Lateral Entry into Government - II

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

\n\n

Click here for Part I

\n\n

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- The DoPT recently issued a notification inviting lateral entry at joint secretary-level posts.
\n
- Lateral entry may impact the basic governance principles of the country.
\n

\n\n

What is the rationale?

\n\n

\n
- It is based on assumption that generalists are ill-suited to deal with emerging policy implications.
\n
- It is in terms of dealing with new technologies and new modes of thinking.
\n
- Hence the country is in dire need of domain experts.
\n
- The recent lateral entry policy also aims to augment manpower in the bureaucracy.
\n
- This means that the process would become a part of the regular recruitment.
\n

\n\n

What are the concerns?

\n\n

\n
- **Understanding** - Neither the DoPT nor Ministries concerned cared to define ‘domain expertise’.
\n
- Most of the 10 posts open for lateral entry are generalist in nature.
\n
- Therefore, domain expertise is salient only in a very narrow context.
\n
- But clearly, there cannot be joint secretaries in all branches of a given Ministry.
\n
- **Accountability** - Most democracies train their higher civil servants to be accountable rather than efficient.
\n
- A civil servant is cautious of answering to a quo warranto writ against alleged action/inaction.
\n
- In any case, a civil servant is expected to follow the decisions taken by the political executive.
\n
- How far will this be practised by lateral entrants is doubtful.
\n
- **Training** - Private sector experts becoming joint secretaries may be given a training or orientation.
\n
- However, it may not match the 15-20 years of acculturation/on-job training that regular officers receive.
\n

\n\n

How will it affect the fundamental principles?

\n\n

\n
- The Constituent Assembly preferred the parliamentary over the presidential system.
\n
- The parliamentary system is more responsible but less stable.
\n
- The presidential system is more stable but less responsible.
\n
- The country thus opted for **responsibility** over stability.
\n

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

\n\n

\n

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

\n\n

\n

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

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

