

The History of the Civil Service Reforms from Capacity Building Lens

V.Srinivas, IAS

1. I thank the Secretary DOPT, the Chairman and Members of the Capacity Building Commission for inviting me to speak at this virtual round table discussion – the History of the Civil Services Reforms with focus on the Capacity Building Aspects of the Civil Services Reforms. Governance models of India are robust and rule bound, with institutional evolution dating back to nearly 200 years.
2. Let me begin with 1834, when the National Capital was shifted from Calcutta to New Delhi, and India had a joint Secretariat arrangement, with 2 Secretaries. The Government of India dealt with important functions of legislation and the Local Governments dealt with details. The transaction of business rules were introduced in 1861 which continue to this day as Allocation of Business Rules for Government Departments. The Central Secretariat expanded to 4 departments – Home, Military, Foreign and Finance in the 1st phase, and by 1910 reached 8 Departments based on functional needs – Commerce, Education, Agriculture, Railways. The Secretaries to Government of India were responsible for careful observance of rules and orders and for correspondence with Secretary of State.
3. In 1899, the Secretariat Instructions were issued which carry on to this day as the Central Secretariat Manual of Office Procedures. A lot of emphasis was placed on the need for permanent record to be preserved in the inherited memory of the Department to be perpetually put in print. File notes were kept separately from correspondence portion and flag file system introduced. These continue to this day. Lord Curzon's words still continue to be relevant "Secretaries/ Deputy Secretaries/ Under Secretaries must write to prove their mettle, only by doing so can they validate their abilities to the Viceroy – promotions were dependant on the acumen with which an official could write a note'.

To this day the skill of competency in the Central Secretariat is determined by quality of file notes, quality of Cabinet notes, quality of Committee of Secretaries notes. The Department of Administrative Reforms created in 1918, dealt with the organizational structure of the central secretariat. A pyramidal organization with Secretary on top, Deputy Secretaries in the middle and Under Secretaries was introduced. The Joint Secretaries became a regular feature by 1947 and Additional Secretaries were appointed to deal with expansion of public business. Vertical movement of files to various sections of Government became a feature. It was noticed that a regular pilgrimage of files not only from one department to another in the same secretariat but also from the GOI to the provincial government and to the Secretary of State in the Council was witnessed.

4. Decision making in the Central Secretariat was a process driven exercise with multiple consultations. Lord Curzon notes on a file that meandered for 3 ½ years it had wandered like an uneasy spirit through the Departments of Government of India until at length it came up to me to be exorcised and laid". In 1947, India had 28 Departments, 8 Central Administrative Offices, a Cabinet Secretariat and 20 Ministries. The Planning Commission was established in 1951. The complex Governance challenges today are administered by 84 Ministries/ Departments and over 300 Attached/ Subordinate/ Autonomous offices.
5. The Indian Civil Service capacity building programs existed even during the period of the East India company. Covenanted Civil Servants had to pass an examination and undergo 2 years training at the Haileybury training college in Law, Political Economy and Indian Languages. Administrative Reformers Sir Charles Trevelyan and Robert Lowe felt the introduction of competitive examination offered a trust worthy method of selection to higher levels based on character and ability. Lord Macauley felt that the company's civil servants should go out to India by 25 with a degree in general education, he said 'the most illustrious jurists have been men who never opened a law book till after close of a distinguished academic career'. The Federal Public Service Commission recruited for the All India and Central

Services and the Provincial Services were recruited by the Board of Revenue in the States. Judicial Training has been an important feature of Civil Service Training both for Executive and Judicial branches of the Covenanted Civil Service. The All India Services served in any part of India and assigned to a province. The Central Services dealt with Foreign Affairs and administration of Railways, Posts & Telegraphs, Customs, Audit & Accounts, Science and Technology departments.

6. The Department of Administrative Reforms is a custodian of several Commissions and Committee Reports. The broad thrust has been public administration must be accountable, citizen friendly, transparent, promote integrity, result oriented and improve its performance.
7. Several lessons can be drawn from each of these reports. Let me mention a few in this address.
 - a. **A.D.Gorwala Report 1951** – The IAS competency remains anchored in the foundational and non-negotiable values of integrity and credibility – *“commitment to larger public good against all odds”*. Integrity is one of the cardinal philosophical premises of good administration. There is no truer maxim from the point of view of good administration than the old rule ‘what is not inspected is not done.’ The normative system of inspections of field offices, Collectorates, Divisional Commissioner offices, night halts for all field officers including District Collectors continue to be valid to this day.
 - b. **Paul Appleby Survey 1953** – O&M units are necessary in every department. The Performance Management Divisions and Results Framework Documents emanated from the recommendations of the O&M units. The initiative of increasing efficiency in decision making in the central secretariat implemented in 2021 was based on O&M units.

- c. **Santhanam Committee Report, 1964** – Administrative delays, Government taking upon themselves more than what they could manage scope for personal discretion in the exercise of powers and cumbersome procedures were identified as the major categories of corruption. The CVC's institutional oversight was established to ensure accountability levels in Government.
 - d. **The 1st and 2nd ARC's** – addressed the challenges of changing nature of administration from law & order agency to development administration, envisaging an overhaul of the machinery of Government for attaining a socialist pattern of society (1st ARC) and for unshackling the Indian economy from the cobwebs of unnecessary bureaucratic control (2nd ARC).
 - e. **The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments** – Decentralization and empowerment of Panchayati Raj institutions meant a significant shift in the governance model at District and Sub-Division level with developmental functions being devolved to the local elected bodies.
8. The current approach for training to civil servants with induction training – comprising of a common foundation course with enhancement of infrastructure at LBSNAA emanates from the 2nd ARC Report on Refurbishing of Personnel Administration. Mid-Career Training to update the knowledge base of the participant in the context of rapidly changing policy environment and develop competencies for the job profile would happen when promotions took place. They were intended to enhance formal qualifications and create greater confidence in an officer.
9. In a career spanning 33 years, and covering nearly 50 percent of Independent India's Governance period, I have witnessed several critical milestones in capacity building programs.

Let me list a few which could be considered by the Capacity Building Commission for incorporation into their Annual Health of Civil Services Report:

- a. **Training in Rule of Law** – As a Nation deeply committed to Democracy, India has significant policy legislation for ensuring equality before law and justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done. Deep knowledge and understanding of the interpretation of laws of the land is extremely important for civil servants.

The Code of Criminal Procedure, the Code of Civil Procedure, the Indian Evidence Act, the Representation of People's Act, the Essential Commodities Act, the State Laws on Tenancy and Land Revenue and Land Records Rules are essential knowledge.

Specialised knowledge of institutional structures like Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund, Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act are part of on-the-job learning. The Central Secretariat functioning needs a deep understanding of CSMOP and Allocation of Business Rules.

There is enough anecdotal evidence available on the outstanding work of District Collectors/ Sub-Divisional Officers putting service above self in fighting the COVID pandemic, conducting free and fair elections, conducting Court Work/ Magisterial Work to ensure the supremacy of the Rule of Law to prevent administrative over-reach, protect downtrodden and weaker sections, fight pressure groups and ensuring institutional credibility. Understanding/ updating/ interpreting the Laws of the Land necessitates constant capacity building which is necessary for maintaining a strong governance model.

As Chairman Board of Revenue, I had strived to instil the confidence in young officers the values to adjudicate without fear or favor in complex revenue litigation on land ceiling, tenancy reforms, protection of rights of women, protection of government lands, temple lands and common lands. It also needed a detailed understanding of Tenancy Laws, Land Revenue Laws, Code of Civil Procedure. A lot of hard work, discipline and commitment are needed to conduct court work, adjudicate timely, work without fear or favour and there are simply no short cuts to success.

- b. **Simplifying a Citizen's Journey with Government** – An empowered citizen represents the best example of ensuring government accountability and implementation of benchmarked governance. For this focus on transparency and accessibility of information and timely redressal of public grievances & improving service delivery are important aspects of modern-day capacity building policies to facilitate a 2-way communication. Digitalization of governance process has ensured significant empowerment of citizens. Capacity building programs with focus on **Simplifying a citizen's journey with Government represents Next Generation Administrative Reform** – a citizen's journey in a hospital (Digital AIIMS), a citizen's journey in revenue courts (Digital Rajasva Mandal), a citizen's journey in public grievances (CPGRAMS). The focus on the citizen is important.
- c. **A good Work Environment is extremely important.** Every Report since 1951 has to address issues of stability of tenures, institutional credibility, civil servant–minister relationships, handling pressure groups, maintaining social harmony and judicial oversight. Each of these aspects are extremely important for a healthy work environment, promoting a degree of specialization.
- d. **Performance Appraisal should be timely** – Timely Performance Appraisal provides insights into the areas in which an official has attained domain

expertise. It is important that Performance Appraisal is against established and proven targets and competency levels are carefully assessed. The 2nd ARC in its Report on Refurbishing Personnel Administration has devoted considerable attention to the importance of Performance Appraisal. Domain expertise in a new sector is often a steep learning curve and takes time.

- e. **India's Founding Theories of Public Administration are based on High Moral Tones** – Those who won freedom for India and created its Constitutional system were men of rare talents and dedication. India's constitutional values are deeply rooted in high moral tones with a universal dimension. The moral principles of the Indian Constitution are reflected in the code of ethics for civil servants which include financial probity, integrity in work, intellectual honesty in tendering advise and morality in personal life. The code of conduct envisages All India Service Officers to be model citizens well above the social norms of the times. Over the years, the Nation's personnel policies have established functional and comprehensive systems for assessing reputations for honesty and probity in public life.

10. To conclude, let me say that the people of India look upto the Civil Service to deliver justice. There is great satisfaction that comes from ensuring timely justice and efficient administration. The citizen is the centrality of a civil servant's odyssey, and commitment to larger public good is the defining goal.

11. Once again, I thank the Secretary DOPT, the Chairman Capacity Building Commission and all Members for giving me the opportunity to participate in the virtual round table on 'Revisiting the History of Civil Service Reforms from Capacity Building Lens.' I wish you all success in this challenging policy endeavor.

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