

Lateral Entry into Government - II

The Founding Fathers felt that India needed a responsible government more than an efficient one

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What is the issue?

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- The DoPT recently issued a notification inviting lateral entry at joint secretary-level posts.

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- Lateral entry may impact the basic governance principles of the country.

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What is the rationale?

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- It is based on assumption that generalists are ill-suited to deal with emerging policy implications.

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- It is in terms of dealing with new technologies and new modes of thinking.

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- Hence the country is in dire need of domain experts.

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- The recent lateral entry policy also aims to augment manpower in the bureaucracy.

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- This means that the process would become a part of the regular recruitment.

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What are the concerns?

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- **Understanding** - Neither the DoPT nor Ministries concerned cared to define 'domain expertise'.

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- Most of the 10 posts open for lateral entry are generalist in nature.

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- Therefore, domain expertise is salient only in a very narrow context.

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- But clearly, there cannot be joint secretaries in all branches of a given Ministry.

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- **Accountability** - Most democracies train their higher civil servants to be accountable rather than efficient.

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- A civil servant is cautious of answering to a quo warranto writ against alleged action/inaction.

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- In any case, a civil servant is expected to follow the decisions taken by the political executive.

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- How far will this be practised by lateral entrants is doubtful.

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- **Training** - Private sector experts becoming joint secretaries may be given a training or orientation.

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- However, it may not match the 15-20 years of acculturation/on-job training that regular officers receive.

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How will it affect the fundamental principles?

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- The Constituent Assembly preferred the parliamentary over the presidential system.

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- The parliamentary system is more responsible but less stable.

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- The presidential system is more stable but less responsible.

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- The country thus opted for **responsibility** over stability.

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- There are methods at disposal to ensure that the government is responsible:

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- i. independence of judiciary
- ii. subjecting the executive to constant scrutiny of the legislature
- iii. maintaining **bureaucratic neutrality**

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- **Accountability** is a complementary principle to responsibility.
- But the idea of lateral entry seems to be opting for **efficiency** at the cost of accountability.
- There is no assurance of accountability, bureaucratic neutrality and conformity to due process.

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Source: The Hindu

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