Good Governance and Citizens' Empowerment

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to highlight the role of bureaucracy in maintaining the governance of a democratic country especially India. Is bureaucracy active in fostering development? Does it adopt inclusive approach to promote the claims of multiple stakeholders? How to introduce good governance to overcome the uneven economic development of India?

Good governance is the highest aim of Democracy, and bureaucracy is the machinery to accomplish this gigantic task. However, the Indian bureaucracy created by the British Raj was not oriented to undertake the welfare functions of the people. Rightly so, in the Pre-1947 era, the bureaucracy was described as the "steel frame" of the British Administration in the country. In fact, the Indian Civil Services (ICS) was the main bulwark of the British government in India and, that, it was more important to the British, than even the British Army. It was dedicated to the task of keeping "the British Flag flying high" in India. To achieve this goal of pleasing the King Emperor and the British government, a very high standard of work and duty was set before the civil servant.[1]

This dedication and commitment on part of bureaucracy could not be transferred into the Indian service culture and devotion to its own people after independence. Rather it was lost into bribery and corruption, doing great disservice to our own country.

Introduction

The inefficiency and blunders of post 1947 government destroyed the hopes and dreams placed in bureaucracy by the people. As a matter of fact, the concept of good governance emerges from the malady of misgovernance i.e., misuse of power, fraud, money laundering and non-performance of duty.

The concept of good governance was upper most in our ancient past as reflected in the statecraft of Ramayan, Mahabharat, Manusmriti and Kautiliyan Arthashastra, which reiterated that "happiness of the king lies in the happiness of his subjects." Good governance aims at providing an environment in which all citizens, irrespective of class, caste and gender can develop to their full potential. The four pillars of good governance are ethos, ethics, equity and efficiency.[2]

Unfortunately, the maintenance of moral standards and norms in the conduct of public affairs was slowly pushed to the periphery in the country. But no government wants to own up responsibility to this downfall of morality into civil services. But theoretically, every academic and political discourse involving bureaucracy begins with the dictum of probity and integrity in public life. How can we translate this precept into day-to-day reality? The recent exposures of fund embezzlement of ex-governments by Modi Government is a great shock to the nation that no branch of Government – be it Legislature, Executive, or judiciary is free from corrupt and contemptuous behaviour. The deep seated corruption amongst Politicians, ministers like Chidambaram, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati is now an open book in the public domain.

What should be the remedy for this widespread loss of integrity and accountability in personal and professional lives, should be the first and foremost agenda to be addressed by the government of the day. It is a great relief that PM Modi is doing his utmost to bring the guilty to public notice but he is being degraded and abused by opposition and allies for the

same. It is an evidence of the fact that politicians don't want to empower citizens who empower them.

U-turn to the ancient ideal philosophy of Good governance as elaborated by Kautilya in his Arthashastra seems to be the only Panacea to this evil. Europe, America and Russia had had these bitter experiences way back during two world wars. The natural culmination of which resulted into the creation of welfare state in America in 60sand rejection of Socialistic system of Protection in the former Soviet Union in 90s. The sum total effect of this long-drawn process resulted into what is called LPG-Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization post 1992. The pivotal objective of LPG is to spread the message of Good Governance by introducing the concepts of Right to Information, transparency, Citizen's Charter, Social Audit eventually mobilizing into a truly civil society. This obviously means induction of good behavioural qualities like honesty, integrity and commitment to public duties with a high sense of justice and fair play. C. Rajgopalachari in a talk over the All-India Radio in 1956 had emphasised that "character is a fundamental requirement of a good administrator."[3]

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study, in the light of above imperatives is to highlight the breakdown of ethical norms at every level of bureaucracy in India. It examines the mechanism to restore the lost values and morale in the civil services of India through Good governance. We have been witnessing to its consequences in the western countries and America. They have consolidated their civil society by inculcating esteem for Rule of Law in the people. On the contrary, respect for law is totally absent in our society due to extreme advocacy of diversity and multicuralism which prevents the process of National Integration – a vexed issue of Indian Politics for 70 years. The norms of Good Governance will have to be strictly adopted by the Politico-legal administration themselves, if we have to accomplish this goal.

Citizen and Administration Divide

"Citizens are the core of good governance." But there is an evergrowing chasm between citizens and government machinery.

More or less, we all know about the state of governance in the developed and developing countries both. Recent studies indicate that people's are quite saturated with government intervention or government help in the advanced western countries. A comparative study between high and low income countries reveals interesting facts about their allegiance or trust towards governing bodies and institutions. In the established democracies like the US, Nordic countries, Japan, Italy etc. people have outgrown the stage of receiving commands from governments. Established institutions like various departments and ministries that have shaped industrial societies for generations seem to be losing their authority over average citizens. Public confidence is declining not only in key government institutions such as parliaments, police, civil services, armed forces, education systems, churches, the press etc. We even find a weakening, sense of attachments to that most basic of all western institutions, the nation state.[4] On the contrary, in the low-income developing countries like China, South Korea and India, there is a great respect for power, authority and bureaucracy. Relatively speaking the awe and glamour for power is the maximum in India, whereas, in South Korea and China the young prefer to be less respectful to authority. In all three instances, state of economy emerges as the key factor in determining respect or no respect for the government authority.

As far as, the breakdown of trust and faith in the governmental institutions is concerned, India, too, is undergoing the same experiences for past 30 years. In the newer democracies like India, government has failed to deliver the goods and become excessively corrupt. Major institutions like legislature, executive and judiciary have failed to protect the basic rights of the majority citizens. Hence, the erosion of faith in these institutions. We have similar cases of governmental inefficiency and corruption in other South Asian and African countries too. Therefore, there is a worldwide tendency to question the governmental institutions for its failure to provide universal facilities to the citizens in the developing societies. According to studies, both established and newer democracies are experiencing declining public support for representative governments. There is a demand for good governance today where both government and citizens perform the task jointly, popularly termed as participatory democracy.

Public of advanced societies are becoming more likely to act in autonomous elite-challenging fashion. Mass public are less respectful of elites and more likely to challenge them. They are becoming more involved in the politics and administration of their societies. People's initiatives are visible everywhere, be it womens' issue, environmental question or wild life interest. There is an overall activism with regard to welfare activities.

But in India the elitist and insulated approach of public administration and major democratic institutions are still being maintained. However, in the wake of Liberalization and globalization there is a pressure on good governance, accountability, transparency and right to information now. Therefore, the government is under civil obligation to adopt global norms of least governance, privatization, open market policy and commercialization. But sudden withdrawal of governmental support and welfare activities on part of administration is not the solution in case of India.

Review of Welfarism and Civil Society

Public administration as a means exists for the public. However, there are two dimensions of this statement. One is the instrumental view which is based on the processes of government and treats the public as the recipient or clients of administrative endeavours. The other is a more participative view which places the public at the centre of administration as a decider and the prime mover. In the first view, the public constitutes as the client, in the second, the agent. Unfortunately, in India, common people have neither been treated as client nor the agent by

administration. In the event of present administrative crisis, if the public administration wants to become a fit instrument of public service, it will have to target the social aspect of administration.

The Indian state had declared itself a welfare state under Nehruvian policy. Preamble of the constitution clearly states that the independent Government would be pursuing the Directive principles of State policies for its citizens. However, even after 70 years of independence, government has failed to develop social security system covering every citizens.[5]

Only a small section i.e., 20-30% of the Civil Society, who are working in the government, business or organised sectors are covered under the social security system such as bank, life insurance, medical cover, pension scheme, education & business loans etc. 70-80% of its people do not come under any form of social security system. This unequal social division has distorted the definition of civil society in India. Ironically, 10% upper crust people settled in government jobs cannot even spend on their monthly expenditures from their own pockets, in fact they throw their expenditure on the huge subsidies provided to them by the Government in form of salary, increments, incentives, allowances and benefits like provident fund, gratuity, pension etc. On the contrary, the unorganised and scattered citizenry constituting farmers, peasants, labourers, craftsmen, tribals, child workers and women depending on their traditional skills not only eke out their living without any governmental support and assistance even under very hostile circumstances, but also, fulfil the day-to-day needs of the upper class people depending on government subsidy. Then who is relying and depending on whom? Who is obstructing the development of the weaker section? As a matter of fact, the real obstruction to development is the business, elite and service class who, through their ever increasing pay packets are going on widening the socio-economic disparities. It is difficult to arrive at a legitimate and universal definition of civil society in view of extreme social inequalities. Aren't the labour class stakeholders in development? Unfortunately, only 20-30% have the entitlements of citizenship but the vast self-sustaining gentry is treated merely as vote-banks.

Unfortunately, population explosion is the worst problem of the Muslim vote bank as well as the BPL section. It is very difficult to change the mindset of the poor class to plan their families in view of the old belief system that the more the hands, the more the earnings. Illiteracy, poverty and religious fanaticism have become grave hurdles in the implementation of universal civil code aimed at common social security to all its citizens by government.

A note of caution is important here. Welfare administration in India can't be compared to its counterparts in the west, welfarism is in deep crisis in the western countries today. It is changing due to changes in the economy, society and polity. Welfare state approach which grew in the western economic thought in response to world economic crisis of early 1930s is being attacked by the capitalist-economy now. One solid reason for erosion of welfare administration in Russia and America is the consolidation of their economies by 90s. They have attained economic self-reliance and stability at the grass-roots to a great extent. Therefore, the underlying philosophy of welfare state of providing full employment is not valid there any more.[6] According to Freedman and Hayak, state intervention affects the economy which should be left to itself.[7] Contrarily in India, the extension of welfare state to the disadvantaged section of the society is the most urgent priority even now. It cannot be denied any more that impact of globalization on Indian state is quite damaging to the health of the 70-80% citizenry. State intervention is essential for the social health of these citizens. Privatization of education and health in a country, where 30% masses are illiterate and 70% villagers have no access to health facility can deprive the poor from acquiring education and health lifelong.

In other words, India has not attained the economic prosperity to go the western way in-toto. Therefore, the focus of welfare activities must shift from urban to the rural poor and marginalized section.

Restructuring of Bureaucracy

World over there is this wave of restructuring or reinventing the government ever since David Orborne and Ted Gaeblar had undertaken the exercise called reinventing Government.[8] According to them in the present global environment, bureaucratic institutions created during the industrial era increasingly fail us. Future environment demands institutions that are flexible and adaptable, that deliver high quality goods and services, institutions that are responsive to their customers, who are led by persuasion and incentives rather than commands, and they give their employees a sense of meaning and control even ownership. Institutions need to empower citizens for tomorrow rather than simply, serve them today.[9] However, we cannot import the wholesale idea from outside. Every country has its own problems rooted in history and influenced by the recent past and present. A colonial past and a long 70 years of independence has not imparted the Indian society the maturity to do away with the government in the manner it is being done in the US or other European countries. We need to have adequate government to fulfil our basic needs and expectations. Problems faced by Indian society are typically Indian ones and they can be met only if we have Indian solutions. What to do?

Changing the Mind Set of Civil Servants

One of the crucial changes that should be made by the civil servants themselves is the change of mind set. Howsoever, drastic the structural changes might be, the civil services would fail to deliver the goods, if it harbours the same old mind-set, arrogantly assuming that it knows the best and it alone can execute. One can understand as to why the civil services find it difficult to mix up with the people because they have been nurtured in V.I.P. culture which is responsible for creating the mental distances and a sense of insecurity, in sharing the platform with the common man. It was created by colonial

administration, but it really became Omni-potent and Omni-present during a socialist-era after independence. But the whole world is undergoing a transition and Indian civil service can not remain aloof from the happening changes, otherwise the people would force upon the changes through strikes and agitations, like it often happens in cases of Jats and Bheem army, gurjars, Maharashtra Kisan Andolan, Shiksha Mitra of UP, Aanganwadi and Asha workers. All are stakeholders in the society, so their grievances must be resolved by the State administration. Any resistance on the part of civil services would only damage their image of facilitators or service providers.[10] As India has a multitudinal and pluralistic society, with a rich cultural heritage and diverse peoples' experiences, hence, peoples' participation in administration can resolve most of the knotty problems by saving time and money spent by government.

Conclusion

In fact, the basic difference between government and good governance lies in enabling the weaker section in enhancing their competencies to access the benefits of developments happening in their own countries. There is no dearth of educational, scientific, material, industrial and modern progression taking place in India but the weakers sections cannot enjoy its fruits because of the inaccessibility to the life supporting sources of food, clothing, shelter, electricity, water, road, sanitation, education, health and internet. It is the responsibility of the Government to create social opportunity for the marginalized groups and individuals. However, it can't be one sided efforts, needy citizens will have to become active agents of change in keeping with citizens charter by rejecting the dependency theory of the past. In order to minimize the discrimination and inequality of opportunities and enhance their competitive capabilities, capacity building programms and training workshops must be organized by bureaucracy. Hence, development must be a liberating mechanism from sufferings and citizens' empowerment by the government must be the key to good governance.

Merely creating categories and reservation within reservations may be a short term. Affirmative approach of Government but a long-term approach involves a sound capacity building of the deprived and respect for equal human values, not a partial or reserved value system. A step in this direction has already been started in form of a protest movement launched by Lakhs of Dalits and Subalterns members in Hyderabad to denounce the 70 years old dependency and reservation system. The future events will decide the mood of the Nation.

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