
Need for Reform in Governance of India

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India had been the British colony for almost two hundred years. The British had not only ruled the country with the aim of exploitation but also changed the socioeconomic fabric of the country. The country gained independence on 15 August 1947. However, the top freedom fighters who became policy makers continued to follow the same pattern of governance, which was followed by the British earlier, disregarding the fact that the type of governance was ill suited for independent country. India adopted the constitution on 26th January 1951. Later, the Planning Commission came into existence with the Prime Minister of the country as the Chairman. Community development program was started from 1952, which envisaged people's participation in the development. Each district was divided into Development Blocks and each block having about hundred villages was divided in ten circles, each circle having about ten villages. In 1951–52 the program was started in 55 blocks and for want of funds and trained personnel, the entire country could be covered in more than 5000 blocks by 1962–63. These Development Blocks are functional even today. The reform suggested in the below-mentioned paragraphs is highlighted here. I am suggesting to recruit a separate class of IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officers with similar status and service conditions to work as District

Development Officers democratically with extension techniques for improving and strengthening democratic governance in India. The Block Development Officer was the key official for development in the block and he was assisted by six to eight subject matter specialists known as Extension Officers, who were specialists in various fields such as Agriculture Extension Officer, Animal Husbandry Extension Officer, Industries Extension Officer and so on. Development work at village level was looked after by village-level workers or Gram Sevaks. The District Collector was the overall supervising officer of this development program. There was an elaborate arrangement of job and orientation training of Block Development and Extension Officers from one to three months. The Gram Sevaks were also imparted with pre-recruitment training of two years. Paradoxically, the district collectors were not imparted any training in connection with this developmental program, even though they were supposed to be the guiding, supervising, and controlling authority for the Block Development Officers and other officers at district level. Due to lack of the training as well as proper perception of the program, the collectors converted this well conceived developmental program into target oriented program, wherein the collectors were

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concerned with physical achievement of the program instead of the developmental or social impact of the same.

The Planning Commission soon realized this and therefore, introduced three-tier Panchayati Raj system starting with Gram Sabha at village level, Block Panchayat at Development Block level, and district or Jilha Panchayat or Jilha Parishad at district level. Wherever this has worked effectively, Jilha Parishad has virtually been the district administration. Some states like Maharashtra and Gujarat have appointed a second IAS officer to work as District Development Officer along with the regular collector. The author had an opportunity to observe the proceedings of the Jilha Parishad by taking permission from the Chairman of the Jilha Parishad. The meeting was conducted by the elected Chairman of the Jilha Parishad. The IAS Secretary of the Jilha Parishad was not permitted to participate in the discussion except when the Chairman directly asked him a question. The Chairman used to ask him only about the rules or legal position or some finer points. The Chairman of the Jilha Parishad was provided transport facilities and residence cum office in one of the buildings owned by the state. This

is taking the people's program in the right direction; the only shortcoming in this was when the District Development Officer was transferred after completion of his three years tenure as a collector of same or other district or given some other assignment unrelated with district development. The experience gained as the development functionary is lost forever. On the basis of this and similar experience a reference was made by the author to the Planning Commission suggesting that separate cadre of District Development Officers should be started, wherein an IAS officer should continue throughout his service as District Development Officer, while having the same status and promotional opportunities as other IAS officers. I do not know whether the matter was brought to the notice of the Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission but a reply was received from the office of the Planning Commission stating that there is no proposal to increase the cadres in the service. I am of the firm opinion that a reform in the governance in this regard is very much necessary. Equal number of IAS officers should be posted as District Development Officers as the traditional number of collectors are presently in existence. Except for their initial training, these separate cadre officers should be trained specially in the developmental work and should remain throughout their service as District Development Officers.

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Their status and promotional opportunities should be same as their counterparts, i.e., the traditional collectors. This reform will go a long way in effective implementation of people-oriented program.

Another area in which reform is necessary is various specialized subject matters related to development in the district. For example, the agriculture department should stop recommending use of high doses of chemical fertilizers and equally or more costly chemicals used for plant protection. Along with the first green revolution, most of the world famous scientists have recommended use of high dosage of NPK fertilizers. Indiscriminate use of these fertilizers for last four to five

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decades has resulted in heavy dependence on costly plant protection measures. This costly fertilizer cum plant protection type of cultivation has resulted in agricultural debts for most farmers. Spirally increasing cost of cultivation is making it impossible for the farmers to repay the increasing debts. Thousands of farmers have committed suicide due to this phenomenon. India has already developed organic farming in almost all crops in all the states. The cost of organic farming is negligible compared to use of chemicals both as fertilizers and pesticides. One member of ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics) visited various foreign countries and during his visit in 1990s he came across one book called "Vrikshayurveda". The book is in Sanskrit and he was able to bring the microfiche of the book. The book was translated into English with the help of Head of Sanskrit Department of Osmania University, Hyderabad. No costly chemicals have been advocated as plant protection measures in this book. Various plant materials have been used for plant protection in this ancient book. This only confirms that dependence on costly and poisonous chemicals is absolutely not necessary. What is required is proper dissemination of this information.

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There may be a period of vision for a couple of years till the reforms indicated above to improve and strengthen the democratic structure and method with the objective of promoting all sided development of the country are implemented. Technical department like agriculture has to discourage recommending high cost of production technology like use of costly chemicals

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and promote low-cost technology like natural farming to boost up production and productivity, ultimately leading to sustainable agriculture.

To sum up, I quote a book entitled “Vision 2020” written by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, a visionary scholar. In this book, written much before he was elevated to the office of the President of India, he has also talked about the reform in governance in India.