

## YET ANOTHER SUBVERSION

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What amaze every liberal in India and abroad are Narendra Modi's unending and brazen attempts to centralise all power and decision making in a federal, democratic setup. To achieve this, he has been systematically weakening or subverting every national institution that has flowered and flourished in Independent India. Their autonomous and professional functioning apparently stand in his path towards an unabashed one-man rule. After destabilising the judiciary and breaking the backbone of the executive, his eyes have now moved to the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and his present endeavour is to upset their selection so that, he has the final say —through his chosen smokescreens. Despite the fact that Article 320 of the Constitution empowers only the UPSC to screen and select persons for filling up the posts in different services under the government, Modi has flown a hawk among law-abiding birds. His “suggests” to his own ministries that they consider his proposal to decide on going over the recommendations of the UPSC by deciding who would go to which service and to which state.

Let us try to understand how the present system works. For the last 70 years, the UPSC has established a time-tested system to conduct examinations in two stages — Preliminary and Final — to select several lakhs of applicants, by evaluating their capacity to face very tough questions. This is quite different from university examinations where the stress is on acquisition of academic depth. What the UPSC looks for is not skill at memorising text books but in facing pressure and responding to them with coolness. There are other psychological tests as well that are injected into the examination pattern and the interview to which the selected candidates are called , so as to give a fair assessment to the board as to who would be more suited for the rigours that lie ahead. India has a track record of honestly selecting its civil servants, but what happens to them after that is a different matter. It is a fact that many tend to become more bureaucratic than service-oriented and both corruption as well as ineptitude are fairly high. But no has accused the UPSC for wrong selection. It is the system into which these young people are thrown and the manner in which they are brutalised by the political class and their own unscrupulous seniors that is largely responsible.

The UPSC goes through its rigorous process annually and short-lists a number of candidates for all the All India Services and the Central cadres on a strict rank-cum-option basis. There are only 3 All India Services — the IAS, the IPS and the Indian Forest Service. Their officers are recruited centrally through the UPSC and are trained by the Central government which injects an all-Indian ethos. What is more important is that it is the UPSC that recommends to the Central government who is to go for which State — again through a very transparent system of balancing the candidate's rank and choices. These three All India services are meant to serve both the Central and State governments to which they are allotted — for the rest of their lives. Hence, fairness in selection is a must as, every year, persons from the deep southern states are posted to far north or the northeast and vice versa. This ensures that even if, perchance, a state government becomes very parochial and even desires to secede from India (as has happened on half a dozen occasions already), the All India service officers would still work only for the Union of Indian. And, in addition to this, the UPSC ensures that the quotas reserved for candidates from the OBC, SC and ST categories are strictly followed in all service appointments.

Other than these three All India Services, the UPSC's common civil services examination also recommends candidates for 17 Central Services, like the Indian Foreign Service, the various Accounts Services, the Revenue Service, the Indian Railways and so on. What distinguishes these services is that while the All India service officers would serve both their State-cadres and the Central government, at different phases — subject to selection on merit — the Central Services work only under the Central government. As in the case of the IAS and IPS, the UPSC decides on who will go to which Service on the basis of the 'options' given by the candidates, along with their ranking and the vacancies available under the different categories in each Service. This is a very complex process and the UPSC has excelled in it, through trial and error. No one is saying that the system is totally flawless but it is certainly as good as anyone can expect. What matters most is that political jockeying hardly matters, as the UPSC is protected by the Constitution and no angry political boss can bully the Commission or its Members. No one is also saying that these who are selected for the coveted services, the IAS or the Indian Foreign Service are proven 'superior' to others. The UPSC's ranking only means that these candidates scored better results in the written examinations and in the interview.

Over the last 70 years, the UPSC system has been accepted as fair and transparent, even if a handful of court cases are filed. Most are dismissed by the courts which have upheld the transparency of the UPSC. Prime Minister Modi's new proposal

is that all decision-making should not be left to the UPSC. He says that who will go to which Service and to which State in the three All India Services would, in effect, be decided by him. How? His proposal is that, in addition to the rankings in the UPSC, it is the probationer's performance at the Training Academy in the Foundation Course (F.C.) that would also count in deciding his Service allotment. All services have to attend this 3 month F.C. and this highly subjective system of 'performance rating' at the Foundation Course is meant to upset what the UPSC had screened and decided. In effect, the UPSC's merit list would be torpedoed by a report decided by PM's own Department of Personnel & Training — through its own Training Academy. How this 3-month 'Foundation Course' can decide who is more fit for serving in Maharashtra or in Mizoram is just not clear. Besides, though it is a common course for the 3 All India and 17 Central Services, the fact is that the numbers are too large to be trained in one campus as before, namely, the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie. A big section under this so-called common training in Hyderabad and another section does it in Gurgaon. So, how does this disjointed course decide the fate of thousands of trainees for their whole life? The Foundation Course is the only time when officers meet their colleagues from other services or state-cadres and establish life long relationships. This will be destroyed, as many will spend the entire period to ingratiate themselves with the trainers so that they do not lose out and in horse trading in the corridors of power to get the Service or State cadre of their choice.