

The Indian Civil Service Needs Servicing

In a classical democracy, it is the elected executive, which is supposed to lead the government of the day in terms of charting out a customised path to the desired development based on the needs perceived and felt by it. However, it is always the permanent executive, i.e., the bureaucracy which not only provides a semblance of stability between many elected governments which come and go, but also ensures the systematic execution of the developmental schemes and programmes as conceived by the peoples' representatives at the helm of affairs. That is why it becomes quite imperative that the latter remains alert to the tasks and duties assigned. The overall motivation, commitment, efficiency and effectiveness of the permanent executive are some of the very critical factors, which often decide the effectiveness of any government.

Hence, it is very important that the bureaucracy always remains on its toes to deliver on the promises made by the government in keeping with the relevant norms of good governance. The periodic training and capacity building are also important to ensure that the bureaucracy retains the right attitude and orientation to deliver various people-oriented services while also upholding the true spirit of bureaucratic neutrality. The bureaucrats need to walk like a trapeze artist to maintain a fine balance between the requirements of the ruling dispensation and democratic opposition without compromising the larger public interests. Whenever the bureaucracy has failed in maintaining this equilibrium, it has ended up between the two stools, inviting flak. Of all the things, the bureaucrats should never forget that with changing times, their role has come to be more of a facilitator and a coordinator. They need to ensure, as far as possible and practicable, that most of the services are delivered on an auto mode rather than requiring their physical presence and active intervention all the time.

We often get to hear that it is the bureaucracy, which is actually running the show in this country. And believe it or not, many of the bureaucrats are often carried away by this ego-pumping myth. One feels that what the people actually mean by the said observation is that the bureaucracy actually has a bigger responsibility in running the affairs of the country than many of them are ever prepared to understand and appreciate. Most of them also forget the

oath taken at the beginning of the service to serve our countrymen and start behaving like invincible and arrogant monarchs of the hoary feudal days. Times have changed and so should they. They should never forget that they are here to facilitate the development administration in a democratic country to provide the elusive 'Holy Grail' of good governance. And they have to do the same in cooperation with and under the stewardship of the elected representatives in our 'first past the post' system.

Their role ought to be confined to assisting the latter in realising the good governance to the best of our abilities and intentions. And while they do so, they should ensure that the same is done within the precincts and norms of the relevant rules and laws while also protecting the interests of all the stakeholders and the larger society we serve.

Many of them are often so woolly-eyed to think as if they would never go and would always be here. They should never forget that they shall soon join the rank and file after our retirement. So, it is in their own vested interests to cut the rigmarole and ensure that the overall service delivery mechanism becomes as speedier, transparent and simpler as possible. The unsavoury experiences they had before they joined the civil service or they still have in other states or in our dealing with other departments beyond our own turfs should prompt them to bring about incremental systemic improvements for better service delivery. They ought to ensure to reduce the pain and discomforts a citizen faces in getting a particular service in a government office in keeping with the dictum, 'that government is the best which governs the least'. However, many of them love doing diametrically opposite by making the system further complex and byzantine by further adding on to the debilitating mumbo jumbo.

The system should be such which gives less scope for discretion and procrastination and is usually in consonance with the rational norms and rules of propriety. This is more required today when we have extended the 'Right to Information' (RTI) to every citizen including ourselves in this country. A good number of bureaucrats also find the now justiciable 'right to information' quite irritating. But consider its benefits as a common citizen and the benefits that might accrue to them when they are no longer civil servants and part of the system through which they now get things done easily for us simply because of the position and authority at our command. In fact, many of them have already been availing the same if some of the landmark RTI judgements are to go by, e.g., those pertaining to the now mandatory provision of getting to peruse one's 'annual confidential report' or 'performance appraisal report'. Ergo, they should ensure the better implementation of RTI in keeping with the spirit of this epoch-making Act.

But more than that, they should all do what they are supposed to do, i.e., to do their assigned duties with all their dedication and devotion. A teacher should teach, a doctor should treat and a government official should deliver service at his/her table without in anyway becoming arrogant, inaccessible or difficult. This is required more so at a time when people have become more 'rights' conscious and educated, thanks to the reasonably successful functioning of the Indian democracy. Doing thing in any other way may actually invite them trouble, going by the way RTI has come up or the way media breathes down our throat. Goethe was right when he said that 'let everyone clean his house and his

surroundings properly and the entire world would be clean'. So if everyone does one's job well, the overall governance is bound to improve.

The civil servants should positively think of themselves as God's 'chosen ones' a la celebrated social scientist Max Weber. The Almighty has given them an opportunity and privilege to serve their countrymen at the expense of millions of their co-citizens. They should make the most of this opportunity and leave their footprints on the sands of time as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would have said. If we all strive for excellence in all walks of life, we can see the systemic and cascading changes everywhere. This is also a constitutional requirement in keeping with our fundamental duties as enshrined in Article 51A, Part IV of our Constitution. Our attitude to work and to the service seekers, i.e., the citizens must change. Only then can we actually be a great country where each of our citizens can live a dignified life without in anyway much depending on people like us. We shall grow or perish together. As permanent executives, the bureaucracy has greater responsibilities to shoulder. By not treating our people well, they are putting the same society at a danger of which they are also members. So, they must take another oath today to improve the system as much as possible if we wish to retain the sheen and shine of the celebrated 'steel frame'.

Salient Points

- In democracy, elected executive lays down the developmental policies for the desired development while bureaucracy systematically executes the same.
- Bureaucracy should always remain on its toes to deliver on the promises .
- With changing times, bureaucrats' role has come to be more of a facilitator.
- Some bureaucrats are often carried away by the ego-pumping myth that bureaucracy is actually running the show in this country.
- That government is the best which governs the least.
- The system should give less scope for discretion and be in consonance with the rational norms of propriety.
- A teacher should teach, a doctor should treat and a government official should deliver service at his/her table without in anyway becoming arrogant, inaccessible or difficult.
- Let everyone clean his house and his surroundings properly and the entire world would be clean.
- Bureaucrats' attitude to work and to the service seekers, i.e., the citizens must change.

Glossary

Semblance: outward aspect

Hoary: ancient

Grail: ultimate ideal

Byzantine: complex or intricate