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A STUDY ON ROLE OF E-GOVERNANCE IN EMPOWERING CITIZENS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Electronic governance or e-governance implies government functioning with the application of ICT (Information and Communications Technology). Hence e-Governance is basically a move towards SMART governance implying: simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance.

This paper deals with the Importance of Digitalization and role of E-Governance in empowering the citizens in India.

Keywords :E-Governance, Digital Governance, ICT, Development

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Government of India has been at the forefront or using technology in different aspects of governance, be it satellite based communication in 1980s or use of electronic messaging much before the advent of internet in the country or even the use of video conference for monitoring the implementation of government programmes and schemes across the country. National Informatics Centre, an attached office of Ministry of Electronics & IT has been closely working with government in provisioning state-of-the-art infrastructure in the form of nationwide network (NICNET), data centers and video conferencing facilities to name a few.

Digital technologies are vital for the inclusive growth of a country like India, which is at the peak of its demographic dividend. The present government is committed to provide governance and services to the citizens in an affordable and efficient manner within the shortest span of time. The only way in which this can be accomplished is through the efficient use of innovation and technology. Presently, digital transformation of India is on an exponential growth path and aiming towards a trillion dollar digital economy by 2025.

What is e-Governance

Countries throughout the world have implemented electronic government or e-Government. E-Governance has become essential in a fast-growing and demanding economy like India. Because of the expansion of digitization, many governments around the world are introducing and incorporating technology into their government processes. The government's use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to offer and facilitate government services, information exchange, communication transactions, and the integration of diverse stand-alone systems and services is known as electronic governance or

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e-Governance. To put it another way, it's the use of technology to carry out government tasks and achieve goals. Government services are made available to citizens and companies in a simple, efficient, and transparent manner through e-Governance. Digital India, the National Portal of India, the Prime Minister of India's portal, Aadhar, online tax filing and payment, digital land management systems, and the Common Entrance Test are all examples of e-Governance.

Citizen friendly initiatives by the government on e-Governance

Digital India Initiative

In 2015, the Digital India Initiative (DII) that is an initiative of 'Digital India' had announced a flagship program by the government and the program aimed at several smartphones to transform India into a digital economy with the participation of both the citizens and business. It promises to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy with high intellectual capital.

The Digital India initiative, in general, aims to assist in achieving the following visions:

- Digital Infrastructure as a utility for every citizen
- Governance and services on demand
- Citizen digital empowerment

In recent years, the government has taken several steps to improve citizen-friendly e-Governance. Because our country has such a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and trait features, some of the projects can be described as "unique to our country."

2.0. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE : CORE OF E-GOVERNANCE

The story of India's digital transformation is one of an Information and Communications Technology (ICT)- led development by use of technology that is affordable, inclusive and transformative. By ensuring digital access, digital inclusion and digital empowerment, the 'Digital India' programme has harnessed digital technologies to bring about a positive change towards good governance that is easy, economical, transparent and efficient governance. In fact, it would be correct to say that digital delivery of services to citizens forms the driving force to the next generation growth trajectory towards a robust and knowledge-based economy. India is now poised for the next phase of growth - creation of tremendous economic value and empowerment or citizens as new digital applications permeate sector after sector.

Digital India has given boost to entrepreneurship and has enhanced access to health, education and public utilities. It has led India to revolutionize e governance by delivering speedy and transparent services to citizens, ensuring their participation and empowering them with the conducive environment to connect and grow.

3.0. KEY COMPONENTS OF DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Digital delivery of services has simplified the way in which the citizens interact with government to avail various services and enhanced the ease of living of citizens. Citizen centric e-Services aim to digitally empowers the society and transforms the economy. Various new citizen centric and transformational digital platforms that have been developed include BHIM-UPI, e-NAM, GSTN, DigiLocker, GeM, e-Hospital, MyGov, UMANG, SWAYAM, Jeevan Pramaan, etc.

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i) **Broadband Highway**

Broadband for All (Rural) aims to provide broadband connectivity by connecting 2,50,000 gram panchayats by optical-fibre cables. About 2,90,162 kilometres of optical fibre have been laid, connecting 1,15,643 gram panchayats. Limited private-sector participation in building infrastructure is a challenge.

Broadband for All (Urban) aims to improve broadband connectivity in urban areas. Guidelines for the grant of unified licenses to virtual network operators (service providers that do not own infrastructure) and spectrum management have been issued. The government is working on guidelines for reforming right-of-way policy and allowing cable TV networks to provide broadband service to increase its availability to the public.

ii) **National Information Infrastructure**

It aims to integrate the country's digital infrastructure to provide high-speed connectivity and cloud platform services to government departments up to the panchayat level besides social sector services like e-education, e-health, e-agriculture, financial inclusion, etc. Currently, a pilot is under way in one district each in five states (Gujarat, Nagaland, Karnataka, Kerala and Uttarakhand) and two Union Territories (Chandigarh and Pondicherry).

iii) **Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity**

It aims to deliver mobile coverage to every corner of the country by 2018. Currently, about 52% of people living in rural areas have smart phones and more than 90% of 597,608 villages in the country have mobile service coverage. Generating demand for mobile services in rural areas is a challenge, which also results in limited participation from private-sector telecoms and internet service providers

iv) **GI Cloud (Meghraj)**

In order to utilise and harness the benefits of Cloud Computing, this initiative aims to accelerate delivery of e-services in the country while optimizing ICT spending of the government. This has ensured optimum utilization of the infrastructure and speed up the development and deployment of e-Gov applications. More than 890 applications are running on 15300 virtual servers.

v) **National Knowledge Network**

National Knowledge Network (NKN) is a state-of-the-art network and is an important step towards knowledge society. Some of the NKN enabled applications are: Virtual Class Rooms, Collaborative research groups over NKN (closed user groups), National Digital Library of India (NDL), National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), various grids (like Cancer Grid, Brain Grid, Climate Change Grid), etc.

vi) **eSign**

Electronic Signature (eSign) service is an innovative initiative for allowing easy, efficient and secure signing of electronic documents by authenticating signer using e-KYC services. Some applications enhancing services delivery are Digital Locker, e-filing Financial Sector, account opening in banks and post office, driving license renewal, vehicle registration, certificates for birth, caste, marriage, income certificate etc. 5 e-Sign providers have been on-boarded and more than 5.89crore e-Signs have been issued.

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4.0. INITIATIVES OF E-GOVERNANCE

Through the applications of digital technologies, the government of India is undertaking specific initiatives to improve the delivery system to ensure that the benefits of the welfare schemes of the government reach directly to the targeted beneficiaries, including the poorest of poor in a convenient manner without any pilferage. Some of them are discussed below:

a) **JAM Trinity for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**

The combination of 32.94 crore Jandhan bank Accounts, 121 Crore mobile phones and digital identity through 122 crore Aadhaar is helping the poor receive the benefits directly into their bank account leading to a saving of Rs. 90,000 crore.

b) **Digital Payments**

The growth of digital payments ecosystem is set to transform the economy. Over the past four years digital payment transactions have grown multifold from 316 crore transactions in 2014-15 to 2430 crore transactions in 2017-18.

c) **UMANG App**

It has put the power of governance in the hands of common people. It is a single mobile app that offers more than 307 government services. The target is to provide more than 1200 digital services on a single mobile app.

d) **Digital Delivery of Services**

It is now easily available to common people through various platforms. Some of them are discussed below:

- **National Scholarship Portal** which has 1.08 Crore students registered with scholarships worth Rs 5295 Crore disbursed in last 3 years.
- **Jeevan Pramaan** for ease of verification of pensioners using Aadhaar digital identity.
- **E-Hospital and Online registration** Services to ensure that patients can get easy access to doctors. Currently it is implemented in 318 hospitals.
- **National Soil Health Card Scheme** was launched in 2015 to provide information on soil health digitally. So far, 13 crore cards have been issued.
- **National Agriculture Market (eNAM)** is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the existing Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. Over 585 markets in 16 states have already been integrated. It has around 93 lakh farmers and 84,000 traders registered.
- **DigiLocker** is now possible to eliminate the need to carry any paper to avail a government service. With more than 1.56 crore registered users, 68 issuers, 27 requesters DigiLocker provides access to over 336 crore certificates in digital format on a single platform.
- **E-Visa services** involve completely online application for which no facilitation is required by any intermediary / agents etc. E-Tourist Visa (e-TV) has been introduced in 165 countries, 24 airports and at 5 Sea Ports.
- **National Judicial Data Grid (e Courts)** has been launched with objective to provide efficient and time-bound citizen centric service delivery, provide

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transparency of Information and access to its stakeholders and enhance judicial productivity both qualitatively & quantitatively. E-court is a justice delivery system which is affordable, accessible, cost effective & transparent. NJDG provides information on cases pending, cases disposed and cases filled for both High Court and District Court complexes in the areas of civil and criminal cases. Information on category wise pending cases and period wise pending cases is also available on the NJDG portal.

- **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** is a transparent online market place for government procurements. It is attempting to increase efficiency and transparency in public procurements.

5.0. CHALLENGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

The following are the challenges towards e-governance in India,

1. Privacy and Security

A critical obstacle in implementing e-governance is the privacy and security of an individual's personal data that he/she provides to obtain government services. With the implementation of e-government projects, some effective measures must be taken to protect the sensitive personal information of the people. Lack of security standards can limit the development of e-government projects that contain personal information such as income, medical history etc.

2. Authentication

It is very important to know the right user of the services or it may be misused by private competitors. Meanwhile, the digital signature plays major role in providing authenticity.

3. Interoperability

Interoperability is the ability of systems and organizations of different qualities to work together. The e-governance applications must have this characteristic so that the newly developed and existing applications can be implemented together.

4. Accessibility

In India, there is still gap arising between users and nonusers; it is because of language barrier, inadequate infrastructure in rural areas, etc.

5. Infrastructure

It is essentially required for implementation of e-governance as much as possible in India. Electricity, internet and poor adaptability of technology will retard the progress of e-governance.

6. Low IT Literacy

Much of the Indian people are not Information Technology (IT) literate i.e they do not have much knowledge about IT. So, in India, having such low level of IT literacy is a major obstacle in implementation of e-governance in India.

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6.0. DIGITAL DIVIDE

It refers to any inequalities between groups or countries measured in terms of access to, use of, or knowledge of ICT. Digital divide inside any country refers to inequalities mainly among individuals and households. The digital divide can exist between those living in rural areas and those living in urban areas, between the educated and uneducated, between economic classes, and on a global scale between more and less industrially developed nations. In India, majority of the masses, who living below poverty line and they deprived of government services. In contrast, some portions of people are immensely using the e-services of government.

However, this gap needs to be made narrow, then only, the benefits of e-governance would be utilized equally.

i) Cost

In developing countries like India, cost is one of the most important obstacles in the path of implementation of e-governance where major part of the population is living below poverty line. A huge amount of money is involved in implementation, operational and evolutionary maintenance tasks. These costs must be low enough so that to guarantee a good cost/benefit ratio.

7.0. WAY FORWARD

Government of India is spending a lot of money on e-governance projects but still these projects are not successful in all parts of India. There are various challenges for the implementation of e-governance in India. Unawareness in people, interoperability, local language of the people of a particular area, privacy for the personal data of the people, digital divide, poverty, illiteracy, cost of implementation, etc. are main challenges which are responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of e-Governance in India.

But in spite of all challenges India has number of award winning e-governance projects. e-governance is getting momentous in India. As the usage of information technology is growing very fast, Indian government is making many efforts to provide services to its citizens through e-governance. And for the future implementation government must take some actions to make the people aware about the e- governance activities so that people may take full advantage of these activities and e-governance projects. The participation of people can play a vital role in implementation of e-governance in India.

Therefore, we can say that e-governance is the key to the 'good governance' for the developing countries like India to minimize corruption, provides efficient and effective or quality services to their citizens.

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