

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA: REFORMS, INNOVATIONS, AND CHALLENGES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

AMAN SHARMA¹

aman81sharma41@gmail.com

GOPINATH THASIL²

drtgopi@gmail.com

¹ Research Scholar, ² Assistant Professor,
Department of Public Administration,
Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, Regional Centre,
Sector-12, Chandigarh, India

Corresponding Author: Gopinath Thasil

Abstract

The change in public administration in India has occurred at an exponential rate through a series of reforms aimed at increasing transparency, efficiency, inclusivity, and citizen-centric governance. This study provides an analytical examination of the latest national-level administrative initiatives and innovations, in the context of key theoretical frameworks such as New Public Management and the principles of good governance. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the research utilizes official documents, policy reports, and secondary scholarly literature. The results show that digital interventions, such as Direct Benefit Transfers via Aadhaar-based ID cards and e-governance portals, have likely delivered significant improvements in service delivery, accountability, and anti-corruption measures. Capacity-building reforms, such as Mission Karmayogi and lateral entry recruitment, are being judged on their potential to increase agility and expertise within the administration. Nevertheless, the persistence of challenges, with weak institutional capacity, political interference, and deficiencies at the lower levels of administration, can all continue to prevent transformative outcomes. The analysis stresses that while India's governance journey has seen promising evolutionary changes towards responsiveness and efficiency, achieving a fully inclusive and sustainable administrative ecosystem requires reforms, effective accountability systems, and further decentralization. This paper expands the literature by establishing policy recommendations: continued investment in capacity-building, ethical frameworks for governance institutions, and strengthening citizen participation in administrative procedures.

Key Words: Accountability, Administrative Reforms, Citizen-centric Governance, Digital India, Good Governance.

1. Introduction

Public administration in India plays an essential role in the nation's development and in the provision of public services to one of the world's largest populations. Over the years, the administrative system in India has evolved from a rule-based traditional bureaucracy to a more citizen-centric governance system. In recent years, the Government of India has promoted a "Reform, Perform, Transform" mantra, touting a paradigm shift towards people-centric governance ("people" here meaning administrators, not local citizens). This change

is evident in a succession of significant policies and administrative reforms aimed at introducing greater transparency, efficiency, and public accountability across sectors. The impetus for such reforms stems from the realization that responsive and inclusive public administration is essential for social and economic progress in a democracy as massive and diverse as India. Concurrently, implementing reforms in a complex federal system serving 1.4 billion citizens is a significant challenge. This paper presents an overview of public administration reforms and innovations at the national level in

India. It discusses how these reforms and innovations could improve governance outcomes, while also highlighting the ongoing challenges that must be addressed. By incorporating the latest developments (within the last five years) alongside the basic views, this analysis provides a picture of the evolution of public administration in India.

2. Historical Context and Theoretical Foundations

India's system of public administration was, to a large extent, built upon the Weberian bureaucratic system, which was originally introduced during the British colonial era, and it has hierarchical systems and procedures (that are rule-bound). After independence, India inherited a system of civil service that, although competent, was often seen as rigid and inward-looking. As early as 1953, Paul H. Appleby, writing a review of Indian administration, highlighted "the rigidity, lack of administrative action, and [lack of] human-relations orientation" in the administration of the bureaucracy (Appleby, 1953). These characteristics implied a procedure- or function-centered rather than people-centered orientation. Over the following decades, several commissions and committees reinforced the need for making the system more citizen-friendly and results-oriented. Notably, the First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 1966 and the Second ARC (2005 to 2009) implemented extensive reforms to improve efficiency, accountability, and service delivery.

The Twelfth Report of the Second ARC, "Citizen-Centric Administration: The Heart of Governance" (2009) was especially influential in reflecting on ways of enhancing citizen participation, and recommending processes that might allow citizens to seek information, make suggestions, demand better services, hold officials accountable and participate in the decision-making process (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2009). These recommendations, when adopted by the government, laid the conceptual groundwork for treating the country's citizens as partners and stakeholders, rather than recipients of services.

3. Foundational theories in public administration have also guided reforms

The ideals of New Public Management (NPM), which took shape worldwide during the 1990s and were based on efficiency, decentralization, and citizen orientation, were well-suited to the liberalization era in India. With the beginning of economic liberalization in 1991, it was felt that the need was to end the regressive, "license-permit-quota" regime, which continued to perpetuate excessive regulations/controls. Scholars contended that globalization and liberalization required India to "dismantle the regime of regulations, controls, restrictions, licenses, and secrecy" and to become significantly more responsive, transparent, open, and competitive (Basu, 2023). This paradigm change included removing redundant rules, simplifying processes, and adopting transparency - basically losing a rule-centric approach and adopting a result-

centric approach. Economic reforms in the 1990s, such as the abolition of import licenses, effective business permit reform, and the introduction of citizen charters, reflected this shift.

Another underlying component has been the notion of “Good Governance”, popularised in the 1990s (e.g. by the World Bank). This framework emphasises accountability, the rule of law and participation. India officially adopted ‘good governance’ as an objective, and Good Governance Day and indices have been established to measure the performance in the area of governance. By the 2000s, efforts such as the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005, “a fundamental right empowering citizens to demand information,” were becoming an important part of the concept of good governance, which holds that transparency and accountability are its bedrock. The RTI, as well as social audits in programs such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, were providing citizens with the tools to look critically into the functioning of the government. Consequently, ideas about how public administration ought to be at a global scale and experiments in domestic policy have influenced the understanding that public administration should be citizen-centric, participatory, transparent, and outcome-focused.

4. Materials and Methods

A qualitative research design was employed in this study to examine the themes related to governance and public administration. The approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of institutional dynamics, policy practices, and stakeholder experiences that cannot

be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone.

4.1 Study Design

A descriptive and analytical qualitative design was used. The study focused on reviewing existing policies, institutional arrangements, and administrative practices relevant to the topic. Emphasis was placed on identifying patterns, challenges, and relationships among variables such as parliamentary roles, governance mechanisms, and service-delivery processes.

4.2 Data Sources

The research relied entirely on secondary data. Materials were gathered from:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Government reports and policy documents
- Official parliamentary publications
- Books and academic monographs
- Reputable organizational websites and institutional archives

All documents selected for review were published within the last ten years, except where earlier foundational material was necessary for historical context.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a structured documentary review process. First, relevant literature was identified using keywords aligned with the study themes. Second, abstracts and summaries were screened to ensure relevance. Only documents that directly contributed to the study objectives were included. Full texts were then examined, and key information was extracted systematically. Notes were organized under thematic categories such as

governance practices, oversight mechanisms, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement.

4.4 Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis to interpret the collected materials. After categorizing the documents, recurring concepts and issues were identified and grouped into broader themes. The analysis emphasized comparison across sources to highlight consistencies, differences, and emerging trends. Interpretations were guided by established governance and public administration frameworks but remained grounded in evidence from the reviewed documents.

5. Digital Transformation and E-Governance

One of the major forces behind administrative change in India has been the digital revolution. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for governance, better known as e-governance, has been a goal for the last two decades and has accelerated significantly over the last five years. Early initiatives included the creation of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in the 1980s and the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006, which provided mission-mode projects to create digital versions of people's core national services (land records, passports, taxes, etc.). Building on this base, in 2015 the Government of India launched the ambitious Digital India program, which aims to turn the country into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy. Digital India focuses on improving digital infrastructure, providing

government services digitally, and promoting digital literacy and inclusion.

The effect of these efforts is evident. As of today, 2023, India has around 830 million internet users, making the country a huge digitally connected democracy (Aggarwal, 2023). Rural internet subscriptions exploded as connectivity improved, and the urban linkages have narrowed the urban-rural digital divide. With more people online, the government quickly increased the online services and platforms. Today, applications for passports and driver's licenses, payment of taxes, and utility bills can be done via a web portal or mobile applications. For example, the UMANG app aggregates hundreds of Government services on a single mobile platform, and the DigiLocker service (introduced in 2015) offers a digital vault for citizens to store scanned copies of their official documents online. It has registered over 160 million citizens who can access and share digital copies of certificates safely. These initiatives are some examples of how e-governance can help to improve convenience and ease the bureaucratic friction.

A fundamental component of India's digital governance is the creation of a unique digital identity for residents: Aadhaar. The Aadhaar biometric ID system has issued IDs to more than 1.3 billion people, enabling online identity authentication. This system has served as the backbone for many public services and welfare schemes in implementing Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), which disburse subsidies and benefits directly into citizens' bank accounts. By removing

ghost beneficiaries and intermediaries through Aadhaar-linked verification, the government has significantly reduced leakages in welfare programs (Press Information Bureau, 2024). For instance, unearthing divertible and fraudulent cooking gas (LPG) is now done by directly distributing the benefits to the verified subjects, which limits diversion and fraud. The welfare consequences of this system are laid out in the next section, but it is clear that the use of digital ID and payment has radically increased administrative efficiency.

Citizen-facing e-government portals have also helped enhance service quality and user satisfaction. Recent empirical research in India shows that well-designed government websites and online interfaces can positively affect perceptions of service quality and citizen satisfaction (Singh et

al., 2022). One study found that factors such as information clarity, ease of use, and interactive services on e-government portals were statistically significantly associated with higher citizen satisfaction and trust in online services (Singh et al., 2022). This would imply that, as government services move online, ensuring high usability and transparency on digital services is key to public acceptance. The government's emphasis on the concept of “minimum government, maximum governance” has facilitated automation of routine work, such as e-procurement, e-filing in offices (e-office system), and the use of data analytics in the planning of various government policies. These mechanisms reduce discretionary human decision-making and delays, thereby reducing opportunities for petty corruption and improving responsiveness.

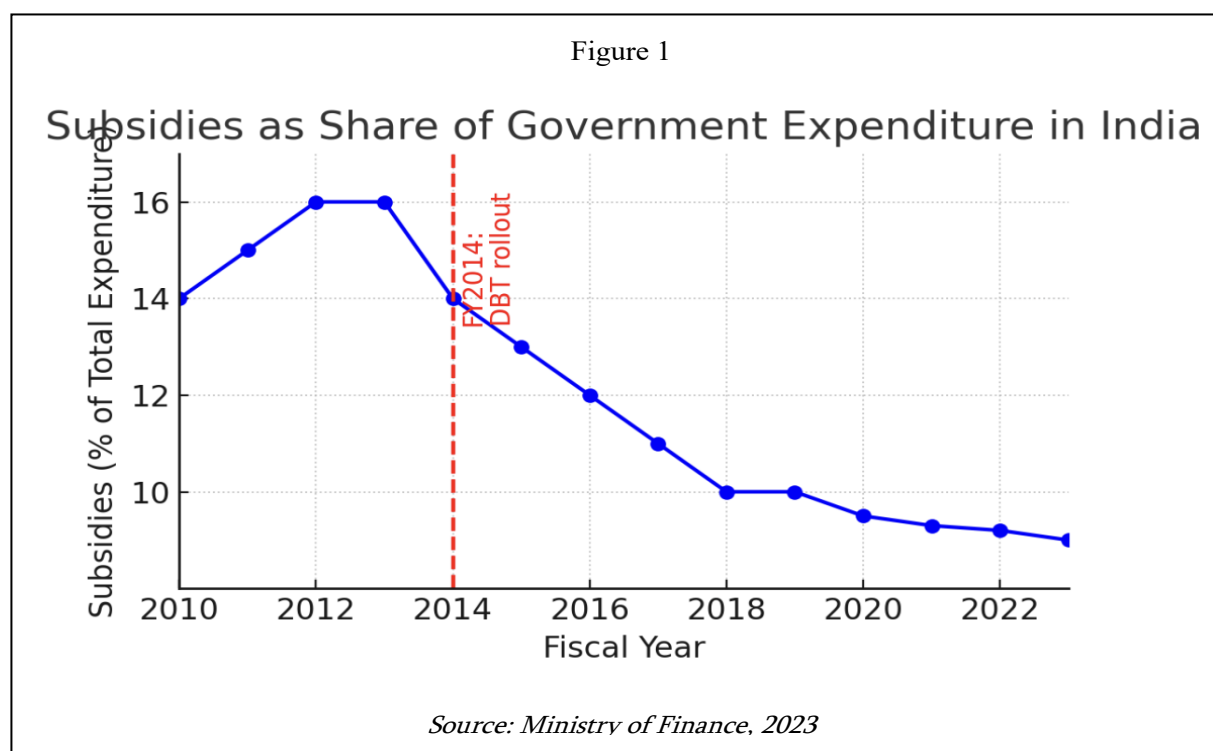


Figure 1: Subsidies as a percentage of total government expenditure in India (2010-2023). The red dashed line (FY2014) marks the broad rollout of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system and Aadhaar linkage. Over the subsequent decade, subsidy spending as a share of expenditure declined from ~16% to ~9%, even as the number of welfare beneficiaries increased substantially, indicating improved targeting and efficiency.

India's digital transformation is also evident in governance innovations such as MyGov, an online citizen engagement platform launched in 2014. MyGov facilitates not only public participation in policymaking processes, but also the submission of ideas, engagement in the quizzes and surveys around government initiatives - a shift towards interactive governance with two-way communication. Similarly, social media has become a governance tool: many ministries and local police departments are actively using Twitter and other platforms to address citizens' complaints in real time. The mass adoption of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is another success. In 2022, India led the world in instant payment volume, accounting for around 46 percent of global real-time payment transactions (Aggarwal, 2023). This payment infrastructure, pioneered by the government and the central bank, enabled financial transactions, allowing us to fund programs such as direct cash transfers and pandemic relief payments. It is a good example of government-supported digital public goods catalyzing private innovation for the public at large.

Crucially, e-governance is not just a technological construct but also a strategy of inclusion regarding access. Recognising this, the government came up with the idea of Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) in 2017 - a gigantic digital literacy plan targeting rural citizens. To date, over 50 million people have been trained through this program, making it one of the largest digital literacy projects globally (Aggarwal, 2023). As part

of these goals, by enhancing digital literacy and making inexpensive internet available (through projects like the BharatNet rural broadband project), the state is trying to ensure that the benefits of e-governance are not marginalizing rural or disadvantaged populations. These efforts show the important role played by ICT in India's public administration reform strategy, which heavily utilizes ICT as a tool to improve the efficiency (in terms of speed and cost), transparency (in terms of reducing opacity and asymmetry of information), and inclusiveness (in terms of reaching remote areas and disadvantaged groups).

6. Citizen-Centric Welfare and Service Delivery

A defining feature of India's administrative reforms over the last decade has been an enhanced proliferation of citizen-centric service delivery and, in particular, welfare programs towards the poor and marginalized. The government has launched and expanded many social schemes, and at the same time, improved the delivery mechanisms to ensure benefits are given to the people for whom they are intended with the least leakage. This approach is in accordance with the idea of 'Antyodaya' (uplifting the last individual) and the 'Together with all, development for all' motto. The initiatives to cover basic needs: housing, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel and financial inclusion. For instance, the initiative, called Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), has built more than 100 million toilets in rural India to eradicate open defecation. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has

given free connections of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to over 80 million poor households, replacing smoky wood fires with clean cooking fuel. The Housing for All, Electricity for All, and Tap Water (Jal Jeevan Mission) schemes are similar in that they focus on reducing gaps in the provision of essential services. While these programs are policy programs, their success depends on their administrative efficiency and implementation innovation.

The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system has been a game-changer in how welfare programs are delivered. Under DBT, cash transfer benefits or subsidies are directly deposited into beneficiaries' bank accounts, which are normally linked to Aadhaar numbers for identification purposes. India's government recently announced that, by eliminating leakages and excluding non-bad, vulnerable households, the DBT platform helped India achieve savings of 3.48 lakh crore rupees (equivalent to US\$42 billion) over the past decade (Press Information Bureau, 2025). The share of subsidy expenditures to GDP fell substantially, while the recipient base grew, indicating increased targeting of resources. Noted, the proportion of subsidies in the national budget of about 16 percent in the early 2010s had decreased to about 9 percent in 2023, mostly due to efficiency gains. At the same time, the coverage of welfare programs increased sixteen-fold (from 11 to 176 crore payments) after the implementation of DBT, highlighting how digitized beneficiary lists and payment processes

enable the state to scale up to more people without corresponding increases in expenditure.

This effect is evident in the results of particular schemes. For example, in the Public Distribution System (PDS), which distributes food rations, the integration of Aadhaar authentication and DBT has reduced duplication or forgery of ration cards, resulting in an estimated 1.85 lakh crore rupees in food subsidy leakages (Press Information Bureau, 2025). In the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), direct payments with an estimated 98% timeliness achieved saved more than 42 thousand crore rupees by reducing fraud and delays. Similarly, the PM-Kisan income support scheme removed over 2 crores of ineligible beneficiaries and is estimated to have saved 22,000 Crores (Press Information Bureau, 2025). These examples reflect the dramatic reduction in the so-called leakages (i.e., funds lost to corruption, ghost beneficiaries, or inefficiencies), freeing up resources that can either be redirected to bona fide beneficiaries or used to extend coverage. While these numbers are based on government and related research reports, third-party analysis is worth a try for verification; however, it is agreed that efficiency gains have improved significantly.

Citizen-centered service delivery goes beyond efficiency to encompass public access and convenience. The rise in the number of one-stop service centres, including common service centres in rural areas, and online portals has reduced bureaucratic friction for citizens seeking government services. The process of obtaining a

passport has been significantly simplified and digitized (Passport Seva Kendra), leading to a drastic reduction in the time required to obtain a new passport and its associated costs. Likewise, the implementation of single-window business licenses and other clearance processes has improved business and living conveniences. The World Bank Ease of Doing Business estimates indicate that India moved up in the ranking from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019, primarily due to the simplification of procedural activities and the digitalization of permit applications (Press Information Bureau, 2025). The citizen-side of the equation: On the citizen side of service delivery, a large number of states have passed Public Service Delivery Guarantee Acts that stipulate statutory time limits for officials to provide certain services (such as giving out a document) and thus have codified standards for services.

Another component of citizen-centered service is to enhance mechanisms for redressal of public grievances. The Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is a national online portal through which citizens can file complaints about government services and have them routed to the appropriate authorities for action (Basu, 2023). CPGRAMS helps monitor status and hold officials accountable for solving problems promptly. Many projects are underway to modernize and strengthen CPGRAMS to ensure a quicker response time (Basu, 2023). Additionally, CPGRAMS is being integrated into the state and district portals to align local grievances with the central grievance redress system, so that they can

be channeled directly for redress (Basu, 2023). Grievance redress has been acknowledged to be a pillar of good governance circuitry, because it has direct contact with the issue and concern of citizen grievances. Another significant finding in this regard is that by using technology - even social media listening for complaints - the government is in a position to be more responsive to public opinion than it may have been in the past. The effectiveness of complaints fluctuates a lot: some of the complaints were well resolved, whereas others were not settled, which indicates a need for progress regarding accountability.

“Last-mile delivery” was especially relevant in times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21), the Indian public administration made significant efforts in relief and healthcare delivery. The existing DBT infrastructure enabled rapid cash transfers to many hundreds of millions of vulnerable people during lockdowns. For example, 800 million poor individuals under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana were given free rations and cash transfers to impoverished women, farmers, and pensioners (Press Information Bureau, 2022). The inherent support, in the form of a large base of bank accounts (created under the Jan Dhan Yojana financial inclusion scheme) and Aadhaar IDs, ensured that this response was achieved very quickly. The COVID-19 vaccination program was run on the Co-WIN (communication with women integrated nutrition) digital platform to enable real-time monitoring of vaccine administration and to issue digital certificates nationwide. As these examples show, investments in citizen databases,

digital public infrastructure, and service delivery mechanisms pay off during emergencies. They can help make responses more effective than they would be under legacy administrative processes.

7. Transparency, Accountability and Participation

Transparency, accountability, and participation are the pillars of democratic governance, and India has made significant progress on these fronts through reforms in laws and administration. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, empowers citizens to seek information from any public authority, thereby making the administration more transparent. While millions of RTI petitions are filed each year, over the last five years, delays and appeals have repeatedly obstructed the right of access to information. The RTI Act has led to greater dissemination of government information on official websites, such as yearbooks and project information. Many departments now proactively publish the document in the public domain (proactive disclosure) to avoid RTI queries, indicating a process of normalization of transparency (Panja, 2021). Furthermore, as part of its Open Government Data initiative (data.gov.in), public datasets on different aspects of government operations have been made available for public review.

Another type of accountability tool has been the development of audit and oversight institutions. Over the last few years, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has

adopted advanced data analytics to audit schemes. This practice has allowed them to detect anomalies. Similarly, there is institutionalization of internal and external program evaluations. Periodic National Family Health Surveys, National Achievement Surveys in education, and other studies are undertaken by the government to measure outcomes and results, with the results published to keep implementing agencies accountable (CAG, 2023). These measures are an example of evidence-based governments where data and feedback can be used to refine policy design and implementation.

Citizen involvement in governance has been promoted as a control measure. The Second Administrative Reform Committee (ARC) recorded various levels of involvement, from information-seeking to a hands-on role in decision-making. While RTI is the typical case, India has seen an increase in public consultations on draft laws and policies. Bill drafting is increasingly done online for public comment; the National Education Policy (2019) and the Data Protection Bill, for example, received thousands of citizen and expert comments. Not all recommendations have been implemented, but the process itself shows a shift from closed policymaking to a more participatory approach. Civil society groups and citizen groups still serve as watchdogs, pointing out issues ranging from environmental clearances to budget implementation, and making the administration accountable and responsive.

Malfeasance in public office remains an important area to explore. After a long-overdue process, the Lokpal Act, 2013, came into existence, and India appointed its first Lokpal (national ombudsman) in 2019. The Lokpal has begun investigating high-level corruption cases, but its effectiveness is still evolving. Moreover, e-Governance has naturally improved accountability by making fewer discretionary powers available. When processes are computerized or decisions are coded mechanically, the scope for arbitrariness is reduced. For example, public procurement auctions have made it transparent what the government is buying and made it harder for government procurement officials to favour certain bidders without public scrutiny. Some success stories include the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), a digital procurement marketplace for the common good, which has simplified procurement and documented savings while expanding vendor participation, resulting in gains in fiscal diligence (GeM Annual Report, 2024).

Performance monitoring is used to hold people accountable. The central government's Performance Monitoring and Evaluation System (PMES) and the dashboard created by NITI Aayog on Aspirational Districts discourage competition and peer pressure among officials. The Aspirational Districts Programme, for example, has ranked districts according to developmental indicators (112 districts are in the inchoate stage) and updates progress monthly (NITI Aayog, 2018). District collectors are held responsible for changes in health, education,

and other areas and slackers are publicly shamed. An evaluation of the program conducted by UNDP found that it has broadly delivered positive results on targeted development outcomes, but that capacity and data quality remain issues. By naming and shaming poor performers and, conversely, rewarding the best performers, the administration aims to instill results-based accountability at the local level.

There has also been an increase in the reach of social accountability systems. Community involvement in audit: social audits of local project spending by community members are a legal requirement in government programs such as MGNREGS (rural employment plan) and the rural housing plan. By conducting social audits, some states, such as Andhra Pradesh and Meghalaya, have identified loopholes and enabled corrective action. Some recent features also keep processing departments on their toes: the rise of media (24/7 news channels, online channels), and an active judiciary (public interest litigations). Independent courts and a free press have traditionally been key to keeping bureaucracy accountable over abuse of power or carelessness. Over the last half-decade, trendy investigative journalism and court verdicts helped highlight issues like the abysmal, insufficient application of the welfare schemes or encounters of law enforcement misbehaviour and forced the administration's forceful reactions.

Citizen-centric accountability is also reflected in the institutionalized feedback mechanisms. Some

services currently request feedback from their beneficiaries; for example, after passport applications are processed, citizens may be asked to rate the service. Much like their private-sector counterparts, business intelligence systems enable agencies to collect customer feedback and provide a closed-loop system for user satisfaction and improvement. Periodic citizen surveys-e.g., the Ease of Life Index, as a need which incorporates views of public utilities in the urban space-also reiterate the principle that it is the population which a government serves that must be recognized as ultimately the quintessential yardstick of government performance.

8. Administrative Reforms and Capacity Building

Public administration reform and capacity building are essential elements of public administration reform. Reorganization of the civil service's internal organization and human resource management is a strategic imperative. The Indian civil service - especially the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and other All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) Services - has long been seen as a kind of steel frame, upon which the government stays. Yet, the need for a more adaptable, specialized, and performance-based body has long been acknowledged. In recent years, various initiatives have been taken to build capacity, bring in expertise, and make the bureaucracy more agile to address today's challenges.

One prominent reform in the area of viability is the Mission Karmayogi (or the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building), launched in 2020. The mission embodies a transition from a “rules-based” to a human resource management system in which assignments and duties are based on officers’ competencies and skills rather than on seniority or generalist experience (Indian Institute of Public Administration, 2021). Officers have the opportunity to develop new skills through online learning on iGOT Karmayogi, a digital learning platform. The mission sees learning as a continuous process, learning by doing (field-based learning), and a personalized career path, with the overarching goal of developing a well-competent, modern, and responsive civil service. According to the Government of India, Mission Karmayogi seeks to professionalize civil servants into creative, constructive, proactive, and technologically enabled workers, while preserving Indian cultural and value orientations (Indian Institute of Public Administration, 2021). Still in its early stages, this reform has the potential to be transformative by permanently institutionalizing capacity building across all levels of government.

Another major reform is the demand for “lateral entry” of professionals from outside the traditional sources of the civil services, normally at the mid- to senior-management level (Joint Secretary and Director ranks). This proposal, recommended by the Second ARC and taken forward by the government think tank NITI Aayog, aims to bring new talent and domain expertise into the bureaucracy. Since 2018, the central government

has been employing experts from the private sector, academia, and public-sector undertakings for positions in economic affairs, infrastructure, commerce, and other departments. As of August 2023, a total of 63 people have been brought in through lateral entry into various ministries, of whom 57 are still serving. This lateral hire brings skills in technology, finance, and public policy, which may not always be readily available in the career civil service. The hope is that they can provide new ideas, help overcome difficult technical problems, and instill a competitive spirit. However, its scale is still small compared to the approximately 5 million public employees in India, and it has encountered opposition from some quarters, as well as problems arising from circumventing affirmative action provisions, since lateral recruits are hired on contract and are not subject to the reservation quotas applicable to UPSC recruits. The government's recent attempt to increase lateral hiring (they advertised 45 new positions in 2024) met with some pushback. This shows that although the idea is appealing from the perspective of administrative flexibility, its execution must be nuanced to account for integration into fractured institutional settings and for equity allocation.

Organizational restructuring is another type of reform. A major transformation in 2015 was the replacement of the Planning Commission, which was 65 years old, with a new institute, NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India). The shift from the top-down, centralized five-year planning model to the think-tank and cooperative

federalism model represented by NITI Aayog is from the Movisual Planning Model to a Policy incubator model in collaboration with state Governments. Examples of efforts undertaken by NITI Aayog include the Aspirational Districts Program and competitive indices (on innovation, export-readiness, health, etc.), which serve as positive incentives for states to improve governance outcomes. This is part of a larger pattern of decentralization and devolution of authority and discretion, away from command-and-control towards greater coordination and competition between sub-national units. Similarly, constitutional federal trends have involved efforts to devolve more financial and administrative authority to the states and localities in keeping with these constitutional federal doctrines. Whereas the ongoing efforts are geared toward localizing and contextualizing governance, with the center serving more as an enabling agency.

Inside the civil service, performance management and ethics have been improved. Rather, the government has used rules like FR 56(j) to suspend officials it deems corrupt or inefficient before they have had a chance to serve three years, making it clear there are real consequences for nonperformance. Periodic service assessments and more stringent vigilance protocols have resulted in the demotion or forced retirement of several officers in recent years, thereby increasing accountability. Additionally, managerial culture change in the pursuit of greater probity includes training in integrity through ethics training, observances such as Vigilance Awareness Week,

and the promotion of a code of conduct. The implementation of technologies such as CCTV in the office management system, biometric attendance systems, and digitized file tracking has also reduced absenteeism and shirking, potentially increasing productivity.

In addition, the Indian Government has adopted public-private partnerships (PPPs) and, at the same time, outsourced public services and infrastructure, thereby indirectly transforming administrative procedures. The public administrator, therefore, transforms his tasks from direct provision to a contract-based model, with regulation in some areas: the role of the public entity, in partnership with private entities, is to ensure and encourage efficiency and investment. While Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in infrastructure (roads, airports, etc.) has had a chequered history, it remains an important mechanism for harnessing private skills and capital. Recent studies indicate that PPPs, if well designed, can enhance service delivery and require strong public capacity to ensure contract management and protection of the public interest. The success of PPPs is therefore directly related to improving the quality of administration in negotiation, regulation, and monitoring.

The role of training and grassroots capacity is known to be important in the context of administrative reforms. Apart from Mission Karmayogi for officers, a series of programs has been introduced to train local government officials, including panchayat secretaries and municipal officers, in new skills. With the introduction of

online training modules, the skilling of personnel across a wide range of topics, from accounting to disaster management, has been scaled up. Further, peer-learning forums and best-practice sessions (led by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances or NITI Aayog) provide administrators with exposure to innovative solutions. The impact of these capacity-building activities is cumulative, though; in some respects, districts have substantially improved their public service delivery by adopting good practices from other districts.

9. Inclusive and Sustainable Governance Initiatives

Governance for all has become one of the main areas of attention in public administration reform: it ensures that governance works for all segments of society, is future-oriented, and is inclusive. Inclusivity in this context refers to the inclusion of marginalized groups in the development agenda and decision-making. In contrast, sustainability implies a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and long-term vision.

One recent innovation in inclusiveness is the empowerment of women in politics. The provision of women's reservation is brought in the India Constitution (128th Amendment) Act, 2023, generally known as the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, providing one-third of the total seats in the national Parliament and state legislatures for the socio-economic status (SES) category of females. The extremely symbolic step, which will be enforced after the next census, attacks the critical

lack of women's representation in the highest decision-making bodies, from the current about 15% in Parliament to the expected close to 33%. The argument goes like this: The higher the number of women in office, the more likely policies and administration are to reflect women's perspectives and needs, thereby making governance more inclusive. At the local level, women have been active since the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution (1993), under which one-third (and, in many states, 50 percent) of the seats in panchayats and city councils are reserved for women. Recent literature suggests that councils run by women are likely to spend more on public goods associated with water, health, and education, providing additional evidence for the case for gender inclusion at the higher legislative level. This institutionalization not only marks a gender-inclusive turning point in the developmental process but also requires support through capacity-building programs for the first wave of women legislators and the facilitation of their effective participation.

In terms of social inclusion, the government continues to develop affirmative action policies - reservations in jobs and education - for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) who together form a majority part of the population. Public administration is entrusted with implementing these policies in service delivery and the recruitment process. Special interventions to benefit historically disadvantaged communities, such as scholarships and entrepreneurship programs for SC/ST

communities, nutrition interventions in tribal areas, and improved delivery in backward areas, have been implemented. As mentioned earlier, the Aspirational Districts Program aims to improve human development indices in districts with high SC/ST populations. Moreover, disaggregated data are increasingly used to pinpoint pockets of exclusion (for example, villages with low girl-child school enrolment or poor health-related outcomes among the tribal population), enabling public agencies to target interventions. This evidence-based approach to becoming more inclusive represents a paradigm shift away from previous one-campus-fits-all responses.

Youth inclusion is another form of inclusivity. The population of India is under 30 years old, prompting public administration to harness the energy and feedback of younger citizens. The National Youth Policy (last revised in 2014, updated in 2021, and now in a new draft) emphasizes youth engagement in governance and nation-building. The Youth Parliament and internship programs provide platforms for youth to be heard and to be exposed to governance. Several departments host hackathons and innovation challenges to encourage youth entrepreneurs to crowdsource solutions to public issues, such as applications for waste management or new paradigms for rural development. Youth are brought into the consultative process, and the administration not only benefits from young ideas but also gains ownership in public service. Additionally, skill development activities like Skill India help improve young people's employability

and, in turn, employment, thereby aiding their integration into the economy, which is a governance focus.

On the sustainability side, environmental and climate considerations have essentially become more visible in policy and public administration in India in recent years. The country faces a twin challenge: maintaining high economic growth while reducing environmental degradation. This has led to the creation of new institutions and the adoption of ambitious goals at the administrative level. Therefore, a significant reservation has been the creation of a dedicated Ministry of Jal Shakti in FY 2019, brought about by the amalgamation of water-related departments, an indication of comprehensive water resource management in the backdrop of the looming water crisis. Another is the establishment in 2015 of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), headquartered in India, to promote the global spread of solar energy and mark India's leadership in sustainable development.

Another notable set of commitments is in the area of climate change: At the Paris Agreement (COP21) in 2015, India committed to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), aiming to derive 40% of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. At the same time, renewable energy capacity (solar and wind) is growing rapidly, so that in November 2021 (almost 9 years earlier than expected), the world reached this target. By late 2021, India had around 156.8 GW of non-fossil fuel installed power capacity, accounting for 40.1 percent of total

installed capacity. Following this success, India revised its targets at COP26 in 2021, stating that it will achieve 500 GW of renewable capacity by 2030, including non-fossil capacity, and a goal of net-zero emissions by 2070. Accomplishing these goals requires strong administration, with coordination spanning from low-carbon infrastructure, such as wind and photovoltaic plants, to the phase-out of fossil-fueled infrastructure and financing. The Government of India has initiated multi-sectoral missions, such as the National Solar Mission, the National Hydrogen Mission (to enhance green hydrogen production), and incentives for electric vehicles. While the public administration has to balance development and the environment (which leads to debates and conflicts over environmental impact assessment (EIA) norms between ministries of ease of doing business and ministries of environmental protection), good governance here will be finding sustainable solutions to enable economic growth without irreversible environmental degradation.

Owing to sustainability, long-term urban planning is also a must. Programs like the Smart Cities Mission (launched in 2015) and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) emphasize urban rejuvenation, with sustainability as their central theme, including promoting public transport, solar lighting, improved waste management, and climate-resilient infrastructure in cities. Local government is presumptively pushed towards data-based planning (e.g., using sensors to manage traffic and pollution) and citizen participation in design, with many

Smart Cities initiatives soliciting public participation from residents in developing development plans. Whilst results differ from city to city, the diffusion of these concepts marks the way for a paradigm shift towards a modern, sustainable approach to urban governance.

The general idea of “future-ready administration” has been surfacing within the background of the 25-year-long “Amrit Kal” towards 2047, the centenary year of independence, and the dream of India becoming an economically and socially developed nation. This vision requires a public administration that is forward-looking and prophetic. For instance, the government is investing in digital infrastructure to build the India Stack (digital ID, payments, data exchange frameworks) that not only meets today’s requirements but also creates capacity for future governance models (which may include AI and big data). Meanwhile, the realisation that disaster management will play an increasing role in the context of climate change has led the National Disaster Management Authority to enhance its response capabilities and early warning systems. Cyclone shelters, disaster preparedness drills and climate change adaptation plans have become common in many states, a big change from a largely reactionary stance.

10. Challenges in Public Administration

The first is the bureaucratic inefficiency and procedural delays, which have dominated the system for decades. While the implementation of process and technology reengineering has improved the situation to some degree, claims about red tape,

decision-making bottlenecks, and excessive paperwork are still being heard across the board. The fact is, government organisations often work in silos and there is little to no coordination - the lack of coordination has often been described as a form of “departmentalism.” This can lead to contradictory policies or delays; for instance, an infrastructure project can be delayed because different departments (environment, forests, railways, etc.) clear files sequentially and without much coordination. Among other things, the notorious intrusion of the bureaucracy’s penchant for specific regulation and bureaucratisation tends to repress innovation and local initiative. According to a 2021 report, bureaucracy, corruption, political interference, and a lack of infrastructure are among the major issues in India’s public sector that hamper effective service delivery (psppjournals.org). Reforms to address these problems are slowly introduced, but change is slow on the ground.

Corruption is an important issue in both elite decision-making and lower-level dealings between the people and the government. Petty corruption - the corruption of paying for basic services, police help and land registration - has declined in some places through e-government, but has not been eliminated. India’s Corruption Perceptions Index, known for its transparency, has historically been close to the global middle, and change has been gradual. While the number of high-profile scandals has been on the decline over recent years, compared to the 2000s, this decline is likely attributable to an improved control environment and greater

deterrence; perceptions of corruption at the political and administrative levels remain the same. The institutional mechanisms for enforcing accountability, such as the Lokpal and the Central Vigilance Commission, should be strengthened to make them effective deterrents. Anti-corruption activities also require cultural transformation, something that is once again lacking without ethical leadership and popular pressure. A mix of e-governance (to eliminate opportunities for face-to-face rent-seeking) and strong enforcement will help improve India's rating on this front over time.

The politicization of bureaucracy and interference in particular issues are other challenges. The ideal of a neutral, professional civil service is eroded by inappropriate political pressure on officials, such as frequent transfers of honest officials or pressure to favour special interests. There is also the short tenure of transfer for Indian civil servants within a particular posting, during which certain state officers are transferred in less than a year, thus disrupting continuity and policy implementation. These regulations and those of the Supreme Court require employees to be hired for a minimum of 10 years and to be shielded from political whims, but these are not always respected. This is an endemic, functional problem embedded in patronage politics, and its reform requires political will to honour the independence of institutions. As encouragingly demonstrated in areas such as election conduct and the work of regulatory authorities (e.g., the Election Commission and the RBI), institutions can exercise autonomy and act professionally in India. Bringing

that culture into day-to-day management is still a challenge.

One of the most basic constraints is administrative capacity, especially at lower levels of government and in less developed areas. Indian bureaucracy is a multi-tiered pyramid; the top echelons (IAS officers, central services) are reasonably well-sophisticated, but most of the actual service delivery is done by state and local government personnel who might have poor training, resources, and/or motivation. For example, a village secretary or municipal clerk generally carries a heavy workload in a low-support environment with a low salary, which can affect service quality and receptiveness to new initiatives. In addition to these, training and capacity building at all levels are as important as in the higher civil services. The government's efforts to empower district collectors and frontline workers with technology, for example, through tablets for health workers and apps for agricultural extension, are very helpful. However, unless continuity in mentoring and incentivisation is ensured, uptake may be limited. Third, some are now unemployed who previously held public jobs: vacancies in government at many levels (from school teachers to judges to policemen), overwork of existing staff members, and slower public services (why? yes, the court backlog remains massively high because of judge vacancies). As government's scope of authority expands, institutions need to fill these vacancies and increase their workforce, as appropriate (e.g., health inspectors or environmental regulators), to meet the expanded scope.

The magnitude and heterogeneity of Indian conditions themselves constitute a challenge for the administration's control that few other countries have had to deal with. Implementing any policy consistently across 28 states, 8 union territories, and over hundreds of millions of beneficiaries is a massive task. Conditions vary widely; what would work in a well-governed southern district might not work in a remote northeastern tribal district. Making policies flexible for local adaptation and building the institutional capacities (panchayats and urban bodies) of local governance bodies to play a greater role are important. Even though local bodies were created with the 73rd & 74th Amendments, devolution of functions and finances has been incomplete. Many local bodies are resource and capacity-poor. It would be a challenge, and the solution would be to strengthen governance to bring it closer to people. Each of them often refers to the concept of 'cooperative federalism'; in fact, the central and state governments have enhanced their cooperation through institutions such as the GST Council (which oversees the national goods and services tax), consultations, and related bodies. Even so, center-state relations can be strained (for instance, over the allocation of funds and the implementation of central schemes), and political differences can act as impediments to organizational effectiveness. Administration is a complex process, and federal administrators must work with state officials to carry out programs while at times dealing with conflicting priorities.

Another set of challenges concerns the system of justice and the rule of law, key components of

public administration. Although not directly administrative in the narrow sense, the performance of police, reviewing courts and regulatory enforcement agencies directly impacts governance outcomes. The police force in India, for the same purpose, continues to struggle due to a lack of personnel and training, and sometimes even corruption, which erodes citizens' trust in them. The justice delivery system is characterised by millions of cases pending in courts, which adversely affects the expeditious enforcement of rights and contracts (International Institute of Administrative Sciences 2024). The government has begun digitising courts (the e-courts project) and ADR methods, but the pace of improvement is slow. Public administration can encompass a host of welfare programs. However, if justice, in the sense of property rights, contract enforcement, and basic law and order, reigns, the rule of law is weak, and the overall quality of governance is poor. Hence, suggested yet rarely accomplished police reforms and suggested but minimally achieved judicial reforms are necessary elements of the public administration reform agenda.

The public administration faces new challenges and demands from citizens. Cybersecurity, data privacy, and misinformation management are now relevant issues within the governance domain, and the bureaucracy needs new skills and structures to address them. In addition, the public today has increasingly demanding expectations for service quality; comparisons are frequently made with the private sector or the best-governed countries, which puts pressure on the administration to perform

better. Such positive pressure, in turn, can result in public disillusionment if it is not realized. Crisis management, whether a pandemic, a natural disaster, or economic shocks, challenges the government's resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only revealed shortcomings in health infrastructure and coordination, but also showcased the state's capacity to mount a massive vaccination campaign. Payments from such experiences must be institutionalized as 'business as usual' (e.g., keeping emergency preparedness strategies up to date, maintaining stocks of essential goods through the supply chain, etc.).

Conclusion

There is a discernible trend in the history of public administration in India over the recent years towards making governance more effective and responsive to the demands of 21st-century democracy. Through a combination of technological innovation, policy reforms, and institutional restructuring, India has embarked on an agenda to make its administration more efficient, transparent, and citizen-responsive. Government schemes such as Digital India and Direct Benefit Transfers demonstrate the government's potential to deploy technology at unprecedented levels to enhance service delivery and minimize leakages. Reforms in the training of the civil service (Mission Karmayogi) and in lateral recruitment are a sign of openness to introspection and change within the bureaucracy, seeking to overcome the inertia of the past. Technically speaking, this focuses on results and accountability, ranging from real-time

dashboard monitoring to simplifying processes that impact everyday people's lives. Basic propositions of the Second ARC and its predecessors about an administration "at the heart of government" and in partnership with citizens are gradually becoming a reality.

This study also highlights the fact that the administrative evolution in India is yet a work in progress. Many of the reforms are still in their early stages, and their effects are yet to be seen. There are deeply entrenched administrative and political reasons for that: progress will not be even across regions or across sectors. However, these aforementioned improvements have not yet been fully enjoyed by all citizens; there are still challenges to overcome (digital divide, capacity divide, etc.). Continuous feedback and course correction are of utmost importance. By its nature, public administration has to be a dynamic and learning process, able to draw lessons from failures (a scheme that did not achieve its targets) as well as successes (a pilot project that can be replicated). In the spirit of cooperative federalism, what works in one state or district must be shared and implemented elsewhere, forming a virtuous cycle of excellence.

Looking towards the future, when India hopes to be a developed nation possibly by 2047, having ministries such as public administration, which will be at the centre of the needs, will be pivotal in taking the journey ahead. The phrase "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" will surely evolve into "Minimum Government and Maximum

Governance,” where government will play a lesser role in direct control and more in facilitating and enabling the private enterprise and civil society to succeed, while ensuring the public interest. The shifts and trends detailed in this paper - digital government, empowerment, efficiency and inclusive policies - all signal an administration that is more intelligent, leaner and more responsive to its citizens’ needs. If India follows this path, building on the good YoMs with political and administrative commitment over time, it may develop a governance model that is not only inclusive but can rapidly accelerate development while ensuring that its benefits are fairly distributed.

India’s experience is also very instructive for other developing countries. It shows that, even when achieved through a large bureaucracy, transformation is possible through the acceptance of technology and new ways of thinking, and that people-centered public administration is not only possible but also productive. India's case illustrates those possibilities and hurdles in governance reforms at scale. Ultimately, the success of these reforms will be judged by how much they have contributed to improving the quality of life of the average citizen and to restoring the trust between the public and the state. Public administration in India is in the process of change - a difficult, complex process of change, but with mixed results, which give hope that governance in India is becoming more effective, responsive, and inclusive. With perseverance and through inclusive learning and planning, India’s administrative system can

continue to evolve into one that genuinely fulfills the aspirations of its people and the vision of India’s Constitution.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relied solely on publicly available secondary sources, no direct ethical risks were involved. Nevertheless, academic integrity was maintained by properly acknowledging all sources and ensuring that interpretations were presented accurately. No proprietary or confidential information was used.

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