The Role of Akshaya and Friends in Rural Area
Arun Kumar P S, Alvin Abraham, Girish S (Assistant Professor)
Department of Commerce & Management, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Kochi Campus,
Amrita Vishwa Vidhaypeetham, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.

Abstract: Today, we are lived in an information technology (IT) world. It will show the importance of IT in
government functioning. In India various state governments and central ministries adopt E-governance
programmes like Akshaya, FRIENDS, Bhoomi, e-seva, CARD, Vidya Vahini, Gyandoot etc. In Kerala
mainly Akshaya e-centres and FRIENDS play an important role in e-governance projects. Akshaya centres
are functioning under local bodies and three tier Panchayat level and FRIENDS worked under district level.
Akshaya project start with the intention of creates e-literate state later it comes into other services for
public, in the case of FRIENDS project begin for providing public utility services. Government to citizens
(G2C) provide an interface between government and citizens which enable the citizens to benefit from
efficient delivery of a large amount of public services. This study focused on analyse the role of Akshaya and
FRIENDS in rural area. How many people are use this service? For what purpose etc. are considered.
Key words: Akshaya e-centers, FRIENDS Janasevana Kendras, e-governance,...

I. INTRODUCTION
E-Governance system is implemented for the purpose of providing better service to the public with the help of
information technology. The exact development of a country is depends on the development of rural area. After
the implementation of e-governance systems the citizens in rural area can be access correctly and timely. In
India a large number of initiatives have been undertaken by various State Governments and Central Ministries to
support e-Government, National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) is an example for this.
In the case of Kerala state mainly two projects play the role of providing G2C services, Akshaya and FRIENDS.
FRIENDS is the first e-governance service provider in Kerala. Which covered only the government
departmental payments are collected through it. During that time it will comparatively more beneficial to the
common public other than traditional payment method.
E-governance system is providing more effective and efficient service to the public. It helps to reduce the red-
tapism and corruption in official level. All the documents and transactions are recorded in digital format and
also providing government authentication.
Traditional systems in government offices are not effective; it will take more processing time and the benefit of
the service become lost. Red tapism, corruption, influence by the political party, personal bias etc ...are the
limitations of traditional governance system. Later, after the introduction of information technology (IT) in
government departments all documents are converted into digital format (digitalisation) for easy accessibility
and long life storage and reference purpose.
FRIENDS and Akshaya now arrange the facility for access those services with the help of IT and internet. In
Kerala citizen from both urban and rural area are using e-governance service once in a month; mainly for utility
payment in various government departments or get online certification from revenue departments.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Akshaya and FRIENDS provides several services which are accessible to the rural people such as e-learning, e-
business, e-payment, e-governance etc. It acts as an instrument for improving their overall living standards and
their social and economic growth. So the purpose of this research is to analyse the role of Akshaya and
FRIENDS for improving the life of rural people.

III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of the study is to analyse the performance of Akshaya and FRIENDS in rural areas. This research is
focused to understand more about different services provided by Akshaya and FRIENDS to the general public in
Kerala.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY
1. To analyse the role of Akshaya and FRIENDS in rural area.
2. To study about Indian’s various E-governance programmes.
3. To analyse the performances of Akshaya and FRIENDS in rural area.
4. To know the different services provided by Akshaya and FRIENDS.
5. To know the attitudes towards E-governance system from the general public.

V. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology adopted in the research comprises of primary and secondary data and their systematic analysis. The Primary data is collected through survey with the help of questionnaire, personal interviews from FRIENDS offices, Akshaya project office and centres. The secondary data were collected from website, books, magazines, newspapers, Akshaya sites etc...

VI. FRIENDS (Fast Reliable Instant Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services)

FRIENDS is the project of Kerala State IT mission. The project was launched in Thiruvananthapuram in June 2000 and was replicated in other district headquarters during 2001-2002. The FRIENDS Janasevana Kendras work from 9.00 AM to 7.00 PM on all days except national holidays. FRIENDS developed for handling 1000 types of bill payments in various Public Sector Undertakings. The payments include utility payment for electricity and water, revenue taxes, motor vehicle taxes, license fees, university fees, railway ticket booking etc. These Kendras are operating as one in every district headquarters. FRIENDS owned, managed and controlled by the government itself.

Government of Kerala introduce this project for allocating the various departmental payments through one single window. This single window system is help to reduce the crowd in government departments.

Achievements of FRIENDS or Janasevana Kendras
1. Increased citizen acceptance over the years, as can be evinced from the increase in the number of transactions over the years.
2. Introduction of new services (eg: Electrical Inspectorate) at all FRIENDS centers.
3. Periodic refresher training programme to Service Officers.

VII. AKSHAYA

AKSHAYA project one of the landmarked ICT project by Kerala State Information Technology mission. Akshaya e-centre Project started with the noble intention of making at least one member in each of the families E-literate. The project was started in Malappuram and it was inaugurated by President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (1-November 2002). Malappuram is declared as the first e-literate district in India. In the first phase 100% e-literacy was achieved in 8 districts and it has been a big success. It was the first district-wide e-literacy project in India and it was one of the largest known Internet Protocol (IP) based wireless networks in the world. This project makes Kerala the first e-literate state in India. This has started creating a knowledge power to bridge the ‘digital divide’.

In addition to opening up a wealth of information, Akshaya will also offer specific information tailor-made to the needs and wants of the Keralite in local language. The content is aimed at helping the general public to access information useful to their everyday life. Tools including customized software and CDs accessible at every Akshaya centre will also be made available. Primary CDs are based on the sectors of education, career development and training, agriculture guidance, health care, information technology, law and justice, etc. were made available. A self-development module includes spoken English, personality development, vocational training, career guidance, etc. are also provided to the public.

Implementation of the first stage of the Akshaya project is on in Malappuram district and latter it extended to all districts. Table 1 shows districts wise details of Akshaya centers in Kerala.

Table 1 : AKSHAYA CENTERS in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl no</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of Akshaya centers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alapuzha</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Kozhikkod</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Akshaya centers owned by the individual entrepreneurs and operate under the guidance and control of government. Centres allocated by the government itself, one for every 1000 families living in Municipal or Panchayat wards. Akshaya centres provided both open services and controlled services to the public. Open service are those services provided by the Akshaya centres directly to the public, just like an intermediary. It includes passport application, P S C application, online recharges, payment of university fees, payment to the government departments etc... Then controlled services are those provided by Akshaya centres within the restrictions and supervision of government, just like an agent. It includes 23 types of certificates under e-district from village office.

Nammeni Panchayat in wayanad district provide e-districts certificate within 43 seconds to its applicant. This is the fast record of e-districts project through Akshaya. Traditional method of apply for a certificates from revenue department will take 10 minute to 2 days time and the verification time provided by government maximum of 7 days. E governance system reduces those times with the help of IT and internet.

The operations of Akshaya project mainly focused on three distinct phases. The first phase is enabling the people by imparting basic skills in computer operations and making them familiar with internet i.e the period of e-literacy training. The second phase is to ensure hands-on-skills in operating a computer using internet and familiarize the people with the basics and scope of IT. In the third phase Akshaya e-centres are emerging as platforms for ICT related education to people for capacity building.

After the completion of this project it offers many services. The services provided by this project are:-
1. E-Pay :- Electronic mode of payment of utility bills like electricity, land phone, university fees etc.
2. E-Krishi:- Provides A to Z solutions for farmers and also provide online agriculture trading and information portal.
3. E-Vidya:- Provides advanced IT learning for e-literates and others.
4. E-Ticketing:- Provides online reservations for train, flight, and bus tickets.
5. It provides networks of 3000 e-kendras throughout the state.
6. Delivery of public service and e-governance application through these e-kendras.
7. It helps in generation of locally relevant e-content.
8. It helps the rural population to access the ICT services.
9. It creates 3000 directs employment opportunities and investment of over Rs. 100,00,00,000
10. It increased the PC and ICT applications penetration.
11. It provides other services such as online passport registration, online medical transcription course, and online communication providers for expatriate Indians etc.

The ‘Akshaya’ meaning ‘perpetuating prosperity’ marks the beginning of a drive to bridge the digital divide. The Akshaya project aims to transform the lives of families in Kerala. It cut across the social, linguistic and cultural barriers, and to bring home the benefits of Information Technology to the common people by familiarizing at least one person from each family in Kerala with computers and empower the people to access relevant e-content in the regional language[3].

Achievements of Akshaya
- RSBY chits Health Insurance Policy cover 2, 00, 00,000 families (160,000 APL families and 28, 00,000 BPL families and renewal of policy for 29, 00,000 families.
- Akshaya register 20 lacks families in RSBY within 45 days.
- 5,85,00,000 citizens enrolled under UID through Akshaya Centers
- Akshaya has so far succeeded to start CSCs in Lakshadweep, followed by roll out of e-literacy and G2C services.
- Aakshaya was reaching the remote rural locations on a sustainable basis, and also providing a variety of world-class services, the Akshaya e-centres would support social inclusion of hitherto hereby marginalized communities and under-privileged sections of the rural society.

Successfully completed projects by Akshaya
Recently government of India introduced three project related with e governance undertaken by Akshaya e-centres in Kerala that are, UID Aadhaar, National Population Register (NPR) and renewal of ration card under food safety bill. UID aadhaar and NPR project was successfully accomplished now. Table2 shows the Enrolling details of UID aadhaar in Kerala[4]. Aadhaar firstly introduced in Wayanad and Pathanamthitta districts in Kerala. This project collects biometric information about the citizens. NPR collects those biometric information for population counting and socio-economic information’s about citizens. Those report leads to new food safety bill in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasargod</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: akshaya.kerala.gov.in
Table 2: AADHAAR in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl no</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number of persons registered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>91.91</td>
<td>3039666</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>94.38</td>
<td>2481943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>98.95</td>
<td>1199632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>96.37</td>
<td>2045017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>95.43</td>
<td>1888869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>93.61</td>
<td>1036727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>3070053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>96.26</td>
<td>29993905</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>95.55</td>
<td>2685697</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>92.52</td>
<td>3803647</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Kozhikkode</td>
<td>95.15</td>
<td>2939559</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>96.13</td>
<td>784939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>96.04</td>
<td>2425717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kasargod</td>
<td>91.87</td>
<td>1196686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: uid.kerala.gov.in

Now Akshaya e-centres collects information for renewal of ration cards for better implementation of food safety bill in India. It is help to access the man power of the country and also the socio-economic level of citizens in India. It helps to identifying the black money.

Now a day the Akshaya centres which are spread to every corner of the villages with full network connectivity, are linked to these FRIENDS Janasevana Kendras. All the government department services will be extended to the citizens through these centres. Akshaya is a prestigious project implemented by the IT Mission of Government of Kerala with an aim to bridge the digital divide with an additional goal of bringing Information Communication Technologies to the general public for better awareness of E-Governance and to be a part of Governmental activities. The project brought forward the enormous managerial and entrepreneurial talent of women also. The participation of women and women empowerment programs are also taken account in this project.

Today, Akshaya is acting as an instrument in rural empowerment and economic development. The project is a mechanism in creating huge economic growth and creation of direct and indirect employment in the State by focusing on the various facts of e-learning, e-governance, e-transaction, etc. Thus, the project is having a long-standing impact on the economic, social and political scenario of the State.

VIII. FINDINGS

- From this study show that the majority of citizen in Kerala are happy with the e-governance system. Because it simplifying the human effort and save time.
- It is more convenience to use (both user and the government authority) for example, one time registration system in e-district project record information once and it will keep as a future reference for issuing other certificates.
- FRIENDS and Akshaya providing better public utility services through the single window system for accessing government departmental services.
- FRIENDS –owned by government itself. Akshaya owned by individual entrepreneurs under the guidance and support of government.
- Akshaya project start with the intention of fully e-literacy, but now this program was not working properly because of lack of fund provided by the local authority.
- In rural area majority of people are agriculturists and allied people. They utilise these service more effectively, because the government provide financial as well as technical support for the development of rural areas.
- In rural area majority of people use Akshaya centers for getting e-district service for education purpose, getting allowances from government and local authorities.
Level of literacy rate in rural areas increased through the effective communication of information to the beneficiary. Students can access information about further study and apply on timely. For example online application and allotment process of higher secondary, degree, and P G level education done through akshaya centers.

E governance system will reduce red tapism, corruption and influences by the political parties, personal bias etc. because it operate in a systematic manner.

Successful accomplished enrollment of UID aadhaar and NPR shown the success of e governance system in Kerala.

Comparison between the role of Akshaya and FRIENDS in rural area show that Akshaya plays an important role, it cover all most all public utility services. Akshaya is near to home service provider, easy accessibility, save time and efforts etc are key features of success.

FRIENDS is only deal with departmental payments in government and universities. Then Akshaya centers deals with both open and controlled services. Open service are those services provided by the Akshaya centers directly to the public, just like an intermediary. Controlled services are those services provided by Akshaya centers within the restrictions and supervision of government, just like an agent.

Akshaya is acting as an instrument in rural empowerment and economic development.

**IX. SUGGESTIONS**

- FRIENDS and Akshaya project providing most of similar services to the public. Akshaya performed better than FRIENDS. Therefore only one single window system is needed.
- Accessibility of services is creating value. Therefore Akshaya centers create value among the rural people.
- Private participation is creating socio-economic benefit to the public. It creates employment opportunities and reduces office works in government offices.
- Use educated and skilled persons for data entry and operations and also provide better training and guidelines to the persons who handling the e governance system.
- To ensure and safeguard the authenticity and accuracy of information sharing.
- Use centralized data processor with highly protection, operations and control done by authorized persons.
- Keep records separately on the base of open system operation and controlled system operation.
- Provide financial support for e literacy program, and also provide necessary computer knowledge for day to day use like e-banking, job base training, e-kirshi, online applications filing etc.
- Encourage new entrepreneurs and also provide necessary equipments and financial support for working of Akshaya effectively.

**X. CONCLUSION**

Akshaya and FRIENDS play an important role in Kerala for better implementation of e governance. FRIENDS only focused on government departmental payments. But Akshaya focused on providing services from different departments are brought under one umbrella at any Common Service Centres (CSC). The Akshaya project is an ambitious e-literacy programme of the Kerala State. The involvement of private entrepreneurs, besides promoting entrepreneurship development and self-employment, has contributed to the sustainability of the project’s implementation.

For citizens the opening of Akshaya centres has brought an opportunity to become part of the current knowledge revolution, besides bringing about a great technological transformation to the district. The Kerala State has set an example for moving from a manual to electronic process with broadband technology as an enabler for bridging the digital divide. Making each and every citizen a creative participants and contributors of the knowledge society. Akshaya took a normal transition, necessitated by the needs of the society and sustainability of the Akshaya entrepreneurs by tying up with renowned educational institutions to impart various courses and to deliver government to customer services. It is just a single window that provides wide range of utility services and it takes care of everything under e governance. In future Akshaya will offer Tele-medicine, Business Correspondent, E-business and offer expertise to other states also. The content developed in the regional language would include education, health care, law, career development and training, agriculture, taxation, housing and other revenues to empower people to better help themselves.

**References**

[4] uid.kerala.gov.in