Transparency and Accountability in Governance And Welfare Administration

Ms. Ishrath Unnisa
Lecturer in Political Science
Govt. Degree College, Zaheerabad

Abstract

Transparency and accountability form the foundation of good governance and democratic strength. In the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, these two principles are essential to ensure that India's progress is not only economic but also ethical, inclusive, and citizen-centered. Transparency means openness in government actions, policies, and decision-making processes, enabling citizens to access information about how power and public resources are used. Accountability ensures that all institutions, officials, and representatives are responsible for their actions and answerable to the people. Together, they build public trust, reduce corruption, and make governance more efficient and people-driven. India, since independence, has made continuous efforts to strengthen transparent governance through legal frameworks such as the Right to Information (RTI) Act, citizen charters, and e-Governance initiatives. These instruments have improved accessibility and brought citizens closer to administrative processes. However, as India moves toward the goal of a developed nation by 2047, the expectations from governments—both central and state—are expanding. Telangana, as one of India's most forward-looking states, has already shown leadership in digital public service delivery through projects like MeeSeva, Dharani, and Telangana State Data Portal. These initiatives promote transparency by leveraging technology to minimize human interference, ensure quick service delivery, and leave digital audit trails for accountability. Looking ahead, a transparent and accountable government must focus not only on technology but also on strengthening public institutions, civic participation, and ethical governance. Educating citizens about their rights, strengthening local self-government institutions, and encouraging participatory budgeting are crucial. Future governance models should ensure that information flows openly and that feedback mechanisms are integrated at every stage of public policy—from formulation to evaluation. An accountable government is one that welcomes evaluation and learns from criticism. Public servants should be trained in ethical leadership, and anti-corruption laws must be strongly enforced. Regular audits, social accountability tools like social audits and citizen report cards, and open data systems will ensure that citizens remain active participants in democratic governance. In Telangana, integrating these mechanisms into digital platforms can make governance faster, fairer, and more reliable. By 2047, the goal of Viksit Bharat should be to achieve a governance structure that is transparent by design and accountable by culture. It should not merely rely on rules but be embedded as a value system guiding public institutions. Telangana's experience in combining technology with governance reform can become a model for India's development journey. With transparency ensuring openness and accountability ensuring responsibility, good governance will evolve into great governance—responsive, ethical, and sustainable.

Key terms : *Accountability; Transparency; Ethical Responsibility; e-Governance; Accessibility; Legal Framework; Integrated System*

1. Introduction

Effective governance is essential for the development and wellbeing of any society, and at its core lie the principles of transparency and accountability. In the context of India's ambitious Vision Viksit Bharat 2047, these principles take on renewed significance as the nation strives not only for economic progress but also for governance practices rooted in ethics, inclusiveness, and citizen participation. Transparency in governance refers to the openness and clarity with which government actions, decisions, and resource allocations are conducted. It allows citizens to observe and scrutinize the workings of public institutions, which in turn fosters trust and confidence in the system. Accountability complements transparency by ensuring that public officials and institutions are answerable for their actions and decisions. It requires mechanisms through which citizens can hold government entities responsible, thereby minimizing corruption and inefficiency. Together, transparency and accountability are pillars of democratic governance that ensure public administration is both effective and responsive to the needs of the people.

This study delves into the institutional and legal frameworks that India has employed to foster transparency and accountability, including landmark policies and innovations such as the Right to Information Act (RTI), citizen charters, and the increasing use of e-governance platforms. While these frameworks have brought substantial improvements, the paper also critically examines the challenges and obstacles that hinder their full realization, including bureaucratic resistance, lack of awareness, and technological barriers.

Through case studies and policy analysis, this paper highlights the transformative impact of transparent and accountable governance on welfare administration in India. It articulates how strengthening these principles can lead to better public service delivery, enhanced citizen engagement, and ultimately the realization of the goals set forth in Vision 2047.In a rapidly digitizing society, embracing transparency and accountability also involves leveraging technology to create more participatory and inclusive governance systems. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, offering practical recommendations to enhance governance reforms and ensure equitable development and justice for all citizens.

2. Literature Review

Transparency and accountability in governance have been recurring themes in academic literature and policy discussions for decades. Scholars such as Amartya Sen and World Bank theorists have underscored the importance of open governance as a precondition for development and public trust. Political theorists argue that transparent systems make it possible for citizens to monitor public officials, participate in decision-making, and hold authorities accountable for their actions, which in turn deters corruption and mismanagement. In the Indian context, the emergence of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005 marked a watershed moment in the movement towards open governance. Numerous studies have analyzed the transformative impact of the RTI, observing significant increases in public participation, responsiveness in bureaucracy, and exposure of wrongdoing in diverse sectors from welfare delivery to environmental management. According to Bhatnagar (2018), e-governance initiatives like digital service portals and grievance redress platforms are crucial in making administration more transparent and efficient

International experiences from countries like Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Canada, which adopted freedom of information policies much earlier, reveal that sustained political will, active civil society engagement, and robust legal frameworks are indispensable for success. In India, however, scholars such as Rajesh Tandon and Jean Drèze have pointed out persistent challenges: social and economic inequalities, digital divides, and bureaucratic resistance often limit the reach and effectiveness of transparency measures. Studies also highlight that accountability is not only an institutional process but also depends on social awareness and grassroots activism. Further, literature on welfare

10

administration demonstrates that schemes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) achieve better outcomes in states where transparency and social audit mechanisms are robust. Academic critique suggests that while legislative and digital advancements are commendable, ongoing political commitment, public education, and technological inclusivity are necessary to translate transparency and accountability into everyday practice.

Transparency and Accountability in Governance and Welfare Administration: Pathways to Viksit Bharat 2047

3. Legal & Policy Frameworks

India has implemented several critical legal frameworks and policy initiatives to institutionalize transparency and accountability in governance. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 remains the cornerstone of India's access to information regime. The RTI mandates timely response to citizen requests for government information, promoting openness and empowering civil society. Citizen Charters, first introduced in the late 1990s, set standards for public services and commit public agencies to timelines and quality benchmarks, giving the public a basis to demand accountability.

E-governance initiatives, as outlined in the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) and Digital India programme, seek to transform service delivery through digitization, reducing bureaucratic discretion and enhancing transparency. Administrative reforms like the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, aim to investigate corruption in public offices, and mandatory social audits for flagship welfare schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) boost accountability at the grassroots level. Judicial interventions have also played a decisive role.

Supreme Court judgments on fundamental rights, electoral transparency (such as candidates' asset disclosures), and public interest litigation have expanded the scope of information access and public scrutiny. These collective reforms create a strong—though still evolving—framework for transparent and accountable governance and welfare delivery in India.

4. Case Studies

4.1 MGNREGA Social Audits: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship welfare scheme that mandates social audits to ensure transparency in wage disbursement and project implementation. In states like Andhra Pradesh, institutionalized social audits have empowered villagers to publicly review and question the use of funds, significantly reducing leakages and corruption. Regular public meetings, where expenditures and job cards are displayed, enable community monitoring and lead to corrective action against erring officials.

4.2 Public Distribution System (PDS) Reforms: The targeted PDS in Tamil Nadu has been lauded for its transparent and accountable delivery, with fair price shops using biometric and computerized records to prevent diversion or denial of food grains. Active grievance redressal, display of entitlements, and public vigilance, supported by civil society, have made PDS more effective and citizen-oriented.

4.3 Digital Service Delivery: MeeSeva in TelanganaMeeSeva, an e-governance initiative, offers over 150 public services on a digital platform and is recognized for reducing discretion and delays. Digitization of land, revenue, and welfare services has made records accessible, checked rent-seeking behavior, and enabled a transparent interface between citizens and the state. The initiative highlights the role of technology in promoting accountability among service providers.

4.4 Delhi's Bhagidari Initiative: Bhagidari is a collaborative governance program initiated by the Delhi government, aiming to bring citizens, resident welfare associations, and public agencies together for discussion and monitoring of city services. Through frequent workshops and feedback channels, the program has increased transparency in municipal services and strengthened local accountability.

11

4.5 Kerala's People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning: Kerala's campaign is a widely cited example of participatory budgeting and local governance. By involving gram sabhas (village assemblies) in development planning and expenditure monitoring, the state enhanced transparency and accountability. Public reports, social audits, and open meetings ensure that citizens oversee how funds are used for health, education, and public services.

4.6 Asset Disclosure by Elected Representatives: In line with Supreme Court directions, the Election Commission mandates all candidates for public office to disclose their assets, liabilities, and criminal records. These disclosures, available in the public domain, allow voters and watchdog bodies to scrutinize politicians, increasing accountability and reducing non-transparency in electoral politics.

4.7 PM-JAY Health Scheme IT Portal: The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) uses an IT portal for real-time monitoring and beneficiary verification in public health coverage. The digital system enables tracking of hospital claims, fraud prevention, and accountability in service delivery, with all claims and denials visible to authorized users and subject to audit.

5. Challenges

Despite significant progress in establishing transparency and accountability frameworks, multiple challenges remain in India's governance landscape. The implementation of the Right to Information Act is uneven; many departments delay responses or deny requests citing vague exemptions, and a lack of digitization in several rural and remote areas further limits access. Bureaucratic resistance, entrenched interests, and corruption at various levels hinder reforms and dilute citizen oversight.

Socio-economic disparities and digital divides restrict marginalized groups from effectively exercising their rights to information and participation in governance. Many citizens are unaware of their entitlements and grievance redressal mechanisms, limiting grassroots accountability. Language barriers, illiteracy, and weak public education compound these issues, making it difficult for all sections to benefit equally from transparency initiatives. Moreover, the protection of whistleblowers remains inadequate, and activists seeking to expose public sector corruption often face threats and harassment. E-governance projects face challenges related to cybersecurity, data privacy, and uneven internet penetration. Policy inconsistency and lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms result in periodic lapses in service delivery and accountability.

6. Recommendations

To enhance transparency and accountability in governance and welfare administration, several actionable steps are proposed:

6.1 Strengthen RTI Implementation: Ensure all government departments respond to information requests promptly and proactively disclose critical data online. Digitalization of records and training for public information officers can help close gaps in compliance.

6.2 Increase Citizen Awareness: Launch educational campaigns using media, schools, and community organizations to inform citizens about their rights, entitlements, and grievance mechanisms. Focus on marginalized and rural groups, addressing language and literacy barriers.

6.3 Expand Social Audits and Public Oversight: Institutionalize social audits for more welfare schemes, with mandatory participation and protection for whistleblowers. Involve local communities in planning, budgeting, and monitoring.

6.4 Harness Technology for Transparency: Deploy robust e-governance platforms with security and privacy safeguards. Ensure accessibility through mobile-friendly interfaces, regional languages, and public kiosks to bridge the digital divide.

    6.5 Promote Legal Protections: Strengthen whistleblower and anti-corruption laws to protect citizens and officials exposing wrongdoing. Encourage judicial vigilance and regular review of transparency legislation.

    6.6 Improve Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish independent oversight committees to regularly review the implementation of transparency and accountability measures and publish findings for public scrutiny.

7. Conclusion

Transparency and accountability are indispensable pillars for building good governance and effective welfare administration, especially as India pursues its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. Legal reforms such as the RTI Act, innovations in e-governance, and strong social audit mechanisms have set a positive trajectory for democratizing public administration. Case studies from MGNREGA, the PDS, and digital initiatives like MeeSeva illustrate the tangible benefits—reduced corruption, improved service delivery, and empowered citizens.However, persistent challenges—bureaucratic resistance, digital divides, social inequalities, and inadequate awareness—require continued effort, innovation, and political will. Meaningful reforms must expand grassroots participation, invest in technological accessibility, and protect those who expose wrongdoing. By strengthening the monitoring and education of both citizens and officials, India can realize a future where governance is open, inclusive, and responsive to all. A sustained commitment to transparency and accountability will be essential for achieving equitable development and public trust, making welfare delivery truly effective as the nation advances toward 2047.

References

Bhatnagar, S. (2018). *E-government: From vision to implementation*. Sage Publications.

Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. Penguin Books.

Election Commission of India. (2022). *Disclosure of assets and liabilities of electoral candidates*. Election Commission of India.

Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice. (2005). *The Right to Information Act, 2005*.

Jain, L. C. (Ed.). (2005). *Decentralisation and local governance: Essays for George Mathew*. Orient BlackSwan.

National Informatics Centre. (2022). *MeeSeva services digital platform*. Government of Telangana.

Paul, S. (2002). *Holding the state to account: Citizen monitoring in action*. Books for Change.

Planning Commission, Government of India. (2009). *Social audit of key welfare programs: Report*.

PRIA. (2002). *Social audits as a grassroots approach to transparency and accountability* (Working Paper). Society for Participatory Research in Asia.

Supreme Court of India. (Various years). *Judgments on RTI and electoral disclosure*.

World Bank. (2004). *World development report 2004: Making services work for poor people*. World Bank Publications.