

GOVERNANCE AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN INDIA - A NEW MODE OF GOVERNANCE

Prof. (Dr.) Anupam Sharma¹

¹Deptt of Political Science and Public Administration, Doctor Harisingh Gour University, Sagar, (Central University), Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, INDIA

Abstract

Digitisation has become a great agent for the transformation of society and has proven a big instrument in the economy, politics and social spheres. Most of the countries in the 21st century, focussing the adoption of digital processes in different walks of life. India like other countries started focusing on maximum governance covering citizen-oriented, citizen-friendly simple, swift, transparent and accountable modes of administration (governance). The present research paper analyses how digital initiatives have been ensuring hassle-free delivery of services to the citizens, maximum governance and citizen-centric administration and proving beneficial to achieve the twin objectives of good and maximum governance.

Key Words: digitisation, maximum governance, citizen-centric, governing apparatus and efficiency

I believe the government has no business to do business. The focus should be on Minimum Government but Maximum Governance

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi

The term Governance is comparatively wide and soft replacement of the word administration. It spells out more than the traditional functions and mode of performing these functions that the administration used to spell. In the 21st century, there is no need for maximum administration, the need is only for maximum governance covering citizen-oriented, citizen-friendly simple, swift, transparent and accountable modes of administration (governance). We do not any more say good administration and maximum administration but we simply say good governance and maximum governance because the people and the government perceive them in a different sense. In maximum governance, new development- especially digital technology is being used very effectively and proving beneficial to achieve the twin objectives of good and maximum governance.

Government is not merely a structure or a functioning body in a set pattern, but it is a living organism. It operates in an environment and develops as society and environment develop, hence it keeps on adjusting and readjusting according to the environment in which it operates. The new and most powerful environmental change in the present century is the digital revolution, hence government cannot remain unaffected by this digital revolution. Therefore, the government has started functioning in the changed milieu of digital pre-dominance. The government all over the world as well as in India has started performing its functions through this new revolution of digitisation.

In India, the government has started adapting digital technology in its functioning. Digital technology is a very dynamic technology that keeps on changing day to day level, hence government has to be one step ahead so that it may address the concerns that arise in this dynamic field. India is one of the leading nations in the field of digitisation and the impact is being felt at the grassroots level (<https://www.meity.gov.in/>). Digitisation has revolutionalised the social, political and economic scenario of Indian society and provided a digital platform for all sections of the country connecting nationally and internationally. Digital India increasing accessibility to education, health, agriculture and the Public Distribution System (PDS) along

with governance to people's fingertips. The faith that the public has in government and governance has increased significantly as a result of Digital India. It has also aided in the transparent and corruption-free direct delivery of services to recipients. India has become a world leader in utilising technology to improve the quality of life for its people as a result of this approach (<https://sansad.in/>). According to eGDI, India has jumped 13 ranks from the year 2014 to the year 2022. A total of 22 online services have been assessed for the 2022 Survey, (eGDI) (meity.gov.in).

This rank could be secured due to the application of digital technology in different spheres of the government. The Digital India Program launched in 2015 by the present government has proved a milestone in the journey of e-government. Subsequent initiatives have been taken by the government supporting e-government initiatives of digital government. The application of technology in government's functions has been enhancing quality of digitally delivery of services. The idea of minimum government and maximum governance aims at securing people's participation in the governance of policies and institutions (Gurram 2022). The present government's focus is on a Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, (collective efforts, inclusive growth), minimum government and maximum governance, digital India, executing policies with an impact-strategy, transparent and non-corrupt government, Make in India', and citizen Centric approach, all have been realising through digitisation of government services efficiently. PM Modi said "I strongly believe that technology can and must bridge the gap between the government and the citizens. It is an empowering tool for the citizens and an accountability medium for the government". The citizen-centric e-governance services have been implemented in different states under the e-district project. (<http://www.upagovt.com>). The Government of India is committed to uplifting the deprived sections of society hence it initiated steps for their well-being, especially in the field of delivery of services (<https://desapublications.un.org>).

The present government, first time launched the MyGovt platform, on 26th July 2014 to encourage popular participation in governance by seeking their ideas and suggestions (www.mygov.in) on various issues from bottom to top. MyGov today has more than 26 million registered users (www.mygov.in) interacting with their elected government. Other initiatives such as the Digital India Program, Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDSA) Unified Payment Interface (UPI) etc. have been proving significant tools for transforming India into a digitally and economically empowered society. Digital India's mission has become a way of life, particularly for the poor and marginalised and it has brought a more human-centric approach to development.

Application of ICT in India Government System:

India is a large and developing country with a robust democratic citizen-centric framework guiding its governance (Malhotra, 2018, p. 9). Enhancing this framework, ICTs were considered as a great tool therefore, after the 1990s, the government of India consistently took initiatives for digital citizen-centric administration. Digitization of services as a tool of citizen-centric government was taken first time in India with the internal automation of railway department and public delivery services wherein an online railway reservation system was initiated in the country (irctc.co.in). Subsequently, computers and web-based technology were used in other government departments. Information Technology Act, 2000 came into force for legal sanctity to all electronic documents and other activities carried out by electronic means. The Second Administrative Reform Commission (2nd ARC 2005) in its several reports recommended a technology-based citizen-centric perspective to the governance in the country (<http://darpg.gov.in/arc-reports>). The National Portal of India 2005 (india.gov.in) was the first portal of this type launched to provide online service delivery through a centralized unified

portal. In the same vein, in 2012 second portal called Open Government Data (data.gov.in) was launched to bring more coordination among government departments and ministries.

The National e-governance Plan (NeGP) was formulated by the leading departments such as the Department of Electronic and Information Technology (DeitY) and the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG) with the vision of 'Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance' with 44 Mission Mode Projects. It has been playing an important role in the identification and prioritisation of e-governance projects in the country (<http://negp.gov.in>).

The governments took several initiatives in the journey from e-governance vision to implementation. The institutional mechanism at national and state/UT levels is set up for the implementation of e-governance projects. The Indian government has been moving from e-government to mobile government where delivery of government services are available on mobile sets of the citizens through apps and other electronic platforms. These apps are easily accessible, ensure access to resources without discrimination and provide inclusivity. These mobile apps catering the needs of people in the health, education, safety and security and agriculture fields.

Digital India Program:

The government of India launched nine pillars of the Digital India Program for the digitisation of services. The objective was to create a digitally enlightened society and a modern economy (www.meity.gov.in) by ensuring digital access, digital inclusion, digital empowerment and bridging the digital divide. The overall goal is to ensure that digital technology improve the life of every citizen, expand India's digital economy, and create investment and employment opportunities (<https://sansad.in/>). After launching this umbrella program, various other initiatives like many mobile apps have been started by the government ensuring the success of this digital program. Some of the major facilities available on the digital platform include Aadhaar (Digital Identity), Unified Payment Interface (Digital Payment), DigiLocker (Paperless Governance), UMANG (Mobile Governance), API Setu (Data Exchange), CoWin (Vaccination Platform), Government e-Market Place (Public Procurement), DIKSHA (Digital Education), E-Sanjeevani (Digital Healthcare), etc. (<https://sansad.in/>). The Government approved the expansion of the Digital India programme with a total outlay of ₹14,903.25 crore during the period of 2021-22 to 2025-26 (https://sansad.in). To enhance the skills of government officials, the government of India under the information security and education awareness phase launched capacity-building program. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used in an innovative way.

Digital Technology and Governance in India: ICT ensures a two-way communication protocol, which provides information and services to the people and receives inputs from their citizens. The application of ICT in the governance process is related to the idea of having an efficient, responsive, accountable and transparent administrative system. In the present century, most countries including India, are led by a technology-based governance system. The government of India has taken the following measures to enhance the quality of services through digital technology:

Digitalisation of Agriculture: India is primarily an agrarian economy where a large chunk of the population is still dependent on agriculture. Enhancing agriculture services, mobile services of the government help in providing customized information to the farmers to increase soil productivity and it helps to eliminate of across the supply chain of agriculture produce. The farmers of the country are getting the latest weather information, and take advance decisions

to manage risk associated with their agriculture. A step ahead, mobile apps are also created by the government for the development of the agriculture sector such as the Agrimarket app, which is an application, that keeps updating farmers about the prices of crops in markets within a certain periphery of their current location. Other apps like Plantix App and Kisan Suvidha mobile app becoming great beneficial tools for the farmers of the country. Another initiative like eNAM is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the existing Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities (enam.gov.in).

Digitalisation of Education: Initiatives for enhancing connectivity through technology, education has been focussed under the digital India program and after too. Educational institutions are connected to their students in different ways from admission to results providing. Initiatives like PMGDISHA, National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) and web initiatives including National Scholarship Portal, National Mission for the Education through ICT E pathshala, e-pariksha, and e-basta eliminating the digital divide in the education realm. (Malhotra, 2018, page 15). Students are being provided access to education through online mode and they can complete their credits through online courses. Services like Digi accounts of the students, are mandatory for the students to have their details in Digi lockers. Various online educational platforms from beginning to higher education including digital libraries are set up by the government machinery. Reading material for the students is also available on online platforms. These initiatives bridge the gap of the digital divide and ensure access to world-level classrooms for the marginalised sections. Educational institutions are connected to national and international educational institutions and faculties through educational exchange programs etc.

Digitalisation of Health Services- Health services are also being provided through online mode which enhances the quality of delivery of health services and ensures faceless health services to the needy. Started maintaining online medical records of the patients, online medical consultation to the people and online medicine supply of the services are being done in governmental hospitals. During COVID-19, digital health services in the country reached the next level such as online mechanisms for CORONA vaccinations, data updation through mobile numbers, record maintaining of patients etc. In order to ensure that patients have easy access to doctors, hospitals and online registration services were started. In 2015, a National Soil Health Card programme was introduced to make information on soil health available through digital means. A total of 13 crore cards have been delivered to date. The Direct Benefit System to the beneficiaries is expected to bring transparency and integrity. Recently farmers have been getting government financial support through digital payment and India's digital apps are very popular in India and abroad.

Digitalisation and Financial Inclusion: Digital transactions have reached a good number in the last few years. According to Press Information Bureau, on 19th December 2023, a total digital payment transactions volume increased from 2,071 crore in FY 2017-18 to 13,462 crore in FY 2022-23 at a CAGR of 45 per cent: During the current FY 2023-24, digital payments transactions have reached 11,660 crore till 11.12.2023 (PIB 19th Dec. 2023). Digital payment has made its reach in the remotest areas and this mode of payment is also appreciated and accepted by other countries. Maximum use of digital transactions have been accepted by all and having various modes of payment on their mobile sets.

Digital Payments: The expansion of the ecosystem for digital payments is expected 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. The BHIM app is now one of the most popular digital payment methods for sending, collecting, and paying utility bills.

Other Digital Services : Technology for Planning, disaster management, security and justice, e-Courts, e-Police, e-Jails, and e-Prosecution has been initiated by the government to connect with people and enhance the quality of delivery of services. Video conferencing and other electronic platforms to connect people and provide information have become very common practices in day-to-day administration.

- eVisa: Services of e-Visa involve a completely online application, without the assistance of any intermediary/agents etc. E-Tourist Visa (e-TV) is now available in 165 countries, 24 airports and at 5 Sea Ports. Since the launch of the scheme (November" 2014) more than 41 Lac Visas have been issued.
- eCourts (National Judicial Data Grid): The purpose of these eCourts is to deliver citizen-centric service in an efficient and time-bound manner. It ensures transparency of information and access to its stakeholders and improves judicial efficiency in both qualitative and quantitative terms. E-court is a transparent, affordable, and accessible method of delivering justice. In the judicial sphere, digitisation is proving popular and people-friendly.
- The common people have been given control over governance through other initiatives like UMANG. It is a single mobile application that provides over 307 government services. On a single mobile app, the target is to offer more than 1200 digital services.

Actually, since the citizens are being considered clients and customers of the government services, the mode of rendering services should be changed. Digital technology has enabled the government to render client-oriented service in a simple swift, accountable and transparent manner. Now the clients (citizens) are better served, they can ask for the citizens' charters and can hold the government accountable.

Digital services provide citizens access through their mobile and other devices to government information and services which empowers citizens differently. Citizens are kept in the centre when the government formulates policies for digital implementation. Citizen-centricity is all about turning the focus of government around- looking at the service delivery through the eyes of the citizens rather than operational or other imperatives of the government system (Malik, et al. 2014). They are connecting with the government in an easier way rather than travelling and getting government services at their doorsteps. This way of delivering services minimises the gap between people and government and increases faith and trust too. Governments' services in the field of social, economic and political enhance the quality of life of citizens and empower them to accept the challenges of emerging times. Another side is that where digital services are proving a great tool for maximising governance but it is also a need of the hour to investigate that these digital initiatives not become another web. How digital services may be easier or less technical and smoother needs to be investigated. This is another area for researchers and academicians to find out the ways that how it is becoming another web of technology.

In the last few decades, predecessor governments have initiated various measures for enhancing the quality of services, making the system more participatory and citizens-centric. These initiatives require a unique approach to implement them and enhancing the quality of delivery of services. There are certain challenges in this governing process, which enumerated by scholars, academicians and government machinery are as under:

Challenges of Digital Public Service Delivery:

Citizen-centric government and maximum governance have been focused on by the government in the country. Undoubtedly, people directly benefitted from these initiatives and received maximum public services through online mode but still, there are many challenges which arrest the success of digital governance in India, in which technological, human resource challenges and the ability and willingness of governing apparatus and people are major challenges.

The real problem at the grass root level is that both the stakeholders are not spontaneous part-takers in digital governance and this is evident from the fact that despite all the technical support systems in various departments it is seen that people are struggling in the government offices at the counter for their turn with file and papers in their hands, because its online facilities, people fail to receive services because government official are not held accountable. The problem is that of accountability, responsibility, and transparency which needs to be addressed whether it is banking counters, tahsil or thanas (police stations), the efficient delivery system is absent despite the all-technical system available.

This is a proven fact that people have the nature to adopt technology which can be seen very commonly in the success of Amazon, Flipkart and other online shopping platforms and financial transactions where OTP system is required, all these are well welcomed by the people and working successfully in the country. Now the question is why it is not so successful in all government system. Why papers are still in demand? Infrastructure like computers and internet are there, but internet connection is not working efficiently, therefore, people are still in the queue. We claim that we have gone digital delivery of services but still, it is in a nascent stage, therefore various challenges are before the governing apparatus.

There are two stakeholders in the business of digital delivery of services first one government and administration and second the people, so we have to look into the capacity of the government and administration for the delivery of service through digital technology. Has the government been able to enhance the capacity of the governing apparatus and are the officials well-trained? How far is the governing system willing to use this technology for people's benefit? Is the digital technology being used as per government policy by the lower rung of administrative machinery? The people - another stakeholder, are capable and willing to avail the benefits of digital delivery of public service?

Available data reveals that the number of technology and internet users has been increasing but still a major part of the population has limited access to ICT and devices due to various reasons therefore they do not have their approach to digital government services. Like lack of literacy, lack of digital literacy is a big barrier to achieving the goal of full delivery of government services. Still, a large chunk of the population has little access to government services due to a lack of digital literacy. Although the government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), are making constant efforts to remove the lack of awareness but still it is a major challenge for the government and the people. We cannot doubt the willingness and capability of the people of India as the people have supported, accepted and participated in the government-initiated. One has to appreciate the enthusiasm of the people of India for digitisation of services.

There are several challenges such as technical challenges, human resources challenges before the digitisation and digital delivery of service in the governance process before all stakeholders like government, people and governing apparatus, but beyond these above-mentioned challenges, the other major challenges are whether the government and people are able and

willing to accept digitisation process and continuous practising this process in governance. This is not one-time affair, it is a continuous process. It is a way of life and a way of culture.

Cyber threats and crime are commonly faced by users and they do not know even that they have been victimized. Data revealed by the National Crime Records Bureau and other national and international organisations that personal data and information of users, are not safe in the virtual world, which needs a well-defined legal framework and well-trained and equipped administrative machinery. These challenges are major barriers in the way of digital governance in the country. The government in the country has been constantly taking security measures for users but due to a lack of digital literacy and applying these security measures, they are becoming victims of cyber threats in the country. Although there are many challenges, but these can be addressed efficiently by the following measures.

Suggestions to Ensure Quality of Digital Public Service Delivery:

It is appreciable that the government of India is proactive in initiating steps for digital governance especially the Modi government has paved the way, though it was Mr. Rajeev Gandhi (Former Prime Minister) who could preempted the development of digital technology. It is basically a technology supported by hardware machinery and skilled manpower. It is but natural that challenges relating to the machinery and the skill were bound to crop up.

The challenges enumerated by scholars, academicians and government machinery are persisting in the country. The major challenge for the governing apparatus is the data of the beneficiaries, which must be available at the click of a button. Before shifting to the new mode of governance, a very inclusive, complied updated data of all beneficiaries should be with the administrative apparatus. This onus should be concerned with administrative machinery and beneficiaries.

The real challenges are that of the ability and willingness of two stakeholders - the administrative machinery and the people. Technical support system and its related challenges can be tackled, but if we fail to address the ability and willingness issue of the stakeholders, successful digital governance will remain a bowl of half-cooked rice. Hence the government should try to initiate steps to enhance the capacity of the administrative functionaries and the people at the grassroots level, so fruits of digital services should be available to beneficiaries.

The government needs to address the issue of transparency, accountability and responsibility at the administration level because it creates trust between users and the administrative apparatus. A time-bound delivery system followed by strict penalties for non-performance only part of the officials. Still, the govt officials say that we do not have proper data for an efficient delivery system, hence a data bank of all the beneficiaries should be created, even leaving no room for any excuse.

People should be aware of the rights and services they are authorized to get. If they are unaware, the system should be efficient to ensure the delivery of services to them. The government should reach the people through digital technology and digital modes of governance. Government service centers need to be proactive and government services should be at the doorstep. The second stakeholder people must find a digital delivery system quickly and easily. Capacity building is a big threat for the government therefore, the Government has initiated a capacity-building program in 2023 in which the government approved the expansion of the Digital India Program and made provision for Cyber-awareness courses for college students.

the government has also approved Cyber-awareness courses for 12 crore college students (<https://pib.gov.in/>, 16 August, 2023).

The easy way of rendering government services and people's spontaneous participation in this process are two important characteristics of digital delivery. It is commendable that both the stakeholders have been quite proactive in adopting this new mode of governance, but both (government and citizens) have to cover a long way ahead. The introduction of Artificial Intelligence in this field shall open the doors for better governance. Though it is too early to predict this and government has already started contemplating on this new development.

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