Developing countries like India inherited a structure of governance characterised by large amount of paper work and file handling, time consuming process and many levels of explicit controls and approvals. These Government structures grew with Government taking the mantle of development and addressing citizen welfare.

The advances in information and communication technologies alongwith convergence and the Internet is profoundly changing the way economies and societies develop and grow. The full impact of these technologies is not clear and they may increase the North-South divide that already exists.

It is being realized that one way of becoming part of the global network world is to encourage electronic governance. Even though the benefits are not clear-cut, it does appear that a failure to be part of this new network world will leave the developing countries further behind.

Another important component of the factors, which interface with the ability of developing nations to harness the use of IT for better and more productive governance as well as delivery of public goods and services, is the issue relating to Digital Divide between countries integrating with each other in the total IT environment. The divide that shows up is not merely between countries: developed and developing, rich and the poor, English-speaking and non-English speaking. It also exists within countries, between one community and another, one race and another, one ethnic group and another. This becomes clearer when we look at all the relevant parameters with reference to the pre-requisites indicated above.

More than 80% of the people in the world have never heard a dial tone. This is as much an indicator of unevenness of economic development globally as it is of a digital divide. Information Age skeptics often ask how meaningful it is to talk about getting connected into the Networked World in area where there are problems of hunger, disease, lack of medical care, potable water and so on. But in the words of UN Secretary General Kofi Anan “People lack many things: jobs, shelter, food, health care and drinking water. Today, being cut off from basic telecommunications services is a hardship almost as
acute as these other deprivations, and may indeed reduce the chances of finding remedies to them."

The skewed nature of development indicators is well known. The transition from a conventional information and knowledge management system to a modern ICT based system has to follow either a pedagogical, political or an economic paradigm. The fastest and most cost-effective results can be obtained when the transformation is brought by the private sector in an environment in which there is intense price and technology competition. This alone can ensure that, whether in the Government or private sector, the transition is done in the most cost-effective manner. An added benefit is that automatic prioritization of those areas resulting in the highest gains, is ensured. However, the cost-volume-quality equilibrium (of ICT-based services) that is reasonable, would vary considerably from country to country and on the basis of how community is being served. Ways would have to be found to meet the costs for the more disadvantaged. However, unless the whole process is linked to user charges and private investment, it cannot be sustained since developing countries are impoverished nearly all over.

Another indirect impact is that by moving towards e-Governance a Government can greatly stimulate adoption of IT by business and industry. Business processes can also get speeded up since governmental procedures would no longer have a drag effect on the velocity of business, which is seen as a significant factor in the competitiveness of nations. In fact a powerful catalyst in developing an empowered, fast, global and electronic society would be to embrace ICT technologies and apply them in the process of governance. This would bring about SMART governance - an acronym for simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent government.

The far-reaching implications of increasing use of IT in the Government context could include remote access by the public to Government information and services in a variety of ways. Cooperative arrangements among Government agencies could be encouraged to integrate services and to provide one stop shopping. Information would also be gathered much easier without duplication of efforts and many routine and repeated tasks could be simplified or totally eliminated. Taken together all these steps require a fundamental change to systems, procedures and processes so as to provide basic services to a broader segment of citizens with optimal quality and at a desired time, place and cost.

The Internet is plagued by misuse. There are many ways in which it can be misused, the most common of which is probably scam (bulk, junk email). Most scam is straightforward advertising and therefore merely annoying, although it does waste Internet bandwidth. Other scam contains more dangerous information.
The complexity in attempting to introduce e-governance is lucidly brought out in the above example. This can be further analysed using the ‘7-C model’. The ‘7-C’s’ are: Commitment, Connectivity, Capital, Competence, Content, Citizen Interface and Cyber Laws. It is apparent said that the hurdles to entry into the digital world are complex and admit no easy solutions. But understanding of the issues involved has progressed to a level where a systematic approach to the problems is possible.

In this backdrop, I perceived to study the subject of Information technology in socio-economic transformation of India. My guide Dr L.M.Porwal, Head of Department of Commerce V.S.S.D. College gave to immense encouragement and support to undertake study on this rather unique subject and bring forth the problems and difficulties, which are being faced in different sectors where IT is being used or has potential to use. I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Porwal, who introduced me to this new world.

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With this I commend my work to the august house of readers.

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