



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
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- ii. subjecting the executive to constant scrutiny of the legislature
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- iii. maintaining **bureaucratic neutrality**
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- **Accountability** is a complementary principle to responsibility.
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- But the idea of lateral entry seems to be opting for **efficiency** at the cost of accountability.
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- There is no assurance of accountability, bureaucratic neutrality and conformity to due process.
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Source: The Hindu

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