Preface

Technology has been one of the major factors in increasing production, benefiting consumers and promoting the development of a country. In recent years, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are being looked upon as a formula for providing greater opportunities for sustainable development and social inclusion of marginalized sections of society. The Government of many countries have sought to improve public administration through Information Technology(IT) in what has come to be known as "e-governance" The usage of IT has not only improved the delivery of services by the governmental organisations, It has also increased transparency and accountability of government processes and allowed citizens to participate in their overall development. The access to information and ICT, however, is not uniform. Technological changes have led to a divide between those people and communities who can make effective use of IT and those who cannot and has been referred to as the 'digital divide'.

There is considerable debate not only on the definition of digital divide but also on the indicators and their extent that constitute the concept of digital divide. As a result the definition and concept of digital divide has evolved over time. With time it came to encompass social, cultural and political realities, including human resource inequities and social/community resource inequities generated by lack of access to digital technologies. In this context it came to be defined as economic, social and cultural deprivation generated by using ICT access and skills.

This unequal access to information has posed challenges to the government to take appropriate steps to bridge the gap... In India several measures have been taken by the Government to put in place an enabling and empowering strategy, with key interventions as necessary, and a focus on disadvantaged groups and identified backward areas and thereby reduce the divide between the information 'haves' and information 'have nots' These include inter alia, enactment of the Information Technology(IT) Act, 2000; liberalization of the telecom sector to encourage foreign participation and many programmes such as NeGP, Community Service Centres, IT for masses, Digital Libraries to increase IT penetration, especially in the rural areas. .However, disparities in

the levels of ICT access and use continue to exist and it has been observed that although the major metropolis are at par with some of the developed countries, but rural areas of States like Bihar and Orissa still lag behind.

In this study an effort has been made to understand the conceptualisation of digital divide as the underlying conceptualizations affect how one defines the divide, which in turn affects the framing of and the possible solutions to the issues. This study has also reviewed the existing government policies in India for bridging the digital divide and to identify the constraints in implementation of these policies for bridging the digital divide. The conclusion of the study has been that digital divide continues to exist in the country and further research is required to ascertain if the gap is widening. There is, thus, a need for reshaping policy to meet local needs and bridging the digital divide. Indian policy makers need to reassess the digital divide both from technological as well as socio-cultural perspective, to adopt new courses of action that will help integrate Information technology into society.