

Initiatives and Challenges of Good Governance in India

Chinmayee Satpathy



After all, the good governance in the country can thrive only when every Indian citizen would ignite themselves in the flame of patriotism adhering to truth, peace and non-violence as means to perceive India of our dream

THE CONCEPT “Good governance” is relatively a new term which has come to limelight in 1990s; however the principle of good governance is not new to the Indian society. While throwing attention over the state of affairs in ancient India, it is noticed that the king or the ruler was bounded by the dharma which precisely meant to ensure good governance to the people. “Rajadharmā” was the code of conduct or the rule of law which was superior to the will of the ruler. Even in the great epics like Mahabharat and Ramayana, the rulers abide by the principles of good governance which are more often cited in many occasions. Arthashastra written by Kautilya the Minister of the famous King Chandragupta Mourya which is a treasure house filled with precious gems of wisdom. Arthashastra extensively deals with the policies of statecraft and state administration have wide relevance in recent times. “Artha” is defined as material well-being of the people living on the earth and “Shastra” shows how the state administration should be carried out in the best interests of the people. The key elements of Kautilya’s policy are the protection, welfare and prosperity

of the state and its people which is the utmost concern of the ruler. The perceptions and principles brought forward by Kautilya in this Shastra have universal appeal and applicability since it is based upon the fundamental principles of good governance, accountability and justice.

India is a country of great diversity with varied culture, dissimilar lifestyles, languages and population, and states having different levels of social and economic development. The well-being of a community depends upon the choices made by the people and granted by the authority. The whole idea of good governance is the participative system of governance in which those who are called upon to govern on behalf of the people are motivated with a will to give their best, serving and doing well to the people, solving their problems and making their lives more livable, satisfying and enjoyable. The essential prerequisites for quality governance are that, the system should be good and suited to the needs, aspirations, background and ethos of the people concerned and those selected for operating the system should be endowed with the character and competence and

The author is Post-Doctoral Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Govt of India, New Delhi.

motivated by the spirit of public service (Kashyap, 2003).

India has given the message of universal brotherhood and tolerance to the whole world in the past. The National Freedom Movement of India was based upon the principle of nationalism, democracy, secularism, non-alignment, and free mixed economy. Mahatma Gandhi advocated the concept 'Ram Rajya' for India basing upon the principles of good governance which necessarily meant for dreaming India as a welfare state where the necessities of the down-trodden, the welfare of the commoner and their progress through indigenous industries would become the hallmark. After independence, the Indian Constitution has also been framed for securing justice, liberty, equality and empowering weaker sections including women, youth and poor, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes through making special provisions in the Indian Constitution. India's experiences during the past six decades have clearly established that good governance in India aims at expansion of social and economic opportunities, removal of poverty and efficient delivery of services at the grassroots. For effective functioning of good governance, every citizen must be empowered and has right to be informed, express their views which must be heard and considered, participate in various decision-making processes of governance and contribute in meaningful ways.

The major characteristics of good governance as outlined by the United Nations are that the authority and its institutions are accountable, effective and efficient, participatory, transparent, responsive, consensus-oriented and equitable. The World Development Report 1997 has also underlined the effectiveness

of the state as an essential prerequisite for economic growth, eradication of poverty and hunger and sustainable development. The World Bank indicators of good governance encompass democracy, transparency and accountability which are the major yardsticks to measure the effectiveness and responsiveness of government administrations.

Features of Good Governance

- Good education facilities offered by the government having greater employability,
- Development of basic infrastructures like roads, bridges, power, telecom, airport, irrigation and transport
- Safety of public life, property, peaceful law and order,
- Creating new employment opportunities in the government and private sectors,
- Effectiveness and efficiency of working of government and its staffs,
- Good business environment with free-market economy,
- Reducing inequalities in the society through positive discrimination in favour of poorest of the poor
- Providing total freedom of speech, of religion, of work and attitude of non-interference by government.
- Provision of more concessions to citizens and free from bias,
- Good business environment and
- Citizen centric services.

Major Initiatives

Recently two major initiatives have been taken up in India for empowering common man and

effective functioning of governance which include Right to Information and E-Governance.

Right to Information

The citizens are the center of democratic governance. Every citizen has right to participate in public life, governance and society. Right to Information is derived from the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of the Indian Constitution which says that "All the citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), India is under an international obligation to effectively guarantee to citizens the Right to Information as per Article 19 of the ICCPR.

The Right to Information Act has been enacted on 12th October, 2005 which marks a significant shift in the Indian democracy and ushered a new era of empowerment of common man in India. Through this act one can examine, audit, review and assess the government works and decisions to ensure that these are consistent with the principles of public interest, integrity and justice. The greater the access of the citizen to the information, the greater would be the responsiveness of the government to community needs. Right to information therefore promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration by making the government more open to public scrutiny. Without information, the common man cannot adequately exercise his rights and responsibilities or make informed choices. So Right to Information is the most effective instrument to check corruption where the citizen has the right to take the initiatives to seek information from the state and thereby enforce transparency and accountability.

E-Governance

E-Governance effectively delivers better programming and services in the era of newly emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs), which herald new opportunities for rapid social and economic transformation worldwide. The governments at the national and state level seek to harness their potential and create new dimension of economic and social progress through bringing change in traditional governance structure to e-governance system. E -Governance has direct impact on its citizens who derive benefits through direct transactions with the services offered by the government. It explores new facet of leadership approach, skill and mindset of the citizens of the country. However, the process of e-governance requires sustained commitment, political will; adequate resources which can develop a system of e-governance in order to make the current policies and practices of government more efficient and effective. E Governance can renovate the relationship between public, private sector and government and enables better policy outcomes, high quality services and greater engagements with the citizens the country.

Challenges to Good Governance in India

While evaluating India's stand amongst other countries of the world, it is revealed that India is compared favourably with many developing countries though it has long way to go to attain the level of developed countries. The criminalization of politics and corruption are two major challenges of good governance in India which need to be addressed on urgent basis.

The corruption has virtually spread in almost all aspects of public life. The person lying on the

street is left to struggle incessantly with corruption throughout his life. Corruption is relatively inherent in terms of client public puzzle, harassed by opaque rules and procedures, excessive delay in disposal of public matters. It not only averts the benefits of globalization to reach the common men but also denies transparency, accessibility and accountability, confuses rules and procedures, proliferate mindless control and poor commitments at all levels. Hence, there is foremost need to check corruption at all levels through raising public consciousness and strong commitments not to make dishonest compromises which would put down the moral values and ethics of life.

India being the largest democratic country in the world is struggling hard to emerge as world class leader in the fields of social and economic development. However, the nexus of crime and politics is so strong that the common citizens of the country have no stand to say or exert their rights. In order to prevent such misuses on May 2, 2002, the Supreme Court of India has given a historic judgement following the public interest litigation (PIL) led by an NGO that, every candidate contesting an election to Parliament, State Legislatures or Municipal Corporations has to give true declarations of candidate's educational qualifications, criminal charges and financial records. Though, many commissions and committees have been framed to bring improvement in the situation, these reformative measures are just a drop in the ocean. So a new beginning is necessary to ameliorate criminalisation from politics and the seriousness of matter should be properly worked out. The educated youngsters should be encouraged to enter into Indian politics and these young leaders should be properly nourished by the

patriotic commitments and abide by the core principles of democratic governance.

Conclusion

The effective functioning of governance is the prime concern of every citizen of the country. The citizens are ready to pay the price for good services offered by the state, but what is required is transparent, accountable and intelligible governance system absolutely free from bias and prejudices. In the present era when India is progressively moving towards development and prosperity, there is a need is to reformulate our national strategy to accord primacy to the Gandhian principle of 'Antodaya' to restore good governance in the country. In such circumstance, when the nation/state machineries become more efficient and accountable, the citizens can enjoy higher per capita income, wide spread literacy, adequate health facilities with longer average life.

After all, the good governance in the country can thrive only when every Indian citizen would ignite themselves in the flame of patriotism adhering to truth, peace and non-violence as means to perceive India of our dream. At this movement, every Indian should swear that the moral principles of our life should never be waved out by the money and muscle power. Let our moral strength succeed over material strength. Let's learn from our past Indian heritage. Being responsible citizens of the country it is our foremost duty not to pledge a vote for deviants to ruin our nation rather to vote for the honest and upright citizens who can be good administrators and reformers to bring positive transformations and can lead our nation under their dynamic leadership. □

(E-mail: chinusatpathy@gmail.com)