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Technology is central to new modes of governance, and to emerging definitions of citizenship, participation, and progress. As state functions get automated through e-governance, experiences get codified, and paradigms of knowledge production come under the digital eye, the notions of governance and citizenship are changing. This conference explores questions at the intersection of technology and society in contemporary India, bringing together researchers and practitioners from a wide range of technical and social scientific backgrounds. Its aim is not so much to reiterate the conventional definitions of development, technology, transparency, and governance, but to unpack the construction of these terms in a way that allows us to make sense of the new practices of governance, and of contemporary politics, law and citizenship.

In bringing together computer scientists, IT professionals, and academics from the social sciences and humanities, this conference seeks to facilitate interdisciplinary conversations to help rethink and reconfigure our own modes of research and practice. The goal of this conference is also to bring together research paradigms that rarely intersect, and to generate productive conversations at these interdisciplinary sites. The 3-day conference will address: (a) information architectures in e-governance (b) epistemological and political issues of governance and citizenship (c) broader questions at the intersection of technology and society, and emerging research paradigms in science, technology and society.

Day 1: Research presentations on the first day will introduce case studies of e-governance projects in India that highlight: (a) how technologists imagine governance, politics and citizenship and how their imaginations inform the design and architecture of e-governance technologies (b) the technical challenges commonly perceived in the design and implementation of e-governance systems, such as compliance with technical specifications as laid down by the government, developing user interfaces, maintaining ‘security’ of the system and the information, enhancing ‘participation’ through technologies, and so on (c) implementation experiences from e-governance projects, and accompanying resistance from voices in the government, bureaucracy, citizens and civil society.

Day 2: When we add “e” to “governance,” what assumptions inhabit our understandings of governance, state obligations, citizen expectations, democratic participation, and technological solutions? On this day, social scientists and researchers investigating the questions of governance, technology and citizenship will present their work. How can we unpack notions of transparency, efficiency, and democratic design, while understanding popular demands for increased surveillance, information access, accountability and efficiency in governance? What elements of older, legacy systems are eliminated, and what new understandings are incorporated in technocratic governance systems? The second day’s discussions will explore the social and epistemological questions emerging out of e-governance architectures and their implementation.

Day 3: Concluding day discussions will attempt to articulate a broader platform of research into questions at the intersection of technology and society. The interdisciplinary field of “Science and Technology Studies” [STS] is now institutionalized in several western research sites, and is beginning to influence emerging sites of research in India. Historically, this field was shaped by researchers trained in science/technology as well as in social scientific research, and more recently in cultural studies and electronic arts. How might we augment such emerging interdisciplinary spaces in India? What relevance does it have to the practical and pragmatic demands of our shifting technological, ecological, and social climate? We are at a point where new paradigms and tools are necessary to make sense of multiply intersecting areas of knowledge, such as those that bring together the life sciences and information sciences, and of complex social and political processes that are unleashed by new world orders of scientific knowledge production, technological development, and environmental conflict. As the Indian state, in tune with many developing nations, re-invents itself – through policies, through economic subsidies, through political aspirations, through education initiatives, and through a renewed emphasis on science and technology – how can STS methods and research practices help us understand, and shape, this era of transition?