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## GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES – THE M.L.MEHTA LEGACY

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## GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES – THE M.L.MEHTA LEGACY

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### Introduction

Shri M.L.Mehta is best remembered as Rajasthan's longest serving Chief Secretary in the last 30 years, an innovator par excellence, a caring humanitarian who made public service his life time ambition. I have spoken many times in his honour, including delivering a speech on his retirement on December 31, 1997. Today as I deliver the 6<sup>th</sup> M.L.Mehta oration, I am overwhelmed by memories of this extraordinary individual who inspired a generation of civil servants, placing Nation above self at every opportunity. Not only was he an amazing individual, he was my mentor and a father figure in my early years in service, always there to handhold and guide. I would like to thank the M.L.Mehta foundation for giving me this honour. I have chosen a subject that is close to the legend's heart – **"Good Governance Practices – the M.L.Mehta Legacy"**.

Before I head into the subject, I would like to share my fondest memories of Shri M.L.Mehta. I met Shri M.L.Mehta when I was 24, 31 years ago – he was amongst the first civil servants I met when I joined Rajasthan cadre. I vividly remember how excited I was when I heard him speak at the HCMRIPA – he spoke of the chivalry and pride of Rajasthan, the courage and resilience of Rajasthan's farmers and the informality of the Rajasthan IAS cadre. He spoke of his drought relief work as Sub-Divisional Officer Ajmer, years as Collector Dungarpur and Bhilwada and as Tribal Area Development Commissioner. He had contributed significantly to people's welfare in every posting. What shone through was his immense passion for public service, his ethical values for integrity and his deep commitment for poverty eradication.

As Chief Secretary, he conducted a night halt with the Committee of Secretaries in the CAD-IGNP colony at Bikampur – a small desert village. That 2-day visit to IGNP Command Area symbolized the very best qualities of good governance – direct interaction with people, night halts in rural areas and effective supervision from the highest levels.

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The compassion he had for the rainfed farmers of Rajasthan who were totally dependent on livestock and seasonal migration for livelihoods was a unique feature in his long years in the IAS.

He often mentioned,

*“my father said I should serve with farmers and the poor, they need your support far more than industrialists, it’s important for civil servants to represent the voiceless”*

As Chief Secretary, he ensured that the best officers in the cadre served in Agriculture, C.S.Rajan, Umesh Kumar, Subhash Garg, Anirudh Krishna and myself, all served in Agriculture in his tenure. He ensured that the World Bank and several other External Aid Agencies engaged extensively with Agriculture Department of Rajasthan – the Integrated Watershed Development Project with World Bank financing was one of the most prestigious projects implemented by the State. The State witnessed a significant number of partnerships with SIDA, Sweden, OECD, Japan, KFW Germany and CIDA Canada, almost all of them working in Agriculture and Forestry sectors. I recall visiting the World Bank, the Canadian and Swedish embassies from Government of Rajasthan a number of times was in the M.L.Mehta years.

As Chief Secretary, M.L.Mehta would often interact with village communities – in 1997, I conducted 2 of his visits to the Highest Productivity Award winning Watersheds in Ajmer district, Andheri Deori and Cheeta Kheda. In many ways, he was the father of watershed development programs in the State, as he chased the dream of drought moderation in Rajasthan. Large scale animal migration to other States from Rajasthan during the winter months concerned him. His focus areas included development of watersheds through construction of check dams, promotion of a second crop in rainfed areas, focus on animal husbandry to reduce migration and improved management of pasture lands and above all people’s participation. He conceptualized the “Gopal Yojana” which was a bare foot veterinary services scheme, training hundreds of volunteers as “Gopals” - Veterinarians with focus on breed improvement of Rajasthani cows. Post retirement, M.L.Mehta established the Rajasthan Mission on Livelihoods and continued to work with the poorest sections of the society for employment generation. Shri M.L.Mehta was a deserving recipient of the Padma Shree for his services to the Nation.

### **Good Governance – The M.L.Mehta Legacy**

Shri M.L.Mehta was appointed as Chief Secretary of Rajasthan on 1/2/1994 and demitted office on 31/12/1997. The 1994-97 years when he served as Chief Secretary, witnessed very high quality governance and several good governance models came to the fore which are still relevant in 2020. The Hindustan Times had

carried a series of articles on Governance in States, rated Rajasthan as the best governed State of India in that period.

I will present the following aspects of the M.L.Mehta legacy relevant for contemporary Governance

- Best Practices in Cadre Management - Stability of Tenures for Senior Civil Servants
- Fighting Corruption and building ethical organizations
- Enhancing State Capacity
- The pursuit of transparent systems of governance

#### *Best Practices in Cadre Management – Stability of Tenures for Senior Civil Servants*

The M.L.Mehta legacy witnessed the best practices in cadre management. In the years 1994-97, the Rajasthan IAS cadre witnessed remarkable stability of tenures. It was truly a golden age for the civil service, officers were given time to produce results on a post. In many Departments, the learning curve is steep and it takes time to produce results. Hence stability of tenures is important for sustained quality of good governance. In M.L.Mehta years, transfers were quite limited except when retirements necessitated some changes.

Let me recall M.L.Mehta's team of senior civil servants in the Secretariat – Arun Kumar as Home Secretary, I.C.Srivastava as Revenue Secretary, Dr. Adarsh Kishore as Finance Secretary, V.N.Bahadur as Health Secretary, Parmesh Chandra as Secretary Rural Development, Mohan Khanna as Secretary Planning, C.S.Rajan as Secretary Agriculture, Rakesh Hooja as Secretary CAD, Dr. Sudhir Verma as CEO all had virtually coterminous stints with Chief Secretary in their jobs. The Deputy Secretaries and Special Secretaries too had long tenures, infact Dr. Govind Sharma still retains the record of the longest tenure as Deputy Secretary DOP (A-1).

Even in field postings there was stability of tenure – V.S.Singh as Jaipur Development Commissioner, Satyanarayan Thanvi as Collector Jaipur, Shreemat Pandey as Collector Kota, Shailendra Agarwal as Collector Chittorgarh all enjoyed stable tenures. Outside Government, Public Sector Enterprises and Boards also witnessed stable civil service leadership – P.N.Bhandari as Chairman RSEB, A.S.Kapoor as Chairman IGNB to name a few.

The long tenures promoted the good governance agenda significantly – creation of new institutions, enforcement of rules to make the institutions work, and sound implementation of welfare state schemes in education, health, poverty alleviation and employment. There was also strong collective leadership in the civil service. The bureaucracy became a strong instrument in the government's development agenda. Rajasthan's GSDP growth rate was on par with India's growth rates, infrastructure

projects like the IGNP gathered considerable momentum. Several new Departments / Divisions were created – the Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation, the Lok Jumbish, the Spinfed, the Project Monitoring Unit in Planning Department.

N.Vittal, former Central Vigilance Commissioner of India has often stated that the nexus between politicians and bureaucrats can be substantially contained through a system under which all sensitive posts are filled based on the recommendations made by a neutral and objective committee. And once, the appointments are made, persons should not be transferred for a period of 3 years. In case the tenure system is strictly followed, honest civil servants may not generally feel threatened. The big lesson to take forward from the M.L.Mehta legacy as Chief Secretary Rajasthan, there exist significant benefits the State can draw from stability of tenures of senior civil servants.

### *Fighting Corruption – Building Ethical Organizations*

M.L.Mehta was extremely focused on fighting corruption and building ethical organizations. Infact he showed tremendous resilience in fighting corruption. That period witnessed the Chief Minister dismissing the Minister of Irrigation who tried to force the Irrigation Secretary to allot maintenance contracts to dubious contractual firms. The Chief Secretary recognized the negative effects of corruption and often said that corruption is a regressive tax that hurts the poor the most. He categorized officers as “honest and efficient”, honest and inefficient”, dishonest and efficient” and “dishonest and inefficient”. He tried his best to promote the “honest and efficient”. There was tremendous focus on maintaining the trust in public institutions through improved quality of trainings.

The Chief Secretary’s oversight of Departments was through the Committee of Secretaries. The Committee of Secretaries met regularly to ensure that exchange of information on governance challenges was timely. The tightening of the administrative system helped accountability of the juniors to their seniors. There were no major corruption scandals or fundamental governance failures that emerged in his period as Chief Secretary in any of the Departments in the State. Infact the practice of regular oversight of Departments was a feature of another Chief Secretary with whom I served closely – Shri Dheer Chand Samant, who conducted Plan Development Coordination Committee meetings on a regular basis.

In the Ramayana, Maharishi Valmiki has underscored the basic principle of governance in simple words “Yatha Raja, Tatha Praja”. Ethics, morality and efficiency are the foundation on which the ethical superstructure is built, moral courage is needed to go beyond the charter of public duty. It is important that public

service should be built on ethical behaviour and ethical benchmarks should be brought mainstream.

There were certain essential traits that I observed in the top leadership of ethical organizations – (a) selflessness, to sub-serve public interest as against interest of self, (b) integrity to insulate from extraneous influences, (c) objectivity to stay committed to merit based decision making, (d) accountability to ensure every act of omission or commission is yielded to public scrutiny, (e) openness, transparency to be the mantra of all official acts, (f) honesty: justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done and (g) leadership, where a true leader leads by example. M.L.Mehta lived by the dictum “I am ethical, I am accountable, I am the IAS”, and believed that the IAS competency remains anchored in the foundational and non-negotiable values of integrity and credibility.

Service, ethics and trust are inter-related and high public service ethics have a reciprocal link to high public trust. As I look back at my years in the Indian Administrative Service in Rajasthan, I notice that ethical, effective and equitable public service has always inspired public trust. As Chairman, Board of Revenue for Rajasthan, I observed how important it was to live-up to public trust, adopt professional codes of ethics, and be ruthless with proven misconduct. This was exactly the M.L.Mehta legacy. In his retirement speech on March 31, 1997 he said “I know I was ruthless with some officers, but I was convinced that I was right in taking those decisions.”

### *Enhancing State Capacity*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century governance of the Indian Administrative Service is marked by competitive recruitment, stringent training norms, timely performance appraisal and constant evaluations. There is emphasis on performance management practices, open, transparent and accountable systems of service delivery. There is increased regulatory oversight by the Central Vigilance Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Central Bureau of Investigation. India’s first Lok Pal has been appointed and fully operationalized. The accountability levels in Government today are far higher than they were ever in the past.

One of the significant contributions of M.L.Mehta to enhancing state capacity was his efforts for the revival and resurgence of the HCMRIPA as one of India’s pre-eminent training institutions. He remains HCMRIPA’s most celebrated Director and remembered as the man who developed the new HCMRIPA. The AGMUT cadre officers also trained with the Rajasthan cadre officers at HCMRIPA for several years. The Institute was equipped with state of the art lecture halls, library facilities and hostel facilities. M.L.Mehta himself was closely followed the work of Officers training at HCMRIPA, he taught at the HCMRIPA, was often seen playing tennis in the morning hours at the HCMRIPA tennis courts. The HCMRIPA conducted many

conferences, symposia, round table discussions and overall the ambience was conducive to serious academic pursuits. The Institute also published a high quality quarterly “Prashashnika” featuring articles on the governance practices in the State.

In 2020, Mission Karmayogi represents the Government’s landmark decision for appropriate training for augmentation of knowledge skills and efficiency. Built on the 6 pillars of policy framework, institutional framework, competency framework, digital learning framework, electronic human resource management system and monitoring and evaluation framework, Mission Karmayogi seeks to transform the civil service HR management from rule based to role based and one of continuous learning. The training of civil servants at the various academies will be restructured to include the optimum use of the digital learning platform of iGOT. In the short and medium term Mission Karmayogi will ensure that skill mismatches in placements are avoided by preparing civil servants of the future who are creative, constructive and innovative through transparency and technology. The most interesting aspect of the Capacity Building Mission is that it will calibrate the civil service positions to a framework of roles, activities and competencies approach to create and deliver learning content to the identified FRACs in every Government entity.

### *The pursuit of transparent systems of governance*

The demystification of Rajasthan Government was an area of governance that M.L.Mehta pursued. In the precursor days to the Right to Information, access to Government information on project works at village and gram panchayat levels was being extensively sought. It was in his tenure that social audit was introduced. The Chief Minister focused on simplification of rules and processes. He often said the “Rajasthan Tenancy Act and the Rajasthan Land Revenue Act are like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, they need to be simplified into the Hanuman Chalisa”.

In 2017-18 years, I served as Chairman Board of Revenue for Rajasthan. And I could usher in one of the most significant steps in transparent governance systems for improved justice delivery, with the Digital Rajasva Mandal project, with online judgments being made available in each of the 10,000 Gram Panchayats of Rajasthan. I travelled 8000 kilo-meters in the State to oversee the Revenue campaign in 32 districts, travelling from Barmer to Dholpur, and Sri Ganganagar to Banswada visiting several villages and interacting with thousands of officials and villagers. What struck me in every village was the proliferation of Digital Technology. Rajasthan’s villages had changed and villagers were technologically enabled. E-Mitras, Digital Merchant and Business Correspondents were visible in every village. The proliferation of Jan Dhan accounts and Aadhar had enabled a huge transformation and empowerment. The march to Digital Rajasthan was enabled by affordable smart phones, internet access along with a developed financial technology sector. Citizens no longer had to line up in long queues to pay routine utility bills as the State adopted digital platforms.



In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has redefined India's governance models. Getting to live with the coronavirus has meant less contact governance, officials having to work in masks and gloves and adoption of work from home policies for nearly 60-75 percent workforce. There has been a lot of focus on digital decision making in the central secretariat with the virtual offices being enabled through e-Office implementation, web-room meetings, file disposal on virtual private networks and work from home policies becoming more streamlined. The emphasis on integrated service portals has been a feature of the redefined governance model. E-services could be provided in real time as Government tries to provide integrated services across departments. The digital empowerment of citizens was most felt in online classrooms, literacy platforms and in participative governance. The benefits of several successful e-governance projects like e-Hospital, PMJDY, Aarogya Setu app, e-NAM and SWAYAM was seen. Further District Collectors who have stood at the frontend in the battle against the Coronavirus pandemic have shown maturity and commitment well beyond their seniority, in ensuring that rural societies adopt to the new normal.

The District Collectors of India have thrived in taking forward technology for redressal of public grievances. The disposal of public grievances has reached an overwhelming 90 percent in most States. The technology platforms in Districts have developed significantly to ensure real time monitoring and high quality redressal of public grievances.

### *Administrative Innovations*

M.L.Mehta was an administrative innovator par excellence. In the 1977-80 years, he was closely associated with conceptualization and design of "Antyodaya" which was a precursor to the "Integrated Rural Development Program". As I have said, he was the father of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation programs in Rajasthan and the Gopal Yojana. Many watersheds in Rajasthan won awards for Highest Productivity in Rainfed Agriculture in his tenure – Cheeta Kheda, Losing, IWDP Bhilwada, Andheri Deori. He would often sit in the midst of farmers in Bhadsoda listening to issues and suffering on the ground. He returned from Rajasthan's villages to find knowledge solutions to vexing issues of State policy in consultation with National and international stake holders. He visited the World Bank headquarters once a year for consultations. M.L.Mehta ensured the State's response was effective and Government became a part of the solution rather than blocking progress.

Let me cite some of the important administrative innovations for 2020. At the Central Government level, the One Nation, One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC), the UDAN Scheme stand out. The ONORC scheme has introduced national, inter-state, inter-district and intra-district portability with the citizen empowered to walk into any fair price shop of choice. The authentication is done by aadhar. So far 26 States/ UT's



have on-boarded the ONORC. The initiative looks at collecting data into a central repository and easing portability, benefitting a large number of migratory workers, labor, daily wagers in both organized and unorganized labor by providing them options for an FPS dealer of their choice. The initiative also allows tracking of entitlement of beneficiary and checking so that they do not draw twice in the home state as well as the sale state.

The UDAN initiative is a regional connectivity scheme conceptualized by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, involving airlines to bid for routes connecting un-served and unserved airports with Government providing the viability gap financing and other concessions. The UDAN initiative has benefitted passengers with affordable air connectivity, airlines with concessions for operating regional routes, remote and regional areas. Over 77,000 flights, 42 lac passengers and 48 new airports have been added to the Indian aviation map.

At the State Government level, the Bihar Government has reformed the Examination Systems and Processes of the Bihar School Examination Board adopting online registration, evaluation and computerization of the entire processes. A centralized online admissions system for 23.39 lac students has made the BSEB a role model for other Boards in the country. Another success story has been the Prayagraj Mela Authority's Kumbh Mela 2019, which hosted 24 crore people including more than 5 crore pilgrims on one day. Projects worth Rs. 4300 crores were undertaken for the Swachh Kumbh which was also a Secure Kumbh, Digital Kumbh and Cultural Kumbh.

At the District level, the Imphal East District of Manipur developed the "Bleed with Pride" campaign to empower women/ younger girls to understand menstruation as a natural body cycle to fight stigma attached with menstruation. The District Administration Imphal East provided reusable sanitary pads to 5000 students of government schools of classes 6 to 12. Another innovative project is the Chandauli Black Project wherein the District Administration cultivated chemical free black rice resulting in farmer's income being raised from Rs. 54532/ annum to Rs. 255500/ annum.

### *Concluding Observations*

I have covered the vast canvass on the subject of "Good Governance Practices – the M.L.Mehta Legacy". It was always a very positive experience to serve under M.L.Mehta because of the tremendous confidence, stability of tenures imparted to an official. Further one could be certain that the Chief Secretary would back the efforts for fighting corruption and building ethical organizations. There was support for transparent and accountable systems of governance. Officers who were represented meritocracy, displayed abiding commitment to hard work and were innovators were encouraged. In many ways the 1994-97 years were the golden years for the Civil

Service of Rajasthan. Let me conclude by saying, “a Constitution may indicate the direction in which we are to move, but the social structure will decide how far we are able to move and at what pace”. M.L.Mehta was a trend setter for good governance initiatives in Rajasthan.

Let me thank the M.L.Mehta foundation for inviting me to deliver the 6<sup>th</sup> M.L.Mehta oration.

Jai Hind.

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### About the Speaker

V.Srinivas is the Additional Secretary to Government of India in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions with additional charge of Director General, National Centre for Good Governance. He has served as Chairman of the Board of Revenue for Rajasthan, Ajmer and the Rajasthan Tax Board. He has also served as Secretary to Government of Rajasthan, Deputy Secretary and Joint Secretary in Government of India, as Advisor to Executive Director International Monetary Fund, Washington DC, Director General National Archives of India and as Deputy Director (Administration) at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. V.Srinivas is an Indian Council of World Affairs Fellow for the years 2017-19 for his book “India’s Relations with the International Monetary Fund 1991-2016 – 25 years in perspective”. V.Srinivas’s 2<sup>nd</sup> book “Towards a New India – Governance Transformed 2014-19” was published in 2019 by Konark Publishers. V.Srinivas has a Master’s Degree in Chemical Engineering from College of Technology, Osmania University. He joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1989, at age 22, and has 32 years of distinguished service. V.Srinivas has authored 166 articles/ papers on public finance and public administration and delivered 66 orations. He is a senior policy maker, an academican and an institution builder par excellence.