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*Basappa Danappa Jatti*

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*Twenty-fourth Annual General Body Meeting  
October 15, 1978*

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May I first of all, thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak to you on this occasion of the Annual General Body Meeting of the Institute. Perhaps the only qualification I can claim for this honour, you have been doing me for the past three years, is my deep and abiding interest in the study and practice of public administration.

You will agree with me that ever since we gained Independence, we have witnessed a substantial increase in the number of our national problems. To begin with, we inherited poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, to mention a few. Then came seemingly paradoxical problems, like drought and floods. In the recent weeks, however, public administration in the country as we all know has been under extraordinary pressure as a result of unprecedented floods, first in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, and later in West Bengal. Indeed, thousands of people in parts of West Bengal still continue to reel under the fury of the flood waters. I sometimes wonder if one of the important reasons for at least some of the

problems and crisis we face today is our inability to foresee them in time. Public administration has to remain wide awake to the changes in the environment. It has to remain constantly alert and to continually monitor the changing social scenario. Administrative inertia could be a patent impediment to development administration. We have to be pro-active and not reactive. We have to develop a system wherein we anticipate problems, and remain in a state of preparedness. We find our administration, quite often, engulfed by problems. The end result is that a multitude of men, women and children, already living below subsistence level, are subjected to further suffering and privation. Our efforts to rebuild the nation will be frustrated unless we seek constantly to improve our capacity to come to grips with problems. The average citizen judges the entire administration by the shortcomings of those officials and agencies with whom he comes in contact. When there is breakdown of administrative machinery and things go wrong, he is ready to find fault with everyone connected with administration.

Administrative reform is needed all along the line and we are constantly striving for it. But it is very badly needed at the 'cutting edge' level where the people meet the government in face to face encounters. The post office, the railway booking counter, the rural extension worker, the primary health centres—these are the agencies where the image of Government is made or marred.

Those who have entered and accepted public service as a career have a special responsibility to cultivate that zeal we call the 'public spirit'. That does not, however, come forth just by being in public service. It has to be created and imbibed. There is no better reward for a civil servant than the ready appreciation from members of the public.

Efficiency is no doubt very important. But when it comes to public administration, something more than managerial efficiency is required. Prompt service—be it in the form of a domestic electricity connection, road repairs or relief to the flood-stricken—creates the feeling amongst the citizens that there is good administration. The true attitude of the administrators is more often expressed in terms of courtesy, respect and a feeling for the people

amongst whom they work, acting for them and not over them.. This, in turn, will bring dividends in the form of regard and response from the people.

If you would recall, last year the Members' Annual Conference focussed its attention on a fascinating topic, namely, 'Public Administration and the Citizen: How far Public Administration can be Public !' I am sure such debates and discussions go a long way in sensitising the public servants to the virtues of being both humane and effective.

The sources and the effects of the problems that strain us today are only too well known to be repeated. I would only like to stress that the public administration that does not adjust itself to or take into account the rapidly changing demands of the social and economic conditions today will gradually cease to be effective in terms of its real goals or objectives. We have got to analyse our whole governmental system, so as to make it more responsive to the people it is supposed to serve; and also to vitalise those who are inside it. For an apathetic civil servant will not only do nothing for the organisation but, on the other hand, may harm it in many respects.

We have still to go a long way to make public administration more efficient and socially responsive. Traditional structures, traditional procedures and rules and regulations have got entrenched in our system. They must give way to new modes of organising work and new patterns of human behaviour. This whole question of the reorganisation of public administration in India—a gigantic task, no doubt should be given the most earnest thought by competent and responsible practitioners as well as the academicians and bodies like the IIPA so that important developments may be looked for in this direction in the foreseeable future.

I have no doubt in my mind that we have both the resources and the potential to undertake such a job. All that is needed is the will and the commitment. This can come through training and research effort, to raise the level of consciousness to create a 'being' who is humane and professionally sound.