Citizen Engagement and Participatory Governance: Comparative Study of India and China

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Abstract

The development of a modern nation is based upon the infrastructure and the Governance process. It is a herculean task to understand the rigid administrative structure of China and India. The comparison has been necessitated due to the competitive world market. The government structure and the availability of various facilities are some of the critical parameters in understanding the issues. The paper seeks to probe the various issues that interfere in the day to day administration. India and China represent two different nations in the Asian region. China with a Communist political regime has a population of 1.36 Billion and commands a GDP growth of $9.24 Trillion. Interestingly, India with a democratic regime and a population of 1.25 Billion commands a lower GDP of $1.88 trillion. In recent times reforms in civil services, accountability, transparency etc attracted the attention of the world. A look at Chinese administrative structure shows a pitiable condition of the present public policies. The issues of social welfare predominates the agenda. For an average Chinese civilian an accountable government, reason, security, human rights, transparency, justice, opportunity, innovation and inclusiveness constitute the core values to lead a life of dignity. Some of the challenges that India and China experience are related to Demographic challenges, environmental degradation, rising middle classes, malfunctioning of the bureaucracy etc. An interesting observation made by Political and Economic Risk Consultancy Limited a Hongkong (2012) firm is worth mentioning. It had registered Indian bureaucracy in Asia at 9.21 out of 10, while China was 7.11 over 10points. Some of the key factors that were highlighted include- inadequate infrastructure and corruption, bad taxation system, environmental regulations and non-accountability of the bureaucratic classes. Another Report of the World Bank 2014 while ranking on the ease of doing business in 189 economies gave China 90th position, Hongkong 3rd, The USA 7th, Japan 29th and India 142nd. The paper seeks to explore the concepts of participatory action and engagement between the authorities and citizens. Can we extend the argument to understand the local governance in China too?

Keywords: Governance: UNDP notes that: “Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable. And it promotes the rule of law. Accountability: To be accountable for the job especially for civil servants. Transparency: Openness in administration. Innovation: New Techniques, Local Governance: Local administration with small distinct units.

Introduction

The objective of the paper is to explore the possibilities of enhancing participatory governance in the interest of the civil society. Based on secondary sources the ideas are presented. A bird’s view on the nature of Governance is attempted. The study concludes with a few recommendations for the initiation of fruitful reforms for the sustenance of political systems and the economy. China and India have mega-population, mega – corruption, mega –growth etc. yet the functional administration is very distinct. The right to participate in a society’s decision making processes has been accepted by the world community as fundamental human right. Participatory governance and citizen engagement help in deepening
democracy. By enhancing Social Capital, efficiency and sustained growth can be realized. They may even promote pro-poor initiatives like equity and social justice. The need for sustainable development also stems from the efficient use of resources. The basic right of a citizen is to participate in the political processes as well as “Governance”. Participation of a citizen can be in the form of seeking information on public policies and judging its accuracy. The main purpose of government is to protect people's basic rights. Almost all citizens have the right to participate in governing the nation.

They may choose different ways and methods of doing this. Seeking, accountability, transparency, good governance and even informing the citizen at the global, national to the local level. A special mention may be made about lobbying for the laws that are of special interest for the poor and the marginalised sections. Sometimes, through a demonstration people oppose the law. A key instrument in fighting corruption in India is the Right to Information Act 2005, a powerful piece of legislation by international standards, and one that has been used effectively to campaign against corruption.

Right to Information Act was enacted due to the articulation of a demand in the public sphere by the people. Based on protest, long march and sensitisation of the citizens for a good law public opinion was generated. The Right to Information Act in India can be regarded as the best tool for a citizen to participate in the governing process. It paved the way for the creation and the recognition of the participatory rights of the citizen. This even led to a focus on the deliverability of services. Inspite, of frequent threats the struggle for space in public affairs is continuous. The ideologies of a government can neither be ignored nor treated as a single variable. Public confront a democracy in India and Beijing a communist system on critical issues. A good citizen has a responsibility to work or improve his or her society. The urge to help and ameliorate the conditions of the less fortunate is also equally important. This alone creates a good interface between the citizen and the government.

Any governance associated with efficiency, effective administration within a democratic framework can be regarded as Good Governance. It also encompasses the active participation of the people in governance through the national, state and local self-government agencies. The state is expected to play the role of a provider. An engaged citizen complements by participation. While the state has to play the role of an active promoter.

The necessity for the public officials to engage citizens, in an impartial manner is equally important. This will help in providing information and equity for all stakeholders. Good Governance is accordingly associated with accountability, political leadership, enlightened public policy choice making and a committed bureaucracy which can adapt to the challenges. A strong civil society including a free press and independent judiciary are the other factors that can contribute for Good Governance.

The World Summit of 2005 stipulates that “Good Governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels are essential for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger” [1].

The Millennium Development Goals identify Governance as an important developmental goal. By fostering public participation at various levels. They include the following: public policy development, public service delivery and public accountability.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report of 1997 Good Governance can be defined as an ‘exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels.’

Here it is worth mentioning the ideas of a great Political Scientist. P. Samuel Huntington. The answer to this question perhaps lies in insufficient growth and slow economic development. Political scientist Samuel Huntington, in his controversial book Political Order in Changing Societies in
1968, observed that where political opportunities are scarce, corruption occurs as people use wealth to buy power. And where economic opportunities are few, corruption occurs when political power is used to pursue wealth. The argument is best illustrated by a comparison of India and China [2].

Indeed, China also has its corruption problem. But compared with corruption in India, which is "rent-seeking" and an attempt to grab a part of the existing wealth, corruption in China is "profit-sharing" according to Jagdish Bhagwati. The Communist Party puts a straw in the milkshake and wants the milkshake to grow. For example, Liaoning province under Bo Xilai as governor consistently achieved double-digit growth. But Bo Xilai, a member of the Central Politburo and secretary of the Chinese Communist Party's Chongqing branch until March 2012, was found guilty of corruption, stripped of all his assets and sentenced to life imprisonment on September 22, 2013.

Authoritarian China has a corruption level not much higher than that of democratic India. For example, in 2014, according to the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, China's score at 38 out of 100 was only marginally worse than India's 36. Access to China's entrenched political elite is limited, but economic opportunities abound. In India, on the other hand, political opportunities exceed economic opportunities. It is easier to become an elected representative than a successful businessman. In India, with elite accessibility, numerous political opportunities and economic scarcities, the tendency is to rely on patronage to solidify power and amass gains as quickly as possible [3].

Legal System in India and China

Though all of us don't agree on the existing legal practices. It may be observed the differentiation is essential to understand the political milieu of India and China. "One big difference," Singh added, "comes in the form of the legal system. In India, a firm can sue the government and win, which may not be as easy in China. Also, the public at large is much more vocal and active in India. Any group can file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against a firm, which will frequently get heard in court. Also, it is the case that corporate governance is stronger in India, on average, due to better disclosure and Securities and Exchange Board of India regulatory guidelines. This [is true] even though there are some fine Chinese firms, and some quite poorly governed Indian firms [4].

Politicisation of Corruption

Zhou Yongkang was a dominant leader in the Communist Party of China's (C.P.C.) and enjoyed the patronage for four decades. In the Sichuan province oil industry thrived as his relatives and party leaders shared the assets. This was a major factor that altered the course of corrupt politics in China. Several political parties in India are involved in corrupt practices.

Civil Society is also actively engaged in combating corruption from public life. Anna Hazare's movement against corruption makes a new dimension among civilians in India. Government is also today trying to takes same initiative by passing a strong law for combating corruption. Transparency International India executive director Ashutosh Kumar Mishra gives credit to the anti-corruption movement sparked by Gandhian Anna Hazare. His high-profile protests helped force the previous government to create a number of anti-corruption bills. Earlier in China, also the role of the President XI Jinping's high profile campaign to combat corruption is also worth mentioning.

Role of Corruption in China and India

China has initiated the economic reforms during mid 1980s and India in early 1990s. Since then, China and India have come a long way. During 2014 China has achieved the distinction of largest economy, with highest GDP in the world, US$ 17617.3 billion and attracted highest FDI. India has become the third largest economy in the world, US$ 7375.9 billion (International Monetary Fund, 2014). According to Transparency International both India and China have high levels of corruption.
Corruption in Asia from the point of view of pervasiveness and arbitrariness and came to the conclusions that foreign investors may not get deterred by pervasiveness of corruption but may not invest if arbitrariness is high in a country. During the last two decades the nature of corruption in India has changed. From 1950 to 1980s the petty corruption and administrative corruption were more prominent, but starting from 1980s, the political corruption has become the more predominant. During the last decade, starting from 2000 till 2012 India has witnessed unprecedented political corruption both in quantity and number of cases. Some of the corruption scandals include Bofors (1986, US$ 285 million), HDW Submarine Scandal (1987, US$ 68.85 million), Securities Scam (1992, $ 1.65 billion), Ketan Mehta Stock Market Scam (2001, US$ 200 million), Satyam Computers scam (2009, US$ 1.47 billion), Commonwealth Games scam (2010, US$ 1.31 billion), 2G spectrum scam (2010, US$ 40 billion), Coalmine allocation scam (2012, US$ 40 billion) (Business Today, 2014; Financial Times, 2014) [5].

According to Huang, China has a history of corruption, but the present-day corruption has its source in economic reforms as an unintended by product. Culturally, Chinese society works around a concept called ‘Guan Xi’ or relationships. It is known fact that in China to be able to transact business one needs a strong network of friends, who help each other and that is at the heart of “Guan Xi”. Another cultural aspect of Chinese society is that of gift giving. In the initial stages of reforms, unscrupulous businesses made huge profits by manipulating the local officials and deriving “price arbitrage”. The officials benefited from the gifts and bribes. Due to the language barriers and lack of knowledge about local practices international investors had to take local firms as agents or partners and in many cases these agents or partners did the ground work. This arrangement suited many investors as this speeded up the process of getting the required permits from the local officials and also fuelled corruption. Most researchers are of the opinion that corruption retards economic growth, but in case of China this did not prove to be true. In case of China “the opposite seems to be happening” (Huang, 2015).

The ever growing corruption has become a cause of worry for the Chinese’s government. This has culminated in President Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption drive after assuming the office in 2012, in which he promised to go after both ‘Tigers and Flies’, to root out corruption. As a result of his campaign, till date, 414,000 officials have been disciplined and 201,600 officials were investigated and punished till 2013. Some senior officials caught were, the deputy Chief Engineer of the Railawy Ministry, who was in charge of the projects liking China with bullet trains was arrested for embezzling US$ 2.7 billion in 2011. China issued a request for extraditing, Li Chang Xing, who was the chairman of Yuanhua International Corporation, trading in cigarettes who was supposed to have absconded to Canada with US$ 7.7 billion. General XU Calhou, one of the senior generals was caught with cash, which needed 14 trucks to haul it away. Zhou Yongkong, the former security chief was the biggest ‘tiger’ caught till date. The other “tigers” who were arrested include Ling Jinhua, Jiang Jeminand Liu Tienan [3].

The need of the hour is to reflect on the proportion of corruption in India and China and the need for the changes in the regimes too.

Media Development and Democracy

Many observers emphasize that a free press is not just valuable for democracy, a matter widely acknowledged, but the final claim is that this process is also vital for human development. This perspective is exemplified by Amartya Sen’s argument that political freedoms are linked to improved economic development outcomes and good governance in low-income countries by encouraging responsiveness to public concerns. The free press, Sen suggests, enhances the voice of poor people and generates more informed choices about economic needs. James D. Wolfensen echoed these sentiments when he was the president of the World Bank: “A free press is not a luxury. A free press is at the absolute core of equitable development, because if you cannot enfranchise poor
people, if they do not have a right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about change.” [6]. Governance entails processes and institutions that contribute to public decision-making. When those processes and institutions concern the public sector, the term public governance is used. It can be argued that there are three categories of public governance: civic, political and development. Civic and political governance deal with issues that are related to human rights. Development governance mainly pertains to planning, budgeting, monitoring and accountability of socio-economic development policies and programmes. Participatory governance is one of many institutional strategies of development governance. Citizen engagement is the desired outcome or logical end of participatory governance [7].

Limitations of the Study

- Lack of authentic information about the current state of economy in India and China
- The initiation of reforms In India and China based on a shift in their economic ideologies due to liberalisation, globalisation and capitalism. The transition period can be regarded as a difficult agenda to understand the political economy of any nation.
- If corruption is eliminated structural changes can be noticed otherwise the continuous decay of the polity and the economy may thrive.
- Attention to the details on the violation of the rights of the marginalised sections that are more vulnerable to corruption.

Good governance does not occur by chance. It must be demanded by citizens and nourished explicitly and consciously by the nation state. It is, therefore, necessary that the citizens are allowed to participate freely, openly and fully in the political process. The citizens must have the right to compete for office, form political party and enjoy fundamental rights and civil liberty. Good governance is accordingly associated with accountable political leadership, enlightened policy-making and a civil service imbued with a professional ethos. The presence of a strong civil society including a free press and independent judiciary are pre-conditions for good governance [8].

Conclusion

I hope that in the near future India and China maintain high standards of good governance. I quote Kaufmann of the World Bank who recognised five indicators of Good Governance. They are political stability, the rule of law, government efficiency, regulatory quality, and levels of corruption in each nation. Since a country that registers with widespread corruption invariably has low investment rates, poor economic growth and limited human development. A Participatory citizen can check the administration through SMART Governance. Otherwise the poor, the ignorant the illiterate and the masses have to bear with maladministration and an unjust system. Though India was ranked less corrupt than China yet, “Despite the engagement, innovation and participation of vibrant civil society, media and people at large, corruption continues to be one of the country’s biggest challenges.” The ranking still “reveals India’s bitter reality of political corruption [9].” .The Economic and Social council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) similarly considers governance good only if genuine steps to minimize corruption are taken; if the views of the minorities and the voices of the most vulnerable sections of society in decision making is ensured, and if it is responsive to the present and future needs of a society. It has identified eight salient features of good governance: i) participatory in nature, ii) consensual in orientation iii) accountable iv) transparent v) responsive vi) effective and efficient vii) equitable and inclusive and viii) rule of law.

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