

Good Governance Practices in Ancient Tamilnadu

*Dr. A. Sasirekha

**Dr. A. Stephen

*Asst. Professor, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai

**Director, Knowledge Business School, Salem

Abstract:

Good governance and practices are the signs of a powerful nation. Being a secular nation, our ancestors had followed various systems and procedures that helped to portray ourselves as the best among the nations of the world. The purpose of this article is to discuss the best practices that had been followed long back by our ancestors for their good governance.

Key words: Good governance- Practices in ancient History of Tamilnadu.

Introduction

‘Governance’ refers to the managing of the affairs of an organization. This implies that the activities of an organization must be performed in a proper and the best manner possible. If all the activities of an organization are performed effectively and in an efficient manner, then the organization will certainly be successful.

The term “Corporate Governance” has become popular today. This is because good corporate governance will result in the success of an organization which in turn will make its stakeholders happy. Now the question is whether this scope of good governance can be extended to a country like India. This article makes an analysis of the same.

Characteristics of Good Governance:

Needless to mention that good governance will have certain characteristics. These characteristics have been identified by the United Nation’s, Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific. They are briefly explained below.

1. Participatory: It refers to the giving of an opportunity to all concerned to express their views and feelings.
2. Consensus oriented: It implies that every decision of a group must be unanimous or at least by a majority of all concerned.
3. Transparent: It refers to the openness and that there is no secrecy.
4. Accountable: It is the liability on the part of the concerned to complete the work successfully failing which the concerned is liable for punishment.
5. Responsive: Responsive is the way of taking into confidence the opinions / feelings of one side by the other side.
6. Equitable and inclusive: It means that equal importance must be given to all concerned and the feelings of all concerned must be considered in the decision-making process.
7. Effective and efficient: It refers to doing only right things in the right way.

Following the rule of Law: It refers to the strict adherence of the rules and regulations by all without any exemption.

A depth analysis of the characteristics of good governance shall reveal that what is applicable to a business / service organization is also applicable to a government.

Good Governance in a country

It is a fact that every citizen of a country wants to lead a happy life. This is possible only when there is good governance in the country. Now the question is how to ensure/establish Good Governance in the country. No doubt, the management experts have contributed umpteen means and techniques for the good governance of organizations – both business and service. Here arise two questions, namely, whether the scope of good governance can be extended to a country also, and secondly, if so, whether the same characteristics are applicable to the good governance of a country also. When we consider this question in depth, we will find that promoting good governance in a country is a challenging task due to its large size and diversity of interests. As in the case of the organization where Good governance could be achieved only by the joint efforts of its employees and the management, Good governance in a country could be ensured by two sets of people, viz, the citizens of the country and the Government which is responsible for running the administration of the country. It is a fact that if all the citizens of a country practice good governance, the country need not experience any difficulty to promote the same. The contribution to good governance from these two sets of people may best be understood in the following manner.

Individual's Contribution

Needless to mention that every individual must possess good character and behavior. All our ancient literatures speak about such good character and conduct of every individual by explaining the life history of great personalities and / or events that took place in their days. These literatures make individuals be a perfect person. When a person is perfect in every aspect, no doubt, he will be valuable not only to his family but also to the society. This is why the famous saying 'Charity begins at home' has come into being. Thus, if everyone serves his family and thereby the country, at that moment his contribution to the good governance of the country is ensured.

Government's Contribution

The individuals, who are responsible for the administration of the country, collectively constitute the government. The government can ensure good governance by applying good principles and adopting good policies for the benefit of the citizens of the country. For example, even though the country can earn revenue by selling liquor, it should adopt 'Prohibition of liquor' policy as consuming of liquor will spoil the morale and health of the drinker directly and will turmoil the society indirectly. Similarly, the government must make all the citizens of the country to be aware of all its policies and welfare schemes so that they get benefits from such policies and schemes. Further, the government must ensure transparency in the process of implementation of such policies and the schemes so that chances of misuse, malpractices, fraud, etc. may be largely eliminated.

Contribution of Management Experts and Ancient Rulers for Good Governance

Needless to mention that today's management experts have developed new (modern) practices to ensure good governance in the business and service organizations.

Now the question is 'Is it the present day management experts alone have developed new practices for the good governance of organizations or our ancient Kings, Emperors, Poets, Saints, etc. also had developed and practiced such things in their kingdoms and / or lives?'

If we refer to the history of Tamil Nadu and make an analysis of the lives and ruling practices of our ancient Kings, Emperors, Poets, Saints, etc. we can understand very clearly that all these great personalities had practiced such things to achieve good governance. This article makes an attempt to explain how, in the ancient days, the great personalities of Tamil Nadu practiced Good Governance in their Kingdoms.

Practices from Ancient History:

Some of the practices which bring out the characteristics of good governance of our ancient king- emperors of Tamilnadu are explained in the following pages.

Participatory, Consensus, and Transparency

History has evidence to the fact that our ancient Kings and Emperors allowed their Queen, Ministers, Military men and the public to participate and contribute in the decision- making process. In the 10th century, ParanthakaChola, a King, belonging to Chola dynasty, from Uttaramerur, introduced a unique election system called “Kudavolai” to select members for different committees of village administration. The details of the system were inscribed on palm leaves and stones. It elaborates about the committees to be constituted, the functions of each committee, the minimum qualification of the members of the committee, their disqualifications, the mode of election, their powers and so on.

The features of the constitution of Uttaramerur were as follows: Each village was divided into 30 wards. One representative was to be elected from each ward. Specific qualifications prescribed were (I) age limit (between 35 and 70 years), (II) educational qualification (basic discipline, understanding and drafting suitable resolutions) (III) Possession of minimum immovable property (he should possess 1/2 of a Veli (1 Veli = 2.6 Hectare = 280000 sq.ft) of taxpaying land) and above all, (IV) the candidate was expected to be honest and unbiased.

While prescribing the essential qualifications forward membership, it constructively stated that the following were disqualified: (i) a committee member who has not submitted his accounts, (ii) a member who accepted bribe, (iii) misappropriation of property of his office, (iv) acted against the interest of the society, (v) found guilty of incest and other sins. It was not only the individual who was disqualified for anyone of the above acts but all his relatives in the father’s family, the mother’s family and his wife’s family was permanently debarred.

Mode of Election: The names of all those candidates with required qualification and free from disqualification in each ward were to be written on separate leaves. On an appointed day all the members of the village were to assemble at the village assembly hall. All the village elders present in the village on that day were to be seated on a raised platform and the election held for one ward after another. There were for each ward, separate pots in which the bundle of leaves was to be placed. A young boy was to be requested to come to the platform and pull out one leaf from each pot and hand it over to the village Scribe (madhyastha). The village madhyastha was to stand up and before receiving the leaf, show his opened palm to all the assembled villagers (to indicate that he had not hidden illegally any leaves with the name of his favorites) and then receive the leaf from the boy, and read loudly the name found on it. He should then pass it on to the elders seated on the platform. Each elder should also verify the name on the leaf and read aloud. The person whose name was found on the leaf was

deemed to have been elected. Similarly, all the members will be elected. The members thus elected will serve for one full year.

The above system of election as found in the inscribed record of the 10th century is a significant evidence that there was PARTICIPATION, CONSENSUS and TRANSPARENCY in the system of administration of the country even long back in the autocratic system of the administration. The same must be followed by rulers of even a democratic country.

Accountability

Accountability refers to the liability of an individual for not discharging his responsibility. This means that if one does not discharge his responsibility, then he is sure to get punishment. The following incident from history will evidence it. The best example for accountability can best be understand from the Tamil Epic ‘Silappathikaram’.

‘Silappathikaram’ tells the life story of a man and wife, namely, Kovalan and Kannagi. When Kovalan went to Madurai to sell his wife’s anklet, he was identified as a thief of the anklet of the queen of Pandya kingdom and the Pandiya King of Madurai, Nedunchezhiyan, without making a proper inquiry, ordered to kill Kovalan. After that, Kannagi proved before the King that her husband Kovalan was not a thief. Then the King admitted that he had made a mistake of not making the proper inquiry which implies that he had not discharged his duties as a King, properly. So he decided that he deserved a punishment for not properly discharging his duty and he fell on the floor and died. This incident very clearly reveals that anyone who does not discharge his/her responsibilities must be punished.

But, today, in India, the concept of accountability is not strictly followed. People at the top in the hierarchy escape from punishment for their mistakes with the help of loop-holes in the statute and through back-door means.

Hence, the concept of ACCOUNTABILITY must be strictly followed by the people responsible for running the government, especially in a democratic country like India.

Responsiveness

It is the way of taking into confidence the opinions /feelings of one side by the other side. If the responsiveness exercised by a human being is not only for the representations made by other human beings but also to animals, it is the real sence of responsiveness. Such real responsiveness had been exercised by our ancient Kings/Emperors of Tamil Nadu. The history of the King ManuneethiChola is the best example of responsiveness.

In 235 BC, a King, named ManuneedhiCholan, also known as Elara, ruled the southern part of Tamilnadu. He had hung a huge bell in front of his palace. He announced that anyone seeking justice could ring the bell and their voice will be immediately responded.

One day, Veedhividangan, the son of the King ManuneedhiCholan, went around the city in his chariot. People cheered him where-ever he went and welcomed him by beating drums and with pipes. A young calf terrified with the loud noise ran here and there and got itself crushed under the wheels of the Prince's chariot. The mother of the calf helplessly watched its little one dying. The cow then walked to the Palace gates and rang the bell demanding justice from the King. The King came out and saw the

cow. He learned from his courtiers about the death of the young calf under the wheels of his son's chariot. To keep his promise, King ManuneethiCholan, he himself crushed his son under the same wheels of the Chariot. The Prince was killed in the same way the calf was killed. The King experienced the same pain which the cow would have experienced due to the death of its calf. Thus, the King responded even to the poor animal, the cow, and rendered justice. Nevertheless his act will not get back the life of calf, but it is an evidence for the RESPONSIVENESS of the King. On the same path followed by the King, the rulers of the Government should also respond to each and every one of their citizens.

Equitable and Inclusive

It means that all must be treated equally irrespective of Sex, Wealth, Qualifications, Religion, Status etc and that all must have an equal opportunity of being included to which he/she is eligible for consideration.

In those days, there were no schools or higher institutions as they are available today. It does not mean that the people of those days were not educated. The fact is that the system of education in those days was different. The system was called 'Gurukulam'. In this system of education, a young boy or girl (called Sishya) who wants to learn/study something will find a teacher (called Guru), and will stay with him till he/she learns what he/she wanted to learn without restriction on the period. It must be noted that during the stay of the Sishya with the Guru, the Sishya has to do any work assigned to him by the Guru. While admitting the Sishyas, the Guru will not consider the sex, community, religion, income, status etc., In fact, in Gurukulam, even the son of the King of the country must sit with the son(s) of the people of the country. Thus, this system of 'Gurukulam' education reveals that there were EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVENESS in those days. Thus, the present to the government should not make any difference in sex, community, religion, income, etc, office citizens for any of its activities.

Effective and efficient

'Effective and efficient' refers to that only right things must be done in the right way. The act which is not a factor right in nature should not be done by one to please other.

Emperor Raja RajaCholan decided to construct a temple which will be unique in some character. KarurThevar was appointed as the architect to construct the temple. Raja RajaCholan gave a design of the temple and asked the architect to go ahead for the construction of the same. But, the architectKarurThevar said that the Gopuram (Tower) of the temple could not be constructed as per the design given by the King and if constructed it will automatically collapse immediately at the completion of construction of the temple.

Raja RajaCholan did not accept his opinion and hence asked him to prove it. KarurThever immediately started constructing the Gopuram using bamboo poles. When the Gopuram was complete, it immediately collapsed. Raja RajaCholan understood the efficiency of the architect and granted permission to construct the temple according to the design of the architect. Then KarurThevar prepared a good design of the present temple and constructed it. They named the temple as Brahadeeswarar Temple (Big Temple) and it is world famous even after 1000 years of its construction. This has become possible because of the EFFECTIVE AND

EFFICIENT work of the Emperor Raja RajaCholan and the architect, KarurThevar. Needless to mention that the rulers must exercise the 'Effective And Efficient ' quality of administration.

Following Rule of Law

It refers to the strict adherence of all the rules and regulations in force in a country by all without any exemption. The following evidence from history proves the same.

The policy of King Harichandra was to follow the rule of law everywhere and at all times. Chandramathi was his wife and Lagidhasan was his only son. Due to fate, Harichandra lost his Kingdom and became a cremator in a burial ground. While he was serving in the burial ground, he strictly followed the instructions (rules & regulations) of his employer called Ejaman.

One day his wife Chandramathi came to the burial ground for cremating her deceased son. Harichandra asked his wife Chandramathi to pay the fees for cremating the dead body. Chandramathi said that she had no money. Even though Harichandra knew that Chandramathi was his wife and the deceased boy was his son, he (Harichandra) refused to cremate the dead body. (Pleased with the good guilty of Harichandra in following the rules and regulations, the God blessed Harichandra and took him with, his wife Chandramathi and deceased son Logidhasan to Heaven is a different story). This implies that the rulers (government) must follow the RULE OF LAW of the country in strict and real source. He was asked by his employer to collect some money from the relatives (owners) of the dead body for cremating it in the burial ground.

Conclusion

Historians state that the people of those days were very happy even in the autocratic system of public administration. Perhaps it would have been due to the following of the characteristics of good governance by the then rulers.

For exercising Good Governance in the present day democratic administration, while the various practices of our ancient Kings and Emperors are available, we need not strive for innovating new means and techniques. This is also evident from the couplet given below of Saint Thiruvalluvar:

[IniyaUlavaakaInnaadhaKooral](#)

[KaniiruppakKaaikavarnThatru](#)

This Rural state when pleasant words are available, bitter word to be used is like, leaving sweet ripe fruit, choosing the sour unripe fruit.

To conclude, good governance in a democratic country, like india, can be exercised by following the practices of our ancient Kings , Emperors, Poets, Saints, etc., in the real sence and spirit of the characteristics of good governance. If necessary, suitable modifications could be made in the means and techniques for achieving good governance to suit the present day administrative set – up.

Now, the choice is ours whether to taste the ripe fruit or not.

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