



Indian Bureaucracy As The Steel Frame: Is It A Fact Or A Fiction?

Rashmi Baro

M.A

Department of Political Science

Gauhati University, Guwahati, 781014, India

Abstract: The concept of Indian bureaucracy as the Steel Frame has been prominent in India since the Colonial times. India's bureaucracy has been instrumental in framing the nation's socio-economic structure since independence. The framers of the Constitution of India recognised the importance of permanent executive body that can provide stability to administration. It is a professional body organized in hierarchical structure to serve the nation impartially. Starting with a brief historical overview, this article critically examines its relevance, strength and challenges to analyse whether the notion of India's bureaucracy as 'The Steel Frame of India' is indeed a fact or merely a fiction. Furthermore, along with strength, weakness and threats associated with bureaucracy this article tries to give a nuanced understanding about Indian civil service, possible bureaucratic reforms and its aspiration towards governance, socio-economic development and democracy.

Key words- : Accountability, Bureaucracy, Democracy, Politicization, Political Executive, Permanent Executive, Administrative Reforms

INTRODUCTION

Bureaucracy is a hierarchical government structure with complex rules, regulations and functions connected to various governmental policies and programmes. It is a strong non-elected arm of permanent executives that carries out the executive branch of the government and its significant role in serving the nation can not be replaced by any other organization.

India has a long history of civil services since the ancient time. During the Mauryan administration, the civil servants were called 'Addhyakshas' and they required to clear rigorous examination to be appointed for the service. During the Medieval period, the 'Iqtedars' used to play the role of civil servants in Sultanate and they were called 'Mansabdas' by Mughals.

Civil Servants of British East India Company later became the 'Public Servants' under the British Crown rule which was mainly to establish a strong foundation to the British rule in India. The first Civil Service Examination was conducted under British in London. Satyendranath Tagore was the first Indian to clear the examination conducted under British.

Later, on demand of Indian Nationalist leaders Indian Civil Services exam was conducted in India for the first time by British that aimed to promote colonial objectives. The Indian civil services were heavily influenced by colonial rules. The leaders fighting against British rule were extremely critical of the performance by Indian civil service working under British Empire.

After Independence in 1947, the foundation of Indian bureaucracy became crucial for the systematic execution of the new nation, India. Later, the Indian Civil Services was replaced by Indian Administrative Service. The hiring of the administrative official in India was done for the first time through an open competitive exam under Union Public Service Commission in the same year of Independence. On 21st April, 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel coined bureaucracy of India as 'The Steel Frame of India' addressing the first qualified batch of IAS. IAS is known for its steel like firmness, impartiality, integrity, efficiency, effectiveness in their work from the very grass root local level to managing affairs in international level.

BUREAUCRACY AND ITS CHALLENGES

The bureaucracy falls under the executive branch of the government along with the political executives. The bureaucracy is also known as the permanent executive as they are non-elected body of the executive branch unlike the political executives elected by the people for a specific period of time. The political executive is responsible to legislate and proper implementation of the laws introduced by legislature and directs the bureaucrats to do proper execution of the laws as per the constitutional guidelines and needs in various levels of the society.

Civil servants also known as the administrative officials are specially trained intellectual body responsible to assist ministers by maintaining political neutrality discovering public issues and collecting required data to frame public policies. As the political executives are temporary body, hence not all of them are well trained in their field and have little knowledge about their respective department. The bureaucrats as permanent executives carries vast knowledge, experience, and specialization in their respective fields. They play an indirect role in policymaking by assisting and guiding the political executives. Political executives takes advice from the bureaucrats in analysing underlying public affairs and their records in details. Bureaucrats are the agents who keep an eye on any kind of social issue in various sectors such as education, health, employment, gender issues, child development etc. They collect all the necessary informations regarding those issues and submit those informations to the political executives and also assist them in finding proper resolution by giving them both technical and non technical guidance.

Moreover, co-operation between politicians and bureaucrats and their joint efforts are important aspect for the required social development. Both the political executive and permanent executives are equally responsible for both failure and success of a society. However, the bureaucracy which is also seen as the crucial arm of our democracy often interfered by the politicians. The bureaucrats functions under overall decisions controlled by the politicians sometimes willingly to get favours or sometimes under heavy pressure. Civil servants can better assist and give rational advice to the politicians by their comprehensive analytical studies but the final decision to accept or reject the advice rests upon the politicians. In such a situation a loophole is seen in co-operation between these two permanent and temporary executive bodies. There are political executives who does not value the information and assistance given by the bureaucrats. Also there are bureaucrats who provide wrong information to the political executives which can lead to wrong policy implementation and it can be identified as extreme bureaucratization. The co-operation and non-interference between the permanent executives and temporary executives is crucial to fulfil the desired outcome.

There are many drawbacks and challenges related to the bureaucracy of India. One of such issues is the Politicization of bureaucracy, meaning bureaucracy interfered by political executives. Politicization can be seen from both positive and negative side. The permanent executives are structured to be politically neutral but cannot be completely isolated from politics as they are directly engaged and actively involved with political executives in implementing and executing the public laws. Politicization of bureaucracy from the positive side can be perceived in a way where the civil servants actively co-operate and obey the orders given by the political executives and help the government of independent India in building a welfare state and protect its democracy. On the other hand, due to various reasons such as overcentralized decision making process the bureaucracy working in various levels of the nation often face some sort of torture and humiliation in their workplace. Politicization of bureaucracy in negative way is course of activities where the civil servants cannot validate themselves within the framework of political neutrality and they become oriented towards the personal interest of the Political parties which is an encouragement towards criminalisation of politics or corruption. Over politicization of bureaucracy is a failure in working as per the norms and values provided by the Indian Constitution and it loses it's significance as the 'Steel Frame' of India.

In spite of having tight job security and facility there are numbers of civil servants who are unlikely to show their courage to speak up for rationality. And those who show some courage to speak up for rationality may face unexpected and inconvenient orders such as sudden transfer that can affect the personal life of such bureaucrats for which they may lose their confidence and morals. Another side of politicization of bureaucracy is where the civil servants butter up their political bosses in pursuit of timely promotion, convenient posting and other perks. The problem with bureaucracy arises when it tries to protect the unlimited aims of the politicians that hampers the democracy. India follows Parliamentary form of government where the PM is the chief executive of the government, hence, the Indian constitution provides certain superior powers and position to the PM and to his office. By taking advantage of the superior authority political executives might use the bureaucrats for their personal party interest. More often, due to heavy pressure coming from the political side many honest officers are unable to work for the larger good. If the bureaucrats are completely controlled by the politicians then the entire civil service will be ineffective, inefficient and corrupted. Bureaucracy is the source through which people can connect to the politicians. In various sectors of our society there are numbers of civil servants who overuse their power to dominate or manipulate the general public for which the public, especially the uneducated ones feel hesitate to approach the civil servants. Due to lack of inefficiency and accountability people loses the trust and confidence to approach civil servants creating a big question mark on its tag as the Steel frame of India.

BUREAUCRATIC ROLE MODELS OF INDIA

Despite perceptible decline in value and moral there are numbers of courageous officers today maintaining a necessary distance from negative politicization. They are significantly having the courage to be accountable and rational without indulging in politicking to win the favours of the political masters. For instance, Ajit Doval, National Security Adviser of India has done tremendous job regarding the offensive defence strategy against Pakistan known as Surgical Strike. This was a strategic mission which made India successful in occupying Kashmir. Another such bureaucrat is S.Jaishankar, former Foreign Secretary of India has proven his excellence in the field of international relations and foreign policy of India. He is one of the intellectuals working behind India's success to rise as one of the major global powers today. Also, PK Mishra, Pradip Kumar Singha, Amitabh Kant, Naresh Chandra Saxena are some of the prominent civil servants who have done their best and successfully served to the nation's welfare. According to Naresh Chandra Saxena, a former member of the Planning Commission of India, there are around 70-75% honest civil servants in the country and the rest 25-30% need to be fixed and it is a serious matter of discussion to introduce some significant reforms to encourage greater efficiency, transparency and accountability.

BUREAUCRATIC REFORMS

The bureaucracy of India has often been criticized for several reasons. The need of administrative reforms in Indian civil service is not very recent. Due to the changing status-quo of society the challenges and the ideas of reforms to tackle them also changes. It is important to introduce administrative reforms at times to promote strong administrative accountability and efficiency. Administrative Reforms Commission, 1966 was one of the landmark initiatives taken to ensure highest standard of efficiency in public services. This commission submitted several reports relating to centre state relations, financial administration, personnel administration, economic administration, agricultural administration etc. In 2005 second administrative reforms commission was established to address new challenges and shortcomings faced by the first ARC through introducing measures to enhance efficiency, transparency, e-governance, local-self governance, ethics in governance etc.

Despite of high economic growth, India has not done well in various social sector programmes like poverty, unemployment, health, gender, sanitation etc. India has always been in top when it comes to population growth and diversity. As a result India burst into diverse needs, ideas and demands. Therefore, reforms are essential to fulfil all kinds of desired societal needs by fostering transparency, accountability and citizen-centric governance. In today's increasing population and in urgency for rapid growth and production it is important to bring some innovative changes in bureaucracy by introducing impactful measures as follows

Firstly, to introduce digitization, e- governance to reduce paper work rigidity or delay to reduce bureaucratic hardles. Secondly, to ensure merit based appointment and leaving no space for corruption and nepotism. Corruption or nepotism encourages the placement of unskilled and non-rational individuals in the service. Merit based recruitment brings individuals having the skill and ability to handle any harsh challenges they face in there work. Thirdly, decentralization of power and responsibility is essential to empower grass root level administration to give quicker response to local issues and promote accountability in all levels. Fourthly, promotion should be on merit basis and politicians should not be independent in transfer of the officials. There should be an internal tribunal to look after the respective transfer protocol. Fifthly, a mechanism for timely evaluation and scrutiny of the performance of bureaucrats should be established. The RTI Act has given transparency in certain amount but it is yet to reach complete transparency. Non-compliance in proactive disclosed is often seen in public authority. So, transparency should activated through measures like proactive discloser to foster accountability in bringing transparency.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, by embracing transparency, digitization, meritocracy, decentralization and by widening or enhancing the selection process of civil servants, their training and capacity building programme government can introduce civil servants with competency, adaptability to deal with today's changing socio-economic society. The concept of Steel Frame is given to the Indian Civil Services for its strength to support the nation like a steel frame supporting a building. Its role as the Steel Frame of India often comes under many debates. Bureaucracy is responsible for implementing policies and delivering public services by maintaining law and order. However, its effectiveness is often hampered by politicization and red tape. Moreover, many efforts have been made in form of bureaucratic reforms to fix the drawbacks existing in India's civil services. Many welfare programmes are either not properly designed or fails to reach the outcome. Fortunately, with the use of mass media, information technology, the activities of executive functions of the government are coming under effective public scrutiny. These reforms if implemented properly by focusing on both input and output factors, the bureaucracy of India will stand strong as the real Steel Frame. Indian Constitution is flexible and it provides certain provision to necessary change or reform the process of recruitment and conditions of service etc. under the part XIV of the Constitution. From the Constitutional point of view India's bureaucracy is indeed a steel frame but practically it is hampered or interfered by various factors. Nonetheless, with the ongoing reforms such as e-governance, digitization will bring transparency and meet the needs of the sustainable socio-economic requirements.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Saroha, Sakshi. "Why Civil Servants are called the Steel Frame of India? Explained." JAGRAN Josh (2021).
- Biswas, Minarul Islam. "Bureaucracy inthe 21st Century India: Present Status and Concern." International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity (2017).
- Saxena, Naresh Chandra. "What AILS the IAS and why it fails to deliver." Chandigarh: Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd., 2019.
- Unnithan, Sandeep. "The Game Changers." India Today 14 April 2017.
- Meraj, Qazi Fabihan. "Historical Developments in Indian Bureaucracy." Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture 32 (2022): 692-706.