

Constitutional Law and Public Administration in India

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E-Governance

E-governance stands for electronic governance. So, e-governance as the name suggests is the application of information and communication technology for providing government services. Why do we need e-governance? There are a lot of reasons why we might need to switch to e-governance. Firstly, it can help in a better delivery of government services to citizens. Secondly, it can improve the interactions between businesses and the industry. Thirdly, it can empower citizens by facilitating access to information. Fourthly, it can help in making the government more efficient and more importantly, it can usher in lesser corruption, more transparency, more convenience, all of this at reduced costs. With e-governance, the government can save a lot of money that might otherwise be spent on resources that are needed for providing services to people.

This might be stationary, this might be machinery, the number of personnel who are required for managing these affairs, etc. Another advantage is that of transparency. All the information would be accessible to people at their disposal, which makes the government more transparent and when the government becomes more transparent, it becomes more accountable as well. Once citizens have access to the information which is provided by the government, they can hold the government accountable for its actions. Moreover, once things become automated, it is easier for the government to process the information and deliver services more efficiently. It takes less time and there would be fewer errors while the government renders its functions, making it efficient over. Lastly, it facilitates citizens to be more proactive in engaging with how governance is being carried out in the country. They can interact more closely with the government, making them more cooperative. They can also be more active and aware citizens, which makes them capable of advocating for the rights they have as citizens and the duties that the government owes to them. Even though all of these advantages are there, e-governance comes with its own set of challenges.

For the rural population, the accessibility of the internet is an issue. Therefore, they might not be able to make use of the facilities offered by e-governance in a fruitful manner. Secondly, there is this low literacy rate in most parts of our country, which makes it difficult

for people to navigate through e-governance or on their own. So, they might need the help of other people, maybe the government officers themselves will have to assist these people, illiterate people especially, in how to go about accessing these services through technology. So, this might make the whole system seem redundant.

Language may be a significant barrier. Many people may not be able to understand the system if these services are offered to them in English or in a regional language that is not their own language. So, language may be a considerable barrier in e-governance. Another aspect that we need to bear in mind is that when the government becomes technology centered, we always need to be cautious about the loss or leakage of data. If there is a breach of sensitive data of the citizens, it can have very many dangerous consequences.

So, e-governance comes with its own set of advantages and challenges. We have something called the National e-Governance Plan of 2006, which formulates the framework for ushering in e-governance in our country. Its vision statement makes it clear that it wants the government services to be accessible to the common man through government service delivery outlets. This it claims will bring about more transparency, efficiency and reliability at affordable costs. So, what are these government service delivery outlets? This is found in a three-tier architecture.

So, at one end, we have the government service centers. These are the outlets through which e-governance services are made available to the citizens. There will be many common service centers in your locality. If you go to your nearest common service center, you can approach the common service center for getting your applications, getting your renewals, getting your registrations done etc. The personnel sitting there in the common service center would be able to process your applications through online facilities. There needs to be infrastructure which will facilitate the common service centers to provide the services to the citizens. This infrastructure is provided by the government. This may be in the form of computers, logistics, technology, network, etc. So, whatever infrastructure goes into it, that is termed as the common and support infrastructure. This infrastructure will help share information between the government and the citizens through the delivery of services through common service centers. Now what are the services that are sought to be provided through e-governance? They have titled it as mission mode projects. This is nothing but the services that are sought to be provided to the citizens. So, this may be in the form of banking services or may be getting your applications done. It may be in the agricultural sector.

There may be different mission mode projects in each sector. There may be a separate mission mode project for the healthcare sector, for the agricultural sector, for the banking sector, etc. Each of these mission mode projects will be implemented by and spearheaded by the concerned ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture will be taking care of all the mission

mode projects that are there related to the agricultural sector. So, that is how the National e-Governance Plan facilitates e-governance in our country.

How does this infrastructure work? First of all, there is the Department of Information Technology which will create this common and support infrastructure and it will also lay down the standards and policy guidelines that are to be followed. Then before the mission mode projects each of those are owned by and led by and implemented by the concerned ministries. The state governments may adopt certain state specific projects also for implementing it through e-governance. One particular example for this would be the system of Bhumi that is prevalent in Karnataka. This is an e-governance initiative for digitizing land records in the state of Karnataka. This is one such example of a state specific e-governance project. But there are limitations to the number of e-governance projects that can be implemented through state level. Otherwise, most of the e-governance initiatives will be at the central level. It is the Planning Commission as well as the Ministry of Finance which allocates funds for the smooth functioning of these e-governance. And the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs takes the policy level decisions for each of these projects.

There is an Ethics Committee which is headed by the Cabinet Secretary which will oversee this program to provide inputs from a policy perspective as well as implementation perspective. This is the overall architecture that has been envisaged under the National e-Governance Plan for ushering in e-governance in India. There are a lot of e-governance initiatives which have been taken in our country and which have been proved to be very successful. Common service centers are the go-to places if you want to get your online applications or renewals done. These are available in most of the localities. Then we have something called Umang. Umang is a platform which will let you access many different kinds of services that are offered by the central government, the state government and even the local bodies all in one platform. And the advantage of Umang is that it is available in many regional languages.

Digilocker is something that is familiar to most of us. This is one platform that will allow you to access, download and store your government documents like Aadhaar card, voters ID card, PAN card etc. So, the documents which are stored in Digilocker can be shown by you to a government official or if you show them for any identification purpose, you need not produce the original copy of the document. The copy in the Digilocker would be sufficient. It will be considered as authentic as the physical copy of your certificate.

UPI or the Unified Payments Interface might be an app that most of us will be using on a daily basis. This is an app that will help you make money transfers in a cashless mode. We also have an interesting initiative called MyGov. MyGov is a platform which will help citizens to provide their own inputs for governance. The citizens can submit their vision, their ideas for how the country should be run to the government. So, the government will

be in a position to understand what the citizens' expectations are, and what their ideas and visions are made available to them through this platform.

MeriPehchaan is another initiative which will help users access a lot of services with a single set of credentials. We also have something called Diksha. Diksha is an app that has been targeted for the teachers to help them bring about digital infrastructure for a better teaching facility in the country. Arogya Setu is an app that all of us have used during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, all of these are e-governance initiatives that have proven to be very successful and very helpful in navigating for the citizens. These are only some of the initiatives. There are a lot of state specific initiatives also. There are a lot of pan India initiatives that have been launched by the government that are being proposed to be launched etc. the most recent one being a policy called the National Data Governance Framework Policy. This as the title suggests is to understand how the data that is collected through e-governance initiatives is to be processed, stored, and handled with. This policy gives an exhaustive set of guidelines which can be useful in understanding how to deal with this data. It enumerates the best-case scenario of how to go about managing a data set. It proposes to set up an Indian Data Management Office. This Indian Data Management Office would be set up under the Digital India Corporation functioning under the Ministry of Electronics and Information and Technology. The Indian Data Management Office will formulate the rules that are required for accessing data, for using the data and it will develop the circumstances in which the data will have to be disclosed. And this Indian Data Management Office is also expected to come up with something called the Indian Data Sets Program. So, under the Indian Data Sets Program what is envisaged is that the data that is collected from citizens by government entities that will be depersonalized, and it will be anonymized so that the data would not be, the data would not enable us to track the persons from which we have sourced the data. So, this non-personal and anonymized data will be collected and retained for facilitating governance purposes. So, this Indian Datasets Program is something that will be implemented by the Indian Data Management Office.