UNIT 7 PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: IMPROVING SELF- GOVERNANCE THROUGH ICT

Structure

7.0   LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

• explain the significance of PRIs as self-governing institutions in democratic set up;

• describe the changing role of PRIs;

• identify the need and importance of ICT intervention in local governance;

• highlight the application areas of ICT in PRIs; and

• explain the concept of e-panchayat and its challenges.

7.1   INTRODUCTION

Importance of local governance in a democratic polity can hardly be underestimated. In developing countries local governance institutions not only make democracy more meaningful, but provide much needed participation of the masses in the socio-economic transformation of the nations.

The concept of self-governance is one of the cherished values of Indian society. Self-governing institutions at the grassroots played an important role in ancient India. Self-governing village communities had existed in India even in the times of Rig-Veda. In course of time these village bodies took the form of 'Panchayats,' which means an

assembly of five persons. The panchayats looked after the affairs of the village. It is believed that these bodies were the pivot of administration and centre of social life. Sir Charles Metcalfe, the provisional Governor General of India (1835-36) called the Indian village communities as 'the little republics.' Now days these little republics are known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural areas.

After independence PRIs have come into existence in most of the states since 1959 consequent to the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. The inception of PRIs opened a new chapter in the annals of Indian democracy. In the process of development of the country, PRIs have been playing a vital role as agents of rural transformation. These institutions help in purposeful understanding of the masses and articulation of their responses. Democracy is introduced to grassroots of the country through these institutions. Even the common people of the country are associated with administration through these institutions. Through PRIs, local people not only determine policies but they also guide and control the administration for the execution of these policies. The importance of Panchayati Raj system lies in the fact that it assures expansion of democracy at the grassroots and ensures public participation in development programmes. Therefore, PRIs have become backbone of our democratic set up.

PRIs have undergone many changes especially in its role from the days of the British Empire to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. In the era of globalisation, PRIs right from the village panchayats to the Zilla Parishad have to redefine their roles as that of catalysts and facilitators. Effective and meaningful functioning of these institutions would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of citizens. The World Bank Report 2000 stated that 'development must address human needs directly, that institutions of direct democracy, such as, panchayats should be rooted in processes that are socially inclusive and responsive to changing circumstances'. Therefore, strengthening of PRIs as self-governance institutions at the grassroots level to run the administration of local affairs is much needed for more meaningful democracy. In this context, sincere efforts need to be taken to substantially enhance the knowledge, skills and capabilities of PRIs with the use of ICT. In this Unit an attempt is made to discuss ICT enabled initiatives undertaken in the country to reorient PRIs as self-governing institutions and make them vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India.

7.2   CHANGING ROLE OF PRIs

Democracy does not become meaningful without strengthening the grassroots institutions. Local self-government institutions are those institutions constituted at the grassroots level to administer local affairs. These institutions comprise those representatives who are directly elected by the people at regular interval of time. They are constituted by the Acts of state governments. These institutions fulfill the local needs, relieve the administrative burden, secure economy in administration, promote political consciousness, decentralise power and authority and make democracy a success.

Popular participation and strengthening of local governments are essential to achieve development at the local level. Institutions of governance at the local level have a clinching role in promoting a new equilibrium in rural India. The development machinery at the grassroots level work under the control of PRIs. Prior to 1992, state governments adopted different patterns of PRIs and there was no uniformity in the structures, powers

and functions, election methods, allocation of financial resources etc. of these institutions. Government of India has brought certain reforms in these institutions through 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. This amendment aimed at creating uniform pattern of PRIs in all the states. It devolved a package of powers and functions to the PRIs. These institutions now perform a wide range of functions. This includes maintenance of public streets, proper drainage, electricity supply, lighting, medical relief, construction and maintenance of public toilets, registration of births and deaths, provision of primary education, water supply, maintenance of burial ground, etc. In addition, they are also expected to take up functions, such as, promotion of cottage industries, animal husbandry programmes, pollution control, famine relief, construction of culverts, maintenance of village roads, reading rooms, etc.

The XI Schedule added to the Constitution by the Act lists out 29 subjects to be transferred to Panchayati Raj bodies. They include agriculture, land reforms, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, social forestry, small scale industries, rural housing, rural roads, rural electrification, poverty alleviation programmes, primary, secondary and vocational education; adult and non-formal education, libraries, rural markets, rural health centres, family welfare, women and child development, social welfare and welfare of weaker sections, public distribution system and maintenance of community assets.

The Constitution through 73rd Amendment visualises panchayats as institutions of local self-government. It also devolves the powers, functions and responsibilities to panchayats in respect of 29 subjects to prepare their schemes and development plans and implementation of these programmes of economic and social development. The Constitution enjoins the state government to take steps for devolution of powers and functions to the panchayats to enable them to become 'institutions of self-government'. However, the available information reveals that the process of devolution has not yet been firmed up in most of the states. The extent of devolution of powers and functions is subject to the will of the state legislature. It is found that the steps have been taken in most states on piece-meal basis.

Experience of one decade of implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act shows that PRIs in most of the states have not delivered the services to rural people in accordance with the provisions made in the Act. Although the Act empowers them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice and implement the schemes of rural development as may be entrusted to them including those related to matters listed in the XI Schedule, they failed to become the real institutions of self-governance due to lack of community participation and insufficient capacity in running their activities. Therefore, capacity building measures need to be taken at local governance level to strengthen PRIs. Capacity building may be defined as support or intervention that empowers people, communities or organisation to achieve their objectives. Effective capacity building includes learning by doing, access to resources, facilitation, mediation and training. These measures comprise developing community audit skills, facilitating a strategic plan and phased operational measures and encouraging the monitoring and evaluation of progress.

The challenges before the PRIs in the new millennium are formidable. Infact, these institutions are to transform themselves from being representative political institutions to being community institutions of direct democracy with support from the local community. These institutions have to work within the broad framework of good governance. The

positive challenges of these institutions are preserving democracy at the grassroots, initiating necessary steps for good governance, maintaining accountability and transparency with the purpose of social audit, exploring possibilities for new initiatives or new power equations, civil society activities through partnership with NGOs, achieving women empowerment and developing efficient service delivery mechanisms.

Poverty reduction should be the highest priority mission of PRIs in the new millennium. These institutions have to draw long-term plans for rural development and catalyse public-private partnership to realise them in the areas of health, education, roads, water supply and other infrastructure services. They have to ensure that their administration and functions are accountable to the people to facilitate empowerment.

To meet these challenges a considerable number of ICT initiatives have been undertaken by the Central and state governments since 1990s. These initiatives have vast potential to ensure a more accountable, responsive and citizen friendly PRI. Positive harnessing of ICT can open new vistas for PRIs' efficiency and effectiveness.

7.3   ICT INTERVENTION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: NEED AND IMPORTANCE

Need of ICT Intervention in PRIs

With the passage of 73rd Amendment Act to the Constitution of India, the panchayats in rural areas received the Constitutional legality to function as local self-governments in the third tier of governance. Enormous authority has been given to them for managing their affairs including the responsibility to plan for their areas and collecting revenues for their sustenance. But even after more than a decade of this Constitutional sanction, the third tier governance is yet to take the full shape. The benefits of ICT are sparsely garnered and in general they function in isolation with little participation of the people in their affairs except to cast vote in an interval of five years.

Governance generally means rule of law, openness and accountability. Using ICT in local self-governance can ensure at least the last two components. Through openness, accessibility can be ensured to the citizens to know about 'what is being done, will be done and has been done' by the state and its agencies. At the local level, for example in the panchayats, the common villagers have very little accessibility to the activities of the panchayats, the funds they are getting and the funds they are raising. Despite of being the people's body the panchayats most often fail to be accountable to the local people in true sense of the term. Accountability means that the conduct of government needs explanation whenever citizens demand such explanation.

At the local level, in particular, non-availability of information leads to adhocism in prioritisation of schemes/ programmes, poor decision-making, slow process of making corrections during implementation and narrow participation of people in the process. In rural areas, most of the states have adopted the three-tier panchayati raj structure with village panchayat at the lowest level, block panchayat at the intermediate level and zilla panchayat at the district level. It is desirable that there should be a strong organic link all through the process. The present status of data communication system however, is not so effective. Most of the data generated at gram panchayats of the district are stacked

at the intermediate levels. Again, the flow of information from the blocks (the middle tier) to district is irregular on one hand and inadequate on the other hand because this data transfer is done manually and through human agencies like postal and courier services.

The state level data on varied items can be available in hard form, but it is partially true for district level data. In case of block level too, data on different development indicators are rarely available. For example, there is no consolidated data on infant mortality rate or fertility rate. Along with this there are problems of accuracy and completeness of data irrespective of the locality where they are gathered/ generated. Accredited agencies like Central Statistical Organisation, National Sample Survey Organisation or Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) goes up to the state level only. Though census provides a lot of data but they have a very defined area of operation and are concerned with specific time period only. For local level planning state level data are of little use. As a consequence, there remains large scope for adhocism.

Next is the case for transparency without which governance at the local level remains incomplete. It is expected that local people should have adequate access to the affairs of management of local bodies. The present practice is to convene meetings of gram sabhas twice in a year for sharing the achievements of gram panchayats. This has the Constitutional sanction (Article 243A). But the higher tiers, that is, intermediate and district have no such platform to share the experiences with the local people.

In case of beneficiary oriented programmes, the panchayats at the village and block levels are mainly entrusted with identification of beneficiaries. Though in matter of identification there are limited deliberations, but the list of selected recipients/beneficiaries is mostly not exhibited either in the office of village panchayat or block (intermediate) panchayat for public viewing. This may lead to corruption in the finalisation of the list. In addition to this when the scheme is actually implemented, i.e. at the time of delivery, local people have no channel to get the information regarding expenditure made or quantum of assistance etc. This lack of transparency further leads to corruption and jeopardises the interests of the people and the government. Manifestation of corruption in different forms distorts the policy objectives of the government and acts against the interest of the people. Along with transparency, accountability should also be there for successful governance. At the local level there is little scope for interaction between the people on the one hand and local bodies on the other. As there is no regular channel for effective communication between the local bodies and local citizens, the nature of development is not participatory. Lack of information sharing among the functional departments and the panchayats results in problems of interim coordination.

Importance of ICT in PRIs

Effectiveness of any institution depends on the delivery mechanism and the supportive rules and procedures acting in harmony with each other, so that the institution can discharge the functions and play the assigned role. For keeping in track, the institutions interact and exchange ideas with the stakeholders. The direct stakeholders are to be given importance, structures have to be redefined, and procedures and practices of governance have to be brought closer to people. Local governance should be understood from such a perspective, instead of just being seen as an agent of programme implementation. ICT intervention can facilitate this process.

ICT interventions aid in the process of development by sharing knowledge, increasing productivity, overcoming geographical boundaries and facilitating procedural openness. ICTs lead not only to increase in supply of information with economy and reliability, but also consequently, to better decision-making and innovations. It also leads to demand for greater openness and transparency in operations. It is a powerful tool of empowerment.

ICTs can improve local self-governance of PRIs in three distinct ways:

- it creates 'efficiency benefits' in the policy cycle. By acquisition, transfer and management of complex policy information and data it helps decision-makers in taking informed decisions;

- it improves the delivery of local government services; and

- it gives a facelift to the government civil society interface by increased access to government information and facilitating dialogue and public feedback on government projects and performance.

ICTs play an increasingly important role in helping policy makers and administrators to better manage the provision of public goods and services at the local level. They can enhance basic infrastructure services such as water, sanitation and electricity; speed up the approval and delivery of permits, and provide timely and more relevant response to information requests. Thus, ICT has emerged as an effective instrument to bring masses closer to the government. The Working Group on IT for Masses appointed by the Centre perceives ICT providing a unique and new opportunity to address age-old problems in the field of education, health, rural development, poverty alleviation, employment, etc. and to be a major facilitator for information transparency, good governance, empowerment, participative management and grass-root democracy.

Experiences of developing countries like Chile and Uganda encourage us to use ICT for the benefits of rural masses. Based on the experiences of these countries following four aspects can be delineated pertaining to the role of ICTs:

- empowerment of people through their wider participation in planning, implementation and management of programmes;

- transparency and probity by exhibiting the transactions, progress of work, future plans and actions and thus allowing access of the common man;

- increased effectiveness and efficiency of services provided directly by government and its agencies; and

- enhanced coordination within the different segments of the functional departments of the government.

7.4   ICT IN PRIs: APPLICATION AREAS

ICT application has vast potential to ensure more accountable, responsive and citizen-friendly PRIs. Wired PRIs would, not only be more transparent, but also more open to social audit. People can easily register their grievances through e-mail as we see in case of Gyandoot Programme in Madhya Pradesh. Software such as Rural Soft can be used

in monitoring rural development programmes and projects. ICT can also help in reducing the corrupt practices in rural infrastructure development projects undertaken by the PRIs. With the aid of Geographical Information System (GIS) and satellite imagery, a detailed visual record of the projects can be maintained, which can be accessed any time with a click of mouse. Physical verification of the projects would be no more at the mercy of time, but can be done by anybody, from anywhere and at anytime. Thus application of ICT can increase legitimacy and acceptability of the PRIs among its stakeholders.

The 'Working Group on IT for Masses' has recommended the need to re-engineer various services such as those related to local governance at block or panchayat levels through extensive use of ICT. It further suggested that ICT should provide relevant information while fulfilling local information needs of the people. ICT enabled initiatives will help in the successful realisation of powers and responsibilities of PRIs through a lot of information input and their efficient analysis. Therefore, ICT enabled initiatives can play a crucial role in the following areas of PRIs:

- **Participatory Planning**

   Participatory planning needs access to a wide variety of information by the officials as well as the people and civil society. ICTs have the potential to provide comprehensive information and increase the speed and quality of this process. The concept of GIS can be applied to three major sections, namely inventory, analysis and planning. GIS consists of reliable and accurate spatial and non-spatial information on land and land resources. With the help of GIS, Panchayat Resource Mapping can be done, which can help not only in preparation of local plans, but also in consolidation of these plans at district level. Subject to the state laws, PRIs have the responsibility of agriculture, including agricultural extension, soil conservation, social forestry and farm forestry; all of which needs the aid of GIS and remote sensing data for efficient and effective performance.

   At the implementation stage, application of ICT can lead to better resource mobilisation and deployment, manpower management and technical support. ICT can make quick, comprehensive and transparent impact-assessment possible, which can enable better implementation of the projects and plans. Thus, ICT makes decentralised and participatory planning a smooth and simple affair and helps in realising its inherent benefits, i.e. efficiency, equality and empowerment.

- **Taxation**

   Subject to state laws, the PRIs can levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. Experience of integrating ICT with the Central and States' tax administration shows more revenue collection and less corruption. The same can be replicated with tax administration and fiscal planning of PRIs.

- **Education**

   Subject to state laws, primary and secondary education, vocational education, adult and non-formal education and technical training are the responsibility of the PRIs. Panchayat centres equipped with ICT tools and services can become major hubs for educating people on a mass scale. ISRO has launched Edusat- world's first satellite

dedicated to education to enable radio and TV broadcast, internet based education, data broadcasting, talk-back option, audio video interaction and video conferencing. This will be real-time interactive learning available 24 hours a day. By spending around Rs. 2 lakh for infrastructure, the PRIs can have access to Edusat facilities and take education to the doorsteps of the rural and disadvantaged sections.

- **Training**

  Training of numerous functionaries as well as elected representatives has emerged as one of the most challenging areas in the effective functioning of the PRIs. Training is not one time process; rather it needs time-to-time administering on the recipients. Developing appropriate training module needs expertise. ICT can help in easing the difficulties faced in the area of training through District Panchayat LAN (for local contents), internet, video conferencing, etc. It can also provide cyber platform to share variety of panchayat related experiences from across the country.

7.5   E-PANCHAYAT PROJECT: ANDHRA PRADESH

ICT-enabled PRIs or e-panchayat does not mean merely computerisation of backroom offices, but encompasses a wide range of activities and actors. This can result in 4-dimensional interface namely:

- P2P: Panchayat to Panchayat
- P2B: Panchayat to Business
- P2G: Panchayat to Gram Sabha
- P2E: Panchayat to Employees

P2P (Panchayat to Panchayat) interface may involve sharing of data and conduct of electronic exchanges amongst different tiers of the PRIs. This also may entail horizontal information sharing with other agencies in their geographical jurisdiction. District Panchayat LAN would connect the PRIs at the district, block and village level and the district would be connected to higher levels of the governments through the internet. District Management Information System (DMIS), based on bottom-up approach would utilise the LAN. P2P interface would help in better coordination of resources, comprehensive planning and effective implementation.

P2B (Panchayat to Business) interface may involve sale of PRIs' goods to the public as well as procurement of goods and services by them. This would require the maintenance of electronic catalogues for purchasing, electronic tender floating and displaying the award and terms of the contract on the net. This may lead to improved transparency and accountability in the transactions of the PRIs.

P2G (Panchayat to Gram Sabha) interface is the foremost objective of e-Panchayat. Generally, P2G interface is thought to be confined to information related with schemes, procedures and forms. But this would be the first level of P2G interface. In the next level, the members would try to obtain information about various rules and laws. After this, efforts to know about the facts related with fund flows would be made. People would start questioning the decisions and their rationale. E-panchayats can help in realising these

goals of information dissemination, transparency and accountability and make P2G interface a potent weapon of democratic decentralisation.

P2E (Panchayat to Employees) interface can cover work guidelines, rules and regulations, salary structure and training modules. The local government functionaries including elected representatives are expected to know about Panchayati Raj Act, numerous rules framed under them and various orders issued by diverse governmental agencies. ICT enables accessibility to such updated documents thereby enhancing decision making by PRIs.

E-panchayat is a software product conceptualised, designed and developed by National Informatics Centre, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, as a part of e-governance initiatives. At present, it is being implemented in 450 gram panchayats in the State with an investment touching eight crore rupees. E-panchayat has been designed taking into consideration all the information and knowledge management requirements in a gram panchayat. It covers all information requirements for the village panchayat functionaries and rural citizens. The Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, success stories of gram panchayats in the country, Government orders pertaining to village secretariats and functions of the village secretary and elected representatives of gram panchayat are included in the e-panchayat software package. Thus, e-panchayat fits well into the information systems at gram panchayat level. The software is web-enabled and citizen-centric.

E-panchayat software in Andhra Pradesh comprises nearly 30 main modules and 150 sub-modules in line with the 30 sectoral functions of the gram panchayats. Some of the important modules are explained below:

Gram Panchayat Administration

This module provides following information and services:

- minutes of meetings;
- schedules of Gram Sabhas;
- agenda update;
- certificates and licences;
- bill payments;
- attendance monitoring of Panchayat functionaries;
- gram Panchayat meetings management;
- gram Panchayat cleanliness monitoring;
- registration of births/ deaths/ marriages, etc.;
- issue of trade licences;
- pension schemes management system;
- self-help groups and other villagers welfare schemes management system;
- assets management, property tax assessment and management;
- property lost/found reporting system;
- law and order management system;

- encroachments checking and monitoring module;

- government orders searching and retrieval system;

- village statistics maintenance and reporting system; and

- intensive sanitation management information system.

Agriculture

This module:

- facilitates educational services on the best agricultural practices to enhance the yield and reduce expenditure and enhance the quality of produce for the farmers;

- facilitates agriculture and related departments to provide season-specific, region-specific information services to the farmers;

- enables elected representatives of gram panchayats to manage farmers' grievances;

- enables gram panchayat secretariat to report the details of agriculture production of the village; and

- offers counselling services to the farmers by agriculture experts.

Irrigation and Water Conservation

This module:

- provides information on irrigation canals to the farmers;

- facilitates education on various water harvesting and conservation schemes;

- enables reporting of problems on pipelines, canals, etc. and subsequent review of problems by Sarpanch (or the head of Panchayat or Village Council); and

- facilitates the appraisal of the status of water cess payments and reporting on the dues.

Elections

This module provides the following information services:

- registration of voters;

- objection to voters list;

- elected representative information;

- publication of electoral rolls; and

- dissemination of electoral rolls.

Housing

This module provides information on:

- low cost housing techniques;

- application for housing scheme; and

- loan recovery status

Adult Education

This module provides information on:

- enrolment of adults;

- schedule of education programmes;

- training kits for adult education;

- feedback on education programmes; and

- status monitoring

Cultural Programmes

This module provides information on:

- enrollment of artists;

- training of artists;

- schedule of programmes; and

- information on opportunities

Women and Child Welfare

This module extends information services on:

- immunisation schedules;

- nutrition programme;

- schedule of camps; and

- counselling by health workers

Social Welfare

Under this module services available are:

- atrocities reporting;

- welfare scheme information;

- inventory of handicapped persons;

- donors information;

- counselling; and

- application for schemes

Village Accounting System (VAS)

Following are the features of VAS:

- cash transactions;

- bill receipts;

- ODs and cheques receipts;

- automatic challan submission;

- treasury payments;

- classified accounts;

- all kinds of taxes and fee collections;

- cheques/DDs reconciliation; and

- reports (Daily collection report)

Feedback studies confirm the satisfaction of rural people with the functioning of e-panchayats in the State. E-panchayats have facilitated the implementation of right to information at the village level. They have equipped the rural folk with comprehensive and updated information thereby ensuring transparency in local governance.

7.6 E-PANCHAYAT: CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Some of the challenges in the effective implementation of e-panchayats are mentioned below:

- there is lack of adequate infrastructure that creates regional imbalances;

- the input cost in networking of PRIs is very high;

- there is shortage of software and quality content in regional languages; and

- due place to traditional folk media is not accorded.

E-panchayats should be based on ethnocentric, need-based and bottom up approach. They have to steer clear of these limitations to accomplish the constitutionally mandated goals.

7.7 CONCLUSION

In the process of development of the country, PRIs have been playing a vital role as agents of rural transformation.

In the era of globalisation, PRIs have to redefine their roles as that of catalysts and facilitators. Therefore, sincere efforts need to be taken by these institutions to enhance knowledge, skills and capabilities through ICTs. ICT initiatives lead to greater openness and transparency in operations and empower PRIs as self-governance institutions. ICT initiatives can be applicable in the areas of participatory planning, taxation, education and training, and service delivery.

Further, electronic knowledge-based panchayats, that is, e-panchayats aim at equipping rural people with comprehensive and updated information and ensure transparency in governance. In other words, e-panchayats have strengthened participative democracy at the grassroots.

However, applications of ICT to the PRIs have to address to certain crucial factors-regional imbalances, resources, software development, and high cost- to facilitate rural development and self-governance in the country.

7.8 ACTIVITY

1) Let us know about experiments in e-panchayat in other states of India and their experiences.

2) List out some of the software developed for rural applications in the country.

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7.10 ANNEXE

12,600 Village Panchayats to be Computerised this Year in Chennai Second Phase of the Programme to Kick off Shortly

As part of its efforts to take Information Technology enabled administration and e-

governance to villages, the State Government proposes to computerise all 12,618 village panchayats in the current year.

Till date, 1,113 village panchayats have been provided with computers. They were covered in the first phase of the computerisation programme launched in October 2004. In the first phase, 385 panchayat unions, 29 offices of Assistant Directors of Panchayats in the districts and the Directorate of Rural Development were also covered. The total cost was Rs. 10.37 crore.

The second phase, scheduled to be taken up shortly, will cover 5,409 village panchayats. Orders have been placed with the Electronics Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited (ELCOT). Last week, it informed the Rural Development Department that the supply would be made by the first week of November. The village panchayats have been identified and Rural Development officials have advised them to keep buildings ready for installation of computers.

In the current phase, apart from around 5,400 panchayats, the Local Fund Audit Department will also be computerised. The cost is estimated at Rs. 28 crore.

Funds for the two phases have been provided from the 11th Finance Commission grants.

The Rural Development Department has also initiated steps for the third and final phase. Proposal has been sent to the Government for sanction of about Rs. 32 crore to cover the remaining 6,096 village panchayats.

An elaborate training programme is being given to panchayat Presidents and officials. A web-enabled software, designed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), in consultation with the Comptroller and Auditor General, is being used for maintenance of accounts of Panchayat Raj institutions.

Asked how the village panchayats were making use of the computers, the officials said the response was encouraging. Of 1,113 panchayats covered under the first phase, nearly 900 were using computers for data entry.

T. Ramakrishnan
October 10 2005, The Hindu