

# THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE IN DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

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The nation-state had its beginning in Europe in the 15th century and evolved subsequently as a result of which individuals and communities began to lose control over themselves with the state becoming gradually more powerful. This development took place almost simultaneously along with industrial revolution, intellectual and cultural renaissance and technological progress in western societies. These beneficial factors no doubt influenced the quality of public governance in these countries quite favourably. In Asia, Africa and Latin American countries too the nation-state became powerful in 20th and 21st centuries with the gradual eclipse of imperialism and colonialism. Although the state in these continents became more powerful, the quality of democracy and governance took a different shape and form when compared to traditional democracies in the west. Many of these countries coming out of the shackles of imperialism and colonialism were suffering from abject poverty, poor literacy, gender injustice, appalling malnutrition apart from feudal social relationships and powerful elite. Unfortunately, alongside these deficiencies, the politicians, bureaucrats and corporate leaders in many of these emerging democracies got into an unholy nexus of varying shades exploiting people in the name of development and democracy.

Although it is easy to blame most of the socio-economic problems of these countries due to colonialism, imperialism and capitalism to some extent, such an excuse cannot hold any longer especially when most of the countries in this region have attained independence quite some decades back. It is also significant to note that the Afro-Asian countries as well as Latin American countries have during this period adopted democracy as a rule of governance almost mechanically which proved to be an advantage as well as a disadvantage. It was an advantage because it had politically awakened the subservient & sluggish people suddenly and made them realise that their destiny depended only upon themselves. Western concepts of Liberty, Equality, Rule of Law, Independence of the Judiciary and representative democracy based on universal franchise became attractive jargons to the newly awakened, educated and elitist population. The aspirations and ambitions of the people too increased as a result. While these were welcome developments, democracy in these countries due to local conditions and culture had also contributed to many distortions such as proliferation of undemocratic political parties coupled with dynastic politics and selfish political leaders of powerful mafias based on unhealthy and obnoxious nexus between corrupt politicians, incompetent civil servants, cunning criminals and wily businessmen. National leaders of unimpeachable integrity became rare. This is not to say that all emerging democracies became bad or corrupt. What I wish to state is that the quality of democracy in many of these developing countries got vitiated depending upon the negative influences resulting in bewildering shades of democracy varying from dictatorship to different kinds of oligarchy. In fact, many writers on democracy feel that democracy has a self destroying streak if it does not function well. Prof. John Keaye keeping in mind these distortions has recently authored a book under the title *The Life and Death of Democracy* (Simon & Schuster 2009) stressing the point that most of the modern democracies are not necessarily democracies in substance although they may be so in form, proceeds “to raise awareness of the brittle contingency of democracy, at a time when there are signs of mounting disagreement about its meaning, its efficacy and its desirability”.

Juxtaposing its normative and empirical, classical and modern, ideal and practical dimensions, Sanford A. Lakoff, in his book *Democracy: History, Theory, Practice* refers to three forms of autonomy within modern democracies: Individual autonomy representing the

rights of individuals to regulate their own conduct as they see fit, providing only that in doing so they do not deny others the same opportunity; plural autonomy representing the right of social groups to regulate themselves to pursue their own end within a similar limit and communal autonomy representing collective self-determination through political association, whether by majority rule or by consensus. Lakoff argues that evaluation of quality of democracy must start with these forms of autonomy and how society balances the inherent tension. If we evaluate the present day democracies on the basis of the extent of harmonisation of these autonomies, you are bound to be disappointed because of the damage caused by violence, corruption and exploitation to social harmony & social justice.

John Hobbes in his famous treatise Leviathan observed that the lives of human beings were “nasty, brutish and short” hundreds of years back. In spite of material and scientific progress, it cannot be said that things have substantially improved especially in respect of the poor and neglected persons. Democracy no doubt enjoys an unprecedented popularity now, based on Abraham Lincoln’s dictum of providing “a government of the People, by the people and for the people”; although many of the present day democracies are not living upto these democratic ideals. Ironically, democracy is considered as a medium to protect the freedom of the people in governing themselves and that at the same time such protection is not possible by merely having democratic institutions unless they are backed by ever vigilant citizens. This leads us to the next question as to whether democracy and development in emerging economies can go hand in hand. In case of a passionate attachment to either of the concepts, one sees an apparent conflict between the two. If one attaches too much of importance to the essential ingredients of Democracy, such as Liberty, Equality, Rule of Law, Equal opportunity, Independent judiciary and vibrant media, it is often noticed that in such circumstances an elitist group or coterie dominates in all areas of governance. If on the other hand, one attaches too much of importance to Development by giving priority to economic growth and social justice, it seems to accommodate corruption and violence since merit and competence takes a backseat in governance. This conflict between democracy and development seems to be an eternal conflict as is reflected in the writings of many sociologists and political scientists although experience teaches us that these two terms need not necessarily be conflicting or contradictory.

The development landscape, evolving in the last 50 years of development experience, has according to the World Bank Development Report (Entering the 21st Century- World Development Report – 1999/2000) taught us certain critical lessons. First, macro-economic stability is essential for growth and development. Second, growth does not trickle down and human needs need to be addressed. Third, no one policy will trigger comprehensive development. Fourth, institutions matter for sustained development. No doubt, at the macro level, considerable progress has been made across the globe in economic, technological and social sectors with world exports rising, foreign direct investments growing geometrically and technological and managerial innovations flooding industry. Simultaneously, at the national level there has been substantial increase in the number of countries that have introduced and implemented variety of poverty alleviation plans and schemes.

In spite of these gains, one sees serious gaps in many countries in eradicating poverty. Although the wealth of the world has substantially increased and foreign direct investment has been raising in the poorer countries, the gap between the rich and the poor has equally increased. One notes with shock that in the past ten years, a smaller and smaller percentage of the world’s population has controlled a larger and larger percentage of the world’s wealth. This is often due to the corroding influence of ever increasing corruption at political and bureaucratic level which flourishes due to availability of enormous state funds for Development and tremendous increase in international aid from multi national agencies and bilateral arrangements. Added to this, is the increasing number of terrorists’ and extremist’s

organisations, drug cartels and trafficking of human beings which disastrously threaten the quality of personal safety and security contributing to disturbing tensions among different segments of the society and pressures on the state institutions.

The confusing scenario of global progress along with violence and corruption leads us to wonder whether anything can be done to productively harness the gains of democracy and development without the slings and arrows that flow during the developmental process within a democratic framework. The present disenchantment of the people with political parties, political leaders and parliament arise mainly because of failures in public governance and deficiencies in marketplace. There are different categories of the poor such as subsistence farmers, landless labourers, slum dwellers and urban squatters who were deprived of basic necessities such as food, shelter, health and education. Democracy as a political institution is justified on the ground that people's aspirations can be achieved only by people through consensus. Yet, the appalling poverty in emerging democracies is a standing testimony to the incompetence of the government and consequent failure of the free market. If that be so, governance holds the key to make democracy and development meaningful and successful to the people at large. Good governance is indeed critical in the emerging democracies if people's faith in democracy is to be restored.

What is good governance? In my opinion, good governance essentially means adequate and proper delivery of public services to the common man without any hitch or hindrance in developing societies. In addition, good governance should seek to provide better quality of life, social equality, rule of law and peaceful life without any threat from within and outside. Most of the rulers in emerging democracies often dream of ambitious projects and plans in various sectors without realising the limitations of resources, both financial and human. What really happens in many of these countries is unproductive use of financial and natural resources at a tremendous cost because of poor managerial skills in public administration. The lethargic public service flourishes in the context of corruption, violence, low civic consciousness etc. Very often, scholars in public administration advocate the need for ethical governance to stress standards of integrity based on transparency and accountability. While highest standard of integrity in public governance are no doubt welcome, I am of the view that efficient governance, more than ethical governance is the first step towards transparency and accountability. I would therefore observe that people should fight for efficient governance as a pre-condition towards ethical governance. Governance is therefore a critical input for the success of any democratic or developmental effort. It would follow that governance alone will ultimately ensure liberty, equality and justice. If delays in administration of public services continue to occur, if administration of justice is not efficient and if economic progress does not percolate to the poorest of the poor, it is obvious that people's faith in democracy or development will not continue. Apart from the duty of persons in governance to be responsible and accountable to the people at large, the people themselves have to be ever vigilant in questioning chronic inefficiencies and long delays in public governance. Tolerance towards poor public governance is no virtue in such a scenario as it will only aggravate injustice and will pose a serious threat to liberty in the long run. Another important factor to be borne in the mind is the need to limit the role of the government so as to ensure that the governmental resources are effectively used in core areas of governance such as healthcare, sanitation, education, infrastructure besides currency and security. Government should not be allowed to fritter its limited resources to items outside these core areas. As Woodrow Wilson said "Liberty has never come from the government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of government. The history of liberty is the history of resistance. The history of liberty is a history of the limitation of governmental power, not the increase of it."