e-Registration in Maharashtra: Transforming the idea of service delivery!

The Context

Mr. Gaikwad is standing in long queue outside an old building, carrying bunch of sheets with some text inscribed, waiting to get through and reach the representative; Mr and Mrs Rao are struggling to meet the notary, search an advocate and finally hire a middleman to get some text typed and documents prepared; while Mr. Das is sent back due to deficiencies or inappropriateness in documentation after wasting two days of office leave. Mr Patel voluntarily returned due to unbearable waiting time while Ms D'souza lamented to return empty handed due to the window of office hours lapsed. Mr. Deshpande, the government employee, typically overloaded with multiple tasks and bound to perform them single handed, from scrutinising the documents, identifying and verifying the parties, to storing/updating the records manually, collecting fees, and of course, patiently attending to the visitor's queries. Helplessness, exhaustion, red-tapism, involvement of indirect channels, ambiguity, unnecessary delays in service delivery deemed as necessary; cumulatively administered this system. The description is a classic example of any registration office functioning in our Indian States' twenty years ago.

The Issues

The Department of Registration and Stamps, Government of Maharashtra serves as a vital contributor in the State Revenue. It facilitates and registers some of the most significant events in persons' life such as buying and selling of immovable property, renting properties, payment of stamp duty, marriage registration and activities alike; in lieu of stamp duty and registration fees. With growing urbanisation in the state, the department witnesses a hefty footfall for registering documents; with around 30 lakhs registrations done in 2013-14 and 1.5 crore citizens visiting Sub Registrar Offices (SRO's) annually.[1] Such massive public demand results in long queues, space crunch, increased waiting period, stress on the infrastructure, overworked staff and hence inconvenience to citizens. Citizens were required to spend an entire day just for getting their agreements registered. Also, citizens often paid exorbitant amount of money to middlemen to get their agreements registered.[2]

The Initiative

To overcome the deficiencies mentioned and make the registration process citizen centric, various technological measures were undertaken. For past two decades, various technological breakthroughs have revolutionised the erstwhile registration process, to such an extent that in state of Maharashtra, an individual need not be physically present at the registration office to register documents, though limited to certain agreements. The service delivery in the state is brought right at the citizens' doorstep.

Various transitions in document registration process include that the department first began with the manual system followed by the introduction of 'SARITA' the computerized system for registration of document introduced in 2002. Ten years later, i-SARITA a centralized web based online registration system was introduced in the department to bring all the stand-alone systems to communicate with each other. But, the citizens' visit to Sub Registrar office was still inevitable. Finally, in the year 2014, the department

rolled out its flagship e-Governance initiative of **e-Registration,** facilitating the citizens to register anytime, anywhere.

The implementation of **e-Registration of Leave and License Agreements** has produced multiple benefits to all stakeholders-Citizens, Department and Society. While citizens experienced ease in service delivery; department extracted greater revenue for the state treasury, which rose from Rs. 19,63,500 in 2014[3] to Rs. 60,77,95,528 in the 2019[4]; Therefore, technological intervention has opened doors for augmenting state revenue given the fact that the Stamps and Registration Department witnesses highest number of cases of tax evasion[5] along with heavy indulgence of middlemen in the process. The important question remains whether such an initiative is likely to tap leakages and has the potential to bring greater transparency in similar erstwhile legacy governance systems if replicated in different domains?

[1] Department of Registration & Stamps, Government of Maharashtra.

[2]https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/soon-citizens-can-register-property-documents-online/articleshow/68713070.cms

[3] http://igrmaharashtra.gov.in/dashboard_Data_ArticlewiseAndYearwise.aspx?GvData=maharashtra

[4]http://igrmaharashtra.gov.in/dashboard_Data_ArticlewiseAndYearwise.aspx?GvData=maharashtra

[5]Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on government sector, Government of Maharashtra for the year ended March 31, 2017.

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