

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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There is no gainsaying the fact that the development and progress of all the constituents of a nation are necessary for its overall development. Almost 75 per cent of the population of our country lives in villages. The development of rural areas is, therefore, a must for the overall development of the country.

Even in the present century, people in many rural areas are forced to live in conditions of extreme poverty. Governed by superstitions, they are an ignorant, a lot living under utter inhuman conditions confronted with total lack of medical and other infrastructural facilities. Therefore, besides meeting the fundamental needs of water, food, education, medical facility of the rural people, the socio-economic development of villages is also necessary. Certainly, it can play an important role in fulfilling this task.

In the communication and dissemination of information, the print and electronic media have a definite role. While newspapers and small and big magazines come under the category of print media, radio and television fall under electronic media. In the communication of information, computers and internet have an up role to play. Through e-mail just sitting at home, one can get

news and information from any part of the country and even from abroad. The entire information can be obtained through the world wide web (www) at the click of the mouse.

There is no denying that in rural areas, education must be given the first priority. The uneducated rural people not only become easy victims of superstitions but they also remain cut off from the means of development around them which can help emancipate them and improve their quality of life. It is through education that awareness may be created among the masses so that they do not fall prey to superstitions, miracles and mumbo-jumbo. Education has also a role in changing their mindset so that they come out of their age-old views, customs and traditions.

The availability of medical facility and family welfare schemes for the rural people is also a dire necessity. The IT may play an important role in the field of information in matters relating to agricultural schemes and crop technology. Through IT, the farmers may be educated about new fertilisers, pesticides and improved agriculture-related tools and artefacts. Also, they can be told about the availability of improved high quality seeds. Through IT, they can also be

educated about various crop diseases and the ways and means to safeguard their crops against those diseases. Not only this but updated information about animal husbandry, dairies, sugar and cotton produces etc., can be provided to the farmers through IT.

The market price of crops, vegetables, etc., prevailing in the various parts of the country may also be made available to the farmers through internet so that they are seized of the competitive market and may plan the sale-purchase of agricultural produces accordingly. In the sale and purchase of agricultural produces, there can be extended benefits of e-commerce as well.

Through IT, forecast about weather can also be made available to the farmers so that they can plan the sowing and harvesting of their crops accordingly. Moreover, in times of drought, the information regarding the beneficial crops to be sowed may also be made available to them.

The villagers may also be given the advance warning of the happenings of natural calamities like earthquakes, flood, drought, cyclones, etc., so that timely action may be taken and the avoidable loss to life and property may be averted.

In the social development of villages too, the role of IT may not be undermined. In mass awareness programmes, IT may play an important role. The importance of democracy and the role of franchise may also be highlighted to the villagers through IT.

The IT, therefore, seems to have an important role in the all-round development of villages. But, how can the benefit of IT be passed on to farmers and villagers? In the dissemination of information to

its consumers viz., farmers and villagers, internet and multimedia may indeed prove very useful. As is well known, multimedia involves the combination of text, graphics, audio-visual and animation, etc. In fact, multimedia computing has now become an independent branch of IT.

Needless to say, in educating rural masses and in mass awareness programmes multimedia has an up role to play.

With a view to taking the benefits of internet and multimedia to the villages, it is necessary that information centres should be opened there. The management of these centres may be done at the village panchayat level. By imparting proper computer training, the rural youth may also be given the responsibility of running these centres. In this way employment opportunities may also be created in the villages.

Thus, through the use of internet and multimedia the e-governance of villages can be started at the panchayat level. Centres at panchayat level may be opened in different villages which may be connected by internet to each other and to the district headquarter. Through these centres, the village folks can send their grievances to the district administration. They can also get any information from the district level at a much faster speed.

Computerisation of land records has, of late, been done in some States including Madhya Pradesh. This has not only facilitated ready collection of revenue by the district administration but has also come as a great help to the village folks. Earlier, the handwritten land records used to be maintained by *patwaris* and other workers. However, timely updating of these records was seldom carried out which created hassles for

extending credit to the farmers. But, now the availability of systematic land record in computerised form has come to the rescue of farmers. Indeed, this is a glaring example of the application of IT in rural development.

It is now becoming possible for any villager to get the revenue record from the district administration directly through the village panchayat without even bothering to visit that district. Only some minimum fee amount is required to be paid for availing this facility. Earlier, the farmers had to personally visit the revenue department situated in the district and had to appease the authorities to procure the information needed by him. Besides wastage of time, this procedure entailed lot of unnecessary

expenditure too. But now, thanks to IT, the villager can get all the information expeditiously through village panchayats only. Besides saving time and money, this procedure also does away with the practice of corruption.

Thus, the IT may be used to advantage in a variety of ways for rural development. Through information centres at the village level or directly through the centres run by gram panchayat, the village folks may readily get all the necessary information. However, the modern information and communication technology has an edge over the traditional print and electronic media as information can be carried at a much faster speed to its real consumers, e.g., villagers and farmers.