

Good Governance: A Key Requisition for an Egalitarian Society

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ABSTRACT

Good Governance is the key to stability and growth. People make institutions and institutions make the nation. Good governance and probity in public life is an important footstep in building the character of a nation and its citizens. A modern and developed nation sustains itself on the commitment of its citizens to the principles and values of public service. A country is not respected for its forests and mountains, roads and rivers, monuments and structures but the quality of its human resource. A value-driven society is the hallmark of a progressive nation. Today, as democracy takes root all over the world, people demand Good Governance. The principles of good governance, namely transparency and accountability, fitness and equality, efficiency and effectiveness, respect of the rule of law and high standards of ethical behaviour represent the basic foundation upon which a responsive and open government can be built. Even as India marches ahead maintaining a robust rate of economic growth, corruption continues to be a major area of concern. Corruption undermines democratic institutions and poses serious threat to the development of a nation. All the institutions-political, judicial, investigation and vigilance, civil services, media and the civil society-have an important role to play to enhance probity and integrity in public life and change the society for the better. Political leader have an onerous task of leading by example. They must display exemplary values and behaviour in their personal and public conduct. The standards set in politics have a profound and cascading influence on the masses. unless the elected representatives and the political leaders lead by example in upholding probity and honesty in their public lives, there will be little progress in the regard. The civil services must constitute the basic fabric in the process of nation building and our quest to promote excellence in public service. A clean civil service is the key to the well being of society. Civil servants must maintain the highest standards of personal integrity and probity in public life. They must be the drivers to create transparent and accountable systems of governance.

Introduction

With the achievement of independence, India has marched ahead on all fronts making substantial progress almost in all fields of life. But the most spectacular

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achievement of India lies in the political and administrative fields. Though democracy was inaugurated in India with the enforcement of her republican Constitution on January 26, 1950, its implementation began to take shape when the first general elections to parliament as well as to the legislatures of the states were held in 1951. Since then, in all the elections, people have freely exercised their rights of franchise and have chosen their representatives who have governed the country so far. For a large country like India, good governance is the real pivot of peace and prosperity.

Currently, the term 'good governance' is being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being regarded as one of the root causes of all the evils within our societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are basing their aid and loans on the condition that the reforms that ensures 'good governance' are effectively implemented. So it is important for us firstly to understand the meaning of 'good governance'.

The Oxford English Dictionary recognizes 'governance' as a separate, independence entry and defines it as "the action or manner of governing". 'Good Governance' was used, in the English literature for the first time in the year 1628. There is a marked difference between the word 'government' and 'governance'. This was subtly conveyed as far back in history as 1701 in the observation: "Wise princes ought not to be admired for their government but governance". The Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English language defines governance as a method or system of government or management. The term 'governance' is thus a qualitative expression and a normative concept, different from government.

The concept of governance was not entirely unknown to the nationalist leadership in India that spearheaded the freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi used to talk about 'Swaraj' as well as 'Suraaj'. However, the term 'governance' was not much in use when the Indian constitution was in the making. In short, we can say that governance is a process by which decisions are implemented. An analysis of government thus focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision making. Government is the prime actor in the process in the process of governance.

Concept and Need of Good Governance

Good governance as means of economic development has to have some core characteristics. We can call a government a good government if it gives SMART administration. By SMART administration, we understand a government that is Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent. The IT revolution has reinvented the structure and process of management and governance. Internationally, electronic governance or 'e-governance' is

emerging as the order of the day, Moving towards SMART governance. In India, as declared by the then Prime Minister in 2002, the vision of the government is to implement a comprehensive programme to accelerate e-governance at all levels of the government to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability at the government-citizen interface.”

The other internationally recognised features of good governance are; participation, consensus orientation, effectiveness and efficiency equity and inclusiveness and the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimised, the views of minorities are taken into account and the voices of most vulnerable in the society are heard in decision making. It is also responsive to the future and present needs of the society.

We need good governance at all levels of the Indian economy. Our governments at the centre and state levels have proved to be ineffective and inept. Our people have little confidence in the police force. Our politicians both in power and opposition are insensitive and callous towards the people and their problems at large. We are the victims of a slow bureaucracy. There is fear and anger among people after every tragedy of the kind of Mumbai terrorists attack and mismanagement of financial of Mumbai terrorists attack and mismanagement of financial resources at all levels of government. Cumbersome producers of doing business of any kind are the examples of bad governance and make a case for good governance.

We need to encourage and incentivise a culture of good governance and accountability at all levels of operation in the economy which calls for change in the way of planning, policy making, communicating, analyzing, understanding, adopting, implementing and ensuring accountability, responsibility, positive attitude and aptitude of of manpower of all kinds. To bring about change, we need to overhaul our system of governance with true-self accountability as ‘Mantra’ of progress and prosperity in India and elsewhere in the world. To give a blue print of good governance, we need to analyze the system most objectively.

To minimize the impact of the new economic reality of the global economic crisis, we need good governance at all levels of operation in the economy starting from those at the international level (World Bank, IMF, WTO) to those governing social and economic relations in the family and the neighbourhood. The main pillars of good governance are: political reforms, empowerment of local governments, speedy and efficient justice, instruments of accountability and the implementation of best practices.

Issues in Good Governance

The main issues and features of ‘good governance’ can be discussed as follows:

Participation

Participation in the governance system by both men and women is a keystone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institution or representative. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concern of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand, and an organised and civil society on the other. In India, we can increase people's participation by providing e-governance facilities. Participation of people can be increased when all information regarding policy making reaches the people and they are able to give their positive response. A strong government base in the country is capable of simplifying administration.

Rule of Law

Good governance requires a fair legal framework that is enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force. For the development of any nation, it is required that the rule of law prevails, since most entrepreneurs, whether domestic or foreign, are attracted towards a region where there is a rule of law and where they can feel secure.

Transparency

Transparency means that decision are taken and their enforcement is done in a manner that follows a set of rules and regulations. It also means that the related information is fully available and directly accessible to those who are affected by such decisions. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable form.

The Right to Information Act, 2005 is a landmark, legislation enabling a transparent government. It is now a major weapon in the hands of people. If people use this right rationally, it can also minimize corruption. Transparency is of crucial significance in a country like India where mass poverty is prevailing and most of vulnerable people are unable to get the benefits of schemes that are meant for their welfare. It makes our whole system transparent, it may be possible for us to increase two percentage points in India's GDP, mainly by curbing corruption and wastage.

Responsiveness

Good governance requires that institutions and process try to serve all the stakeholders within a reasonable time frame. E-governance plays a major

role in it, since it enables the government and the people to communicate directly with each other.

Consensus Oriented

There are several actors and viewpoints in a governance system. Good governance requires balancing different interests, in a society or, what is in the best interest of the whole community and how it can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social context of a given social order.

Equity and Inclusiveness

A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires that all groups, more particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve their well being. The Constitution of India provides equality to all the citizens before the law. But if we look at the Indian society, there is a wide inequality. India has achieved a substantially high growth rate after the economic reforms of 1991. But the growth fails to include all people within its ambit. If we ponder over the past achievements of India, we find vast inequalities. The focus of the Eleventh Plan 'Towards the Fast and More Inclusive Growth' was most appropriate.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Good governance implies that the process and institutions produce results that meet the needs society and make the best possible use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in terms of good governance also covers a sustainable use of resources and the protection of environment. Sustainable development is the need of the present times. By sustainable development, we mean a development process that not only accelerates economic growth but also distributes its benefits equitably, regularizes the environment rather than destroying it and empowers people rather than marginalizing them. Only a government that is efficient realizes the dream of the sustainable development process.

Accountability

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only government institutions but also the private sector and the civil society institutions must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. In general,

an organisation or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

E-governance proves to be a major step towards realizing the dream of an ideal state. However, barring a few islands of excellence, e-governance has not really taken off in the country due to several operational economic, personnel, planning and implementation issues. The tag is really conspicuous when India has emerged as a global centre for software development. Hence, it is appropriate to analyze the issues and problems involved in the implementation of e-governance in India and arrive at a proper strategy to promote effective implementation of progressive laws and policies. An effective infrastructure support is an imperative for e-governance. A major obstacle in this domain is an absence of adequate and efficient data link. The sharp divide between rural and urban and other regional variations still persists. The coverage of internet in India is quite low as compared to many other IT enabled nations. Evidently, the ICT sector of India is still not ready to take to e-governance in a big way. The lack of adequate IT skills is a drag on the process of e-governance in India. Further, a lack of co-ordination has been a bane of India's e-governance initiatives.

For successful e-governance, the Internet should cover the whole country. To ensure the success infrastructural initiatives, the government should play an important role. Stakeholders' participation has to be ensured at each appropriate stage viz. analysis, design, development and implementation of an e-governance project. The citizen should be on line, not in line. In the process, e-democracy could be turned into a reality and the scope for e-debate would increasingly strengthen the same. All these contribute to SMART governance. Public awareness campaigns, training and orientation for successful e-governance are requisites to the transformation of mindset.

It is true that good governance is a utopian dream but we ought to make it a reality. So far, India's efforts towards ensuring good governance in the country have mostly taken the path of structural redesigning. Its actual need is spiritual cleansing which has not been adequately addressed. The key to most of India's problems including the administrative one lies in the inclusion of proper orientation to the system.

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