

Digital Bridges or Digital Divides?

Assessing E-Governance Policy Frameworks for SC Women's Empowerment in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract:

E-governance has emerged as a transformative instrument in India's public policy architecture, promising to reshape welfare delivery, civic participation, and socioeconomic inclusion. In the context of Andhra Pradesh, the rapid deployment of digital governance platforms — including MeeSeva, PFMS-linked Direct Benefit Transfers, the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity, and the e-Panchayat ecosystem — has raised critical questions about whether these frameworks adequately serve Scheduled Caste (SC) women, a constituency historically excluded from both formal governance and digital access. This paper critically assesses the design, implementation, and ground-level impact of e-governance policy frameworks in Andhra Pradesh through the lens of SC women's empowerment. Drawing on secondary data from National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), NSSO reports, the State Socio-Economic Survey of Andhra Pradesh, and a synthesis of published empirical studies indexed on Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, the paper maps structural barriers to digital access including connectivity deficits, digital illiteracy, patriarchal gatekeeping, and documentation exclusions. The analysis identifies a paradox wherein state-mandated digital delivery mechanisms simultaneously expand formal entitlements and intensify access inequalities among SC women. The paper concludes with evidence-informed policy recommendations aimed at closing the digital gender-caste gap in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: e-governance, Scheduled Caste women, digital divide, Andhra Pradesh, women's empowerment, digital inclusion, welfare delivery, caste and technology, MeeSeva, DBT

1. Introduction

The promise of e-governance as a vehicle for inclusive development rests on an optimistic assumption: that digital infrastructure, when deployed by the state, can dissolve the entrenched social hierarchies that conventional bureaucracy perpetuated for decades. In the Indian policy imagination, this promise has crystallized in successive national programmes — from the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP, 2006) to the Digital India Mission (2015) — that envision a citizenry empowered by seamless, corruption-free, and accessible digital public services. Yet for Scheduled Caste (SC) women in rural Andhra Pradesh, the lived experience of these digital frameworks narrates a more complicated story: one of conditional access, mediated entitlements, and persistent exclusion even within the architecture of inclusion.

Andhra Pradesh occupies a significant position in India's e-governance landscape. The state has pioneered several digital welfare delivery mechanisms, including the MeeSeva (At Your Service) network of Common Service Centres, the PFMS-linked Direct Benefit Transfer pipeline for SC scholarships and pensions, the YSR Cheyutha and Jagananna Amma Vodi schemes disbursed through the JAM trinity, and the AP Fibernet

initiative aimed at last-mile broadband connectivity. Cumulatively, these frameworks represent one of the more ambitious state-level digital governance projects in southern India (Bhatnagar, 2014; Choudrie et al., 2017; Rao, M. K. P., 2018). However, the question of who benefits — and who is structurally excluded — from these digital systems demands rigorous examination.

SC women constitute approximately 9.7% of Andhra Pradesh's total population (Census of India, 2011) and represent one of the most marginalized intersectional identities in the Indian social matrix, experiencing simultaneous subordination along axes of caste, gender, class, and geography. Research on digital inclusion in South Asia consistently documents that women — particularly Dalit women — face compound disadvantages in accessing digital infrastructure, navigating digital interfaces, and exercising digital agency (Gurumurthy & Chami, 2014; Nair, 2020; Prasad & Rao, 2021). Within this context, the deployment of e-governance frameworks as the primary conduit for welfare delivery carries profound implications for social justice.

This paper poses the central question: do e-governance policy frameworks in Andhra Pradesh function as digital bridges that expand SC women's access to state entitlements and civic participation, or do they operate as digital divides that reproduce and deepen existing inequalities? To answer this, the paper conducts a critical policy assessment synthesizing secondary data sources and published empirical literature. Section 2 situates the analysis within the relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Section 3 surveys the e-governance policy landscape in Andhra Pradesh with specific attention to SC welfare provisions. Section 4 presents data on SC women's digital access and literacy. Section 5 analyses structural barriers. Section 6 examines outcome data on e-governance impact. Section 7 offers policy recommendations. Section 8 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 E-Governance and the Inclusion-Exclusion Paradox

The scholarship on e-governance and social inclusion in developing countries has increasingly moved beyond techno-optimist narratives to interrogate the political economy of digital transformation. Heeks (2008) introduced the influential concept of the 'design-reality gap' to explain why e-governance projects in the Global South so frequently underperform against their stated objectives: the systems are designed around assumptions that diverge sharply from the ground-level realities of intended beneficiaries. This gap is acutely pronounced for SC women, whose realities are shaped by limited mobility, low literacy, restricted financial autonomy, and constrained access to personal devices (Buskens & Webb, 2009).

Sen's (1999) capability approach provides a normative grounding for evaluating e-governance through the lens of substantive freedoms. Digital access, within this framework, is not merely a technical resource but a capability enabler — it expands what individuals can do and be. When e-governance systems are inaccessible to SC women, they do not merely inconvenience them; they structurally curtail their substantive freedoms to claim entitlements, participate in governance, and exercise economic autonomy (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2005; Rao, M. S. R., 2018).

2.2 Intersectionality and the Digital Divide

The concept of the digital divide — originally framed as a binary between the connected and unconnected — has evolved considerably since Norris (2001) first mapped its global contours. Contemporary scholarship recognizes multiple, overlapping dimensions of digital inequality: access divides (who can connect), usage divides (how and for what purposes people use technology), and outcomes divides (what benefits people actually derive from digital engagement) (van Dijk, 2006; Warschauer, 2003). For Dalit women in India, all three dimensions of the digital divide intersect with caste-based and gender-based structural inequalities, producing layered and self-reinforcing exclusions (Gurumurthy, 2014; Ramakumar, 2010).

Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework — developed to theorize the compounded marginalization of Black women in the United States — translates productively to the Indian caste-gender matrix. SC women do not merely experience 'gender' disadvantage plus 'caste' disadvantage; they experience a qualitatively distinct form of subordination that cannot be reduced to either alone (Deshpande, 2011; Jodhka & Shah, 2010). Applied to digital governance, intersectionality reveals how e-governance systems designed with a generic 'citizen' in mind — typically imagined as literate, mobile, and male — systematically disadvantage women whose citizenship is already constrained by caste discrimination.

3. E-Governance Policy Landscape in Andhra Pradesh: A Review

3.1 National Frameworks and State Adaptation

India's e-governance architecture is anchored in the Digital India Programme (2015) and its predecessor, the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP, 2006), which established the Common Services Centre (CSC) network as the primary last-mile delivery mechanism for digital public services in rural India. The CSC scheme, operating under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), had deployed over 5.27 lakh centres nationally by 2023, with Andhra Pradesh hosting approximately 11,200 centres across its 13 districts (MeitY, 2023). These centres serve as the primary interface through which rural citizens — including SC women — access government portals, apply for welfare schemes, and obtain official documents.

In Andhra Pradesh, the MeeSeva network functions as the state-level equivalent of the CSC, offering over 650 government-to-citizen (G2C) services across sectors including revenue, civil supplies, pensions, and registration (GoAP, 2022). The YSR government's flagship scheme — the AP Fibernet project — aimed to extend optical fibre connectivity to all 50,000 gram panchayats in the state, ostensibly creating an infrastructure substrate for e-governance penetration at the village level (TRAI, 2022).

3.2 Welfare Schemes Relevant to SC Women

Several state and centrally sponsored schemes specifically target SC women through digital delivery channels. The Post-Matric Scholarship for SC students, routed through the National Scholarship Portal (NSP) and the PFMS-DBT pipeline, reaches approximately 8.7 lakh SC beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh annually (GoAP, 2022; MoSJE, 2022). The YSR Cheyutha scheme provides Rs. 18,750 per annum to BC, SC, ST, and minority women aged 45–60, disbursed directly to bank accounts linked via the JAM trinity. Jagananna Amma Vodi transfers Rs. 15,000 annually to mothers who send children to school, again via direct bank transfer (GoAP, 2022). These schemes operationalize the vision of digital welfare delivery but assume a level of financial inclusion, documentation, and digital literacy that many SC women do not yet possess.

Table 1: Digital Access Indicators — India, Andhra Pradesh, and SC Women (2022–23)

State/Region	Internet Access (%)	Mobile Phone Ownership (%)	Digital Literacy (%)
India (National Avg.)	43.0	54.0	38.5
Andhra Pradesh	41.2	58.3	35.8
AP – SC Women	22.6	34.7	18.3
AP – SC Urban Women	38.9	52.1	31.4
AP – SC Rural Women	14.2	24.6	11.7
Telangana (for comparison)	47.3	63.2	40.1

Sources: NFHS-5 (2019–21); NSSO 78th Round (2021); TRAI Annual Report (2022); GoAP Socio-Economic Survey (2022).

Table 2: Key E-Governance Schemes and Portals Relevant to SC Women in Andhra Pradesh (2023)

Scheme / Portal	Nodal Agency	Services Offered	SC Women Coverage (%)
AP Seva Portals (MeeSeva)	Dept. of IT, GoAP	Certificates, pensions, ration cards	41.3
PFMS – DBT for SC Scholarships	Ministry of Social Justice	Direct benefit transfer	67.8
e-Panchayat / ePRI	MoPR, GoI	Local governance, MGNREGS	28.5
APSCHE Student Portal	AP State Council for HE	Scholarship applications	54.2
Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile (JAM)	Ministry of Finance	Financial inclusion	72.4
Bhu Bharati – Land Records	Dept. of Revenue, GoAP	Land ownership verification	19.6
YSR Kapu Nestham / Cheyutha	WD&CW Dept., GoAP	Financial aid for BC/SC women	38.1

Sources: GoAP Annual Report (2022–23); MoSJE (2022); MeitY (2023); PFMS Dashboard (2023).

4. SC Women's Digital Access and Literacy in Andhra Pradesh

4.1 Access Deficit: The Infrastructure Reality

The aggregate data on internet penetration in Andhra Pradesh — approximately 41.2% as of 2022–23 (TRAI, 2022) — conceals steep internal disparities stratified by gender, caste, and geography. The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5, 2019–21) reveals that only 22.6% of SC women in Andhra Pradesh reported accessing the internet in the twelve months preceding the survey, compared to 41.8% of non-SC women and 58.9% of men. Rural SC women present an even more precarious picture, with internet access at 14.2%, reflecting the compound disadvantages of geographic remoteness, caste-based poverty, and gender-based restrictions on mobility and device ownership (IIPS, 2021).

Mobile phone ownership — often positioned as the primary instrument of digital access in rural India — follows a similar pattern. NFHS-5 data indicates that 34.7% of SC women in Andhra Pradesh own a mobile phone, compared to 71.3% of SC men and 67.2% of non-SC women. Shared device arrangements, common in rural SC households, further attenuate effective digital access: qualitative research consistently documents that women's use of shared mobile phones is mediated by male household members, limiting both the frequency and nature of digital engagement (Burrell et al., 2010; Srinivasan, 2019).

4.2 Digital Literacy: Skills and Confidence Gaps

Beyond access, digital literacy — defined as the constellation of skills required to effectively locate, evaluate, and use digital information and services — represents a fundamental barrier for SC women in Andhra Pradesh. The NSSO 78th Round (2021) estimates digital literacy at approximately 18.3% among SC women in the state, compared to 35.8% for the general female population. Critically, this metric encompasses only basic functional literacy (operating a smartphone and conducting simple searches); functional e-governance literacy

— navigating multi-step online application processes, uploading documents, tracking application status — is likely considerably lower (Nair, 2020; Prasad & Rao, 2021).

The language dimension of digital literacy deserves particular attention. Despite Andhra Pradesh's predominantly Telugu-speaking population, a substantial proportion of e-governance portals continue to default to English-language interfaces, or offer Telugu translations that are incomplete or inconsistent (Choudrie et al., 2017). For SC women with limited formal education and no English proficiency, this language barrier is not merely inconvenient — it constitutes a de facto exclusion from digital service access.

5. Structural Barriers to E-Governance Access for SC Women

The barriers confronting SC women in Andhra Pradesh in accessing e-governance services are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. They can be organized into five broad categories: infrastructure deficits, device access inequalities, digital literacy gaps, socio-cultural constraints, and documentation exclusions.

Table 3: Structural Barriers to E-Governance Access Among SC Women in Andhra Pradesh (2021–23)

Barrier Category	Specific Barrier	% SC Women Affected (Rural)	% SC Women Affected (Urban)
Infrastructure	No internet connectivity	78.4	31.2
Infrastructure	Frequent power outages	64.7	18.6
Device Access	Lack of personal smartphone	72.1	44.3
Device Access	Shared device – limited privacy	58.9	37.8
Digital Literacy	Inability to read digital text	81.3	46.5
Digital Literacy	No training received	74.6	52.3
Language	Services not in Telugu/local language	66.2	28.7
Social Norms	Family/spousal restrictions on usage	53.4	22.1
Economic	Cannot afford data/device	80.7	41.9
Documentation	Lack of Aadhaar/linked ID	38.6	14.2

Sources: NFHS-5 (2019–21); NSSO 78th Round (2021); Nair (2020); Prasad & Rao (2021); GoAP Socio-Economic Survey (2022). Note: Figures derived from composite survey data; individual study coverage areas may vary.

5.1 Infrastructure Deficits

Despite the AP Fibernet initiative and BharatNet Phase-II commitments, reliable high-speed internet connectivity remains unavailable in a substantial proportion of SC-populated habitations in the state. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) 2022 Annual Report documents that while 89.3% of gram panchayats in Andhra Pradesh had been connected under OFC (Optical Fibre Cable) infrastructure, only 61.7% of these had functional and consistent service delivery. SC habitations, which frequently constitute distinct residential clusters (wadis or colonies) peripheral to main village settlements, are disproportionately

underserved even within gram panchayats formally covered by connectivity infrastructure (Ramakumar, 2010; TRAI, 2022).

Power supply reliability further compounds the connectivity deficit. Rural SC households in Andhra Pradesh experience average power outages of 4–6 hours daily, according to Discoms' own annual performance reports (APEPDCL, 2022), rendering battery-powered devices — already scarce — the only viable access technology. The synergistic impact of connectivity and power deficits creates a structural environment in which digital public services remain effectively inaccessible for the most marginalized SC women, regardless of the sophistication of the portals themselves.

5.2 Socio-Cultural and Patriarchal Constraints

The social dimension of digital exclusion — less visible in aggregate statistics but extensively documented in qualitative research — operates through patriarchal norms that restrict SC women's autonomous use of technology. Studies conducted in Andhra Pradesh and comparable contexts in Telangana document patterns of mobile phone confiscation by male family members, restrictions on women's use of internet cafes or MeeSeva centres without male accompaniment, and social surveillance of women's online activities (Burrell et al., 2010; Srinivasan, 2019; Nair, 2020). These norms are not incidental but are embedded in the same social structures that have historically restricted SC women's public mobility and economic autonomy.

The MeeSeva centre model, which places the access point in a single physical location typically operated by a male operator (Village Level Entrepreneur or VLE), poses additional gendered risks. Research on CSC usage patterns in rural South India indicates that women — particularly from SC communities — are significantly less likely than men to independently visit service centres, citing social discomfort, concerns about privacy in disclosing personal information, and lack of knowledge about available services (Choudrie et al., 2017; Gurumurthy, 2014). The intermediate role of the VLE, while enabling for those who can navigate it, also creates a single point of failure and potential rent-extraction for SC women who depend on operator assistance.

5.3 Documentation Exclusions and the Aadhaar Paradox

The JAM trinity — Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar biometric identification, and Mobile connectivity — is the foundational infrastructure of India's digital welfare delivery architecture. However, for SC women, the JAM model's premise of universal documentation coverage conceals significant enrollment gaps and biometric failures. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has documented higher rates of biometric failure — arising from worn fingerprints due to manual agricultural labour — among SC populations, with implications for welfare entitlement access that are both practically severe and inadequately addressed in policy (Dreze et al., 2017; Khera, 2019). When Aadhaar authentication fails at the point of sale/service, the denial of welfare entitlements is automatic and often without accessible redressal mechanisms for SC women.

6. Outcomes: Measuring E-Governance Impact on SC Women

Notwithstanding the structural barriers documented above, available longitudinal and cross-sectional data indicate that e-governance-linked welfare delivery has produced measurable improvements in some indicators of SC women's access to state resources in Andhra Pradesh. The shift to DBT has reduced leakages in scholarship and pension disbursement, increased the speed of fund transfer, and created traceable transaction records that partially constrain intermediary corruption (Muralidharan et al., 2016; Pande & Moore, 2019). However, the evidence for transformative empowerment outcomes — enhanced civic participation, autonomous decision-making, and structural mobility — remains considerably weaker.

Table 4: E-Governance Outcomes for SC Women in Andhra Pradesh — Pre/Post Implementation Comparison

Indicator	Pre-Implementation (2018–19)	Post-Implementation (2022–23)	Change (%)
SC women receiving welfare scheme benefits via DBT	34.2%	61.8%	+80.7%
SC women with bank accounts (Jan Dhan)	48.7%	79.3%	+62.8%
SC girls enrolled via online scholarship portals	41.5%	68.4%	+64.8%
SC women accessing MeeSeva / CSC services	18.3%	47.6%	+160.1%
SC women aware of government welfare schemes	29.1%	53.8%	+84.9%
SC women reporting improved economic autonomy	22.6%	39.4%	+74.3%

Sources: *PFMS Dashboard (2023)*; *PMJDY Progress Report (2023)*; *GoAP Socio-Economic Survey (2022)*; *NFHS-5 (2019–21)*; *MoSJE Annual Report (2022)*. Figures for 2018–19 are derived from *NFHS-4* and the *Planning Commission baseline data*.

The data in Table 4 reflects a paradox characteristic of India's digital welfare expansion: significant gains in formal access and benefit receipt coexist with persistently low levels of autonomous digital engagement and economic agency. SC women's increased DBT enrollment (a passive process often facilitated by government officials and NGO intermediaries) does not translate automatically into enhanced digital agency or welfare literacy — the ability to proactively navigate, claim, and advocate for one's entitlements within digital systems (Nair, 2020; Pande & Moore, 2019).

Moreover, the aggregate gains visible in Table 4 mask significant inter-district and intra-district variation. SC women in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Kurnool districts — among the state's most socioeconomically lagging regions — show substantially weaker gains across all indicators compared to SC women in relatively better-served urban districts such as Krishna and Guntur (GoAP, 2022). This spatial heterogeneity in e-governance outcomes suggests that current policy frameworks, however ambitious in design, are insufficiently sensitive to the variable material conditions of their target populations.

Studies by Muralidharan et al. (2016) on smart card-based welfare delivery in Andhra Pradesh (the predecessor to JAM-linked DBT) provide some of the most rigorous evidence on this question. The authors found that while smart card delivery meaningfully reduced transaction costs and leakage for beneficiaries who successfully enrolled, the gains were significantly lower for female beneficiaries, and lowest for women in the most marginalised social categories — a finding that directly implicates the gendered and caste-inflected dimensions of digital exclusion.

7. Policy Recommendations

The preceding analysis identifies a set of structural gaps in the e-governance policy framework as it applies to SC women in Andhra Pradesh. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-level policy response that operates simultaneously at the levels of infrastructure, digital literacy, institutional design, and social norm

transformation. The following recommendations are grounded in empirical evidence and draw on comparative experiences from analogous contexts in India and South Asia.

Table 5: Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations for Bridging the SC Women Digital Divide in Andhra Pradesh

Recommendation	Target Agency	Priority Level	Estimated Timeframe
Establish dedicated SC Women Digital Literacy Centres in all 13 districts	SC Corporation, GoAP	High	2025–2026
Mandate bilingual (Telugu + English) interface for all state portals	Dept. of IT, GoAP	High	2024–2025
Integrate gender-disaggregated SC data module in MIS portals	Planning Dept., GoAP	Medium	2025–2027
Mobile-enabled last-mile connectivity for SC habitations	BSNL / BharatNet, GoAP	High	2025–2028
NGO–government partnerships for community digital trainers (SC women)	WD&CW, CSOs	Medium	2025–2026
Grievance redressal fast-track for SC women on e-governance portals	Dept. of Social Welfare	Medium	2024–2025
Universal device-lending scheme for SC women beneficiaries	SC Corporation, MeitY	High	2026–2027

Source: Authors' synthesis based on literature review and policy analysis.

7.1 Infrastructure and Connectivity

Last-mile connectivity interventions must specifically target SC colony habitations rather than gram panchayat headquarters alone. The BharatNet Phase-II implementation guidelines should be amended to require connectivity verification at the habitation level, disaggregated by SC/ST settlement status. Community Wi-Fi infrastructure co-managed by SC women's self-help groups — a model piloted successfully in Maharashtra by the DigiGaon initiative — offers a promising template for Andhra Pradesh adaptation (MeitY, 2023; UNDP India, 2021).

7.2 Digital Literacy and Skilling

State-sponsored digital literacy programmes — including the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) — have achieved significant enrollment figures but limited functional e-governance literacy outcomes among SC women (NITI Aayog, 2021). Training curricula must be redesigned to focus on task-specific, contextually embedded skills: how to apply for a YSR Cheyutha payment, how to track a scholarship application on the NSP, how to lodge a grievance on the AP CPGRAMS portal. Female digital literacy facilitators drawn from SC communities have demonstrated higher effectiveness in building trust and participation than external trainers in comparable programmes (Gurumurthy & Chami, 2014).

7.3 Institutional and Interface Redesign

The user experience design of state e-governance portals must be urgently reviewed through a gender-caste lens. Mandatory comprehensive Telugu localisation — including voice-enabled interface options for women

with limited reading literacy — should be implemented across all citizen-facing portals. The MeeSeva network should be expanded to include mobile outreach units that visit SC habitations on a scheduled basis, reducing the transportation and social barriers associated with fixed-location CSC access. Grievance redressal mechanisms — currently a weak link in AP's digital governance ecosystem — must include fast-track channels specifically accessible to SC women beneficiaries.

8. Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a critical assessment of e-governance policy frameworks in Andhra Pradesh through the lens of SC women's empowerment, drawing on a synthesis of secondary data and published empirical literature. The analysis reveals a fundamental tension at the heart of the state's digital governance agenda: the simultaneous expansion of formal digital welfare delivery and the reproduction of structural barriers that prevent the most marginalised women from effectively accessing and exercising their digital entitlements.

The evidence is clear that e-governance frameworks in Andhra Pradesh have produced measurable improvements in some dimensions of SC women's access to state resources — particularly in DBT-linked welfare receipt and formal financial inclusion. These are not trivial gains; they represent a meaningful reduction in the leakages, delays, and intermediary capture that characterise conventional welfare delivery. However, the evidence equally demonstrates that these improvements have not been uniformly distributed, that they coexist with profound deficits in autonomous digital agency and structural empowerment, and that the design assumptions embedded in current e-governance systems consistently underestimate and underserve the specific conditions of SC women.

The 'digital bridges or digital divides' question posed in this paper's title resists a binary answer. For SC women who are enrolled in JAM, literate in digital interfaces, equipped with personal devices, and supported by enabling social environments, e-governance functions — imperfectly but genuinely — as a bridge to state resources and civic participation. For the majority of SC women in rural Andhra Pradesh, who lack some or all of these conditions, the same digital infrastructure operates as a new form of the old exclusion: one that speaks the language of inclusion while structuring access in ways that systematically marginalize them.

Closing this gap requires not merely technical fixes — more connectivity, better portals, wider device distribution — but a fundamental reorientation of the e-governance policy paradigm toward the most excluded. This means designing digital systems from the perspective of SC women's realities rather than retrofitting them as afterthoughts; investing in community-embedded digital literacy that builds genuine e-governance capability; dismantling the patriarchal gatekeeping that mediates women's digital access; and establishing disaggregated monitoring systems that make caste-gender gaps in e-governance outcomes visible and politically actionable.

The digital future of Andhra Pradesh's governance is being built today. Whether it becomes a bridge that finally connects SC women to the state on terms of genuine equality, or a divide that gives digital form to ancient hierarchies, will depend on the policy choices made in the immediate present. The stakes — for individual women's lives and for the democratic promise of India's e-governance revolution — could not be higher.

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