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POLITICAL CONTROL OF BUREAUCRACY IN INDIA : EMERGING TRENDS

APPROACHING THE THEME

A critical dimension of the intellectual discourse relating to the working of parliamentary democracy in India in general and the administrative system in particular, is the increasing attention being focused on the accountability of bureaucracy. It has often been suggested that the bureaucracy in India is rarely subjected to any meaningful control and its powers have steadily increased with the passage of time. Public confidence in the bureaucracy appears to have 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 institutions.¹ (Yadav 1996:40).

Two related, though distinct, trends can be discerned in this regard. In the first place, recent controversies involving minister-civil servant relationship have raised doubts – both in the academic circles and in the public mind – as to who controls and directs governmental activity. Secondly, the increasing politicisation of the bureaucracy has seriously undermined the credibility of administration.

Tensions in minister-civil servant relationship have resulted in political leaders adopting extreme positions with regard to the bureaucracy. While one Central Minister is reported to have informed the bureaucrats in his Ministry, that "[civil] servants should not speak till the master permits... [you] are not to apply your mind, you are just to do what you are told" (*Indian Express*, 25 August 1995), another Minister stated, in an interview, that bureaucrats are "like servants..." [who] should not be allowed to act on their own (*Pioneer*, 10 June 1995).

Even senior bureaucrats have conceded that in recent years, the bureaucracy 'has buckled here and there in a way it never did in the past' (From Cabinet Secretary, Subramaniam in an interview, *Times of India*, 18 July, 1996). A deeper examination of the spate of cases filed in the courts against former ministers, for their alleged acts of omission and commission while in office, clearly point to the complicity of senior officers. Commenting on one such case, an editorial in a leading daily asserted that the "crass collusion" between the corrupt and deprived has "become brazen beyond belief" (*Hindu*, 21 August 1996). A few years ago, a senior civil servant resigned alleging that the entire politico-administrative system had been perverted by the "greedy and power-hungry politicians and corrupt and self-seeking civil servants" (*Maheshwari*, 1992; also *Malhotra*, 1992). 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 services² 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. (Agarwal, 1996)

It is relevant to note in this context, that the legislature too, has achieved little success in ensuring accountability of the bureaucracy. The enormous expansion of government activity has triggered off a situation wherein, ensuring the accountability of the executive to the legislature has become distant, peripheral and at times even illusory (Shastri 1993a). A recent study on the accountability of the administration to the legislature in India, concluded :

Parliament's helplessness... when pitted against a scandal prone and obdurate government must... [be] an unedifying spectacle for those who lay store by the parliamentary system of democracy. (Prakash, 1989)

The fall out of the increasing politicisation of the bureaucracy, 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 bureaucrats have publicly criticised both the political leadership and the 'erring bureaucrats' with a view to exposing the 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 bureaucrats 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*, 21 June 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 judgements in which the courts have censured bureaucrats for the manner in which they have exercised/abused their powers. In many cases, bureaucrats have been sentenced to jail terms for their actions.

In the light of the above developments, this paper focuses on the emerging trends in political control over bureaucracy in India. An in-depth assessment is attempted of the factors that have contributed to the increasing tensions in minister-civil servant relations, the changing role and attitude of the bureaucracy and the steady erosion of parliamentary control over the bureaucracy.

POLITICISATION OF BUREAUCRACY : FACTORS AND FORCES

A critical factor that has perverted political control over the bureaucracy has been the growing nexus between the politician and the bureaucrat and the resultant politicisation of the bureaucracy (Mukherjee, 1987). The integration in terms of "group objectives" between the bureaucracy and the political leadership has become possible with the civil servants increasingly abandoning their political neutrality.

A 'COMMITTED BUREAUCRACY' : ITS ANTECEDENTS

In the years after independence, political neutrality of the bureaucracy was, by and large, respected, both by the bureaucracy and the political leadership. 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 1960's), the bureaucracy 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 resulted in the bureaucracy being caught in the political cross-fire 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 former retired civil servant, M.N. Buch has rightly 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*, 1 October 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 opponent 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, Mrs 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 beginning 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, emphasis added)

With the end of one party domination at the centre, the politicisation of the bureaucracy became even more apparent and a change of leadership at the centre was, in most cases, accompanied by the mass transfer of senior bureaucrats. In the process, the bureaucracy often failed to draw the line of distinction between 'political convenience and administrative and constitutional propriety' (Chawla, 1992).

A natural corollary to the desire of the political leadership to use their power for partisan political ends, was the politicisation of the bureaucracy. It has been suggested that the "excessive responsibility given to the Ministers...induces civil servants to keep their political masters in good humour" (Parthasarathy, 1998; 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 and 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, emphasis added).

J.N. Dixit, a former Foreign Secretary believes that 'politicians being the repository of power, have politicised the bureaucracy'. He goes on to add :

Generally those civil servants who have prospered in career and responsibilities have towed the politicians line and served his narrower interests. Those who have adhered to their basic terms of reference and were upright tended to have a chequered career. (1994, emphasis added)

POLITICISING BUREAUCRATIC TRANSFERS

This politicisation of the bureaucracy 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 Minister for Personnel of the Government of India 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). Recently, in the state of Karnataka, a senior bureaucrat was transferred from her position only because she refused to comply with the instructions given by a Minister. The Minister alleged that though the officer was honest she was not 'result-oriented' and 'her arrogance irritated' him (Deccan Herald, 18 February 1996).

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 18 month tenure of the BJP government (June 1991 to December 1992), 460 senior bureaucrats were transferred, the Samajwadi Party which came to power subsequently, effected 321 transfers during its 18 month tenure. The BSP 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). What appears disturbing is that such politically motivated transfers were defended by senior civil servants 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).

Alarmed at the spate of transfers, eight senior Secretaries to Union Government and ten State's Chief-Secretaries met the Cabinet Secretary in July 1995, to urge the Prime Minister to revamp the administrative system and provide greater stability of tenures (*Times of India*, 11 July 1995). In a subsequent note to all Chief Ministers, the Minister for Personnel 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*, 18 July 1995).

CORRUPT POLITICIANS AND CORRUPT BUREAUCRATS : THE ALLIANCE OF MUTUAL CONVENIENCE

The frequent transfer of bureaucrats and attempts to place 'pliable officers' in critical positions is also linked to the phenomenal increase in governmental expenditure on development - related activities and the wide scope it provides for corrupt practices. 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. An upright police officer rightly lamented that :

Corrupt politicians are understandably very comfortable in association or axis with corrupt officials, since both sides stand to prosper from such an arrangement... When honest officials find their blatantly corrupt colleagues move up the promotion ladder, they are bound to be influenced. If they are themselves weak or fence-sitters, they would join the burgeoning ranks of the dishonest. (Riberio, 1995).

In the light of the recent Telecom Scandal, involving the former Minister for Communications and a senior bureaucrat in the Communications Ministry, it has been maintained that the politician-bureaucrat nexus is no longer a mere aberration or a stray instance :

Anyone who knows anything about the goings-on in the vast governmental labyrinth knows that crass collusion between rapacious politicians on the take and equally greedy civil servants on the make is distressingly widespread and is increasing by the day. (Editorial, *Hindu*, 21 August 1996).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION FOR BUREAUCRACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

While the political leadership has undoubtedly contributed to crippling political control over the bureaucracy, the role of the bureaucracy in perverting the instrumentalities of control cannot be lost sight of.

Bureaucrats frequently allude to the unbearable political pressures they are subjected to and the vitiated atmosphere in which they have to operate. A counter-point often made is that such pressures can always be neutralised, given the protection that the bureaucracy enjoys under Article 311 of the Indian Constitution. Bureaucrats appear to have buckled to political pressures as they desire to be pliable (Singh, 1990; Lall, 1993) and often have a 'flexible conscience' (Alexander as quoted in Prasad, 1996 : 14). Honest bureaucrats, it is emphasised, are far from helpless, if they are willing to summon the necessary courage, in view of the Constitutional protection provided (Irani, 1995). A senior bureaucrat felt that it was only the spineless bureaucrats who took recourse to the 'helplessness argument' considering the constitutional protection and guarantees the higher civil services enjoy in India and if bureaucrats abdicated their responsibilities, the Ministers might as 'well run their Departments with stenographers' (*Statesman*, 8 October 1995). The truth of the matter appears to be that many bureaucrats tend to act like politicians and the nexus appears to be between politicians and a politicised bureaucracy (Nayyar, 1994).

'ENLIGHTENED' SELF INTEREST

The manner in which high level bureaucrats 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, 6 May 1996). While zealously pursuing and protecting its own interests, the isolated functioning of the bureaucracy—as a ‘form of social organisation’ that ‘emphasises the parts at the expense of a view of the whole’ (Sengupta, 1990 : 17) is clearly visible.

Not only have the bureaucrats been successful in manipulating the ministers to serve their own group interests, they have often misled the political leaders into taking decisions which are not always in the national interest. The controversy surrounding the role of the minister and the civil servant in the sugar scandal that erupted in 1994, bears testimony to this fact. The minister concerned made a statement on the floor of Parliament that the bureaucracy was responsible for the scandal and what could he ‘as a Minister do, when in a democracy, officials take decisions involving Rs. 400 crores’ (Indian Express, 14 June 1994).

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 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 *Hindustan Times*, 1994). Bureaucrats argued that if a ‘Minister names his Secretary in Parliament or in the media, he kills this doctrine which has stood the test of time everywhere.’ (*Ibid*).

In a debate in the Lok Sabha in 1958, on the nature of minister-civil servant accountability, the then Union Home Minister stated that :

I would like it to be generally a rule that except where a minister can be shown to be altogether free of blame and not at all responsible for any act of omission which is open to objection and criticism, he should assume responsibility. I think in this matter a little strictness would be better than leniency. (India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, 20 February 1958).

Attitudes of the elite bureaucracy towards their jobs was assessed by N.S. Saksena, 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.

Saksena 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 per cent. 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’ (Saksena 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’ (*ibid*).

It is relevant to note in this context, that a World Bank report on the Indian Civil Service stated that promotions within the civil services were based exclusively on seniority. Officers were recruited in batches and within a batch ‘seniority was determined by the rank assigned by the public service commission’ and ‘officers retain their seniority for the rest of their careers and it is rare for an officer to be promoted out of order’ (*Hindu*, 24 June 1996). This has resulted in a complacent attitude among the bureaucracy. The behavioural proclivities of the bureaucracy have been succinctly stated in the following statement :

[E]njoying the trappings of power and pomp, without taking responsibility, showing authority without allowing themselves to be accountable... stalling with sincerity, passing the buck with efficiency...and showing immense capacity for sycophancy (which is) ...appreciated and often rewarded (Roy, 1996).

JUDICIAL ACTIVISM AND CONTROL OVER BUREAUCRACY

The growing nexus between the ministers and civil servants and the perversion of the instrumentalities of political control of the bureaucracy, has resulted in the Courts stepping in and reining in the bureaucracy. ‘Judicial Activism’ has been viewed by many as an antidote to executive inaction and insensitivity. In recent years, the courts have passed severe strictures against civil servants for either not exercising their powers or abdicating their responsibilities. A court judgement, passed in 1995, which attracted a lot of attention and was widely debated, was the punishment handed down to Vasudevan, a senior bureaucrat who was serving as Secretary, Urban Development, Government of Karnataka. Vasudevan was sentenced to one month simple imprisonment by the Supreme Court, for contempt of court. The court sentenced Vasudevan for having failed to comply with an undertaking given to it in a case relating to a government servant’s plea for various benefits. The benefits included the creation of a super-numerary post to accommodate the said employee. The Supreme Court judgement in this case raised a host of questions including those relating to the ‘accountability in the law of ministers and civil servants and their relationship mutually’ (Noorani, 1995a).

When the Supreme Court held Vasudevan guilty, the bureaucracy rushed to his defence claiming that bureaucrats :

[A]re required to function within the Rules of Business laid down by the concerned government. To relate this to the Karnataka officers case, Vasudevan could not, on his own, have adjusted the officer by *Suo Motto* ordering the creation of a super numerary Class I post ... Vasudevan would have been required, with his Minister’s endorsement, to move the State Finance Department to accord formal approval to a proposal for the creation of a new additional post. (Vohra, 1995).

A leading lawyer argued that the Court appeared to have erred in holding Vasudevan guilty as :

The Court's order holding Mr Vasudevan guilty of contempt was clearly violative... of the guarantee of liberty. The Court's order which he was supposed to have violated was anything but precise. His culpability was not established. No specific charge as to his role was framed and his explanation as to his personal role called for. The Court indicted an individual without pin-pointing his guilt. (Noorani, 1995b)

The IAS Officers of Karnataka, in a memorandum to the Chief Justice of India, submitted that in the Vasudevan case there appeared to have been a "miscarriage of justice" and the "civil imprisonment for as long a period as one month awarded to [Vasudevan has].... dealt a severe blow to the morale of the civil services" (*Indian Express*, 4 November 1995).

However, it has also been pointed out that in the Vasudevan case, there is no evidence to show that any Minister gave directions to frustrate the Supreme Court orders. Vasudevan was specifically told by one of the judges hearing the case that he could be released if he indicated the name of the Minister responsible for the contempt of court (Irani, 1995). Vasudevan preferred to remain silent. It is common practice in the administration today, for bureaucrats to act on the oral instructions of ministers. Nothing prevents the bureaucracy from recording their views in writing and seeking written orders and if it has buckled in this regard it has only itself to blame.

The impact of the Vasudevan case on the functioning of the administration is only too apparent :

It is likely that a certain percentage of public servants may seek to protect their position by soliciting clear-cut written decisions from their masters and refuse to act on verbal directions of whatever kind... However, it may happen that the incident results largely in the political masters being compelled more than at present, to be served by more malleable functionaries. (Vohra, 1995 emphasis added)

THE DYNAMICS OF LEGISLATIVE CONTROL OVER BUREAUCRACY

In the context of the dynamics of parliamentary democracy, the mechanisms that have been developed by the legislature to ensure the control of the executive, assume relevance. While the instruments of legislative control of the political executive have occupied the spotlight of attention, the devices for ensuring administrative control - which aim at the bureaucracy - have not been sufficiently focused on. Regular recurrences and ever changing patterns of bureaucratic neglect have sadly undermined legislative control over the bureaucracy. Several examples can be cited in this regard.

While the Lok Sabha has the right to discuss, debate and approve the financial proposals of Government, over the years, these discussions have not permitted a detailed scrutiny of the budgetary proposals of the government. In most cases, the Lower House has passed the demand for grants of departments even without a discussion. An analysis of the discussion in the Lok Sabha on the

demands for grants during the period 1985 to 1995 (both years included) -- 11 budgets - shows that the House has concentrated mainly on seven ministries/departments. The demands for grants of as many as 11 ministries/departments were not taken up for detailed discussion even once during this period. Further, between 1985 and 1995, on most occasions, more than 85 per cent of the demands were passed without any discussion.

In view of this trend, the Indian Parliament, in 1993, took the initiative to establish Department Related Subject Committees to permit a more detailed analysis of the budgetary proposals of the Government. A perusal of the Committee reports shows that time and again mention is made of the fact that the recommendations made in the previous reports, have not been implemented or taken seriously by the bureaucracy. When the Committee recommendations merely require the bureaucracy to concede to issuing a circular, memo or holding out an assurance that care would be taken to ensure that lapses do not recur, they are readily accepted. However, if the Committee demands stringent action against those responsible for an irregularity, change in procedures, or adopting new methods, the bureaucracy usually adopts a lukewarm attitude (Shastri 1996; 1994b : 140-42). A newspaper editorial rightly warned :

If the recommendations of these committees were sought to be consigned to oblivion on account of official apathy... [it] would negate the very concept of executive accountability to the legislature. (*Deccan Herald*, 19 May, 1995 emphasis added).

What is true of the Department Related Standing Committees is also true of other legislative committees. A study conducted on the attitudes of the bureaucracy towards legislative committees in one of the Indian States, reflects the general experience of Indian legislatures (Shastri, 1994b). Committee members have opined that bureaucrats who appeared before the Committee 'mislead the Committee, knowing fully well that what they were stating before the Committee, was at variance with the facts, as they were anxious to shield people (both politicians and bureaucrats).⁴ Committee members have also conceded that the bureaucracy often "tended to take the legislature lightly and trivialized the issues being examined, as they were well aware that they could exercise considerable control through the Minister."⁵

The reactions of senior bureaucrats, who appeared before legislative committees, are worth recording. Commenting on the view that bureaucrats attempt to cover up the lapses of the administration, a former Chief Secretary to the Government of Karnataka, felt that an officer 'had to justify what has been done as all government decisions have to be justified.'⁶ Yet another senior officer felt that 'every civil servant (appearing before legislative committees) would try and defend himself as any stricture was unpleasant and defending the actions appeared the easiest way out.'

From the views expressed by both the bureaucrats and legislative committee members, there appeared to be a syndrome of "mutual hostility" that

often manifests itself in the exchanges between the committee members and the bureaucracy. There was a growing feeling of helplessness amongst the legislators caused by the fact that the accountability of the executive to the legislature had become remote and irrelevant.⁸ A related development was the syndrome of "bureaucratic indifference" often reflected in the casual and cavalier way the bureaucracy treated the committees' recommendations. Such an attitude seriously undermines the utility and effectiveness of legislative control over the administration.

SUMMING UP

If the mechanisms of political control of the bureaucracy have to be strengthened and made more meaningful, wide ranging reforms have become imperative. A long overdue reform is ensuring greater transparency in administration. Openness in administration is a natural corollary to the economic liberalisation programme which has aggressively been pursued in India since 1991. However, precious little has been done in this regard. The secrecy that pervades government administration 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 replaced by a Right to Information Act. 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 'system's failure'.

In keeping with the philosophy of economic liberalisation, steps need to be taken to downsize that bloated bureaucracy. Further, the elite services (mainly the IAS) need to be demystified. The present system does not permit senior positions in the government to be filled up by lateral entry from Non Governmental Organisations and professional institutions/experts. The elite services are likely to oppose such a move as it would threaten their monopoly over these positions.

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. A former Minister has rightly observed :

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 *Hindustan Times*, 1994)

It is interesting to note that both in the U.K., and Australia, efforts to prevent the politicisation of the bureaucracy have yielded positive results. In the U.K., ministers have been permitted to appoint political advisers who fulfill a role that 'senior officials find offensive' (Wilson, 1997 : 2). Further, the

bureaucracy in the U.K. 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' (*Ibid*, 2:15). 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 transfer of the IAS and the IPS 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 Service Board needs to be constituted to oversee appointments and promotions of civil servants. Further a tenure system for senior positions 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 a such a move as it would deprive them one of their 'biggest powers'. The Chief Secretaries Conference held in November 1996 also favoured the setting up of Civil Service Boards to restrict political discretion and establish norms for minimum tenures.

It would be useful to record at this stage the practice followed in other parliamentary systems. In the U.K., the political leadership exercise 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 didn't (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).

Legislative Committees have the potential to play a vital role in ensuring the accountability of the bureaucracy. These committees, if permitted and taken seriously, can play a vital role in extending the 'range of parliamentary scrutiny, deepening of parliamentary accountability and widening of the public policy debate. An indifferent bureaucracy can prove to be the greatest obstacle to the success of any new experiment aimed at ensuring greater control.

The above reforms have become vital if political control of the bureaucracy is to be strengthened and made operationally purposive.

NOTES

1. 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.
2. In India, the civil services are classified under three heads : (i) All India Services, (ii) Central Services and (iii) State Services. Officers belonging to the All India Services (which include the Indian Administrative Service – IAS, the Indian Police Service – IPS and the Indian Forest Service – IFS) are recruited on all India basis, and allotted to a particular state cadre. These officers, besides manning important positions in the State are allotted to, serve on deputation at Centre. In this paper the officers belonging to the IAS and IPS are referred to as the senior bureaucrats / elite civil service. Officers recruited to the Central Services work at the Central Secretariat and at regional state offices of the central directorates while those of the State Services work in the concerned State administration.
3. The cases of bureaucrats like Khairnar, Alphons, Kiran Bedi, Biswas, Madan Gopal, Durai can be cited in this regard.
4. C. Byre Gowda, Member Legislative Assembly, Karnataka in an interview with the author (1992).
5. Shreenaly Chandrasekhar, former Member, Legislative Assembly, Karnataka in an interview with the author (1992).
6. R.A. Naik, Chief Secretary (Retd) Government of Karnataka in an interview with the author (1992).
7. M.A.S. Rajan, Additional Chief Secretary (Retd.) Government of Karnataka, in an interview with the author (1992).
8. H.D. Deve Gowda, then MP in an interview with the author 1992.

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