

**DIGITAL INDIA' MISSION; A CONSTITUENT TO E-DEMOCRACY IN INDIA**

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**Abstract**

The present-day digital revolution in India allows its citizen to participate in Democratic activities more efficiently than ever. The rationale establishment of Information and Communication Technology has made India a destination for major Cyber activities in the World. It is, therefore, argued that Digital technology can now help India to realize the ambition **of creating an e-Democracy here. The 'Digital India' campaign in the direction to making** India a Digital hub of the World began in July 2015 with some well-directed programs. Those programs could bring some incredible changes too in the information infrastructure of the Country. The major barrier to the development of India into an e-Democracy was the urban and rural divide in terms of information, that existed in India up to recent times. The 4 lakh kilometre fiber optics network that has been laid down as part of the Digital India program across the Country could eliminate this divide to a great extent by providing high-speed internet facilities to both rural and urban India. The establishment of Common Service Centres (CSC) and the conversion of Post offices into multi-service centres also helped the Country to bridge the digital divide that existed among citizens. The open data platform (<http://data.gov.in>) facilitates the proactive release of datasets in an open format by the ministries or Departments for use, reuse, and re-distribution for the public and academia becoming an outstanding method for acquiring transparency in governance. MyGov.in is a platform for citizen engagement in governance. Some other tools like online messaging through SMS and email are also employed for enhanced citizen participation. This study found that India the largest Democracy in the World is aspiring to acquire the position of an accepted Digital Democracy or e- Democracy in the present World scenario.

**Key words:** - e- Democracy, Digital India, e-Governance, Digital Democracy, Information and Communication Technology, Common Service Centres.

## Introduction

Indeed, India has tremendously improved in terms of IT infrastructure and its procurement of internet-based industries and services. The nation-building process is fast progressing in a more justifiable and equitable manner in every part of India. This is enabled because of a well-informed citizenry that has been created by the present-day digital revolution in the country. The utilization of Information and Communication Technology in a more virtuous manner by the Government, allowed millions of poor Indians to enjoy real freedom and now they become conscious of their innate rights too. It is argued that Digital technology can now definitely help India to realize the ambition of creating a just and equitable society there. When Prime Minister. Narendra Modi was proclaiming the 'Digital India' programme, nobody in the country believed that these programs would have such far-reaching positive outcomes. The maximum mobile internet speed that was offered by the then 3G mobile phone technology in early 2014 was only 9 mega bytes per second, but it was not enough for a country like India to progress digitally. So, the Government approved all the applications from Cell phone providers to operationalize 4G technology in the Country. The enormous speed that has been created by the fourth-generation (4G) mobile phone and internet technology allowed the Government to start the aforesaid new Information Technology revolution called 'Digital India' and through that a Digital Democracy or an e - democracy in India.

Digital India as a campaign was launched in India on July 1, 2015, by the Indian Prime Mr. Narendra Modi. It is an initiative that can be realized both as an enabler and beneficiary of key schemes run by the Government of India such as E-Kranti, Standup India, JAM Yojana (Jandhan aadhar mobile) Bharatmala, Make in India, BharatNet, Sagarmala, UDAN-RCS D edicated Freight Corridors, and Industrial Corridors. This plan envisaged empowering Indian citizens digitally by providing a number of online infrastructures irrespective of the geographical boundaries and improving digital literacy in rural areas. Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) is in charge of implementing the Bharat Net project and is the primary custodian of the Digital India project. The motto of Digital India Mission is 'Power to Empower. This Programme is mainly focused on three areas:

1. Providing digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen.
2. Governance and services on demand (day and night).
3. To watch over the digital empowerment of every citizen.

The techno-savvy Government which is in power in India since 2014 could change the IT establishment strategy of the Country from traditional to modern through a handful of digital smart projects. The opinions in this regard, of some learned writers, that point out the emergence of some possible traits of e-Democracy in India are worth mentioning here.

. “The digital smarts and social media popularity of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet are now being actively leveraged to establish a direct connection between the Government and its citizens. Think of it as a modern-day version of Akbar’s Diwan-i-Aam where any aggrieved citizen, however lowly, could ring the palace bell, and report injustices to the sovereign. The e-governance initiatives of the Modi regime seek to achieve precisely this, through digital connectivity.” (Krishnan, 2016)

The ‘Digital India’ programme will enable citizens to easily access wireless internet, promote the use of digital platforms, and make eServices available to people in an effective manner. This innovative idea will be helpful in bringing down the use of paper and will provide Internet services to the rural areas. This will ensure the remotest communities of India are included in the digital transformation process. Information is key to development. Internet and mobile connectivity in all communities will enable them to elevate their knowledge level, awareness level, and finally socioeconomic status

It is a mission to translate India into a global digital power house. It comprises various initiatives under a single program each targeted to prepare India for becoming a knowledge economy and for bringing good governance to citizens through synchronized and coordinated engagement of the entire government.(Boro, November 2017)

**The multiple pillars of ‘Digital India’ that are catalysts to e-Democracy**

The Digital India programme is planned to have multiple pillars. They are the Broad band highway, Universal access to mobile connectivity, Public internet access programs, e-governance reforming government through technology, e-Kranti-electronic delivery of services, information for all, Electronics manufacturing, IT for jobs, and Early harvest program. Among these, the first six pillars are the real catalyst to develop an e-Democracy in India. The Broad band highway as envisaged by Digital India aims the broad band internet connectivity for all, transcending the division between rural and urban. The broadband highway, especially in rural India, will enable different stakeholders to utilize different services pertaining to the areas of Agriculture, Banking, e-Panchayaths & RD, e-health, e-education, e-governance, e-commerce, and more importantly a well-planned electricity distribution management to urban and rural India. The e-governance reforming government through technology is a ‘government process Re-engineering,’ using IT to simplify and make the government process more efficient. The universal access to mobile connectivity aims to increase network penetration and fill the gaps in connectivity all over India. The establishment of Common Service Centres (CSC) and conversion of Post offices into multi-servicecentres are the chief components of the Public internet access programs. ‘Transforming e-governance for transforming governance’ is the mission of e-Kranti. It considers the critical need for transforming e-governance and promoting mobile governance and good governance in

the country. The e-Kranti put forth 44 mission mode projects, grouped into three, Central 15, states 17, and integrated 12. Another important pillar of Digital India is the provision of information to all. The open data platform (<http://data.gov.in>) facilitates the proactive release of datasets in an open format by the ministries or Departments for use, reuse, and re-distribution for the public and academia. **MyGov.in** is a platform for citizen engagement in governance. Other tools like online messaging through SMS and email are also employed.

### **e-Democracy**

e-Democracy in its simplest sense is the smart use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools to enrich and transform the existing systems of Governance and practices. The new forms of online communications that are initiated by digital technology allow us to overcome the various existing problems of participation, lack of time to interact, and lack of opportunity for policy discussions, etc. Their irresistible use of ICT increases the transparency, responsiveness, and accountability of the government and offers citizens an additional opportunity to participate in political processes. This results in better political decisions for the entire society.

e-democracy is formed out of the combination of two words, electronic and democracy. Digital democracy or Internet democracy is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in political and governance processes. It incorporates information and communications technology

to promote democracy; such technologies include private technology and government-created technology. It is a form of government in which all adult citizens are eligible to participate equally in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-democracy>)

e-Democracy helps in the dissemination of political information to the public and enhanced communication and participation in the governing process. Participants of e-Democracy would include civil society, administrators, politicians, and the economy. e-Democracy is not just paying fines or taxes over the Internet but act as a channel of communication between the public and administrators over the matter of reducing tax, improving the conditions of the road, consulting the experts on various matters pertaining to agriculture, gardening, rearing of cow, cooking, education, etc. It also empowers citizens in the process of making major national decisions. E-Democracy initiatives could be e-forums, E-town hall meetings, e-consultations, e-referenda, e-voting, e-rule making, and other forms of e-Participation. (Iyer, November 2014)

E- Democracy, therefore, is the citizen's direct participation in various administrative and law-making processes of the State. The 'Digital India' thus developed out of the Information and Communication Technology now makes the representative Democracy of India into a Direct democratic one, where all the population gets a share in the administration of the state. There are two models of people's participation that exist in e-democracy. They are the Consultative

model and Deliberative model of participation. In the Consultative model, the people can communicate their opinions and desires to the Government through different e-communication means. The information received by these interactions will form important resources for further policy legislation and governance. In the Deliberative model, there is multidirectional interactivity between the people and legislatures. Here the public will get an opportunity to participate in deliberations and policy framing process along with the legislators. Of this, the consultative model is the most possible one in the present-day e-Democracy in India.

#### **‘e’-Democracy Specific Programmes**

- **National Information Infrastructure (NII)**

Building ICT infrastructure is one of the key prerequisites for establishing an e-democracy in the state. The National Information Infrastructure (NII) is one such instrument that integrates different networks and cloud infrastructure in the country, to provide high-speed internet connectivity and cloud platform to various government departments up to the grass root level. A total of 2,50,000 Village Panchayaths of India will be covered under the fiber optics network by the completion of this mission. These networks, after the completion, will definitely act as the channel of communication between the people themselves and between the people and the Government like the nervous system in a human body. Then the people will definitely get a chance to participate in online

discussions about political issues with increasing interest and frequency.

- **Universal access to mobile connectivity- Broad band for all**

The problem of mobile phone connectivity shall be a hindrance to the growth of e-Democracy in India. More than forty thousand Villages in India are still not covered under mobile networks. The mobile phone and mobile internet connectivity in each and every village are an essential requirement to establish an information society here. Universal access to mobile connectivity is a comprehensive development plan put forth by the government of India to establish Mobile coverage to remaining uncovered villages in a phased manner.

- **Public Internet Access Programmes**

The Common Service Centres (CSCs) under the Digital India program are planned to constitute about 2.5 lakh centres all over India. CSCs would be made viable and multi-functional end-points for the delivery of government and business services. These establishments later would act as a means for two-way communication between the people and Government or between people and legislators in an e-Democracy.

- **Aadhaar-Digital Biometric Identity Infrastructure**

This digital identity module, being part of the digital revolution in India has the purpose of authentication of residents to prove their identity and for service providers to confirm that the residents are ‘who they

say they are' in order to supply services and give access to different benefits now. But the very identity of citizens would later allow the state to carry out the e-voting in India, which may be a revolutionary part of e- Democracy.

### Service Delivery Gateways

- **National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG)**

The National e-Governance Plan has the main aim to make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets. These outlets ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at low costs to satisfy the basic needs of the common man. One of the goals of the National e-Governance Plan to meet this vision is the cooperation, collaboration, and integration of information across different departments in the Centre, States, and Local Governments. Government systems characterized by islands of legacy systems using heterogeneous platforms and technologies and spread across diverse geographical locations, in varying state of automation, make this task very challenging. The National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG) simplifies this task by acting as a standards-based messaging switch and providing seamless interoperability and exchange of data across.

- **State Data Centre**

Under National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway(NeGP), there are State Data Centres for the States to combine services, applications, and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of

Government to Government(G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C), and Government to Business(G2B) services. These services can be rendered by the States through a common delivery platform impeccably supported by core Connectivity Infrastructures such as the State-Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Service Centre (CSC) that are part of the National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway. State Data Centre would provide many functionalities like Central Repository of the State, Secure Data Storage, Online Delivery of Services, Citizen Information/Services Portal, State Intranet Portal, Disaster Recovery, Remote Management, and Service Integration, etc. State Data Centres would also provide better operation & management control and minimize the overall cost of Data Management, IT Resource Management, Deployment, and other costs.

- **Open Digital platforms**

There are two citizen-centric platforms provided by the Digital India mission for the use of people around the Country. They are the Open Data Platform and Citizen Engagement platform. The Open Data platform (Data.gov.in) facilitates the proactive release of datasets in an open format by the departments for use, reuse, and redistribution by the stakeholders. MyGov.in is a platform for citizen engagement in governance and casts a medium to exchange ideas and suggestions with Government. It will facilitate two-way communication between citizens and the Government to bring in good governance.

Apart from this, the Government shall pro-actively engage through social media also.

### Review of Literature

Various works of literature pertaining to the areas of e-Government, Information Communication Technology, Digital Politics, Digital Divide, etc. were reviewed to conduct this study. e- Governance is possible everywhere i.e.in every form of Government but e-democracy is possible in Democracies alone. There is a major thumb rule in the application of e- Governance or e-Democracy in the World. The major rule in this regard is that the e-Government should focus more on 'Government' than on 'e'. All the digital facilities should be provided to the citizen for their well-being. E- Government is not about 'e' but about Government. It is the process of transformation of the relationships of Government with its constituents.(Satyanarayana, 2004)

E-democracy: A new challenge for measuring democracy is an article that highlights the importance of digital media's potential for democratizing political communication and processes. It also poses a question of Digital media's contribution to the improvement of democratic quality.(Kneuer, 2016)

'E-Governance: A Step towards Digital Democracy' is a scholarly paper about the importance of e – governance in India. It says that e-governance makes the government process accountable and provides vital inputs to the government's policy-making process. The automation thus happened by the effective utilization of ICT

speeds up the routine administrative functions. It enables the government to work better, yields higher revenue growth, and costs less, apart from servicing citizens' needs as never before. Citizens can freely interact with various government departments anytime, anywhere with maximum speed and with minimal effort and this is what digital democracy actually means.(Nair)

'A refreshed 'Digital India' programme will play a critical role in pursuing a \$5 trillion economy in the country. According to one article, India is one of the fastest digitizing states in the World. All these achievements are because of the explosion of mobile connectivity and penetration of internet infrastructure nationwide by the BharatNet program. The emergence of start-ups in the digital transformation space that is creating new livelihoods, services, and wealth for millions of Indians is also highlighted.

In the opinion of Pat Hall, Information Technology and in particular the internet should be available to all people in their Mother tongue irrespective of the numerical strength of the population. Information Technology must move to meet the user community and provide services fully localized, working in local languages, and according to local cultural conventions (Keniston & Kumar, 2004)

### Conclusion

India, the largest Democracy in the World has had an impetus for growth in terms of its Information Communication Technology infrastructure. The notable infrastructural improvements in rural and urban India, by

the mission 'Digital India,' were the laying of 4 kilometers long optical fiber network across the Country, connecting 15 lakh Panchayaths via high-speed broad band internet, and establishment of wi-fi hotspots by about fifty thousand Panchayaths in the Country. The Internet penetration has been reached its ever time height in India recently. It is astonishing that the rural India is nearing to the urban India in daily internet usage rate. The regular internet users of the country have reached about 50 crore people now. This steady improvement in Digital infrastructure allows the country to cope with an e-Democracy here. The success of e-Democracy lies in the larger citizen participation in the affairs of the government by them in a regular manner. The main goal of e-Democracy shall be the strengthened incorporation of citizens in the political debate. Internet connectivity will enable the people to participate in online discussions, that once have been the monopoly of a few elites. By this digitalized participation, we can expect increased transparency and legitimacy of our political systems through a well-informed democratic engagement.

The development of e-Democracy in its desired form can attain only through the active participation of people all over the country, using the available digital platforms. So that, the Government need to digitalize more and more services and processes. The increased use and publication of government data will attract more and more people towards digital platforms to engage with it. Where more data is available to the public and other government departments, there is more participation and

accountability. e-Participation will enable a more advanced political debate through digitalised venues. The main methods for these are creation of web sites where citizens can address and solve their issues on a regular basis. Online voting shall be the only realistic method with which citizens could consistently and easily participate in governmental affairs. Online voting may receive higher voter turnout for their respective elections.

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