
Codes of conduct and ethical codes for governance have been in existence from the times of Hammurabi’s code. If people within a society are to live in harmony, codes of conduct that are based on ethical values are necessary. In India issues related to ethical governance and ethical conduct of individuals in public space are always a favourite topic of debate. Discourse pertaining to the individuals’ responsibility to a collective and to the ethical responsibility that a collective has is more seldom. Values apply to everybody—the individual, the collective and to those working within a system—whether it is the public administration system, the judiciary, the law enforcement agencies or the Government. In this context, the book under review makes an important contribution by looking at the many complexities of integrity, ethical behaviour and good governance in the Indian context.

This book is a collection of 21 articles, each of which critically addresses the decline in honesty, ethical behaviour and transparency across diverse sections of society. The authors of these articles make a difference by not limiting themselves to criticism, but have genuinely tried to understand the reasons behind the loss of ethical values and also provided solutions to the problems that have been discussed in their articles. Since the contributors to the volume are from diverse backgrounds, there are several solutions being offered for discussion rather than a marked preference for only one solution. In the introduction, Bharat Wakhlu makes it clear that the volume does not seek to be a mere criticism of the Government and politicians, but aims at finding solutions where the citizenry of a democracy wakes up to its rights and responsibilities as people belonging to the larger collective of a nation. In other words, everyone of us as Indians has been entrusted with the ‘keys to integrity, ethical behaviour and good governance’.

The articles in book can be broadly classified into those that look at the judiciary, the public administration, the Government and the individual. The solutions provided are drawn from diverse areas of spiritualism to changing the processes within a system. Some of these solutions, such as those that appeal to the individual or the reader to wake up to the call of their nation, might seem naïve. Many of the readers would also ask how the nation has responded to the call of its citizens. This attitude underlines the chasm that exists between those that govern and those that are governed. Both these groups seem to inhabit separate disjointed worlds which are what seem to permit the large degree of apathy that exists in the society for corruption that is evident in everyday life.

Kautilya’s Arthashastra goes into the details of corruption in governance. He talks of roles and responsibilities of each person who holds a position within the governance structure. In more modern times, the Government of UK has published a Councillor’s Guide. This is a workbook for elected members and discusses issues related to ethical governance. Reading the articles in this volume brings up some important aspects related to ethical conduct for discussion. Just as people in public office who have the trust of the collective need to adhere to certain codes of conduct, so does the citizenry have a responsibility to their nation. There are certain ethical expectations from the members who hold public office. At the same time other members of society also need ask themselves whether they live up to these expectations. Many articles in this volume discuss national values and their changing patterns. Are national values those that are lived by public figures? Is this why we witness an erosion of national values today? While some of these questions are answered in these articles, several are also left unanswered. In the context of ethical conduct the questions of how to ‘bell the cat’ and how the person who bells the cat is to be protected still remain to be studied.

The notions of values and good behaviour are common truths. All of us know what is right and what is wrong. It is the implementation or imposition of these that is difficult. As D. R. Kaarthikeyan says, ‘even society has a role to play’. But how do members of a society learn to play this role? Several people are hardly aware of the contents of the constitution and how or why a democratic government functions. Education about the constitution, civil rights and responsibilities will need to start in school and not just as a static civics lesson, but as a much more dynamic construct of the effect of these administrative bodies on our everyday lives. This will drive home the importance of ethical values and conduct in public life. Kaalam’s ‘national standard of ethics for standard growth and prosperity and peace’ is an interesting suggestion. Lessons learnt in one’s childhood are seldom forgotten and starting with the family is a good exercise. However, if the ethical crisis in public administration is because corruption and/or unethical behaviour go unpunished whereas good behaviour is ridiculed, then society basically undoes what the family has taught.

‘Ethical governance refers to the processes and procedures and culture and values which ensure high standards of ethical behaviour.’ How can such high standards of ethical values be ensured? By educating and empowering the public through their rights. The right to information (RTI) in India was one such act that gave strength to the people and is a good counterbalance to what Sreedharan calls ‘power without accountability’. England has a Standards Board (www.standardsboard.gov.uk) that was created in response to the Nolan report about falling standards in governance. There is also a committee for standards in public life. All local governments in the UK now have adopted ethical governance and the local councils make their codes of conduct public. With RTI, this would also be a way to instil ethical practices in local bodies in India. The volume addresses these issues in great detail and some of the data provided are informative.
Most contributors to this volume have done commendable work in courageously addressing corruption in crucial administrative sectors. However, there could have been some contributions from teachers, from some students and from members of rural governance/administrative bodies. Experiences of people from all walks of life would have served to highlight to the urban readers how deeply corruption in public office affects everyday life. The Edicts of King Asoka spoke of state morality and of private or individual morality. His edicts talk of good conduct for the citizens and the ruler. Along the same lines it is also important to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the one who does not hold a public office as much as the one who holds public office. Although this has been done in some measure, the book could have addressed issues related to the individuals’ responsibilities in greater depth. The volume could have had a few examples of ethical governance, efficient judiciary and public administration as there are few references to other works that might be of interest to the readers. Maybe some of the contributors could have talked about their role models to highlight their ideals of ethical values.

A volume such as this was long overdue and will enhance the level of debate in ethical conduct in governance, public administration and the judiciary significantly by making the readers aware of the role of society and the individual. The collection of articles also presents a good trigger for debates in ethics and forms a sound basis for evolving a concept of ethical values for readers interested in administration. I would also recommend the book to public libraries and government agencies.


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Rishikesha T. Krishnan has written a book tracing the development of innovation in India post-independence. The question that the author explores in some detail is why with a talent pool that has demonstrated ability to innovate virtually in every part of the world, India has failed to be the source of major innovations on a sustained basis? This is a good question to ask and indeed has been the subject of some debate. The author has attempted to find answers by following a logical sequence of factors that influence innovation in the industries.

Throughout the book the importance of the political and economic context in which innovation is done is elaborated. Chapter 4 sets this aspect out well. After independence, the socialist policies of the time coupled with the lack of access to capital justified the reliance on public sector to provide virtually all manufactured goods. That this led to highly protected, inefficient and substandard organizations was an unfortunate, but perhaps predictable consequence. The author should have also emphasized the lack of enterprise on the part of individuals to raise funds from the public, as was demonstrated by Reliance in the 1970s. Some of the policies of the Government exemplified by the diligent enforcement of acts such as the MRTP, are mentioned briefly as disincentives for innovation. In reality, it was far more impactful than that. Such acts served to kill innovation. Later in the chapter, the author states that following the liberalization in the 1990s, such draconian policies were removed.

The positive impact on innovation that this had is not emphasized.

The importance of competition, reproducibility and scale-up in driving innovation is justifiably highlighted with good examples, particularly from the engineering and automobile manufacturing sectors. In the pharmaceutical sector the emergence of generics and the dimensions of innovation of generics are well set out. The lack of success in developing new chemical entities is a global problem facing the pharmaceutical industry as a whole. Besides a host of regulatory reasons for this, there is the issue that many metabolic disorders are caused by small but finite changes in multiple pathways and a single ‘magic bullet’ will not resolve this. In fact, the future of the pharmaceutical sector and the healthcare sector in general is dependent on finding appropriate business models that address the inherent complexity of variations between individuals.

The analysis of the emergence of the software industry in India is excellent. The important differences between the software development centres of multinational companies and the more recent entrants are well brought out. The difficulty in developing branded offerings is vexing problem. Perhaps this should be an incentive to find alternative ways of building competitive advantage and therefore margin elasticity.

The role of the Government in various stages of innovation from providing trained manpower, infrastructure, fiscal incentives and regulation has been covered in depth. Changes to the intellectual property law have brought the Indian Patent Act more in line with international laws. Although this was seen as a threat in the beginning, it has actually provided a much needed thrust to innovation. The number of international patents granted has been used as a metric for innovation. The author has cited authoritative studies to draw conclusions about innovation in India and also within specific sectors such as the academia, pharma and information technology. Although this is by and large accurate, it is worth mentioning that process patents in manufacturing are often difficult to police and industries opt to work them as secret processes. That having been said, the power of granting letters of patent as an inducement for innovation is well acknowledged and in the book there is a good account of the state of affairs in India.