

CHAPTER X

CIVIL SERVICES AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

- 10.1** Pay Revision Commissions are appointed at periodic intervals and recommendations relating to enhancement of emoluments implemented. Administrative reforms seeking improvement in the efficiency of the Civil Service, simplification of procedures, efforts to improve transparency in governance and transforming the attitude of the public servant towards growth and development of the areas under their charge are also equally important matters that should be resolved along with pay revision. Lack of proper delegation, innumerable checks and counter checks on various matters, at various levels diluting responsibility, inordinate delays in decision making on account of complicated procedures have all contributed substantially to distance the governed from the governing. The need to have a re-examination of the existing system of rules, regulations and procedures which often contribute towards stalling progress has to be given priority. It would be better if pay revisions are coupled with administrative reforms and both are implemented simultaneously so that government service becomes a real service rather than an immobile, insensitive apparatus
- 10.2** Clause 3 of the Terms of Reference in the GO appointing the PRC requires the Commission to examine the present Civil Service set up as a whole and make suggestions to increase its efficiency and social accountability.
- 10.3** The subject is not only vast but complex and basically it is an area which has to be traversed by an Administrative Reforms Commission. Nevertheless the nexus between efficiency, social accountability and a correspondingly befitting pay packet cannot be denied. The Commission, in their limited time, can only touch upon some of the major issues and it goes without saying that these will have to be followed up by Government, which has to initiate action on all connected matters.
- 10.4** To begin with, it has to be stated that social accountability and people orientation has to be conceptualized primarily in terms of the professional responsibility of each employee. A public servant must be judged by what he does and does not do as a professional in his own sphere of responsibility. Towards this end, a system to judge the qualitative and quantitative output of an employee has to be devised. The Commission understand that there is a separate high powered Unit working with the single minded objective of modernizing the departments under a programme called MGP. The Commission believe that the efforts of MGP are bound to yield dividends in toning up crucial areas of public administration and it is the hope of the Commission that their recommendations would be assiduously followed up for implementation. The Commission also feel that MGP would possibly

cover the areas like promotions, accountability, training etc. Therefore what the Commission suggest may end up as duplications of the MGP recommendations. Nonetheless, the Commission would like to touch upon a few selected topics for suggesting greater efficiency in the Civil Services.

10.5 A large number of Government employees have direct contact with the public at large. Personnel of departments like Revenue, Police, Sales Tax, Motor Vehicles, Agriculture, Panchayats and even teachers of schools and colleges are under public scrutiny. Unfortunately, the image of a public servant in the public eye is none too flattering. Of late, attitude wise and behavior wise he is perceived as a public enemy rather than as a public servant. That he is installed in a position to serve and help the needy who approach him for information, guidance, solace intervention or even solution of a problem is often ignored and the official authority conferred on him is used to obstruct the delivery of service. The public who really constitute the tax papers are the ones providing remuneration to these Government employees and are justified in expressing a grievance that the treatment meted out to them is not only disappointing but even frustrating. Such neglect or lack of sincerity manifests itself in an assumption in the mind of the public that he has not been able to get his problem solved because of non payment of gratification or that he had not approached the concerned Government servant through the proper intermediary or an influential person. This distances the Government servant from the public and the gap between the Government and the governed widens+. While Unions have got an important responsibility of projecting the interest of employees and fight for legitimate rights and higher remuneration, they should also exercise concern over the behaviour standards of the Government servant.

10.6 A public office, as the name suggests, is an office intended to serve the needs of the public. It is unfortunate that very often, members of the public who approach public offices to get their needs attended to, have to go back with a sense of frustration either because their requirements are not attended to in an appropriate manner or because the concerned person dealing with the subject is absent. Such situations have to be avoided for which it is necessary to put into operation a system by which if the particular functionary is not available in the office either on account of leave or on duty elsewhere, the immediate superior officer should not only have access to the papers handled by the person absent but also the authority to take action on any issue pertaining to such papers so that the visitor to the office need not return empty handed only on the ground that the concerned person was not present in the office. It might also be desirable, particularly in the departments where the public have to interact very closely and frequently to publish prominently in the concerned public office that visitors will be received at a pre-determined time on specific days in a week. Going a step further, notices ought to be displayed in all offices on what that office is expected to do and what an ordinary citizen on his part is expected to do for getting a service rendered from the concerned

office. As an example if an office is in charge of issuing licenses, a visitor to the office should have a clear idea regarding the type of licenses issued from the office and the forms and other documents which the applicant should provide to the office for securing such a license. Needless to say, there should be a time limit prescribed for all such activities. An example that can be quoted is that of Government of India prescribing a time limit before which passport applications have to be processed and disposed off.

- 10.7** The foremost responsibility in any scheme of revamping the Civil Service is to get the image of the public servant changed for the better. Where contact with the public is an essential aspect of one's professional responsibilities, how the public or the client groups concerned feel about such a public functionary is indeed a matter of importance in the evaluation of his performance. The difficulty is to develop a mechanism through which unrepresentative and motivated opinion does not filter through as feedback on the performance of the concerned public servant. Patent lack of courtesy and responsiveness particularly by those whose duties bring them routinely in contact with the common citizen, creates the indelible first impression of a callous minded civil servant. Behaviour and good relationship with members of the public and being sensitive to their needs should certainly be one of the criteria for assessing performance of a public servant. The Commission are aware that this kind of behavioural pattern is not universal. There are many contrary instances that are reassuring keeping alive the hope that much can still be salvaged with a little determination, purposive administration and dynamic leadership.
- 10.8** Ensuring social accountability depends upon a combination of several inter connected issues. Briefly they are, assessing an individual's capacity within his professional domain in quantitative and qualitative terms providing training at induction level and at subsequent periodic intervals, making promotions at least at higher levels on a selective basis, insisting on periodical cadre reviews and recognizing and rewarding merit where it is due. Each of these issues is briefly dealt with.
- 10.9** There are limits, even in the best of conditions, to evaluate the quantitative output of an employee. Even when precise, quantifiable and objective criteria for performance are devised and sought to be applied, there will remain room for some subjectivity in judgement. Also it is needless to state the obvious that not all kinds of performance lend themselves to quantification. However, through the guidance of MGP and on their own initiative all Heads of Departments should endeavour to include a quantitative indicator in the ACRs.
- 10.10** Qualitative judgement is, perhaps the trickier of the two. It is necessary to calibrate scales of performance to varying levels of responsibility within any given functional sphere. Quality of work has necessarily to be judged by

superior officers. However bland remarks like outstanding or excellent would be of no use in changing the concept of evaluation. It is necessary for the ACRs to contain a descriptive write up by at least two superior levels on the qualitative aspect of an employee's work. This aspect of an employee's work should be connected with regularity and punctuality in attendance. The latter aspect is of significance in the context of social accountability and speaks volumes of the public perception of a Government office where the commonplace spectacle of late attendance and early exit of employees leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Therefore, even if one caters to the uncertainties of the urban transport system regular and punctual attendance for eighty percent of the working days ought to be the minimum requirement for being recognized as a benchmark for an individual who sets store on these parameters of qualitative assessment.

10.11 Performance appraisal or writing up the ACR in a meaningful way is the logical step to be followed after considering the quantitative and qualitative output of an employee. If the ACR is a true indication of a person's ability or lack of it, it can be the basic document from which assessments can be made regarding whether or not a person can be promoted to higher positions. It is unfortunate that at present the ACRs are colourless documents, providing no insights into the professional capability of an employee and promotions are made almost exclusively on the basis of seniority. It is heartening to note that the MGP is devising separate ACR forms for each department, reflecting the needs of that department. The crying need of the hour is introduction of such a change. The Commission feel that each departmental head should devise separate ACR forms indicating the quantitative parameters as well as an opportunity to include a qualitative assessment of the employee. This can be vetted by the MGP. What has to be noted is that there cannot be a common form of ACR for all categories of employees. It should be designed specifically for each specific category so as to elicit precise information about matters relevant to his field of work. The format should contain a paragraph in which the person reported upon should record what he was expected to do and what he did during the period reported upon.

10.12 Gaining promotion, step by step, through an automatic process of the seniormost person getting precedence is the accepted pattern in Kerala at present. This is manifest at all levels. Even the post of Chief Secretary has been given to persons with only one or two months service left, which makes a mockery of the salutary principle of selectivity and the need for a minimum period of continuity to be effective.. There is prime need today for stressing on the cruciality of merit in determining suitability for functional promotion. The idea is, no doubt easier spelt out than acted upon. Apart from the many imponderables in the assessment of merit 'per se', there is the important question of the proportion in which merit should mix with the other crucial factor seniority. Merit and seniority ought to be combined in varying proportions to determine one's suitability for promotion. Since historically

only seniority has been considered for promotion it will continue to be a factor governing promotion. The Commission would therefore recommend that in the case of last grade employees seniority alone may determine eligibility for promotion unless he is found explicitly unfit for gross indiscipline, dereliction of duty, criminal offence or some such other grave failing. For employees upto the gazetted level, again seniority may be given full weightage but when promotion is made to the gazetted level it should be ensured that if there are adverse remarks they should be taken note of and as far as possible the promotion route should be through a DPC. It might be desirable to make passing of tests like Account test or Manual of Office procedure mandatory for being considered for promotion and the principle could be extended to even time bound grade and ratio promotions. What is needed is to drive home the point that promotions cannot be considered as an automatic accrual of a service benefit. All employees who are gazetted ought to be promoted only when the proportion of merit is larger than mere seniority, the weightage for merit becoming higher for higher posts. The DPCs should be convened regularly and each DPC should conceive of systems particularly suited for that department. Thus, for a technical department, skill levels might form an important criterion while for a field department achievement of pre determined targets might be a more relevant factor. The Commission can only suggest that the Government may devise such methods so that the Civil Services might become more responsive in future to people's needs.

- 10.13** Providing training at induction levels and at periodic intervals while in service is another important area of concern. The training need not necessarily be in an institution, but can be within the department. A forward looking Head of Department can devise such programmes for optimal efficiency in the department.
- 10.14** Periodic cadre reviews is another reform which has been neglected so far. Cadre reviews will require, among other things, comprehensive job analysis, job evaluation and ascription of relative values to different jobs and arriving at cadre strengths, which might require additions in certain categories and deletions in others. With increasing use of technology and modern tools of administration the need for periodical cadre reviews needs no emphasis. In the long run it can result in optimum numbers of staff for optimum work. The Commission recommend that the Department of P&ARD take the initiative in organizing a calendar for cadre reviews.
- 10.15** One area of public administration that is hardly ever noticed is the need to reward the really meritorious. There is no denying the fact that in almost all the departments and at all levels one can find a few individuals who are willing to shoulder extra responsibilities. There are several who contribute very meaningfully to the department. In the governmental system rewarding such persons of exceptional merit can easily degenerate into a routine system. That has to be avoided, for which a continuous recognition for a minimum of

at least five years of sustained good work ought to be rewarded either by accelerated promotion or by the grant of advance increments. Perhaps MGP can suggest the mechanism for the system to work. Another aspect of recognizing merit is by encouraging higher qualifications and rewarding acquisition of such qualification, if that would help the objectives of the concerned department, by either advance increment or promotion. This has been touched upon elsewhere in our report. Accountability in our administrative culture is mostly perceived in negative terms, influenced by the overriding concern that one must not do anything wrong or irregular. The obverse of “accountability” is the enjoyment of a measure of freedom and discretion to commit bonafide mistakes in trying to experiment, innovate, and promote public good by taking initiative. This aspect has also to be given the weight it deserves and it needs no mention that bonafide errors should not stand in the way of career advancement of an otherwise capable employee. Punitive action in such cases can cause demoralization. There is also need to clearly earmark specific areas of functioning and accord appropriate delegation of powers.

- 10.16** In conclusion, the Commission would like to emphasise that any degree of refinement can succeed only if there is a political will. Today the Right to Information Act has become law and consequently every citizen has the inherent right to know why his legitimate need is not being looked after. The time is thus ripe for every Civil servant to understand the role he is expected to perform in Society and seek to retain his status as a public servant.
