

**'COMMENTARAO' IN "THE TELEGRAPH" OF MARCH 17 2014**

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**"Misuse of Power and the subversion of order" by S L Rao**

**Indira Gandhi tried to nurture a "committed" bureaucracy and judiciary. A charitable interpretation was that she was looking for commitment to ideas and ideology. Another view is that she sought to create a conformist administration and judiciary. Subsequent governments (especially Janata and NDA) tried to change the administration back from 'commitment' to neutrality. However the rot had gone deep. They had learnt the ways to cooperate with politicians in framing policies in ways that would leave loopholes for leakage and theft. Implementation was the means that enabled even much lower levels in the administration to get illegal incomes. UPA 1 and 2 over ten years of governance have carried this cooperative commitment that benefited politicians and bureaucrats alike, much farther.**

**The power of politicians over administrators has always been supreme. Lack of tenure in any office, frequent transfers, suspensions, poor confidential reports, there are many means available to politicians to suborn recalcitrant bureaucrats. The response of some bureaucrats (a declining number especially at senior levels) has been to persist in opposing what they consider wrong policies and face the unpleasant consequences. Many choose the alternative route and let the politicians have their way. Many in the administration participated and benefited as well.**

**There have been recommendations for correcting the system by Administrative Reforms Commissions and Police Commissions. They have made recommendations to guarantee minimum tenures in one position, improve individual accountability in each of the central services, minimize political interference, ensure objective performance evaluation, improve selections, even introduce recruitment of outsiders at middle and higher levels of the bureaucracy, while developing methods to enable career officers to work outside government. Almost none of these recommendations has been accepted, and hence not implemented. Meanwhile, the overall quality of the services appears to be declining and there are growing instances of bribery corruption, and cooperation with politicians to earn**

**illegal wealth, or favour people who could help them.**

**The present Prime Minister spent over 30 years in top government positions (Chief Economic Advisor, Finance Secretary, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Finance Secretary, Deputy Chairman of the Planning commission, Advisor to Prime Minister Chandrasekhar, Finance Minister, and the last ten years as Prime Minister). Almost the first of the few statements he has made over ten years as Prime Minister was when he took office in 2004. He expressed determination to implement necessary administrative reforms. Many welcomed this since he did not need anyone to tell him what needed to be done. He has introduced no reforms.**

**The administrative services and the police (at all levels) have experienced further deterioration under the UPA. Frequent transfers of upright officers after only a few months in a position are common, causing huge problems for young families. Suspensions of young upright officers happen often, intimidating many into silence. Charge sheeting officers on flimsy has happened. These have been on trumped up charges, but essentially for not obeying wrong instructions.**

**At the same time the salaries and pensions of government servants were greatly increased. Today's officers will not easily consider leaving government service. In addition, many important new positions especially as independent statutory regulators in various fields were created. Selections to these positions were confined to retired central service personnel. Lobbying for such positions many times included being compliant to wishes of the deciding political masters. This was to ensure the officer got one of these positions. The stick was used when the temptation to cooperate because of the juicy carrots did not work.**

**Bright young people joining the administrative services find themselves in increasingly difficult work conditions. However the challenge of effective administration and development persuade many to stay on. Despite this deterioration in work conditions, many bright young people continue to join the central services of government. Many are idealistic, and choose this over other careers. Many may lose their ideals as they are exposed to the realities of public administration in a political system that is very grabby and uses government services to earn moneys for themselves and their political**

**parties.**

**The television news has revolutionized our knowledge about how officers are mistreated. Let us look at three instances at different levels that have received media attention in the last year or so. Vidya Shakti was a recent entrant into the administrative service. She is said to have been effective, firm and enthusiastic in her work. Some illegal constructions were demolished on her instructions. This was converted into a communal issue, instead of recognizing the constructions being what they were, violations of law. She was bullied and suspended. The young officer has not said anything about her experience. Perhaps she was too traumatized and feared further consequences to herself and her family.**

**Duggal was an upright officer in Haryana, the land of 'khap' panchayats described by the Aam Aadmi Party) as social groups. He questioned land transfers that hugely benefited the son-in-law of the ruling family of India. To intimidate him and make him withdraw his charges, Duggal was subjected to much harassment. He suffered transfers, charge sheets, etc. Fortunately as a man with more years in government than Vidya, he resisted and his point of view was publicized by the media. But his career has been jolted. It is unlikely that successor political parties in government will entrust him with important assignments.**

**My last example is of a very senior officer, Health Secretary of India until last month, Keshav Desiraju. Desiraju is from the Uttarakhand cadre. He has an outstanding reputation for perceptiveness, social concern and hard work. He is deep, perceptive and committed to promoting peoples' welfare. Health (like Education or Human resources) does not get the best officers who prefer the economic Ministries. So he (like his predecessor Sujata Rao) was a rare exception of a very competent officer in health. He brought in many desirable changes. He had to deal with the legacy of a wrecked medical education system that is regulated by the autonomous Medical council of India. Under its guidance. The under the table payments for many post graduate and undergraduate courses is mind boggling. Unqualified people were permitted to set up medical colleges since there was so much money to be made. Ketan Desai a former President of MCI was charged and is out on bail. That has not stopped his many beneficiaries in politics from trying to**

**get him back into the lucrative MCI> Desiraji tried to prevent this. He was villified and suddenly transferred. Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, not known for hounding officers, is said to have been instructed by some higher up (PMO? Congress President's office?). He could not ignore these high level insytucytions. Desiraju was moved and his ideas for reforming Health services in India with him.**

**The administrative services must be freed from the political bullying it is subjected to. We must have administrative reform that permits honest officers to get on with their work, and make each of them accountable. If we do not achieve these reforms sonn, we will become more than a “crony capitalist” state. We will be a banana republic. (1215)**