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The *manthan* in the IAS

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The origins of the IAS reside in Max Weber's principles on bureaucratic organization. The structure is hierarchical and some of the operating principles are - reliance on rules and regulations, developing technical competence, working impersonally and placing a premium on formal, written communications. In this article, I will show that there is a mismatch between the structure of the IAS and its operating environment and this is leading to demands for a structural transformation, such as lateral entry. The decoupling of the structure from the operating system started immediately after independence and has increased during the past 25 years, largely due to the emergence of three new factors, (1) need for political engagement, (2) increasing focus on implementation of development programmes, and (3) demand for peoples' participation. Let us see how these three aspects have transformed the operating environment of the IAS.

There is wide consensus that political engagement is a necessary part of the work of the IAS. This recognition is not recent, even the Indian Civil Service (ICS) understood the significance of politics in decision-making. Just before independence the ICS, to prevent its abolition, was actively engaged in the politics. In 1946, ICS officers established connections with Vallabhbhai Patel, the first home minister, to convince him of their commitment to an independent India. After the constituent assembly decided to retain the ICS, senior members of the ICS wrote to Patel expressing their gratitude for his support.

Importance of political engagement was recognized even after India's independence - "from the first day of independence the administration was indeed in politics" (Rai 1976). Administrative ideas have to blended with politics - "in reality the political and practical considerations are often inseparable" (Lall 1958) and "politics, let there be no mistake, is the senior civil servant's breath and staff of life, whether he perceives it or not in the tasks he performs" (Mitra 1981). Narrating his experiences of higher levels of administration, former Home Secretary, L. P. Singh (1971) advised a group of trainee IAS officers that politics was an integral part of functioning - "practically all government is politics - anything you do has political implication", and "unless you keep on studying political behavior and problems relating to the political institutions functioning in the country and at least some other countries, I think, you can never make a first-rate civil servant". Finally, he said that "many of the grievances of the civil servant about the functioning of our political system arise from too idealistic view of public affairs and in non-recognition of the fact that after all politics is concerned with power".

One of the important reasons for the establishment of the ICS (and the IAS) was to reduce political patronage. However, the IAS ended up distrusting both patronage and politics (Appleby 1953). As a result, the IAS continues to view politics as "interference" - something external to decision-making. This has had two implications. First, political representatives never got their rightful space in decision-making and were largely confined to playing advisory and recommendatory roles. Second, the IAS failed to acquire skills and competencies to engage with the political process effectively. In the face of increasing demands for political

participation in decision-making, the IAS took recourse to three key tactical responses. One response was to follow a hands-off approach where the IAS operate within the latitude given by the political executive. Another response was to rely on incremental decision-making where decisions are made in small steps based on past experience of the political processes and the local context. This tactic is also commonly called "muddling through" and enabled the IAS to adjust to the multiple political interests as well as incorporate the voices of the 'publics'.

Another trend was the need for 'real' citizen involvement in decision-making. Several committees, practitioners and researchers have found that citizen participation is an important part of real-time decision-making by the IAS (Kothari and Roy 1969; Taub 1969; Potter 1986; Sen 1995). The development of the Internet, with the power of websites, distribution lists, listservs, blogs and search engines, only enhanced the need to embrace this trend and actively manage citizen engagement opportunities. Today, citizen participation has emerged as the centerpiece of the working of the IAS.

The third trend was the increasing push to achieve goals connected to development and welfare programmes. Perceiving politics to be an externality, the IAS began to equate political neutrality with program neutrality. The assumption was that goal achievement was unconnected to the enthusiasm of IAS officers towards specific social and economic goals (Appleby 1953). This preference of "technique over purpose" reduced the motivation of the IAS to achieve economic and social goals. Nehru in his address to the Fourth Annual General Body Meeting of the Institute of Public Administration made the point succinctly - "In a period of dynamic growth, however, we want as civil servants persons who are not _ _ _ _ _ merely head clerks but people with minds, people with vision, people with a desire to achieve, who have some initiative for doing a job and who can think how to do it. But the person who is completely neutral is a head clerk and no more _ _ _ _ _ Can a person be neutral, I ask you, about basic things which we stand for, our state stands for, our Plan stands for _ _ _ _." In her address to the Institute of Engineers, Indira Gandhi reiterated the same idea - "unreserved faith in the programs they (IAS) administer _ _ _ _. We must all have a commitment to the development of the country and a sense of personal involvement with the welfare of our people". The mounting pressure to achieve social and economic goals set out in the increasing number of development and welfare programmes led to the practice of advocacy by some IAS officers. This set of IAS officers began to particularly champion the socio-economic interests of the poor and the disadvantaged.

These three responses - incrementalism, advocacy and decision-making within bounded settings - were largely based on the positional power of the IAS. This positional power enabled to the IAS to navigate government processes and negotiate with individuals, groups of people and interest groups from a position of strength. Learning to use positional power for negotiation and navigation had a flip side too – it could be used for gaming the system and promoting cronyism. This sowed the seeds of a "spoils system". Thus, we

have a unique Indian hybrid - an operating system based on the tenets of a spoils system, nested within a classical Weberian bureaucratic structure.

The mismatch between the structure and the operating system is akin to running an Apple computer on a Microsoft operating system and has led to a churn in the bureaucratic system, a sort of *manthan*. The churning in the IAS is producing several by-products - and one is the idea of 'lateral entry'. The manthan will stop only when we are able to develop a structure that matches the everchanging, contextual operating environments where decisions are made. This will be the *Amrit* (nectar), which the Gods and Devils were seeking when they churned the Ocean with a mountain.

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