

## **SUBSERVIENCE, NOT EFFICIENCY: THE PRIME MINISTER & CIVIL SERVICE 'REFORMS'**

*Jawhar Sircar*

The Hindu Centre for Politics & Public Policy, 20 July 2018

In 2014, when Narendra Modi became Prime Minister he could have — and should have — pushed through urgently-required structural reforms to improve India's conservative bureaucracy<sup>1</sup>. He had an unprecedented mandate for it and had charmed voters into believing that he would cleanse Indian governance as none before him ever had<sup>2</sup>. In reality, however, he appeared quite comfortable with the creaky bureaucratic apparatus that he had inherited, for he had assumed that his first-hand experience in running it at the state level for over a dozen years would suffice. But the fact is that the two sets of administration in our federal set-up, the central and the state are actually as different as chalk is from cheese<sup>3</sup>. This is not only in terms of scale or the number that a control freak can command — but what distinguishes the two bureaucracies are their totally different world-views and consequentially, their approaches to governance. In a state, a CM can operate through his bureaucrats, who swear personal loyalty to him or her rather than to democracy, and may do wonders<sup>4</sup>— though many of these Gujarat myths<sup>5</sup> are now being busted on closer scrutiny<sup>6</sup>.

But this personal fiefdom model clearly does not work in the national capital of 1.35 billion people. In a rather impersonal Delhi, systems matter more than rustic loyalties and experience counts, not just genuflecting. Mr Modi is finally realising this now — after his disastrous botch-up with demonetisation, the several hit-wickets over GST and his failure to move the economy upwards even when blessed with the lowest-ever petroleum prices. This partly explains why he has chosen the last of his

---

<sup>1</sup> Veerappa Moily, Union Minister and author was entrusted in 2005 to head the Second Administrative Reforms Commission and after 4 years, he has produced 15 volumes of report and recommendations — that were not acted upon by either the UPA government nor the NDA.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from Mr Narendra Modi's speech at Baba Ramdev's rally in Delhi, reported in *India Today* online on 5 Jan 2014. (1) "Bureaucracy's hold is getting strong and the BJP is working hard on this". (2) "We were not born for posts but to do something in life. (3) "Most governments come and work day and night on how to win the next elections. But with Gujarat's example, I say everything is possible."

<sup>3</sup> Shriram Maheswari: *Problems and Issues in Administrative Federalism*, 1992, Allied Publishers

<sup>4</sup> Shah, Ghanshyam (June 2013). "Politics of Governance: A Study of Gujarat". *Studies in Indian Politics*. 1 (1): 65–77

<sup>5</sup> Leading the Modi fan brigade are Bibek Debroy's *Gujarat; Governance for Growth & Development* (2012, Rediff Books) and Uday Mahurkar's *Centrestage: Inside Narendra Modi Model of Governance* (2014, Random House). While the first hagiography earned the economist a permanent seat on Modi's high table, the latter was a calculated primer for Modi's style of governance, meant for the Delhi analysts, media persons, middle men and bureaucrats.

<sup>6</sup> Ghatak, Maitreesh; Roy, Sanchari (12 April 2014). "Did Gujarat's Growth Rate Accelerate under Modi?". *Economic and Political Weekly*. 49 (15): 12–15 *The Economist* of London has exposed several other claims.

very secure five year term to tinker around with the bureaucracy. This means that after four years of relative peace, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in particular and the civil services in general are suddenly being targeted for overhauling. Not a week passes without some bright idea being floated or an order being issued. A spate of recent announcements, however, call for a closer look and the moot point is : will these usher in revolutionary improvements in the functioning of either bureaucracy or democracy or will the proposed measures help consolidate the iron grip of one person or a party?

But why did Mr Modi decide to lean so heavily on the bureaucracy from the day he took over as Prime Minister? The reply is simple — he needed a set of people to could carry out his commands without question. The Secretaries to the Government of India were his points-persons, and cabinet ministers were told this quite unambiguously. For widely differing reasons, he behaved as if his ministers, save a couple of lucky exceptions, were hardly worth relying upon. This is not a sweeping generalisation: I can cite many instances to substantiate this observation, from my experiences when running a mammoth public institution like Prasar Bharati for two and half years in Mr Modi's regime. For example, the sudden and unwarranted decision in October 2104 to permit the controversial RSS supremo to misuse Doordarshan to broadcast his traditional Dushera Day speech to his cadres was taken obviously by the PM himself<sup>7</sup> No one was consulted in an 'autonomous organisation' and it was thrust upon all — including a protesting CEO of the pubic broadcaster. The minister appeared to have been left out of the loop and incidentally, this is the same decent gentleman who was ordered by PMO to return home and change from the jeans he was wearing — to some more appropriate dress, before boarding his plane for his foreign tour. It was made clear to everyone in Delhi that Mr Modi's ministers were not his colleagues — they were his subordinates. He was much more than primus inter pares or first among equals. After all, it was he who had ensured that his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), almost single-handedly, won an absolute majority in Parliament. In one sweeping order, he abolished the 68 Groups Of Ministers (GOMs) though which the previous NDA government operated — deciding all inter-ministerial issues and problems through consensus. It signalled that the PM would take the call after consulting the secretary of the ministries and if rarely required, the ministers.

In a theatrical gesture, he kissed the (hopefully disinfected) steps of Parliament for countless cameras to capture the moment when he entered its portals for the first time, but none of his subsequent actions revealed any fondness for parliamentary democracy. Not surprisingly, Mr Modi's cohorts took their cue from him and sang the virtues of the American presidential system. The hyper-communicative PM chose not to be present in Parliament most of the time and when he did attend, he sat

---

<sup>7</sup> RSS chief's speech shown on Doordarshan, stirring controversy, Live Mint, 3 Oct 2014  
<https://www.livemint.com/Politics/vAvPYrSC6P4mYMazJy87BI/Doordarshan-telecasts-RSS-chief-Mohan-Bhagwats-annual-speec.html>

scowling — without participating in the debates. But more important is the fact that even though he wielded enormous, unprecedented powers, Narendra Modi did not utilise them to dismantle obnoxious parts and abolish the feudal habits of the bureaucracy. After all, the same machinery had served avaricious post-Mughal rulers in their ruthless exploitation and more or less the same bureaucracy was taken over by Warren Hastings and Cornwallis in the latter half of the 18th century, once they snatched the reins of power.

The colonial duo, in turn, did sprinkle a few white men on the top but they also twisted this feudal bureaucracy for their own purposes of extortion and repression as also to facilitate their own unjust enrichment. The new 'nabobs', as the British overlords were called, set up hundreds of 'circuit houses' to hold peripatetic revenue courts (on their 'circuits') in the interior and built countless inspection bungalows to strengthen their control and bring rural India to heel. Mr Modi, on his part, had the best opportunity of surgically aborting a lot of vile formations within this colossal pyramid — but he chose not to, or perhaps did not find time between his excessive but ineffective foreign tours and endless political lectures and campaigns, when in India. Instead, he used technology to seek explanations directly from District Magistrates in this 'federal polity', bypassing the constitutionally approved layers. This reveals a control freak who cares little for the spirit of federalism that the constitution enshrines. Over the next few months, it became increasingly clear that he was an unabashed centraliser who did not believe in 'cooperative federalism', which was one of the many catchy phrases he popularised, only for effect.

Indeed, his centralising<sup>8</sup> of all decisions, postings and transfers was not only unprecedented, but it resulted in impasses and deadlocks. Critical posts of heads of national-level institutions were kept vacant for several months and years — even as they went to seed — and all important boards and committees took even longer to fill up. Decisions had to await his personal attention but he was forever roaming all over — bestowing embarrassing bear-hugs on every foreign leader he met. He did introduce a new and subjective '360 degree assessment system', but this was to ensure that those he did not want were not promoted as Secretaries or Additional Secretaries. Mr Modi also brandished a weapon called 'repatriation' that had been used very rarely in the past. In the last four years, more IAS, IPS and Central service officers have been sent back to their states or cadres from the central government than in the preceding four decades put together. Cabinet reshuffles have been infrequent, but reshuffling of Secretaries, Additional Secretaries and Joint Secretaries are so regular and unpredictable that it has started to demoralise the bureaucracy. But these terror tactics do not qualify as structural changes.

---

<sup>8</sup> Mr Modi justifies his centralisation in his first Independence Day speech from Delhi's historic Red Fort in August 2014 thus "I have started making efforts at making the government, not an assembled entity, but an organic unity, an organic entity, a harmonious whole- with one aim, one mind, one direction, one energy." News 7, 15 August 2014. Full text of PM's speech.

On its part, the bureaucracy soon mastered the art of survival. Many bent backwards, in contorted yoga postures, to applaud every 'scheme' that the leader announced. Most of these schemes were just rehashes of earlier or existing schemes, renamed with much fanfare by the Prime Minister and his coterie. Total personal loyalty and unusual subordination could just not ensure efficiency and delivery. No advice was either sought from (or given by) 'professional administrators' who had spent a lifetime in drafting and implementing complex schemes and projects. Else, an administrative disaster like the demonetisation of currency notes could not have either been conceived or rammed through. It also explains why no senior official was held responsible for this Himalayan blunder. Mr Modi and his protege from Gujarat, Finance Secretary Hasmukh Adhia, decided everything in total secrecy. The chatteratti of Delhi spoke of how the Finance Minister himself was not kept informed of details and the Banking Secretary was never in the loop — which explains why the banks floundered for want of a determined line of command. More recently, Arvind Subramaniam, the government's senior most economist, submitted his resignation to go back home to the US, just as Arvind Panagariya, the former vice chairman of Niti Aayog, did a while back. But then, these economists have already picked up enough materials to write their best-seller books, even as they returned to their more lucrative professorial assignments in the USA, to further leverage their rare first-hand experiences beyond classrooms — obviously for economic benefits.

### Challenging the UPSC's method of selection

It is against this backdrop that the Prime Minister's proposal of May 20, addressed to all the ministries, is alarming. It suggested that the Department of Personnel and Training, which Mr Modi heads, should finally determine the fate of candidates who successfully clear the extremely difficult civil services examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Mr Modi wants the allocation of the three All India Services, the IAS, the Indian Police Service and the Indian Forest Service as well as the 17 to 20 Central Services to be done by the training institutes that successful civil service candidates report to for the first 100 days, rather than the UPSC. Currently, the UPSC uses its time-tested 'rank cum option' system to allocate the service for successful candidates. But if the new system is enforced, a successful candidate who qualifies for the three All India Services, where a 'state cadre' has also to be determined, will have his — or her — fate determined by the training academies, not the UPSC alone. This is even though the current system has worked well for seven decades. All officer-trainees undergo their common training, known as the Foundation Course (F.C.) at the training academies, of which the 'mother' training institute is the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie. Unfortunately, as the LBSNAA can no longer accommodate all the successful candidates, who now number around 1000 to 1200, some officer-trainees do their F.C. at new training centres located in other cities. This is a pity because the F.C. period is the only time civil servants from different services stay together and acquire life-long friends, beyond their own service or cadre.

Apart from the fact that it is not clear how these multiple training institutes will standardise their assessment grades in just three months, what is causing concern is that successful candidates may spend the entire F.C. period currying favour with their trainers to ensure they move upwards to more coveted services or careers. Or that open political jockeying will be the order of the day to help enterprising candidates jump from the middle of the list to the top — as Mr Modi's department will then matter more than the UPSC. However, the Prime Minister's 'decision' may not pass the test of judicial scrutiny if it is carried out as Article 320 of the Indian Constitution empowers only the UPSC to recommend and decide the postings of officers to different services and state-cadres. But if this case goes to a 'considerate bench' in the Supreme Court, anything can happen. Indira Gandhi bullied the judiciary and encouraged judges like AN Ray to crawl and be rewarded. The key point, however, is that Mr Modi chose to impress all civil servants once again that he is the boss, and he will decide their fate and future, even if the first experiment is likely to be after the next general elections.

For the last seventy years, the UPSC has been following a very rigorous, transparent process, inviting applications from some hundreds of thousands of aspirants. In 2016, some 11,35,943 candidates applied for the UPSC's 'Preliminary' examination and 4,59,659 actually took the examination. Only 15,445 were selected to take the next very tough series of 'Final' examinations. After that, the UPSC constituted interview boards with highly qualified experts — vice chancellors, retired civil servants, top scientists, army generals and other specialists — to grill the cream of the candidates that emerged through these two stages. In 2016, only 2961 were called for the interviews, and 1209 were finally recommended by the UPSC for appointment to the civil services. Thus, only one out of every 940 aspirants made it to some service, with just one out of every 4000 or so 'general category' aspirants qualifying for the IAS. It is important to note that there are four categories of 'posts' in each service, reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), the Other Backward Castes (OBC) and the residual 'General' lot.

The UPSC also scrutinises the 'options' submitted by individual candidates for specific services of their choice, in terms of vacancies available for each service under these four categories. For those who opt for and also qualify for the three All India Services, there is the additional option for the state cadres they prefer, and these choices have to be done precisely in conjunction with the limited number of posts available under each category (SC, ST, OBC, General) for each of the 23 services. Even the UPSC does not claim that its system is perfect, but it has earned credibility and is the best we can get. The fact that the UPSC selected less than 200 for the IAS and the Indian Foreign Service out of the 4.6 lakh aspirants who appeared for the preliminary examination does not mean they are 'superior' — it just means that they scored better in a specific set of tests.

The lateral entry Joint Secretaries

The second 'bouncer' was lobbed on 19th of June —that 10 'professionals' would be inducted from the open market at the 'cutting edge' level of Joint Secretaries in the central government. By declaring these 10 posts to be contractual in nature and not on the permanent rolls, government conveyed its intention to bypass the constitutionally laid down imperative of getting the selection done only by the UPSC. Earlier governments had brought in professionals from outside like Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Vijay Kelkar and Jairam Ramesh, but without such fanfare. They were all highly qualified individuals with impressive educational and work experience, and, in any case, the post of "Chief Economic Advisor" is usually filled by foreign based economists — even after 70 years of Independence. The civil services were not alarmed at their entry or even when these economists did not return to their universities in the US, like Kaushik Basu or Rajan did. They hardly noticed the trickle of such contract based employees who often bypassed the UPSC rules and took no note when their terms were extended under various provisions, or they moved from job to job, within government. It was only when some of these 'professionals' reached ministerial status and rose even higher, that the regular bureaucrats woke up. But then, these 'professionals' were well qualified and so very few in number. Moreover, they were not 'regular joint secretaries or secretaries' who replaced officers from the IAS or other services — they were just 'special adjuncts'.

This time, however, hackles have been raised because the advertisement is for 'regular joint secretaries' and is quite vague about their qualifications from which it looks like a case of testing the waters before the real reason emerges. It is worth noting that many of the earlier crop of professionals subsequently joined politics, which is one of the several concerns expressed after the present advertisement was issued. To appreciate better why 10 Joint Secretary level market recruits have become the subject of so much discussion, let us try to understand what this is all about. The highest official in the Government of India is the Secretary in charge of a ministry: there are usually around 70 to 80 such posts for a total of 50,000 civil servants. They, in turn, control some 60 lakh government employees of other grades. Eight or so of these Secretary-level posts are usually occupied by scientists and other specialists, such as the Secretaries in charge of atomic energy, space, science & technology and statistics. The real cutting edge of the central government is, however, at a notch or two below, as the Secretary is usually busy with meetings, briefings, parliamentary demands, important policy decisions and ceaseless fire-fighting or attending to ministers. Thus, the ubiquitous Joint Secretaries — roughly 470 of them — actually run each critical vertical in the central government.

Ten lateral level entry Joint Secretaries may be too small a number to worry about, but it is also too small a number to make a difference, if that is what Mr Modi desires. Of course, it is not clear, how much power they will be given because while Mr Modi can be a blind Dhritarashtra where his few hand-picked acolytes are concerned. He has an established record of showering disproportionate favours on those members of Delhi's establishment who swore undying loyalty to him before he

became PM. In fact, besides their farsightedness in getting 'anticipatory affection', one is not sure of their other skills (if any). In any case, faculties beyond this act of suzerainty that some pledged to him during the height of the UPA 2 regime, really do not matter to Mr Modi. He would, however, certainly crush any civil servant or economist if he or she played 'footsie' with the Opposition now, in the same manner in which Amitabh Kant or Bibek Debroy had done. That is the fear — are we heading for ten mini-Kants recruited in one shot — to carry out 'special tasks' that even the most 'accommodative' of serving bureaucrats baulk at?

The media is, however, not fully correct when it says that the IAS is threatened by the possibility of 10 external professionals coming in laterally at the Joint Secretary level. The IAS no longer dominates the Joint Secretary-level appointments, as the other services have secured their rightful positions. Moreover, most states (like Gujarat, when Mr Modi was its chief minister) are unwilling to let their officers go on deputation to the 'Centre'. The Opposition, instinctively smells a rat — it sees this move (of lateral entry into the service) as yet another attempt to 'saffronise' the administration — with what looks like just the first set of 10, with more to follow. Niti Aayog CEO, Amitabh Kant, who is certainly permitted to talk more than any Central minister, has pronounced that we need to be "flexible" and "transparent" in selection — without elaborating either of the words<sup>9</sup>. The secretary of the department and authorised officials of the PMO, however, maintain a strange silence — which fuels more concerns. But Kant also announced that more lateral recruits would be taken in, at the level of Deputy Secretary or Director in the central ministries. An occasional breath of fresh air is surely desirable — if one is sure of the quality of 'professionals' — not just their loyalty. What is critical is that safeguards need to be put in place to ensure that a 'lateral entry' Joint Secretary is not a stooge of a business house who will be adequately rewarded by the house for extending favours to it, once this low-paid term is over.

Senior civil servants — even of the regular variety — are known to alter government policies to suit certain business interests, even if this causes losses to the exchequer. A disturbing news that one hopes is not true is of a just-tired secretary of the Human Resources Development ministry, who drafted the controversial rules to accord the 'centre of excellence' tags to even unborn universities. It is reported that he is currently employed (which is quite immoral) on very lucrative terms by the same business leviathan that stands to benefit from this rather illogical rule — and that hundreds of crores of rupees are involved. The media says that government has been unduly kind in granting special permission to this favoured bureaucrat to serve his new master, before the quarantine period was over<sup>10</sup>. Like Kant, this user friendly officer was incidentally, a blue-eyed boy of the earlier regime as well and

---

<sup>9</sup> Lateral Entry Will Be For Finest People In The World: NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, 11 June, 2108, NDTV site.

<sup>10</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ex-secretary-not-in-conflict-over-jio-institute-says-hrd-ministry/articleshow/64954109.cms>

was posted abroad many times. Orwell's dictum comes to mind, that 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'. After all, the business house is so close to the centre of power. These 'breaches' of conduct are rare among regular civil servants who get a pension, but what has one who comes from the private sector and will return to it father three years to lose, if he was to devote his energies for 'business promotion'? There are many other areas that need clarity and the pronouncement made about more such recruitments to follow, needs to be spelt out in greater detail and placed in the public domain or before Parliament

It is almost certain that the UPSC is out of the selection, as these ten are supposed to come in for 3-year contracts — in which case it is not mandatory. Even so, entrusting the UPSC with the selection may be less controversial, and it could conduct special but transparent examinations, as it has done earlier. Transparency in selection is critical, because all said and done, the maximum salary of some \$3000 a month and the usual "car and a flat" (even in south Delhi) are not likely to get professionals settled abroad all so terribly excited— that Kant talks of. Incidentally, only 3 of the 70 to 80 secretaries in the government of India occupy much-envied bungalows in Lutyens Delhi and joint secretaries are allotted quite modest flats — compared to the private sector honchos. We are not even discussing the utter humiliation that many public servants have to go through at hands of elected politicians and their acolytes— in the name of democracy. Besides, when since thousands of senior posts are lying unfilled because of the constitutional compulsion to reserve almost half the number only for eligible SC, ST and OBC candidates, the present regime must clarify whether these 10 are to follow this reservation norms. Or else, 'contract employment' may well be misused to defeat the reserved quotas — and Dalits do have a point.

No one says that government does not require lateral entrants at each level to bring in special skills — we already have two Secretaries selected from the open market. At the same time, IAS and other officers — many of whom are toppers from the IITs and IIMs or qualified doctors, lawyers, or economists — also need to be encouraged to specialise, after their district phase is over. But professional specialisation of IAS officers has not been encouraged by Mr Modi's own tightly-controlled personnel department or by state governments. As a result, these highly-qualified professionals and university toppers (who constitute the bulk of the IAS) are usually made to move from atomic energy to gobar gas — without being allowed to acquire the desired degree of 'specialisation'. This is where Mr Modi could have made the historic difference —that was expected of him — by encouraging specialisation and professionalisation among the highly-qualified existing officers, who have also acquired 20 or more years of 'hands on' experience in administration from the village level upward, before being selected as joint secretaries —through a rather tough process of weeding out.

Repeating an old order

Then we get a third hammer from Mr Modi. ((Even more)) Very recently, the central government has written to the states to agree to a rule that IAS officers at the level of Secretary and Additional Secretary are henceforth to be assessed on their attitude towards the weaker sections of society. This is quite superfluous as this provision was embedded in the All India Services Conduct Rules a long time ago, and has since been one of the major criteria on which 'performance' is judged. If Mr Modi needed to send placatory signals to the weaker sections of society — that are quite disappointed with him and his government — he could very well do so on his weekly radio broadcast, Man Ki Baat. It is doubtful whether former Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani's scandalously insensitive handling of Rohith Vemula's suicide or the repression let loose on Dalits after the clash at their Bhima Koregaon anniversary or even the attacks and murder of carcass flayers will be forgotten, because such a legal provision is being reiterated. But the high-handed manner in which state partners in our federal set-up were literally ordered to agree immediately to this order or face political humiliation is characteristic of Mr Modi's regime. The shots were, sadly, fired from the shoulders of the IAS.

Equally important is the mention that Secretaries and Additional Secretaries would be assessed on both "financial integrity" and "moral integrity". But this is not only not a new provision, a small but viscous number have always managed to prosper under corrupt political masters. There are exactly 5004 IAS officers in India (in a population of 125 crores) out of which some 65 to 70 make it as Secretaries in the central government — and Mr Modi has certainly failed "to improve their efficiency". Even though civil servants are constantly under multiple surveillance, the existing vexatious procedures for convicting any government official (not only those in the IAS, IPS or IFS) are really self-defeating. Thoroughly upright seniors can hardly punish their corrupt juniors at present, because of processes that take decades and exonerates most. The 'dreaded 3 Cs', the CBI, the CVC (Central Vigilance Commission) and the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General), can hardly function effectively as they are hamstrung by the same dilatory procedures. Yet, the 'the 3 Cs' are either a reason for serving officers refusing to take risks or for really injecting terror — without hardly being able to check corruption so rampant in the bureaucracy.

Mr Modi would have been better served if took a he took a break from his 'loyalists' and consulted the very few 'reformist Secretaries' who are beyond fear or favour. This creaking bureaucratic system that was a product of our 'Soviet' period that preceded economic liberalisation is screaming for reforms. For instance, a simple 'out of the box' solution is to hold secret ballots periodically in every government office, to create a reliable database of 'marked officials' — those whose financial or moral integrity is in question. Everyone in the office knows who they are, but the honest majority suffer in silence as these nefarious elements are favoured by every regime. Many of them are also the most litigant ones and some also lead employees' unions. They can make life miserable for their colleagues or superiors by manufacturing spurious complaints against them. All this is quite well known —

obviously to someone who has completed 16 years in overloading it over the bureaucracy — in one continuing stretch. He is surely aware that the existing rules do not encourage action against the corrupt, the immoral and the troublemakers. The suggestion is that once such a database is created through a series of 'secret ballots', government would have evidence that even the courts would accept and would not have to wait for the bribe to be taken or a woman to be actually molested. It could direct the attention of the investigating agencies to the leads provided by this data and go hammer and tongs after the 'marked officials' — and not plod as at present only after formal complaints are lodged. Instead, in Mr Modi's regime, an officer like former Coal Secretary HC Gupta was convicted and awarded a jail sentence, even though all his colleagues swear that he was an honest officer who may just have slipped up.

If we agree that the UPSC's highly competitive examinations still select the best candidates possible, we need to examine what happens thereafter. Young officers are thrown into a system where they are brutalised by the political class and unscrupulous seniors, resulting in many among them becoming corrupt, callous, inefficient or simply lazy. Every government since Independence — including this most hyped one — is equally guilty of permitting the political class to bully civil servants and traumatised them into inactivity, connivance or even cash partnerships. The vast majority has simply been numbed into compliance. Narendra Modi is one of the rarest rulers who really did not need to curry favour with the dirtiest layer of the political class — as he could make or break anyone. He missed his tryst with destiny by unfortunately mesmerising himself with his unreal oratory<sup>11</sup> and in masquerading unapologetic narcissism as state policy<sup>12</sup>. Mr Modi could have used his electoral mandate to institute permanent civil service reforms. Instead, he allowed himself to be distracted by other preoccupations and then scrambled in his last year, to tighten a screw here and a nut there — but also ensure that his personal power and glory increased, at any cost.

Consequentially, the corrupt tax officer extorts even more and the slothly sleep during office hours. He bludgeoned the top layer of the bureaucracy but could never elicit their confidence in rebuilding India, shoulder to shoulder. His crudely communal approach to governance may not have elicited horror from serving

---

<sup>11</sup> It is painful to compare his negligible achievements in Administrative reforms with what's he promised, say at Varanasi on 22 December 2013 "we want to bring development, it can happen - brothers-sisters, the biggest problem before the country is good governance - we got 'Swarajya' but we didn't get 'Surajya'; didn't get 'Susashan' - from this very land of Maharashtra, Lokmanya Tilak had given a Mantra, "Swarajya Mera Janmasiddh Adhikar Hai" - brothers-sisters, the nation fought with "Swarajya Mera Janmasiddh Adhikar Hai" - and we got 'Swarajya' - today, the need of the time is - that we all demand that 'Surajya Mera Janmasiddh Adhikar Hai' - before Independence, 'Swarajya' was our birthright, after Independence, 'Surajya' is our birthright" India Today, 23 Dec 2013, website.

<sup>12</sup> An excellent example of corruption and the bureaucracy may be seen in Akhil Gupta's Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India (2012, Duke University Press), especially in chapter 3 on 'Corruption, Politics and the Imagined State' pgs 75-110.

officers, most of are terrified of 'big brother' watching them all the time, but retired officials rose up against a PM and his regime's impropriety — as never before in India's history. His government will surely go down in history as one which spread fear amongst insecure civil servants for no productive reason, but one where sycophants prospered to dizzying heights, while the totally upright, imaginative and innovative officials went unconsulted, unwanted or unrewarded.