GOOD GOVERNANCE: A PRESSING NEED

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Abstract: This paper explores the idea of governance in contemporary times. As an ideal which has reached unprecedented increase in interest around the globe only recently, good governance is an emerging subject of debate and analysis among national leaders and scholars alike. While often misunderstood to be a synonym of 'government', the aim of governance is actually to go beyond government and make administration and governmental activities more accessible and responsive to, and easier to navigate for the broader citizenry at large. Governments around the world have of late introduced several strategies and incorporated newer means, including Information and Communication Technology, to get closer to citizens, make citizens more aware of their rights and dues from the government, at the same time also making them more cognizant of their responsibilities as civic members of society. Mechanisms of good governance have increasingly been come to be used by governments all around the world and have, in the process, become essential elements of a government's international credibility and popular legitimacy. However, this process, despite the best of intentions, has not been a smooth one. Governments are often very reluctant to give up their privileges and bureaucrats shudder at the thought of transparency. Given these circumstances, this paper explains the meanings and origins of governance as a concept, its components, means that are adopted to make the scheme of good governance a reality, hindrances that countries face in this regard and the possible way forward, using India as a reference case.

Keywords: Governance, Good Governance, Participation, Rule of Law, Accountability Mechanisms, Transparency

The basic idea of governance is to hold the society together so that it can develop and march towards certain goals. The concept of governance is as old as human civilisation. In contemporary times, it is used to refer to the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. Webster's *Third International Dictionary* states that, 'Governance is a synonym of government, or the act or process of governing, specifically, authoritative direction and control'. This means that governance is about the effectiveness of the executive branch of government.

The *United Nations Development Programme* defines governance as the essence of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It is a conglomerate of the mechanisms and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations and mediate their differences. According to the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*, governance is about 'building trust between citizens and government', that is, it is about building social capital.

The term governance, however, became popular in the context of good governance – a term which was used mainly by aid givers when evaluating the performance of third-world countries seeking economic assistance. This revamped term indicates a shift from government-centric decision-making processes to the shared endeavour to the process of governing the country that ultimately creates an enabling atmosphere where every individual realises his/her goals. Good governance is to be regarded as a paradigm of public administration. Public administration must be employed to achieve the governance which will come to the benefit of the largest number, if not all members of the body-politic. According to Nicholas Henry, the present era (21st century) may appropriately be called an era of good governance.

Good governance as a model was propagated by international financial institutions during the 1980s-90s in response to poor governance in the developing countries. The decade of the 1980s saw the failure of the

government-led model of development, where the government was providing every service from womb to tomb, but failed to satisfy the citizens' needs and bring about the desired level of development and self-reliance. The developing countries had to go back for more aid and loans. That led to the ushering in of the market-led development model, where the private entities were allowed in non-core activities. This model was pushed for in the developing and underdeveloped countries mainly by the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions insisted on structural adjustments by the aid takers. Such market-oriented reforms could bring aid to the Third World countries, but even this model failed to take off successfully. The reasons for this failure was identified as poor governance in those countries, characterised by arbitrary exercise of power, corruption, leakage, secrecy and opacity in the system, and ineffective managerial techniques. In this context, the World Bank introduced the concept of good governance. Good governance means the attainment of ideals of democracy and participation of people in all activities of state. This participatory administration finds its fullest realisation in a society which is governed properly. At present, developing nations must receive foreign aid in its various forms, but the same is not to be treated as *'Aladdin's Lamp',* which can do everything itself. The proper and effective use of foreign aid is a crucial issue and its proper use depends upon the strategies and methods of public administration. This question also led to the increase in significance of the concept of governance. Although the concept of good governance was introduced by the World Bank as a conditionality for availing loans, it has become a need of the society and nation-states started developing their own concepts of the same. Examples include Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interpretation of good governance as *'life, not file',* Human Development Model in the context of the South-Indian State of Kerala, Happiness Model of Madhya Pradesh, Gross Happiness Index of Bhutan etc. Here, good is seen as an end, not solely as a means, by defining it in terms of transparency, accountability and so on.

Good governance is a value-laden term, which aims at enhancing citizen satisfaction. It promotes/calls for a participative model of governance; making governance corruption-free. Good governance tries to maintain certain normative standards like:

i. **Participation**: Government should ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate during the decision-making process, not only through their elected representatives, but themselves, so that their interests get reflected in the governmental policies and programmes.

ii. **Rule of Law**: It means absence of arbitrary exercise of authority and provision of a fair legal framework. This requires effective enforcement mechanisms and an independent judiciary.

iii. **Transparency**: Allowing unhindered flow of information from the government / administrative machinery, and its accessibility especially to those who are affected by the decisions taken.

iv. **Responsiveness:** Making institutions responsive to the needs of all those who are going to be affected by their actions.

v. **Equity:** Participation in governance structures and processes requires treating all citizens equally, that is, the government should promote equity so as to ensure participation by all the stakeholders of the society.

vi. **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the usage and employment of resources without affecting the genuine societal needs and demands. Goal orientation should also be a priority of administrators.

vii. **Accountability:** Ensuring Answerability as well as proper enforcement of procedure in case of violation of established norms. In addition to public institutions, the private sector and civil society organisations need to be accountable to society for their acts.

viii. **Adjustment to Changing Times:** In this age of globalisation and liberalisation, there are both interactions and collaborations between national and international organisations doing various types of jobs. Good governance must see to it that the collaboration among both national and international institutions has been ensured and this collaboration has come to the maximum amount of benefit to the body-politic. Good and effective rapport between governmental and non-governmental institutions, both national and international, as well as MNCs and NGOs, must be achieved as all of them have a key role to play in the development of society.

Barriers to Good Governance:

The reason often quoted for governments not being citizen-centric are attitude and work of some government servants, ineffective implementation of laws, the deficiencies in the existing institutional structures and citizens themselves.

i. **Attitudinal Problems of the Civil Servants:** There is a growing concern that the civil services have been inflexible, self-perpetuating and inward-looking. Consequently, their attitude is one of indifference and

insensitivity to the needs of the citizens. This is more so in case of the Third World countries' bureaucracy, which had a colonial birth and consequently carries forward its legacy. The asymmetry in the power and information between the civil servant and citizen; citizens' illiteracy; poverty, lack of awareness about their rights etc., led to the civil servants thinking that they are doing a favour to the citizens rather than serving them.

ii. *Lack of Effective Accountability Mechanisms within the System:* Inefficiency breeds in governance when the system is unable to hold the civil services accountable for their actions. Delay in initiating disciplinary proceedings, imposition of penalties is even rarer, cumbersome disciplinary procedures, are the reasons for civil servants apathetic attitude towards the public. In addition, safeguards provided to the civil servants have often been misused.

iii. *Low Levels of Awareness of Rights and Duties among Citizens:* Although the urban middle class is becoming more and more aware of its rights, rural society which is dependent on the government is yet to become aware about the rights available to it. On the other hand, low levels of compliance of rules by the citizens also acts as an impediment to good governance; when citizens do not adhere to their duties, they infringe on the freedom and rights of other citizens.

iv. *Ineffective Implementation of Laws and Rules:* Numerous laws aimed at maintaining public order and safety, maintaining sanitation and hygiene, protecting the rights of citizens, giving special protection to vulnerable sections of the population should be implemented effectively. This will ensure the welfare of all citizens and also provide a facilitative environment that encourages each citizen to contribute his best towards the contribution of society; otherwise citizens will face a great deal of hardship and may lead to reduced trust in the administration and government.

v. *Institutional Deficits:* The institutional structures provided may not have been properly designed and hence it may lack capacity, resources to implement the laws in letter and spirit. The system often suffers from problems of excessive centralisation and policy action plans are far removed from the needs of the citizens. This results in a gap between what is expected and what is being provided. Without the adequate capacity-building of civil servants, laws and policies will not be implemented effectively.

vi. *Necessary Preconditions for Good Governance:*

An analysis of the barriers to good governance reveals that there are several preconditions which must be fulfilled in order to make governance citizen-centric. Some of the preconditions are sound legal framework, competent and dedicated workforce, decentralisation, delegation and accountability. Besides, a number of tools can also be employed to make administration citizen-centric. These are

a. Re-engineering processes to make governance citizen-centric
b. Adoption of appropriate modern technologies
c. Right to Information
d. Accountability
e. Independent evaluation of services
f. Grievance redressal mechanisms
g. Active citizens' participation: public-private partnerships

1. Sound Legal Framework:

Orderly existence of any society is possible only if it is a grounded on a sound legal framework. The Indian Parliament has enacted a large number of laws to achieve the objectives enshrined in the constitution. However, such laws should be amended or repealed to meet the needs and challenges of the time so that the welfare and development of society/citizens are not affected. In the absence of any updation, old and archaic laws become an obstacle in smooth administration. Such laws offer loopholes and escape provisions for the corrupt. They also corrupt ordinary citizens who find it expensive and time-consuming to abide by such laws and offers 'speed money' to speed up the process.

The present Central Government has removed as many as 1500 Acts in its first term. Around 2000 more obsolete central Acts not in sync with the contemporary times have also been identified for eventual revocation. In fact, the Law Commission has been given the responsibility to regularly examine the relevance of the existing laws to the present-day needs and requirements.

2. Competent and Dedicated Workforce:

A sound legal system and a strong institutional mechanism needs to be complemented by competent and motivated civil servants to run the system in order to provide an effective citizen-centric administration.

3. Decentralisation, Delegation and Accountability:

The principle of subsidiarity proposes that governance functions shall be carried out closest to citizens at the smallest unit of governance possible, and delegated upwards only when the local unit cannot perform the task. The citizen delegates those functions that he/she cannot perform to the community, and functions that the community cannot discharge are passed on to the local governments in the lowest tiers, and so on: from local to state governments, and from States to the Union. this brings the citizens and the community at the centre of governance. This will, in turn, make administration more accountable and responsive.

4. Various Tools:

a. **Process Simplification**: Simplification of processes, creating the provision of single-window solutions, reducing hierarchical tiers, updating and simplification of existing departmental manuals and codes etc. should be the priorities of administrative reforms.

b. **Adoption of Modern Technologies/E-Governance**: Governance reforms and citizen-centricity should be the primary focus of adoption of modern technologies, including E-Governance projects.

c. **Transparency and Right to Information**: These are essential preconditions of good governance. Access to information empowers citizens to demand and get information about public policies and programmes, thus making the government more accountable and helps to strengthen participatory democracy and citizen-centric governance. It will help citizens to keep themselves informed about the laws/policies/schemes/services of the government, the rights that are available to them, expected quality of service from the government etc.

d. **Accountability**: Accountability means answerability of public officials towards the public. Here, administration shall answer the questions asked by the public. Such questions can be of two types: **(i)** Questions that merely seek information/data, and involve one-way transmission of information. For example, questions that are asked under RTI provisions. Such provisions promote transparency and, to a much lesser degree, accountability in government.

(ii) A second type of questions enquires about why a particular action has been taken, in addition to what has been done; thus, it involves a two-way flow of information, with the citizens usually providing feedback in respect of the working of government departments and service delivery of public agencies. Such mechanisms include Citizens' Charters, Social Audits, Citizens' Report Card, Outcome Surveys, etc.

e. **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Monitoring and evaluation is important in governmental setups because of its large size in terms of workforce and its wide reach. The success of the laws, policies and guidelines which are implemented by a large number of field organisations depend on their effective administration. This necessitates constant monitoring and evaluation.

f. **Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Meeting the expectations of the citizens, especially in a welfare-state like India, as it performs multiple functions, is a challenging task for any government. there might arise some deficiencies in the provision of the services by the government. This is the cause of citizens' grievances. Both external and internal constraints prevent the administration from meeting the expectations of the citizens. Addressing the grievances of those citizens whose expectations are not fulfilled is primarily the task of the government agency concerned.

g. **Active citizens' Participation:** Citizen-centric administration invariably involves giving a voice to citizens in the governance process. That is, the administration must provide a platform where citizens may voice their concerns, provide feedback on various initiatives, policy inputs etc. Such platforms can facilitate proactive sharing of information with citizens as required under the RTI Act, setting up of consultative mechanisms for stakeholders, involving citizens' groups in certain aspects of governance etc.

The mantra of 'minimum government, maximum governance', as enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims to promote citizen-friendly and accountable administration. Minimum government means reduction of government role in many areas, making it an enabler rather than a provider, whereas maximum governance means to maximise public service delivery for the betterment of the people. In the last few years, the government has tried to implement these concepts as exemplified by:

• Doing away with the practice of submitting affidavits for small level executive jobs in the government and allowing self-certification of certificates for the reduction in time and effort on the part of both the citizens as well as the officials in many government offices.

- Leveraging the power of Information Technology brings with it the advantage of transparency and speed for the benefit of the citizens. In this regard, the government has embarked upon a time-bound Digital India Plan.

- The Government of India has also taken a number of initiatives for improving 'Ease of Doing Business'. The emphasis has been on simplification and rationalisation of the existing rules and introduction of Information Technology to make governance more efficient and effective.

- One of the focus areas of government is to reduce the decision-making layers to the minimum while allowing for faster means of information-sharing / dissemination. For this, the government has launched a platform 'MyGov' and the website india.gov.in for this purpose. This is a citizen-centric platform to empower people to connect with the government and contribute towards good governance.