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### E-Government In India : Opportunities and Challenges

#### Abstract ::

*Public administration, governed by bureaucratic structures built on rationale principles, that dominated the twentieth century, has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times. E-governance, which is a paradigm shift over the traditional approaches in public administration, means rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. This new paradigm has brought about a revolution in the quality of service delivered to the citizens. It has ushered in transparency in the governing process; saving of time due to provision of services through single window; simplification of procedures; better office and record management; reduction in corruption; and improved attitude, behavior and job handling capacity of the dealing personnel. The present study substantiates these theoretical assumptions about e-governance by analyzing some experiences at the local, state and federal levels of government in India.*

#### Introduction :

In the past, service delivery mechanisms of the government departments left much to be desired in India. Cramped spaces; shabby ambience; discourteous dealing personnel and their chronic absenteeism; demands of gratification; inefficiency in work; long queues; procrastinating officials; procedural complexities; etc., were some of the undesirable features of the working of the government departments. Consequently, a visit to government department by a citizen to make use of any service used to be a harrowing experience. With the rising awareness amongst the citizens and their better experiences with the private sector – the demand for better services on the part of government departments became more pronounced. The infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has played a prominent role in strengthening such a demand. The metamorphosis in the quality of delivery of services to the citizens by the government has been more pronounced in recent years with the advent of e-governance.

E-governance, which is a paradigm shift over the traditional approaches in Public Administration, means rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. This new paradigm has brought about a revolution in the quality of service delivered to the citizens. It has ushered in transparency in the governing process; saving of time due to provision of services through single window; simplification of procedures; better office and record management; reduction in corruption; and improved attitude, behavior and job handling capacity of the dealing personnel. The present study substantiates these theoretical assumptions about e-governance by analyzing some experiences at the Union as well as State Government Level in India.

Public Administration, governed by bureaucratic structures built on rationale principles, that dominated the twentieth century, has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times. It is so because it tended to be rigid, laid too much emphasis on red-tapism; sap creativity; thwarted initiative; wore out dynamism and denied justice as of resultant delays. In addition the focus was more on following procedures and keeping records. Consequently the government moved at snails pace, that too, after guzzling scarce public resources. This criticism seems to be harsh and overstated, but it brings the sordid and murky picture of the system to light. The clarion call is revamp the government and the archaic governance system.

Most of the advanced countries including United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, Newzeland, and United States of America (USA) have adopted series of measures under a new model based on market principles. This new model has several names such as: 'managerialism', 'new public

management'; 'market based public administration'; 'the post bureaucratic paradigm'; or 'entrepreneurial government' (Huges, 1998). Though these appear to be different terms yet they convey the same message i.e. replace the traditional bureaucratic model with a new model. Have faith in market principles: cut costs; reduce budgets; improve public managements, simplify rules and procedures; check corruption; inject transparency; and strengthen market forces by minimizing the role of the state. To make the new system more effective and ensure efficacy, the use of information technology in the governance process is emphasized.

No doubt, India has introduced these global trends/ measures in 1990, but no sincere exercise has been undertaken in the corresponding 15 years to examine the effects of these reformative measures, especially the role of the information technology, in the governance process. The present paper is an attempt to fill this gap in the existing literature.

The term governance needs to be understood before we move on to e-government and E-Governance. Governance is not the exclusive preserve of the government. It extends to civil society and the private sector. It covers every institution and organization from family to the state. It involves exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage the affairs in, and "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". It can be better understood as, "the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences".

The two terms- e-government and e-governance are independent of each other, but are at times used alternatively, there by the major distinction between e-government and E-Governance is missed out. E-government is understood as the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to promote more efficient and cost effective government, facilitate more convenient government services and allow greater public access to information, and make government more accountable to citizens, where as governance is a wider term which covers the state's institutional arrangements, decision making processes, implementation capacity and the relationship between government officials and the public. E-Governance is the use of ICT by the government, civil society and political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue and feedback to promote their greater participation in the process of governance of these institutions. Thus, e-government can be viewed as a subset of e-governance, and its focus is largely on improving administrative efficiency and reducing administrative corruption.

### **Scope of E- Government**

"E-Government" refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

Traditionally, the interaction between a citizen or business and a government agency took place in a government office. With emerging information and communication technologies it is possible to locate service centers closer to the clients. Such centers may consist of an unattended kiosk in the government agency, a service kiosk located close to the client, or the use of a personal computer in the home or office. Analogous to e-commerce, which allows businesses to transact with each other more efficiently (B2B) and brings customers closer to businesses (B2C), e-government aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive.

While e-government encompasses a wide range of activities, we can identify three distinct areas. These include government-to-government (G to G), government-to-citizens (G to C), and government to business (G to B). Each of these represents a different combination of motivating forces. However, some common goals include improving the efficiency, reliability, and quality of services for the respective groups.

**The Government to Government(G TO G)** sector represents the backbone of e-government. It is felt that governments at the union, state and local level must enhance and update their own internal

systems and procedures before electronic transactions with citizens and business are introduced. Government to government e-government involves sharing data and conducting electronic exchanges between various governmental agencies. There are number of advantages with government-to-government initiatives. One benefit with this is cost savings, which is achieved by increasing the speed of the transactions, reduction in the number of personnel necessary to complete a task, and improving the consistency of outcomes. Another advantage, which flows from this, is improvement in the management of public resources.

**Government to Citizen(G TO C)** facilitates citizen interaction with government, which is primary goal of e-government. This attempts to make transactions, such as payment of taxes, renewing licenses and applying for certain benefits, less time consuming and easy to carry out. Government to citizen initiatives also strives to enhance access to public information through the use of websites and kiosks. Further, one of the main goals of implementing these initiatives has been to create a "single window" where citizens can carry out variety of tasks, especially those that involve multiple government departments, without requiring the citizen to initiate contacts with each government department individually. Thus, the G to C initiatives is driven by an urge to provide "better government" through improved efficiency and more reliable outcomes.

**Government to Business (G TO B)** sector includes both the procurement of goods and services by the government as well as the sale of surplus government goods to the public on line. There are two motivating forces behind G to B. Currently; the business community prefers to carry out its activities such as sales, procurement, and hiring through electronic means. There are large numbers of software companies, which are producing number of products focusing on performing routine business activities on line. Thus, many companies like to extend the cost savings realized through Business to Business (B to B) transactions to their business with union, state and local level governments. The second reason for the growth of G to B is the demand for cost cutting and efficient procurements in the government. Developing countries, where there is great pressure to minimize costs due to shortage of funds, G to B are being encouraged by the governmental agencies.

### **E-Government Initiatives in India: An overview**

The Government of India kick started the use of IT in the government in the right earnest by launching number of initiatives. First the Government approved the National E-Governance Action plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007. The plan is an attempt to lay the foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-governance within the country.

It proposed to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms at the enter, state and local levels to provide a citizen centric and business centric environment for governance. The Government has given approval in-principle to the plan and overall programme content; implementation approach and governance structure. While endorsing he plan, it was observed that: weight age must be given for quality and speed of implementation in procurement procedures for IT services; suitable system of motivating the states for quick adoption be incorporated; provision of delivery of services to the citizens through a single window should be encouraged; Out sourcing of services wherever and whenever feasible; efforts be made to promote and develop public private partnerships to utilize the full potential of private sector investments; and connectivity should be improved and extended up to the block level in the states. Apart from the action plan, the following measures have also been introduced:

1. Adoption of "Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 by the Government of India to provide legal framework to facilitate electronic transactions. The major aims of this act are to: recognize electronic contracts, prevents computer crimes, and make electronic filing possible. The Act came into force on 17 October, 2000;
2. Establishment of the National Taskforce of Information Technology and Software Development in May 1998;
3. Creation of Centre for e-governance to disseminate the best practices in the area of e-governance for the use by the Central and State Governments and act as a nodal enter to provide general information on e-governance, national and international initiatives, and IT policies of the government(s);

4. Developing e-office solutions to enable various ministries and departments to do their work electronically. Modules such as Workflow for Drafts for Approvals, e-file, e-notings, submission of reports, integrated personal information and financial accounting systems have been developed;
5. Setting up of a High Powered Committee (HPC) with Cabinet Secretary as its Chairman to improve administrative efficiency by using Information Technology in overnment;
6. Designating a Joint Secretary level officer as IT manager in every Ministry/ Department; and
7. Instituting websites by almost all Ministries and Departments and providing information on aspects such as their objectives, policies and decisions, contact persons, etc. Some of them have started their electronic newsletter for giving publicity to their activities on wider scale; and identifying departments, which have frequent inter-face with the citizens, and computerizing them on priority basis.

Thus, it can be inferred from the above that a good beginning has been made to make government a reality in India, but still a lot needs to be done. Sincere efforts are required on sustained basis in future also to maintain the momentum.

### **Challenges For E-Government In India::**

The governments both –the Union and the states must make earnest efforts to complete the daunting, but formidable task of quicker and effective E-government programs by:

1. Making a policy choice in favour of computerization to overcome radically the even if it requires huge investments for the purchase of hardware and software;
2. Serious efforts would be required to mobilize resources for this arduous job. One way to deal with the situation could be that governments enter into arrangements for leasing of computers. This would reduce initial heavy capital investments. There are a large number of agencies which would like to fund the leasing to the departments. Ministry of Finance can be asked to provide concessions to these agencies;
3. Establishing complete connectivity between various ministries and departments so that transfer of files and papers could be done through Internet thereby choosing efficacious speed as an alternative to manual labour. To make this really effective, there is a need to make databases of various departments compatible with one another. Thus, interoperability of e- governance projects is of vital importance if the citizens are to feel the benefit of IT in day to day life;
4. Supplying information to the public in a language that they understand and are comfortable with, and generally, it is the local language. As, technology is available by which transliteration from English into other languages can be made. Therefore, the problem is manageable provided there is enough motivation to do this onerous task;
5. Changing the mindset of the government employees who are used to working only in the manual mode. This is a big task and needs patience and careful planning. Workshops, seminars, and training programmes are required to be organized to spread awareness among the employees at all levels;
6. making cyber laws available to the public as early as possible so that the IT systems and information documents stored in the systems has the same legal validity as the documents stored today on paper; and
7. Build supporting infrastructures of power and all weather surface transport system to bridge the digital divide between the rural and urban India Last of all the Government must address on urgent basis: the two major concerns in the IT implementation- the security and privacy. Steps must be initiated to generate confidence among the individuals and organizations to conduct on-line transactions and communications.

## Conclusion ::

Public administration, governed by bureaucratic structures built on rationale principles, that dominated the twentieth century, has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times. E-governance, which is a paradigm shift over the traditional approaches in public administration, means rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. This new paradigm has brought about a revolution in the quality of service delivered to the citizens. It has ushered in transparency in the governing process; saving of time due to provision of services through single window; simplification of procedures; better office and record management; reduction in corruption; and improved attitude, behavior and job handling capacity of the dealing personnel. The present study substantiates these theoretical assumptions about e-governance by analyzing some experiences at the local, state and federal levels of government in India.

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