

IMPACT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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Abstract: *In today competitive era the concept of good governance play an important role, particularly in the developing country like India. International organizations, help in framing the standards of good governance in all over the world. This paper main object of this paper is to find out the impact of E-governance in the Rural Indian context. It critically examines the process of change and continuity as contained within the complex interplay of the normative structure of governance and the agency of emerging resistance. The overall attempt of this paper is to locate how culture, context, technology and politics have become entangled in relations of power and asymmetry.*

Key words: *Development, e-governance & good governance*

The Global Scene

The international politics has been changed due to the interference of various international national organizations. Now country moves to bipolarity politics to multipolar world politics. As the result the, it renewed interest in democracy, participation, transparency and efficiency. This wider context of political transition coincided with the massive failure of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in most of the developing countries. International development Organization like World Bank woke up to a new realisation that governance reform is the key to all developmental problems in underdeveloped and developing nations. Unlike SAPs which emphasised the role of market as opposed to the state, this new approach towards reform brought the role and capacity of the state and institutions under serious consideration. Interestingly enough the governance reform agenda became quietly complementary with two related themes of democracy and economic development. Together they formed a triad of a magical solution to all the anguish and distress associated with underdevelopment. This triad focussed together on political system, institutional structures and governance processes with an eye on the public-private partnership.

Now, good governance has become the catchword in the international development community. The term is wrapped with codes of morality that it seems to be without of any politics at all. It is widely assumed that in most of the developing countries political societies are corrupt and hegemonic and governments are unrepresentative. While not denying the problems of corruption and perils of status quo, this paper focuses on the politics of the good governance agenda itself and also the hiatus it creates between the governed and those who govern.

Good Governance

Governance encompasses the institutions, systems, “rules of the game” and other factors that determine how political and economic interactions are structured and how decisions are made and resources allocated. Clearly implicit in the general concept is the notion that good governance is a positive feature of political systems and that bad governance is a problem that countries need to overcome.

Good governance also concerns about how the government should remove the poverty, way of maintaining the economic stability and how to provide the basic services to the people.

Some believe that it is related to political right, order, rule of law, and the institutional conditions for free markets to flourish. People those are not a part of political for them good governance related to equity and fairness, protection for the poor, for minorities, and for women, and a positive role for the state. For many others found along the continuum from right to left, the concept is attractive for its concern about order, decency, justice, and accountability.

In General good governance focused on economic institutions and public sector management, including clearness and accountability, regulatory reform, and public sector skills and leadership.

According to World Bank some of distinct aspects of governance which needs to be stressed for reform are:

- The form of political regime
- The process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development
- The capacity of government to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions

All these reforms help in establishes the close link between democracy, economic development and good governance. As far as the criteria of good governance are concerned, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific set out eight major characteristics. It is participating, harmony oriented, accountable, transparent, approachable, effective & efficient, unbiased & comprehensive and follows the rule of law.

In short good governance provides a universal formula with a progressively rising mix of deregulation, privatisation, civil service reform and delegation as well as decentralization with the objective to provide better governability across societies.

Global to Local: A Case of India

As has been already mentioned good governance principles are believed to be applicable regardless of the culture and context. In this paper, however, this view would be critically scrutinised and contradicted. What becomes important in such an endeavour is the nuanced understanding of the state-society relationship, particularly in everyday practices as governance lies in the complex overlap of state and society interactions. This is not an easy task when we talk about a vast and diverse entity called India. The attempt here is not to draw a gross generalisation of Indian context, but to bring forward the significance of particular contexts in analysing the state-society relationship.

Keeping this challenge in mind, we turn to specific initiatives of the Indian government which fits into the overall paradigm of good governance. E-governance initiatives provide an interesting example in this regard as it reclines at the intricate intersection of technology, culture

and politics. Moreover, a NASSCOM (2003) study shows that e-governance is the fastest growing sector of the IT market in India which grew above 18 per cent in 2001-02.

E-governance in India: Change and Continuity

E-governance deploys information technology (ICT) for improving information and service delivery to citizens (consumers) by enabling them to participate in the decision making process through a wider network of private and civil society organisations. Therefore the government becomes more transparent, accountable and efficient¹¹ and hence fits perfectly into the agenda of good governance. Not surprisingly, 'E-governance for Development' has been a prominent slogan in India which has been heavily influenced by international agencies such as DFID, UNDP, G-8 and World Bank. Ministry of

Information and Technology was found, National IT task force was implemented and National E-governance Plan was adopted as part of such development initiatives.

There are many core projects both at the national level and regional level such as smart card, national ID card, computerisation of revenue departments, generic office management system. Some of the well-known state initiatives have been *Gyandoot* of Madhya Pradesh government, *Friends* of Kerala government and *Bhoomi* of the Karnataka government. However, most of these national and state government projects fail to remain sustainable even after a successful pilot phase. For example, one of the secondary sources pointed out that *Gyandoot* which started with much hype has already died down. The level of awareness about services available under such projects is very low among the villagers and in addition infrastructure appears to be the strongest barrier. There could be multiple reasons for such failures which might differ from one project to the other. However, on a generic level it is believed that citizens and officials both are equally habituated to the hierarchic, non-transparent system of governance which has been operating for many decades now. Furthermore, there is a considerable gap between citizen's expectations and government's visions which renders these schemes not so attractive for the villagers. Adding to these systemic drawbacks, are often strong resistance from local politicians. Many instances from Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh show that villagers have to depend on the middlemen to access information from computers installed in Panchayat offices. Even contracts for VLEs (village level entrepreneurs who run the IT kiosks) are fraught with corruption embedded in local political society and bureaucracy.

Therefore, e-governance cannot be seen essentially as an administrative innovation facilitated by ICT but should also be recognized as a social process which involves not only change in the mental scape and the ways of governmentality but also contested area of social forces shaping the evolution of this technocratic innovation. Technical processes defining the contours of e-governance are embedded in the structures of power which might also become reactionary. This is particularly evident in villages where local elites play key roles in the implementation of the ICT-based projects and enjoy the greater benefits from this public good. "The idea that ICT is inherently a liberating technology, and hence e-governance, is a new way of transcending inept and inefficient bureaucratic systems, which empowers 'end-users', appears to be completely inaccurate in the rural societal setting."

This brings us to the issue of change and continuity involved in any social process and interaction. New technology can hold novel promises for improving the system and structure of governance and hence the quality of life. Nevertheless, it also leads to many open-ended questions; what is main agenda of ICT led development initiatives? Does it help bridging the digital divide or boost the divide? How far does it contribute in the development of our communities and everyday life? It might be too early draw any

conclusive answers to these questions. However, it becomes quite evident from the experiences of already implemented projects that technology is not ethically and socially neutral. For that reason, instead of focusing on an irreversible impact of technology on a community, it would be much more effective to see the reciprocal cycle of influences binding together technology, individual choices and consequently social shaping of such technologies.

Politics, Context and Agency

Talking about individual choices brings us to the notion of agency. It is the agency of individual actors operating within a particular cultural context that defines the contours of state-society relationships. As it has already been mentioned governance lies in overlapping zone of interaction between state and society or in another term in the intersection between political and the social. Hence, it is the dynamism of these interactions that would bring a shift in the structure of governance.

Given this frame of understanding, it can be easily construed that even in case of technological interventions, individual actors, their cultural context laden with shared norm and values and ensuing choices will finally determine the state-society relationship and therefore also the standards of governance. This paper does not intend to deny the macro perspective which thrives on the power of the state institutions. In fact, it tries to combine both macro and micro frameworks by emphasizing the reciprocal relations between the two.

Conclusion

Good governance presents us with a normative frame loaded with liberal values which clearly neglects the context of changing societies and local cultures. As coded in strong moralistic language it hardly addresses the real issues of governance experiences by actors who are part of the context. It lacks legitimacy in the same way modernisation theories did once. Moreover, good governance agenda persuaded by international agencies reflects a particular ideology commensurate with the Western neo-liberal philosophy and hence used as an instrument to leverage aid policies. As Bondyapadhyay puts it, "the term 'good governance' as it is being used today by the North has become the symbol of recolonisation and new Imperialism." Similarly, according to Mitra, "In its most typical form, this usage makes it possible for those with the money and the vision to instil their objectives in the qualifier 'good' that precedes governance. Even when the definers of good governance act out of the best of intentions, the pre-qualification lowers the legitimacy of the concept for those affected by it in direct proportion to the hiatus between what they perceive as their interests and those of their minds."

In taking a critical view towards good governance paradigm, this paper attempts to challenge the Universalistic approach which is mostly dominated by Western schools of thought and relegates any deviations as anomalies awaiting corrective measures. Rather, it draws attention to continuous flows of knowledge and institutions from both above and below, from both outside and within. A deeper understanding of this

complex mechanism can be enriched by emerging paradigms of transculturality which probe directly into questions of asymmetries involved in every social and cultural processes rather than avoiding them in a transcendental quest.

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