

**Public Administration in the era of Illiberal Democracy,  
Artificial Intelligence and Big data**

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**Abstract**

*The three big themes among many that have unravelled the discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century is the rise of illiberal democracies, effects of Technology on Democracies that include effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and humongous data. This century is quite different from 20<sup>th</sup> century where we discussed the rise of Fascism, Nazism and the threat it posed to the democracy and liberal world order. This century is witness to the conceptualization of Good Governance which is the point of convergence between both capitalist and communist regimes. The state-citizen relationship is seeing dramatic muddling that result in new makeover. In the same breath, Public Administration will definitely get impacted due to these developments, because Public administration operates within a specific temporal and spatial context. The decision making and public choice will also see myriad challenges. The principle challenges will come through the advent of technology revolution. Of course, there are stories of fear associated with AI but there are good ones as well. Obscurantism to technology is no answer. This paper intends to analyse public administration within the context of Artificial Intelligence, illiberal democratic order and Big data. Further the paper will dig out the new challenges and opportunities that these themes have for public administration in India.*

**Keywords:** Illiberal Democracy, Public Administration, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Governance.

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**Introduction**

Public Administration as a field of study has had a very young age. The development of the field of Public Administration for a long duration has been camouflaged by the field of the political science. Wilsonian dichotomy and the gap it generated was filled by Frank J Goodnow and Nicholas Henry with their works—*Politics and Administration* (1900) and *Introduction to the study of Administration* (1927). These developments in Public Administration were paralleling seeing great upheavals in the politics around world. The rise of Fascism, Nazism and communism required different and unique skill sets from the administration of a country. After the New Deal(1933-36) and the Cold War, we have had new stints and quite rejuvenating makeover's that were provided by the themes of Managerialism, Reinventing & Reengineering Government and New Public Service (NPS). Managerialism infused new energies into the system of public Administration. The concept of Good Governance was always basic to any new discourse of Public administration whether that be New Public Service model of R. B Denhardt and J.V. Denhardt or the "Reinventing Government" model of David Osborne and Gaebler. All of these models have the core concern of welfarism in-built. Managerialism came with new concepts of leaner, meaner, faster, performance and application-oriented business ideas (Pollitt, 2007) that had to be replicated in Government settings. The Re-inventing theme argued that Governments can be transformed like big successful corporations, more efficient, less bureaucratic, cutting the red-tape and more entrepreneurial (Osborne & Gaebler,1995). Because the governments can't behave like corporations in toto, they have to keep the concerns of citizens foremost and can't substitute citizens as customers; Governments have to treat the man at the end of the ladder as good as one who is well off, this is why NPS gave the concept of "serving rather than steering". This approach was more democratic, addressing the needs of all, rested on coalition between Government, civil Society and private organizations (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). The paradigm of Comparative Public Administration and Development Administration rejuvenated the field of study with new dimensions. There is a need to go beyond "national boundaries" and "peculiar historical settings" if public administration has to be scientific (Dahl,1947). This, Robert Dahl argued will ensure an end to the continued domination from hitherto west led one-size-fits-all cognition. This paved the way for the competitive studies by F. W. Riggs through his *agrarian-industria* typology (Riggs, 1957) and his famous Fused-

Prismatic theory (Riggs,1964).Riggs in particular emphasized the links between Public Administration and its Environment and advocated that administrative behaviour in a given society must be understood in the context of social background (Peng,2008).

## **The Ecology of the Public Administration**

The ecology or contextual underpinnings are quite pertinent to understand the behaviour of a genus. Similarly, the ecological understanding of Public Administration argued that it is very important to gain the experience and sense of the context before we discuss the core aspects. This study through ecological perspective emerged from biological science. The larger contexts within which the public administration operates are:

- ✓ Political System
- ✓ Social System
- ✓ Economic system

The political dimension is one of the important aspects of public Administration. Democracy, since the days of Herodotus has meant the rule by the people. It is the most effective and least evil among myriad options that are available to us. Liberal Democracy is the pinnacle of the thought of man when it comes to its philosophical underpinnings. The world has reached through evolutionary process to an ideological end point where we can't find anything better than Liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989). The American way of exporting democracy across the world has had its dangerous implications. The argument that Democracy always brings or sustains peace is not always true. It definitely has implications for its administration and Governance. The devastation that comes through exporting democracy is well documented by various academicians. This was an effort that was not indigenous to the local settings that is why; the Administration was not able to cope with the challenges in Iraq after US invasion. (Owen, 2005; Gat, 2005; Russett, 2005).J. M. Gaus argued that he plans, programs, policies, and design of public administration is directly influenced by the factors within which it works. It can be separate for different ecological settings.

The three systems mentioned above are very basic to any administration of country. The next dimension that gained prominence in 21<sup>st</sup> century is that of Technological Sub-system (TSS). Technology has taken over every length and breadth of Public administration. Other ecological settings within which administration operates has also been described as the

relationship between Government and technology, culture, social system and economic system (Heady,1996).

### **Age of Anger and Good Governance**

Across the world as of now we are witnessing a new phenomenon and that is the rise of illiberal democracies. These democracies value “free and fair” elections in order to legitimize their rule but in real sense it is the subversion of liberal democratic project. This is happening all around us and demagogues are boasting about this phenomenon. The constitutional liberal freedoms that these democracies are supposed to provide their citizens are seldom offered. Thus, it a skewed form of democracy. The veneer of it is polished with democracy but in actual sense it is closer to illiberal order (Zakaria, 1997). This trend is quite evident across Turkey, Russia, Hungary, India, Philippines. Victor Orban quite openly recently declared Hungary an “illiberal democracy”.

The rise of populism and nationalistic fervour again in the world has made academicians argue that we are back to 19<sup>th</sup> century world. The demagogues are controlling press, freedoms of speech and expression. There is widespread muzzling of dissenting voices by positions of power. The press which is fourth pillar of democracy is used to subvert the public opinion in favour of party in power. The rise of alpha-males who control the major democracies right now across the world use major democratic tools to favour their cause and defeat their opponents. This might be due to the anger and disagreement prevalent in the discourse of 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophies. We now live in a world that inherited lot of its ideas from Voltaire and Rousseau. Rousseau warned us against this rise of anger that was inherent in the ideas of materialism, Capitalism and Nationalism (Mishra, 2017).The 19<sup>th</sup> century world was deeply affected by thought of these thinkers who apart from believing in “freeman” also talked about the religion being an important aspect in human life. The 21<sup>st</sup> century man is no free in any sense. The argument that “man is free and everywhere he is in chains” has new connotations that is man will never be free again. The shackles are not only those by governments but also by growing technology and the ever-increasing dependence on it.

The rise of idea of Good Governance has given legitimacy to all philosophies cutting across political divide. The democracies are as much emphasising better governance as are communists and autocrats. Thus, if a government provides better governance, it is least important as to which part of the world you are living in. The rise of communist China, and

its successful model has raised many eyebrows across South Asian countries and Western counterparts. The administrators there are more efficient and productive. Is it important to have Liberal-democracy for better governance or is it just not important? In the words of Alexander Pope, “For the forms of government let the fools contest, whatever is administered best is the best”. Have we reached a point where citizens are asked to leave the Politics to politicians, you just focus on GDP and growth figures? Is Good Governance a shield that autocrats or illiberal demagogues use in order to camouflage their poor human rights records?

## **Information Technology, decision making and free-will**

Information Technology has affected every aspect of human life. We now live in a world that is more scared of dangers from Robotics rather than racism and disease. Many analysts’ scientists and academicians including Stephen Hawking and Noam Chomsky have warned from the dangers of Artificial Intelligence. When the machine gets better than a human being, it is there when the disruption starts. Apart from the physical dangers that the AI poses, the threat that it poses on the political and social life is far more devastating. This is the effect that is silently disrupting the basic foundations of Social- Contract as well as our way of making decisions. Google, Facebook and other big social media companies know more about us rather than we do. Their algorithms know our preferences and choices and tell us about those things even before we start searching on Google (Hariri, 2018). The data we consume and we produce is humongous and often referred to as Big-Data. The threats that this phenomenon poses are grave and alarming.

The rationality and economic man doctrine suffice that human beings can take decisions that maximise his choices. The premise of this doctrine is that economic man has:

- ✓ Complete information about the situations.
- ✓ Has complete rationality or is rational.
- ✓ Has infinite sensitivity.

According to Ward Edwards (1954), the method of these thinkers is just “armchair” method based only on assumptions. Decision making is basically a cognitive exercise. Herbert Simon in total contrast to the Rationality doctrine came forward with the idea of “administrative man” who knows about the limits and constraints of options available and just settles for ‘good enough’ decision. This decision is also termed as “satisficing” or “bounded rationality”

to use Chester Barnard's terminology. These decisions combine the aspects of satisfaction and sufficing. Generally, in an organisation every one is a decision maker and this principle applies also for Government organizations (Simon, 1965). As information shortage is the problem so is the information overload. What 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges have done is that human beings have to process humongous information. This has led to confusion and siphoning of lot of information from human brain. Human brain can't process all the data it receives hence according to Simon human beings require computers and Information technology in order to make better decisions. This argument was again made by Yuval Noah that human beings in 21<sup>st</sup> century will require same technology that has disrupted whole citizen-state interactions. This phenomenon is going to get aggravated even more though Artificial intelligence. In this age, the concept of free will and liberty are a misnomer. The Governments are more and more depending on technology in order to be able to administer better. The citizens of a state are being constantly monitored. Their preferences for political parties are recorded and fed with the data that ensures bias towards a particular political party. Political parties are using social media to great effect in order to indoctrinate the citizens with a particular doctrine or view point. The elections of countries are managed through big data and AI algorithms. A case in point is the Russian meddling in the US elections (Riley & Robertson, 2017).

### **Artificial Intelligence and Governance**

Public Administration in this century will make more and more use of technology. The governments all over the world are depending on the premise that if they know more about their citizens, they can give better governance. This has led Citizens to deposit their unique identities with the governments. Western and more developed countries are demanding facial recognitions and are storing the data in databases. In developing world, we are seeing that governments are demanding the deposition of Iris scans and fingerprints. These have raised serious privacy questions. In the areas of urban governance, nowadays despite using facial recognition technology for security issues, psychologists warn that linking of facial recognition with other technologies can get a clear understanding of a person's mind and breaches his privacy (Grey, 2003). This model was even tried by Delhi Government in schools across Delhi. This exercise came in for sharp criticism from intellectuals like Pratab Bhanu Mehta. He compared this with Panopticon. This idea was formulated by Jeremy Bentham—British Philosopher and social theorist in 18<sup>th</sup> century, who designed this model

for prison administration which allowed one watch man to guard all prisons without inmates knowing about this process. This idea was later analysed and nuanced by Foucault.

According to World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018) due to automation technologies there will be 75 million jobs loss, 133 million new roles will emerge and new 58 million jobs will be created. This will be a big challenge for administration, to cope with the challenges and deal with the new opportunities. This will definitely require new skill set from administrators and public managers. Apart from the fears of Panopticism and Foucauldian apprehensions, AI has shown great promise in the field of forecasting high crime risk transportation areas. AI has been used to make transportation safer and efficient that are riskier and less safe (Kouziokas, 2016). The opportunities due to AI revolution are many in the fields of Governance delivery like Health, Transportation, education, Urban Governance, energy, Security and environment. But the challenges are also quite substantial that will include, labour displacement, Job losses, imposed totalitarianism, technical oligarchy— where very few will control the data, national power and stability of global power equations (Dafoe, 2018).

### **Artificial Intelligence and India: Some Good Experiences.**

It was in 2018-19 budget speech that Honourable Finance Minister mandated the NITI Aayog to sketch the modalities of National Programme on Artificial Intelligence. It was in this backdrop that NITI Aayog adopted a three-pronged strategy: -

- ✓ To undertake Artificial Intelligence Projects in various areas.
- ✓ Building coherent and vibrant Artificial Intelligence Technology ecosystem in India.
- ✓ Collaborating with various experts and stakeholders to realise this Programme.

According to Accenture Artificial Intelligence is expected to boost India's annual growth rate by 1.3% by 2035. According to NITI Aayog (2018) discussion paper on Artificial Intelligence, AI has the potential to boost the following areas/sectors of Indian Economy: -

- ✓ Healthcare.
- ✓ Education.
- ✓ Agriculture.
- ✓ Smart mobility.
- ✓ Retail.

- ✓ Manufacturing.
- ✓ Energy.
- ✓ Smart cities.

Global healthcare market driven by Artificial Intelligence alone is expected to grow from \$600 million in 2014 to \$6.6 billion in 2021 (Frost & Sullivan,2016). This will definitely have challenges and opportunities for healthcare system in India.

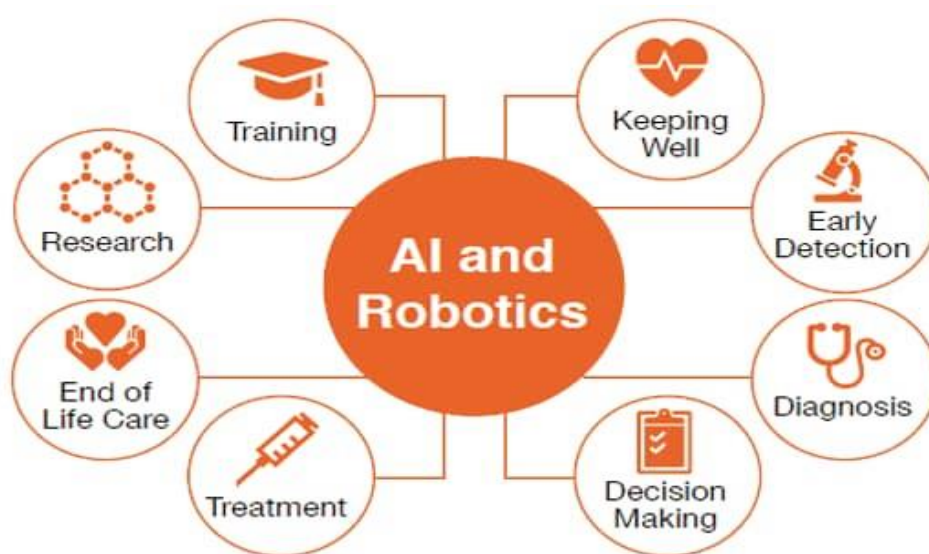


Figure 1.AI

and its uses across Healthcare chain.[Retrieved from PMC," No Longer Science Fiction, AI and Robotics are Transforming Healthcare]

TheAgriculture in modern and scientific age has various challenges. Farmers have to feed growing population that is increasing at a very rapid pace. Land use and patterns are also creating new challenges because population is increasing at a very rapid pace. Due to aspirational surge more people are moving towards urban areas. This is putting more pressure on agricultural land. Hence farmers have to increase yield from per capita harvested area. This is only possible due to increased and efficient use of technology and more specifically Artificial intelligence. In this context Soft computing—use of approx. calculations that are imprecise but good enough to solve complex problems, in the biological and agricultural fields has been studied and analysed to good effect. Further in precision farming and to study the soil and water regimes related crop growth, researchers have developed various methods

like genetic algorithms, artificial neural networks, decision trees etc (Huang *et al*, 2010). This is surely going to be the path of agricultural sector in India in order to remain competitive, efficient and effective.

The field of education is again a vast area that had not yet realised the full potential of Artificial intelligence. The use of AI can have great advantage and impact on the learning experience of students. Learning through AI has number of benefits that erstwhile classroom learning seldom provided. AI will ensure better and personalized experience of learning. The students will be having one-one relationship with the tutor. There will be no instances of embarrassment and bashing. Tutors will give/provide individualized help to students (Schofield, Rebecca & Britt, 1994).

## Conclusion

The world is transforming at a great pace. We are seeing great transformations due to technology, big data and Artificial intelligence. These transformations are affecting our Political system/discourse, social orders and stratification, our deep entrenched ideas about liberty, freewill and decision making, Liberalism, political choices and more. Human beings are in search of God-like powers (Hariri, 2018) that is going to transform our societal foundations. Hitherto the discourse was about the void between haves and have-nots, this shall transform into void between tech savvy giants and non-tech populace. Humans will be under a bigger and sophisticated Leviathan. The challenges for administration are also deep and vast. The skillset required has to be brilliant, sharp and incisive. Public Administrative skills of 20<sup>th</sup> century have outlived their utility. We are facing huge challenges of governance for developing and under developed world and the developed world including some Asian giants are fast tracking towards 5G revolution. The scope of technology in better delivery of Governance is vast. The voids and imperfections of 20<sup>th</sup> century are yet to be filled and new challenges of Artificial Intelligence have emerged. That means the answer again has to be from and within Information Technology and Artificial intelligence. Obscurantism is no answer/option at all. Informed decision making by citizens and administrators will require services of Artificial Intelligence that will enable better data processing and stacking of alternatives efficiently/properly. The questions of “hypocrisy” raised by Dwight Waldo (1977), in his valedictory series lectures, seem to be even more relevant today. The question in 1977 for Dwight Waldo was that why do we expect an instrument to deliver compassion

and sympathy for us? The situation in 21<sup>st</sup> century and in times to come will not change and is even more scary. The instrument—bureaucracy will turn more faceless and machine-like and what will be implications for the end-values that mainly come from political science like Justice, equity, fairness and equality that this faceless instrument will deliver will be a daunting paradox.

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