Chapter 4

Tracking the Evolution of E-Governance in India

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is made in this paper to gain an understanding of the evolution of Electronic Governance (E-governance) in India. The initial part of the paper examines the Historical Perspectives and the evolution of E-governance in India since the formation of the Department of Electronics. The following sections give a detailed study about the initiatives taken by the Government of India over periods of five years and their Missions and Objectives in the creation of a “Transparent and Efficient Governance” from grass root levels. The relative development with the induction of these technologies through various policies and reforms are mapped against the projects and gauge the significant impact on the ability of our government to establish the current E-governance structures.

1. BACKGROUND

The last few years have seen a massive explosion in information technology the world over. The heavy duty computers have given way to sleek devices and laptops. The confluence of electronics and tele-communications has opened new vistas of transmission, storage and retrieval of information as never before. These are being increasingly used for decision-making not only in the corporate world but even in public administration. Terms like e-commerce and e-governance are the new buzz words. This phenomenon will become even more critical as years roll by. The total scenario is changing very fast. In this setting, it would be interesting to ask what would be the shape and contours of governance in India in twenty or twenty-five years from now: governance in its comprehensive form encompassing the transnational and national, at state level and at the cutting edge i.e. the district and below. It is appropriate and timely to put such questions to ourselves because the time-clock is moving fast and we have already glided into the third millennium.

The social pressures generated by the ever-increasing population are enormous and so also its massive burden on civic amenities and the socio-economic infrastructure. The developed countries
have made extensive research on the needs of their citizens and produced what is considered as best for their system, but never before in India has an effort been put in to map the evolution of e-governance since the inception of the Department of Electronics. Looking into the computerization era, the government needs and citizens expectations are perfectly balanced, with the digital divide that criss-crosses the developmental roots. Since much of our literature followed the lines of application based approaches, in this paper the author is approaching the way through which Indian contexts and perspectives conflicted in the best interests of success. A thorough research on socio-economic developments in rural populace is what defines the effectiveness of any e-government application.

In this paper, a review is being made in order to bring an enlightened view, as to how e-governance evolved over decades in the Indian context, in transition from a purely application based phenomenon to the role of catalytic facilitator through interaction. In carrying this out, the annual reports of the Department of Electronics (1970-98) which later became the Ministry of Information Technology (MIT) and subsequently the Department of Information Technology (DIT) (2000-2004) were found to be very useful. ICT allows governments to service citizens in a more timely, effective, and cost-efficient method. E-government implementation may meet initial citizen resistance, require cultural sensitivity, and change the way that citizens and governments relate to each other. The increase in technology and communication has changed some of these attitudes on the part of government. Looking into the future, more autonomy would be given to states in the implementation of different projects run all over the country, extending into a self-reliance mode of governing system.

2. EARLY COMPUTERIZATION HISTORY

Global shifts towards increased deployment of IT by governments emerged in the nineties, with the advent of the World Wide Web. Technology as well as e-governance initiatives have come a long way since then. With the increase in Internet and mobile connections, citizens are learning to exploit their new mode of access in wide-ranging ways. They have started expecting more and more information and services online from governments and corporate organizations to further their civic, professional and personal lives, thus creating abundant evidence that the new “e-citizenship” is taking hold. E-government as a term was formally recognized for the first time in the joint report of the National Performance Review and the Government Information Technology Board, Access America: Reengineering Through Information Technology, issued February 3, 1997 (Relyea, 2002). In general, researchers have described e-commerce as the mother of e-governance (Gupta, Kumar & Bhattacharya, 2004). The other competing term is ‘e-government’. The distinction between e-governance and e-government can be a matter of debate. Some international institutions have defined e-government, while other bodies have taken up e-governance. Riley (2003) has made a distinction between the two, based on their characteristics. According to him, while ‘Governance is a way of describing the links between the government and its broader environment - political, social and administrative’ ‘Government’s foremost job is to focus society on achieving the public interest’. He therefore describes ‘e-government’ as consisting of electronic service delivery, electronic workflow, electronic voting and electronic productivity, whereas ‘e-governance’ constitutes electronic consultation, controllership, engagement and electronic societal guidance. Leaving aside settled differences in the meaning of these two terms, in practice, these terms are often used interchangeably. E-government is