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## Democracy and Bureaucracy: Working of Provincial Autonomy

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### **Abstract:**

*Provincial autonomy, with ministers responsible to the legislature, and the permanent officers still looking to the Indian office for power, protection and inspiration were difficult to work. The administration was not so smooth. In provinces where parties other than congress were in power, the civilians did not create any trouble, but in the provinces in which congress ministries had been formed; co-operation of the civil officers was not very genuine.*

### **1. Introduction**

The members of the Indian civil services had since the planting of British administration in this country, enjoyed immense prestige and power. They had performed and were performing duties for wider in scope and more responsible in nature than any that was normally done by their competitors in Britain. These functions had not been simply administration, but political as well in character. It was correctly defined as 'STEEL FRAME OF BRITISH RAJ' by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George for its role in influencing and implementing government policies and decisions. The period between 1858 and 1919 was one of bureaucratic despotism, described as the bureaucratic state, which ensured continued peace and internal security by providing a political system based on the rule of law within the framework of executive dominance. B.B. Mishra has called it "law based absolutism" and this conduced to the progress of modern science and literature. Prior to 1861, it was considered that representative institutions were too much of a strain for an alien or foreign government. A lot many acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935 were passed in order to transfer self-government to Indians. The success and failure of the constitutional experiment especially after the Government of India Act 1919 and 1935 depended largely on the cooperation of these I.C.S officers. After the Act of 1919 the agitation for more representation to Indians increased.

Seeing the dissatisfaction the government in 1924 appointed the reform enquiry, with Sir Alexander Muddiman as chairman, to suggest ways and means of constitutional advance within the framework of existing statutes. While the majority recommended transfer of a few more innocuous subjects to popular control, the minority, with four Indian members of whom Tej Bahadur Sapru was one, held that dyarchy had failed, and a new constitution should be framed 'on a permanent basis with provisions for automatic progress in the future so as to secure stability in the government and willing co-operation of the people'.<sup>1</sup> Demands of the Muslims continued to be more controversial. Besides stepping beyond the concept, of minority protection, they started advancing claims based on ideas of political domination and independence. In his presidential address to the all India Muslim league in 1930, Muhammad Iqbal presented the vision of a 'consolidated north west Indian Muslim state' within or without the British Empire as 'the final destiny of the Muslims at least of north-west India'.<sup>2</sup> With this background, the other communities holding a privileged position were hardly likely to water down their claims. The latest to demand representation as a separate community were the depressed classes on the ground of their very low socio-economic status among the Hindus. Several attempts to find an agreed solution failed, because the communities concerned knew that they had the full backing of the government.

Later the communal award, to which the several communities reacted differently, formed the basis for constituting the legislatures, provincial and federal, under the act of 1935. After the Second Round Table conference (1930-32), a white paper containing proposals for constitutional reform was drawn up. Thus, after many such developments the bill based on the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee was passed into law in 1935. And the Act of 1935 came into force on 1 April 1937. Accordingly the new constitution for India was drawn up on the assumption that there would be an Indian federation of democratic provinces and autocratic states; and the assurance of the prince's 'steadying influence' was rendered doubly sure by giving them greater representation in the two chambers of the federal legislature than could be justified on a purely population basis. Also the provincial governments were now wholly placed under popular control, diarchy being abolished; there were, however, safeguards ostensibly for the protection of the minorities and a variety of other interests, which made deep inroads into the powers of the popularly elected ministers. The provincial legislatures, constituted on the basis of the communal award, were so vivisected that there was ample scope for playing the imperial game. There was to be a federation of British India and the Indian states. Since transfer of power at this level was to be partial, a dyarchic

government could not be avoided. Defense, external affairs excepting commonwealth matters, and ecclesiastical affairs were to be administered by the governor general solely at his discretion with the aid of three advisors. All other subjects were to be in the charge of ministers answerable to the Federal legislature in accordance with the principle of parliamentary government.

Though the provincial executive looked like a parliamentary executive, yet in reality, the discretionary powers of the governors and their special responsibilities restricted the scope of a true self government of parliamentary type to a great extent. In brief, we may say that these safeguards were intended to entrench British Empire with imperialism firmly on the soul of Indians who had started pestering the white masters to free themselves from their clutches and to nullify the so called provincial autonomy that the act had designed as another step towards self-government. Thus the period of 1919 and 1935 there was a strange relationship between the bureaucrats and the so called popular ministers. Due to their loyalty towards the British government, they were to an extent reluctant to the working of the ministry.

The civil servants were loaded with so much of work so it was obvious that they would not agree to play a second fiddle to the regular head of a transferred department. If the partial responsible government that was being introduced was meant to be real and if this form of government was gradual to grow and expand, the civil services should have been reconstituted on a new basis to fit in with the new system. The policy of the British government was as imperialist as ever before. It was willing to make only such concessions as would not jeopardize its hold on the country or affect adversely British commercial and other interests. It aimed at framing a constitution in which its protégés—the favored communities, the princes and other interests were so placed that they had a vested interest in the perpetuation of British rule. As P. Hardy has observed, the reforms of 1935 were their last and, in the event the most portentous essay in balancing and ruling India.<sup>3</sup>

Elections were held in 1937 and Congress came out as largest party. It formed ministries in the seven British provinces and all the provincial subjects came under the popular control of the ministers who did the administering with the help of bureaucracy placed under them. The interaction that took place between the bureaucracy and democracy under the new Act was chiefly in the provincial field, the central executive remaining irresponsible because of the non-implementation of the federal stipulations. There was a difference in the approach between minister and civil servant, a difference arising from bureaucratic adherence to rules and ministerial emphasis on politics. The civil servants were not so easily ready to transform themselves as loyal ministers in the office. As with the inauguration of provincial autonomy in 1937 the civilians had to adjust themselves to the control exercised by the ministers in all departments of provincial administration. Mere good intentions of the Governors or their eloquence statements could not be of any practical utility. Sir Hallett, the governor of U.P, for instance, said, "After all the relations of a governor and his ministers were not those of a master and his servant; rather they are partners in a common enterprise a good government of the provinces."<sup>4</sup>

Governor symbolized and represented the Imperial interest, which did not meet the demands of the Indian nationalism which the Ministers claimed to press. Culturally too, the gap between the Governor and his Ministers was not inconsiderable. The Gandhian pattern of dress, mode of living and habits of mind was all different from those of the earlier Ministers who served under diarchy. It was precisely to bridge the gap created by mutual suspicion and social barriers that the Secretary of state suggested the expediency of 'social contacts' being established with a view to promoting, understanding and goodwill. Social and personal contacts were in addition designed to ensure the attendance of Ministers not only at the departure of the outgoing Governor or at the reception of his successor, but also on the occasion of the Governor's address to the Legislature.<sup>5</sup> Several examples from the private correspondences between the bureaucrats and Ministers and their memoirs and interviews show that the relationship of bureaucrats with the ministers varied. Some were ready to work according to the changed situation but some still considered themselves superior to Indians and showed their unwillingness to work under the Indian Ministers. Examining the reaction and relations of the ministers and the civil servants, in December 1938, Linlithgow claimed that provincial autonomy has proved marked successes. There were friendly relations between governors and Ministers. The latter received 'loyal and willing cooperation' from the services. From the Governor General they received 'friendly and ready cooperation'.<sup>6</sup> One of the Indian civil servants K.L. Punjabi told that the general attitude was clear enough, but the strategy and tactics had to vary with the personality of the minister and the occasion. Further discussing the role of bureaucrats he felt that conditions had changed; before the congress took office, work was comparatively easy because the secretary of the ministry could take any case to the viceroy above the head of the member in-charge; but after the formation of the congress ministry the secretaries relied much more on persuading the ministers to give due weight to the rules and procedures.<sup>7</sup>

Thus bureaucrats had problem dealing with the new situation of working under the provincial autonomy where they were not the masters. In the Nagpur province differences arising from regional, linguistic groups' and personality cult thus began to sprout gradually. The secretary of state's directive was that while not hesitating to tender advice on the merits of each case a secretary must do his best to plant himself in the mind of his minister and carry out his policy. The secretaries were generally aware how their ministers would react to certain issues, but in the final presentation of the case to the minister some of the secretaries became rather inclined to advise the course which they thought would be more acceptable to the governor as being in keeping with the recognized canons of sound administration.<sup>8</sup> It was a strange marriage of dissimilar. For by the new act of 1935 the provinces were to be advanced to the status of fully fledged parliamentary democracies with almost complete autonomy in regard to purely provincial affairs. The British governors were to be Meta morphed into constitutional monarchs and the members of the Indian civil services into servants instead of masters.<sup>9</sup> Talking about the relationship between the Ministers and the civil servants S.S. Kheda mentions that there were cordial relations and Chief Secretary C.W. Gwynne worked loyally with Panditji in U.P.<sup>10</sup> Another I.C.S Bhaktavatsalam says that the British civil servants—Chief Secretary and others also accommodated and adjusted themselves. C.F. Brackenbury, a British Chief Secretary; he used to come to the office dressed in khadi.<sup>20</sup> When the Congress ministries came into power they were full of enthusiasm and wanted to do a lot for the Indian people. There was all kind of schemes. The ministry was full of schemes and every minister wanted to carry out his own pet programme. The P.W.D. man wanted roads all over the place. The Education Minister

wanted schools opened right and left. Even the Indian bureaucrats sometimes faced problems to handle the situation with the Indian ministers. One of the Indian civil servant Shri H.V.R. Iengar, finance secretary, recalls that due to this attitude of the Ministers it was difficult to work with them.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the time relations between civil service and the ministry in other departments were of adjusting nature. The Congress ministry decided on certain matters of policy. Bureaucrats recognized that they were the instruments, to give shape and direction to the policy. They were not necessarily consulted about the policy. They took a political decision and it was the business of bureaucracy to give the minister advice as to how that decision should be implemented. So, they had no trouble with the ministers.

Their respective spheres were well recognized. Dr. Sampurnand a minister in U.P. in 1937, also claims that the attitude of the civil servants towards the ministry cooperative. He says "except perhaps in the case of one or two, they were not particularly obstructive. A few of the younger one certainly seemed to welcome the changeover, they seemed to like us. They thought that they had hit the real chance of doing something for their country. We saw the difference. In the case of others, it was simply wait and see, just to some extent cynical but not obstructive. Even in the case of the Governor, it was surprisingly very good because Sir Harry Haig was a civilian and we somehow felt that on the whole he would be obstructive there. He was not obstructive. He had his own views, of course, in certain respect, but on the whole his attitude was correct, we might say perfectly correct."<sup>12</sup> Talking of the impression about the efficiency, character, and honesty of Indians vis-a-vis the British civil servants an Indian civil servant Mr. Venkatachar was of the opinion that whatever may be the opinions expressed by the nationalists, there was one thing about the I.C.S. which remained till the end their sense of duty, integrity and their main business was to uphold the authority of the government. There, the British and the Indians acted exactly as one. They both kept the values, whatever values the I.C.S. had built up. There was no change in that. They both acted similarly, though they belonged to different races. But in terms of the execution of work, authority, the exercise of power, the standards were maintained thoroughly by both the people. There was no departure from that. British and the Indian civilians, as a class, in terms of integrity, efficiency both shared the same values. Whatever values the institution had, they shared it in equal measure. No one was superior to other. When an Indian worked, he brought the same qualities to bear as an Englishman did. It might have been that the Englishman may think that in times of emergency or anything like that, he would be thinking imperially whereas an Indian would be thinking as an Indian. That is a matter of some kind of personal opinion, but right through all these things, they depended entirely on the machinery which consisted of both Indians and the British.<sup>13</sup>

After the introduction of the provincial autonomy and the power being handed over to the Indian ministers, many English officers started feeling that there was no use staying in India. They felt more and more depressed. Now that provincial autonomy had been introduced, a district life was becoming quite intolerable with politicians continually butting in and working little ramps. A young English police officer with two or three years of service, who was posted for a few months at dandat, asked Greenlane, an English officer posted as a district officer, 'what's the good of our being here? We can't do anything now and we're not wanted. They would much prefer to have their own officers. So why remain? The administration was getting shadier and shadier and English officers could not prevent it. What useful purpose, then did they serve? They might occasionally smooth over a local comment squabble, but they couldn't settle the general communal question. Nor could they contribute much to the large scale social and economic reform, which was so badly needed. That now they must necessarily depend on the Indians, themselves, and in any case it was beyond the capacity of foreign bureaucrats. The outlook was certainly gloomy; and over all there hung the shadow of impending war.'<sup>14</sup>

The attitude of English civilians towards the administration of the country changed rapidly as they had lost paternal interest in the country. They had only monetary interest, pecuniary interest in the country. Those were the early days of the British when they were really interested in India. There was no agitation against them, and so they felt like doing something good for the country and taking a personal interest. You come across many old civilians who went all out to be friendly with the people, to know their problems and to do something for them, a sort of 'Ma-bap' Government. But later that spirit had disappeared from the English members of the service. Then they were concerned only with their salaries, their pay, their allowances, their good life, pleasures and comforts of living. That paternal interest in the country had gone. It was more a law and order administration than a developmental administration. The reason for this change was due to the fact that they thought their days were numbered and that they met with resistances from the people for whom they thought they were doing something. If the people were not appreciative, well then what was the use of doing things? If people appreciate and welcome you, then you do something for them, otherwise you spend 11 to 5 in the office and draw salaries.<sup>15</sup> Lady Collen Nye when asked, about the feeling of the senior civil servants at that time, about their departure, the end of the British rule. She replied that it varied tremendously. Some people felt that it was too quickly done for the benefit of the country and too quickly done for their own benefit, to some extent. But, by and large, they were prepared to go along with whatever Mountbatten thought was the right thing to do, and everybody hoped that it would be done with minimum loss of life, and distress and turbulence possible, and if it was felt by "the powers that be" that the quicker the better, well quicker was the better.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the end of 1944, the Indian Section of the services had come to the conclusion that the days of the British in India were numbered. It was only a question of time. The attitude of the British was one of the stark disbelief. They could not imagine that they would have to leave India or could leave it so soon. It was very difficult for the British to imagine that India could go on governing itself after their departure and this belief went on right up to the end. They could not believe that this was possible and, in fact, they were convinced that what the then British government and Mountbatten between them were doing was all wrong.<sup>17</sup> "Now it is certainly true that there were many British officials in India, some very high officials, who did not wish to see the end of the British raj and were prepared to use every strategies possible to pressure British hegemony, and their own jobs, as long as possible."<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Conclusion

Thus the interaction of bureaucracy with the ministers was both of cooperation and non-cooperation. The bureaucracy generally cooperated with ministers in spite of the displacement of the Centre of political gravity through the reforms. The most striking feature in the ministry was the greatly increased respect which officials of classes evinced towards the decisions of the council as well as towards the status of its members. It created genial and cordial relations between ministers and bureaucracy which was reflected in the behaviors of district officers who withdrew themselves to enable elected representative to establish direct links with their constituencies. The reports of the provincial government, on the working of the reforms made it clear that there had been no want of loyal co-operation on the part of the service or of cordial appreciation on the part of the ministers. But on the other hand ministerial responsibility and All India Services with their old conditions of services could not go together. Provincial autonomy, with ministers responsible to the legislature, and the permanent officers still looking to the Indian office for power, protection and inspiration were difficult to work. The administration was not so smooth. In provinces where parties other than congress were in power, the civilians did not create any trouble, but in provinces in which congress ministries had been formed; co-operation of the civil officers was not very genuine. They did not only openly flout the authority of the ministers and often either silently ignored their orders or carried them out only half-heartedly and perfectly. There was yet another trend which became noticeable in the functioning of the transferred department, the tendency of ministers to centralize administrative decisions at the provincial headquarters for political reasons. It affected the efficiency of the district officers, who were kept in ignorance of some facts and given no opportunity to comment. Local officers were led to feel that the interests of the high authorities created in politics and that the political dependency, more especially under extended democracy, contributing to the emergence of an alternative local agency of communication with the ministry.

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