

Governance in South Asia : State of Civil Services

- Dr. U. Subrahmanyam

Friends :

It's my privilege to introduce the Book on Civil Services by Dr. K.S. Chalam and I express my gratitude to Dr. Chalam and the publishers for offering me to introduce the Book on this occasion. The release of the book titled "Governance in South Asia : State of Civil Services" by Dr. K.S. Chalam is timely, when discussions are going on Civil Services Reforms and the new pattern of civil services exam is introduced from 2011 onwards for Prelims and from 2013 for the Mains Exam. The reforms required are not only meant for the method of recruitment, but the Civil Services itself and its functioning. The challenges faced by civil servants and to make them prepare to face new challenges in the changed environment. Dr. Chalam needs no introduction, a well known political and educational economist and being a former member of UPSC and vice-chairman of Dravidian University, his rich experience at National and International fora and indepth knowledge, is fully reflected in the present book, being an author of 27 books in English and Telugu. The present Book not only offers a comprehensive account of the state of civil services in South Asian countries, but also brings together experiences of eminent bureaucrats and critics from SAARC nations, especially on the need to reform.

The Book contains fifteen chapters with articles contributed by eminent critics and former bureaucrats discussed in four parts which are :

1. Governance and Civil Service
2. Civil Service Reforms
3. Functioning of Service Commission in SAARC region
4. Case studies

Dr. Chalam contributed 2 chapters, apart from the introduction and editing and compiling other articles written by the eminent critics. The author in his introductory remarks observes that it is very interesting to find that the civil servants are the real workers at grass root level to maintain the national integrity of the country, as the Civil Servants are required to implement the laws of the land made by the Parliament and the state legislature.

The system favoured from the beginning that majority of the civil servants are coming from the elitist classes. Even though the reservations in the recruitment process was introduced, author feels that still the domination of this elitistic class continues. Though some civil servants coming from the elitist class made use of the position for their self development by abusing power. But there are equally sound facts to show that it was due to the imagination and vision of some of the so called bureaucrats that India could achieve a sustained growth later due to the fundamentals developed by them (Frank 2006).

While discussing about the present day civil services aspirants, the author comments that there is perceptible change in attitude of aspirants after the 2008 economic crisis. Civil Services and Central Services are considered by everyone now as a premier service and competition for services are increasingly manifold after the sixth pay commission. The salaries of Group A Services are comparable, if not better than corporate executive. Therefore, the number of aspiring candidates for Civil Services has crossed a million mark for around 1000 vacancies per year.

The author made an interesting comparison in an amusing manner, the different categories of services according to Chaturvarnas, IAS, the premier among them as Brahmins, IPS to Kshatriyas and IRS as Vysyas and others as Sudras to serve all.

The reforms introduced by UPSC in 2011, in the form of CSAT or Preliminary Exam to filter the aspirants will further increase the number of urbanites as it is biased against rural and social sciences graduates. Till 1980s, social sciences and humanities graduates dominated, now more number of engineering, medical and agriculture graduates qualified in subjects other than the academic disciplines in which they pursued earlier.

The author points out to the 2nd Administrative Reforms Committee, headed by Sri. Veerappa Moily. Even though the report was accepted, government failed to accept important recommendations. More than any time, the civil servant is now functioning under severe constraints. Further, the transition of the economy is from mixed to purely private orientation with attendant institutional arrangements such as citizen's charter, RTI Act, P.C. Act, etc., making the life of sincere civil servant into complicated and she / he has a propensity to commit mistakes.

While talking about the induction of training to civil servants, the author observes that a national training policy was formulated by Rajiv Gandhi. A structural training program with foundation course at Lalbahadur Sastry Academy. Training the civil servants under close supervision of by senior officers of the work of the Juniors, constructive advice and guidance is much important than training in U.S. Institutes and with experts outside the system.

Speaking about the ethics of the civil servants, the author observes that the professional qualities like honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency, responsiveness are now replaced with business like values of a commercial manager. State role is now seen as a facilitator rather than a service provider and larger good of the citizen is replaced by interests of market.

Speaking about the reforms, the author observes that "there is a need to have a reappraisal of the system with an idea of retaining those values which are valid and discard those which are redundant for a modern state.

Indian Bureaucracy is not a replica of west. It has its own identity with checks and balances with traditional laws of the land and elaborate rules and regulations. Indian Civil Services cannot be compared with other systems because powers delegated under certain terms and conditions under the constitution. This may not be true of other systems. A civil servant is rule bound and supposed to uphold the provisions of the constitution. His neutrality as a principle and a value is the distinctive character. This will ensure impartiality.

The present day challenges to the system encountered is in its transformation from a classical British to market-based American system. If the rules are based on sound principles of public policy such as efficiency, equal opportunity, internal and external productivity of the system rather than based on whims and fancies of an arrogant and self-centred Bureaucracy.

The author points out to the dichotomy between public administration and new public management that suffer from looking at the constitutional structure of administration in India. He mentions about Rohr's study carried out at Woodrow Wilson centre in Washington which indicates that constitutional foundations of administrative practices are different from others. It concludes with Rohr's ethical traditions of the administration which cannot arise in thoroughly unjust regime because of unfavourable answers to the fundamental question on moral legitimacy of the regime itself precludes further inquiry.

(The introduction of Book is delivered at Book Release on 11.09.2014
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