

ICT and E-Governance in India

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Abstract: the revolution in the Information and Communication technology has brought a new agenda for governance in India. The advent of budget smart phones and availability of data packages in cheapest price has given a greater scope for the citizens as well as government machineries to utilize the benefits of e-Governance. With the introduction of Digital India scheme, India is witnessing a transformational digital revolution with the promises to reshape the social, economic, cultural and political landscape of the country. It promises to transform India into a digitally empowered society by focusing on digital inclusion, digital literacy, and easily accessible digital services. However, the e-governance could not reach to all the sections of people especially in rural India. In rural India there are certain infrastructural as well as cultural barriers to achieve the goals of e-Governance. Therefore, the government needs to address those issues and also it should make the service transfer machineries user friendly among those people. For the success of e-governance through ICT, the government needs to create a work culture of maintaining, processing and retrieving the information through an electronic system and use that information for decision making.

Keywords: ICT, e-Governance, Digital India, Good Governance.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The emergence of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has offers a way for faster and better communication, efficient storage, retrieval and processing of data and exchange and utilization of information to its users. ICT has provided enough scope to being used as a tool for processing and tabulating data as an aid in decision making. With the growing computerization and increasing internet connectivity at the cheapest price, this process has presently reached a stage where more and more users are motivated to do their things in an advanced way in order to leverage the advantages provided by ICT. In recent decades, the ICT became one of the major tools of governance through which the government seeks to deliver services to the citizens. The use of ICT in governance can be regarded as a means to promote 'Good Governance'. The advancement of ICT not only enables public oriented governance 24/7, but also enables Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) governance. In recent decades, the governments

either embrace E-Governance or cease to effectively govern. The demand for 'good governance'; slogans for 'paperless office'; cry for transparency and death of secrecy and insistence on right to information can give all that stands for good governance and indeed E-Governance is the other name of good governance (Fadia and Fadia 2008). It includes tools, e-decision making, e-consultation, strengthening two-way channels, structures that encompass all forms between the electorate and the elected. The present study seeks to understand the evolution of e-governance in India and how it has changed the concept of governance in India.

II. METHODOLOGY:

The present study is an analytical one. The secondary sources like books and articles published in different journals and newspapers are being used for this paper. Various government reports are also being used in this paper.

III. CONCEPT OF E-GOVERNANCE:

E-Governance means the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all the processes, with the aim of enhancing government's ability to address the needs of the citizens. The basic purpose of the E-Governance is to simplify the government processes and functions by providing the government related services and utilities 'on-line'. According to the World Bank, e-Governance refers to the use by government agencies of Information Technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and various arms of government resulting in better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resultant benefits are less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and cost reductions (SARC 2008).

According to the second Administrative Report, the e-government aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive. The goals of e-Governance are: a. Better service delivery to citizens b. Ushering in transparency and accountability c. empowering people through information d. Improved efficiency within Governments e. Improve interface with business and industry.

IV. E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

E-governance offers the potential to improve governance through transparency and better access to information about public services. Efficient provisioning of public services and goods hinges upon fast exchange of information between citizens and government agencies,

ICT tools can go a long way in aiding this process. India is well poised to take full advantage of the IT revolution sweeping the globe. It has taken a number of policy initiatives in different areas.

Recognizing the growing importance of electronics, the Government of India established the Department of Electronics in 1970. Following that, the establishment of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977 was the first major step towards e-Governance in India as it brought 'information' and its communication in focus. Needless to mention here that in the early 1980s, the use of computers was confined to very limited organizations. The arrival of personal computers brought the storage, retrieval and processing capacities of computers to Government offices. Hence, by the late 1980s, a large number of government officers had computers; however, they were mostly used for 'word processing'.

The E-Governance initiatives in India took a broader dimension in mid 90's for wider sectoral applications with the major emphasis on citizen centric services. Following this, many states and UT's have also started various projects related to the E- Governance. In order to facilitate the growth of e-commerce, electronic communication through Internet and accelerate induction of IT in critical sectors of the economy, an "Information Technology (IT) Act 2000" has been approved by the Central government of India. The Act provided legal frameworks to facilitate electronic commerce as well as electronic transactions. It aims to recognize electronic contracts, prevention of computer crimes, electronic documentation, digital signature etc. The Ministry also had set up a Centre for e-governance and inaugurated a comprehensive bilingual website, both in Hindi and English, aiming to create better awareness of electronic and information technology.

Another major development that took place in the field of e-governance in India was in 2009. The Government of India appointed a commission of enquiry, called the 'Second Administrative Reforms Commission (SARC)' "to prepare a detailed blueprint for revamping the public administrative system" on August 31, 2005 (Yadav 2009). The Commission released its report on e-governance entitled "Promoting e-Governance: The SMART Way Forward" on January 25, 2009 in New Delhi. The Commission has given a call for making e-governance available to all by the year 2020. Further, it recommended that "A clear road map with a set of milestones should be outlined by Government of India with the ultimate objective of transforming the citizen-government interactions at all levels to the e-Governance mode by 2020" (Yadav 2009).

In 2006, the Government of India launched National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) to make all the government services available to the citizens via electronic media. It is a nation-wide strategic program to transform the country from a government-centric to a citizen-centric paradigm in service provision; to treat citizens as clients rather than beneficiaries of government services; and to empower the citizens to demand and receive convenient, cost

effective and transparent services from the government. As mentioned in the website of Ministry of Electronic and Information Technology (MeitY), “the NeGP takes a holistic view of e-Governance initiatives across the countries, integrating them into a collective vision, a shared cause. Around this idea, a massive countrywide infrastructure reaching down to the remotest of villages is evolving, and large scale digitization of records is taking place to enable easy, reliable access over the internet”¹. The objective of NeGP is to bring public services closer home to citizens. It wants to “make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets, and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable cost to realize the basic needs of the common man”². Initially 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMP) covering various domains were introduced under NeGP. However, in 2011, 4 other projects- Education, Health, PDS and Posts were initiated to make the list 27 MMPs to 31 MMP. The MMPs intend to transform the provision of services in a specific sector or level of government (state, municipality, district, village) to meet service level agreements (SLAs) representing country-wide standards of transparency, efficiency, accessibility and reliability of public service delivery. In the year 2015, the government has initiated NeGP 2.0 or E-Kranti. The main objective of E-Kranti is to ‘Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance’. It aims to ‘ensure a Government- wide transformation by delivering Government Services electronically to the citizens through integrated and inter operable systems via multiple modes, while ensuring efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs’³.

A. Digital India

India jumped one step ahead in E-Governance with the introduction of Digital India programme. Digital India is a flagship programme introduced by PM Narendra Modi to empower India and the Indians with technology. It can be regarded as a transformational initiative incorporating the spirit of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s 2014 Lok Sabha Election campaigning slogan ‘Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas’. It aims to bridge the gap between the digital haves and have-nots. The objectives of Digital India are concentrated on three key areas – Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen, Governance & Services on Demand and Digital Empowerment of Citizens. As remarked by Ravi Shankar, Digital India BRIDGE (Bringing Revolution In Digital Governance and Economy) channelises initiatives like Aadhar, eSign, digital lockers, Aadhaar Pay and BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) to offer citizen-centric services at marginal costs — or zero cost⁴. The Digital India programme pulls together many existing schemes like National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN), National e-

¹ <https://meity.gov.in/divisions/national-e-governance-plan> accessed on 12/11/2019.

² <https://meity.gov.in/divisions/national-e-governance-plan> accessed on 12/11/2019.

³ <https://meity.gov.in/content/e-kranti> accessed 10/11/2019.

⁴ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/e-possibilities-digital-india-e-money-job-bhim-bridge-modi-4798511/>

Governance Plan (NeGP), Common Service Centres (CSC), and transforming these schemes and implementing them in a synchronized manner. It took initiatives like eSign, eHospital, Digi Locker, BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money), UPI (Unified Payments Interface), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), etc. As reported in Financial Express, in India over 3,134 crore digital transactions were done during 2018-2019, according to Digital India's official Twitter handle. From RuPay alone, about Rs 1 lakh crore worth transactions were completed during the same period while the same stood at Rs 8.8 lakh crore via BHIM UPI⁵. Yet, despite being such initiatives, the e-governance could not reach to all the section of people especially in rural India. In rural India there are certain infrastructural as well as cultural barriers to achieve the goals of e-Governance. Besides, the Digital India initiatives also create new kind of challenges to the lower income population. Availability of on-line services of government benefits as well as market services poses challenges to the small-business runners like shopkeepers, vendors etc.

V. IMPACT: BRIDGES OR DIGITAL DIVISIONS?

India's rising experience of ICT initiatives in e-Governance has established significant success in improving accessibility, cutting down costs, reducing corruption, extending help and increased access to un-served groups. In this phase of experimentation, e-government initiatives have reached millions of people belonging to the diverse sections of society. Enhanced access to information and services has indeed afforded the opportunities of economic and social development, assisted participation and communication in policy and decision-making processes and empowerment of the weakest groups. E-governance can mainly be seen as a key element of the country's governance. Besides, ICT can play an important role in strengthening the democratic institutions as information flows can enhance awareness of citizens of their rights apart from enabling their voices to be heard well. Information is an essential leverage tool for monitoring political authorities within the process of democratic governance. In order to help get information out, the citizens can use ICT to monitor public authorities and resources. Further, the use of ICT can also amplify the coherence of information, since it enables citizens to cross-reference and link pieces of information it can make it easier to understand patterns of governmental actions and policies. Finally, ICT can also help lessen the asymmetry of information between elected officials and the electorate, and between bureaucrats and elected officials. Use of open source software, cheap infrastructure based wire-less local loop technologies to provide low-cost connectivity to rural India can reduce the gap between urban-rural, poor-rich by delivering services to door. The e-Governance service reduces the Digital Gap among the citizensof the country.

⁵ Budget 2019: All eyes on Modi 2.0 for 'Digital India' dream after digital payments success
<https://www.financialexpress.com/budget/budget-2019-all-eyes-on-modi-2-0-for-digital-india-dream-after-digital-payments-success/1627150/>

Challenges:

Despite the rapid growth of the Indian software sector, its lack of articulation with the rest of the economy raises serious doubts concerning the ability of low income countries to leverage ICT's in their pursuit of development (Vijaybhaskar, Gayathri 2003). India, being the largest democracy in the world, has much to gain from e-Governance, especially when citizen participation in governance is one of the features of the fully evolved stage of e-government. Implement e-governance is not an easy task for government due to various challenges. One such challenge is illiteracy which can be regarded as a barrier to being a techno-friendly. Although the government is taking initiative in delivering services through technologies, most of the people, especially from the rural areas, have to rely on others. For uploading own data or entering name for availing certain schemes, the people must go to other person who is techno-friendly. In doing so, the beneficiaries need to pay that person for helping in entering data on-line. On the hand, due to high population and diversity in terms of culture and language, enabling e-Governance might become hard for the government. All people could not read English and there are 22 official languages in India, hence it is not an easy task to include all the language in the programming of electronic apps whereas the educational programmes, computer software and the printed texts are generally available only in English. Besides, it has been seen that, sometimes, bad network creates problem for using electronic apps and do the needful for any online services which is also a major challenge. In addition to this, the poor power supply in the rural area is also a major challenge towards achieving e-Governance in India.

Again it is not an easy task to provide online services or schemes in different layers of governments in India. From Panchayat level to Central level, if the Government needs to computerize all its services, it requires huge amount of fund. On the other hand, the lack of appropriate infrastructure creates challenges in enabling the use of ICT for health sector, school Education in rural India is a serious

VI. CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion it is noticeable that the objective of the achieving e-governance and transforming India to a digital India goes far beyond mere computerization of policies and schemes. It is creating not only new opportunities, but also responsibilities. For the success of e-governance through ICT, the government needs to create a work culture of maintaining, processing and retrieving the information through an electronic system and use that information for decision making. The success of the initiatives of e-Governance lies in how efficiently it can enhance people's participation in government activities through the access of ICT, bringing government and services it offers to its citizens, promoting

accountability, transparency, responsiveness and efficiency in government functioning and ensuring that functioning to be better at lesser costs.

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