

TECHNOLOGY: EMPOWERING THE RURAL SOCIETY

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Ours is a nation which is expected to lead the usage of technologies like Cloud, rise as a breeding ground of start-ups and be the focal point of global spending on digital technologies. The Digital India campaign of the Government with special emphasis being laid on digital financial transactions and cloud technologies will go a long way in evolution of better services and amenities for the citizens. The goals of a cashless economy as well as an inclusive economy can only be achieved by harnessing the digital technologies in a potent manner. We live in the Digital age after all.

The human civilization has come a long way from the days of cave dwelling and bare-hand-hunting. The one constant which has brought about a change in human way of life is technology. It is development in technology which has brought the humans out of cave into a world so shrunk, that there rarely is a distance between corners. Technological evolution alone has been the single most important parameter to divide the known human history into various ages of stone, bronze and iron. If the climbing of evolutionary ladder is any indication, the present age is undoubtedly of digital technology. The digital technology has ushered in a new era of human existence which knows no bounds in terms of changes in the way of life. As fate would have it, India with a population of 1.34 billion people and about 69 per cent of that in rural areas, is both a pioneer in digital platforms and yet a nation which needs digital technologies to bring a large part of its population in the mainstream of fast-track economic development.

Reaching the Rural Masses:

We are a nation so uniquely placed that on one hand, we are the leaders of digital revolution with our own home versions of Silicon Valley and yet there



exists a vast divide amongst our population where we are yet to bring our rural Bharat to the India known to us. A study recently released places India at 43rd position in terms of Global Connectivity Index, based on a spectrum of parameters, while we score well in terms of a knowledge economy, we lag in areas of broadband connection assessments. The silver lining lies in the fact that there has been an increase of 2.3 times in the number of computer households over the last three years. It is now an accepted fact that investments in digital technologies is a factor which directly impacts the GDP of the nation, brings about more transparency in the functioning of Government, induces an upliftment in lives of citizens and helps achieve the overall goal of citizen centric good governance.

Social Impact through Digital Initiatives:

The social impact of the digital technologies may be gauged by the fact that as many as two million women and men are selling / re-selling various lifestyle and clothing products via the means of online merchant platforms amounting to business worth 8 to 9 billion USD. This is projected to grow anywhere between 48 to 60 billion USD by the year 2022. These online re-sellers are typically women homemakers and unemployed men who acquire these products from large stock suppliers, then advertise these products using the social media platforms and then earn a commission on the sale of the product. This is a typical home based business which is aided by the digital technology wherein causing the home based person an economical boost which doesn't need much of capital. Such model of business aided by the programs of Government such as **National Digital Literacy Mission** can go long way in economic upliftment of rural population of the country. The thoughts of , a village lady sitting

in a small village of Madhubani district selling masterpieces of Madhubani print products online or a lady sitting in rural areas of Sambhalpur trying to find buyers for the Sambhalpuri Pata sarees online, do not seem very far-fetched anymore. This would be the potential of digital world unleashing economic empowerment like never before.

Facilitating e-Education:

Ours is a society wherein the literacy rates stand at 74 per cent and the industry struggles to find skilled labour and employable graduates. In such a scenario, it is all the more pertinent to have an atmosphere of value addition to one's knowledge base and skill sets. Digital platforms of e-learning are a one stop solution to such needs of the economy and society. The e-education industry of India is presently valued at 247 million USD and is set to grow eight folds to about 2 billion USD by 2021 according to a report released by Google and KPMG. The common people are becoming more and more aware of these digital platforms of e-education, this is highlighted by the fact that the searches for online education have doubled over past two years and there is a four times rise in educational content on online platforms over the same period. The most heartening factor is that more than 44 per cent of such education related searches are now coming from beyond the top six cities. This is representative of the Government efforts to bring in people from tier 2 and 3 cities as well as rural areas of the digital platforms. The need is to popularize these channels so that geography does not hinder the yearning for education and it becomes available right at home of the rural population as well.

Women Empowerment through Digital India:

A true measure of evolution of a society is depicted by the status women of the society have. In this regard, the approach of successive governments in our country has changed from welfare to development to the empowerment of women to ensure gender equality in society. While gone are the days of protective patronage and subjective equality, the present society can not prosper unless a holistic development based approach is successful to ensure economic independence and empowerment of women. The umbrella scheme of **National Mission for Empowerment of Women** talks about use of digital and information technology in no uncertain

terms. Various initiatives of the Government such as the **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh**, Support to Training and Employment Program for women, **Dhanlakshmi** scheme, **Swadhar**, **Ujjawala** can greatly benefit from the use of digital technologies at the disposal of the Government today. The tools like Public Financial Management System for funds disbursal and monitoring under these schemes, linking of Aadhar to projects like Ujjawala and Swadhar can promise a zenith in the area of women empowerment in our country. New initiatives like One Stop Centres and Women Helpline have digital technology at the core of their functioning.

Community Mobilization has emerged as a strong means to channelize the various flows of social and economic development in the rural areas of our country. What started in 1985 under the NGO called Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency, now has over 1.8 million Self Help Groups which are promoted under the **National Rural Livelihood Mission**. These Self Help Groups have a great potential to make larger impact by making use of technology available to cater to their financial and accounting record-keeping, MIS of such Self Help Groups for Financial Institutions and Government, mobile based banking system for these Self Help Groups etc. These digital mediums will not only bring about a greater transparency in working of the Self Help Groups and strengthen them, but also make them more attractive for the Banks and Financial Institutions. This will lead to an overall financial inclusion of the rural masses and help the nation overcome the menace of poverty.

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