

New Experiences of Public Accountability in India

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Public accountability is regarded as an instrument in new democracy. Prosperity of political parties in democratic countries is based on the public and individuals. The people elect public representatives on the basis of their party manifestos. Public accountability proves to be a good medium for winning the confidence of people. The government which rules the country with the sense of public accountability is always supported by the people. Specially, public accountability is the source of creating transparency in the administration. Public administration is taking initiatives towards improvement of services and takes them to the people in a good way as well as supervises them. Similarly, public also use the accountability to ensure the transparency in the services which they receive. In short, in a society, government as an organization adopts the various principles to achieve its goals and materialize objectives. The government and public both should adopt the accountability as principle for providing and accessing the services. The government, with the help of public accountability, not only achieves its goal but also can develop the confidence and reliability in public easily. It is an essential part for the survival of the democratic governments.

The different principles are being adopted in the developed and under developed countries in order to make public accountability possible. Transparency in performance is being strengthened through administrative reformations. Supervision is regarded as an important weapon of Public accountability in fulfilling the government duties and obligations. Accountability of legislature, presentation of budget, Judicial review, and transparency in accounts are the external ways of supervision, while, hierarchy, inspection scrutiny and unity of command are the ways of internal supervision. Likewise, political parties, media, and NGOs are external ways of unofficial supervision. Besides, in strengthening the public accountability further, public participation, administrative reforms and right to information are playing influential role. The people are able to interact with government activities directly through these ways and playing a vital role in government activities and initiatives. Thus the public is making them accountable while collecting information about the activities of the officials and institutions which are providing public services.

Evolution of public accountability is attributed to the system of Sweden Ombudsman. In 1809, Sweden created this post for receiving and hearing complaints regarding administrative and court. Later, the other countries also started adopting powers, ways and institutions similar to this. In India the effort is being made for establishing the post and institutions of such kind since 1960. K M Munshi had demanded to introduce a post like Ombudsman. Later, the law minister Ashok Kumar Sen had raised his voice in support of this post in the parliament. In 1963, the word 'Ombudsman' was translated into Hindi as Lokpal. In Pakistan this was substituted as 'Muhtasib'. Shanti Bhushan proposed the first Lokpal Bill in 1968 and got it passed in fourth Loksabha. But in Rajiya Sabha it was not passed. Later, in 1971, 1977, 1985, 2001, 2005, 2008 this bill was presented in the parliament but not passed. Finally, 55 years later, on 18 December 2013 this bill was passed. Thus, Lokpal and Lok Ayukta law was enacted in 2013. This Lokpal makes public offices, government officials and public representatives responsible. This Act gives right to Lokpal to take action against the government employees involved in corruption and bribery. Similarly, Lok Ayukta also works as lokpal at the state level. Before Lokpal Bill is passed other institution were established to control the corruption in administration for instance on the recommendation of Santhanam Committee. In 1964, vigilance commission was established later, Anti Corruption-Bureaus were established in different states which helped to control bribery and other activities of corruption and made public accountability possible. In 2011, Whistle Blowers Protection Act was passed for the protection of those who raised their voice against the corruption and scandals and misuse of their powers. This act helped general people that they 'under Competent Authority' can lodge complaint against not only the officials of high profile of central and state government but also against Prime Minister and any Member of Parliament if they found involved in any scandal and using their rights illegally.

India is a Parliamentary government where people elect the members to the Parliament. So, public representatives represent the people. Executive is made from them, thus the executive is accountable to all members of the parliament. Many committees have been formed to make the Legislative and Executive accountable. Public Complaint Committee is regarded as an important chain between people and public representatives. This committee supervises the complaints received from people and provides remedies. Besides, there are many committees such as Estimate Committee, Public Account Committee, and committee for Government Assurance. Accountability is made possible through the effective supervision on the performance of the legislature by these committees.

India like other countries has started including various experiments in its activities to make accountability, supervision and transparency possible along with providing public services at institutional and local level. Department of Administration Reforms and Grievances has constituted process of urban charter. More than 767 charters have been prepared and they are under work in various ministries of central and state departments and agencies. This was a better and easy experiment of public accountability wherein every department makes a record of services, obligations, rights, even standard, time and duration. This urban charter improves performance of public law and order and the ways of public accountability under friendly atmosphere among the people. Right to information Act was enacted in 2005. This act gives right to the citizens to receive information leading to the empowerment of the citizens. Besides, e-Governance plays a vital role in promoting and improving the public services. First, the purpose of e-Governance was to use information technology and collect the data. But today it is considered as an important instrument for transparency and accountability in the activities of the government.

Presently, media, interfering into every department is exposing negative or positive realities to the public. Through different medium of information every citizen is watching government activities 24 hours sitting at home. Media is not only providing information to us; rather it is playing a critical role in bringing public issues into light and making the government accountable. It is exposing corruption found in government institutions, departments, formation of policies and implementation. Specially, political and executive body fear media and try to create transparency in their duties and obligations. Holding discussion with leaders and representatives of the government and implementing agencies media keeps an eye on them. That is why popularity of media is growing in public day by day.

Thus the alone analysis shows that the sense of public accountability is not only promoted through legal initiatives; rather the concept of public accountability is introduced through other new sources like information technology, e-governance and media to the local level that is the essential part for survival of democracy in India.

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