# The Municipal chairman who manages business like an American
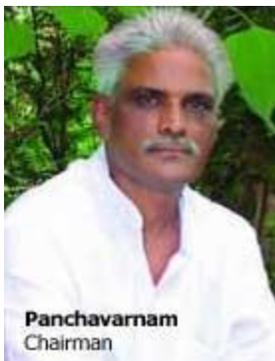
## Hi-Tech Punruti

*Punruti is a town in Cuddalore district of tamilnadu.*



Panruti Corporation Office

Entering Punruti corporation office in Punruti feels like entering a multinational software company. Though a government body, everything is clean and well-maintained right from the garden around with light-grass and trees.



Panchavarnam
Chairman

The head of this corporation office is Panchavarnam a man in his 60's. A congress party member and elected chairman of the corporation since 1996.

All employees in the office wear uniforms.. and everyday they put their finger on a finger-print identification system for marking their attendance to the office.

(...I stress here to the reader that you are still reading about a government office and the government employees here.)

The attendance system other-than identifying the person by his fingerprint, notes down time of reporting to work, calculates whether the person is late. If a person is late by a minute they are still late to office, and if they are late by 30 minutes, the system doesnt identify them and marks them absent for the day.

Not just employees of the office, but also the vehicles that the corporation owns are identified by tags attached to them. Every vehicles IN and OUT times, the driver of the vehicle, are all recorded by the system.


An employee terminal

Very unlike a government office, there are no dust-laden files on any desk, and every employees desk has a computer and adjacent desks are separated with dividers.

"Not just in looks, but we are better and professional in our work also", says chairman Panchavarnam, the man behind all these differences and professionalism at work in the panruti corporation office (my terms government office).

While he is from congress, no councillor of the wards under the corporation is from the same political party. Still everyone works as per his plans since he has got huge respect from the local people for all the efforts he has taken. There can be no complaints here like 'somebody did a scam on all the money paid as tax by people', 'they are making us come again and again to get a copy of a lost birth or death certificate', etc., Because everything in this office is transparent.

There is a search desk computer in the reception of the office where people can search the presence of records in the office on birth / death certificates, water tax/house tax dues, and a lot of other information.

People can pay the tax dues in a nearby counter and get the receipts immediately. While the employee at the counter is making the tax receipts a parallel screen towards the payer announces whether the person is typing the tax amount and name properly into the system. This avoids scams like the cashier typing a lower amount or different name and later making an amount for himself.



Further more, people don't have to come to the corporation office to use the search desk to find information. They can SMS through their mobile phones, their water tax id

for example to the corporation number, and receive information as a reply SMS from an automated system .. The automated messaging system is provided to the corporation office, by the communications company AirCel.

A new water connection, house plan approval are two known processes that take a lot of time in other corporation offices, sometimes there are people who even wait for years for these approvals. But in Panruti corporation office, it takes a maximum of 1 week.

And there are specific notifications of maximum period within which the service will be provided to consumers, delay more than this period will attract an issue escalation within the office hierarchy. So, people aren't complaining about things since they have been taken into confidence that this is not a normal corporation office and they mean serious business here.

All this looks like a dream for an Indian to see in a government office. But all this thankfully is real in Panruti.

**How did all this happen.. how long did it take.. who are behind it**

"It took 8 years for me", says Panchavarnam the chairman.

"I didn't know anything when I started as the chairman here. The officials used to call a meeting, propose a decision, make the decision and go ahead. I felt left out. When people ask questions I couldn't answer since I had no information. Things like "the ledger is missing.. or the officer incharge is on leave.." were being told to poeple.

"I am not highly educated. Earlier I didn't know anything about computers. Friends used to tell me that all these information can be computerized and things can be automated. Then, with the help of a software engineer SethuShankar I started the work.

"I didn't go to the government for help. We prepared templates for certificates and forms for every process to help computerization. Now I almost know every statistic about this town Panruti. The births and death records for the past 30 years are done. People who lose their old certificates come here to get them in minutes and leave happy without having to do a panic search or run to every desk for processing.

"Contracts assigned to different contractors by the corporation are all recorded. I have a board in my room displaying the same. This transperancy gives faith and confidence to the people who come here.


Board in chairman's room

"Like this I once started displaying the number of phone calls made or received by the office, and the cost incurred. This drastically reduced the calls and the bill amount from the immediate months.

"I have asked the people not to meet any official in the office separately. Only when they meet someone individually can there be a possibility of scheming. People can give a request or petition and they can get the requested certificates in a short time. Also, when there is a maximum period notified to the consumer within which the corporation will make sure the certificates are issued, why would anyone try to force a quick response by bribing.

"All these information is also available through Panruti website. (Unfortunately, the article didn't report the website's name..)



"I designed all certificate and form templates free of charge for the corporation. Also helped them computerize record collection. In my knowledge, any corporation office in Tamilnadu can use the templates and computerize the process on same lines without having to do it from scratch." says SethuShankar the software engineer who lead the computerization process.

"People from other local corporation bodies, and from world bank have visited Panruti office. Recently, I even had a chance to visit the President of India. I explained everything that we have done in Panruti corporation office, and told him that everything is now happening transparently. He expressed surprise at the work and was thrilled.

"Many local body chairmans have come and visited my office and pessimistically cribbed that all this can never happen in their office. Even I thought all this won't be possible, but when I made efforts slowly things became possible and I could make the change.

"I advice everyone that all this can be done, and request them to try it gradually in their office. Wherever there's an internal corporation meeting, I go there and talk about the work we have achieved in Panruti, expecting people to get interested to try it in their

offices. But a long time worry is nobody wants to try all this.", says panchavarnam sadly.

**Future plans:**

Panchavarnam has a list of things to do in next few months for Panruti. Looking at the list itself makes one feel jealous of people of Panruti for having been blessed with such a chief for their corporation.

**Land survey:**

Panchavarnam plans to draw a survey map of everybody's land assents in the town and record this data with detailed information. This will stop people fighting with each other on their land conflicts, or going to the police to complain on the conflicts. All they will have to do is use the search desk and find the coordinates of land area marked under their ownership.

**Consolidated ID card:**

All people in panruti are being given ID cards with their name, blood group, their water tax number, house tax ID, passport, driving license, bank account numbers, electricity connection number, gas connection number, and all sorts of information linked to one corporation ID number. (Sounds similar to a social security number implementation in America)

**Insurance**

Also, all people of Panruti are being brought into an insurance cover, of Rs.10,000 per head. This would cover every person from a 3-month old to a 70-yr old. The cost of premium for each person has been calculated to 3.40Rs, which the chairman and the members of the corporation have planned to bear as costs.

**Trouble ticket number:**

(sounds like the online helpdesk concept.. very similar to that) Hereon, any complaints filed at the corporation office will be given a trouble ticket number. This enables the compalinant to know the status of the complaint and the action taken by just sending an SMS through his/her mobile phone with the ticket number. People who don't have mobile phones can search the information with the ticket number at the corportaion's search kiosk or search desk.