



E-GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A STUDY OF POST 2014 INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The world is witnessing the rise of New India; India which is not only emerging as a strong nation externally, but also as a country driven by governance motivated by principles of inclusiveness and social justice. With 'Sabka Sath- Sabka Vikas' as the new mantra of governance, ensuring social justice has now gained greater importance. New India is sphere heading the task of ensuring 'Good Governance', based on the principle of social justice. It has now been realised that an important tool for establishing good governance is e- Governance. Infact, the change of guard in 2014 has spurred the country's leap towards e Governance. With the dream of 'Digital India', a digital revolution was launched which surpassed all sectors. E governance and use of ICT has helped in ensuring equitable access to public benefits and just distribution of pertinent entitlements like education, healthcare, social security etc. In this way E governance has emerged as an important tool for ensuring social justice and inclusion. This paper will deal with the social implications of e Governance, in terms of ensuring social justice. It will showcase major e governance initiatives post 2014 and would be an attempt to analyse how benefits of e Governance can help in establishing a 'New India' or 'SMART India'.



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KEY WORDS :- e-Governance, Good Governance, Antyodaya, Digital India, e-Kranti, SMART India, Social Justice.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the world is witnessing the rise of "New India" with a greater fervour. The task of transforming India into a new vibrant nation in the world map has begun. The aim is to change the image of India as a developing country to one which has the potential of becoming a 'Vishvaguru'. 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' has become the mantra of the governance. 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas' has emerged as the new unifying theme. The concept of social justice has redeemed and clubbed with the modern tools e Governance and thus given a new face.

E- GOVERNANCE: A TOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In his *Grundlegung Zur Metaphysik de Sitton*, Immanuel Kant says, "So act as to treat humanity, whether in their own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only". Kant's premise that citizens ought to be treated as 'ends' and not only means, still holds true especially in the era when government functions have metamorphosed from being a "controller" to that of a "coordinator" and "provider" and as an agent for ushering socio-economic development. "Social justice" and "Good Governance" have thus become the main agenda of the modern-day states.

The modern-day nation states face twin target of not only establishing social justice but also transforming its own administrative structures, thereby making it more accountable and transparent so that the fruits and outcome of development are distributed among the beneficiaries in a just and equitable way. Against this backdrop, e- Governance could act as a catalyst in establishing social justice by ensuring equitable access to public services and the benefits of economic growth to all (Joshi, 2015, 229).

E- Governance could act as a vehicle for ensuring social justice in following ways:

(a) Facilitating non-discrimination: Social justice is concerned with distribution of benefits and burdens in society irrespective of caste, sex, race, colour, creed, or religion. e Governance which involves universal and non-discriminatory service delivery to citizens thus, facilitates social justice.

(b) Providing equality of access to Government information and Services: E-Governance broadens opportunities for citizen participation and strives to provide unhindered access of government information and services among masses especially marginal groups (i.e., women, physically challenged, indigenous peoples, minorities etc.). Thus, equality of access to government services through e Governance helps in establishing social justice.

(c) Enhancing citizen participation in the democratic process: Use of information and communications technology enhances citizen participation in the democratic process. Through computerization of political discourse, policymaking and the political process, citizens are more actively involved in the policy-making and decision-making process. ICT integration in government processes thus facilitates greater openness, transparency, and accountability (Solinthone and Rummyantseva, 2016, 4).

ICTs have made it possible for citizens around the world to be included in the policy process, to have their voices heard, to participate in the decision-making process of development, and ultimately, to influence decision making. Marginalised voice could reach to the policy makers benches who could thus formulate policies which are socially just.

(d) Enhancing service delivery and social justice: Through the tools of ICT, which broadly includes television, mobile, radio and telephones - the public can have an easy access to information and services. By providing the public with details of government activities and providing them with venues to actively participate and thereby audit these activities, e-Governance compels officials to be more accountable and transparent for their actions and decisions, as well as to improve not only the delivery of services but also the quality of these services. This can help in establishing social justice.

(e) Enhancing Women/ marginalised sections empowerment: E-Governance has the capability to provide women folk and other marginalised sections, not only with access to information technology (IT), but also with IT training and education. E-Governance can provide marketing and promotion services for their businesses such as handicrafts, garments, and traditional arts. Females, farmers, tribals and other depressed classes can augment their productivity and profits by getting enamoured to access to information on improved agricultural inputs, weather, markets, new production techniques and farming technologies. In addition, it could also lead to poverty alleviation among them by increasing their access to credit benefits.

(f) Providing equality of opportunities: Equality of opportunities is a prerequisite for ensuring social justice. e- Governance with its inclusive character provides equality of opportunity, thereby facilitating social justice.

(g) Facilitating grievance redressal: Another fundamental facet of social justice is providing citizens a platform for grievance redressal. However, mere existence of this mechanism will not ensure social justice. There should exist a functional mechanism. e- Governance, with its ability to create a direct interface between government and governed ensures viable and functional grievance redressal mechanism.

(h) Safeguarding Human rights: Social justice entails human rights promotion. e- Governance by promoting non-discrimination, equality of opportunities and efficient grievance redressal; safeguards human rights and ensures social justice.

HARNESSING E-GOVERNANCE TO ENSURE SOCIAL JUSTICE

Efforts in improving the landscape of e Governance in India started from 1970's and became even more faster with the launch of Nation e Governance plan in 2006. However, post 2014, e Governance initiatives got a big fillip. Since coming into power, the Modi government declared socio-economic transformation of India and a corruption free governance as the new political mantra. It was declared that 'P2' (Pro-People Proactive) and 'G2' (Good Governance)" are the new directional themes for "New India". Breaking the stereotype, the NAMO regime took ICT tools as a mechanism for ensuring social justice and making governance inclusive and participative. PM Modi while addressing DST-CII India Italy Technology Summit, said, "India has made technology a medium for attaining social justice, empowerment, inclusion and transparency" (Times of India, 2018, October 30) He further said that the technology is emerging as a tool to achieve effective last mile delivery of services (Times of India, 2018, October 30).

The policy makers have now realised that e-governance is not all about technology. It is more about governance involving people, processes, and outcome; adopting information and communications technologies (ICT) tools to improve the transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of public institutions. It is a mechanism to create a system of good governance which aims at promoting human development, especially of the marginalised and neglected section of the society. Thus, it was understood that e Governance has emerged as a tool for social inclusion and for promoting social justice.

Infact, it has been declared that ensuring social justice and equitable distribution of social resources has been the prime objective of the present governance. On philosophical level, this draws inspiration from Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay's 'Antyodaya' vision, i.e. 'Ant ka Uday' or 'rise of the last person'. Infact, it has been said that the guiding philosophy of Indian governance post 2014 has always been to achieve social justice through Antyodyay: *Lakshya Antyodaya, Praan Antyodaya, Path Antyodaya. (Aim Antyodaya, Resolve Antyodaya, Path Antyodaya)*. Even PM Modi also declared in a public rally in Tiruppur (Chennai) that - social justice is an article of faith and not a mathematical formula (Business Standard, 2019, February 10th).

Traditionally the scope of social justice was limited, and its beneficiaries were confined within few prescribed sections of the society. Now, the concept of social justice has been re-engineered, and the categories of beneficiaries has been widened and reconfigured. Now, it includes women, tribals, farmers, old age persons/ destitute, disabled, unorganised sector, minorities, EWS etc. along with SC's, ST's and OBC's. With the enhancement of target beneficiaries, scope of social justice has also widened.

With the dream of 'Digital India', 'NDA 2.0' ushered a digital revolution which surpassed all sectors and helped assimilating the key advantages of going techie. With the aim of ushering social justice and good governance, based on key pillars of inclusivity, participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and efficiency, vision of Digital India was envisaged.

Digital India Programme

Post 2014, the NDA regime implemented the 'Digital India' programme to leverage IT as a growth engine of new India and construct a digitally empowered society. Digital India is a comprehensive programme that includes various government ministries and departments and is being coordinated by MeitY. The programme will be implemented in phases from the year of its inception (2015) till 2018.

e-Kranti: National e-Governance Plan 2.0

For enabling social justice and good governance, another watershed initiative taken post 2014, is "e-Kranti: National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) 2.0, which is initiated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)" (PIB, 2015, March 25th). With the vision of 'Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance', e-Kranti stands as an important pillar of Digital India Programme (PIB, 2015, March 25th).

Its mission is to ensure a government wide transformation by delivering all Government services electronically to citizens through integrated and interoperable systems via multiple modes (PIB, 2015, March 25th).

Within the umbrella project of 'Digital India', the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY), has taken a number of e-Governance initiatives. These initiatives have helped in transforming the lives of marginalised and dispossessed sections of society by enhancing inclusivity, accessibility, affordability and accountability (PIB, 2015, March 25th).

The following initiatives can help us understand how e governance has helped in promoting social justice in India, especially post 2014:

1. WOMEN AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Mahila E-Haat:** As a part of 'Digital India' and 'Stand Up India', it is a significant initiative for women entrepreneurs across the country. It is an online marketing platform where such women entrepreneurs can showcase their products (Vikaspedia. Mahila E-Haat). The vision of this initiative is to empower and strengthen financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs in the economy by providing continued sustenance and support to their creativity (Vikaspedia. Mahila E-Haat).
- **National Repository of Information for Women:** NARI portal is an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide women citizens with easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women. The portal endows women with the power of information to build their life skills and facilitates them in taking full advantage of the services provided by the Government for them (Vikaspedia. National Repository of Information for Women).
- **The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP):** An initiative of NITI Aayog, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) is a first of its kind, unified access portal which brings together women from different parts of India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations (Vikaspedia. The Women Entrepreneurship Platform).
- **Udyam Sakhi portal for Women Entrepreneurs:** Udyam Sakhi, a Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises initiative, is a network for nurturing social entrepreneurship creating business models revolving around low-cost products and services to resolve social inequities. It seeks to encourage women entrepreneurs and to aid, counsel, assist and protect their interests (Vikaspedia. Udyam Sakhi portal for Women Entrepreneurs).

2. SCs/STs AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has developed an online web-portal e-utthaan.gov.in for monitoring of Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Castes.
- Similarly, Ministry of Tribal Affairs has developed the online web-portal stcmis.gov.in for monitoring of Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes.
- On 12th June 2019, Shri Arjun Munda, Union Minister for Tribal Affairs launched the "e-governance initiatives for ST Welfare schemes". It was being said that that as per the "SabkaSaath, SabkaVikas and SabkaVishwas", these e-governance initiatives will serve their purpose of the betterment of tribal communities across the nation.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs has developed online portals namely 'Direct Benefit Transfer' (DBT) Tribal (GOI. Direct Benefit Transfer) and NGO Grants Online Application & Tracking System for bringing in greater e-Governance in implementation of welfare schemes for STs (PIB, 2019, June 12).

3. UNORGANISED SECTOR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on 5th March 2019, launched the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) Yojana at Vastral in Gujarat. Informal workers on subscription to this scheme, receive an assured monthly pension of Rs 3,000, at 3.13 lakh common service centres (CSCs) across the country (The Economic Times, 2019, February 17).

4. SENIOR/OLD CITIZENS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Jeevan Pramaan:** It is biometric authentication system based on Aadhaar for pensioners. Inaugurated by Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, in November 2014, the system aims to provide validity to Digital Life Certificate without requiring the pensioner to be present in person before his/her Pension Dispensing Authority (PDA) (GOI, Jeevan Pramaan).
- **Anubhav platform for retired government employees:** It is an online initiative that enables submission and display of commendable work done by retiring employees. a motivator for serving employees. This would also be a wonderful opportunity to garner the resource of retiring employees for voluntary contribution to nation building post-retirement (Vikaspedia. Anubhav platform for retired government employees).
- **Sankalp Portal:** Sankalp is a platform instantiated by department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, Government of India, where pensioners can access opportunities to work/contribute towards society and organizations/associations can select appropriate skill and expertise from the available post of human resources (Vikaspedia. Sankalp platform for pensioners).

5. DISABLED AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Unique Disability ID:** The UDID project is being implemented with a view of creating a National Database for PwDs, and to issue a Unique Disability Identity Card (UDID) to each person with disabilities. It includes services like online availability of data of Person with Disabilities across country through a centralized web application, online filing and submission of registration application form for disability certificate/ Universal ID card etc. (Vikaspedia. Unique Disability ID).

6. SMALL ENTERPRENUER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **e-launch of Support International Patent Protection in Electronics and IT scheme (SIP-EIT):** SIP-EIT is a scheme initiated by Department of Electronics & Information Technology (DeitY) for providing financial support to startups and MSMEs to strengthen their competitiveness through innovation and its protection (GOI. Startupindia).

7. YOUTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **National Scholarships Portal (NSP):** National Scholarships Portal is one-stop solution through which various services starting from student application, application receipt, processing, sanction and disbursement of various scholarships directly to students are enabled without any leakages (GOI, National Scholarship Portal).

8. FARMERS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **mKRISHI – Mobile App for Aquaculture Operations:** The mobile App is expected to revolutionize the way the farm activities are carried out. The App being used in a large scale can provide the trend of aquaculture activities across the country. It will also help in resolving to farmer's issues quickly on a more personalized approach. By employing bio metric authentication, it could help in evading corruption (PIB, 2015, August 27th).
- **National Agriculture Market (e NAM)**
- **M Kisan portal**
- **Soil Health Card**

9. MINORITIES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Pradhan Mantri Modi Minority Scholarship Scheme 2019:** Prime Minister, Narendra Modi along with the cabinet, took a decision to benefit 5 crore minority students with scholarship. This Benefit will be given to the minority beneficiaries via various scholarship schemes, which could be availed online, includes (Times of India, 2019, 11th June):
- ✓ 5 Crore Minority Students to be Benefitted in Next 5 Years.

- ✓ 50% of Beneficiaries will be Girl Students.
- ✓ Minorities will get benefit under various Pre-Matric, Post-Matric & Merit-cum-means.
- ✓ Around 10 Lakh Begum Hazrat Mahal Girls Scholarship will be included in this Program.

10. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Only when citizens are given the platform for participating in policy making, can legislators make laws which are beneficial for them and instil justice in society. Following are certain citizen participation platforms aided by ICT tools:

- **MyGov (Citizen participation platform):** With the goal of establishing good governance, MyGov aims to create a bridge between Government and citizens. It inspires citizens as well as people abroad to engage in various activities i.e. 'Do', 'Discuss', 'Poll', 'Talk', 'Blog', etc. (PIB, 2016, November 30).
- **e-Sampark:** This is a platform for dispensation of information about government programmes and initiatives through mails and SMS campaigns. It thus entails the essence of Digital India and maintains direct connectivity between government and citizens. (GOI, e-Sampark).

11. RURAL INDIA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Gyansetu:** It is an internet based real time ICT system to provide e-Services to the rural population of India. Gyan Setu or a digital knowledge bridge is an internet based real time ICT system, which aims to provide e services to the doorsteps of rural population of India. e-Services which this system will provide includes, railway reservation, agri product rates, online education, doctor consultation, public grievances etc.

12. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Mobile Seva:** Mobile Seva is an innovative initiative for establishing mobile governance in the country. It aims at widening the reach of, and access to, public services to all citizens in the country, especially in the rural areas by exploiting the much greater penetration of mobile phones in the country. It also leverages the innovative potential of mobile applications in providing public services (GOI, Mobile Sewa).

13. SOCIAL JUSTICE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

- **Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation:** It is an interactive e governance platform involving not only grievance redressal but also monitoring and reviewing of government schemes and projects. It can thus be viewed as a tool for ushering good governance (PIB, 2015, March 25th).

14. SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH LITERACY

- **National Digital Literacy Mission:** As a key component of Digital India initiative, National Digital Literacy Mission was launched in November 2015, with a dream of transforming India into a digitally empowered society. In this regard, government is working towards connecting all the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through Bharat Net optic fibre network (PIB, 2015, July 1st). The 'Digital Saksharata Abhiyan' is geared towards making at least one person in every household digitally literate. Efforts are also in progress for developing software in regional languages so as to promote digital inclusiveness. The attempt would further unleash democratization and decentralization of technology in connecting citizens and government (PIB, 2015, July 1st).

All these initiatives have helped women, youth, old persons, tribals, SC's, minorities, farmers etc to establish themselves firmly in the society and has helped them furthering the aim of social justice. An improvement in e Governance landscape would help these sections of population to integrate into mainstream economic and social development process of the county and could prove to be a vehicle for socio economic development.

However, there are several challenges faced by the country in implementing e-Governance initiatives, notably been cultural challenges (which includes: attitudinal issues like negative attitude to information and communication technologies, communication issue since e mail is still not considered a primary medium of communication, feudalistic mindset, lack of political will, corruption, social issues like poverty, distinction based on caste, sex etc.), organizational challenges (poor infrastructure and maintenance, inefficient structures and processes, inappropriate design of user interfaces, lack of cross functional synergy, capacity building gaps, problems in affordability/connectivity, lack of equitable access, technical issues like security and privacy or non-compatibility of hardware etc.) and resource based challenges (digital divide, stagnant and traditional mindset of people, passive citizen participation etc.)

CONCLUSION

Despite these challenges, a 'New India' is emerging which is increasingly using the benefits of e-Governance in order to establish a just and fair social order. However, it is noteworthy that government in this regard need to create enabling environment for the e-Governance to remain relevant and socially acceptable by the citizens. The government will have to make significant investments in areas of process re-engineering, capacity building, training, assessment, and awareness to fully exploit the rich potential of e-Governance. However, this also requires active participation of civil society. In fact, any attempt by government and civil society for improving governance in general, and for establishing e-Governance in particular, should be based on five pillars, viz. PP, PA, EPI, PM and DNP, i.e. Policy Planning, Policy Awareness, Effective Policy Implementation, Policy Monitoring and Demand for New Policies (Trivedi, 2014, 130).

There is also an imminent need for effecting some fundamental changes. These structural reforms will help in creating future readiness of the country to successfully and quickly adopt new e-Governance initiatives.

- Massive literacy drives given the high percentage of illiteracy in the states and bridging digital gaps by investing in imparting computer education at primary and secondary level of schooling.
- Proper IT and Cyber security norms.
- Ensure deeper penetration of ICT infrastructure to enhance accessibility by most marginalized and disadvantaged sections of society.

The 21st century India has realised that IT (Indian Talent) + IT (Information Technology) = IT (India Tomorrow). Governed with the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Saabka Vikas', it is spearheading the aim of establishing "New India" through ICT intervention. However, this task of ensuring social justice through e-Governance is indeed challenging and will require sincere will and committed effort by all three major stakeholders - the political executive, the bureaucracy and citizens. This will significantly contribute to the successful transformation of 'India' to 'e India' or 'SMART India', a role model for other countries to follow.

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