

Citizen Services in the Age of AI

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Preface and Acknowledgment

India is a welfare state in which the government assumes responsibility for securing a wide range of social rights for its citizens and for addressing the social effects of the market economy. It seeks to reduce social disparities by directly providing, supporting, or subsidizing essential services and social benefits. In this framework, the state has an important role in ensuring that economic and social well-being is not determined solely by an individual's ability to participate successfully in the market.

Citizen services cover a broad range of government facilities and programmes intended to improve quality of life. They are delivered through online platforms, government offices, and outreach mechanisms, with increasing use of technology to improve accessibility and efficiency. Essential public services include water supply, sanitation, healthcare, education, and many others, which are central to a decent standard of living. Administrative services cover documentation, permits, licenses, land records, registration, and other interactions with government departments. Governments also provide welfare services for vulnerable groups, including the poor, elderly, persons with disabilities, and women, through social security, employment, and programs for women and children.

The Public Service Guarantee Act provides a statutory framework for the time-bound delivery of government services and establishes mechanisms to hold public officials accountable for delays or failure to provide services within the prescribed period. The introduction of Right to Services legislation has strengthened citizens' ability to demand timely and transparent public services.

Digital technology strongly influences the relationship between citizens and democracy. Online platforms have expanded opportunities for political engagement through mechanisms ranging from social media campaigns to e-governance services that allow citizens to interact more directly with public institutions. At the same time, the digital environment presents new challenges. Misinformation and the development of online echo chambers can affect the quality of public debate. As a result, digital literacy has become an important part of contemporary citizenship, requiring individuals to distinguish credible information from unreliable sources and participate responsibly in online political discussions.

The main role of AI in public services would be to shorten the gap between citizens' needs and the service(s) that meet them. This is only possible when separate offices' records are connected, because an integrated service delivery approach using intelligent technologies would provide one complete picture of citizens' needs and aspirations.

Intelligent technologies differ from earlier e-governance in one important respect. Digitization moved the citizen-state interface from paper to screen. AI begins to automate part of the human judgment exercised at that interface at various decision points, such as whose identity is genuine, who is eligible and who is not, which grievance needs escalation, which taxpayer merits scrutiny, and so on.

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In the age of technology, governance is not about managing systems; it is about multiplying possibilities

Shri. Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India
Civil Services Day
21.04.2025

Introduction

Citizens are at the center of a democratic system and are its principal participants. Meaningful citizen empowerment requires more than the formal existence of rights. It depends on those rights being protected, citizens having access to relevant information, and governments and fellow citizens actively involving them in democratic processes. At the procedural level, democracy requires fair mechanisms that uphold the principle of “one person, one vote” and ensure that institutions responsible for making and implementing policies remain subject to appropriate checks and balances. At the level of outcomes, democratic governance should respond to the interests and concerns of all citizens without discrimination, pursue the common good, and create institutions that enable individuals to safeguard and exercise their rights.

The concept of the welfare state therefore encompasses a system in which the government takes active measures to safeguard and improve its population's economic and social conditions. Its foundations generally include equal opportunities, a fairer distribution of resources, and collective responsibility towards individuals who cannot secure the basic necessities required for a dignified life. Common forms of welfare provision include Social Security, compulsory unemployment insurance, and financial assistance for people unable to work. While the extent and nature of these measures vary, most contemporary countries include elements of the welfare-state model.

A welfare state can also support the effective functioning of democracy by creating the social and economic conditions citizens need to exercise their rights meaningfully. Political freedoms have limited practical value when people lack access to education, healthcare or basic economic security. Measures such as public distribution systems, publicly supported education and healthcare programmes can enable citizens to participate more fully in democratic life. Welfare policies can therefore be viewed not merely as government assistance or acts of charity, but as mechanisms through which constitutional commitments to equality, dignity and social justice are given practical effect. In India, the welfare-state framework places people at the center of development, emphasizing inclusion and adherence to constitutional values.

The notion that the state should actively promote its people's welfare also traces back to India's ancient socio-political traditions. Early texts and inscriptions describe several responsibilities tied to public welfare, including encouraging economic activity, creating employment, undertaking public works, providing assistance during natural disasters, ensuring access to medical care, keeping the ruler accessible and accountable, and protecting people from fraudulent practices. These traditions broadly distinguish between an individual's responsibility for mental and spiritual development and the state's obligation to secure material well-being and social justice. The latter has historically been recognized as an important responsibility of the ruler or the governing

authority. Democracy is commonly understood as “rule by the people”, but this definition raises an important question: who constitutes “the people”? The concept of citizenship helps answer that question.

Citizenship establishes membership in a political community and determines who can participate in its governance. While democracy provides the institutional framework for participation in government, citizenship determines who is included in that framework and on what terms. Consequently, democracy and citizenship are closely interdependent concepts. Their relationship raises fundamental questions about voting rights, political participation, and accommodating minority identities and cultures, making it an ongoing subject of debate in political theory.

The relationship between citizenship and democracy has also evolved over time. Globalisation is one of the forces contributing to this change. Greater movement of people across national borders and increasingly complex social, economic and cultural connections have made dual and multiple citizenship more common. As individuals develop legal or personal ties with more than one political community, the traditional understanding of citizenship as belonging exclusively to a single nation-state has become increasingly complicated.

Digital technology represents another major influence on the relationship between citizens and democracy. Online platforms have expanded opportunities for political engagement through mechanisms ranging from social media campaigns to e-governance services that allow citizens to interact more directly with public institutions. At the same time, the digital environment presents new challenges. Misinformation and the development of online echo chambers can affect the quality of public debate. As a result, digital literacy has become an important part of contemporary citizenship, requiring individuals to distinguish credible information from unreliable sources and participate responsibly in online political discussions.

Despite these changes, the fundamental connection between democracy and citizenship remains intact. Democracy gives citizens the means to govern themselves, while active, responsible citizenship strengthens the legitimacy and resilience of democratic institutions. As societies become increasingly diverse and interconnected, sustaining this relationship requires balancing the safeguarding of individual rights with the collective responsibilities, participation, and sense of belonging on which self-government depends.

PART- A: TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY (PSD)

A society is generally described as democratic when its political system is based on citizens' sovereignty, transparent decision-making processes, and a government that remains accountable to the people. Although these principles may not always be realised completely in practice, they provide important benchmarks for understanding democracy in contemporary societies. The term “democracy” originates from the Greek words *demos*, meaning “people”, and *kratos*, meaning “power”. It is therefore broadly understood as government by the people, or a system in which citizens participate in determining the rules under which they live. Democracy is widely regarded as a system that combines political stability with fairness and public participation.

Section 1: Building Blocks of Public Service Delivery

Citizen services cover a broad range of government facilities and programmes intended to improve quality of life. They are delivered through online platforms, government offices, and outreach mechanisms, with increasing use of technology to improve

accessibility and efficiency. Essential public services include water supply, sanitation, healthcare, education, and many others, which are central to a decent standard of living. Administrative services cover documentation, permits, licenses, land records, registration, and other interactions with government departments. Governments also provide welfare services for vulnerable groups, including the poor, elderly, persons with disabilities, and women, through social security, employment, and programs for women and children.

1.1 Social Justice & Citizens Welfare

Social justice has no single, universally accepted definition. At its core, however, it rests on the principle of creating a society in which individuals and social groups are treated fairly and have an equitable share in the benefits and opportunities available within society. In this sense, social justice extends beyond the narrow application of justice through courts and laws. It encompasses fairness and equality across the different social, economic and institutional dimensions of public life.

A welfare state may broadly be understood as a system in which the State assumes responsibility for protecting the health and well-being of its citizens through measures such as financial assistance, pensions and other forms of social support. It is also understood as a state that provides citizens with a broad range of economic protections when they can no longer meet essential needs on their own. In such a system, welfare benefits are regarded as entitlements arising from citizenship and public policy rather than acts of charity. Individuals seeking these benefits should therefore not be placed in a position where they feel ashamed or apologetic. Public services should also be of a standard comparable to services available through private means, rather than being treated as inferior alternatives.

A meaningful welfare state is consequently expected to address a wide range of basic requirements, including healthcare, education, employment, sanitation, access to safe drinking water, unemployment support, poverty reduction, housing and other essential needs. Evaluating India's progress towards becoming a welfare state therefore requires assessing the extent to which government policies and programs have improved the population's overall well-being. This includes examining changes in public health, living standards, economic conditions, education, employment opportunities and environmental conditions.

For citizens, the State and its administrative machinery are often experienced primarily through their functions as providers of public services, enforcers of law and regulators of social and economic activity. Improving administrative quality and creating a more responsive relationship between citizens and public institutions requires a range of reforms. Greater transparency in the functioning of government departments and public bodies is among the most significant of these requirements. Although various efforts have made public administration more open, substantial challenges remain. Inherited governance structures, along with established rules, regulations, and procedures, have often created barriers to the public's easy access to information.

The problem is not limited to formal rules and institutional structures; it also has an attitudinal dimension. A legacy of hierarchical and feudal administrative patterns can contribute to reluctance toward openness and public scrutiny. Although many recognize the need to change administrative attitudes, those within the system often place responsibility for that change on others rather than accepting it themselves. Transparency faces a similar challenge: people demand openness in institutional

decisions while remaining less willing to accept scrutiny within their own sphere of authority. Excessive secrecy and limited openness in official transactions can create conditions conducive to corruption and run counter to the principles of accountable and democratic governance. This has strengthened the demand for greater transparency across government departments and public institutions.

Effective government ultimately depends to a significant extent on public trust and confidence. Institutions established to serve citizens must function impartially and operate within a framework of rules that is fair, predictable and transparent, allowing people to organise their economic and social activities with confidence. This institutional trust is reflected in the functioning of courts, the civil service, public-service delivery systems and the formulation and implementation of public policies.

Corruption poses a serious challenge to this relationship because it involves using or misusing public authority for private benefit. When corruption persists without effective checks, those in power can divert public resources. As a result, policies intended to reduce poverty, expand opportunities, and promote economic activity may fail to achieve their objectives. Ensuring accountability, transparency, and integrity in public institutions is therefore central to maintaining public confidence and making welfare-oriented governance effective.

1.2 Good Government and Good Governance

Good government creates the responsive administrative and institutional conditions necessary for effective governance. Although good governance and economic development represent broader, long-term objectives, neither can be sustained without first establishing a system of good government. In practical terms, good government involves several interconnected elements. These include political legitimacy secured through democratic elections, peaceful transfers of power, the existence of political opposition and representative institutions; accountability supported by access to information, separation of powers, effective internal and external auditing, and efforts to limit corruption and nepotism; administrative competence reflected in a trained and capable public service, realistic and implementable policies, and responsible allocation of public expenditure; and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion and movement, impartial and accessible systems of criminal justice, and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of state authority.

Good governance, by contrast, broadly refers to how political authority is exercised, social affairs are regulated, and public resources are managed to pursue social and economic development. It extends beyond government alone and encompasses the institutional and structural framework through which a state operates. This includes how decisions are made, policies are formulated and implemented, institutions exercise their functions, information moves through the system, and leaders provide direction. It also includes the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed. Governance, therefore, concerns not only the integrity, efficiency, and economy of government but also how effectively institutions respond to the needs and objectives for which they were established.

Among the principal responsibilities of government, public service delivery is particularly important, alongside development and regulation. Effective public service delivery rests on three essential dimensions: timely provision, service quality, and accessible mechanisms for addressing citizens' grievances.

1.3: Principles of Citizens' Charter

The idea of modern public service delivery gained prominence during the 1990s, particularly with the emergence of New Public Management (NPM) and the development of the Citizen Charter (1991) in the United Kingdom.

The Charter established an understanding between citizens and public service providers for timely, efficient service delivery. The broader objective is to deliver public services efficiently and economically, within the resources available to the State. In the present system, Citizen Charters intend to improve the quality of services provided by government departments and make citizens aware of the standards they can expect.

Citizen Charters today seek to establish clear service standards, give citizens reasonable choices, and ensure public services are available fairly to all eligible users. Departments are expected to make genuine efforts to implement these commitments effectively. Independent assessment of performance against prescribed standards can further strengthen their effectiveness.

It also provides different service options, allowing people to choose according to their needs and preferences. For instance, consumers may opt for LPG through cylinders or piped connections. Similarly, water-quality service standards help citizens understand the level of service expected from public and private providers.

Citizen Charters also seek to balance efficient use of public resources with citizen satisfaction. By specifying service standards, they enable citizens to compare the promised level of service with its actual delivery, thereby strengthening departmental accountability. Charters generally set out relevant rules, procedures, and schemes through which citizens can access services, while also providing avenues to raise grievances with the concerned department.

It sought to extend consumer-oriented rights to public services by enabling citizens to seek redress when services were inadequate or failed to meet prescribed standards. Its central objective was to make public services more accountable and responsive to citizens.

It specifies the services a government department offers, expected delivery timeframes, applicable service standards, and mechanisms for citizens to register and resolve grievances. Its broader purpose is to promote greater transparency and accountability while making public administration more accessible and citizen-friendly. In this sense, it represents a formal commitment by public authorities towards the citizens they serve.

The Citizens' Charter approach also contributed to the emergence of Public Service Delivery Acts, which provide for time-bound delivery of essential services such as healthcare, education, certificates, and welfare benefits. These laws can also prescribe penalties for officials responsible for delays and provide a legal basis for service-delivery commitments. Together, such measures have sought to strengthen accountability and improve the efficiency of public services.

A key approach to improving public-sector performance is to make service delivery more citizen-focused and quality-oriented. The Citizens' Charter is one of the most recognized mechanisms for this purpose. It can improve access to public services and set clearer expectations by informing citizens about an organization's functions, how to access its services, the level of service they can expect, and the steps available when something goes wrong.

A Citizens' Charter does not, by itself, create legally enforceable rights. However, it can help citizens exercise existing rights and may provide non-legal avenues for seeking remedies, such as complaint mechanisms or independent adjudication. A typical charter sets out service standards, information on the services offered, and procedures for obtaining redressal. While it can also help government employees understand their organization's responsibilities, its primary purpose is to serve the citizen, and it should not be treated merely as an internal management instrument.

In this context, incorporating established principles of public service delivery, such as those followed in the UK, can provide a useful framework. Every public service should:

- i. Set standards of service
- ii. Remain open and provide complete information
- iii. Consult and involve citizens
- iv. Promote accessibility and choice
- v. Treat everyone fairly
- vi. Correct problems when services fail
- vii. Use public resources efficiently
- viii. Encourage innovation and continuous improvement
- ix. Work collaboratively with other service providers

Applying these principles can help address, at least in part, the difficulties citizens face in obtaining public services and resolving related grievances. Citizens may often lack information about their entitlements or find themselves unable to secure services despite paying for them. As public expectations continue to rise, demand for better services is likely to put greater pressure on administrative systems. Anticipating this pressure and undertaking reforms proactively can help improve the quality and responsiveness of public service delivery.

For a charter to be effective, its service standards must be clearly defined and easy for users to understand. These standards should be relevant, meaningful, challenging, simple, measurable, monitored, publicly available and periodically reviewed. Such commitments allow service providers to specify the type, quantity and quality of services they intend to deliver and enable their performance to be assessed against those commitments.

As the state's role shifted from direct service provider to facilitator and regulator, greater emphasis was placed on transparency, accountability, and a citizen-centered approach to administration. At the same time, public satisfaction and citizens' confidence in government became key measures of effective service delivery.

1.4 Improving Service Quality

Improving public services requires developing a sustained, quality-oriented culture within government organizations. Quality management involves an organizational commitment to identifying and meeting service users' needs within available resources. This requires setting clear standards across different areas of work, defining employee performance expectations, and regularly assessing organizational performance against citizens' needs and satisfaction. Government organizations should also demonstrate a clear commitment to quality and make relevant performance information publicly available.

Although quality management originated in the private sector, it has become increasingly relevant to public administration as citizens' expectations of government services have grown. Higher expectations have also exposed shortcomings in public

service delivery. Developing systems and workplace practices centered on quality and performance can help create a stronger culture of excellence across the administration.

A work culture built around quality, performance, openness, and transparency requires participation from both employees and citizens in the reform process. Contemporary civil service reforms seek to strengthen organizational culture through greater employee involvement, consistent implementation of change, recognition of individual and team performance, and consultation with service users. Total Quality Management (TQM) can support this process by mobilizing public-sector organizations' available resources to meet citizens' service requirements and embed a stronger customer-oriented approach in public service delivery.

Citizen Services and Quality of Life: Citizens can access these services through multiple channels. Online government portals allow users to obtain information, submit applications, track requests, and make payments digitally. Government offices at the central, state, and local levels remain important points of access, with efforts to make them more efficient and responsive. Key focus areas of public service delivery reforms include: making government services a basic right of citizens, decentralizing government funds, functions, and functionaries to local government institutions, re-engineering government processes, adopting technology as an enabler, and Legal enablement and institutional reforms. If government and its agencies adopt the concept of service excellence, it can become more productive and competitive. Excellence can simply be defined as the quality or state of being outstanding or superior. Excellence provides citizens with happiness and comfort and creates a memorable experience. A strong organizational culture and a relationship of trust with citizens will help districts move closer to excellence.

Several criteria can be used to determine the quality of services (QoS) delivered by various agencies. They can be mainly condensed into five dimensions of service quality; they are;

- *Tangibility*; refers to the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of the personnel to deliver the services,
- *Reliability*; ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. In a large no of cases, the citizens have no faith in the organizations delivering various services at various levels,
- *Responsiveness*; willingness to help the citizen and provide prompt service,
- *Assurance*; knowledge and courtesy of employees and the ability to convey trust and confidence,
- *Empathy*; caring, individualized attention the administration provides to its citizens.

1.5 Strengthening Grievance Redressal

The growing number of public grievances highlights the need for accessible and effective grievance redressal systems. Such mechanisms are essential to accountability because they can correct administrative errors, expose oversight gaps, address misuse of authority, and prevent recurring shortcomings. Grievances commonly arise when public officials are inaccessible, applications go unacknowledged, prescribed time limits are ignored, or officials display an insensitive or unresponsive attitude. Grievance redressal cells have been established at different levels, but their effectiveness remains limited. In many cases, these mechanisms have themselves become a source of public

frustration because complaints remain unresolved or receive inadequate responses. This is reflected in the condition of some public-help counters at railway stations and bus stands, where “May I help you” desks are often unattended or used for unrelated purposes. Unless these mechanisms are made functional and responsive, their continued existence risks further weakening public confidence in the administrative system.

1.6 Use of Digital Technologies

Information is power. In a democratic system of governance, people are expected to participate in the governance process. Effective public participation requires access to information. Therefore, open government is part of an effective democracy. Citizens must have adequate access to the information and analysis on which government business is based. Yet we still follow a bureaucratic culture of confidentiality and secrecy which runs counter to the spirit of democracy. Access to information enables democratic scrutiny of how government functions and helps check corruption, abuse, and misuse of power, including exercising power on irrelevant considerations. Laws that impose unnecessary restrictions on the public's free access to information also need amendment. All departments and public bodies should have computerized information counters so the public can access information and assistance on various essential services and approvals.

Section 2: Indian Context

India is a welfare state in which the government assumes responsibility for securing a wide range of social rights for its citizens and for addressing the social effects of the market economy. It seeks to reduce social disparities by directly providing, supporting, or subsidizing essential services and social benefits. In this framework, the state has an important role in ensuring that economic and social well-being is not determined solely by an individual's ability to participate successfully in the market.

2.1 Indian Constitution and Welfarism

The Preamble is regarded as an integral element of the constitutional framework and reflects the foundational philosophy of the Indian Constitution. It establishes that sovereignty ultimately rests with the people and that the Constitution derives its authority from them. At the same time, the constitutional system is intended to serve the people and create conditions that enable social progress and development. The Preamble expresses India's resolve to constitute itself as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and sets out the principal objectives to be secured for its citizens. These include justice-social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; and equality of status and opportunity. It also calls for the promotion of fraternity, with the objective of preserving individual dignity as well as the nation's unity and integrity.

As stated earlier, a welfare state refers to a system of government in which the State assumes responsibility for protecting and promoting its population's social and economic well-being. Article 39 of the Indian Constitution lays down important objectives for the State in this regard. It calls upon the State to secure adequate means of livelihood for citizens, ensure that material resources are distributed in a manner that serves the common good, provide equal pay for equal work, and protect children, workers and young people from exploitation and conditions that undermine their well-being. The provision also establishes the principle that men and women performing the same or substantially similar work should receive equal remuneration. Taken together, these

objectives aim to create a welfare-oriented State and establish a more egalitarian social order. Assessing whether India is moving towards the ideal of a welfare state requires a clear understanding of what the term itself signifies.

Within the Indian constitutional framework, this objective is particularly reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in Part IV. These principles seek to establish social and economic conditions that enable citizens to live a dignified and fulfilling life. Their broader purpose is to promote social and economic democracy through a welfare-oriented State. Article 38 specifically directs the State to work towards the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, as effectively as possible, a social order in which social, economic and political justice informs the institutions of national life. This provision provides a broad constitutional basis for pursuing welfare.

The Directive Principles reinforce this commitment through several specific provisions. Articles 39, 41 and 42 address issues such as adequate means of livelihood, the right to work, access to education, public assistance, humane conditions of employment and maternity relief. Although courts cannot directly enforce these principles, they provide important guidance to governments in framing policies and legislation. Collectively, they establish a constitutional vision in which the State is expected to pursue social welfare while balancing individual freedoms with broader social responsibilities. Welfare, in this framework, is therefore not merely discretionary political assistance but an objective embedded in the constitutional structure.

The Indian Constitution also explicitly recognizes citizens' responsibilities. When the Constitution came into force in 1950, it contained an extensive set of Fundamental Rights but no corresponding list of Fundamental Duties. While the Directive Principles reflected responsibilities related to governance, the Constitution later introduced specific constitutional duties for citizens. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1976, following the recommendations of the Swaran Singh Committee, introduced Part IV-A and Article 51A, which set out citizens' Fundamental Duties. The 86th Amendment in 2002 added a duty relating to children's education, bringing the total number of Fundamental Duties to eleven.

The Fundamental Duties cover a range of civic responsibilities. Citizens are expected to respect and abide by the Constitution and show regard for the National Flag and National Anthem; protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India; promote harmony among people despite differences of religion, language and region; protect the environment; develop a scientific outlook; safeguard public property; and strive towards excellence, among other obligations. These provisions reflect the principle that constitutional citizenship involves responsibilities as well as rights. They remind us that the constitutional order not only guarantees individual freedoms but also expects citizens to uphold basic standards of democratic and civic conduct.

India's welfare-oriented constitutional framework must also be viewed against the administrative legacy inherited from British rule. Colonial governance was primarily structured around revenue collection and maintaining law and order rather than providing welfare-oriented public services. The administrative machinery was highly centralised and hierarchical, with limited accessibility for ordinary people. Within this system, the population was largely treated as subjects of the colonial state rather than as citizens entitled to responsive public services. This historical legacy shaped the institutional structures that independent India subsequently inherited and sought to transform.

Broadly, public service delivery in India encompasses the systems through which government provides healthcare, education, sanitation, public distribution, social welfare, policing, infrastructure, and administrative services. Effective and equitable delivery is particularly important given the country's large population and social, economic, and geographical diversity. Central, state, and local governments administer public services, with responsibilities distributed across levels. However, the journey to this model has been long, as shown below.

2.2 Citizens' Empowerment - Key Developments in India

After independence, India adopted a welfare-oriented approach that significantly expanded public services, including food distribution, education, and healthcare. The government established large bureaucratic institutions to administer and deliver these services. However, service delivery remained largely supply-driven, which contributed to bureaucratic delays, excessive procedural requirements, and corruption. Although the system was designed around welfare, its delivery mechanisms did not sufficiently focus on citizens' needs and convenience.

Consequently, the government established various committees and commissions to examine administrative shortcomings, including the *First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)*, established in 1966. It played a key role in laying the foundation of Public Administration in India and led to the creation of the IAS, the establishment of the Department of Personnel, the Central Vigilance Commission, and even the concept of Lokpal/Lokayukta was first recommended by it.

However, government administration had still relied heavily on paper-based procedures. This often led to delays, limited transparency, and reliance on intermediaries. Citizens seeking routine services such as land records, licenses, and certificates frequently had to make repeated visits to government offices. The administrative system was structured around the convenience of the State rather than the citizen, making governance heavily bureaucratic and often insensitive to public needs. Over time, it became increasingly clear that governance needed to be more responsive, accountable, and citizen-centered.

The *73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts* (1991) subsequently sought to decentralize decision-making and strengthen local governance, with the broader objective of improving administration and service delivery at the grassroots level. This marked an important stage in the development of citizen empowerment, as transparency and accountability increasingly became central principles of public administration. The Constitution provides the framework for this division of powers and supports decentralized governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), which are particularly important for reaching rural and marginalized communities.

The Conference of Chief Secretaries (1996), organised around the theme "An Agenda for an Effective and Responsive Administration", considered several issues relating to the transformation of public services. The discussions highlighted the need to make administration more efficient, accountable and responsive to citizens.

Around the same period, India also introduced the *Citizen Charter* (1997), inspired by a similar initiative launched in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister John Major (already detailed in Section 1).

The post-liberalization period in the 1990s brought another major change to public service delivery: it ushered in the *era of e-Government in India*. One early example was

the Gyandoot Project, which was launched in 2000 in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. It was a pioneering rural intranet initiative that used information kiosks to connect villages and provide access to basic government and public services. These kiosks offered services such as access to land records, online grievance mechanisms, and information on agricultural market prices. The initiative sought to address the digital divide while improving transparency and accountability in rural administration. By giving citizens more direct access to government information and services, it also reduced the need for people to travel to district headquarters for routine requirements. The Bhoomi Project in Karnataka (2001) also illustrates this transition. The state government digitized more than 20 million rural land records relating to around 6.7 million farmers. By replacing manual procedures with a digital system, the project sought to reduce inefficiency and opportunities for corruption in maintaining and delivering land records. These initiatives reflected a broader transformation in India's approach to governance. The administrative model gradually shifted from a predominantly bureaucratic, state-centered system to one that placed greater emphasis on citizens' needs and participation. Administrative reforms, decentralization, transparency mechanisms, and the increasing use of technology collectively contributed to this transition towards more citizen-centric governance.

The foundation in the evolution of citizen-centric service delivery approaches was further strengthened by several other developments such as the establishment of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005, as well as CPGRAMS (2007)- all of which too need to be understood in detail before proceeding any further.

2005-2009: Second ARC Led to a Paradigm Shift in Citizen-Centric Governance

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005-2009), headed by Shri Veerappa Moily, played a significant role in reshaping public administration by placing the citizen at the center of governance. Among its reports, the 12th Report, "Citizen Centric Administration: The Heart of Governance," was particularly significant in setting out a framework to make administration more responsive, transparent, and accountable. The Second ARC's recommendations supported a gradual move towards time-bound delivery of public services, wider adoption of digital governance platforms, stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms, and broader recognition of citizens as stakeholders with enforceable rights and legitimate expectations from the administration.

The Second ARC represented a broader shift in the philosophy of Indian administration, from an approach dominated by bureaucratic control towards one that placed greater emphasis on citizen-centric governance. Its recommendations on Citizen Charters, grievance redressal mechanisms, and public service delivery have continued to inform subsequent governance reforms. The underlying objective has been to make government institutions more accessible and responsive while strengthening transparency and accountability.

Core Principles of Citizen-Centric Governance: The 12th Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2nd ARC), titled "Citizen Centric Administration--- The Heart of Governance," provides a comprehensive framework for reorienting public administration towards a system that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizens. The commission's central premise was that the administration ultimately exists to serve the people. Accordingly, it emphasized placing citizens at the core of administrative processes and developing systems that keep public institutions

responsive to their needs, rights, and expectations. The report identifies key principles needed to make administration responsive to citizens:

- Rule of Law: A clear, stable, and predictable legal framework.
- Accountability and Transparency: Mechanisms to make institutions and officials answerable for their decisions and outcomes.
- Decentralisation: Delegating powers to the level closest to citizens, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.
- Accessibility: Ensuring equal access to public services and information, regardless of socio-economic status.

Key Recommendations and Reform Mechanisms

i) Service Delivery and Process Re-Engineering: The commission recommended simplifying administrative processes to make services easier to access through Single-Window Systems where multiple services could be integrated through common delivery centers to reduce repeated interactions with government offices, as well as by leveraging ICT and expanding e-governance to simplify processes, reduce excessive official discretion, and limit opportunities for corruption.

ii) Overhauling Citizens' Charters: The commission also found that many Citizens' Charters followed a "one-size-fits-all" approach. It recommended:

- Customized Specifications: Setting service standards based on the functions of individual departments and organizations.
- Stakeholder Consultation: Involving citizens and civil society in drafting the charters.
- Feasible Commitments: Making only realistic service commitments to avoid eroding public trust.
- Independent Evaluation: Conducting periodic performance reviews through independent agencies.

The Reality Check: Present Status of Citizens' Charter in India

The status of Citizens' Charters in India remains mixed. Initially, Citizens' Charters were largely voluntary declarations specifying service standards and delivery timelines. Over time, the concept has developed into a more significant component of public service delivery, with some jurisdictions introducing legal frameworks such as Public Service Delivery Acts. This represents a shift from merely stating what citizens should expect to creating formal obligations relating to service quality, timelines, and accountability.

Since their introduction in 1997, more than 700 charters have reportedly been developed by various ministries, departments and public agencies. These documents generally specify service standards, provide information to citizens and outline mechanisms for grievance redressal. However, independent assessments point to ongoing problems, including weak accountability, resistance to administrative change, and gaps between stated commitments and actual implementation.

Several central government departments and public-sector organizations have introduced Citizens' Charters, and some state governments have followed suit. However, implementation has produced mixed results. Existing administrative work cultures may prevent these commitments from translating into consistent improvements in service delivery. The larger challenge is to change public servants' attitudes toward citizen grievances and establish clear responsibility for addressing complaints at every

level. Despite these limitations, Citizens' Charters remain an important instrument for promoting transparency, accountability and citizen-centric administration in India. Efforts to strengthen their implementation have also contributed to legal and institutional mechanisms governing service standards, delivery timelines, and grievance redressal, with the broader objective of ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently and equitably.

2005: Sevottam model

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India (GoI), created the Sevottam framework in 2005 after studying best international practices such as the United Kingdom's Charter Mark and the United States of America's Malcolm model. It is a framework for continual improvement in service delivery by government organizations until they achieve excellence. *Sevottam* is a generic framework for continually improving public service delivery until it achieves excellence. Excellence here means improving processes to achieve an optimal point of timeliness and quality. It includes reducing uncertainty from the citizens' viewpoint. Government organizations that adopt QMS Sevottam can be certified under Indian Standard 15700:2005 by the Bureau of Indian Standards, New Delhi. For Citizens, Public Service Delivery should not be a game of dice. They should know what to expect. How much to expect? From whom? when? And where? The Citizens' Charter aims to remove uncertainty for citizens through published standards.

The Sevottam model has been developed with the overarching objective of improving the quality of public service delivery in the country. The model has three components and, beyond this overarching objective, expects intermediate outcomes from compliance with conditions designed for each component. The first component of the model requires effective charter implementation, opening a channel for citizens' input into how organizations determine service delivery requirements. Citizens' Charters publicly declare the information on citizens' entitlements, making citizens better informed and hence empowering them to demand better services. The second component of the model, 'Public Grievance Redress', requires a grievance redress system that operates in a way that leaves citizens more satisfied with how the organization responds to complaints/grievances, regardless of the final decision. The third component, 'Excellence in Service Delivery', postulates that an organization can achieve excellent service delivery only if it manages the key ingredients for good service delivery well and builds its own capacity to continuously improve delivery. The ability of such an assessment model to influence service delivery quality depends on how tightly improvement actions are linked to assessment results. Further, any assessment model needs periodic updates to keep pace with emerging developments. Change Management and Research and Development have therefore been identified as important focus areas for running this model, in addition to administering the assessment process and its culmination in certification or awards.

2005: The Right to Information Act

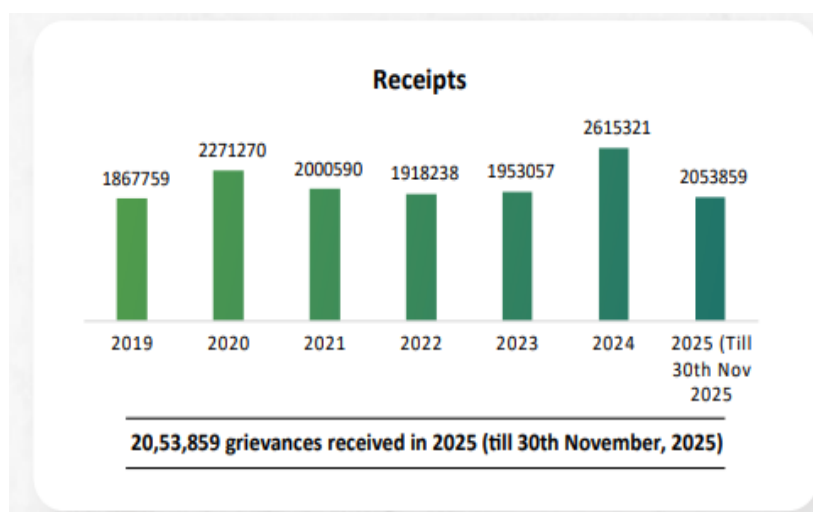
The Right to Information Act, 2005, marked a major development in this transformation of the service-delivery paradigm. By giving citizens a statutory right to obtain information held by public authorities, the law created a formal mechanism to subject government functioning to greater public scrutiny. Access to official information has supported efforts to improve transparency and accountability and has given citizens an important means of questioning administrative decisions and service delivery. RTI has consequently strengthened the participatory dimension of governance by enabling citizens to seek

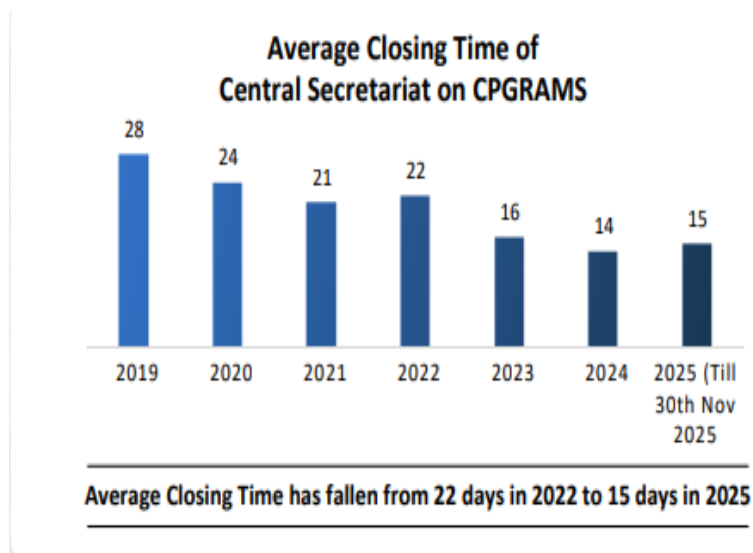
information and hold public authorities accountable. At the same time, the mechanism's effectiveness depends on factors such as timely disposal of information requests, the strength and functioning of relevant institutions, and public awareness of the rights available under the law.

2007: Establishment of CPGRAMS

Public grievance redressal remains a fundamental pillar of responsive governance (Section 1). As the nodal agency for administrative reforms, the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) established the Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) in 2007. CPGRAMS further supported accountability and citizen participation by allowing citizens to submit and track grievances online through a time-bound redressal mechanism. The main aim was to deepen citizen engagement and strengthen accountability across the government system. Over a period of time, it has evolved into a comprehensive grievance management ecosystem, supporting structured reviews, feedback loops, and systematic monitoring across Central Ministries, States/UTs, and key offices such as the PMO and President's Secretariat.

In 2025, all Ministries/Departments and States/UTs received more than 20 lakh grievances (till November 2025). The average disposal time of Central Ministries/Departments has improved from 22 days in 2022 to 15 days in 2025. In 2025 (till November 2025), all Central Ministries/Departments received 2,53,877 appeals. Over 2.2 million pieces of feedback have been collected since July 2022. From 1st January 2025 to 30th November 2025, a total of 10,76,292 citizens provided feedback. The Feedback Call Center contributed the largest share with 7,10,629 responses- around 66% of the total- while 3,65,663 responses were received online, reflecting strong digital participation. Leveraging the impetus provided by the Special Campaign 5.0 conducted by DARPG, all the Ministries/Departments resolved 97.49% of their pending grievances.





Source: Department of Administrative Reforms, GoI, CPGRAMS Annual Report 2025

2011: Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill

In 2011, the central government introduced the “Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011” in the Lok Sabha. The proposed legislation sought to give citizens a statutory right to time-bound delivery of specified goods and services, along with a grievance redressal mechanism. Under the Bill, every public authority had to publish a Citizens’ Charter within six months, detailing the categories of goods and services it provided, prescribed delivery time limits, and the names and addresses of responsible officials. Public authorities were also required to establish Information and Facilitation Centers, including customer care centers, call centers, help desks, and people’s support centers, to help citizens access services and address grievances. The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 20, 2011, but did not become law. It lapsed following the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.

2010-2011 Public Service Guarantee Act

Around the same time, however, several states introduced their own Public Service Guarantee Acts to give citizens time-bound access to specified government services. The Public Service Guarantee Act provides a statutory framework for the time-bound delivery of government services and establishes mechanisms to hold public officials accountable for delays or failure to provide services within the prescribed period. The introduction of Right to Services legislation has strengthened citizens’ ability to demand timely and transparent public services. Before such laws were introduced, government departments were often associated with delays, corruption, procedural difficulties, and limited accountability. Growing complaints about these practices highlighted the need for a legal mechanism to regulate service delivery and provide citizens with enforceable rights. Right to Services legislation aims to reduce corruption, improve transparency, and strengthen accountability in public administration. Because it falls within the domain of state legislation, individual states have discretion to determine the services covered, the implementation procedures, and the extent of its application. The legislation generally combines time-bound service delivery with a formal grievance redressal

mechanism and provisions for action against officials who fail to meet prescribed standards. Thirty states have implemented such legislation. The framework establishes a public-service obligation centered on quality, transparency, standardization, and timely delivery, while giving citizens an enforceable mechanism to address service-related grievances. Madhya Pradesh became the first state to enact a Right to Service law on August 18, 2010, followed by Bihar on July 25, 2011. Other states that subsequently introduced similar legislation include Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Haryana, West Bengal, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Assam. (See Annexure 3)

Right to Public Services legislation enacted by different states generally gives citizens a legal entitlement to specified services within a prescribed timeframe. States usually notify these services separately through official gazettes. Common examples include issuing caste, birth, marriage, and domicile certificates; electricity connections; voter and ration cards; and copies of land records. If the designated officer fails to provide a service within the stipulated period or refuses to provide it without valid grounds, the applicant may appeal to the First Appellate Authority.

After considering the appeal, the First Appellate Authority may accept or reject it through a reasoned written order and may direct the designated officer to provide the required service. A further appeal can be filed before the Second Appellate Authority. It may uphold or reject the appeal, direct the officer to deliver the service, or impose a penalty for unjustified failure or deficiency in service. Depending on the applicable state law, such penalties may range from Rs 500 to Rs 5,000, along with possible recommendations for disciplinary action.

The general procedure begins with the citizen submitting an application for the required service and receiving an acknowledgment. The designated officer is then expected to provide the service within the prescribed period. Unless there is a valid reason for delay, government rules and the relevant legislation require the service to be delivered within this timeframe. Where this does not happen, the applicant can approach the First or Second Appellate Authority. These authorities can direct the officer concerned to provide the service and exercise powers such as summoning officials and requiring relevant documents. Continued delay after such directions may result in a penalty under the applicable state provisions. The legislation may also hold appellate authorities accountable where they fail to discharge their responsibilities or do not provide adequate reasons for non-performance.

2006-2014: National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)

Between 2006 and 2014, the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) and its network of Common Service Centers (CSCs) strengthened e-governance institutions. These centers enabled citizens, particularly in rural areas, to access a range of government and other services while also creating employment opportunities for rural youth. Services such as tax filing, passport applications, banking, bill payments, and certificates became increasingly accessible at relatively low cost. This reduced the need for repeated in-person visits to government offices and shifted service delivery to more accessible channels.

2006: Common Service Centers

Common Service Centers (CSCs) were approved in 2006 as a strategic component of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). The initiative was intended to establish a large

network of assisted digital access points through which citizens, particularly those in rural and underserved areas, could access government and other essential services. The original program envisaged around one lakh CSCs across approximately six lakh census villages, broadly following a ratio of one center for every six villages. The centers were designed to provide physical access to information and communication technology and reduce the need for citizens to visit government offices for routine services. The CSC initiative subsequently became an important component of the Digital India programme. Its service portfolio has expanded beyond government-to-citizen services to include public utilities, social welfare, healthcare, financial services, education, agriculture and business-to-consumer services. The nationwide network is also intended to address India's geographic, linguistic, cultural and regional diversity. CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), oversees the implementation of the programme. CSC services broadly cover:

- Agriculture: Information and services related to farming and agricultural schemes.
- Education and training: Digital education, skill development and training services.
- Healthcare: Telemedicine and other digitally enabled health services.
- Banking and insurance: Rural banking, insurance and financial inclusion services.
- Entertainment: Digital entertainment and related consumer services.
- Utilities: Access to public utility and government-related services.
- Commercial services: Selected business-to-consumer services.

CSC Implementation Model: The CSC program follows a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model involving:

- *Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs):* Operate individual CSCs and provide services to citizens at the local level. VLEs play a particularly important role in extending digital and financial services to rural communities. As local access points, they help citizens who may lack the infrastructure, skills, or connectivity to use online government services independently.
- *Service Center Agencies (SCAs):* Responsible for managing clusters of approximately 500-1,000 CSCs.
- *State Designated Agencies (SDAs):* Support and coordinate implementation at the state level.

Several digital applications have been developed to monitor the functioning and performance of CSCs, such as CSC SMART Solution, CSC Online Monitoring Solution, CSC Online Dashboard and CSC Connect. These systems support geographic identification of CSCs, maintenance of centralised databases of CSCs and VLEs, monitoring of registration status and daily uptime, and assessment of the performance of CSCs, SCAs and states. They also provide role-based access and hierarchical monitoring across national, state, district, block and individual CSC levels, along with information on connectivity status.

2013: Direct Benefit Transfer

The Government of India introduced Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) on January 1, 2013, to reform the delivery of welfare benefits and subsidies. The system was designed to simplify and accelerate the flow of information and funds, improve beneficiary targeting,

eliminate duplication, and reduce leakages and fraudulent claims. Under DBT, benefits are transferred directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts rather than being routed through multiple intermediaries. Aadhaar is commonly used for identity verification and account seeding, while bank accounts, including those opened under financial inclusion initiatives such as Jan Dhan, provide the mechanism for receiving payments. The major objectives of DBT include:

- Improving efficiency and transparency in welfare delivery.
- Reducing leakages, duplication, and fraudulent claims.
- Ensuring that benefits reach intended beneficiaries directly.
- Strengthening accountability and monitoring.
- Improving the targeting and delivery of government schemes.
- Promoting financial inclusion through direct access to bank accounts.

Stages of DBT: The DBT process generally involves the following stages:

- *Identification of beneficiaries:* Eligible individuals are identified under the relevant government scheme.
- *Verification:* Beneficiary details are verified using Aadhaar, bank accounts or other approved identification mechanisms.
- *Fund allocation:* The department concerned sanctions the benefit or subsidy.
- *Direct transfer:* Funds are electronically transferred to the beneficiary's bank account.
- *Monitoring:* Transactions are tracked through digital systems to improve transparency and accountability.
- *Payment confirmation:* Beneficiaries may receive confirmation through SMS or other communication channels.

Key Features: DBT combines digital identification, electronic payments, and financial inclusion to create a more direct welfare-delivery mechanism. Its key features include:

- *Aadhaar integration:* Supports beneficiary identification and verification.
- *Direct bank transfers:* Reduces dependence on intermediaries.
- *Electronic payments:* Enables faster and more traceable transactions.
- *Transparency:* Creates a digital record of payments and transactions.
- *Financial inclusion:* Links welfare delivery with formal banking access.
- *Continuous monitoring:* Enables government agencies to track fund transfers and implementation.

Digital systems in welfare delivery have also been associated with improvements in fiscal efficiency. According to an assessment by the BlueKraft Digital Foundation covering 2009 to 2024, DBT helped plug welfare-delivery leakages and resulted in reported cumulative savings of Rs 3.48 lakh crore. The assessment also reported that subsidy allocations fell from 16 percent to 9 percent of total government expenditure after DBT was implemented. The JAM trinity- Jan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile phones - has been central to this architecture, enabling beneficiary identification, account-based transfers, and digital communication. According to the assessment, the system has helped eliminate or reduce ghost beneficiaries and middlemen, allowing a larger share of welfare funds to reach genuine recipients without a proportional increase

in government expenditure. The rise in the Welfare Efficiency Index (WEI) was cited as an indicator of improved fiscal resource optimization alongside expanded welfare coverage. Reported savings have been particularly significant in areas such as food subsidies, MGNREGS and PM-KISAN. These findings indicate the potential of digital systems to improve the efficiency and targeting of large-scale welfare programmes, although their effectiveness remains dependent on implementation, beneficiary access and the quality of supporting infrastructure. As of June 2026, more than 300 government schemes were being covered under the DBT framework. These include Atal Pension Yojana, Ayushman Bharat: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, Green India Mission National Afforestation Programme, Khelo India, National Ayush Mission, National Food Security Mission, National Livestock Mission, National Mission for Sustained Agriculture (NMSA), PM Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), PM Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana and Swachh Bharat Mission–Gramin

Together, DBT and CSCs represent two complementary dimensions of technology-enabled governance. DBT makes welfare transfers more direct, traceable, and efficient, while CSCs provide physical and assisted digital access to government and other essential services. Their effectiveness ultimately depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on accurate beneficiary identification, reliable connectivity, digital literacy, accessibility, and continued institutional monitoring, which the subsequent Digital India mission and MyGov, coupled with several other endeavors, tried to bridge.

2014: Launch of MyGov Transformed Citizen-Government Engagement

Digital democracy extends beyond the digital delivery of public services. It also creates avenues for citizens to participate in governance, contribute ideas, and engage with policy-making processes, thereby strengthening interaction between citizens and the government. Digital democracy also gives citizens opportunities to participate directly in governance. **MyGov** provides platforms for public consultations, policy discussions, surveys, and idea submissions. By collecting citizen feedback and opinions, it creates a channel between policymakers and the public, supporting a more responsive and participatory approach to governance.

2015: Digital India Mission

Since 2015, Digital India has increasingly developed into a citizen-oriented digital governance ecosystem. Digital India has contributed to a broader shift towards digital and platform-based governance. Its major service-delivery pillars include – *Aadhaar* (digital identity), *Direct Benefit Transfer* (welfare delivery), *Unified Payments Interface* (digital payments), and *DigiLocker* (paperless governance)

Platforms such as UMANG have brought multiple government services, including EPF-related services, gas booking, and certificate access, onto a common platform. DigiLocker supports paperless governance by allowing citizens to digitally store and access documents such as driving licenses and certificates. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has enabled quick digital payments for bills, taxes, and other services. Sector-specific platforms such as e-Hospital, online OPD booking, and Parivahan have further expanded digital access to healthcare and transport-related services, including driving licenses, vehicle registration, and challans. By reducing dependence on physical intermediaries and limiting delays, digital delivery can improve efficiency, reduce

opportunities for corruption, and strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen-state interaction.

Digital technologies have therefore become an important instrument for transparency, accountability, and service delivery. The system has since moved towards SMART governance, incorporating platforms such as India Stack, AI-enabled and multilingual services, and greater emphasis on last-mile delivery through CSCs. Assisted digital platforms have enabled rural citizens to access online services even where independent digital access remains limited.

2017: Digital Literacy Through PMGDisha

Digital inclusion is essential to digital democracy because access to technology alone does not ensure meaningful participation. Citizens also need the skills and confidence to use digital platforms effectively. Initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) seek to improve digital literacy, particularly among rural households. Familiarity with smartphones, the internet, and government portals can increase citizens' awareness, participation, and access to public services and rights. Inclusive digital development therefore helps technology function as an instrument of empowerment rather than exclusion.

Digital interventions therefore need mechanisms that address these social, geographic, and administrative constraints. Citizen Charters and reforms such as Sevottam, service guarantee legislation, and Digital India have contributed to efforts to improve public service delivery and governance. Their effectiveness, however, depends on implementation, citizen awareness, and strong accountability mechanisms that ensure stated commitments translate into actual service outcomes.

2018: Service Delivery Assessment using NeSDA

With the aim of boosting e-governance endeavors at all levels of governance, and to embark on the journey for digital Government excellence, the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) initiative was undertaken by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), Govt. of India. NeSDA reports are conceptualised with an overall objective to measure the depth and effectiveness of existing e – e-Governance service delivery mechanisms. It aims to evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of e-Government services provided across the country. It assesses how far digital services reach citizens, focusing on key aspects like accessibility, user experience, and service quality. It evaluates the performance of e-Government services at both central and state levels; ensures digital services are transparent, accountable, and accessible to all citizens; and highlights areas where improvements are needed for better service delivery. Based on the Online Service Index (OSI) of the UN e-Government Survey and adapted to the Indian federal structure, NeSDA assesses the availability, accessibility, and maturity of online service delivery across States, Union Territories, and selected Central Ministries/Departments.

NeSDA covered six sectors such as finance, labour & employment, education, local government & utilities, social welfare (including Agriculture & Health), and Environment (including fire). This Framework covers services under the G2B and G2C segments in these six sectors. The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), released it to assess state/UTs and Central Ministries on e-service delivery as a benchmarking exercise. NeSDA serves as an important benchmarking exercise to improve online service delivery across the country and promote best practices among States, UTs, and

Central Ministries/Departments. It helps governments identify gaps, strengthen service delivery mechanisms, and improve citizens' experience accessing public services online.

India Moving Towards Unified Service Delivery Portal

Various states are adopting the concept of a 'Unified Service Delivery Portal'. It is a centralized online platform that connects government services from multiple departments, offering citizens a single portal to access a wide range of services. By consolidating services into one user-friendly interface, citizens can access information, submit applications, and avail services without navigating multiple departmental websites/physical offices. Includes features such as digital authentication, single sign-on, online payment gateways, etc., to further streamline the process. Various state governments have begun implementing similar platforms to consolidate their services. Several state-level integrated citizen service platforms include Seva Sindhu (Karnataka), Sewa Setu (Assam), e-Sevanam (Kerala), Odisha One, Apuni Sarkar (Uttarakhand), and SWAAGAT (Tripura).

The graph below visually represents the overall growth in delivering the identified mandatory e-services across all states/UTs over the previous 12 months.

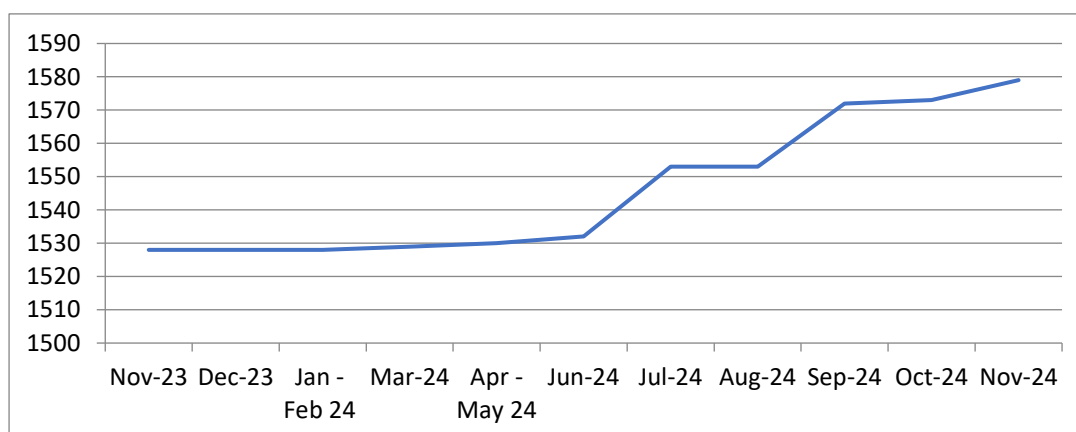


Figure 2.1: Overall growth in the delivery of the identified mandatory e-services across all states/UTs

(Source: NeSDA Way Forward Report, Nov 2024)

Integrated platforms such as UMANG have brought these developments closer to citizens by enabling direct, transparent, and increasingly real-time access to government services at scale. India's governance model has historically evolved from a predominantly state-centered approach towards greater citizen empowerment. A system initially focused on administration and welfare provision has increasingly emphasized ease of living, transparency, and direct access to services, changing how citizens interact with the state.

This transition reflects a broader movement from government-centric to citizen-centric governance, with greater emphasis on accessibility, convenience, and transparency. The principle of "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" is increasingly reflected through digital platforms and more integrated approaches to public service delivery.

Section 3: CHALLENGES IMPEDING EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

However, technology alone does not remove access barriers. Long travel distances, inaccessible facilities, language differences, disabilities, limited digital or general

literacy, bureaucratic delays, and long queues can continue to exclude vulnerable groups. These barriers can affect access to essential services such as healthcare, education, legal support, and welfare programs.

Despite several reforms, public service delivery in India still faces challenges such as bureaucratic delays, inefficiency, corruption, and limited transparency. Citizens may struggle to obtain services within a reasonable timeframe or on equal terms. Various reforms have therefore focused on improving efficiency and accountability. The Digital India mission has expanded online access to government services, while Right to Public Services Acts enacted by several states provide for time-bound delivery of specified services. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) seeks to reduce leakages by transferring welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts. E-governance, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, and real-time monitoring have further changed how public services are delivered.

However, gaps in digital literacy, internet connectivity, and basic infrastructure continue to limit access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

- *Lack of Infrastructure*: Inadequate infrastructure remains a major constraint on effective public service delivery. Poor road connectivity, limited healthcare facilities, inadequate sanitation, and restricted access to clean water continue to affect service delivery in several areas. These infrastructure gaps reduce government agencies' ability to provide services efficiently and consistently.
- *Corruption*: Corruption can weaken the fairness and effectiveness of public service delivery. Practices such as bribery, nepotism, and favoritism may prevent services from reaching those who need them. Strong institutional safeguards, transparency, and accountability are therefore essential to limit corruption and improve service outcomes.
- *Limited Resources*: India's large population places considerable pressure on available financial resources, infrastructure, and trained personnel. Shortages in these areas can restrict the coverage and quality of public services and contribute to unequal access. Marginalized communities are often particularly affected by such resource constraints.
- *Excessive Procedural Requirements and Delays*: Complex administrative procedures and excessive paperwork can make public services slow, difficult, and inefficient. Delays in processing applications can frustrate citizens and increase administrative burdens. Simplifying procedures, reducing documentation, and expanding digital service delivery can help make these processes more efficient.
- *Socio-economic disparities*: Socio-economic inequality and social exclusion create additional barriers to accessing public services. Rural communities, tribal groups, and low-income households may face greater difficulties in accessing education, healthcare, and welfare programs. Addressing these disparities requires inclusive policies and targeted interventions that respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups.
- *Capacity Building*: Effective service delivery also depends on the capabilities of public officials and service providers. Training, skill development, and performance evaluation need strengthening to improve administrative capacity and service quality. Continuous capacity building can help officials respond more effectively to citizens' needs.

- *Lack of people's participation and awareness*: Limited awareness of rights, entitlements, and available government services can prevent citizens from accessing benefits to which they are entitled. At the same time, inadequate citizen participation in decision-making may result in services that do not fully reflect local needs. Greater public awareness and meaningful citizen involvement in service design and implementation can therefore improve both accessibility and responsiveness.

Section 4: IIPA STUDY

Indian Institute of Public Administration conducted a study on ***“Efficacy and Effectiveness of Citizen’s Charter and Service Delivery Act in select Departments of Gol and States” in 2025***, which was funded by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, and recommended the following:

- To promote citizen-centric governance and also align with the vision of the government, the Citizen Charter should be given priority in all organizations. It should be available at the reception counter of all organizations, and its important provisions should be displayed for citizens' benefit. Every organization should have a designated Nodal Officer for the Citizens' Charter. This will promote open government and informed citizens.
- The Public Service Delivery Act has had a significant impact on improving the quality of service being delivered. The process has become simple and transparent, and it has reduced corruption. However, regular updating and monitoring are required. Standards need to be reviewed periodically. Addressing citizens' grievances will enhance citizens' faith and trust in the government
- The citizens, by and large, have been able to access the services, but as the socio-economic data shows, they are mostly the youth. There is a need to raise awareness of the Act and its provisions to educate citizens, particularly women, about its benefits.
- There have been issues in accessing the services digitally. AI needs to be incorporated to improve digital information and service delivery. The advent of AI has opened up huge opportunities to revolutionize governance practices and enhance service delivery efficiency. By harnessing AI technologies, the government can streamline processes, improve decision-making, and enhance service delivery to the citizens. This will herald a new era of citizen-centric administration.

Some Suggested Actions for Effective Service Delivery

Citizen service delivery continues to face challenges such as limited awareness, the digital divide, complex procedures, and administrative delays. Key measures to address these challenges include:

- *Digitization*: Converting records and processes into digital formats to improve efficiency and transparency.
- *Simplification*: Streamlining procedures, reducing documentation, and providing multiple services through single platforms.
- *Convergence*: Coordinating stakeholders involved in service delivery to improve implementation and better target beneficiaries.
- *Outreach*: Conducting targeted campaigns to increase awareness, beneficiary enrolment, and access to grievance redressal.

- *Capacity Building*: Training government employees to strengthen their skills and knowledge.
- *Citizen Engagement*: Using citizen feedback to identify gaps and improve service delivery.

Worldwide, most countries, including India, are exploring how artificial intelligence (AI) can help deliver seamless services to citizens across various sectors, which we will explore in the following sections.

Part II: Citizen Services in the Age of AI

As highlighted earlier, the relationship between the state and its citizens has always been shaped by how public services are designed and delivered. Effective citizen services are central to improving quality of life and strengthening governance. Greater use of technology, combined with accessibility, efficiency, inclusion, and citizen participation, can help ensure that public services reach those who need them most. Citizens judge the state by their experiences at the point of delivery; as a result, with a large population and growing demand for faster, more efficient service delivery, governments must keep up with the latest technological innovations. As a result, the paradigm of public service delivery has undergone three main transitions over the last century.

- In the initial phase- through much of the twentieth century- a service meant a visit to an office and then started the patience to endure a passage through serpentine queues, layers of paperwork, and finally bear the never-ending wait to receive the service or an inexplicable rejection.
- Subsequently, in the latter half of the twentieth century, digital governance moved records and routine procedures online, so that information and services could be accessed at any hour through digital portals and mobile applications.
- The last few years have brought a third shift, propelled by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its allied technologies, which this paper refers to collectively as *intelligent technologies*.

Intelligent technologies differ from earlier e-governance in one important respect. Digitization moved the citizen-state interface from paper to screen. AI begins to automate part of the human judgment exercised at that interface for various decision points such as: *whose identity is genuine, who is eligible and who is not, which grievance needs escalation, which taxpayer merits scrutiny*, and so on.

Section 5: AI Fundamentals

Before exploring the varied possibilities ushered in by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public service delivery, let us attempt to demystify the term AI and trace its genesis.

5.1 Understanding Artificial Intelligence

AI refers to the branch of computer science concerned with systems that perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, recognizing patterns, understanding language, and forecasting outcomes (Russell & Norvig, 2021). A navigation application through Maps illustrates the idea. It does not merely display a fixed route; it combines historical traffic patterns with live data on

congestion and road closures captured through satellite data and GPS tracker data from mobile devices, proposes the fastest route, and revises the arrival time as conditions change. The same logic, applied to public services, could direct a citizen to the least crowded service center or the nearest functioning hospital.

Three features broadly distinguish AI from any other conventional software.

- i. AI can find patterns in very large datasets that would take people months to analyze.
- ii. Generative AI can produce text, speech, images, and code from a short prompt.
- iii. Some AI systems, such as AI Agents, can pursue a goal over several steps with limited human intervention, using neural network logic.

How well any AI system performs depends on three things:

- ✓ the quality of its training data,
- ✓ the design of its model and
- ✓ the context in which it is deployed.

An AI model is the trained mathematical core of an intelligent system that maps inputs to outputs.

5.2 Tracing the Evolution of AI

AI did not arrive all at once. Its history alternates between periods of excitement and long stretches of disappointment, commonly called the “AI winters” (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019).

- 1950: Way back in 1950, Turing (1950) reframed the question “*Can machines think?*” as a practical test: *could a machine hold a conversation so well that a person could not tell it from a human?* Also popularly referred to as the Turing Test.
- 1952: Arthur Samuel wrote a checkers program that improved by playing against itself in 1952.
- 1956: John McCarthy and his colleagues gave the field its name at a summer workshop at Dartmouth College (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019) in 1956. During the same period, early successes such as the Logic Theorist and the ELIZA chatbot encouraged predictions that intelligent machines were a few decades away.
- 1970s (the first AI Winter): Those predictions proved premature. Limited computing power and thin results led to sharp cuts in funding in the 1970s, the first AI winter (the slowdown).
- 1980s: Expert systems, which encoded specialist knowledge as hand-written rules, revived commercial interest in the 1980s, but their cost and unpredictability in the results brought a second winter towards the end of that decade.
- 1990s: The turn came when researchers stopped hand-coding knowledge and let machines learn rules from data. IBM’s Deep Blue defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov in 1997, and the spread of the internet provided the data machine learning needed.
- 2010s: In this period, deep learning techniques using many-layered neural networks transformed image and speech recognition; a deep-learning model won

the ImageNet competition by a wide margin in 2012, and DeepMind's AlphaGo defeated Lee Sedol at Go in 2016 (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019).

- 2022 and onwards: The present decade is the era of Generative AI. Large language models (LLMs), trained on vast bodies of text, now draft documents, answer questions, and converse in ways that often seem human by employing Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques.

5.3 Types of AI

AI is commonly classified in two ways: by capability (measured against human intelligence), and by functionality (according to how a system processes information) (Hintze, 2016; Russell & Norvig, 2021).

Table 5.1 summarises both and adds the three forms of narrow AI most relevant to government: Predictive, Generative and Agentic.

Every system in use today, including every case discussed in this paper, is a form of 'Narrow AI'. For citizen services, the line between Generative AI and Agentic AI matters a great deal. A generative assistant answers when asked, and a person decides what to do with the answer. An agentic system can open a file, check it against a registry, and issue a decision on its own. (and from here could start a mayhem, which the paper would discuss in the subsequent section)

Table 5.1: Classifications of Artificial Intelligence

Basis	Type	Meaning	Status and examples
Capability	Narrow (Weak) AI	Performs one task or a bounded set of tasks well	All current systems: face authentication, spam filters, chatbots
	General (Strong) AI	Would learn and apply knowledge across any task a human can perform	Theoretical
	Super AI	Would exceed the best human minds in every field	Speculative
Functionality	Reactive machines	Respond to present input with no memory of the past	Deep Blue
	Limited memory	Use recent data to inform present decisions	Driver-assistance systems, most machine-learning models
	Theory of mind	Would infer the beliefs and intentions of others	Research stage
	Self-aware	Would possess consciousness of its own	Hypothetical
Narrow AI in practice	Predictive and analytical AI	Classifies, scores, and forecasts from data	Fraud detection, risk scoring

Basis	Type	Meaning	Status and examples
	Generative AI	Creates new text, speech, images or code	Large language models, translation
	Agentic AI	Plans and executes multi-step tasks towards a goal with limited supervision	Emerging government “AI agents”

Note. Capability and functionality categories follow Russell and Norvig (2021) and Hintze (2016). The third grouping is the author’s.

5.4 How AI Supports Service Delivery

AI supports citizen services in at least five ways.

- Pattern recognition and analytics help decision-makers allocate resources and detect leakage.
- Natural language processing (NLP) lets citizens speak or write to the state in their own language and lets officials read thousands of submissions quickly.
- Biometric matching verifies identity remotely, sparing the elderly a journey to an office.
- Predictive models allow departments to anticipate need, for instance by combining weather, soil and crop data to plan drought relief before distress peaks.
- Recommender systems, linked to digital registries, can tell a citizen which schemes she is eligible for and pre-fill the application, moving service delivery from a model in which citizens must ask to one in which the state reaches out (Bagde, n.d.; Mehr, 2017).

With intelligent technologies, citizens can access services, information, and entitlements from a device in their palm, in their own language and by voice, lowering barriers for people with limited literacy in English or Hindi. Intermediaries lose their hold, and departments can serve more people with the same staff.

Therefore, for governments worldwide, AI is no longer confined to narrow back-office tasks such as sorting documents. It now reaches citizen engagement, knowledge management within departments, and support for administrative decisions. Let us critically examine some global cases of AI adoption, particularly in public service delivery.

Section 6: Global Cases of AI Adoption in PSD

We selected nine country cases and one EU case for diversity of region, income, and technique, and for a deliberate balance between documented benefits and documented harms. Read alongside the multilateral frameworks that increasingly shape their respective national practices (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Selected Global Cases of AI in Citizen Services

Country	Name-Initiative	AI function	Principal lesson
Estonia	Bürokratt	Single network of interoperable public-service chatbots	Consolidate front doors before multiplying them
United Kingdom	GOV.UK Chat; “Humphrey” toolkit	Generative assistant for citizens; tools for officials	Publish accuracy and failure rates alongside benefits
Singapore	LifeSG, VICA, Pair	Life-event services; chatbots across agencies; assistant for officers	Keep assisted channels even when digital services mature
Finland	AuroraAI	Proactive, life-event service network	Coordination across departments is harder than the technology
Brazil	gov.br and AlBio	Single digital identity with biometric matching	Scale does not settle accountability
United States	Internal Revenue Service	Machine learning for audit selection and fraud detection	AI used to replace staff leaves fewer people to catch errors
United Arab Emirates	Agentic framework	AI Target of moving half of federal services to AI agents in two years	Agents that act on files raise new accountability questions
Netherlands	Childcare benefits (toeslagenaffaire)	Self-learning fraud risk scoring	Unaudited proxies plus no appeal produce mass harm
Australia	Robodebt	Automated income averaging and debt notices	Removing human verification from individual decisions is unlawful and cruel
Multilateral	EU AI Act; OECD; UN	Risk classification, guardrails, benchmarking	Welfare eligibility systems should be high-risk by default

(Note. Compiled by author and her former interns – Simran & Vani)

Based on analysis of these global cases of use of various forms of intelligent technologies, the author summarises chief learnings as below:

6.1: Global Adoption of Conversational User Interfaces in PSD & Limitations

- Estonia’s Bürokratt began as a single NLP chatbot and has grown into a network of interoperable assistants built on the country’s X-Road data-exchange layer.

- Now there is a scatter of agency-specific bots that have left citizens unsure where to ask (Information System Authority, n.d.).
- The United Kingdom has taken a cautious, pilot-first route. In two public pilots of GOV.UK Chat, one on the web and one in the GOV.UK app, more than 10,000 web users asked nearly 24,000 questions. Among app users, 73 percent found the assistant useful and 64 percent were satisfied, and measured accuracy improved over the trials (Dub & McDonald, 2026).
 - The reporting was unusually candid: the government stated plainly that the assistant “can make mistakes” and recorded hundreds of attempts to manipulate it (Dub & McDonald, 2026).
- Singapore’s LifeSG organizes more than 100 services around life events such as the birth of a child, while VICA powers chatbots across government and Pair assists public officers (Government Technology Agency of Singapore, n.d.).
 - Even so, Singapore keeps assisted and offline channels alongside its digital ones, in one of the world’s most digitized states.

6.2: Global Adoption of Proactive Services and Identity at Scale & Limitations

- Finland’s Aurora AI, coordinated by the Ministry of Finance from 2019, sought to move administration from waiting for applications to anticipating need, connecting a person facing a life event such as job loss to public, private and voluntary services. It deliberately avoided a single central database and was built on data-protection impact assessments and an ethics framework (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2023).
 - Its evaluations found that even the term “life event” lacked an agreed definition across agencies, a reminder that the hardest problems in proactive service are institutional.
- Brazil’s gov.br, by contrast, shows identity at scale: by March 2026 it had about 175 million users and more than 4,000 federal services, supported by Serpro’s AIBio biometric platform holding some 376 million facial records (Radioagência Nacional, 2026; Singal, 2026).
 - Scale, however, has not been matched by public reporting on error and exclusion rates.
- In the United States, the Internal Revenue Service has turned to machine learning for audit selection and fraud detection at a time of sharp reductions in staff (De Noia, 2026).
 - When AI is used to make up for fewer staff, fewer staff remain to catch its mistakes.

6.3 Global Adoption of Agents for Whole-of-Government & Limitations

- In April 2026, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced a framework to move half of its federal government sectors and services onto agentic AI within two years (UAE Government Media Office, 2026). The target is striking for its clarity and pace.
 - It also raises questions of a different order from those posed by chatbots, because an agent can act on a citizen’s file without a human in the loop.

Who reviews the action, who answers for an error and how a citizen appeals are questions the framework will have to answer in practice.

6.4 Some More Cautionary Cases from Global AI Adoption

Two cases from wealthy, well-administered democracies show how badly things can go wrong.

- Between 2013 and 2019, the Dutch tax authority used a self-learning risk-scoring model to detect fraud in childcare benefits. Dual nationality was treated as a risk factor, flagged families were ordered to repay large sums with no hardship exemption, and some 26,000 parents were wrongly accused; many lost homes and jobs (Amnesty International, 2021). The government acknowledged institutional failure, and the cabinet resigned on 15 January 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021).
- Australia's Robodebt scheme (2015 to 2019) averaged annual tax-office income across fortnights to infer welfare overpayments and issued debt notices automatically, without the individual verification the earlier manual process required. The scheme raised about A\$1.73 billion in unlawful debts against some 433,000 people. The Royal Commission called it "a crude and cruel mechanism, neither fair nor legal" (Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme, 2023, p. xxix), and the Commonwealth agreed to a class-action settlement valued at A\$1.8 billion, followed by a further settlement of A\$548.5 million approved in 2026 (SBS News, 2026).

Both countries had courts, ombudsmen and strong data-protection law. Neither protected its citizens, because the systems and the routes to challenge them were never independently audited before deployment.

6.5 Global Frameworks of AI Governance

- The **European Union's AI Act (2024)** responded in part to such cases: it classifies AI systems used by public authorities to evaluate eligibility for essential public assistance benefits as "high-risk", subject to risk management, human oversight and documentation before use (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, 2024, Annex III).
- Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD, 2025**) has documented some 200 government AI use cases and proposed a framework of enablers and guardrails, while the UN E-Government Survey benchmarks digital government maturity across all member states (UN DESA, 2024).

6.6 Lessons Learned from the Global Adoption of AI in PSD

In summary, these ten global cases and two other global instances considered in the paper yield five lessons.

- First, accountability gaps widen as automation deepens: a system that answers questions carries different risks from one that acts on a file.
- Second, strong laws and institutions are not sufficient on their own.
- Third, proactive services promise much, but even well-resourced governments have not settled what counts as a life event or how far anticipation may intrude into private lives.

- Fourth, a single identity layer concentrates both efficiency and risk.
- Fifth, regulatory frameworks are maturing faster than the discipline needed to implement them.

The opportunities are equally clear: well-governed conversational interfaces lower the cost of serving citizens, life-event design breaks down ministry silos, and India can adapt established approaches to risk classification rather than start from scratch. Let us try to understand how India has traversed its journey in the adoption of AI for public service delivery (PSD)

Section 7: The Indian Context of AI Application in PSD

Viksit Bharat @2047 is the national vision of a developed India by 2047. Achieving it depends on more than policy formulation; it depends on the nation-state's ability to turn commitments into services that citizens can actually avail (Sudarshan, 2025). These abilities also include the country's digital capacity.

India's digital foundations are considerable.

- In the United Nations E-Government Survey 2024, India ranked 97th of 193 countries with an E-Government Development Index of 0.6678, up from 105th in 2022, and scored 0.8184 on the Online Service Index, which falls in the “very high” band (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2024). The gap between the two scores suggests that online services are outpacing connectivity and digital skills.
- The National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA), conducted by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) (described in detail in one of the previous sections), shows a similar picture within the country. The share of mandatory e-services available online rose from 48 percent in 2019 to 69 percent in 2021 and 76 percent in 2023, with wide variation among States and Union Territories (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2022, 2024b).

India's AI policy has sought to link adoption with inclusion. NITI Aayog's (2018) *National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence* set out the vision of “AI for All”, and the IndiaAI Mission, approved in March 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore (one crore equals 10 million; one lakh equals 100,000), aims to build domestic compute, datasets and models (PIB, 2024a). The India AI Governance Guidelines, released by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in November 2025, are principle-based and voluntary (PIB, 2025b).

Indian Cases

As described earlier, India's AI-enabled services rest on its DPI, often called the India Stack: *Aadhaar* for identity, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) for payments, and DigiLocker and related systems for consent-based data exchange. NITI Aayog's *DPI@2047* roadmap, released in April 2026, places “democratising AI”, with voice as a primary interface, among its core execution priorities and estimates that DPI already contributes about 1 percent of gross domestic product (NITI Aayog, 2026).

Twelve operational initiatives are summarized and discussed (Table 7.1), followed by three cases that illustrate assisted channels and automated exclusion.

Table 7.1: Selected Indian Cases of AI in Citizen Services

Domain	Initiative	AI function	Reported outcome
Identity	Aadhaar face authentication (UIDAI)	Face matching, liveness detection, biometric deduplication	Over 130.5 crore transactions by March 2025
Welfare	Telangana pensioner life certificate	Selfie-based liveness and image matching	Verification in under a minute; about 93% success
Welfare	EasyGov	Chatbot matching citizens to schemes	12 languages; about 10 lakh citizens reached
Language	BHASHINI	Speech recognition, translation, text-to-speech	22 scheduled languages; integrated in CPGRAMS
Grievance	CPGRAMS and <i>Samadhan Didi</i>	Voice chatbot classifying and routing grievances	Average disposal: 15 days in 2025
Grievance	National Consumer Helpline	Speech recognition and chatbot in 17 languages	Monthly complaints tripled, 2017 to 2024
Information	MyGov Saathi	COVID-19 assistant virtual	Capacity of 3 lakh users a day
Agriculture	<i>Saagu Baagu</i> , Telangana	Advisory bot, soil and quality testing	Net income per acre roughly doubled in pilot
Mobility	DigiYatra	Facial recognition at airports	Over 2 lakh passengers at four AAI airports
Justice	SUPACE and SUVAS	Case research assistance; translation of judgments	Over 79,000 judgments translated with AI support by December 2024
Taxation	GSTN analytics (BIFA, ADVAIT)	Risk scoring and network analysis of invoices	29,273 bogus firms detected, 2023 to 2024
State platform	<i>Mana Mitra</i> , Andhra Pradesh	WhatsApp-based access to services	1,126 services across 35 departments by July 2026

Note 1: Compiled by the author and her former interns Simran and Rida

Note 2: The data mentioned for each of these cases are those reported by the respective implementing agencies

(AAI = Airports Authority of India; ADVAIT = Advanced Analytics in Indirect Taxation; BIFA = Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics; CPGRAMS = Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System; GSTN = Goods and Services Tax Network; UIDAI = Unique Identification Authority of India. One lakh = 100,000; one crore = 10 million.

7.1: Indian Adoption of AI for Identity and Welfare

- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) uses indigenously developed AI models for fingerprint, face, and iris matching, and checks every new enrolment against the entire database to prevent duplicates (Unique Identification Authority of India, 2026). Face authentication, introduced in October 2022, crossed 130.5 crore (1.3 billion) transactions by the end of March 2025 and is used for schemes including PM-KISAN, PM-JAY, and PM Awas (PIB, 2025c).
- Telangana's pensioner life-certificate system replaces the annual journey to a treasury office with a selfie checked for liveness and matched against records; the process takes less than a minute, with a reported success rate of about 93 percent (IndiaAI, n.d.-d).
- EasyGov uses a chatbot to match citizens' circumstances with scheme eligibility in 12 languages and reports having reached about 10 lakh citizens (IndiaAI, n.d.-a).

As these cases show, intelligent technologies remove real physical barriers, especially for the elderly. Unfortunately, these AI-enabled service delivery models also assume easier access to smart devices, digital connectivity, IT literacy, and a measure of digital confidence among beneficiaries/end-recipients.

7.2: Indian Adoption of AI for Language and Grievance Redress

Language had long decided who could use India's digital portals and related platforms, but not anymore.

In July 2022, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), Government of India, launched BHASHINI as part of its National Language Translation Mission (NLTM). BHASHINI builds open models for speech recognition, translation, and text-to-speech across the 22 scheduled languages (Government of India, n.d.).

- BHASHINI now underpins *Samadhan Didi*, a voice chatbot launched by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, on 30 May 2026. This chatbot lets citizens describe a grievance in their own language and automatically identifies the relevant ministry and category (Aslam, 2026). The Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) of DARPG reports an average disposal time of 15 days in 2025 for central ministries and departments, against a prescribed limit of 21 days (PIB, 2026).
- The National Consumer Helpline (NCH) has added speech recognition and a chatbot in 17 languages; monthly complaints rose from 37,062 in 2017 to 112,468 in 2024. The monthly complaints filed through WhatsApp grew from 3 to 18 percent between March 2023 and December 2024 (IndiaAI, n.d.-c).

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, MyGov *Saathi*, a virtual assistant available on the MyGov portal, WhatsApp and Facebook, could serve up to 3 lakh users a day with verified guidance and corrections of common rumors (IndiaAI, n.d.-b).

7.3 Sectoral Services being Delivered Using AI

- *Agriculture - Saagu Baagu*, piloted in Telangana's Khammam district under the World Economic Forum's AI for Agriculture Innovation initiative, combined an advisory bot, soil testing, AI-based quality grading and a digital marketplace. Among more than 7,000 chili farmers, net income per acre roughly doubled within one crop cycle, and the State has since expanded the model (World Economic Forum, 2024).
- *Travel – Digi Yatra* uses facial recognition to let passengers move from airport entry to boarding without showing documents; the Airports Authority of India (AAI) reports more than 2 lakh passengers at its four original airports and shorter waiting times (Airports Authority of India, 2025). These convenience gains come with large-scale biometric data collection.
- *Justice-* The Supreme Court's SUPACE assists judges and clerks with case research, and SUVAS was developed to translate judgments into Indian languages. By December 2024, AI-assisted translation had rendered 36,324 Supreme Court judgments into Hindi and 42,765 into 17 other languages (IANS, 2024). The Court's white paper on AI and the judiciary insists that such tools remain assistive rather than determinative, and recommends ethics committees, disclosure requirements, and mandatory human verification of AI-assisted content (Center for Research and Planning, 2025).
- *Taxation:* In indirect taxation, GSTN's (Goods and Services Tax Network) Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics (BIFA) tool and the ADVAIT platform score taxpayers for risk and map suspicious networks of invoices. A nationwide drive from May 2023 detected 29,273 bogus firms involved in suspected input-tax-credit evasion of ₹44,015 crore by January 2024 (GST Council Secretariat, 2024). The tax administration's own presentation to the OECD¹ lists data privacy, skewed training data, lack of explainability for flagged cases, and skill gaps among officers as unresolved challenges (Agrawal, 2026).

7.4: State Platforms and Assisted Channels

- Andhra Pradesh launched *Mana Mitra* on 30 January 2025, allowing citizens to request government services by sending a message on WhatsApp. It began with 161 services; by July 2026 the State reported 1,126 services across 35 departments, 58.2 lakh citizens served and more than 3.42 crore service sessions (Press Trust of India, 2026). The State has not, however, reported how many of these sessions ended with a service actually delivered.
- Delhi offers a contrasting model. Its Doorstep Delivery of Public Services (DDPS) scheme, launched in September 2018, sent a *Mobile Sahayak* to a citizen's home, for a fee of ₹50, to complete applications on her behalf. The scheme was later suspended when the contract of the agencies running its helpline lapsed, and the government announced in 2024 that it planned to revive it (The Print,

¹ The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) is an intergovernmental organization of 38 member countries, founded in 1961 and headquartered at the Château de la Muette in Paris, France.

2024). Assisted channels funded as short-term projects tend to lapse when the project does.

7.5 When AI and its Data Go Wrong

Like global adoption, academic critiques of two Indian cases reveal the cost of automated decisions made without a human check.

- Telangana's *Samagra Vedika*, introduced in 2016, combines a person's records from as many as 30 government databases. Officials examining food security cards were expected to consult its verdict and could depart from it only by recording reasons. Between 2014 and 2019, during the system's introduction, the State canceled more than 1.86 million cards. After the Supreme Court ordered re-verification in April 2022, by July 2022 the State had processed 205,734 of 491,899 applications and approved 15,471, indicating that at least 7.5 percent of those reviewed had been wrongly excluded, against an official claim of under 5 percent. A request for the system's source code under the Right to Information Act was refused on the ground that the vendor held rights over it (Tapasya et al., 2024a). One woman, Bismillah Bee, lost her family's subsidized rice because the system confused her late husband, a rickshaw puller, with a car owner with the same name; years later, she still lacked a ration card (Tapasya et al., 2024a).
- In Haryana, the *Parivar Pehchan Patra* family database became the basis for welfare eligibility. In September 2022, 102-year-old Dhuli Chand of Rohtak, whose pension had stopped after the database recorded him as dead, rode to the district offices in a mock wedding procession carrying a placard that declared him alive. His family had visited the offices repeatedly, and an application on the Chief Minister's grievance portal had gone unanswered (Baruah, 2022). Government data presented in the State Assembly in August 2023 showed that pensions of 277,115 elderly persons and 52,479 widows had been stopped over three years after they were listed as deceased; of 63,353 old-age pension cases reviewed, 44,050 were found eligible (Tapasya et al., 2024b).

These cases are not an argument for abandoning AI. They show how quietly, and at what scale, an automated system can fail when its records are inaccurate, and no one is required to check.

7.6 Integrating Insights from Indian Case Studies

Taken together, the Indian cases reveal three key learnings.

- The first learning concerns where AI has worked best. Its clearest gains lie in tasks that remove a journey or a language barrier: a pensioner proving she is alive without visiting a treasury, a farmer receiving advice on her phone, a citizen filing a grievance by speaking in her own language. In each case, the citizen remains in control of the transaction, and failure usually means returning to the counter rather than losing an entitlement. The cases that caused harm, by contrast, used data to take something away: a ration card, a pension, the presumption of being alive.
- The second insight concerns what has been measured while implementing public service delivery using intelligent technologies. Implementing bodies report transactions, sessions, users, disposal times and fraud detected. These measure activity and the state's own efficiency. Very few agencies have reported

completion rates, error rates, appeals or the time taken to correct a wrong record, which are the measures that would show how citizens fared. Telangana's claim of an error rate below 5 percent went untested because no one outside the system could check it (Tapasya et al., 2024a).

- The third pattern concerns who acknowledges the risks. Several implementing agencies have acknowledged this in their own documents. The Supreme Court's white paper warns against over-reliance on unverified outputs and fabricated citations (Centre for Research and Planning, 2025). The tax administration lists the lack of explainability for flagged cases among its open problems (Agrawal, 2026). NITI Aayog's *DPI@2047* roadmap identifies the complexity of navigating many separate digital platforms as a persistent barrier to adoption (NITI Aayog, 2026). What is missing is not awareness but the institutional machinery that would turn these acknowledgments into binding practice across departments. This paper proposes that framework (Section 6).

Section 8: Lessons Learned from Global and Indian Cases of AI Adoption

The global and Indian cases point to ten interrelated issues. Some arise from the technology itself, others from the institutions that buy, run and oversee it, and several from the conditions in which citizens meet the state. They are discussed in turn below.

- a. *Accountability and opacity.* Administrative decisions are acts of public authority, not technical outputs. When a model shapes a decision but its reasoning cannot be inspected, the link between an act and the person answerable for it, which Bovens (2007) places at the heart of accountability, is broken. Proprietary code compounds the problem, as Samagra Vedika shows. The official who says "the system did it" leaves the citizen with no one to turn to.
- b. *Bias and data quality.* Machine-learning systems learn from records produced by past administrative practice. Where those records carry errors or historical discrimination by gender, caste, region, or class, the model reproduces them and lends them the appearance of objectivity (Kashaka, 2026). Mismatched names, outdated entries, and failed biometric authentication in rural areas are mundane causes of exclusion, but their effects are severe when a ration card or pension depends on them.
- c. *The digital divide and re-intermediation.* Connectivity, electricity, devices, literacy, and language remain unevenly distributed (Sukumar, 2023). BHASHINI's models, like all speech systems, perform less well on non-standard dialects, which many rural citizens speak. Script-based chatbots fail when a user steps outside the script, and a single timeout can force a semi-literate applicant to begin again. Citizens who cannot complete digital procedures turn to cyber cafés and local agents, so the intermediary whom digitisation was meant to remove returns in a new form, often at a price.
- d. *Automation bias and de-professionalization.* An officer who must write reasons to disagree with software, and who is judged by how many ineligible names she removes, will learn to agree with it. Over time, frontline staff risk becoming data-entry operators, and the professional judgment that once handled the unusual case withers. This extends Bovens and Zouridis's (2002) argument from the relocation of discretion to its gradual loss.

- e. *Metrics that mislead.* Dashboards count log-ins, sessions, and tickets closed. When such counts become targets, they stop being good measures, as Goodhart's Law predicts. A grievance marked "disposed" may remain unresolved, as Dhuli Chand's unanswered application on the Chief Minister's portal shows.
- f. *Privacy and data concentration.* Predictive governance requires large, linked datasets. Linking them improves coordination but creates attractive targets for attackers and can leave citizens feeling watched rather than served. The DPDP Rules were notified on 14 November 2025, with most obligations taking effect after an 18-month phase-in (PIB, 2025a). The Act permits the state to process personal data for benefits and services without fresh consent, so for welfare recipients the right to correct a record matters more than the consent form (Malhotra, Charru & Malhotra, 2024).
- g. *Outsourcing and sovereignty.* When vendors design and run systems, departments lose the knowledge needed to inspect, maintain or change them. At the national level, dependence on imported chips, foreign cloud infrastructure and foreign foundation models raises questions of cost, security and data sovereignty that the IndiaAI Mission has only begun to address.
- h. *Technological solutionism.* Poverty, poor schooling and weak local capacity are institutional problems. Treating them as problems that an application can solve, what Morozov (2013) calls solutionism, can produce better dashboards without better outcomes. Policies conceived at the center also stall when they meet paper-based processes in district offices and clinics, as implementation research has long shown (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).
- i. *Fragmentation of platforms.* Each department that builds its own portal, application, or chatbot adds another interface for the citizen to learn, another login to remember, and another point at which a request can stall. A family seeking a pension, a ration card, and a caste certificate may have to deal with three systems that do not share data, and the burden of joining them falls on the citizen or on a paid intermediary (NITI Aayog, 2026). Interoperability is often discussed as a technical standard; for the citizen, it is the difference between one visit and several.
- j. *Resource costs.* Large models consume substantial electricity and water. For a country still extending reliable power and clean water to every household, the environmental cost of AI in public services needs to be counted.

Section 9: Recommendations and Way Forward*²

The understanding gleaned from review of related academic literature (Refer Appendix), as well as from the closer study of the ten global cases (Section 6) and fifteen Indian initiatives (Section 7), all converge to a singular learning: *a good citizen service is not one that works when the data are right, but one that still treats people fairly even when the data are wrong.* Little of what would have spared Dhuli Chand of Rohtak being ignored in the *Parivar Pehchan Patra* pension database (Section 7.6). Someone should have checked before his pension was cut; his grievance-portal application should have

² * *Disclaimer: The views, recommendations and conceptual framework presented are those of the author and are not definitive. As a part of this Theme Paper, these are placed for open discussion among experts and practitioners, including the regional and local branches of IIPA.*

been addressed, and his record corrected in a single visit. What is required is a set of decisions taken in the right order: protect people first, then expand. A conceptual framework for delivering AI-enabled citizen services using intelligent technologies is expected to avert these kinds of lapses (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1: The Proposed Framework for Delivering AI-Enabled Citizen Services*

Step	Lead	Timeline	First sign	visible	Test success	of
Classify systems by risk	MeitY DARPG State departments	with and IT	Begin now; register within six months	Public register of welfare algorithms	No high-risk system launched without an impact assessment	
Make data rules real	Each department; Data Protection Board		Before May 2027	Named officer and one-visit correction route	Wrong records corrected in a single visit	
Fund the human door	State governments; Common Service Center network		Next two years	Multi-year contracts for assisted services	Assisted requests tracked and rising in remote districts	
Publish citizen outcomes	State governments with an independent verifier		Every quarter	One-page scorecard scheme	Gap between claimed and verified error rates narrows	
Train officers to override	Capacity Building Commission under Mission Karmayogi		Within five years	Override module on iGOT; override rates reported	Overrides recorded and wrongful denials fall	
Count the full cost	MeitY (IndiaAI Mission) with departments		From the next procurement cycle	Energy, water and hosting disclosed in every AI tender	Welfare data hosted in India; task-specific models used where adequate	

(Note. Proposed by the author)

Each of the six steps of the proposed conceptual framework (Table 4) are summarized herewith:

Step-1: Classify Every System by What It Can Take Away: Classifying Systems by Their Capacity for Deprivation

Every algorithm that affects money, food, pensions, housing or liberty should be listed by each ministry and State, assigned a risk class and entered in a public register. High-risk systems should require a written impact assessment, testing for disparities by

gender, district and income group, and sign-off by a named official before launch. This classification aligns with the EU AI Act's approach. In Haryana, the family database was already deciding who received a pension before the Haryana *Parivar Pehchan* Act, 2021 gave it statutory backing. That sequence should be reversed. A departmental order can begin this work while legislation is prepared. No benefit that feeds a family should be canceled on an algorithm's word alone; a named officer should check the record or visit the home first, and the burden of proving ineligibility should rest with the state, not the citizen. This concept is often referred to as the HITL (Human in the Loop) approach in AI terminology.

Step-2: Make the Data Rules Real Before May 2027

India's DPDP Rules 2025 give departments until about May 2027 to comply. Each service delivery agency should use that window to name a responsible officer in each department, create a route for a citizen to correct a wrong record in one visit, and write clear rules for sharing data between departments. This would ensure that the privacy obligations do not freeze legitimate coordination. Every refusal should tell the citizen, in her language, which fact the system relied on, which officer decided, and how to correct the record. Even the software contracts should allow a named independent auditor to examine code and data formats; based on her experience, the author strongly feels that a claim of high accuracy cannot be tested if no one is explicitly held accountable.

Step-3: Keep the Human Door Open, and Fund It

Emulating the Singapore case study, India should treat “*digital first, but not digital only*” as a lasting design principle. A minimum of three user interfaces (UIs), referred to here as doors, are needed for a citizen to interact with service delivery platforms:

- a digital front door such as *Mana Mitra*; a toll-free voice line built on BHASHINI, so that no single private platform holds the only way in. Test the voice line with speakers of local dialects before launch, and publish the results.
- an assisted door through Common Service Centers (CSCs)
- doorstep services such as in Doorstep Delivery of Public Services of Delhi state. In this interface/door operators should be paid for cases resolved rather than forms submitted.
- Estonia's experience also suggests that India's growing number of department-specific chatbots should be consolidated behind a single, interoperable citizen interface. Assisted channels should be funded through multi-year budgets.

Step-4: Publish What Citizens Experienced

Experience shows that metrics such as ‘total number of sessions’ or ‘disposal time’ are useful, but they do not tell a family whether its problem was solved. Each scheme should publish a quarterly scorecard showing the completion rate, appeals filed and won, the time taken to correct a wrong record, grievances re-opened, and the share of requests filed with assistance. A high rate of successful appeals is the error rate in plain sight. Each month, someone outside the department (a third-party impact assessment agency such as IIPA) should call a random sample of citizens whose grievances were closed. Any unresolved case should be re-opened and removed from the officer's tally. An external body, such as a State audit office, an eminent institute, or

a reputed university, should verify the figures. Officers and vendors should never be rewarded for the number of “ineligible” names they remove, since such incentives multiply false positives (Tapasya et al., 2024a).

Step-5: Train Officers Who Can Say No to a Machine

Mission *Karmayogi*, approved in September 2020, already trains civil servants through the iGOT platform (PIB, 2020). It should add a new module on how algorithms fail: what a false positive is, why a system tuned to catch fraud produces more of them, and when and how to override. Officers who override in good faith should be protected, and every override recorded. The override rate then becomes a measure the state can read. A rate of zero is itself a warning.

Step-6: Count the Full Cost of Intelligence

The third and fourth questions raised in Section 1 concern costs that rarely appear in project reports. Every AI tender should disclose the system's expected energy and water use, where its data and models will be hosted, and what it would cost to switch providers. Where a smaller, task-specific model does the job adequately, it should be preferred to a large general-purpose one. Personal data used for welfare decisions should be hosted in India, and the compute and Indian-language models built under the IndiaAI Mission should be made available to States and departments so sovereignty does not remain an aspiration of the center alone.

Concluding Remarks

AI is already part of the everyday machinery of the Indian state, from biometric authentication to a voice chatbot that lets a citizen file a grievance in her own language. The task before public administration over the next two decades is not to decide whether AI belongs in citizen services but to build the accountability, vernacular access and human fallback that will decide whom it serves.

The main role of AI in public services therefore would be to shorten the gap between citizens' needs and the service(s) that meet them. This is only possible when separate offices' records are connected, because an integrated service delivery approach using intelligent technologies would provide one complete picture of citizens' needs and aspirations. A lifecycle approach adds the element of time, so that a service can be prepared before the next stage of a person's life begins. The forecasting capacity for this already exists. What is still missing is the link between forecast and action, and each forecast should therefore start a service automatically. Delivery then moves from a 'pull model' to a 'push model', and its end point is when the citizen receives a service without applying for it. Predictive analytics is, after all, an established application of AI in the public sector, where this time lag could be compressed to a bare minimum. Further, it is pertinent to stay aware of what it would mean for the state to perceive service delivery from the perspective of a citizen. For India, it would mean designing, testing and judging each system from the position of the citizen most likely to be harmed/ignored by its errors. Gandhi's talisman asked whether a step would be of any use to the poorest and weakest person one had seen. That remains the right test. If India can make digital scale deliver services that are fair, transparent and open to correction, it will offer the world a democratic model of intelligent public administration by 2047. If it cannot, it risks automating exclusion, which Viksit Bharat cannot afford. After all, it's all about “*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*”

Appendix 1: Problem Statement and Research Questions

Intelligent technologies promise much. Public service delivery agencies can therefore treat such technologies as a cure for every malady of public service delivery in a large and diverse country: corruption, illiteracy, linguistic plurality, and scarce administrative resources. However, we must understand that these same technologies have real limitations. Many models lack *algorithmic accountability*, meaning that their decisions cannot easily be explained, audited or challenged. Their recommendations can reproduce existing inequalities. A service may be fast, personalized, and even predictive, and still be out of reach for a citizen on the wrong side of the digital divide. AI also rests on a layered *stack, from semiconductors and cloud infrastructure to models and datasets, much of which a handful of global technology firms control*. This raises questions of *data sovereignty*, the principle that data about a country's citizens should be governed by that country's laws and institutions. Large models also consume considerable electricity and water, a cost a developing country cannot ignore.

The question, therefore, is not whether governments should adopt AI, but how its adoption can strengthen people-centered governance. Four questions guide this paper:

1. Can AI deliver personalized services to the last mile without further alienating the poorest and weakest citizens, whom Gandhi asked every decision-maker to keep in mind?
2. If agentic systems begin to take decisions on citizens' files, who remains answerable for those decisions, and how can a citizen challenge them?
3. How should India weigh the speed that automated agents promise against their demands on energy, water, and public budgets?
4. Do the security and privacy benefits of keeping citizens' data and AI infrastructure within India outweigh the cost and delay of building them domestically rather than buying them from global providers?

Appendix-2: Review of Literature on Adoption of AI in PSD

• From Street-Level to System-Level Bureaucracy

Lipsky (1980) showed that citizens do not meet policy as it is written in statute. They meet it through the daily choices of police officers, welfare supervisors, and other frontline staff who work with scarce resources and vague rules and, in effect, make policy at the counter. Bovens and Zouridis (2002) traced how Information Technology (IT) altered this arrangement. In what they termed 'screen-level bureaucracy', officials still meet citizens but rely on software and digital templates. In 'system-level bureaucracy', business rules and decision trees collect data, determine eligibility, and issue decisions with no official intervening. Their central insight is that automation does not remove discretion; it relocates it. Discretion passes from front-line staff to the software engineer, the database designer, the private contractor, and maybe an intermediary, all of whom are out of view of administrative law and public scrutiny. Fourcade and Gordon (2020) extend this argument to what they call the "dataist state", which governs less through fixed rules applied to past conduct than through continuous data collection, risk scoring and prediction. In such a state, the citizen risks becoming a profile to be scored rather than a person to be heard. The authors close by asking what it would mean for the state to "see like a citizen" (p. 96), a question this paper takes up in Section 6.

- **Legitimacy, Public Value and Administrative Burden**

Three further strands inform the literature analysis: legitimacy, public value, and administrative burden.

The first concerns ‘legitimacy’. Drawing on social contract theory, Schmager et al. (2024) interviewed Norwegian citizens about a prototype AI-based welfare service and analyzed their views at three levels: the balance of power between government and citizen, the trade-off between collective good and individual interest, and the practical conditions for consent. Participants were broadly positive, but largely because they already trusted their government, and they insisted on human oversight and transparency. Trust came before acceptance; the technology did not create it. In India, where trust in public institutions varies across regions and social groups, this finding counsels caution.

The second strand concerns ‘public value’. Moore (1995) argued that public managers should be judged by the value they create for citizens, not merely by outputs. Chatterjee et al. (2022), surveying 315 respondents in India, found that both the breadth and the depth of AI assimilation in public services were associated with higher citizen satisfaction, but that perceived risk moderated the effect. Operational gains such as speed and fewer errors did not automatically produce strategic value such as trust.

The third strand concerns ‘administrative burden’, which Moynihan et al. (2015) divide into learning, compliance and psychological costs. These costs fall most heavily on the poor. AI can reduce each: vernacular voice interfaces such as BHASHINI lower learning costs, pre-filling from digital registries reduces compliance costs, and proactive delivery of entitlements reduces the stigma and stress of repeated visits (Bagde, n.d.). The same literature warns, however, that burdens can be shifted rather than removed, for instance from the counter to the citizen who must now prove that a database is wrong.

- **Evidence of Gains**

Systematic reviews describe AI as a field dominated by conceptual and exploratory work, with relatively little impact evaluation of its implementation (de Sousa et al., 2019; Wirtz et al., 2019; Zuiderwijk et al., 2021). The literature notes gains in using AI for well-bounded tasks such as answering routine queries, routing requests, translation, document classification, and fraud detection (Mehr, 2017; Umer, 2026). Further, researchers such as Chandra and Feng (2026), mapping a decade of research, note that studies frequently group chatbots, predictive analytics, and high-stakes automated decisions under a single label, “AI”, although their risks differ greatly.

Indian scholarship has focused on India’s digital public infrastructure (DPI) as the base for AI. Malhotra, Charu et al. (2020) proposed a citizen-centric, co-created architecture for “Public Services 4.0” built on emerging technologies, and argued that flexible legal and regulatory frameworks are a precondition for its sustainability. Bagde (n.d.) describes eight eras of service delivery in independent India, from paper-bound offices to proactive, AI-enabled services, and places India at the threshold of the eighth. Studies of DPI and state capacity caution, however, that scale has outpaced inclusion and that connectivity is not the same as institutional strength (Sathisha, 2026; Sukumar, 2023).

- **Risks and the Accountability Problem**

The literature that reports gains also reports serious risks. Henman (2020) identifies four imperatives that public AI must respect: legality, freedom from bias, due process, and accountability. Kuziemski and Misuraca (2020) describe the public sector's "double bind": it must both regulate algorithms and use them. Liu et al. (2019) show how opaque risk-assessment tools can erode due process even in courts. Studies of citizens' views find that trust depends on transparency, contestability, and a human to turn to (Feng & Chandra, 2025; López et al., 2025). Kashaka (2026) proposes organizing accountability in three layers: the data that feed a system, the model that processes them, and the resulting decision.

Privacy is a further concern. Malhotra, Charru and Malhotra (2024) examine the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 from the standpoint of the citizen, or "digital *nagrik*", and conclude that while the Act is a positive step, its enforcement mechanisms need strengthening and its exceptions need clearer limits.

- **Gaps in the Literature**

Three gaps stand out.

First, the literature on *Viksit Bharat @2047* consists largely of broad policy syntheses that say little about how algorithms reshape the relationship between citizen and state at the last mile (Sudarshan, 2025).

Second, there is little Indian evidence on high-stakes uses of AI, such as eligibility and welfare decisions, and almost none from the citizen's side.

Third, few studies bring together service experience, algorithmic accountability and state capacity in a single frame.

This paper attempts that synthesis through comparative case analysis. It draws on secondary sources, principally official publications, inquiry reports and investigative journalism, and should be read as an analytical review rather than an empirical evaluation.

Appendix 3

Public Service Delivery Act (PSDA) in different States and Union Territories

S.No	State	Name of the PSDA
1	Andhra Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh Public Service Delivery Guarantee Act, 2018
2	Arunachal Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh Right to Public Services Act, 2016
3	Assam	Assam Right to Public Services Act, 2012
4	Bihar	Bihar Lok Sewaon Ka Adhikar Adhiniyam, 2011
5	Chhattisgarh	Chhattisgarh Lok Sewa Guarantee Act, 2011
6	Goa	The Goa Right to Time-Bound Delivery of Public Services Act, 2013
7	Gujarat	Gujarat (Right of Citizens to Public Services) Act, 2013
8	Haryana	The Haryana Right to Service Act, 2014
9	Himachal Pradesh	Public Services Guarantee Act, 2011
10	Jharkhand	Jharkhand Rajya Sewa Dene ki Guarantee Adhiniyam, 2011

11	Karnataka	The Karnataka Guarantee of Services to Citizens Act, 2011 Karnataka Sakala Services Act, 2011 and (Amendment) Act, 2014
12	Kerala	The Kerala State Right to Service Act, 2012
13	Madhya Pradesh	MP Lok Sewaon Ke Pradhan Ki Guarantee Adhiniyam, 2010
14	Maharashtra	Maharashtra Right to Public Services Act, 2015
15	Manipur	Manipur Public Services Delivery Guarantee Act, 2021
16	Meghalaya	The Meghalaya Right to Public Services Act, 2020
17	Mizoram	The Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015
18	Odisha	Odisha Right to Public Services Act, 2011
19	Punjab	Right to Public Service Act, 2011
20	Rajasthan	Rajasthan Guaranteed Delivery of Public Services Act, 2011
21	Sikkim	Sikkim Public Services Delivery (Right to Service Act, 2022)
22	Tripura	Tripura Guaranteed Services to Citizens Act, 2020
23	Uttar Pradesh	Janhit Guarantee Adhiniyam, 2011
24	Uttarakhand	The Uttarakhand Right to Service Act, 2011
25	West Bengal	The West Bengal Right to Public Services Act, 2013
26	Chandigarh	Right to Public Service Act, 2011
27	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Right of Citizens to Public Services, 2022
28	Delhi (NCT)	Right of Citizens to Time-Bound Delivery of Services, 2011
29	Jammu and Kashmir	Jammu and Kashmir Public Services Guarantee Act, 2011
30	Lakshadweep	Lakshadweep (Right to Public Services) Regulation, 2022

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