

ADDRESS AT THE NATIONAL WEBINAR

by



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on

"TRANSFORMING PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE"

Saturday, 7th November 2020, at 1100 hrs.,
At Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi

Transforming Public Governance in India: A Critical Dialogue

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed a great privilege for me to speak at the National Webinar on “***Transforming Public Governance in India: A Critical Dialogue***” being organized by the Jamia Millia Islamia University. I am grateful to Prof Rumki Basu, and the Department of Public Administration for organizing this event. I have had the opportunity to listen to Prof Rumki Basu’s oration on Public Policy at the Mizoram University and was struck by her eloquence and erudition on the complex subjects of governance. Some of her thoughts are reflected in the questions flagged in the concept paper for the webinar - ***the policy implementation question, the audit and targets question, the scrutiny question, the rewards question and the change and innovation question***. She further wants this forum to discuss the new rights given to the people, e-governance, computerization of government records, citizen charters, public service guarantee acts and increasing judicial activism and their impact on governance. The discussion is to center around the role of States in ushering in administrative reform.

I will try to address the issues flagged by Prof Rumki Basu in the context of “***Transforming Public Governance in India: A Critical Dialogue***”, based on the research done for my book “***Towards a New India: Governance Transformed – 2014-2019***”.

The Policy Implementation Question:

The March to New India is about delivering public goods and services. The focus is on social sectors, health and education, social inclusion and social sector intervention, bringing financial inclusion, electricity, housing, skill development, digital tools and justice delivery.

The objective is to ensure development becomes a peoples’ movement through successful implementation of priority programs by bringing together innovation, technology, enterprise and efficient management. Further emphasis is also placed on simplifying operations of government, speeding up decision-making processes and elimination of dead wood.

India’s welfare state programs have undergone massive digital transformation in the past 5 years. This can be seen from issue of 120 crore Aadhar cards, 31.6 crore Jan Dhan bank accounts and 100 percent coverage of the population under the Swachh Bharat Mission which symbolize the rise of a “New India”. Technology enabled interventions are visible in health care, education, energy next generation financial services, e-governance and in doubling farmers income.

The technology enablement of India's villages can be seen from the visibility of e-Mitras, Digital Merchants and Business Correspondents in every village. One of the most popular schemes of government, which has witnessed high off-take is the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, another being the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Rural. The Aadhar linked targeted food subsidy programs and direct benefit transfers have had a significant impact.

The Health sector has witnessed progressive policy making with the formulation of the National Health Policy 2017, the Ayushman Bharat Scheme and the emphasis placed on strengthening the AIIMS and creation of new AIIMS-like institutions across India. Affordable Health Care, envisaged under the National Health Protection Scheme, meets the aspirational needs of many Indians. Further, the National Health Policy has placed a lot of emphasis on human resources as a vital component of India's health care, with a merit-based common entrance examination being introduced at national level, and the Government notifying an increase in postgraduate seats in 35 medical colleges with the objective of increasing the number of specialist doctors in India.

Digital India and Skill India are very forward-looking programs. The imprint of Digital India on public policy and governance is quite visible – the Digital AIIMS experience shows the significant improvements in systemic efficiency that can be brought about by adoption of digitalization practices. In fact, the successful implementation of Digital AIIMS gave me the confidence to implement the Digital Rajasva Mandal project in the Board of Revenue for Rajasthan and the Rajasthan Revenue Courts Grid across 1,532 Revenue Courts of Rajasthan.

The Skill India program has worked well in the textiles sector. A lot of trainings happened and several existing workers were retrained, thereby increasing their production efficiency. Technology upgradation and skill upgradation are important for industry expansion.

Social inclusion has been marked by significant changes in policy and law – decriminalising homosexuality. The Chief Justice of India famously said, "***I am who I am, so take me as I am***" in his judgment granting legal approval to homosexuality. Significant improvements using software-enabled interventions are seen in implementation of scholarship programs and social security pensions. The Accessible India Campaign for creating universal accessibility has one interesting component which I was associated with – the Government websites being made disabled friendly.

There has been a massive contribution in the areas of Yoga, Culture and Sports, India's contribution to the International Yoga Day being celebrated on June 21 has

been significant. Nearly a hundred countries celebrate International Yoga Day in which thousands of people participate – from New York to Wuxi, celebrations being witnessed in Athens, Amsterdam, Madrid, Paris, Islamabad, Kathmandu, Tel Aviv, Dublin, Kiev, Seoul and Tokyo.

Strengthening the Auditing & Accountability Processes

As an Institution, the Civil Services particularly the All India Services have always commanded considerable respect from the people of India. Such respect emanates from a perception that decision-making would be neutral and unbiased and would enable the Nation to achieve the objectives outlined in the Preamble of the Constitution.

The 21st century has witnessed a significant expansion of the Civil Services processes and responsibilities. Recruitment has become highly competitive, training norms more stringent, performance appraisal timely and constant evaluations have been introduced on the capacity of the civil servant to meet current challenges. There is greater emphasis on performance management practices. Effective management of public resources has necessitated open, transparent and accountable systems of delivery. The regulatory oversight by the Central Vigilance Commission, the Comptroller & Auditor General, the Central Bureau of Investigation has increased. Clearly accountability levels today are far higher than they ever were in the past.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India is an important institution in India's fight against corruption. Since 2014, the CAG adapted to the Government's reforms in financial governance in the organization's accounting and auditing practices. Some of the big changes introduced in financial governance are amalgamation of the Railways and General Budgets, the merger of plan and non-plan expenditures, opening up of a number of sectors for foreign direct investment and the introduction of the goods and services tax. The CAG has further focused on improved management of urban and local bodies, and on the need for handling large volumes of digital information from increased automation of tax returns.

In a broader sense, the challenges that civil servants face in the 21st century are no different from those of the 20th century - **Commitment to the larger public good against all odds**¹. Further the New Age competency remains anchored in integrity, building credibility and trust in the institution of civil service. Even in a New Age India, these values are foundational and non-negotiable. You can hire skills, but leadership and faith in fairness and impartiality cannot be outsourced.

¹ Dr. Duvvuri Subbarao in his book "Who moved my interest rate?" said that at the end of his tenure he adhered to the RBI dharma.

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A New Age India 2022, envisages Civil Servants as agents of change, displaying personal characteristics of high morality, courage, independent decision-making, an intrinsic motivation and an inner desire to excel to contribute to policy making. Relentless pursuit of excellence can only be achieved with enormous amount of dedication and seriousness of purpose. There are simply no shortcuts to success. Institutions rise and fall with individuals.

The Scrutiny Question

Fighting corruption is an imperative need. Preventing corruption is based on a credible deterrence, strong audit and accounting mechanisms, robust oversight and monitoring, technology practices for greater transparency in accounting practices and streamlining procurement procedures.

India's 'zero tolerance to corruption' approach coupled with 'minimum government and maximum governance' approach has resulted in simplification of the governance models in recent years. Some of the steps included abolition of the system of attestation/ authentication by government servants for submission of certificates, abolition of personal interviews for recruitments to lower posts and weeding out inefficient civil servants with doubtful integrity above the age of 50 years.

The major causes of corruption are administrative delays, government taking upon regulatory functions, scope for personal discretion in exercise of powers by public servants, and cumbersome procedures. The CVC has promoted transparency, objectivity and accountability in public administration, through observance of vigilance awareness weeks, process simplification, focus on skill development and award of exemplary punishments. The appointment of the Lok Pal, amendments in the prevention of corruption act, strengthening safeguards for whistleblowers and crackdown on benami transactions are all forward looking steps in India's fight against corruption.

The Rewards Question

The Government rewards outstanding and committed work through the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration. There are several success stories in governance where outstanding work was recognized. Amongst the most reported success stories are the foot soldiers of Ambikapur. The Ambikapur model offers green solution adopting a mohalla approach by women self help groups. Over 600 women were enlisted, trained and divided into 20 self-help groups with one garbage clinic being assigned to one self-help group. 225 garbage collection routes were charted in the city covered by 137 teams. Women workers commenced garbage collection at 7 am and ended at 2 pm. The second half of the day was devoted to segregation and cleaning with 17 wet categories

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and 20 dry categories of trash. Trash segregation centres were established which further segregated trash into 156 categories including 133 inorganic and 33 organic categories. The Ambikapur model made people aware of the basics of municipal waste management and understand terms like dry waste, wet waste and segregation at source. The innovation has been replicated in 165 towns of Chhattisgarh.

Let me highlight two success stories in the education sector—‘Unnayan Banka – Reinventing Education through Technology’ and ‘Padhe Dantewada – Likhe Dantewada’—both initiatives undertaken in the Left Wing Extremist Districts, which increased attendance, average marks and produced overall encouraging results through use of technology. In Rural Development, while MGNREGS remains the flagship scheme of the Government for employment generation, the rapid implementation of PMAY – Grameen, to fulfill the Housing for All 2022, has transformed the rural landscape.

In Financial Inclusion, I came across several success stories of business correspondents contributing significantly. However, there is one that I wish to mention here – Pooja Karmasaki, a resident of village Jhakalabhandra, District Nagaon, Assam, who as a bank mitra went door to door to create awareness in tribal villages about the PMJDY scheme, the importance of savings and motivated the villagers to open bank accounts. Within six months, Pooja Karmasaki was successful in opening 1,800 bank accounts in the village achieving 100 per cent financial inclusion and coverage of banking services.

There is one success story in implementation of DDU-GKY program which has impressed me. In Karimnagar District of Telangana, Bharti a widow with 2 daughters obtained basic training in tailoring and earned Rs. 2500/- per month. The two daughters passed the screening test at the employment generation and marketing mission in Karimnagar and qualified for the English readiness and computers course. The 2 girls learnt soft skills, behavioral skills, professional etiquette, leadership and management and basic computers during the 90 days period of training. They were placed at the Heritage Retail Stores Hyderabad and each earned Rs. 9500 per month. The family’s annual income has risen to Rs. 2.58 lac per annum.

Daman and Diu has been mentioned as the role model for use of digital payments. In Daman, Rekha Baigul worked in Banswada Garments and did not have a bank account, her salary was paid in cash. She opened her bank account in HDFC bank with her aadhar number and a reference from the company. Soon 8500 garment workers in Daman opened their bank accounts and digital transactions touched a monthly high of 175000 by industrial workers, covering 3000 industries. Even

small hawkers in Daman use digital payments like BHIM and Paytm. Clearly Daman had switched from a cash dependent society to a digital society.

The Change and Innovation question

On my selection into the Indian Administrative Service, I was assigned the Rajasthan cadre and joined as an IAS probationer at Nagaur, as a life in the Thar Desert beckoned me for the next decade. Rural Rajasthan fascinated me as I conducted night halts in remote villages, and slept at Tehsil offices and Dak Bungalows with enthusiasm. Land Reforms and Justice Delivery Systems were areas I was really good at, as a young Sub-Divisional Officer, District Collector and then as Chairman Board of Revenue. Determined implementation of public policy, constant supervision and honest work can benefit millions of India's population. I have witnessed institutions rising and falling with individuals.

As Chairman Board of Revenue, I interacted with nearly a hundred IAS officers working in the field. The IAS has amongst its ranks some of the brightest and forward looking young officers. The pandemic has brought forth their leadership skills.

District Administration – Resilience, Courage and Conviction

The District Collectors have stood at the frontend in the battle against Coronavirus pandemic. There are numerous success stories of resilience, courage, sacrifice and conviction that have emerged from the Districts. In many ways, the young officers who have stood in the frontlines have shown maturity and commitment well beyond their seniority, implementing the strict lockdown, promoting social distancing, ensuring mobilization of village level COVID-19 taskforces and above all ensuring that the rural societies adapt to the new normal.

District Collectors showed resilience in ensuring proper cremations in COVID-19 death cases. Young Keerthi Jalli said she attended the cremations to ensure streamlining of procedures at cremation grounds. Several District Collectors ensured that online education even in remote areas – the vidya-varathi app being an outstanding example, distributing library books and mid-day meals through village volunteers. District Collectors ensured students reached home safely, as in the case of Kota, Rajasthan. To help farmers, District Collectors mobilized NRLM's self help groups to identify progressive farmers and provide effective market linkages under e-NAM. Many District Collectors also worked with SHG's to ensure door step delivery of services, some also worked with big businesses like Swiggy and Zomato to supply vegetables.

Conclusion

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Let me close my talk by citing the Prime Minister, “*Good Governance is treating development as a mass movement in order to see that fruits of development reach the poor and downtrodden.*” That was a dream I pursued since I joined service at 22.

Let me thank Prog Rumki Basu once again for this opportunity to address the students and faculty of Jamia Millia Islamia University.

Jai Hind.

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