RECENT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN INDIA AND IMPACT

Amitava Basu[1]

[1] Member of the Governing Council, Centre for Environmental
Management & Participatory Development;
S124 Greater Kailash 2, New Delhi -110048, India;
mitaamartya@gmail.com

Abstract. In recent years India has introduced a number of public administrative reforms to encourage greater efficiency, transparency, accountability, and corruption-free governance, and reduced scope for discretion. Against this background of changing times, the paper describes the initiatives taken in India to redefine the role of government and the bureaucracy with a focus on good governance. The paper also discusses the reform measures undertaken in India to strengthen and enhance public administration adopting the e-governance route and empowering citizens.

Keywords: public administration; reforms; e-government; e-administration; e-governance.

Public administration pertains to administrative activities of the government and consists of tasks that facilitate fulfillment or enforcement of public policy. Public administration requires technical knowledge of a field, which enables the administrator to perform the tasks, and management techniques to carry out the functions effectively. With the advent of globalisation and liberalisation, public administration in India is required to dismantle the regime of regulations, controls, restrictions, licenses, and secrecy; and become responsive, transparent, open and competitive. This called for necessary administrative reforms to eliminate redundant practices, procedures, and administrative laws.

Despite the difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent public administration reforms in the country have made a positive impact, especially the online public services. National digital transformation largely contributed to the construction of e-government and e-administration, which facilitated the change in administration from "a rule-based to a role-based" model. To further enhance public administration reforms, the National Conference on e-Governance was organized by the DARPG along with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2020 to exchange experiences relating to e-Governance initiatives through engagement with experts, intellectuals from industry, and academic institutions.

Undoubtedly, reforms are required to address the new challenges in managing public affairs through the enhancement of administrative capability. However, as civil servants are accountable to political executives, which may lead to the politicisation of civil services, external accountability mechanisms such as citizen charters, social audits and outcome orientation among civil servants, assume paramount importance. This would facilitate public administration to be unbiased, rational and enable it to serve the people better.

Recent reforms of significance in India include:

– *"Mission Karmayogi" (National Program for Civil Services Capacity Building)* launched in September 2020 is a capacity building apparatus at individual, institutional and process levels for efficient public service delivery, and aims at building a future-ready civil service with the right attitude, skills, and knowledge.

– To monitor and follow up the implementation of important Government programs and projects, a real-time online system, called *"e-Samiksha"* was revamped in July 2020. It is also used as a digital monitor for the bureaucracy to rein in slackers; and as a tool for intensive screening to weed out officers who are inefficient and of doubtful integrity by premature retirement.

– As part of digital governance, the *e-Office Mission Mode Project (MMP)* has been strengthened to enable ministries and departments to switch over to paperless offices and efficient decision-making.

– An online web-enabled system is developed for the *Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS),* which provides the facility to lodge a grievance online from any geographical location. It enables the citizen to track online the grievance being followed up with the Departments concerned and also enables the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) to monitor the grievance.

– *National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment is comprehensively restructured* to assess the efficiency of e-Governance service delivery of the national and provincial governments.

The advent of globalisation has led to interconnectedness among different economies, and nations have become dependent on each other. Globalisation in its train brought privatisation of public enterprises and liberalisation. In the process, the private sector attained enhanced economic and financial power. Globalisation has profoundly impacted the way public administration functions. For example, India has taken steps to dismantle the regime of regulations, controls, restrictions, licenses, and secrecy; and has taken initiatives to orient public administration to be responsive, transparent, open, and competitive.

On the other hand, the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has emerged as a significant instrument to carry out public administration tasks through simplified work processes in transparent manner and provide service delivery to the people with speed and efficiency. India, for instance, promoted the use and application of ICT in public administration and introduced e-governance to facilitate the effective delivery of services, improved decision-making, knowledge management, communication, human resources, and financial management.

E-Office

Speed, simple work process, transparency, and easy tracking are essential for good and responsive governance. This requires a change in the existing system and workflows in government offices. In recognition of the need for efficiency in government processes and service delivery mechanisms, e-Office is taken up as a core Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP).

The e-Office product is developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) as a single reusable system and brings together independent functions and systems under a single framework. The e-Office introduces an electronic file system replacing the age-old manual process. The e-Office facilitates simplified, responsive, and transparent working of government offices. In the process, e-Office increases accountability, transforms the government work culture and ethics, enhances productivity, quality, resource management, turnaround time, and increases transparency.

The e-Office Suite contains:
– File Management System (e-File) includes the creation of files (electronic and physical files), the automation of the processing of files, the movement of files, the tracking of files and their management;
– Knowledge Management System (KMS) is a centralized repository for various documents such as Acts, Policies and Guidelines;
– Collaboration and Messaging Services (CAMS) are used for internal collaboration and messaging;
– Leave Management System (e-Leave) automates the leave application and approval process;
– Tour Management System (e-Tour) automates staff travel programmes;
– Personnel Information Management System (PIMS) manages employee records and the output of PIMS is the e-Service Book;
– Smart Performance Appraisal Report Recording Online Window (SPARROW) application is used for electronic filing of Performance Appraisal Report (PAR).

To date, more than 400 different ministries and departments of the National and Provincial Governments use e-Office. The UN E-Governance Survey of 2020 ranked India as a country with a high' – e-government development index.

E-Samiksha

To complement e-Office and augment the benefits arising therefrom, e-Samiksha was introduced in 2014 and revamped in 2020. The e-Samiksha system is an online monitoring and compliance mechanism. It is used for tracking the progress of policy initiatives and projects and facilitates follow-up actions of various ministries by the Cabinet Secretary, who is the administrative head of the national government,

and the Office of the Prime Minister on a real-time basis. This initiative is aimed to enhance efficiency, bring transparency, reduce protracted correspondence, facilitate fast tracking compliance of pending action-points of various implementing agencies, and to be used as a digital monitor to rein in slackers and to carry out intensive review for weeding out officers who are inefficient and of doubtful integrity.

The features of e-Samiksha system cover:

– Addition of action-points, issues, and targets in the e-Samiksha digital platform, and the system automatically pushes for regular interval updating the respective stakeholders, till compliance is attained;
– Generation of various exceptional and compliance status reports for the monitoring agencies;
– Facilitating the monitoring agencies to give further directions and send emails or SMS to the stakeholder(s) on a particular action-point or issue;
– Providing the monitoring agencies to give directions to the stakeholders, and the messages are prioritized and displayed in different colours to enable the stakeholders to take prompt actions;
– A two-way module facilitates stakeholders to raise their action-points, proposals or issues, pending with other stakeholders, and to seek updates on their pendency;
– Provision of various other modules for tracking and monitoring compliance; e-Patrachar, a comprehensive tool, has been incorporated into the system to track and speed up communication among stakeholders for sending various types of correspondence such as notices and agendas for meetings, minutes-of-the-meeting, circulars, letters on the e-mail of the user concerned.

The "Archived" option is also available in e-Samiksha for those categories that do not require further monitoring and can be moved from the main dashboard to the archived area.

In this system, most of the activities take place online. By using e-Samiksha, project and programme implementers have been able to avoid physical movement, which in turn resulted in saving of enormous amount of paper work, travel costs and energy. This has helped speed up the monitoring and compliance of a large number of action points, proposals, targets, etc. It has also helped reduce the time taken to deliver services and clarify the pendency of operations through a single window interface.

The initial results have been very encouraging and the e-Samiksha has been widely appreciated. It could become the forerunner for "paperless" functioning in the Government.

National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment

To boost the e-government endeavors and to embark on the journey for Digital Government excellence, the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) was introduced in 2018 by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAPRG), Government of India. The framework of NeSDA is based on the Online Service Index (OSI) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) e-Government Survey, and has been customized to suit the federal structure of India and the e-Governance

landscape of the States (i.e. provinces) and Union Territories (areas or regions administered by the national government).

The overall objective of NeSDA is to measure the depth and effectiveness of existing e-Governance service delivery mechanisms. NeSDA framework covers services under government-to-business and government-to-citizen categories for six sectors, namely. Finance, Labor and Employment, Education, Local Government and Utilities, Social Welfare, including Agriculture and Health, and Environment, including Fire. In the year 2021, three more sectors, namely, Public Procurement, Home (i.e. Interior) Department, and Tourism – have been included in the NeSDA ambit.

To improve the effectiveness of delivering online services to the citizens periodical assessment is conducted by DARPG. In 2021 the NeSDA framework and service portals were primarily assessed on seven key parameters, which are – accessibility, content availability, ease of use, information security and privacy, end-service delivery, integrated service delivery, and status and request tracking. The assessment survey showed significant progress in e-Governance services across the country. In addition, governance in the times of pandemic required the operationalisation of security measures such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), flexible working policies, including work-from-home, and the development of several new applications that brought citizens and government closer through the use of technology and, among others, providing timely services at the doorstep. The key findings of the assessment survey are:
–   Increase in e-Service Delivery;
–   Increasing use of Integrated/ Centralized Portals for delivery of e-Services;
–   Improvement in all assessment parameters.

Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)

Good governance strives to continuously improve and bring excellence in public service delivery and redress the grievances of citizens in a meaningful manner. In this regard, the DAR&PG has been making endeavors by effectively coordinating with different Ministries and Departments of the Government and trying to eliminate the causes of grievances. Redress of citizens' grievances is one of the most important initiatives of the department.

An online platform is set up by the department and is continuously available to the citizens to lodge their grievances to the public authorities on any subject related to service delivery. It is a single portal connected to all the Ministries and Departments of national and provincial governments. The portal is also accessible to the citizens through a stand-alone mobile application downloadable through the Google Play store and a mobile application integrated with Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG) developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and National e-Governance Division (NeGD) to drive mobile governance in the country.

The DAR&PG formulated public grievance redress mechanisms for effective and timely redress / settlement of citizens' grievances. An analysis of grievance disposals reveals about 87% of ministries and departments have disposed of the grievances in less than 45 days. There are continuous efforts to streamline and strengthen CPGRAMS.

National Conference on e-Governance

To enhance public administration reforms, the National Conference on e-Governance was organized by the DARPG along with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2020 and the post-pandemic period in 2022 to exchange experiences relating to e-Governance initiatives with experts, industry, and academic institutions. The conference provided momentum to the e-Governance initiatives across the country and gave opportunities to civil servants to showcase their successful interventions in e-Governance in improving end-to-end service delivery.

The key resolution adopted in the conference was that national and provincial governments will collaborate to bring citizens and government closer through digital platforms; transform citizen services through the use of technology by leveraging the artifacts of India Stack; accelerate the implementation of public digital platforms at national level in key social sectors, i.e. Health, Education, Agriculture, etc.; ensure resilient Government Infrastructure with robust technological solutions to withstand pandemic-like disruptions; integrate all State/District portals with CPGRAMS for seamless Redressal of Public Grievances; adopt e-office version 7.0 in all ministries and departments; use technology for propagating end-to-end service delivery without human interference to citizens at the grass root level.

"Mission Karmayogi"

It is important to understand that despite advanced technological support, innovative initiatives, and various reform interventions, the pivotal factor for success lies in the approach taken and the mind-set of the civil servants, who are primarily responsible for effectively and efficiently implementing the plans and programs.

In this context, the national government launched "Mission Karmayogi" in September 2020. This project aims to "comprehensively reform capacity building at the individual, institutional and process levels for efficient public service delivery". To meet this objective, "Mission Karmayogi" focuses on preparing civil service officers for the future by making them more "creative, constructive, imaginative, innovative, proactive, professional, progressive, energetic, empowering, transparent and technology- oriented". It involves creation of both functional and behavioral competencies in civil servants.

"Mission Karmayogi" signifies the importance of "on-site learning" to complement "off-site learning". It aimed to ensure an ecosystem of shared training infrastructure that includes learning materials, institutions, and personnel and also pivots to align all civil service positions to a Framework of Roles, Activities, and Competencies (FRACs) approach and to create and deliver learning content relevant to the identified FRACs in every government entity.

It ensures that all civil servants are given the opportunity to continuously build and strengthen their behavioral, functional, and domain competencies in their liberated and administered learning pathways. It also enables all central ministries and departments, including organisations, to head on and infuse their resources towards co-creation and sharing the collaborative and common eco-

system of learning through an annual financial subscription for every employee. It collaborates with the best-in-class content creators, including public training institutions, universities, start-ups, and individual experts.

Under the "Mission Karmayogi" an online platform called Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT-Karmayogi**)** is created**.** The platform provides the content to learn from global best practices rooted in **"**Indian ethos". Civil servants are required to take courses on this platform on the basis of which the performance of civil servants will be evaluated. It applies to all civil servants (including contractual employees) in the various ministries, departments, organisations and agencies of the national government. The willing provincial governments are also enabled to align their capacity building plans in a similar manner.

It should be underlined that this online platform has been effectively used by Department of Personnel and Training in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to impart e-learning on alternative line of defense that provides customized learning content to various COVID warriors.

There is also a system for providing tools through which departments and managers can monitor and mentor officials. The system ensures the delivery of learning tools at anytime, anywhere and on any device to train about 20 million users, which was previously not attainable through traditional measures. Further, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), namely "Karmayogi Bharat," was introduced in 2022 as a not-for-profit 100% government-owned company, responsible for delivering and managing the design, implementation, enhancement, and management of a digital platform and infrastructure, managing and delivering competency assessment services, managing telemetry data, and ensuring the provision of monitoring and evaluation.

"Mission Karmayogi" is thus an initiative which is intended to modernize thinking of the civil servants and build and strengthen their competencies.

National digital transformation largely contributed to the construction of e-government and e-administration, which facilitated the change in administration from "a rule-based to a role-based" model. The recent public administration reforms have made a positive impact, especially the online public services which was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic time. NIC leveraged technology to support the government organisations to carry out essential tasks during the COVID-19 lockdown period and supported the administration in this crisis through ICT solutions and infrastructural competences. Technical support has also been provided for conducting desktop-based video-conferencing through different applications at the residences of government officers. The technology-enabled services and platforms were highly successful in providing a sustainable environment.

The use of Integrated Command and Control Centre, e-pass, CCTV cameras equipped with artificial intelligence and e-office enabled the district administration to properly conduct contact tracing of positive cases, quarantine of suspected infected people and preparedness study of COVID-19 hospitals. The officials of the district administration, municipal corporations and many other government bodies extensively used the video conferencing facility of the NIC. It also enabled citizens "to work from home" so that the lockdown did not prevent them

from doing their jobs and earning a living. People were also able to buy daily food and consumables, medicines, cooked meals, etc. and have them delivered to their homes as electronic facilities were available to the public.

In summary, the progress made in regard to digital transformation in the development of e-government and e-administration in India has been fairly significant.

Undoubtedly, reforms are required to address the new challenges in managing public affairs through continual enhancement of administrative capability. However, as civil servants are accountable to political executives that may lead to politicization of the civil services, external accountability mechanisms such as citizen charters, social audits, and outcome orientation of civil servants, are of paramount importance. Thrust needs to be given to change in mindset that impedes acceptance of change and it is a major constraining factor. This would facilitate public administration to be unbiased, rational, and enable it to serve the people better.

Considering India's growth ambition, a massive scale-up in capacity-building is needed both at the political and bureaucratic levels. As democracies mature, elected representatives play a more proactive role in policy-making. It is, therefore, essential that the elected representatives are able to understand the nuances of policy-making, and efforts must be made to build the capability to envision the future and work towards its realisation. The goal should be to equip the entire chain of command to coordinate and steer the ship towards a national goal.

REFERENCES

1. Thammaiah, Menaka, D. (2021) 'Impact of globalisation on Indian Administration', *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 8(5), May, pp. 158–162. Available at: http://www.jetir.org/ (accessed: 17 August 2023).

2. Hanumanthappa, N. (2018) 'Impact of liberalisation privatization globalization on Indian administration', *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 6(2), April, pp. 238–244. Available at: http://www.jetir.org/ (accessed: 17 August 2023).

3. Ministry of Personnel Public Grievances & Pensions, Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances. *Government of India Handbook for Mission Karmayogi*, 2020. Available at: https://dopt.gov.in/sites/default/files/Mission_KarmYogiBooklet.pdf (accessed: 17 August 2023).

4. *IIPA Digest*, October – December 2020. IN FOCUS. Governance practices in pandemic: Global and Indian perspective. Available at: https://www.iipa.org.in/cms/public/uploads/156571615807805.pdf (accessed: 17 August 2023).