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GOVERNANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT: A DELIVERY END POINT OF VIEW

What every nation needs is development, comprehensive development, extensive development, balanced development, and rapid development. This is saying the obvious. Governance strives to assure that. This is also obvious.

What may not be so obvious is the relationship between the two. Once we know the relationship in clear terms, we can ask and answer: How to make it highly productive and effective?

Governance is done by the few and development is done by the many. The few facilitate and the many perform.

How can the few go about their job so that the many can play their part well and nobly? What can the few do and not do to facilitate the creative and contributive effort of the many?

What do the many think? What are some of their concerns and suggestions?

This paper attempts to answer these questions.

AS A CITIZEN

As a citizen, I would like to make my contribution to development, wherever I am, whatever I am.

I am now not making the contribution that I am capable of.

I concede I am partly responsible for this situation.

One reason for my not contributing what I well can is the state of governance. I wish to explore and explain the part those in charge of governance are playing and can play.

ARE CAN

This priority task was not undertaken then. It has not been undertaken even after fifty years of political independence.

It would have been fairly easy to undertake this step immediately after the country got independence from foreign rulers. The fervour of the new found freedom would have broken all defences and given the energy to take up massive developmental work at micro level.

It is now difficult and almost impossible. The powers that be have practised this colonial governance style for some decades now and they have developed a vested interest in the status quo.

The British did what they did for their purpose. The successors to the British governance continue to do what the British did for their own purpose and the purpose is not development. The purpose seems to be to enjoy the fruits of the British type of colonial governance! A cynic pointed out that brown RULERS have taken the place of white rulers.

Development was a casualty then and development is a casualty now since the governance mode has not changed in substance. Governance is not development-centred yet. People have not got the freedom to perform. No wonder, some have started talking about 'a second freedom'.

WE CAN MAKE A BEGINNING

If we mean business, if we want comprehensive, extensive and rapid development, we have to make a clean break from the past. This we can begin at the village level.

As a citizen of the village, so long as I am doing anything for the good of the citizen - and let an Elders Council of the village say that I do that - I should not be hemmed in by the governance machinery.

For a practical reason, I would suggest that the colonial rules and regulations be summarily scrapped.

I say 'summarily scrapped' because otherwise we will set up a committee to examine and report. This committee will take unpardonable time. Worse still, it will be moved by considerations of caution and control. Since the familiar has a compulsive influence on people in power, they will vote for the familiar, however irrelevant, however counterproductive it is.

A case in point is what happened when we set up the CSIR in the fifties, to have class development in the area of scientific and industrial research. Professor Thacker who was the first chairman of the governing council told at a public meeting what happened at the very first meeting of the governing council. A few argued that to have first class research and development, they should have meaningful rules and

regulations that will facilitate research work. The majority said that the CSIR should have the same rules and regulations like any other government department! And it won. Convenience, control and familiarity won. Courage, creativity and contribution lost. It was not the fault of our scientists that we did not get outstanding results; it was the fault of the governance system. We did achieve some results. Whatever was achieved was not because of the governance that obtained but in spite of that.

Governance can be a facilitating factor or a restrictive factor. In good part, it has remained a restrictive factor. Not intentionally, I concede.

From time to time, the country has made attempts to review the governance strategy and style. We had a massive operation in the form of the Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Shri Morarji Desai and later by Shri Hanumanthappa. Many bright people made significant contributions. Crores of rupees were spent. Alas! Their reports and recommendations met the usual fate - they found their fate in some dungeon.

If you don't want to commit yourself, committee yourself is a saying. When you want to delay and destroy an idea, set up a committee, to presumably examine the idea. This has been the approach all along, all over the world and we in this country are not the only victims of this mind set.

This briefly explains why I plead that we scrap all the existing rules and regulations and think fresh and evolve facilitating rules and regulations. The fewer the better, the simpler the better.

To test out, we can have a pilot project in selected villages for a defined period. We can make the necessary course corrections and develop a governance model for villages, a model that will release the creative energies of the people living in the lakhs of villages of India.

People in the villages, at least the well meaning ones, do not even say: Give us the tools. They say: Don't prevent us from doing what needs to be done in this village for the people of this village. You need not facilitate our efforts. Only, do not restrict us.

INFORMATION

If this is too drastic, governance can help us play our part even under the current dispensation, by taking one helpful step. That is, it can make relevant and current information freely available. Such information is power in the hands of people who wish to take to development work.

Thanks to the progress in information technology, this is possible. In certain places, like railway bookings, this possibility has been taken advantage of.

In most places, the information is kept as a state secret!

The mischief that this governance approach does to development is common knowledge. The people behind the governance desk can tell why something CANNOT BE DONE.

Information, organised information, up to date information, relevant information can make a difference in the hands of people who wish to contribute to development.

As a law-abiding citizen, I want to know what is the law. I do not know it now. I am handicapped. I am harassed.

I visualise a well-manned information centre in every village, town and city. This centre will serve its purpose, provided it is managed by competent NGOs.

If we mean well, we can take a lesson from Singapore. In the early 1960s, the Singapore government set up an Economic Development Authority. It staffed the agency with people who took a development-oriented governance approach. How can I help the interested people to get going in establishing factories and service units in record time and thereby help the economic development of the country. The concerted action the agency took made possible setting up units in weeks after they made the application for official clearance. The rest is history.

Why a separate agency, someone enquired of the former Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. His reply was: Old habits die hard. People and agencies soaked in the colonial tradition cannot measure up to the urgent needs of the country. We need to have a total break from the past.

We have set up similar agencies but most of them are only in form but not in spirit. We in governance seem to be jealous of people who create development. We almost get a sadistic delight in delaying things.

Also, we have developed a vested interest in delays.

We have slogans in many government offices: May I help you? So often, they are jokes. Unless governance agencies make it easy for me to work hard and work well and work smoothly, I am tempted to call them jokes.

Without doubt, some of the states are moving in the helpful direction and it is all to the good. We have however a big gap between the facilitating governance we need and the restrictive governance we have.

I believe it is only people who can bring out the development we need. The development that the government takes up can only be selective.

As a citizen, who is keen on development, I want for a start a governance that will NOT HINDER. May be later, I can hope for a governance that will help.

It is possible that governance is keen to help me so I can help development in a big way. In that case, please ask ME and I will tell you what helps and what hurts.

I can help you more than all your experts, local and foreign. I know where the shoe pinches. Credit me with an iota of intelligence and decency.

TIME

Time is a key factor in development. The saying is, we make time our friend or it turns our enemy. Governance in our country is yet to make time our friend. It has no consideration for the time of the development-partner, the people.

A Peruvian economist observed that to start an enterprise, governance machinery in USA makes it possible in 7 days and in Peru 7 weeks. Probably he is not aware it can be 7 months, if not 7 years. The hardy ones would not mind 7 years but most of us who can help development are not hardy enough.

A senior retired administrator, according to a press report, observed that in the planning commission, papers take as many as 267 handlings before they reach the action level. May be, he was exaggerating to make a point but the point is clear.

There is a belief in some quarters that the more a decision is delayed, the more deliberated the decision becomes. . Too safe can prove to be unsafe. This is the case with the best part of governance.

SPEED MONEY

There is also the phenomenon that it pays to delay, it literally pays. It handomely pays!

That is why they talk of "speed money". We may recall the press report that income tax personnel delayed the tax refund papers of as important a person as Bijesh Misra were held back because "his 10%" was not paid.

Those who are part of governance ring their hands and say: This is the way things are! Governance in other countries have handled such case fairly and firmly. Why can't we?

KNOWING-DOING GAP

The problem is not one of knowing what need to be done. The problem is one of doing. There is a big gap between knowing what can be done and what is done. Once governance addresses itself to the mission of bridging this gap, it will be helping development in a big way. We the people will look after the development where we are and wherever we are. Governance need only do what only it can do, to help us be active and effective partners in development.

LEADERSHIP

What we need is not more study tours, more consultants, more high power committees. What we need is the power of leadership. Even today, in certain places, development has been effected in record time, in a world class way. That is mostly because of the leadership of the governance agency. Those who headed the agencies had the wish and the will to achieve. Despite all the existing handicaps, they strove to achieve and achieved. Hats off to them!

This is happening only occasionally and almost by chance. Should we take a systematic move to assure this type of leadership for every development project or at least the critical ones, we will have something to crow about. Conventional considerations and political considerations have to give way to governance leadership considerations.

We have one traditional advantage in our country. The number one man sets the direction and the tempo. People may come back to their "original" state after he leaves the seat of leadership. So long as he is there, things work. This we have been seeing but we are still to capitalise on this phenomenon of yata raja tata praja.

DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNALISM

Governance is happening in the country. Development is happening in the country. One way to have more of this is to celebrate it. One way to celebrate it is to give it due publicity.

Our worthy President Shri Abdul Kalam once observed that in Israel achievements are given due publicity practically every day by the national dailies.

For years I have pleaded on public platforms that at least the major newspapers of the country make a decision that for the one long year, on the first and last page of the paper they will publish only achievements and all that went into the achievements. What a difference it will make for the morale of our country! May be, governance can do their bit to this possibility; I can even call it a necessity

A workable step will be to set up a well managed 24 hours Development and Governance TV Channel. The inspiration and the information this TV Channel provides can make a big difference to the spirit of the people.

UNDUE CAUTION

Caution is an important element in governance. I concede that. I suggest therefore that you start with the village, with a few villages in each eager state.

Please do not tell me what I cannot do. Please tell me what I can do. When you restrict me, please give me a reason other than "the rule-book-says". Please let me operate as a free man in a free country. Please let me oblige the development needs of my country than the convenience and personal needs of a petty official. Holding me down was the motive of colonial governance. By default we are still holding on to that tradition. By default a privileged few have started 'benefiting' by that tradition. Let us make a conscious move to have development-centric governance in as many places as we can, as quickly we can and let us make it a wave. Let us remind ourselves we are in good part a nation of able people, well meaning people, keen people, people who wish to play an active role in development who wish to together take the country to possible places. Let us not stand in our way; let not governance stand in our way. Winston Churchill said in another context, "so many owe so much to so few". Let us say this of the so few that make the governance of THIS country.

This is the plea and prayer of a representative citizen who is keen to play his proud role in development.

DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNALISM

Governance is happening in the country. Development is happening in the country. (The way to have more of this is to schedule it. One way to schedule it is to give it the publicity)

Our monthly President's Report should be an open observation that in local governments we give the publicity practically every day by the national dailies.

For years I have pleaded on public platforms that at least the major newspapers of the country make a decision that for the one year, on the first and last page of the paper they will publish only articles on development and all that went into the achievement. What a difference it will make for the people of our country. May the government can do their bit to the publicity. I even call it a necessity.