

# Performance of Digital Governance and Panchayath Raj Institution in India: E-Governance Initiatives

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## Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on digital governance in India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which aims to decentralize administration and improve the efficiency of rural service delivery. Digital governance has emerged as an important instrument for transforming grassroots democracy through enhanced transparency, accountability, and digital inclusion. The integration of digital technologies into rural governance has strengthened decentralized administration and improved the delivery of public services at the local level. Major initiatives such as e-Gram Swaraj have streamlined planning, budgeting, and accounting processes within Panchayati Raj Institutions, thereby improving administrative efficiency and financial transparency. Similarly, the Svamitva Scheme utilizes drone-based mapping technology to issue digital property cards to rural households. The scheme promotes accurate land ownership records, reduces property-related disputes, and strengthens rural governance through technological innovation.

**Keywords:** Evolution, Role of Digital Governance, Strengthening PRIs, and Digital Initiatives.

## Introduction

Digital governance has emerged as a significant component of administrative reform and democratic decentralization in India. The rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed the functioning of public institutions by improving transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen

Participation. In the context of rural governance, digital governance plays an important role in strengthening the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which form the foundation of grassroots democracy in India. The Panchayati Raj system was established to promote decentralized governance and ensure local participation in rural development. However, traditional administrative practices in rural institutions were often affected by delays, lack of transparency, poor record management, and limited public accessibility. To address these challenges, the Government of India introduced several digital governance initiatives aimed at modernizing rural administration and improving service delivery. Major initiatives such as e-GramSwaraj have enhanced planning, budgeting, accounting, and monitoring processes within PRIs through digital platforms. Similarly, the SVAMITVA Scheme utilizes drone-based mapping technology to provide digital property cards to rural households, thereby improving land record management and reducing property-related disputes. Digital governance in PRIs also contributes to greater transparency, citizen participation, financial accountability, and inclusive rural development. By integrating digital technologies into local governance, the state seeks to empower rural communities and strengthen democratic institutions at the grassroots level.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the evolution and role of digital governance in strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in India.

2. To evaluate the functioning and significance of e-Gram Swaraj in planning, budgeting, and financial management within PRIs.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study adopts a qualitative and analytical research design to examine the role of digital governance in strengthening decentralized rural administration and improving public service delivery. The present study is primarily based on secondary sources of data. The data information has been collected from books, research journals, Karnataka Government reports, policy documents, official websites, dissertations, and credible online databases related to digital governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions in India.

### **Evolution of Digital Governance to PRIs in India**

The evolution of digital governance for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India is a shift from isolated, department-centric computerization to a unified, citizen-centric decentralized digital network. Flagship platforms like the e-Gram Swaraj portal and the Meri Panchayat App have made grassroots planning and fund management fully digital, paperless, and transparent. The digital empowerment of PRIs has progressed in distinct phases over the past several decades:

#### **1. The Foundation Phase (1970s–1990s): Early Digitization and Administrative Computerization:**

Early digitization period, e-governance began with the establishment of the Department of Electronics in 1970 and the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977. It was launch of this satellite-based network laid the groundwork by connecting district headquarters, initiating early data collection and administrative computerization.

**2. E-Panchayat and Mission Mode Phase (2000s–2010s):** The period from the 2000s to the 2010s marked the expansion of digital governance in rural administration through the introduction of the e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP). Following the implementation

of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the Government of India initiated the e-Panchayat project in 2006 to strengthen the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions through digital technologies. During this phase, several software applications and digital platforms were introduced to improve administrative efficiency, transparency, and record management within Panchayati Raj Institutions. Important initiatives included PRIASoft, which was developed to standardize accounting and financial management processes, and the Local Government Directory (LGD), which helped in mapping and maintaining records of PRI jurisdictions.

**3. Integrated Digital Infrastructure (2015–Present):** The period from 2015 onwards represents the phase of integrated digital infrastructure in rural governance, marked by the consolidation of earlier e-governance initiatives and the strengthening of real-time digital platforms within PRIs. A key development in this phase is e-GramSwaraj (2020), which integrates multiple earlier applications into a single platform for planning, accounting, and monitoring of rural development activities. It enables simplified administration and real-time reporting at the Gram Panchayat level. Another important reform is the integration of e-GramSwaraj with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), which facilitates direct online transfer of funds to vendors and beneficiaries, thereby improving financial transparency and reducing delays in fund disbursement. Additionally, the Audit Online (2020) has digitized the auditing process of Panchayat accounts, enabling both internal and external audits.

**4. Spatial Technologies & Real-Time Data (Recent Era):** Under the SVAMITVA Scheme, drone technology has been used to map rural inhabited areas, enabling the creation of accurate property records, property cards, and digital land titles for rural households, thereby helping reduce land-related disputes. Similarly, Gram Manchitra is

a Geographic Information System (GIS) platform that supports Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in spatial planning, monitoring, and visualisation of development projects, improving data-driven decision-making at the local governance level.

## Results and Discussion

### Role of Digital Governance in Strengthening PRIs in India

**1. Decentralized Planning & Budgeting:** Platforms such as e-Gram Swaraj allow Panchayats to plan, execute, and monitor their Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) online. This streamlines accounting, budgeting, and auditing processes.

**2. Transparency & Accountability:** Geo-tagging and digitizing public works ensure that the utilization of funds is visible. This drastically reduces financial leakages and ensures greater monitoring of asset creation.

**3. Enhanced Citizen Participation:** Applications like the Meri Panchayat App enable rural residents to easily access Panchayat budgets, meeting agendas, and project tracking information on their mobile devices.

**4. Digitized Gram Sabhas:** Portals like Panchayat NIRNAY modernize village-level meetings. They facilitate the scheduling of meetings, advance citizen notification of agendas, and keep digital records of decisions made.

### Functioning and Significance of e-Gram Swaraj in PRIs

In this study, e-Gram Swaraj is a comprehensive e-governance platform launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to digitize and streamline the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across India. It serves as a single-window solution for decentralized planning, budgeting, work-based accounting, online payments, and asset management.

**Functioning of e Gram Swaraj:** The portal (accessed via the e Gram Swaraj Portal) drives the entire lifecycle of local governance through several integrated, functional modules:

- **Planning (GPDP):** Enables Gram Panchayats to formulate and upload their Annual Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) online, ensuring local needs are met through structured, participatory planning.
- **Work-Based Accounting:** Acts as a simplified financial accounting system that tracks expenditures maintains digital vouchers, and records physical and financial progress simultaneously.
- **PFMS Integration:** Integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), it enables real-time, digital payments to vendors and service providers, completely bypassing paper-driven and cash-based processes.
- **Asset Management:** Maintains a digital directory of assets created under Panchayat plans, including geo-tagging for spatial tracking and monitoring.
- **Audit & Reporting:** Synchronized with the Audit Online application, it facilitates online audits and generates dashboards and reports that are publicly accessible without the need for a login.

### Significance in PRIs:

- **Enhanced Transparency & Accountability:** By digitizing vouchers, expenditures, and budgets, the platform drastically reduces leakages and corruption, providing real-time traceability of funds.
- **Empowered Decision Making:** It centralizes data, giving higher authorities and local representative's instant analytics on project statuses and fund utilization.
- **Citizen Empowerment:** Citizens can easily view where government funds are being allocated, what assets are being developed, and the status of ongoing village projects, fostering active participation in grassroots democracy.
- **Inclusive Governance:** The portal supports operations in over 22 Indian languages and utilizes AI-powered tools (such as Sabha Saar) to transcribe Gram Sabha discussions directly into structured minutes.

This ensures the platform is highly inclusive and usable at the last mile.

Through these mechanisms, e-Gram Swaraj is strengthening the digital backbone of rural development in India by improving administrative efficiency, enhancing transparency, and ensuring financial discipline at the grassroots level.

### **E-Governance Initiatives in PRIs: Progress and Growth**

E-governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is driven by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's flagship e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP). Key actionable platforms include eGramSwaraj for unified planning and accounting, Gram Manchitra for geo-spatial planning, and the Meri Panchayat App for direct citizen engagement.

- ✚ **e Gram Swaraj:** A simplified, work-based accounting application that streamlines planning, budgeting, and online payments. It is integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), allowing for real-time fund tracking and vendor payments.
- ✚ **Gram Manchitra:** A Geographic Information System (GIS) application that facilitates spatial planning and geo-tagging of assets for Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP).
- ✚ **SVAMITVA Scheme:** Uses drone technology to map rural populated lands, providing property cards to rural households to minimize land disputes and enable asset monetization.
- ✚ **AuditOnline:** An application designed to facilitate the internal and external audit of Panchayat accounts, bringing financial transparency and accountability.
- ✚ **Meri Panchayat Mobile App:** Empowers citizens with transparent access to local government data, GPDP progress, and ongoing developmental activities in their villages.
- ✚ **SabhaSaar:** An AI-powered tool used for recording, transcribing, and summarizing the proceedings of Gram Sabha meetings.
- ✚ **Local Government Directory (LGD):** A standardized directory that maps out local

government entities and jurisdictional boundaries across states.

### **Conclusion**

The performance of digital governance in strengthening PRIs in India demonstrates a significant shift towards transparent, efficient, and accountable rural administration. E-governance initiatives have strengthened decentralized governance by improving planning, financial management, service delivery, and citizen participation at the grassroots level. Key platforms such as e-GramSwaraj, the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), and SVAMITVA Scheme have collectively improved transparency, reduced delays in fund allocation, strengthened property rights documentation, and enhanced accountability in rural governance. However, the overall impact of digital governance in PRIs has been positive, contributing to more efficient service delivery and stronger grassroots democracy. In conclusion, e-governance initiatives have become a transformative force in strengthening PRIs in India, promoting inclusive rural development, and reinforcing the principles of good governance at the local level.

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