

Public accountability and transparency: the imperatives of good governance



Madhav Godbole's book, 'Public accountability and transparency: the imperatives of good governance' deals with the contemporary political, administrative, social scenario in the country. It also addresses the issues relating to the largely untouched areas of judiciary, media and corporate governance. It presents a well documented analysis of the current milieu and all agencies involved in the functioning of the state.

In this book, the author gives a balanced and constructive criticism. He identifies the problem areas and gives his own solutions to those issues. In his first chapter, 'We the people' he analyses the working of the Parliamentary committees, privileges and lists the specific failures of parliament which have 'contributed to the erosion of the confidence of the people in its capacity to deliver'. In his chapter on the 'Unfinished Agenda', the author has minutely scrutinized the electoral reforms. In his inimitable style he has also drawn attention to the weaknesses of the Election Commission of India and has criticized the infructuous expenditure incurred by it on certain schemes. In the chapter, '.

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' the author traces the history of representation of the Muslims in Government and parliament. He opines that to address the urgent problems facing the Muslims in education and employment it is necessary to 'give adequate representation to minorities in the lok sabha and State legislatures'. This often clamoured demand gains added significance coming from a former Home secretary. Addressing the issue of decentralization of governance the author strongly supports the recommendations of the

National commission set up for the review of the working of the Constitution. He supports the idea of the creation of a separate 'fiscal domain' for panchayats and municipalities and for setting up panchayat Councils.

In his chapter, 'Reinventing Government', the author addresses the concept of right to information and criticizes the state and central governments for not sharing secret information even with the judicial commissions appointed by them. The author questions the role of RAW and IB which he feels have been used increasingly by ruling parties for their own purposes. The chapter on 'Some major concerns' looks at downsizing governments and discusses political reforms and human rights. He analyses the working of the police in a balanced approach. On one hand he supports giving autonomy to the police in the discharge of their responsibilities. On the other, he pinpoints their failures and their insensitive approach.

In his multifaceted approach to governance, the author then touches upon the financial sector. He strongly believes that budgets should be more transparent and user friendly. His ideas on budgetary reforms highlight specific areas of financial reforms like risk analysis, credit rating of PSU's etc. In a very innovative suggestion, the author suggests a new role for the Comptroller and Auditor General and setting up of a new National Audit Office as well as a Public Accounts Commission. The idea is bold in its approach as the essence of setting up of the National Audit Office is auditing "value for money".

Quoting the case of UK, where such a Commission has been set up, he makes a fine distinction between audit based on legality, regularity and

propriety laid down under section 13 of the CAG Act in India and CAG's role in UK where the CAG's responsibility is to carry out an evaluation into the efficiency and effectiveness with which a department, authority or any other body had used its resources in discharging its functions. He believes it is truly time the statutory auditing of the CAG is taken out of the straitjacket of finding faults with procedures and moving on to see how expenditure can be so scrutinized as to emphasize the aspects of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In a developing economy like India with liberalization as the driving force, the government executive has to act in a very dynamic situation. Bureaucracy can no longer confine itself merely to following rules and regulations laid down in the past. Time is of the essence and achievement of objectives is of primary importance.

Perhaps, if this new concept is adopted, governments would show more initiative and government executives would not feel hampered in their working. In the next chapter on 'Corporate and Cooperative Governance' the author has delved deep into corporate governance. He has made a vast study of the literature in the US, UK, and other European countries and analysed reports of various committees including the task force of the Confederation of Indian Industry, SEBI and the latest Naresh Chandra Committee on Corporate audit and governance. The author emphasizes the need for credible and strong regulatory mechanisms.

He stresses that public accountability and transparency are as important for the corporate sector as for any other sector of the economy. Regarding cooperatives the author draws heavily from the experiences of Maharashtra.

In the last chapter of the book, the author has comprehensively analysed <https://assignbuster.com/public-accountability-and-transparency-the-imperatives-of-good-governance/>

and documented the working of the judiciary and its misgivings that have been created in the minds of the public about the functioning of the courts in general. The author appreciates the 15 point code of ethics adopted by the judiciary.

The author also analyses the role of the media. He draws attention to the cases of corruption amongst journalists and the decreasing credibility of the press. The abuse by the management of the newspapers for personal gains has also been highlighted. In the end, the author has come to the conclusion that there is no substitute for the involvement of the common person and civil society in governance and in the endeavors to achieve the objectives of governance.

Civil society cannot keep itself away from what is happening in the judiciary, the media, the Parliament and the executive. In fact, one truly feels that unless civil society acts, and acts fast, these pillars of democracy, set up by our founding fathers, will gradually erode. The book is comprehensive in its approach, constructive in its criticism, and educative for the general reader. In the end, however, one feels that, as citizens, we cannot escape the blame for the mess. While on the one hand we are developing economically and creating a niche for ourselves in the international arena, the constitutional structures within the country are getting eroded.

Obviously even though God is in his heaven, all is not right with India. After reading this book, the “feel good” factor seems to fade away leaving the reader with a nagging question-Quo Vadis? (Wither goest thou)