
Book Review

BIMTECH Business Perspectives
4(2) 194–198, 2023
© 2023 Birla Institute of Management
Technology
DOI: 10.1177/22779779231207259
bsp.bimtech.ac.in



Srinath Sridharan and Arun Ganesh, *Time for Bharat: A Researched Conversation on Governance*. Notion Press, 2022, 366 pp., Price: 570. ISBN: 979-8-88805-368-3 (paperback), 979-8-88849-078-5 (Hardcase).

Reviewed by: Manoj Pareek, Associate Professor, Bennett University, Greater Noida, India.

The book “Time for Bharat: A Researched Conversation on Governance” stands as a remarkable endeavor, seeking to offer a profound and all-encompassing exploration into the intricate tapestry of policy formulation and governance in India across diverse sectors within the nation. Within its pages, readers will encounter a compilation of erudite essays, penned by distinguished authors, which collectively weave a comparative and conceptual framework, illuminating the nuanced landscape of governance in the country. Notably, this literary work assumes a timely significance, arriving on the scene precisely when governance issues have surged to the forefront of national discourse, a prominence that has been steadily mounting since the purported pivotal year of 2014.

Today, India as a nation is witnessing profound changes and challenges leading to contentious policy decisions and outcomes during the ongoing “Amritkal” on the completion of 76 years of Indian democracy. Whereby government policies vis-à-vis the governance needs of the nation need to be analyzed by experts and scholars. Thus, this book serves this objective effectively. The successful performance of the policy framework in core democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, executive, and administration, is a necessity for the future of the nation.

For decades, planned economic development under the much-celebrated five-year plans based on the Soviet model put undue emphasis on heavy industries requiring huge investments with long-term returns. This resulted in abysmally low growth and rising unemployment under the so-called license raj. Thus, governance took a back seat in those times. As the implementation of projects took a heavy toll on the resources. However, the real Indian story of sustained economic growth started in 1991, when the regulatory fetters were eased under then-Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Initially, the



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed.

economic reforms gained good momentum but soon slowed down during the UPA-2 regime, due to poor governance, corruption, and a tendency toward risk aversion on the part of the government. The authors of the essays in this book have brilliantly tried to confer centrality to the issues of governance; credit goes to the editors and compilers *Shri Arun Ganesh and Shri Srinath Sridharan* through their meaningful selection of these essays penned by expert authors in a book format. India, today's most populous country, happens to be a multiparty democracy, unlike the second most populous country which effectively runs on the one-party system. Although at present competition with China seems like a distant goal, it will be achievable in a decade or so with the present GDP growth rate already being higher than China's. Therefore, we need to remove the barriers of red tape and complex bureaucratic procedures that give rise to delays and corruption. The ease of doing business is necessary to attract foreign investment in India. Thus, governance will ensure accountability on the part of various institutions of the country.

This book endeavors to dismantle the barriers obstructing India's path to growth by shedding light on the pivotal role of governance as an indispensable prerequisite for attaining the nation's ambitious growth targets. Beyond its focus on corporate governance, this book casts a wide net, encompassing an exhaustive spectrum of governance facets within the economic landscape of India. The essays within these pages venture into the intricate terrain of India's civilizational ethos, delving into critical areas, such as the economy, education, health care, and technology.

Yet, it is worth noting the conspicuous omission of a dedicated chapter on e-governance, digitalization, and artificial intelligence within this volume. This absence, albeit unintentional, leaves a noticeable gap in the comprehensive coverage of governance topics. It is my fervent hope that future editions of this book will rectify this oversight, enhancing its completeness by incorporating these essential dimensions of contemporary governance in India.

The book is right on track when it places emphasis on "transformational governance." Besides, the book has 17 chapters that contain a wealth of summarized discussion on a broad range of subjects. The reader of the book can start with any of the chapters randomly for his/her reading, as they happen to be independent per se.

To me, the very title of the book, *Time for Bharat*, is inviting for anyone who is interested in the subject of governance in a rising India. Almost 800 years of subjugation by foreign invaders tried to stifle aspirations, freedom, and potential. The last ones are the British colonialists, who wantonly looted the country, leaving it high and dry economically. On August 15, 1947, the Union of India came into existence as a sovereign republic, stepping into the world economic arena. It is still in the league of developing countries, marching fast to become a developed country by 2047 when it completes its 100 years of freedom. Governance issues will play a pivotal role in achieving this objective.

As we know, there has been an intense debate going on about the so-called "Idea of India" for three decades, spearheaded by Professor Sunil Khilnani. Khilnani's "Idea of India" is based on Nehruvian thought, but unfortunately, the issue of governance did not find a place in that debate. Moreover, Khilnani's celebrated essay on the "Idea of India" covered merely 50 years of emerging India, whereas today we are celebrating 76 years of our independence, aptly called

Amrit Mahotsav of the Indian economy. In this *Amritkaal*, India needs good governance in all spheres to make rapid strides in its economic transformation.

India, that is, the “Bharat” of today is no longer a prisoner of the past that used to be mired in the so-called “Hindu rate of growth” until 1991, whereas today the country is among the fastest growing economies in the world. It has achieved remarkable success in the renewable energy arena, leaving behind many of the developed nations. Of course, there are naysayers and prophets of doom about India’s rise to becoming a superpower by the mid of the century. However, India is already on a fast track to reaching that goal. Governance will play a significant role in achieving the said objective.

Coming to specifics, the essay on agricultural governance by the learned author Arun Ganesh brilliantly captures the importance of agricultural governance, which is crucial for India’s rise as an economic powerhouse. It considers the optimum use of soil, seeds, fertilizers, and research and development in the agricultural sector.

Besides, it also addresses the need for sound land laws and land reforms, including crop insurance, nutrition, and the emancipation of women’s labor in agriculture. Somehow the author seems to have overlooked the role of grassroots governance through the gram panchayats as envisaged in the Panchayati Raj institution. Thus, the agricultural sector needs major transformation in the broader rural landscape to become a vehicle for change in rural governance and administration.

Today, we are living in a fast-changing world socially, economically, and politically. Fast technological advances are changing the way we live, earn, work, and administer. The advances in digitalization and AI have created platforms like Chat GPT that are ahead of what we had in social media or other forums. These new technological tools are providing us with remarkable efficiency to solve our problems, including the governance challenges; thus, Swaminathan Mani and Rao have contributed an excellent chapter on technological governance.

The authors of these essays in the book have attempted a very meaningful dialogue following rich ancient Indian traditions of scriptures and treatises like *Upanishads*, *Mimansas*, *Sankhyas*, etc. Thus, the editors of the book have rightly said, “we must tear away from victimhood and fragility through our inner strength.” The efforts of the editors in compiling these gems of knowledge are indeed going to rekindle the spirit of inquiry and analysis to find solutions in the sphere of governance.

The book also serves the laudable purpose of bringing together the views of expert professionals, policymakers, and academia. This book has been published at an opportune time when India is hosting the G-20 summit under its presidency. Moreover, it is also a time when India’s startups are blossoming into unicorns, and there is remarkable progress in the field of homegrown entrepreneurship. To tap the huge opportunities for talented human resources, the country needs good governance in all the areas of national importance, like education, health care, energy, manufacturing, trade, commerce, taxation, etc. All of these have been effectively examined by the contributing authors in the pertinent essays.

The chapter dedicated to education governance, penned by Arushi, Anisa, and Sakate, offers a comprehensive exploration of the transformative potential embedded

in the New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020. This chapter underscores the pivotal role of education in shaping a nation's ethos and fostering national pride. It highlights an intriguing perspective on the taxation of not-for-profit schools, currently exempt from taxes, as a potential revenue source to support poor sections of society.

Furthermore, the authors have meticulously dissected the key facets of NEP 2020, encompassing its impact on both school education and higher education institutions, along with the imperative need for skill development. The chapter prominently addresses the pressing issue of bridging the chasm between conventional, theory-centric curricula and real-world problem-solving, a disparity that has hindered the employability of graduates.

However, it is important to note that the chapter opens with a somewhat critical view of India's education system pre-NEP 2020, characterizing it as dysfunctional. This critique, though valid in many respects, should be tempered with the acknowledgment that even under the previous system, individuals from middle-class backgrounds ascended to the highest echelons of global corporations, such as Microsoft and Google. It underscores that while the system may not have been perfect, it did have its merits and successes.

In the insightful chapter penned by Dr Chatteraj and Dr Jain, the spotlight falls squarely on health care governance. The authors underscore the imperative for increased health care spending, enhancements in medical education, and the critical implementation of the government's ambitious universal health care scheme. Their analysis delves into both the supply- and demand-side challenges confronting the health care sector, with a particular emphasis on the necessity to bolster primary-level infrastructure.

However, it is worth noting that the chapter could have further explored the dire conditions and strain faced by public hospitals, a situation that has compelled a significant portion of the population to opt for private health care facilities, eroding trust in the public health care system. Additionally, the authors could have considered the financial burden placed on the exchequer by universal health programs, which necessitate substantial budgetary allocations and escalating resource requirements year after year. Certain state governments have started the UHC scheme with a small contribution from each beneficiary, which has met with success in a large state of Rajasthan. This highlights that, even, individuals with limited means are willing to invest in government-run health care initiatives when they perceive tangible value in such programs.

In Srinath Sridharan's essay on urban governance, readers are treated with a wealth of insights concerning metropolitan planning and governance, with a particular focus on the transformative Smart Cities Mission, Amrut initiative, and Swachh Bharat campaign. While the essay offers valuable perspectives on these overarching national programs, it leaves an unexplored territory that could have provided a deeper understanding of urban governance, i.e., the role and functioning of urban municipal bodies.

Urban municipal bodies serve as the lifeblood of our cities, responsible for maintaining and delivering essential services that impact the daily lives of residents. These critical functions encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from sanitation and solid waste management to street lighting, sewage disposal, and

cleanliness. Although the author briefly touches on some of these facets, they do so without delving into the specific context of municipal governance.

A more comprehensive examination of the workings, challenges, and innovations within urban municipal bodies would have added a layer of depth to the reader's understanding of the intricate web of urban governance. It could have shed light on the practical aspects of delivering essential services in our cities and highlighted the vital role that these bodies play in shaping the urban landscape.

It is noteworthy that the editors have given quotes from revered Sadh Guru at the beginning of each essay that are relevant to the subject as well as inspiring. These quotes motivate the readers to read the essays attentively. Thus, the compilers have rightly stated that Bharat continues to evolve in order to march toward progress and prosperity, and it has been the most enduring civilization of the world, spanning thousands of years but unfortunately plundered and ruled by Western colonial powers. They have very rightly pointed out that the democratic spirit has been alive long before the colonizers came and occupied the land of Bharat. It was well governed by certain democratic kingdoms even 2000 years ago (Lichhawi Gan Rajya and the Gupt Empire). Thus, the book is a tribute to the eternal spirit of Bharat.