized and grassroots democracy. Power to people and their participation in decision-making process at the grassroots level are, indeed, two basic components of decentralized development. Development planners must admit the political scenario and emerging trend of rural transformation that covers a shift of political power to the weaker sections from the traditional ruling class and then judiciously measure the amount of devolution of power being shared by the Panchayati Raj institutions. There is no doubt that the constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 reflects the voice of people empowering them to participate in formulating plans, executing it and monitoring

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the process of goal realization. Delegation of powers and level jumping can also lead to greater efficiency. Simplification of office procedures, standardization of job, output and introduction of appraisal by result would help in boosting efficiency.

One of the basic requirement of good governance is responsive administration, which in turn depends on:

  i.   delegation and devolution of authority and responsibility.
  ii.   adherence to clearly defined ethical standards.
  iii. process of consultation and participation in decision-making.

In the present times, the use of information and communication technologies in e-panchayat is being practiced. However, e-panchayat should not be viewed as a mere technological initiative, but as a part of the process of governance. The prime objective of any technological innovation is to improve the quality of human life. This can be achieved not only by the technological advances, but by successfully assimilating these technological innovations into the human society.

E-panchayat may be defined as the delivery of panchayat services and information to the public by using electronic means. These technologies enable the Government to transform its relations with its other wings, citizens and businesses. Such an exercise leads to better delivery of Government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information and a more efficient Government management. The resulting benefits can be lesser corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and/or cost reductions. With emerging information and communication technologies it is possible to locate service centres closer to the public.

The process of e-panchayat should be understood not only in terms of the analytical or technical dimension, but also in terms of behavioural and organizational dimensions. The analytical aspects of the process revolve around the activities such as information. The behavioural aspects may be analyzed in terms of the abilities of the individuals to interpret the information and develop an understanding of the process of governance. Their motivation, commitment and behavior have a tremendous impact on efficient governance at panchayat level. The organizational aspects encompass the learning capabilities and responsiveness of an organization and the strategic orientation of its top officials. Consistency between the analytical, behavioral and organizational dimensions of process has a substantial impact on the implementation capabilities.

Issues in Implementation of E-Governance

The efforts for e-panchayat have started since the last decade and have gathered momentum in last few years. Faced by initial setback, e-panchayat has often been criticized as being impractical. However, it is now high-time to understand that e-panchayat is a current need and a reality for the developing countries. While implementing e-panchayat, two challenges emerge. First, the strategic challenges of e-readiness. Second, the tactical challenges of closing design reality gaps adopting best practice in e-governance projects in order to avoid failure and to achieve success. Some of the questions to be answered before achieving a successful e-panchayat are:

 (a)   Is the data systems infrastructure ready?
 (b)   Is the legal infrastructure ready?
 (c)   Is the institutional infrastructure ready?
 (d)   Is the human infrastructure ready?
 (e)   Is the technological infrastructure ready?
 (f)   Is the leadership and strategic thinking ready?

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E-governance has become the key to success of governance as well as good governance in this age of knowledge dominant world. India is also prone to adopt e-governance both at 'micro' and 'macro' levels. This is evident from the fact that Government of India has pondered upon to the proliferation of electronic network throughout the country for governance down at the village level through e-panchayts. In its implementation, e-panchayats include the following:

i. **Organizational Approach:** Whenever we talk about governance, it involves organizations which aim at managerment of natural, material and human resources for the well being of the people and also at the optimum level. In turn, an organization becomes an 'information' centric element. There are devices, in an organization, to accrue, store, disseminate and use the information for achieving its goals. Besides, it has been firmly believed by scholars like Karl Deutsch, Talcott Parsons' etc. that an organization entails a communication network for its functioning, may it be human networking or the mechanical networking. But here we are not concerned with the Deutsch's model of communication or information flow. We are here concerned with the making changes in the governance in away we might decide modalities to use ICT for efficient, responsive, simple, transparent and faster pace of Government that minimizes corruption and delays.

ii. **Functional Approach:** The application of ICT in governance can be considered as an 'enabling technology to enhance the performance of governing institutions. ICT take parts in governance in two ways.(i) for critical processes to produce goods and services for the public like information dissemination, registration and licensing process which are re-engineered and automated to its people and (ii) for automating the internal 'back office' processes like payroll, planning processes involved in internal working of organization.

iii. **Social Justice Approach:** Another approach leans towards provision of social justice and encompassing the deprived sections of a society. Good governance has another aspect related to fast growing information and communication technology (ICT). The emerging trends hold promise that political, social and economic priorities could be increasingly based on broad consensus in society and that civil society and various interest groups can directly influence and participate in policy decision making, particularly with respect to allocation of development resources.

The internal workings of Government by processing data. The new model is of the The old model of e-governance was one of information technology (IT) automating information and communication technologies (ICT) supporting and transforming the external workings of governance by processing and communicating data. E-governance should be seen to encompass all ICT, but wealth of new digital connectivity. The advantages of such technology enabled governance are automation, information and transformation, Automation refers to replacing the current human-executed processes which involve accepting, storing, processing, outputting or transmitting information. Various efforts have been made for implementing e-governance and various studies show how developing countries like India, Egypt, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand etc. have improved Government functioning and overcome various administrative and social bottlenecks.

E-panchayat is a reality. We can achieve very high levels of efficient governance if we adopt a process perspective. We have to look across functions and define our aims and objectives. Such as exercise will change the manner in which we look at the things. After this, we should concentrate on the technical side, in which we already enjoy a competitive advantage. In absence of behavioural and organizational dimensions to change, we might not be able to enjoy the benefits of good governance with optimum investment of resources.

CONCLUSION

The e-Panchayat system is a Mission Mode Project by the Indian Government to transform Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) village self-governance units into symbols of modernity, transparency, and efficiency

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through the extensive use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The conceptual ideas center on bridging the digital divide and enabling participatory, citizen-centric, and accountable local governance.

The whole gamut of above discussion can be summed up as the use of ITC at Panchayat level governance with a view to empower the villages with knowledge and information and better service delivery at their demand, for this the internal management of resources within the organization should be appropriate. As such e-panchayat does also require the information network for accruing, storage, analysis and dissemination of the information within the organization.

Democratic governance requires wider people's participation which is possible only if they are properly equipped with information. As such the Governmental organization has to be, by nature, an information intensive organization. Thus democratic governance is an "information centric' process.

Another conceptual dimension of e-panchayat related to function as a vehicle of ensuring citizen's right to information. The right to information empowers citizens with the right to "demand" information and Governments with the duty of "Supply". E-Panchayat can enable the Government to meet its obligation under the right to information by simplifying the delivery process.

As such the e-panchayat becomes 'information receiver', 'information provider'', "service provider' a 'feedback seeker'. In short, it transforms people from 'beneficiary to 'stakeholder'.

Knowledge is not simply esoteric set of data but it is processed, organized and value added set of information. It is essentially oriented to solve problems and facilitates transformation of knowledge into action. Knowledge management is storage analysis, making accessible to all the putting local knowledge to universe and vice versa. Above all, bringing the data base to the needy-both the managers of public affairs and the public themselves is significant function of knowledge management. For the management of knowledge, the information and communication technology be introduced at Panchayat level at the earliest. Now it has globally been accepted that the ICT in governance in poor countries have shown people must have e-readiness, if the ICT is to be used in the governance at the panchayat level. It requires network access, network learning, network society (social values favor use of ICT), network economy (partnership with private stakeholders) and the network policy.

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