

Good effort

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120
250

Topic: 1. Governance is not about institutions but about people being empowered to engage with them.

The concept of citizen engagement in the government was given to this world by this country only. Even if we disregard the various Chalcolithic societies, the sabhas and samitis of the Rig Vedic age are an irrefutable evidence of citizen participation in the governance. Yet, it is an irony, that today our own country is struggling

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to re-engage the citizens and meeting
with resistance from multiple quarters,
having drifted ~~perhaps~~ too far away
from it.

The result, we see today, in
growing citizen disillusionment and
restlessness with the ~~existing~~ system
as displayed strongly during the anti-
corruption movement. Then yet again,
when the citizens took to streets in
the 'Damini' case, the credibility of
the government and its stalwarts
had fallen so low that people
didn't allow a single politician
to lead them and in fact
boased them. The disconnect ^{between} ~~from~~

the government and the citizens had grown so much that the home minister dismissed the idea of even going and talking to the Damini protestors saying, "If tomorrow nazals take to street, will I meet them?"

These things were unimaginable a few decades back. What has changed since? How have ~~the~~ people's expectations of governance changed? What is the new meaning of governance and principles behind it? In this essay we would analyse this changing concept of governance. We would begin by examining what is ~~this~~ change, and what are the principles of the

ritual and the bureaucracy lost its empathy. There was a general loss of accountability and the poor citizen could do nothing but knock from door to door. The public interest and the quality of governance suffered.

Thus a need was felt to give evolve a system which gives back the power to the citizen.

In the new ~~city~~ system, the citizen would be able to directly engage the executive and demand accountability.

The forces of economic liberalisation and globalisation also created a new class of citizens who were aware of their right to good governance

and were not afraid to demand it.
The ^{recent} movements in India, Brazil, Russia, Turkey all have to be seen in this light, i.e. citizen empowerment.

In the new system, power should be decentralised. The 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments, PESA, Forests Rights Act, all have to be seen in this regard.

The principle of subsidiarity i.e. power to lowest possible level as far as feasible & desirable should be followed. Transparency and accountability should be the cornerstones of the new system. Citizen charters and strong, effective grievance redressals for the citizens should be enforced. Use of modern technology should be encouraged with the aim of increasing citizen participation.

Based on these founding principles, this new system would uphold rule of law and check ~~many~~ of the mal-practices which have crept into the existing system.

This is the new governance concept and now we will turn to examine the issues in the present system & ~~how the new system can improve it.~~

2. THE PRESENT ~~VS THE NEW~~

India can perhaps boast of having one of the largest number of institutions in governance. ~~Virtually~~ every new govt. scheme launched creates a plethora of institutions at all levels. And on paper it looks good and the argu-

ment is advanced that in a large ^{federal} country like India to ensure all checks and balances, we need it.

Consider the case of Disaster Management Framework for example. We have a NDMA at top headed by PM tasked with suggesting the guidelines. Then there is a NEC to implement it. At state levels, we have SDMA's and SECs with corresponding role. At the District level, the DDMA is supposed to carry out all disaster management activities, including conducting vulnerability assessment; preparing disaster plans; integrating them in district development plan; monitoring the implementation and coordinating relief operations. All this sounds perfect.

But there was only one major

problem and the Uttarakhand tragedy and CAG report on disaster preparedness preceding it, laid it bare. The problem was, there was no citizen engagement. There was ~~nothing~~ no mechanism by which citizens could engage with these authorities and demand accountability.

So what happened? Hazard Vulnerability analysis of districts ~~was~~ never carried out. Disaster plans were not created, or even if created at district level were not incorporated in the developmental plans. And then there was no monitoring of these plans. At the ground level, the unholy nexus of tourism and contractor

mafia, bureaucrats and politicians ensured that all rules, all precautions were kept aside and greed only prevailed. Even if some worried citizen wanted to raise her voice and check this, there was virtually no mechanism for her to get it heard. The CAG Report further reveals that most state plans didn't incorporate the district plans, no guidelines were followed, NEC ^{hadn't} ~~didn't~~ meet since 2008, and the list goes on... And who gets killed? The poor citizens. Even now there is no way for her to ensure that the relief and rehabilitation money - donated by her fellow citizens or taken via taxes - is properly spent!

Thus, exclusion of the citizen from governance & sole focus on institutions

only leads to governance failure itself
what is more, the incumbents in the
system begin to treat the citizen
with utter contempt. They ignore her,
threaten her, even kill her if she
becomes too "annoying". The murder of
many RTI activists is an example.

Thus the citizen becomes indifferent
from the system - lucky ones migrate,
unlucky ones continue to suffer. But
in the process, the credibility of the
entire institution suffers. People lose
faith! while that may be "ok" in
the case of BCCI, but the larger
democracy cannot afford it.

what else can explain the

Maxal problem? Our state is supposed to be a welfare state, our constitution is supposed to protect specially the tribals, we have some of the most progressive legislations including PESA & forest rights Act, ~~we~~ why, then ^{some} these tribals take up arms against the state like they used to do against the British?

Again, because of the failure of institution based governance model. The forest Rights Act is supposed to recognise their rights over land & forest produce. But the forest officials simply refuse to record their rights & instead file cases against them! The PESA mandates gram sabha approvals and public hearings for approval of mining & industrial projects. But the miners collude with local

administration and politicians to ensure these public hearings are force! They are forcibly evicted from their lands, beaten, raped, lodged in jails and labeled naxalites. What else can they do then?

And all this is because they had no way of demanding accountability earlier. It is hoped that the new Land Acquisition Bill will improve the situation since it has many citizen empowerment provisions including the 80% approval requirement.

Too much of institutional focus of governance also creates many other problems. It ~~is seen that~~ ^{leads to policy} ~~paralysis~~. There are too many people

in the chain and it seems everybody has got a potential veto. No one cares about the outcomes and everybody is just concerned about protecting his own turf. And when it comes to a project involving multiple departments, the problem gets compounded manifold. This breeds corruption, crony capitalism, stalls growth and investments. This leads to further fall ~~consequences~~ in public confidence, scandals, government losing credibility and hurls its will to bring reforms - thus pushing our growth even back.

Sometimes the govt. creates "Single window mechanisms" to speeden things up. But a curious case in many of these supposedly single window mechanisms is that they give only

"in-principle" approvals. Thus the need of getting all the initial original approvals remains and what is effectively achieved is the creation of another retaining authority. An example here is the proposed Bio technology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI). BRAI approvals will only be in-principle & the companies will have to get additional approvals from concerned states & ministries.

Another major ~~issue~~ manifestation of the problems of current system is the blame game we see after every bomb blast or natural disaster. Thus the Bihar govt. blamed center

after the Bodh Gaya Blasts and the center said law and order is a state issue. In the Uttarakhand tragedy, the state govt. blamed IMD for not providing adequate weather forewarning while IMD said it did what it was supposed to do.

The list can go on and on and one can cite say NRHM, CBI, CDSCO issues, but the key point here is - all this happens because citizens are not empowered enough to engage with the govt. and demand accountability. We will now see how this can improve the governance & how to achieve it.

3. THE "FUTURE"

Critics of people empowerment & participation give many arguments like

questioning citizens' competency to govern, citing confidentiality requirements in govt., highlighting how RTI has led to policy paralysis and ^{is a} waste of time for the officials. While questioning citizens' capability to govern themselves sounds like ~~British~~ ^{colonial} (Indians can't govern themselves) and confidentiality requirements can be accommodated as in RTI; it must be pointed out that RTI has done more good than harm. And the policy paralysis is not because of RTI but because of the malafide decisions taken by them and wrong incentive structure of the govt.

Anyways, there are plenty of

examples before us that highlight the success of citizen empowerment & engagement.

Take for example NREGA. Despite all its weaknesses, it stands out as one of the most successful among large schemes in India. And this is uniquely because of its empowering the citizens (statutory right to work) and the central role envisaged for gram sabhas & not any parastatals. Even among states, its performance is best in states which encourage people participation & accountability via social audits, modern technologies and awareness campaigns.

Or should we talk about ~~the~~ how the virtually defunct PDS (based on old institution based model) has

been transformed into many states such as Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan by encouraging people participation, universalisation, technology and audits.

Similarly the Water User Association model, where the farmers themselves are empowered to manage irrigation water, has turned the fortunes of many irrigation systems where the bureaucratic irrigation department had failed.

Perhaps, the most powerful contrast between what people participation can do vis a vis traditional control is govt. control is when we compare

the massively successful Amul cooperative model with APMCs. Today the country needs Amul in every state & district and get rid of the ~~dist~~ APMC managed mandis. This would better our food supply chains, ensure food security & curb food inflation.

Even in the area of forest conservation, the success of Chipko movement & Danuk Taluka^{ESZ} in western Ghats can be attributed to strong people participation.

Despite such benefits, the road to ensure greater people empowerment is not easy. Real success has not yet been achieved in Panchayat devolutions. The vested interests in the existing

system block the move ~~for~~ towards reforms. Thus, ~~rather~~ the Gadgil panel constituted on Western Ghats had recommended a great model for ESZ governance which took the power out of ministers & officials & vested it directly with people. Even if the govt. had issues with other aspects of the report, it should have adopted at least this model.

But sadly, the Kasturirangan panel recommendations which were accepted, vest the power back into politicians and bureaucrats.

Thus, we will have to build a

popular will for such reforms. We will have to educate people.

On the legislative front, we should follow the 'rights based approach' like the RTI, NREGA, Food Security Act. At the same time we must encourage the use of technology, social audits and greater citizen awareness campaigns.

^{Additionally}
~~Finally~~, we must take a strong & decisive step towards developing citizen charters and grievance redressal mechanisms. The Right of Citizens for Public Service Delivery & Grievance Redressal Bill is a very positive step. We must ensure such charters are not a one time exercise &

are regularly monitored in the light of citizen feedback. We must encourage the use of citizen report cards.

To achieve all this we would need to do a major overhaul study & overhaul of our present administrative system.

We would need to train people, invest in capacity building & change the organizational culture.

That would be the true attainment of 'swaraj'.

Conclusion can be improved as compare to the introduction a little weak.

		Obtained
Alignment Competence	30	15
Context	50	25
Content	50	25
Language	30	15
Introduction	30	15
Structure - Presentation	30	15
Conclusion	30	10
	250	120

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