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Indian Institute of Public Administration



Presidential Address

by

SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

at

Second Annual General Body Meeting

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SAPRU HOUSE  
BARAKHAMBA ROAD, NEW DELHI

[ *The following is a verbatim record of a speech made by the Prime Minister, SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, President of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, at the Second Annual Meeting of its General Body held on the 7th April, 1956, at Sapru House, New Delhi.* ]

Friends, for the third time you have elected me as your President. For the third time I have come to this hall to preside over this function, and in between I have done nothing in regard to this organisation. When I come here I try rapidly to find out through the report and from other papers as to what this organisation has been doing—of course from the speeches that are made here also I try to make out what this organisation has been doing. So, I am hardly a suitable person to criticise or to offer any worthwhile suggestions. Nevertheless, since I am here, let me put my ideas before you. They are not very remarkable ones and I have no doubt you have already thought about them.

Mr. Bapat spoke about the vast range of activities of Government today. The range continues to widen and deepen. How far an administrative structure, which was meant to deal with a much narrower range of activities can deal with this vast range, including all kinds of expert, specialised, technical and managerial functions is a matter which is also coming to the fore. Obviously, the range of activities before us is infinitely wider than before. The methods of choosing people for services are still the old methods of choosing them for what may be called broadly the general administrative service and not for any specialised branch

of service that we have today and that we are likely to have more and more in the future.

I have often been troubled by the problem of having to deal with a situation where the administrative machinery works rather in a rigid framework which cannot automatically expand. How are we going to deal with this new situation? The administrative aspect is always important, but it is only in a very backward State that only the administrative aspect is looked after. In all States or countries, other aspects become equally important and they might even become more important than the administrative aspect. How are we to deal with that problem? How are we to deal with it now? It is obvious that the biggest problem that we have to face is the trained personnel for the future expansion of the State's activities in various directions. This is a problem which is continually troubling my colleague Mr. V.T. Krishnamachari and others in the Planning Commission. He wants, of course, engineers, scientists, and other technicians in many fields and we can perhaps make some kind of an estimate of our requirements, bulk requirements, though not easily. I think our demands are likely to be so great that we are always likely to fall short, and there it is better to think in big terms rather than in small terms.

Then there is another aspect, that of the future development of State organisations, State-controlled industries, factories, etc. Of course, it may be hoped that a good administrative officer may go and manage any of these as their head. In fact, in some countries, the opposite process is at work, that is, opposed to the position where the administrator goes as the head of an industrial or technical organisation. It is coming to be believed more and more that the administrative head of a technical organisation should himself be a technician, or at least should know a good deal about the techniques operated

there. We see, in some countries, that technical people come in as administrators, as heads of purely administrative concerns. In some countries they—technicians—come into the diplomatic service because the whole background is technical. The technician comes in as ambassador; he becomes a Minister because the background of the country is becoming progressively governed by the technological advances.

Certainly our background is not that; it is more or less administrative. It is good so far as it goes, but is it likely to be adequate for the changing conditions? Are we prepared for tomorrow? If we are not, then we shall have the biggest bottleneck that you can imagine—money thrown in building huge factories, industrial concerns, State corporations and the like and not finding proper persons for running them—proper persons not only because of their competence and experience but, if I may say so, a certain enthusiasm for the work and a certain kinship and spirit with the idea of the State doing it. It is no good if a person says: "I am doing it, though I basically disagree with the idea of the State running these concerns;" because that does not fit in, even though as a technician he may fit in. Therefore, it is of high importance that we should train people, a special class of personnel for this kind of managerial appointments in State corporations, undertakings, etc. We may, of course, draw upon the private sector or other sectors. But the point is that, even if we draw upon the private sector, the men from it must develop a *public* conscience and not *private* conscience. Only then will they fit in. I think that this is one of the most important things that we have to consider. We are on the eve of a big industrial change, in a sense. Industrial revolution in India is a fact and we have to keep pace in all directions. That is the *first* point.

*Secondly*, even in thinking purely of administration, here is something which is quite beyond my understanding. It is so complicated—various departments, traditions, this and that. I confess I have not understood it at all; I feel lost in it. Once or twice, I had an occasion to look at the civil service rules and the like. I was astonished how the Government of India had continued to exist so long with these rules. It should have collapsed under them. In spite of the impediments that the rules put before it, it is a wonder how it has survived. There are three or four volumes with thousands of slips and the like. Only some selected high pandits understand them. That is bad.

But what is worse is that these rules were framed—I do not know but I imagine—some fifty years back or 40 or 30 or 20 years; they are in their present form hardly less than twenty years old. They are not only pre-independence but pre-manythings. Even without looking at them, I cannot conceive that these rules, framed 20-40 years ago, can be made wholly applicable today. There is, first of all, a big political change. India has become an independent country. Secondly, apart from any political change, I doubt if, even in countries like the U.K., 30 or 40 years old rules are still applicable. I imagine that many things have changed there from time to time. We have been much more static in this respect. The whole background has changed and a new approach has to be made to this problem. If we have to deal with the rules framed not only in the pre-independence days but long ago, in the remote antiquity, one might say, politically speaking, that we are bound hand and foot by something which has no place or relevance today. There may be some rules which are still relevant but the whole outlook or frame is different; the circumstances are different.

*Thirdly*—this is a major factor—we have, rightly or fairly rightly, developed into a State with not only a social outlook but with a social programme which the State undertakes. We have the objective of socialism or the socialist pattern. Now, every machine that you make is meant to turn out something you want. If we want socialism, then the administrative machinery that we have must gradually turn out socialism. If it is turning out something else, then, it does not fit in with the objective we have and there is a constant conflict between these two. I am not referring to the individual; I am referring to the pattern of the organisation right from the recruitment, etc., promotion, and all that.

There are some factors, which, no doubt, have to be common for any efficient system of administration, whatever the objective may be. But there are some factors which are likely to be different. It is just that any decent person you choose may fit into a particular job; he may not fit in well with another job. Take a Vice-Chancellor of a University or a manager of a steel plant, for instance. As a Vice-Chancellor, he may be an excellent person but, as the manager of a steel plant, he may be hopeless; it may be vice versa. Therefore, the same person who may be very good in an administrative machine, meant to produce something, may not be good at all for another purpose when the machine is supposed to produce something quite different.

Therefore, we have to view what is the ideal or the objective of the State. Where do we want to go? What kind of a factory or society are we working for? There we come up to the objective aimed at.

## IV

An equally important thing is the long term or perspective planning—not mere planning for five years. What are we thinking of fifteen years hence or twenty years hence? I do not mean to say that you should consider the process of running a factory, or think what our people would be like, twenty years hence. Of course, that is there but I mean to say that, in spite of our ideals and objectives, our general approach has been pragmatic. We have got no fixed diagram and we are prepared to learn by our experiences and efforts. Therefore we do not have a twenty years' picture which can be called rigid; but we have some picture. Therefore, even in preparing the administrator of tomorrow or the administrator of 10 years later, we have got to keep that broad picture in view. All this is important at any time, but it becomes much more important when the tempo of change is rather fast as it is progressively getting in India and, as I said, will be even more so in our country later. Therefore, this is a very important consideration for you.

In other countries—I suppose in some other countries—the tempo of change is much faster than ours. Take the United States of America which is conditioned more and more by the technological changes. There the Government changes continuously, for good or bad as it may be. A tremendous change is going on technologically, rather frightening change; frightening in the sense how far that may affect the human being; how far the machine will dominate the mere human being and how far the human being will keep himself in command of the machine. It is rather frightening. Whether frightening or not, those changes are there and they will come elsewhere too. Therefore, let us get to understand them.

My point is that all our outlook has to be from

a wide view-point of constantly trying to understand this changing world of ours. I was just reading a book yesterday by a very eminent historian: *History in a Changing World*. In fact, the whole conception of history has changed now. All eminent historians in the past—very eminent and very modern as they were—are out of date. The whole of warfare has completely changed. Every book written from the ancient days to the last war is out of date with the coming of the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb. The whole conception of the physical world has changed by the development of physics. In every department of life you will see how the basic conceptions are changing and we are well on the threshold of unknown regions of mind or otherwise.

If all this is happening around us, obviously, the texture of human life is changing. If that changes, obviously all this business of administration will necessarily be affected. Administration is not static; it is a changing, dynamic, revolutionary process to fit in with the changing times. It is in that spirit that you should approach this question and, naturally, study the peculiar conditions and problems that we have before us.

Now, that leads me to another line of thought. I said: 'peculiar problems we have before us'. More and more I come to the conclusion that, while we must make every effort to learn from the great advances made in other countries in every field, and more especially in scientific and technological field—in every field nevertheless—we shall have to strike our own path. We shall have to find our own path guided by other people's advice and wisdom but not blindly following any either.

All the books on Economics written in America, England, Russia or China may help us, but will not suit us in the final analysis because we have got to

take the conditions of our country. And with the help of others, no doubt, find out, first of all, what our problems are and then seek their solution. Of course, we are doing that. It will not do if we were to get hold of some problem in some other country and may be, a solution of another country and try to apply it to the problem here, which may be different.

## V

Now, coming to a more limited approach to this problem of administration, I was thinking, as I was sitting here, how in the early days of the industrial revolution great inventions did not come from the people at the top. Very few of these came from people at the top. They came from ordinary mechanics working in those rather primitive factories some 150 years ago. They came from the overseers, mechanics and others. Every big invention in the early days of the industrial revolution came from somebody rather low down in the scheme of things; some *mistry* or a mechanic who dealt with things by his hands and not thinking about things in his head. Even subsequently, although we have had naturally great inventors, great scientists, Edisons and Einsteins, it is astonishing how science has progressed, how technology has progressed by the innumerable small conclusions of unknown persons and not by the giants of sciences. Especially, technology progressed by the conclusions of the mechanics. They find out something in their daily work and their suggestions are adopted.

Though this is not entirely applicable to the administrative apparatus, there is no reason why it should not apply to it to some extent. That is to say, do we ever consult or make an effort to get ideas from the people lower down in the scale of the administrative apparatus? Do we ever care to know what they think about their own work? Do

we ever find out from the third grade, the fourth grade—I do not know what all grades are there—or the clerks if they have any suggestions for their own work? I think it would be very profitable if we ask them to suggest improvements. Of course, 90 per cent. of the suggestions may not be good, that does not matter. But, even if one or two are good, they are worthwhile. That has a double purpose in view. One is that we might get good suggestions from the persons who are actually doing the job. The second is that you will make them have a sense of partnership, much more than they do at present. They are being consulted, treated as equals in the matter of getting suggestions even though they may be inferior in grade.

How can this be done? I think it will be a good thing to ask them sometimes to meet together in their own rooms, discuss things and make suggestions for the improvement of their own work, to have better efficiency and less wastage. Whatever the procedure may be, the main purpose of that would be really to give them a sense of partnership in their work and to take away something that I consider very harmful and which still persists; that is, the sense of caste in our Services—the superior service, the second grade, the third grade and so on.

Naturally, there have to be grades in the sense of higher responsibility etc. Men with greater experience and intelligence may be placed in the higher grade. But, do not convert that higher grade into a higher caste. It is bad in every way, but, we in India, who are confirmed practitioners of the caste system, bring in this caste system wherever there is the slightest loophole for it. You must change it. Therefore, I would beg of you to view this problem so as to eliminate this caste system in the Services. To talk about caste in our Services, about the superior Services thinking themselves not merely to be equipped with the experience and intelligence, but

belonging to a higher order of human beings, is a bad thing; especially it is a very bad thing in a democratic set-up.

Somebody here referred to contacts with the public. There again, it is important that we should get rid of some of the old practices and evolve a new line. One should never give the idea to any member of the public, however humble he may be, that one is treating him with discourtesy. A politician, under the stress of circumstances, does not do that. But, in the Services, if people, on account of the security of their pensions, begin to think that it does not matter what the public feels, that is dangerous. This must go. I have received far too many complaints about such treatment of the public.

People whom I have known for dozens of years—they are humble folk, may be peasants—come to me. I might not have time to see Secretaries to Government or any officials. But I never say 'No' to an ordinary man who comes to see me. I would very much like to stop in the middle of the road and talk to him. Perhaps you may not be able to do like that. This democratic approach is admittedly wasteful. My time is precious; your time is precious. However wasteful it may be, I think it is highly important that I should meet him, talk to him, and if I could not help him, tell him so sweetly and send him away with a feeling of comfort. When he comes to see me, that individual is not an individual. He represents to me the millions of people like him. I think in terms of those millions. How am I to speak to them and comfort them? So, he becomes the embodiment of something huge and big. *India is not me and you. India is the lot whom we presume to treat with contempt and discourtesy. It is therefore very important how we deal with the public.* A lot of people come to make mischief and waste time. Anyhow, never allow the

common man take the idea that he is being treated with discourtesy and contempt. This is of the highest importance in a democratic set-up. I can tell you that the biggest man in India, Gandhiji, never turned a man away whether he came from any distant country or from our own country. He never said 'No' to any one who came to see him. Remember, he was a frightfully busy man.

I have placed some ideas before you and I hope you will think about them. I have done so with a feeling of guilt, because, I do not know much about what the organisation is doing, but when I come here, I must, to a slight extent, justify myself.