

# ROLE OF ETHICS IN INDIAN ADMINISTRATION FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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## ABSTRACT

*Ethics has been the distinctive feature of Indian administration since ancient times. Public servants were expected to follow strict ethical principles and the immoral ones were shown no leniency. Today, India has developed in several spheres, but unfortunately it is facing severe ethical crisis in both administrative and political system. Even the recent trends in public administration create a conception that the capacity of democratic system of our country to ensure probity in public life is rapidly deteriorating. As ours is a developing economy, thus it is through better network of public service delivery we can achieve inclusive and sustainable development goals. There is a need to think deeply over ethical issues and to re-establish the significance of ethical principles in the Indian administrative system. This paper discusses the theoretical aspects of ethics in Indian administrative system, its need and increasing role in current scenario. In this paper the public service which has been taken is the ration distribution to the poor households through the ration card. The objective of the study is to explore and examine the root causes of ethical crises among the state functionaries and its impact on delivery of public services with special reference to Public Distribution System (hereafter cited as PDS). The paper attempts to find out what role can ethics play in delivering this basic need of life i.e. food to the poor.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ethics, Governance, Public Service Delivery, Public Distribution System.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of state has been transformed with the growing effect of globalization. The state which was identified as a regulator, interventionist and producer in earlier times is presently recognized as a partner, facilitator and promoter. Even today in the globalize era most of the basic services are provided by the government agencies such as food, drinking water, electricity, etc. therefore, expectations from the state apparatus are increased to perform. Though the Indian administrative system is gradually marching towards new public management, but still the bureaucratic system seems ineffective and inefficient in delivering such services and, therefore, the quality of those services is often questionable. It is the duty of the public agencies to provide the basic services timely and redress the grievances related to those services within a given time framework and thus be accountable to the citizens, because citizens are entitled to get the services from the state which is their rightful right.

That is why the Second Administrative Reforms Commission includes the subject of 'ethics' in its fourth report titled 'Ethics in Governance'. This is the high time to think deeply over ethical issues and to re-establish the significance of ethical principles in the Indian administrative system. This paper discusses the theoretical aspects of ethics in Indian administrative system, its need and increasing role in current scenario. In this paper the public service which has been taken is the 'food distribution to the poor households

through the ration card'. The objective of the study is to explore and examine the root causes of ethical crises among the state functionaries and its impact on delivery of public services with special reference to Public Distribution System (PDS). The paper attempts to find out what role can ethics play in delivering this basic need of life i.e. food to the poor.

## MEANING OF ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN ADMINISTRATION

Ethics has been understood as the rules of conduct, science of morals and human duty. In general the terms, ethics is considered as moral principles that guide the behaviour of an individual or a group. Originally the term ethics comes from the Greek word 'ethos' via 'ethikos' (literally it means habit or custom) meaning the 'usage', 'character', 'moral values' etc. Ethics, as a branch of philosophy, include the study of concepts such as 'duty', 'ought', 'obligations', 'right' and 'wrong'. It talks how people ought to behave, and describe the sets of actions that are, universally and every-time, morally permissible to perform and conformity to the established norms. It involves focusing on and analysing the particular values, especially if they are applied into action, often unselfconsciously or due to habit (Bilimoria, Prabhu, & Sharma, 2007: 3).

Ethics is also describe as the study of morality and the application of reason to determine right and wrong for a given circumstances. Ethics represents the generalized normative rules that will be helpful in solving the problem of moral dilemmas. The function of ethics in public life has many

aspects. On the one hand it is the expression of high moral values, and on another hand, it is the specifics of action for which a public executive can be held legally accountable. Ethics of one's decisions and actions is defined societally, not individually. Any disconnection between the stated values and operating values lead to questionable ethical behaviour. Concern for others is the essence of ethical behaviour and thus it is the bedrock of mutual trust in the society. (National Defence University, 2014)

The great epic Ramayana, gives various instances of civil service ethics, which emphasize on the fact that *Yatha Raja Tatha Praja*, meaning ethical crises in a society reflects the character of those who run the administration of that society (Mishra,2006:14). Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* describe the complex nature of politics, administration and ethics of his period. He explained that there is a link between state administrators' malpractice and the decline in prosperity of state. As a remedial measure he also elaborated efficiency-guaranteeing techniques (ibid: 15).

#### **ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Public services are those basic and essential services provided by the state through its various public agencies which aim is to ensure good life to the citizens. Some examples of public services are - issuing of domicile or caste certificate, birth/death/marriage certificate, issue of ration cards, water or electricity supply etc. including others. Public services form an interface between government/state apparatus and citizens, and thus the smooth and good service provided by government is important in shaping the sense of trust and expectations of the citizens of a country. Here comes the role of public officials/state functionaries who are the key link between the delivery of services and citizens. They are the bridge which carries the very important function of implementation of any public policy.

According to A Strong Foundation, Canadian Centre for Management Development, everyone cannot do public service, it is a special work which can be done only by those who devote themselves to it and feel satisfaction. The rewards of public service are not material, but moral and spiritual which makes the person to devote his life to the service of the nation and to the public good. In reality, public service functions on distinctive standards that reflect specific values. As quoted by Thomas Jefferson, 'when a man gains a public trust while doing public service, he should assume himself a public property' (Lewis and Gilman, 2005:27). Also echoed by Henry Clay that in any country the government is a trust and the officers are trustees; and both of them are created for the welfare of the citizens (ibid:27).

Thus, it can be said that ethical principles provide guide to one's action; they operationalize values and give signal to the behaviour apt for public service (Lewis and

Gilman, 2005:98). Ethics establish accountability between the administration and the public. Abiding by the code of ethics in their duty, officials can ensure the public that they will get the services in a fair manner, which in turn creates the environment of faith and trust among the public and that will make the public confident that officials are doing their duties by keeping in mind their best interests (Naya Panda:2019). Today, the modern institutions demand the separation between personal and public life in order to do independent and reasoned judgements, which is not possible without being an ethical. It is the ethical values which can gives you the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, which can imbibe the qualities of empathy, truthfulness, loyalty, humility and prudence in you, so that you can defend your action publicly and that action could also be acceptable in the society (Lewis, & Gilman:2005).

With growing expectations of the citizens, public services in India are now modifying itself and making efforts for the optimum utilization of limited public resources. Attempts have been taken to frame impartial laws and to increase citizen's participation in administrative affairs. Government is adopting and promoting technology to bring effectiveness, accountability and transparency in public services and hence strengthen democracy. For example, Right to Information (RTI), National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), Digital India, Common Services Centers (CSC), Sevottam Framework of Service Delivery, etc. The Public Services Guarantee Act or Right to Service Act (2007) came into force in various states. Chapter III of the draft of the Public Services Bill, 2007, proposed a standard of ethics in the public service operations called as Public Services Code. It emphasized on the following points:

- (a) every public service employee should perform their duties according to the constitutional laws.
- (b) they should reflect in their actions the virtues of competence, care, diligence, responsibility, honesty, objectivity and non-discrimination.
- (c) they should also strive towards leadership development and professional advancement.
- (c) they should preserve the dignity of their position and never misuse it.
- (d) they should utilize the public funds economically.
- (e) they should have the aim and vision to work for the welfare of the public and also safeguard the interests of the marginalized people that will strengthen social and economic development (GoI, 2007: 6).

#### **CHALLENGE OF ETHICAL CRISIS IN PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM**

Public Distribution System in India is a great public service and universal scheme that provides subsidized food, through the network of ration shops, to poor households. In 1997, the Targeted Public Distribution System (here after cited as TPDS) was introduced, in which food grains like rice and wheat are collected from farmers, distributed to states and supplied to the ration shops where the beneficiaries buy their entitlements. Another landmark legislation came in 2013 when the Parliament enacted the National Food Security Act, 2013, which makes the right to food a justiciable right. Khera (2011) argues that accessibility of food is a big problem than is food availability in the country.

The main aim behind the public policy of providing the basic and essential service, i.e. food, free or subsidized, is to eradicate poverty and hunger in the country. But there is broad consensus that there is a dismal performance on the part of administration unit in delivering this service to the poor. (Afridi, 2017) The lack of responsiveness and lack of redressal of grievances of the poor are one of the major reasons for the poor human development including others. As pointed out by Amartya Sen that the situation of poverty is not only because of lack of income, but also because of lack of responsiveness by the local administration towards the redressal of local needs.

The PDS in India is seen as inefficient due to inconsistent delivery of food stocks and low quality of food grains. The fair price shops are a hub of corruption. It was estimated that 58% of the subsidized food grains supplied from the government remain undelivered to the below poverty line (BPL) households and around 36% is drained out from the supply chain (GOI, 2009:Planning Commission). In a joint survey by Centre for Media Studies and Transparency International India in 2008, it was discovered that BPL households had to pay a staggering amount of 177 million dollars as bribe in the single year of 2007 in order to avail of basic public services such as PDS, water supply, electricity, education and health facilities. This presents a picture of the bureaucratic issues in Indian public service delivery system. It is the expectation of citizens to enjoy timely and corruption-free public service delivery which can be achieved through proper adoption of good governance.(Singh,,2016)

Various previous studies on the public distribution system in India list the major problems including corruption, poor quality and less quantity of food grains, leakage of food grains into open market, incorrect classification of poverty, bogus cards, large inclusion and exclusion errors and non-availability of food grains and irregular function of Fair Price Shops (FPS). Mathur (2014:197) argues that the basic reason why bureaucratic and political leadership is unable to reform and bring much needed change is lack of ethical compass. As public administration is based on deep moral foundation,

therefore when bureaucrats and politicians become 'self-serving' and promote narrow parochial interest at the cost of the larger national goal, they are unable to bring reform and implement change. How to have an administrative system rooted in human values is the biggest challenge that we face in the country today.

In 2009, an expert group to advise Rural Development Ministry, indicated wrong classification of beneficiaries due to the existence of 'ghost cards' in number of states, which means that grains are not distributed to deserving beneficiaries but sell into the open market (GOI, 2005: Planning Commission). All these instances point out towards the maladministration of public officials. One of the major reasons behind this poor management can be that public officials in India receive a fixed salary and there is no incentive for the good performance which makes them less motivated towards their duty. Due to this the officials entrusted with the responsibility of providing service may not be coordinate with the poor people. Another major reason, highlighted in the studies of Mani and Iyer (2012); Rasul and Rogger (2016), cause of the weak performance of the public officials were the frequent transfers and promotion related issues which are in the hand of their political masters, often restrict them to take independent and decisive action. Various other things like citizens' unawareness of their own quota, complex procedures, taking bribes by corrupt officials, poses great challenge in the efficient and effective delivery of service.

In some recent years several initiatives have been taken to bring the effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of public service of PDS. The most important reform is digitalization of the process which has reduced the corruption in the PDS to a great extent. It reflects that technology is playing an influential role in deepening ethical aspect of PDS. The officials have to be more responsive and accountable towards the grievances of the people. And here comes the role of ethics. Ethics shapes the attitude of the public officials, which lead to solution of the problems facing by the public and also lead to development of the society as a whole.

#### **NEED OF ETHICS IN INDIAN ADMINISTRATION FOR EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

In recent years it has been found that citizens are losing faith in the delivery mechanism of public services, and thus it is a major area of concern. In spite of several measures, rules and regulations, the performance report of Indian administration in the area of public services delivery is dismal. Every citizen, at any point of time, face the challenge of work being done properly in any public office. The problems are evident and many solutions are also framed, but the root cause for the inefficient and ineffective delivery of

services is the ethical crises. It is the matter of great concern that in the fast-moving globalized world where Code of Ethics framed for civil servants is present in many countries, there is no such codes exist in our country. There is a necessity that ethical framework for the civil servants should be prepared and in that the issue of conflict of interest along with its resolution should be mainly included (GOI, 2007, SARC, Ethics in Governance, p.42). However, the Second Administrative Reform Commission in India said that codes or standards cannot, by themselves, create ethical attitude among public officials. They can be effective only when these are applied in action, when the vigilance organizations take quick and independent disciplinary action against any violation and encourage the atmosphere of probity (ibid: 1).

The Sevottam model, created by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, has also cited that new initiatives are needed to remodel obsolete administration to performance management, in order to achieve success in the field of public services delivery (GOI, 2005). As, unfortunately, corruption is on the rise in our country, there is need to strengthen the citizens by instituting corruption-free service as a new fundamental right (Vittal: 2001). The Right to Service will make the administrative system more ethical in the delivery of services. There should be the provision regarding specific range of service which the citizen can expect from the service providers and in case if the service will not be provided timely, the concerned officials will be strictly fined.

## CONCLUSION

There is a great link between ethics, administration and public service delivery. The balance among these three is a pre requisite for good governance. If ethics is the base of the administration, then administration is the practical application of ethics, and both foster the delivery of public services which build up trust and satisfaction among the citizens of the country. All citizens must enjoy chaos-free, timely and qualitative service. There should be a strong grievance redressal mechanism for effective and efficient public service. We all know food is the most basic thing which the people need to live. Its availability and accessibility, especially for the poor, is crucial for their sustenance, and therefore government has included it in its public policy on priority basis. The good outcome of any policy mainly depends on its proper implementation, which in turn depends on the state functionaries/administrators. Today need of ethics in administration is more needed than ever before because of new kinds of work pressure and complexities. The ethical crises in Indian administration is clearly felt and its root cause include absence of code of ethics, lack of moral courage among public servants, lack of motivation and proper

incentive in the existing system and lack of proper institutional training in dealing with dilemmas. These issues need to be addressed urgently because the public service delivery is getting affected. Ethics should be made a compulsory study in education at all levels. More training programmes should be organized for the public officials that can accommodate the challenges of current time. Ethics can and will play a positive role in efficient and effective delivery of services, especially in PDS, only then inclusive and sustainable development can be achieved. It is only ethical principles that can shape the bureaucrats' attitude by making them sympathetic and responsive towards the public, particularly the vulnerable section of the society.

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