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Rural Digital India: Towards Learning Society

AMITHY JASROTIA[1]* AND REENU ARTI THAKUR[2]
[2]Department of Sociology, University of Rajasthan, Jainpur (Rajasthan) India
[2]Department of Library and Information Science, University of Jammu, Jammu (J&K) India

ABSTRACT

The present paper is intended to focus on the role of ICT and its implication in education system of India with special reference to rural areas. The paper outlines the various initiatives which are running in rural as well as in urban areas under the banner of 'digital India'. The paper is also presenting various challenges and obstacles faced by Indian government and agencies in implementation. In conclusion, the paper is also suggesting the parameter of integrating the various framework of sustainable development to learning and knowledgeable society.

Key Words : Education, Library, Knowledge society, Learning society and digital India

INTRODUCTION

Education is the major and central tool for achieving overall socio- economic development for all societies. OECD and UNESCO restrain that education should be extend beyond formal learning (based in traditional educational institutions – schools, universities etc.) into informal learning centers to support a knowledge economy known as a "world education culture" (Spring, 2009). Nations, therefore, endeavor to improve upon their educational systems to ensure they meet societal needs, and to achieve the best for their citizens in terms of social and economic development.

Learning society as an educational philosophy regarded the actual process of learning as an activity which takes place outside of regular educational institutions. It is the 'socialisation' of individual lifelong learning, aided through technologies and focuses on social networking, by using the shared learning experiences of individuals as a basis for a larger network of education that exists formally and informally (schools, universities, job-training, support, collaboration, feedback etc.) (McClellan, 2010). While the concept of learning society rely on concepts of 'fluidity' and 'informality', and moving outside of traditional educative boundaries such as schools and universities, some scholars believe that a learning society can be identified as having four main attributes *i.e.* Futuristic, Societal, Reflexive and Global market. There is hard core need of the development of the learning societies where the prime focus is the justice and poverty.

Our present Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's has started his flagship programme under the banner of *'Digital India'* on July 1st, 2015. His vision and efforts for Digital India are very much appreciated and well-received by even in the Silicon Valley of US. Under this banner almost dozens of programmes has been started like BharatNet, Make in India, Startup India and Standup India, industrial corridors, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, dedicated freight corridors and UDAN-RCS. With

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the onset of these programmes the focus of government shifted to integrate technology in digital learning for both urban and rural India. Inspite they also started collaborating public-private-partnerships to enhance reach to rural and remote areas.

Later many scholars, activist and educationist have examined that for having the positive impact on learning and solving the big educational problems of India; technology is not the only solution that we are looking at. There is need to have a bigger vision of enabling technology to help students learn better and teachers teach better. Therefore, solutions to hurdles like affordability, accessibility, mode of delivery and content are indispensable. Thus, it has been realized that the campaign of Digital India especially in the education space is at a nascent stage. There is still a long path to achieve overall success in digital world.

Use of technology in educational system of India :

In the present time it has been realized that the technology can play a pivotal role in improving learning and teaching especially in rural areas. A report based on few case studies edited by Dr. Gray Motteram revealed that teachers, schools and organizations are frequently using technology to demonstrate concepts more clearly. Technological innovation is more in use in science classes, but also often used in social sciences and for English lessons. Internet is playing a significant role in framing projects and research topics and for presentations of their findings.

Such tasks can also benefit learner autonomy, as learners are required to find things out for themselves rather than rely on the teacher and textbooks. This also helps to develop digital literacy and internet navigation skills. There are several examples of flipped classroom approaches where teachers delegate students to watch videos or related articles before coming to class, so that class time can be used for more discussion and for clarifying the concepts. A number of organizations aim to increase the quality of education available to disadvantaged learners by using tablets, video-conferencing, projectors and other technology to support their learning. Many teachers mentioned how they use technology for their own professional development, such as participating in social media communities of practice, following massive open online courses (MOOCs) and using the internet to deepen their own subject knowledge (Lone, 2017).

ICT in education :

In today's time educational institutes are using heavily ICT in their curriculum. They are using various tools of ICT to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information. Education is no more based on the traditional way of disseminating the knowledge. ICT has become an integral part of teaching-learning process and these approaches are replacing chalkboards with interactive digital whiteboards. Students are using own smart phones and other devices for learning during their class time. The concept of 'flipped classroom' is also very much prevalent now in urban classrooms, where students watch lectures at home on the computer and use classroom time for more interactive exercises. Teachers who are able to use all these tools are able to have high order thinking skills, providing creative and individualized options for students to express their understandings. And students become more creative and able to deal with ongoing technological changes at societal and in workplace.

Despite above technological innovation in ICT in education another beneficial aspect is as follows:

- **Access to Audio and visual technology:** ICT is providing easy access to audio visual education. The learning resources are not static and have wider in scope now. With the

help of this vivid and vast technology learners are encouraged to regard computers as tools to be used in all aspects of their studies.

- **Enhancement in learning environment:** Virtual environments is creating entirely new environment in teaching and in learning process. It helps in having **c**ritical thinking, research, and evaluation skills. Students are flown with volumes of information from a variety of sources.
- **Time and Space has Shrinked:** With the introduction of ICT the pace of imparting knowledge became very fast. One can study whenever he wills irrespective of whether it is day or night and irrespective of being in any part of the world**.** Internet is providing number of online portal services for example online library which can be provide plenty of data in few minutes.
- **Distance learning:** With the introduction of satellite beaming of live classes or VSAT distance learning especially for backward area becomes accessible. The concept of remote teaching becomes possible only through ICT. Indian government has tried hard to promote this model of teaching with the help of some IITs and EDUSAT. With the help of these technologies even class remains interactive even after class hours. Social learning platforms like Grockit, Remixlearning.com have achieved tremendous success in the present time. And in India, pagalguy.com is a good example.
- **Mobile based learning management systems :** As compared to computers with broadband connections in India there is a boom of using smart phones. Thus, due to this there is significantly rise in mobile based learning. But mobile based courses are to be optimized for a smaller screen, lower computing power, and slower internet. This is a difficult task, but several Indian startups have got this right.
- **Learning apps:** There are number of apps has been launched today which can helping in increasing reading speed as well in reducing the fear of mathematics. Indian kids are able to learn skills and improve their linguistic, mathematical and cognitive abilities effortlessly. (Lone, 2017).

Activities in Rural India :

Development of rural areas remains the focal point in all government's Five Year Plans. Introduction of ICT is also became the important agenda in rural areas these days. But the application in rural areas has been relatively slow. In India ICT applications such as Warana, Dristee, Sari, Sks, E-Chaupal, Cybermohalla, Bhoomi, E-Mitra, Deesha, Star, Setu, Friends, E-Seva, Lokmitra, E-Post, Gramdoot, Gyandoot, Tarahaat, Dhan, Akshaya, Honeybee, Praja are in functioning for rural development. It has been realized that ICT can play major role in combating rural and urban poverty. It can also help in fostering sustainable development through creating information rich societies and supporting livelihoods (Kumar and Singh, 2012). For example School children in rural Assam, who lacked earlier the exposure and their urban counterparts taken them for granted, have started using technology to their benefit, understanding their lessons better and learning new concepts. Earlier students weren't interactive during science lessons and it was difficult to know if they understood what was being taught.

Another innovative approach is the introduction of ITE (Integrative approach to technology in education). This is a project which aims at improving teaching and learning processes using information technology in school curriculum, providing students an opportunity to create their own learning artifacts. The project, being implemented in government schools and madrasas across seven northern

and north-eastern states in India, helps students have a better comprehension of their lessons.

Another successful initiative in India is the Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development (APARD) which is called as the apex training institute in the Andhra for capacity building of rural development officers and Panchayat Raj officials. The institute, consistently focusing on research to offer high quality consulting services in rural development, has initiated an e- learning project and a number of e-learning products have developed for various target groups. APARD wikis were formed for collaborative learning. WEB 2.0 technologies has used to enable teachers to depart from traditional androgogy. PR comprehensive helpline consists of a traditional helpline using a BSNL phone line, and USHAHIDI technologies have been used. This is providing a platform where people can lodge their complaint through phone, email, SMS or register on the website (Rural Development through e-learning, 2011).

Role of libraries in learning societies :

People in rural areas attain knowledge through the various ICT based tools like PCS, laptops smart phones etc. Libraries are the places where people can have an access to all the types of sources in all formats. Libraries provide both the physical and virtual environment for its users. The users can refer and borrow the plethora of knowledge in any form. Rural libraries referred as a public library located in rural and remote areas. Rural libraries have been established in several states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal etc. with the assistance of various agencies like: Religious Endowments, Gram Panchayat, Cooperative Societies, Youth organizations, Voluntary organizations etc. Some of them are running in the form of mobile libraries, bicycle library, Infothela and operating an information center at the CICs to cater the needs of the residence of the villages.

The rural libraries are assisting the neo literate rural Indians by providing them the place for self study a lifelong process; developing reading habits; arranging lectures, discussions, and talks; Mobile library services; Community Intelligence Centre and a university of the people (melvil dewey). Such extensive services is transformed the traditional society to the learned society. But now we are on the way… and it is now regarded as a learning society as rural libraries in India are educating the 70% of the population.

Libraries are providing great assistance to the youth so that they can educate themselves. Libraries are giving more flexible and reflexive access to individuals. The use of technological development would not only lead to the technological usage, but it also helps in having law and order in society by creating a vision for the society. It helps in nurturing ideas to youth for their betterment. This may also helps in transforming society from the traditional boundaries to the nontraditional. Libraries are also act like a commodity which helps the students, their parents, professionals, and non professionals to make choices, decisions, and usage on the basis of the personal and societal improvement.

In India many new initiatives are in a row which is considering sufficient advantage to the rural libraries and these libraries help out their societies to move towards the learning society. “Rural library plays a vital role for the spread of knowledge and information to the rural community…….. For the benefit of rural people and to support the rural activities, there is a need of rural libraries with all the required facilities. It is not only the establishment of libraries important, but its implementation by Government and Non- Government Organizations. For this lot of projects, schemes are made and undertaken for Information Technology revolution and are running well in different areas” (Kumbar and Lamani, 2014).

Problems and Challenges in implementation of technologies for learning societies :

Although we have started many new programmes and startup but India is still facing various challenges and problems in the introduction of technologies especially in Education system. Some of them are:

- Capabilities are not adequately transferred to end user. This prevents them from using the applications independently.
- Community based participation
- Extraneous Content development.
- Lack of awareness about E-learning material usage and services offered
- Lack of knowledge about ways to integrate technologies to enhance curriculum
- Lack of skills in trainer or kiosk operators
- Lack of stakeholders' involvement *i.e.* government and organization policies, monitoring and control.
- Lack of teacher training and related opportunities
- Limited Infrastructure (hardware and software) for e-learning
- Limited or no technical support for education institutes
- Many ethical questions and issues arise with this use of the latest technologies in education.

"The libraries existing presently in rural areas are in a poor state of affairs. Lack of adequate resources, financial and human, is identified as the major reason for the present status of rural libraries. As far as information needs, a majority of respondents look for information relating to development schemes, employment opportunities, education, health, etc. Mass media including newspaper, TV, and radio are the major sources of information, followed by relatives/friends, and government officials…. the transformation of existing libraries or establishing a new set up of dynamic information centres with the help of the latest IT to effectively cater to the information needs of the rural people" (Takalkar and Devi, 2001) .

Conclusion :

Transforming any society to the learning society depends on its access to information and related technology and this is also implying to the rural India too. ICT is slowly but steadily building an expedition in Indian society too. The budding knowledge society and transforming it to the learning society is growing due to the fact that knowledge sharing is not only restricted to the books or other hard formats but the use of web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 platforms such as websites, apps, videos, live chats, etc., have taken it to another level. The concept has ameliorated the socially marginalized community to attain their entitlements. The partnerships between public and private sectors could expand the scope of education. It is apparent that with committed leadership, willpower, controlled and an integrated framework of the government, technology and rural society would definitely pave the way towards the sustainable growth.

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