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GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMED



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Viksit Bharat @2047

Governance Transformed

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Foreword

Paul Joyce²

The first serious discussion of the need for a new book on public administration and public governance in India occurred within a conversation involving Secretary V. Srinivas of the Indian Administrative Services (whose responsibilities included being head of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, abbreviated to DARPG) and the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS). This was followed, in November 2023, by an important meeting to frame the content and aims of the new book. This was chaired by DARPG and involved IIAS officials. Critical decisions emerged from this meeting. One of these concerned the composition of the editorial group. Also important in terms of the projected approach of the book, Steve Troupin, Executive Secretary of IIAS, spoke at this meeting on the importance of a reference book on Public Administration in India, and Fabienne Maron, Scientific Secretary of IIAS, suggested the desirability of the new book looking at administrative theory and practice.

Two considerations influenced thinking on when the new book should be finished and published. The first was an important anniversary in the history of public governance in India. On January 26, 1950, the Constitution of India was adopted by the nation. This meant that the 75th anniversary of the Republic of India would be in January 2025. And it can be appreciated from reading the book that many of the authors who contributed to it had this momentous anniversary in mind. The second consideration was the IIAS-DARPG conference

² Director of Publications, IIAS

scheduled for February 2025. This was planned to take place in India and be hosted by DARPG.

This book has been written by a team of experts with a deep knowledge and understanding of the practical affairs of governance and public administration in India. As a result, the book is an impressively authoritative reference on public governance and public administration in India. It should be of great interest to early-career civil servants and early-career policymakers in India and of enormous interest to many policymakers, government administrators, and university academics around the world. It contains much detail, much factual material, and much rich description of not only what has been happening in recent times but also of historical developments that will surely help readers to better understand some of the distinctive features of public governance and administration in India.

The subjects covered in the book justify calling this a comprehensive treatment of public governance and administration in India. The following list highlights just a few of the subjects addressed: the Constitution, democracy, decentralisation, social justice, citizen empowerment, gender inclusion, the civil service, digital change, and major policy sectors (health, higher education, rural development, urban development, agriculture, climate change and the environment, relations with the world, etc.).

As IIAS approaches its own anniversary in 2030, when it will be 100 years since it was founded as an institution with scientific purpose in Madrid by the International Congress of Administrative Sciences, it remains focused on the importance of its scientific mission of addressing the problems and challenges facing national and international public administrations. It addresses this scientific mission by facilitating and hosting discussions of practical experience and theoretical analyses by practitioners and academics from all regions of the world, from all cultures. It appreciates the everlasting unfolding of experiences and problems, and the

international diversity of those experiences and problems. To pursue its scientific mission, it is currently embarked on encouraging research and publications that carry out “deep dives” into public governance and administration in individual countries and comparative analysis of multiple countries to draw out lessons about actions and consequences and causes and effects.

The collaboration between DARPG and IIAS in the design and realisation of this new book on India can therefore be seen as a contribution to a long-term strategic endeavour to advance international knowledge creation and exchange in public administration. It could turn out to be a very fruitful collaboration in the sense that the experiences of India over the last decade could be of great practical and theoretical significance for the international exchange of knowledge and lessons. In 2015 the Cabinet of the Government of India authorised a fundamental reform of India’s public governance institutions. It had been decided to replace the long-established system of planning, which the Cabinet had set up in 1950, with a new system for strategic policymaking and to officially lodge part of the government capability in strategic policymaking in a new body, NITI Aayog. This decision was the subject of a Cabinet Resolution:

In the context of governance structures, the changed requirements of our country, point to the need for setting up an institution that serves as a Think Tank of the government—a directional and policy dynamo. The proposed institution has to provide governments at the central and state levels with relevant strategic and technical advice across the spectrum of key elements of policy. This includes matters of national and international import on the economic front, dissemination of best practices from within the country as well as from other nations, the infusion of new policy ideas and specific issue-based support. The institution has to be able to respond to the changing and more integrated world that India is part of.

From other aspects of the 2015 Cabinet Resolution, it was clear that the new system was not intended to be a totally centralised and totally technocratic system of strategic policymaking. The role of the State level of government and the new system's "pillars" were envisaged as follows. First, the States were to be partners. Thus, NITI Aayog was charged with developing "a shared vision of national development priorities, sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in the light of national objectives". Second, the pillars specified a public governance system with the following elements: serving the aspirations of society and individuals, responsiveness, citizen participation, empowering women, social inclusion (i.e., inclusion of all groups), equal opportunities for the youth of India, and technology-enabled government transparency. In all respects, this was a progressive agenda.

This reform can be regarded as a large-scale experiment in public governance. Even when steered by assumptions, beliefs, insights, theories, and so on, the development of public governance in history is always, in the last instance, experimental. And such experiments can be opportunities for the global community of public administration—practitioners and academics—to scientifically evaluate and learn from the trial and error of pioneering experiments.

Nothing I have just written here should be taken to mean that this book is being offered as a systematic evaluation of the success of this very recent experiment with a strategic policymaking reform to the public governance system, but it is important for the reader to bear in mind that India has been transitioning from its decades-old planning system and has been approaching public policymaking and execution in a totally new way since 2015.

There have been signs that the new system of strategic policymaking is compatible with positive national development results. In the years since 2015, some of the statistical data available on India shows the following:

- Poverty: estimated percentages of the population living in poverty are reducing.
- Economy: unemployment is falling as a percentage of the total labour force between 2015 and 2024.
- Health and Education: the percentage of the population using at least basic drinking water services is rising; government spending on health and education is increasing as a percentage of GDP; neonatal and under-five mortality rates are reducing; and life expectancy at birth is increasing (until 2020, when the global pandemic reversed the positive trend in life expectancy).
- Environmental trends: CO₂ emissions per capita from fossil fuel combustion and cement production are increasing; the renewable energy share in total final energy consumption is increasing (over the period 2015 to 2020).

So, it seems that the human development-type indicators (access to drinking water, health, education, and poverty) moved in a positive direction, and there was a positive trend in terms of renewable energy. The emission of CO₂ per capita is the exception in this clutch of indicators, with India showing a negative trend in this respect.

These achievements by India in relation to human development and sustainability indicators are worth underlining. The “average” country over the last decade has made only modest progress on sustainable development indicators, and it is noticeable that India is one of the countries we might describe as doing better than average. Some of the other countries in this category are situated in East Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. I am thinking of Cambodia and Indonesia in East Asia, and Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain in the Arabian Peninsula. This may suggest that India’s experiences over the last decade may resonate particularly strongly with these other societies that appear to have progressed relatively well in terms of national development and sustainability.

It may be too early to conclude if a new approach to strategic policymaking has now been institutionalised within the public governance system of India and is now delivering the required policy dynamism and agility, but the book does provide some interesting data and insights about new policies and successful government innovations in the past decade.

Some examples of innovation and the government demonstrating agility, which are to be found in the book, include the following.

A chapter on the health sector (Chapter 10) includes a description of the third National Health Policy (2017) and the government's recent efforts to improve health care. Within this description is a mention of the increases to the government-financed insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat–Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which is reported to have increased substantially since 2014. This is a government health-care programme operated on a massive scale. As stated in the chapter, “Under AB-PMJAY 345 million Ayushman cards have been issued, and 29,914 hospitals have been empanelled. Sixty-five million authorised hospital admissions have taken place under the scheme”.

The chapter on agriculture (Chapter 4) includes a discussion of what the government has been doing since 2014. It is stated that the Prime Minister announced an ambition to double the income of farmers. Consistent with this ambition, since 2014, there have been a number of new government programmes and schemes introduced. “These include a scheme for soil health cards to all the farmers, National Agriculture Market (e-NAM), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) which provides very low premium for farmers.” The PMKSY scheme, launched in 2015, supports the use of micro-irrigation technologies. The PMFBY scheme, which is a crop insurance scheme, differs from previous schemes because the insurance premium for farmers is very low, with obvious implications for its acceptability and take-up.

A chapter on digital public infrastructure (Chapter 4) argues that India's economic development plans rest heavily on digital transformation. Developments in this respect began with a plan for e-governance in 2006. Three years later, in 2009, came the Aadhaar Project which was set up to provide each person in India with a unique identity number. Then, after 2014, the Indian Government had a policy of integration of Aadhaar with other government programmes, which we might assume was critical for its exploitation to increase government productivity. For example, it is reported that this led to greater efficiency and less fraud in welfare services:

By linking Aadhaar with Jan Dhan bank accounts and mobile numbers (the “JAM” Trinity), the government streamlined the delivery of social welfare programs, reducing fraud and ensuring that benefits reached the intended recipients directly and efficiently. This proved particularly crucial during the pandemic, enabling swift and targeted disbursement of financial aid to those most in need.

In the period up to March 2021, it seems, the Indian Government had saved slightly over an estimated 1% of GDP due to Direct Benefit Transfers and other reforms.

Another chapter (Chapter 3) also addresses the Direct Benefit Transfer reforms applied to the government's operations in making payments as a part of welfare services. This chapter includes an analysis and evaluation of what happened when COVID-19 came to India in 2020. The economic consequences of the pandemic soon hit the incomes of many including those living in poor households. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) was launched in March 2020 and provided direct cash transfers and free food grains, helping the poor, women, and senior citizens. Within a few months, some 200 million people had been helped through this scheme.

As our final example, we turn to the subject of energy and in particular renewable energy (Chapter 11). The Indian Government in 2008 formulated the National Action Plan on

Climate Change (NAPCC), and work began on various missions which included missions related to solar energy and energy efficiency. In 2015 the Indian Government launched a scheme known as Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) that was intended to begin the phasing out of fossil fuel-based vehicles. In 2016 the Cabinet of the Indian Government approved funding related to the development of clean coal technologies. In 2024 the Indian Government launched the Surya Ghar Scheme under which households are provided with free electricity, and they can access financial support to enable solar panels to be installed on their roofs. This last scheme is aimed at 10 million (1 crore) households.

These and other examples in the book build a credible picture of some adeptness by the Indian Government and civil service in using strategic policymaking in public governance. The examples in which the innovation involves digital technology also suggest an ability to increase government efficiency and achieve large-scale public service system reforms (e.g., Direct Benefit Transfer).

From the point of view of international knowledge creation and exchange, and the global dialogue on lessons for public administration, it would be good to see this volume succeeded by a book that reports on the extent to which strategic policymaking in India has been firmly institutionalised as part of a decentralised and inclusive public governance system providing both innovation and agility. This might involve enquiring into the mechanics of strategic policymaking in India and how the civil service adapted and developed appropriate capabilities to make it a success. But in the meantime, this book surely offers many opportunities for policy learning for practitioners and academics in India and for practitioners and academics in the rest of the world.