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**Reinvigorating Governance
Nationwide—Role of the IAS**

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The current debate on governance tends to spill out in many directions, which may not necessarily be relevant from the point of view of a particular Service, which is after all to be viewed as a specialised functional entity within the overall scheme of governance. Relying on a variety of sources and the experience of other countries, including the documentation of the Mussoorie workshop, Dr Shastri candidly reassesses for the present volume the strengths and weakness in the functioning of the IAS as an all-India Service which was originally conceived with a strategic national purpose. His examination of the different agendas of reform leads him to suggest that the unique placement of the IAS should be utilised for calling upon the Service to perform responsibly, while also enabling it to play an effective administrative leadership role in the arena of reform and restructuring of governmental systems.

Since some quotations are from main scripts of the documents circulated at the workshop, page references do not tally with the present volume (Ed).

 APPROACHING THE THEME

The concept of governance needs to be viewed from a multi-track perspective. In its broadest sense, it implies a system or arrangement designed to administer and cater to the needs of those it was essentially meant to serve. Any system of governance would have to be considered against the backdrop of the

ideological values the political system has come to accept, and the socio-economic conditions in which it operates.

A survey of the history of the growth of political ideas and institutions clearly demonstrates that the issue of governance has been central to political discourse. Plato's *Republic* examined in considerable depth, the features of a just society. For Plato, "unless philosophers become kings ... or those who are now called kings come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom there can be no rest from troubles for states" (as quoted in Curtis, 1961a:62). Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* advised the king that in "the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects" (as quoted in Rangarajan:149). In ancient India, the king's duty—*Rajadharma*—was defined in terms of ensuring the physical well-being, and material prosperity of the people (*Yogkshema*).

During the early days of constitutionalism, Locke stressed that in society, power was meant to be used for the common good, and those entrusted with this responsibility were bound "to govern by established standing laws ... and not by exemplary decrees (and) directed to no other end but the peace, safety, and public good of the people" (as quoted in Curtis, 1961a:381–82). The concept of common good was further elaborated by T H Green when he stated that will, not force, should be the basis of the state and the maintenance of common good would not be possible without the active involvement and participation of the people (as quoted in Curtis, 1961b:277–280). Contemporary liberalism has come to emphasise the 'distributive' dimension of governance, focusing on the manner in which "rights, resources and opportunities should be divided" (Galston, 1991:141).

Governance, in spite of all its diverse implications, essentially involves the making of choices—the most fundamental being 'which social problems will become public and which will be left to individual decisions, or to the decisions of other institutions—most importantly the market' (Peters, 1995:3).

The complexities of governance also need to be appreciated in view of the wide range of issues the system is required to address and cater to. As modern democratic societies have come to be characterised by 'irreversible pluralism' (Galston, 1991:140), the emphasis on the need for the 'legitimisation of difference' (ibidem:142) is clearly evident.

The World Bank has recognised the following factors as being crucial to any scheme of governance in contemporary societies: (a) the form of the political regime; (b) the process by which the authority is exercised in the management of a nation's economic and social resources for development; and (c) the capacity of government to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions (World Bank, 1994:xiv).

It is beyond any shadow of doubt that the issue of governance is today critical to the assessment of the problems that confront societies. The Club of Rome in its analysis of the strategies for global survival rightly stressed that the deficiencies of governance are at the root of many of the strands of *problematique* and... improved governance is an essential aspect of any scheme for human survival (King and Schneider, 1991:160). In most democracies the world over, there appears to be a mismatch between what the citizens expect of the state, and the apparent lack of capacity of the state, both in terms of financial and managerial resources. While on the one hand, public opinion surveys indicate general public discontent with the achievements of governments, on specific services and issues the surveys reveal that the public appears reasonably satisfied with the performance of government (Peters, 1995:8, also Yadav, 1996).

The global trend with regard to governance reveals a distinct pattern and approach. With increasing emphasis on deregulated government, a customer friendly administration appears to be the norm. Private management concepts are gradually being applied in public administration, giving rise to the concept of 'new public management' (Pollitt, 1990). Many have referred to this trend as the 'marketisation of the State' (Pierre, 1995:65). The above changes are also reflected in the changing

perspectives on governance of the political leadership. In the United States, the 'reinventing governments' crusade of the Clinton administration resulted in the National Performance Review (NPR) undertaken under the stewardship of Vice President, Al Gore. The NPR has in the main recommended (a) cutting red tape; (b) putting customers first; (c) empowering employees to get results; and (d) cutting back to basics (as quoted in Ingraham, 1995:240). In Canada, Prime Minister Chretien has opined that good government "requires a close and congenial relationship between public servants of every level and politicians" (as quoted in Aucoin, 1995:114). In India too, an action plan for effective and responsive administration has been prepared by the central government with a view to rebuilding the credibility of the government. This plan was endorsed at a conference of Chief Ministers in May 1997, who viewed the initiative as 'important and timely' (statement on action plan for effective and responsive administration, 1997:7).

The discourse on governance in India has been shaped by several factors and developments. Soon after Independence, in the context of the socio-economic conditions of the country, it was hoped that the instrumentalities of governance would work in the direction of realising Gandhiji's dream of *swaraj* for the hungry and spiritually starving millions. Nehru's famous *tryst with destiny* speech made a firm commitment to ending poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity. A state-sponsored scheme of development, which emphasised the importance of a mixed economy and planning was vigorously pursued. While significant progress was achieved in diverse fields, the output of the government fell far short of public expectations. The legitimacy of the development discourse and governance project, and its credibility in terms of being people-centred came to be challenged. Democracy and governance were under threat of being reduced to a mere set of institutions, rules and regulations, and there was a pressing need to reshape the socio-economic content of democracy.

It is in the light of these developments that a spate of social empowerment movements gained strength and attempted to refocus the discourse on governance in the context of the needs

and aspirations of the citizens. At another level, in response to global changes, the government has embarked on an ambitious policy of economic liberalisation, which entails a serious second look at the role of the state and instrumentalities of governance.

A review of the governance strategy in India in the light of the above developments would involve an assessment of the role of the elite bureaucracy—especially, the Indian Administrative Service—which plays a pivotal role in the Indian administrative system, at the federal, state, and district level.

Milton Esman outlines three critical images of bureaucratic behaviour (Esman, 1977), which can help to explain the proclivities of Indian bureaucracy. The first image is that of the rational-legal bureaucracy which conforms to the Weberian model, marked by excessive formalism, hierarchical style of functioning and rule orientation. The rational-legal bureaucrat seeks to preserve political neutrality. The vested interest image projects bureaucrats as 'maximisers of their self interest in pursuit of security, income and power' (ibidem:2). In this case, the bureaucrats are more keen on self service than public service and primarily operate as an interest group. The third image, the entrepreneurial one, projects the bureaucracy as being innovative, flexible, service-oriented and responsive to public needs and convenience (ibidem:3).

Esman concedes, that all the three categories are of the ideal type and never occur in their pure forms. He goes on to add that the champions of 'reinventing government' in the United States have argued that the 'entrepreneurial bureaucrat' is best suited to carry forward the reforms needed in the administration. Esman however opines that this bureaucrat may cause expansions of 'bureaucratic discretion' in the name of innovation and responsiveness, assume a political role in the guise of reinventing government, clash with political leaders and even the public in interpreting public preferences, and in the long run could undermine the efficiency of government.

In the Indian context, the above assessment must be kept in mind, particularly in view of the unfolding economic reforms agenda, and its impact on the role of the state as well as its instrumentality, the bureaucracy.

INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A historical overview of the All India Services needs to be undertaken against the backdrop of the logic and rationale that governed the framing of the federal scheme, as outlined in the Indian Constitution.

The Indian union of states designed by the Constituent Assembly clearly reflected the dominant mood of this body on federal issues. The framers of the Constitution appeared to be firmly convinced that a fortified central authority was imperative to maintain the unity and integrity of the nation. Ambedkar expressed, in most succinct terms, the basic features of the federal arrangement designed for India when he asserted that though India was to be a federation, the country was "one integral whole, its people a single people living under a single *imperium* derived from a single source" (Constituent Assembly debates: 7:43). The country and the people were divided into different states merely for 'convenience of administration' (ibidem).

In the context of the overriding concern for national unity, an attempt was made—as part of the federal scheme—to ensure 'uniformity in all the basic structures' (Constituent Assembly debates: 3:37). This uniformity was projected in terms of a single integrated judicial system, uniformity in fundamental laws and a common All India Service (ibidem). A common All India Service was considered, by the Constituent Assembly as being essential to maintain the unity of the nation. Yet, this decision of the assembly was preceded by a prolonged debate on the nature of the civil service system to be adopted with Independence.

In the pre-Independence days, Nehru had expressed serious reservations about retaining the Civil Service system as it existed during British rule. For him:

... no new order can be built up in India so long as the spirit of ICS pervades our Administrative Public Service... that spirit of authoritarianism is the ally of imperialism and it cannot co-exist with freedom. It will either succeed in crushing freedom or will be swept away by itself. The type of state, it is likely to fit in is the fascist type. Therefore, it seems quite essential that the ICS and similar Services must disappear completely, much before we can start real work on a new order. (Nehru 1945:43)

Among those who made out a strong case for a pre-eminent position to be accorded to the All India Services in the administrative system of Independent India, was Vallabhbhai Patel. His experience as Home Minister in the interim government, had convinced him of the need to ensure that the role of the All India Services was duly recognised in the administrative system. In October 1946, while participating in the provincial Premiers conference (which was called to discuss among other issues, the future shape that All India Services should take) he opined that:

... it is not only advisable, but essential, if you want to have an efficient Service, to have a central administrative Service, in which, we fix the strength as the provinces would require them and we draw a certain number of officers at the centre, as we are doing at present. This will give experience to the personnel at the centre leading to efficiency, and administrative experience of the district will give them an opportunity to contact the people. They will thus keep themselves in touch with the situation in the country, and their practical experience will be most useful to them. Besides their coming to the centre will give them a different experience and wider outlook in the larger sphere. A combination of these two experiences will make the Service more efficient ... they will also serve as liaison between provinces and the government and introduce certain amount of freshness and vigour in the administration, both at the centre and in the provinces. Therefore, my advice is that we should have an All India Service. (Proceedings of the Premiers' conference, October, 1946)

Yet, it must be stressed that in the draft Constitution prepared by the Drafting Committee, there was no mention of the All India Services. Commenting on the non-inclusion of any

provision relating to the All India Services in the draft Constitution, Ambedkar in a letter addressed to the President of the Constituent Assembly clarified that:

The Committee [Drafting Committee] has refrained from inserting in the Constitution any detailed provisions relating to the Services. The Committee considers that they should be regulated by Acts of the appropriate legislature rather than by the Constitution, as the Committee feels that the future legislatures in this country, as in other countries may be trusted to deal fairly with the Services. (As quoted in Shiva Rao, 1965:89)

Well before the Constituent Assembly commenced the debate on the draft Constitution¹, Patel drew Nehru's attention to the fact that the draft Constitution had made no specific provisions relating to the All India Services and desired that suitable corrective action be taken:

The draft Constitution does not provide for an All India Service we will, therefore, have to make provision of these Services in the new Constitution. (As quoted in Shiva Rao 1965:332)

On the floor of the assembly, Ambedkar too defended the need for constitutional provisions relating to the Civil Services:

The dual polity which is inherent in a federal system.... is followed ...by a dual service. In all federations there is a federal Civil Service and a state Civil Service. The Indian federation though a dual polity will have a dual Service, but with one exception. It is recognised in every country there are certain posts in its administrative set-up which might be called strategic there can be no doubt that the standard of administration depends upon the calibre of the civil servants who are appointed to these strategic posts The Constitution provides that without depriving the states of their right to form their own Civil Services there shall be an All India Service recruited on an All India basis ... the members of which alone will be appointed to these strategic posts throughout the Union. (Constituent Assembly debates: 7:37)

In November 1949, when the question of providing constitutional guarantees to the All India Services was being debated in the Constituent Assembly, Vallabhbhai Patel sought to allay the apprehensions in certain quarters on the following grounds:

¹ Patel wrote to Nehru on April 27, 1948. The Constituent Assembly began its debate on the Draft Constitution on November 4, 1948.

... no alternative to this [All India Services] administrative system The Union will go—you will not have a united India, if you do not have a good All India Service, which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has a sense of security If you do not adopt this course, then do not follow the present Constitution This Constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of service, which will keep the country intact These people [All India Service officers] are the instruments. Remove them and I see nothing but a picture of chaos all over the country. (Constituent Assembly debates: 10:51)

In the final analysis, it was the persuasive efforts of Patel, Ambedkar and Gopalaswamy Ayyangar that convinced the Constituent Assembly to accord constitutional status to the All India Services. Article 312 of the Constitution gave a constitutional status to the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, and further provided that if the Council of States [Rajya Sabha], through a resolution, supported by not less than two-thirds majority of members present and voting, opines that it is in the national interest necessary or expedient to create one or more All India Services, Parliament may by law provide for the creation of such Services.

The basic objectives that were hoped to be realised by conferring such a unique status on the All India Services could be summarised as: (a) facilitating liaison between the union and the states; (b) ensuring a certain uniformity in the standards of administration; (c) enabling the administrative machinery at the union level to keep in touch with realities of the field in the state; and (d) ensuring that political considerations either in recruitment or in discipline and control were reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether.

The distinctive nature of the All India Services—in the wider context of the federal system—could be seen in the factors mentioned below. The recruitment, appointment and service conditions of the officers belonging to the All India Services were all to be determined by the central government. As per the cadre system, each officer belonging to an All India Service was allotted to a particular state cadre or joint cadre. The officers belonging to the All India Services were required to work both at the central secretariat and the different state secretari-

ats, depending on whether their services were available to the state government or were placed on deputation with the union government.

While working in a particular state cadre, the officers belonging to the All India Services were to be controlled by the concerned state government, but major decisions relating to disciplinary action, such as dismissal, removal or compulsory retirement could not be taken by the state governments as they were not their appointing authority. Strategic administrative posts both at the centre and in the states, were invariably encadred and manned by officials belonging to the All India Services.

The officers belonging to the All India Services were initially to be posted to the districts in order to permit them to gain first hand knowledge and experience of the nuances of administration. After gaining the necessary experience and expertise, these officers were to be posted to the state secretariat. Officers were also required to be frequently shuffled between the state secretariat and the district, and between the states and the centre.

In giving a special and unique status to the All India Services in the federal scheme, the framers of the Constitution had fervently hoped that the delicate balancing that they had so assiduously sought to arrange, would strengthen the forces of national integration and pave the way for constructive and harmonious co-operation between the union and the states in the larger interests of national unity.

THE ROLE AND PERFORMANCE OF THE IAS IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: AN ASSESSMENT

The role that came to be assigned to the officers belonging to the All India Services of the IAS and IPS both at the federal and the state level has often been described as something unique and a truly 'remarkable feature' (Potter, 1986:163) of

the Indian politico-administrative system. The study team of the Administrative Reforms Commission on centre-state relationships rightly pointed out that:

... an all-India Service that serves the needs of the states but is controlled ultimately by the union is an unusual feature ... [and] cuts across the true federal principle and ... it must have been inserted by the makers of the Constitution for considerations strong enough to override the classical federal set-up. (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1967:1:237-238)

Any assessment of the role and performance of the Indian Administrative Service in India's governance needs to take into account the political environment and social reality in which the administrative system has operated. Michael Oakeshott rightly asserted:

We acquire habits of conduct not by constructing a way of living upon rules or precept learned by heart and subsequently practised, but by living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner; we acquire habits of conduct in the same way as we acquire our native language. (Oakeshott, 1978: 12)

As mentioned earlier, a wide range of factors was responsible for a special status being accorded to the IAS in the governance of the country. These included the nature of the Service as an abiding national network; its exposure in the broadest spectrum of public administration through live handling of issues at the centre and in the states; and its merit and capability (Workshop Report: 85). It would be worthwhile to estimate the performance of the IAS in the light of the above mentioned factors.

The special status and position accorded to the IAS was to a large extent because of the best national talent that it was believed to represent. In the first few decades after Independence, it was beyond doubt that the IAS attracted the best talent in the country, and to enter the Service was considered, both by the entrant and the public at large, as a matter of prestige, honour and achievement. The memoirs of retired civil servants often recall the joy and excitement that was experienced at the time of selection to the IAS.

However, in recent years questions have been raised as to whether the IAS truly represents the best of talent and is truly national in its character. It has been noticed that those entering the All India Services, especially since the 1980s, represent only a few of the states in terms of where they completed their University education. In the period 1986–1989, six states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh) and two union territories (Chandigarh and New Delhi) accounted for more than two-third of those recruited to the IAS. A few years ago, the issue of imbalance in representation was taken up by the Chief Minister of Kerala in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister and other chief ministers. The Chief Minister rejected the 'vague plea' that the selection to the All India Services was done by the UPSC, which functioned independently and recommended the list of candidates going strictly by the principle of merit. He was not willing to endorse the belief that some states are so 'intellectually and scholastically superior to the candidates from all the other states as to justify their overwhelming preponderance among the selected candidates' (*Economic Times*: November 18, 1990). This disproportionate representation has raised doubts in several quarters, as to whether the IAS continues to represent the best national talent. Yet, it must be recorded in this connection, that those states from which fewer degree holders enter the IAS, provide equally challenging career and lifestyle alternatives, especially in the professional sector. The wider career opportunities that are available could be one of the factors responsible for the IAS not attracting the youth in these states.

Further, in the light of economic liberalisation and the attractive employment opportunities it has brought in its wake (both in terms of the type of jobs and perquisites being offered by trans-national and local companies), the best talent in the country does not necessarily appear to be heading towards the higher Civil Services.

The manner in which the talent that enters into the higher services is allotted to various states, has also been a matter of grave concern in recent times. There has been increasing dis-

satisfaction among the selected candidates to the IAS with regard to the cadre allotted to them. Further, a few state governments have also expressed their displeasure with regard to the calibre and attitudes of the officers allotted to their state cadres. The allotment of the All India Services recruits to the different state cadres, which, is now done on a randomised and transparent basis, was earlier done on the basis of the preference list prepared, keeping in mind the choice of cadre as expressed by the successful candidates. Invariably, those who secured a higher place on the merit list were first allotted to fill 50 per cent of the vacancies in the cadre of their choice, while those who ranked lower had to reconcile themselves to a state cadre allotted on the basis of the vacancies. It was ensured that 50 per cent of those allotted to a state cadre hailed from outside the state, with a view to promoting national integration. Now the ratio between outsiders: insiders is prescribed at 2:1.

As a result of the reluctance of the new recruits to opt for certain state cadres, either for security reasons or because of economic backwardness (Ray, 1979:98), these cadres were invariably allotted to recruits who figured lower down on the merit list. Even in the early 1960s state governments had expressed their displeasure about the poor quality of personnel allotted to their states (Rajya Sabha debates: 6.3.61: col.1809–10). Some chief ministers have also resented the fact that they have no role to play in determining the personnel allotted to their state cadre. In the 1960s itself a former Chief Minister of Kerala, E M S Namboodripad stated that "suddenly one morning I find young boys and one or two girls before me saying that they have been posted to Kerala. What shall I do with them? What do I know of them?" (*Statesman*, February 23, 1969). In this context the reported protest lodged by chief ministers of north-eastern states to the Prime Minister about the callous attitude of the All India Service officers posted to their states (*Telegraph*, December 13, 1992, also *Indian Express*, November 22, 1992), gains added significance. The complaint of the chief ministers has been that the officers posted to the north east

region lacked dedication, and availed of the earliest opportunity to seek a transfer out of the region. These officers were contemptuously described as 'suitcase officers' because of their propensity to seek reasons to make frequent trips to New Delhi on official work or to seek a transfer (*ibidem*). An All India Services officer serving in the region sought to explain this phenomenon in the following terms:

... [The] relative isolation from the pivot of power is one of the main reasons for the unwillingness to stay here. One can feel the non-identification with the mainstream power structure. (*Ibidem*)

As noted earlier, the officers belonging to the IAS were required to occupy strategic positions both in the state and union governments, and it was hoped that the guidelines drawn up for deputation of officers belonging to a state cadre to the centre, would be strictly followed. The rules provide that an officer who has completed his tenure in the union government, return to his home state for a minimum period of three years. The central deputation period for officers belonging to the under secretary grade was fixed at three years, those of the deputy secretary grade four years, joint secretary grade five years and additional secretary grade seven years. However, this rule has frequently been violated, and officers deputed to the centre often manage to remain at New Delhi long beyond the permitted period. To ensure that they are not reverted to the state, officers have often sought to please the powers that be, and this in turn has resulted in the further politicisation of the Service.

It has rightly been pointed out that officers who are not inclined to return to the state administration, and prefer to stay on at New Delhi lose touch with grassroots reality. In the process, the 'additional advantage of more people [officers] working both in the union ministries and in the state [having] ... the benefits of seeing both sides ... [and] having a better understanding of the functioning of the governments at both these levels' (Sarkaria Commission report 1987: 51) is denied. In its reply to the questionnaire circulated by the Sarkaria Commission, the then Karnataka government pointed out that as per

the rules, in the event of a disagreement between the state and the union government on the question of the deputation of an officer belonging to the All India Services, the decision of the union government will have to be implemented. Such a provision lays to rest the 'fiction of dual control' (*Ibidem*: 252).

The Sarkaria Commission in its report, pointed out that as a result of the practice of allotting at least 50 per cent of the officers to a cadre from outside the state (for the purpose of promoting national integration), it is these 'outsiders' who generally prefer to go to the centre on deputation, and prefer not to return to the state (Report 1988: 225). Consequently, among the officers 'holding senior posts in the state governments, the *insiders* outnumber the *outsiders* ... [and] this is a serious deviation from the All India character of these Services (*ibidem*). The Commission stressed that:

If the policy of deputing to the union 40 per cent of the officers eligible to hold senior posts is strictly followed, every one of them would have to serve at the union for two to three spells, each of five years, if he is a direct recruit and for one to two such spells if he is an officer promoted from one of the State Services. (*Ibidem*)

In spite of the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and the stand taken by the Sub-Committee of the Inter State Council to ensure strict enforcement of the rules pertaining to deputation of officers belonging to the All India Services to the Centre (*The Times of India*, September 16, 1992), it has been reported by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel and Public Grievances that 57 per cent of the 2900 IAS officers working in the State have never been posted on deputation to the Centre (*Hindu*, September 4, 1996).

A deeper analysis of India's experience with governance clearly demonstrates, that the Indian Administrative Service has contributed in many positive ways to the stability and effectiveness of the administrative system. The efficiency with which the elections are conducted by the Election Commission, with the assistance of the higher bureaucracy is often cited as a case in point. The electoral process, especially in recent times, has been significantly insulated from the political forces and

has been witness to the bureaucracy functioning under the authority of the Election Commission with a reasonable degree of impartiality, efficiency and objectivity.

Bureaucrats often argue that the ills associated with the bureaucracy are largely caused by the interference of the political leadership, who prevent the civil servants from functioning independently. The bureaucrats often appear to be a part of a process over which they have little control.

The two related, but distinct trends with regard to the role of the higher Civil Services in the administrative system, have occupied the spotlight of attention. In the first place—recent controversies involving minister–civil servant relationship have raised doubts—both in academic circles and in the public mind—as to who controls and directs governmental activity. Secondly, the increasing politicisation of the higher Civil Service appears to have seriously undermined the credibility of the administration. The near abandoning of the Weberian ‘neutral competence’ and the resultant integration in terms of ‘group objectives’ (Saksena in interview to Agarwal, 1996), between the elite Civil Service and the political leadership is increasingly being witnessed.

In an extremely frank and forthright analysis, the Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, (which trains those recruited to the elite Civil Services) stated:

Unfortunately many ... officers are accepting a diminished role of themselves by becoming agents of exploitation in a State structure which is callous to the needs of the poor. In the process, they would become totally indistinguishable from other rent seeking parasites—politicians, inspectors they are taking too much from the system and contributing too little. (Saksena in interview to Agarwal, 1996)

The fall-out of the increasing politicisation of the IAS, its apparent insensitivity, and the changing contours of minister–civil servant relationship, is clearly reflected in two important developments. In the first place, ‘bureaucratic activism’ has today become fashionable and has often been applauded both by the media and the public. Setting aside Civil Service regulations, serving IAS officers have publicly criticised both the

political leadership and their ‘erring colleagues’ for the forging of an unholy nexus between the two. These ‘activist bureaucrats’ have seemingly assumed the role of ‘educating the people at large on the corrupting influence... rapidly corroding the moral and ethical standards of society’ (Godbole, 1996). Several retired IAS officers too, have launched vigorous campaigns to expose both the political leaders and the bureaucracy. The efforts of a retired bureaucrat who was also the Chief Election Commissioner, T N Seshan, to cleanse the system is a case in point. Seshan has often referred to the senior bureaucrats as ‘backbone-less wonders’ (*Indian Express*, June 21, 1994), and received tremendous public support, especially in urban areas and amongst the middle class (Shastri, 1993b:21; 1994a:7).

Secondly, the judiciary too, has stepped in to try and rein in the bureaucracy. ‘Judicial activism’ has resulted in a series of landmark judgments in which the courts have censured IAS officers for the manner in which they have exercised/abused their powers.

To put the issue in a historical perspective, it would be useful to keep in mind the fact that in the years after Independence, the political neutrality of the IAS was, by and large, respected both by the officers and the political leadership. Trivedi, a distinguished bureaucrat opines:

It can be said without any fear of contradiction that the first two decades of Independence saw the blooming of a service, highly dedicated and devoted not only to the requirements of a democratic and welfare state, but also to being an effective instrument of social change through responsible and responsive functioning. (Trivedi, 1997:4)

As a result of one party domination (Congress party) both at the Centre and in most of the States, during the first two decades after Independence (till the late 1960s), the IAS escaped becoming a victim of inter-party political rivalry.

Two developments in the late 1960s dramatically altered the scenario. In the 1967 elections to the state legislatures, several non-Congress parties were voted to power. This heralded a new chapter in centre-state relations. The new DMK Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu was among the first to raise the banner of

revolt by informing the Central government that 'it did not require any more IAS officers' (*Statesman*, June 4, 1967). In the changed political scenario, the relevance of the All India Services as part of the federal framework came to be increasingly questioned by the non-Congress chief ministers (*The Times of India*, July 19, 1967). IAS officers were often caught in the political crossfire between competing parties. The policy of transferring officers holding key positions with a change in the ruling party increasingly became the norm. In the context of federal governance and centre-state tensions, officers belonging to the All India Services, were often viewed as agents of the centre (Ray, 1979; Potter, 1986; Shastri, 1995:50-52). Further, when Indira Gandhi took over as the Prime Minister in 1966, she attempted to use the bureaucracy to strengthen her position both within the party and in the government (Mathur, 1992:640-643). A retired civil servant, M N Buch has observed:

Mrs Gandhi was shrewd enough ... to realise its (Civil Service) potential as an instrument to convert the Indian state into her private fiefdom first officers were divided into those who were loyal to the Congress, and those who were true to their Constitutional oath of loyalty to law, duty and the people of India. (*Indian Express*, October 1, 1990)

Commenting on Indira Gandhi's handling of the Civil Service, a leading journalist wrote:

Her regime was instrumental in politicising the civil servants who, instead of performing their role as provided in the Constitution, became a willing vehicle for carrying out political activities and even unleashing vindictive action against the political opponents of the ruling coterie both within and outside the ruling party. (Chawla, 1992)

It was Indira Gandhi who gave a call for a 'committed bureaucracy' and during the internal Emergency (1975-77), the politicisation of the bureaucracy became even more intense:

By the end of the '60s, Ms Indira Gandhi destroyed the concept of an independent and apolitical civil service.... career advancements were made in favour of civil servants committed to the authoritarian rule of the leader. Those who asserted their independence or remained apolitical were quietly sidelined and the opportunists in the civil services started making tacit alliances with politicians By the begin-

ning of the '80s, the IAS and the IPS had lost their independence and apolitical character embodied in the services. The majority of the members of the services still try to maintain the norms of conduct ... but the minority which has thrown the norms to the winds and got politicised has exceeded the critical mass. (Subrahmanyam, 1992)

With the end of one party domination at the centre, the politicisation of the IAS became even more apparent, and a change of leadership at the Centre was, in most cases, accompanied by the mass transfer of senior officers. In the process, the higher Civil Service often failed to draw the line of distinction between 'political convenience and administrative and constitutional propriety' (Chawla, 1992). The government of the day, often referred to by the acronym GOD, became the principal focus of allegiance. The tragedy was that the worship was of a GOD who was neither eternal nor true and rarely right.

In this context, it has been suggested that the 'excessive responsibility given to the ministers ... induces civil servants to keep their political masters in good humour' (Parthasarathy, 1996; also Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987). A former Principal Secretary who served under more than one Prime Minister, has been critical of ministers 'who think that laws and regulations are not for them but only for the bureaucrats' (Alexander as quoted in Prasad, 1996:14). A similar sentiment was echoed by a former Cabinet Secretary:

The politicians' self-assumed role of being the sole guardians of public interest intoxicated them (and) a large part of the bureaucratic machine slowly succumbed to the vicious exercise of power by the politicians. (Deshmukh, 1992)

This politicisation of the higher Civil Services has resulted in officers with a proven track record of honesty and political neutrality being shunted to innocuous positions. Loyalty to the political leadership, became a critical factor that determined key bureaucratic appointments. A former personnel minister at the centre is reported to have observed that when appointing secretaries to departments, they were not looking for "genius or brilliance but the qualities of ... loyalty" (as quoted in Dubashi, 1990). What appears disturbing is that such politically motivated transfers were defended by senior civil ser-

wants themselves on the ground that everyone 'wants to have a person of his confidence in position' (A former Cabinet Secretary and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, as quoted in Godbole, 1995).

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, the political leadership, created a record of sorts with regard to the transfer of senior bureaucrats. If, during the 15-month tenure of the BJP (one of the national parties) government (June 1991 to December 1992), 460 senior bureaucrats were transferred, the Samajwadi party (a regional party) which came to power subsequently, effected 321 transfers during its 18-month tenure. The BSP (another national party) government, during its first one month in office itself, transferred 190 senior officers, and during its short three month tenure as many as 1263 officers were transferred (Singh, 1997). With the six month sharing-of-power arrangement worked out by the BJP and BSP in Uttar Pradesh in early 1997, the trend of mass transfer of IAS officers in the State with the coming to power of a new chief minister became even more pronounced when Mayawati was sworn in March, 1997, and later handed over power to Kalyan Singh after six months, in September, 1997.

Alarmed at the spate of transfers, eight senior Secretaries to the union government and ten states' Chief Secretaries (all IAS officers) met the Cabinet Secretary in July, 1995, to urge the Prime Minister to revamp the administrative system and provide greater stability of tenures (*The Times of India*, July 11, 1995). In a subsequent note to all Chief Ministers, the Personnel Minister wrote that frequent transfer of officers 'may have (a) demoralising effect on the morale of officers and ultimately on the quality of administration' (*Indian Express*, July 18, 1995).

The frequent transfer of bureaucrats, and attempts to place 'pliable officers' in critical positions is also linked to the phenomenal increase in governmental activity and expenditure in development related sectors, and the wide scope it provides for corrupt practices. The reality of the large government, and the resultant influence that the wielders of power come to enjoy is a case in point. Every corrupt politician, it has been alleged,

'generates a multiplicity of corrupt officials' (Subrahmanyam, 1996). Certain positions in the administration were considered to be 'strategic' from the perspective of the scope that they offered for indulging in corrupt activities. Corrupt politicians were keen to fill such positions with those bureaucrats who actively colluded in making this possible.

The patronage network with its sweeping influence has been explained by Beteille in terms of the social reality in which the system operates:

Why has it proved so difficult to keep administration insulated from the small and large demands of patronage? Part of the answer lies in the turn taken by democratic politics in India. But there are deeper causes, embedded in the structures of Indian society. Ours is a society in which claims of kinship, caste and community are strong, not to say irresistible, and ties of patronage often emerge as concessions to those claims. (Beteille, 1997:3)

The manner in which high level IAS officers have ensured the protection of their own group interests and have convinced the political leadership too in this regard, is apparent from the manner in which senior ex-cadre posts have been sanctioned in the states with the sole purpose of providing time-bound promotions to IAS officers. As of May 1996, there were 650 such ex-cadre posts in the states. During the financial year 1995-96 alone, at least six new secretary level posts were created in the central secretariat (*Economic Times*, May 6, 1996). Often to ensure 'time-bound promotions to IAS officers' technical and professional posts are snatched away from the central Services (ibidem). It is relevant to recall in this context, the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister by the Confederation of the Associations of Central Services which drew attention to (i) the recommendations of the Economic Reforms Commission and the Fourth Pay Commission, that the government should empanel the best officers irrespective of the Service to which they belonged, to ensure proper utilisation of the best personnel, (ii) the observation of the Parliamentary Committee on home affairs (report 16th, May, 1995), that the treatment being given to the officers of different Services selected through a common Civil Service examination was not in the

interest of public administration, and that there should be a common cut-off year for appointment of a joint secretary and above, and (iii) similar suggestions of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

In the zealous pursuit and protection of their own interests, the isolated functioning of the elite Services as a 'form of social organization' that 'emphasises the parts at the expense of a view of the whole' (Sengupta, 1990 : 17) is clearly visible. This parochial 'self-interest' approach, distorts the very basis of governance, and the national interest articulated in terms of the interests of the public at large gets ignored (Athreya, 1997:5).

The nature of the accountability of a minister, and the civil servant in a parliamentary democracy has been debated now for quite some time. In a recent media discussion, a former minister opined that the lack of accountability is the bane of the system and bureaucrats ensure 'that the last signature in the file is that of the minister (and even) ... if there is no such signature, the bureaucrat can always raise objections' (Sathe in *The Hindustan Times*, 1994). Senior IAS officers have argued that if a 'Minister names his Secretary in Parliament or in the media, he kills the doctrine of official anonymity which has stood the test of time everywhere' (ibidem).

The attitudes of the IAS officers towards their jobs were assessed by NC Saxena, the Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration:

The IAS has generally been indifferent to the resources that sustain the livelihood needs of the poor. This is reflected in the way IAS officers grade their jobs. Industrial and commercial departments and corporations posts are highly sought after. The lowest ranked jobs are tribal and social welfare, revenue administration, land reforms, urban slums and rural development. (In an interview with Agarwal, 1996)

Saxena further adds that between 1948-52, the total number of dishonest All India Services officers was less than 10 per cent of the cadre; during 1965-68, it continued to be less than 20; in 1995, nearly 60 per cent of the officers 'tend to have a simple programme of making money and obeying the slightest

wishes of politicians' (Saxena, 1995). Of the balance 40 per cent, 30 per cent comply with the illegal orders in the hope of post-retirement benefits. The remaining 10 per cent 'refuse to obey the illegal dictates of their political bosses, and get sidelined into insignificant jobs' (ibidem). Increasingly the 'TINA' syndrome (there is no alternative), or else 'If I do not do it someone else will' approach appears to have affected the higher Civil Services seeking to rationalise this weakness of governance.

All these developments call for a deeper inquiry into the functioning of the higher Civil Services and outlining reform strategies which can help increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the system of governance in India.

■ REINVIGORATING GOVERNANCE: ROLE OF THE IAS

A second look at the system and instrumentalities of governance has today become imperative in India, in the light of three major developments.

In the first place, the policy of economic liberalisation that is being pursued by the government has important implications for the nature and focus of administration. This new policy requires major shifts in the priorities of administration, and thus necessitates a review of the style and content of governance. Secondly, the passing of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, and the subsequent changes that have been envisaged (and not effectively realised) in the local government system also involve rethinking on the structure of the administration, especially the IAS, at both the state and local level. Thirdly, the various movements for social empowerment have brought in their wake, an 'activist perspective' to the role of the state. A logical corollary to these changes, which involve a critical paradigm shift, is the need to reinvigorate administration from a multi-track perspective.

It has often been asserted that if the policy of economic liberalisation is to succeed, the state and its administrative

apparatus must reconcile themselves to a less powerful role. With economic restructuring, the administration is increasingly perceived as a facilitator and promoter. Yet, given the socio-economic realities of a country like India, the 'small government' norm (considered by some as an essential by-product of economic liberalisation) is met with stiff resistance (Edadan, 1997:1616). Administration, in such countries, needs to be geared to create a socially just and acceptable distribution system (Banerjee, 1997), which entails not a shrinking of the responsibilities of the state, but a major redefinition of its role.

The local government system, as envisaged by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, clearly demarcates certain functions and responsibilities as belonging to the local bodies. For effective local governance, the central and state governments need to redefine their spheres of operation and responsibility. This has become vital in order to ensure that the specific autonomy guaranteed to local bodies is in no way eroded by these governments.

Effective governance in the Indian context, would also involve more meaningful forms of accountability, greater transparency and responsibility in administration, strict and uniform execution of all laws and appropriate strategies for citizen participation in the administration. The 'corporatisation of administration', which appears to be the trend in regimes of economic liberalisation, needs to be consciously redefined in order to ensure that the administration effectively supports the aims and aspirations of citizens, and positively demonstrates its commitment to social justice and equity, which is what the country urgently needs.

Given the significant role that was accorded to the IAS in the governance of the country, revitalising the administration would involve major changes in its style of functioning and attitude. While endorsing the views of the Sarkaria Commission that the All India Services are 'as much necessary today as they were when the Constitution was framed' (Report, 1988: 229), there are many areas in which their achievement falls far short of the expectations. Several of these limitations are linked

to the fact that some of the basic norms that were required to be followed with regard to the All India Services have been practised more in their breach and need to be assessed in depth.

A major lacuna that adversely affects the functioning of the administrative system and the higher Civil Services is the near absence of a culture of accountability. The accountability of the system, on many occasions, appears to be peripheral, obsolete and largely illusory. In this context it has been observed, that the entire system of administration appears to be geared to encourage not trust but mistrust (Ardhanareeshwaran, 1997:4-6).

A system of accountability fundamentally implies responsibility and to be effective it must be 'achievement oriented' (Maheshwari, 1983:458). Accountability in its objective dimension implies formal responsibility for specific matters, either to an individual or to an institution, which is governed by clearly defined rules and regulations. In its subjective realm, accountability connotes an individual's sense of responsibility to his/her assigned duty or a 'sense of the public good and the notion which determines and defines conduct even though there are no formal mechanisms' through which 'accountability can be enforced' (Franks quoted in Shastri, 1994:2).

The validity and utility of any system of accountability is judged on the basis of how effective it has been in ensuring that those vested with authority act in a responsive and responsible manner. Ideally, the feeling of responsibility and awareness in an administration, that misuse or abuse of authority will be detected and those responsible for such deviations punished, should be a 'powerful and necessary persuasion to propriety' (see Shastri, 1994:4). Strategies in this regard need to be focused upon.

In recent times, it has been noticed that the subjective dimension of the accountability of the officers belonging to the IAS, has been gradually lost sight of. The analysis of the value preferences of higher civil servants in India, which was undertaken in the previous section bears testimony to this fact. The need for officers inculcating the right values must be under-

scored, and the utility of an objectively designed training programme in this regard has to be emphasised.

The accountability of the administration has also been eroded as a result of the politicisation of the bureaucracy on the one hand and the violation of norms relating to minister-civil servant relationship on the other. Civil service neutrality needs to be reinforced, and the accountability of ministers and bureaucrats must be more precisely defined in terms of 'bureaucratic accountability to the political boss and political answerability to the people and Parliament':

Mutual respect and team work alone would achieve results.... Even if there are differences, the political boss must stand by his official. Never expose your Secretary to public criticism. If a politician calls his Secretary names, the latter would start leaking out information to the Press. It breeds lack of faith and will affect performance. (Sathe in *The Hindustan Times*, 1994)

It is interesting to note that both in the UK and Australia, efforts to prevent the politicisation of the bureaucracy have yielded positive results. In UK, the ministers have been permitted to appoint political advisers who fulfil a role that senior officials find offensive (Wilson, 1997:2). Further, the bureaucracy in the UK has come to realise that if it wishes to play a major role in advising the political leadership on policy matters, it must retain the confidence of the government as 'losing the confidence of government meant losing influence' (Ibidem: 15). In Australia too, the position of ministerial consultant was created which 'took over some roles previously undertaken by senior public servants' (Halligan, 1997:5).

The frequent transfers of IAS officers, and the use of the power to transfer to favour those willing to toe the line of the political leadership, is a direct consequence of the politicisation of the higher Civil Service. A Civil Services Board needs to be constituted to oversee appointments and promotions of civil servants. Further, a tenure system also needs to be introduced. Sustained public pressure would have to be built up in this regard as ministers may not be in favour of such a move, as it would deprive them one of their 'biggest powers' (Alexander

as quoted in Prasad, 1996). The Chief Secretaries' conference held in November 1996 also favoured the setting up of Civil Services board to restrict political discretion, and establish norms for minimum tenures. However, it is not yet established that the message has actually brought about any sense of order in this regard.

It would be useful to record at this stage, the practice followed in other parliamentary systems. In UK, the political leadership exercises the little influence or direct control over the appointment or promotion of senior officials. The senior appointments selection committee headed by the cabinet secretary is left to decide these questions. A former British Prime Minister, John Major is reported to have told his cabinet secretary and head of the Civil Service to decide on questions of promotion and transfer of senior civil servants, as they knew these people and he did not (Wilson, 1997:3).

In Australia, the Public Service Reform Act (1984) provides for a fixed five-year tenure for senior officers (Halligan, 1997:6).

New Zealand's procedure for effecting official appointments is independent of 'overt ministerial discretion' and 'not matched in any other parliamentary democracy' (Robert, 1987: 79). The Higher Appointments Committee oversees all issues relating to transfers and promotions. The heads of departments have been designated as chief executive officers with five year terms. Managerial autonomy is ensured and ministerial intervention has been made transparent (Halligan, 1997:12-13).

The changing dynamics of centre-state relations needs to be borne in mind, and the administration must respond to the emerging trends in these relations. A basic change that needs to be initiated is to reduce the over-riding powers of the centre with regard to the All India Services. On matters relating to the framing and amending of rules and regulations relating to the All India Services, not only should the state governments be consulted, but their concurrence [two-thirds of the states] must invariably be obtained.

The rules relating to the deputation of All India Service officers to the union need to be strictly and uniformly followed.

It must be ensured that 'the services of the best among the All India Services are not monopolised by the union government but are also readily available to the state governments to whose cadre they belong' (Report, 1988: 230).

The recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission to constitute an advisory council for personnel administration for regular consultation on the management of All India Services between the union and the state governments (*ibidem*) needs to be given serious thought. If the governments—both union and state—were to feel that the creation of such a council 'will not serve any useful purpose' (the sub committee of the inter-state council, at its meeting, on September 15, 1992, expressed such sentiments: *The Times of India*), the inter-state council could be made the forum for effecting centre-state co-ordination on matters relating to the All India Services. At present, the central government is the final authority on matters of disciplinary action and framing/modifying of rules and regulations relating to the All India Services. This power should be conferred on a more federal body, like the inter-state council. Such a change must be part of a much more comprehensive reform to empower the inter-state council.

The suggestion of not allotting the home state to any new recruit could also be given serious consideration. Such a decision could reduce the risk of the officers having a personal stake in the administration. While the language factor could be cited as one of the dissuading factors, experience has shown that officers have been able to master the language of the state they are assigned to within a very short time. Rules could also be framed to ensure that those who figure high on the merit list are distributed more or less evenly in all the state cadres. Today, some state cadres are extremely popular for various reasons, resulting in the possibility of all those who rank high in the merit list being bunched together.

Successfully combating the virus of corruption in administration, is critical to ensuring any meaningful positive reforms in the working of the system. While some of the measures suggested above may help challenge the spread of corruption,

transparency in administration would go a long way towards ensuring respect for rules and regulations and their uniform application, thus providing the basis for a corruption-free administrative machinery. The secrecy that pervades the administration today, has encouraged the abuse of power by both politicians and bureaucrats. Greater transparency would permit persistent social pressure on the administration to ensure probity and honesty. The Official Secrets Act needs to be amended, and the proposal for a Right to Information Act given early effect. Civil Service associations have also endorsed this demand on the ground that under the present system, the government is in a position to shield powerful politicians and bureaucrats and blame any lapse on 'systems failure' (*The Times of India*, July 5, 1995).

The bureaucracy must also bear in mind that the public image of the Civil Service has hit an all time low, as revealed by a recent survey conducted as part of the national election study '96, in which the bureaucracy and police received the lowest positions in the index of popular trust in institutions² (Yadav, 1996:40). One of the reasons why the bureaucracy is held in low esteem by the public, is the distance that bureaucrats have maintained from citizens, and the secrecy and closed nature of the administrative system. It is refreshing to note that the Twelfth Metcalfians have suggested that an open approach to public debate was needed to correct the lop-sided public image which causes gaps in perception and performance (1997:79).

To encourage transparency and honesty in administration, it is also necessary for the leadership (both at the political and administrative level) to send the right signals. The Twelfth Metcalfians rightly observed that the type of officers appointed to key positions was indicative of the desire of the leadership to maintain ethical standards, or encourage the corrupt. Appointing

² The survey revealed that out of a maximum score of 100, the Election Commission secured 62, state government and judiciary 59, local government 58, central government 57, representatives 40, political parties 39, bureaucracy 37 and police 28.

persons of integrity, they felt, 'would set a personal example of excellent conduct' (1997:72).

In keeping with the philosophy of economic liberalisation, steps need to be taken to downsize the bloated bureaucracy. The Tenth Finance Commission has opined that 'viable methods of reducing the strength of government employees must be explored, otherwise economic reform may lose its way in a new bureaucratic maze' (*The Times of India*, November 15, 1995). Soon after launching the economic reforms programme, the Prime Minister had stated in 1991, that the strength of the bureaucracy would be reduced by 10 per cent. However, between January 1992 and December 1995 only a 3.3 per cent cut in staff strength was possible (*Financial Express*, March 8, 1996). The manner in which the government has now conceded to the demands of trade unions and gone beyond the Fifth Pay Commission's recommendations has rightly been termed by Tendulkar, a Member of the Pay Commission—as 'fiscal suicide' (*Deccan Herald*, September 13, 1997).

The relations between the IAS and the other Services also need a second searching look. The workshop of the Twelfth Metcalfians has recommended that the IAS should be viewed as a mere 'primus inter pares, vis-a-vis the other Services', since according such a status would require credible justification. The said workshop rightly concluded that the 'many good opportunities of fruitful co-operation with other professionals ... were being lost on account of a conscious or unconscious show of aggressive superiority and an arrogant attitude... by IAS officers' (1997:63). What they went on to add was more significant: 'many other specialist service officers ... were rightly resentful of the over-bearing style of the IAS' (ibidem).

In an age of specialisation, efforts must also be made to promote specialisation within the IAS. The Twelfth Metcalfians have suggested that the specialisation could be on the following lines: (a) a system-wide exposure to develop management specialist competence and personal style (first 12–15 years); (b) 12 to 15 years in a variety of jobs, preferably within a specific part of the administrative structure, and followed again;

(c) by assignments based on the highest management specialist ability level at the final stage (1997:57). The above suggestion could be implemented as a first step towards greater specialisation within the Services.

Further, the present personnel system does not permit senior positions in the government to be filled up by lateral entry from non-governmental organizations and professional institutions/experts (Saksena in interview with Agarwal, 1996; also Sheno, 1997:10). In Australia, an opportunity for lateral entry for those outside the Civil Service has resulted in greater competition (Halligan, 1997:6). In the Indian context it must be emphasised that the IAS is likely to oppose such a move as it would threaten their monopoly over these positions (Saksena in an interview with Agarwal, 1996).

The Indian Administrative Service has the potential to play a positive role in the effective governance of the country. The above mentioned reforms have become vital if the higher Civil Service is to effectively respond to the emerging challenges and play a positive role in the process of governance.

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