

elets

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A new era of **e-Governance**



NaMo will make IT happen

After Gujarat, it's time for India to experience the e-Governance model of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Cloudburst

Computing Solutions Rain from the Skies

Rajesh Aggarwal

Principal Secretary, IT, Government of Maharashtra

e-Transactions with a difference

CAREER GLIMPSE

BORN: 12 - 11 - 1966

SERVICE: IAS

CADRE: Maharashtra

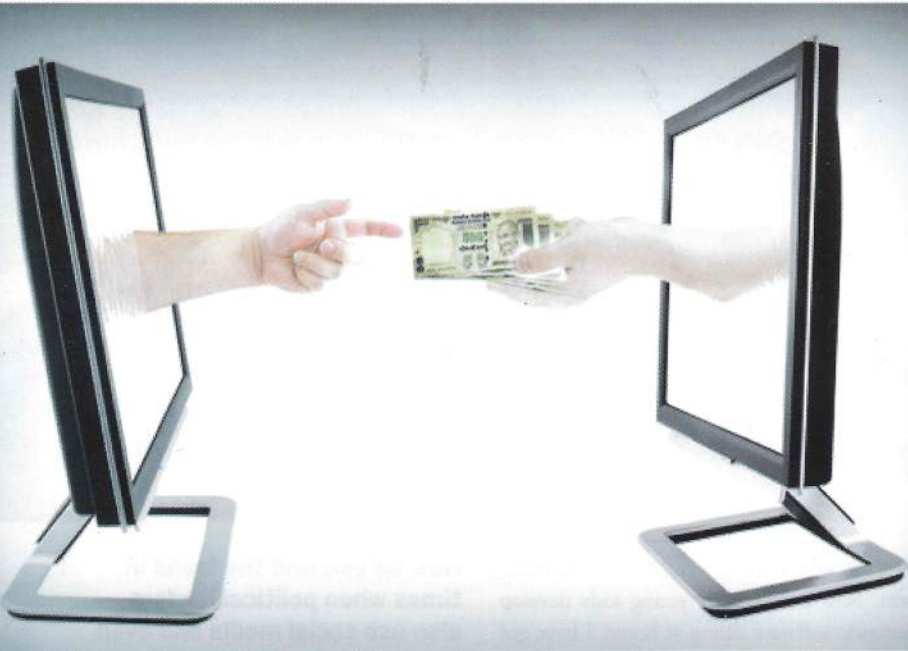
ALLOTMENT YEAR: 1989

EXPERIENCE

At present, Rajesh Aggarwal is working as the Principal Secretary in the Department of Information Technology in the state of Maharashtra. He has held various positions in the Maharashtra Government including the post of Secretary in the Finance Department. Apart from this, he has also held the position of Director in the Election Commission of India and also worked as the Private Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development in the Government of India

There is a need to look beyond normal electronic transactions, which involve the un/necessary cost of computerization, says **Rajesh Aggarwal**, Principal Secretary, IT, Government of Maharashtra. Excerpts from an interview with Dr Ravi Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, eGov





You often talk about the concept of 'Eliminated Transactions'. Theoretically it sounds a great idea, but in the absence of adequate backend support and data sharing mechanism in the governmental setup, will it work?

There is a need to look beyond normal electronic transactions, which involve the cost of computerization. We need to see if certain transactions can actually be eliminated instead of being computerized. We can do away with it through 'Eliminated Transactions' process.

Many departments that exist in India do not exist in European or even the US. With changes in time, thinking and technology, lots of departments need to close down. In some places we have Octroi system. It needs to be replaced with better forms of taxation. Rather than computerizing your Octroi nakas, we need to actually abolish Octroi in system with business process re-engineering.

Let us look at an example in the context of Education. Every year, students taking admission in the junior college would have to furnish Domicile Certificate. This leads to a mad scramble among lakhs of students for getting the certificates before the admission process. Normally, you have to go to tehsil office, where

the whole process is so complicated. So, the only option left for you is to catch up touts and pay him Rs 500-1,000 for getting your job done. But in Maharashtra, we have started a government-at-your-doorstep scheme, under which collectors and ministers camp in a ground close to you, and at the end of the day you will get documents stamped. Another option is that you approach the nearest CSC and gets the work done at an agreeable fee. The next evolution is the e-District projects, under which the village CSC scans your documents and gets signed digitally.

Affidavits are a passé

"We have done away with the need for affidavits in Maharashtra and replaced it with one-page self declaration sheet... Even 65 years after our Independence, we don't trust our own citizen and keep asking for affidavits signed by a gazetted officer or notary!"

In which other domains the concept of e-transactions or 'Eliminated Transactions' has been introduced in the state?

Several, I should say. We very often need affidavits for court of government-related work. But we said affidavits will not be required. Even 65 years after our Independence, we don't trust our own citizen and they are asked to get the letters signed by a gazetted officer or notary. So, we consulted law departments, and we have

added just one sheet in all the application forms, Swa Ghoshna Patra (self declaration sheet), for replacing the affidavit. Now savings from an affidavit come to about Rs 1,000 crore per annum to citizens. Punjab was the first, and we are the second state to introduce this. Simplification of the process is there.

Then it comes to the methodology of paying fees. Earlier, bank challans were needed which required lots of time. As credit and debit cards are used, so simplified the process. As the CSC has an electronic wallet with MahaOnline, as soon as a transaction is made, it reaches the government treasury. We have also standardized the photo quality.

Another example is of MAHADA housing lottery. On its lines, we did an auto rickshaw and taxi permits lottery online and it was a huge success. Online applications and online payments were made. Our focus is simplification and standardization of payments.

How are e-payments helping the citizens of Maharashtra?

Since 1st July, 2013 we have banned cheque books across treasuries and DDOs; treasuries are doing only RTGS and NEFT. Now we are experimenting with a single law. For example, the students have to get scholarship. The college prepares the list and gives to social justice officers in districts who submit it to treasuries. Earlier, treasury issued cheques to social justice offices to make the payments. Obviously, there were delays and leakages. But now treasuries give NEFT or RTGs to the DDO, which gives it to students'

accounts directly bypassing the college system structures. The student receives an SMS without running around the college clerks. In the next step, treasury directly transfers money into students' accounts as money flows through a single electronic branch.

Currently, 97 percent of the money transfers happen electronically. Last year Rs 62,000 crore worth of sales tax came through net banking, as cheques, DDs and cash payments are not allowed. We have another analysis which says

that we have extra Rs 200 crore collections because of net banking in sales tax. Similarly excise duty and IGR registration brought Rs 16,000 crore, and car registration Rs 8,000 crore through net banking.

It is almost a decade that NeGP was brought into service. When you look back, what have been the achievements and failures?

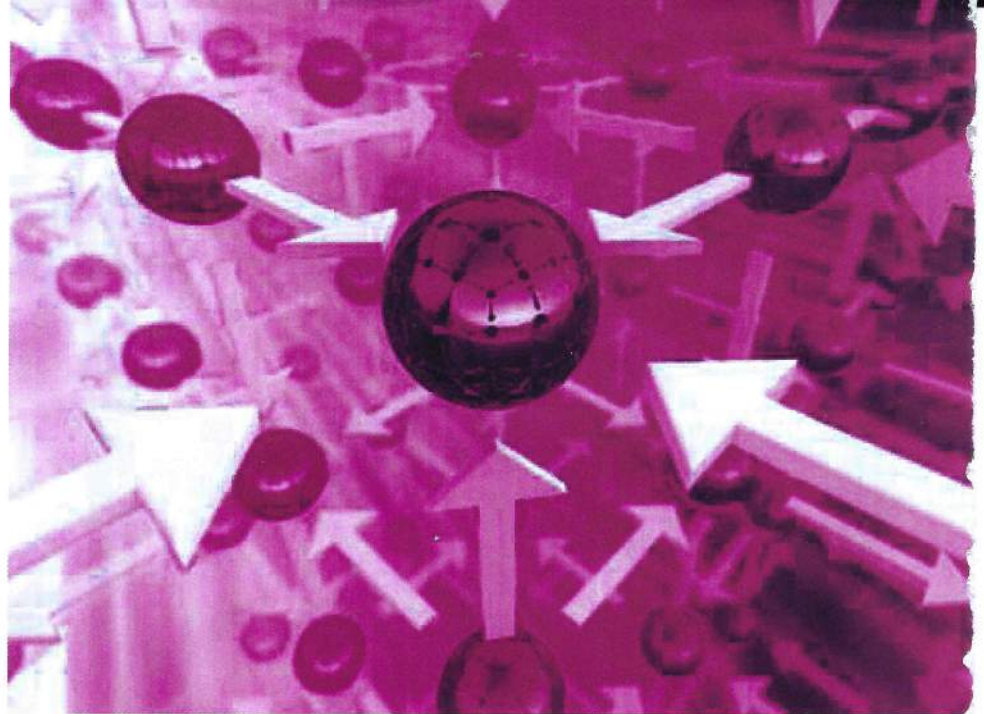
It is a mixed bag. There have been individual champions and individual projects which have been successful, some have seen full-scale success and others not. If you compare the situation some 10 years back, it is much better now. But when you compare it with the world scenario or even in the private sector in India, we have not matched them at all. Obviously, technology has also changed, particularly the bandwidth. In case of SDC 2.0 or NEGP 2.0 or SWAN 2.0 rather than fine tuning, total reboot is required. Hiring these things through private sector would be much better and economical.

You always talk of need for 'massive changes' in the e-governance mechanism. What exactly do you mean by that?

Unfortunately, mindset at the national level as well as at the state level remains in favour of infrastructure creation. We buy servers, purchase desktops, bandwidth etc, though the world has moved on; you create content and throw it on any kind of device or format.

Our mindset is still in the favour of infrastructure creation. We buy servers, purchase desktops, bandwidth etc, though the world has moved on...you create content and throw it on any kind of device or format. We should focus more on easy and simple software creation mechanism, instead...

We should focus more on easy and simple software creation mechanism, more so in the government. Currently, the whole RFP mechanism consumes much more time than the actual writing of the code. For example, e-challan takes practically four days. Lots of things were purchased through the e-District



projects and software creation took a backseat. Now-a-days even young kids develop fantastic software sitting at home. I have got four-five mobile apps developed for android phone from small private startups.

There is a programme called data.gov.in to share data across ministries, so that data is used and reused. Has the effort paid off?

Very few people follow the eGov standards. But in the last two years we have taken lots of measures to ensure this. Even in national level projects, there is blatant violation of eGov standards. People are still afraid of sharing databases. Sometimes they are afraid of exposing themselves to the public, because internally

everybody knows that data quality is absolutely pathetic. People should be agreeable to the idea to putting it in the public domain. There may be some criticism initially but transparency will be there. So data transparency is to be brought in. Attitude reboot is needed. Policies are still taking time to flow.

How do you find the trend in times when political leaders also use social media and even SMS services for their election campaigns?

The new breed of politicians is computer savvy. The recent elections were also fought on social media. In fact, even the power Whatsapp was put into play. This was a direct interaction with the people where the organization takes a backseat. In bureaucracy, too, they put new regulations on Facebook to elicit opinion of the people. For reforms in the examination system, we were putting all the minutes of the meeting for public opinion on our FB page. Students, teachers and parents were responding to us. In fact, in tribal villages earlier they demanded electricity and roads, but now they want network and connectivity. They need network not for Facebook or Twitter but for knowing the commodity rates in their neighboring villages. With changing times, people's demands are also undergoing a sea change.

What are the big hopes vis-a-vis e-Governance for the country?

For last seven to eight years, wherever new recruitment is done, young boys and girls were found computer savvy. Now, employees even in the age group of 50-55 are working happily on computers. And, the new generation is doing lot of transactions on the net. The new generation of government employees themselves want more efficient services through the net. So, it seems, the new generation will drive the government to deliver services online. Moreover, after the recently-concluded general elections, political parties are aware of the real power of the Internet. 