

DEBATES ON ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN INDIA

TRANSFERS

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SUCCESSION LIST
OF DISTRICT OFFICERS

Sl. No.	NAME OF THE COLLECTORS & DIST. MAGISTRATES	PERIOD FROM	TO
1.	SRI B. MOHNTI, O.A.S. (I)	1.11.49	20.11.49
2.	SRI R.G. DAS, I.A.S.	21.11.49	17.3.50
3.	SRI S.S. MURTY, I.A.S.	18.3.52	13.9.54
4.	SRI R.N. SALETOR, I.A.S.	14.9.54	20.4.57
5.	SRI B.G. RAO PATNAIK, I.A.S.	21.4.57	15.8.59
6.	SRI P.S. HABEES MOHAMED, I.A.S.	16.8.59	16.7.61
7.	SRI T.U. VIJAYA SEKHARAN, I.A.S.	17.7.61	11.11.63
8.	SRI J.P. DAS, I.A.S.	12.11.63	10.11.66
9.	SRI H. KHAN, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	11.11.66	24.11.68
10.	SRI S.K. LALL, I.A.S.	25.11.68	7.8.69
11.	SRI S. MORWEIN, I.A.S. Inc.	8.8.69	8.7.70
12.	SRI S.K. LALL, I.A.S.	9.7.67	28.8.68
13.	SRI P.C. PANDA, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	29.8.68	11.12.68
14.	SRI S.K. BAGU, I.A.S.	12.12.68	1.5.70
15.	SRI P. SAHU, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	2.5.70	7.6.70
16.	SRI S.K. BAGU, I.A.S.	8.6.70	18.8.70
17.	SRI B. GOBARDHAN, I.A.S.	19.8.70	25.5.71
18.	SMT. C.N. SWAMY, I.A.S.	26.5.71	25.9.71
19.	SRI B.B. MOHANTY, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	26.9.71	8.10.71
20.	SMT. C.N. SWAMY, I.A.S.	9.10.71	18.9.72
21.	SRI R.C. ROY, I.A.S.	19.9.72	2.3.73
22.	SRI H.S. SARKAR, I.A.S.	3.3.74	21.3.74
23.	SRI R.C. ROY, I.A.S.	22.3.74	17.5.74
24.	SRI K.B. VERMA, I.A.S.	18.5.74	7.11.74
25.	SRI P.K. MOHANTY, I.A.S.	7.11.75	8.7.76
26.	SRI M.K. PURKAIT, I.A.S.	18.7.76	7.12.77
27.	SRI B. JENA, I.A.S.	7.12.77	15.7.78
28.	SRI L. KINDO, I.A.S.	6.7.79	12.6.80
29.	MISS MEENA GUPTA, I.A.S.	17.6.81	27.8.81
30.	SRI U.S. BHATIA, I.A.S.	27.8.81	28.8.84
31.	SRI M.D. BEHURA, I.A.S.	29.8.84	14.6.85
32.	SRI R.B. PATTNAIK, I.A.S.	12.6.85	4.2.86
33.	SRI CHINMAY BAGU, I.A.S.	5.2.86	18.2.86
34.	SRI A. BEHERA, I.A.S.	19.2.86	4.9.86
35.	SRI A.K. PANDA, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	4.9.86	5.9.89
36.	SRI M. RAJAMANI, I.A.S.	5.9.89	9.12.91
37.	SRI G.K. DHAL, I.A.S.	8.12.91	2.1.92
38.	SRI ASHOK DALAVAI, I.A.S.	3.1.92	14.4.95
39.	SMT. G. SUVARNA RANI, I.A.S.	14.4.95	27.8.96
40.	SRI K.G. MOHAPATRA, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	27.8.96	6.9.96
41.	SRI PRADEEP JENA, I.A.S.	6.9.96	18.6.98
42.	SRI F.M. PRADHAN, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	17.6.98	8.7.98
43.	SRI PRADEEP JENA, I.A.S.	8.7.98	5.9.98
44.	SRI F.M. PRADHAN, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	6.9.98	7.9.98
45.	SRI SATYABRATA SAHU, I.A.S.	7.9.98	31.2.00
46.	SRI G. MATHIVATHANAN, I.A.S.	31.2.00	11.4.2001
47.	SRI F.M. PRADHAN, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	51.2.00	51.10.01
48.	SRI HEMANTA SHARMA, I.A.S.	51.2.00	1.5.03
49.	SRI F.M. PRADHAN, O.A.S. (I) Inc.	1.5.03	18.5.03
50.	SRI SASWAT MISHRA, I.A.S.	7.5.03	24.6.05
51.	SRI N.B.S. RAJPUT, I.A.S.	24.6.05	11.4.2007
52.	SRI BRAJAJ KISHORE MAJHI, O.A.S. I (S. B. MC)	11.4.2007	12.4.2007
53.	SRI PRAMOD CHANDRA PATNAIK, I.A.S.	12.4.2007	22.6.2010



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DEBATES ON ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN INDIA: TRANSFERS

1. INTRODUCTION

India has a long history of periodic transfers of senior administrators. As the First Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969 (First ARC), notes, the practice of periodic transfers was historically devised with the view of preventing officials from acquiring personal influence in a manner that could harm or diminish the influence of the ruling political powers. Officers used to be rotated from their posts every 3 to 4 years. The First ARC declared such a system of periodic transfers to be “antiquated,” stating that “it [was] no longer necessary for the Government to be suspicious of its own employees” (1966, p. 110). The commission argued that frequent transfers also interfered with development work, which required officers to be closely associated with the programmes and communities that they were serving. Further, these transfers hamper the officers’ job satisfaction and sense of achievement. Thus, the First ARC laid down that periodic transfers should be exercised only where a post carried regulatory responsibilities; in any post involving development activities and programme management, transfers should be an exception.

Despite these recommendations, transfers have remained an inexorable feature of the higher civil services in India. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008 (Second ARC), notes that “frequent transfers of civil servants continue to be one of the most vexatious governance problems still facing India” (p. 182). The Commission details that, between 1986 and 2006, 48–60% of the total strength of the IAS spent less than 1 year in their respective postings. The number of IAS officers who spent more than 3 years in their respective postings is consistently less than 10% of the total strength in that period. Similarly, another study of the bureaucracy has shown that, from 1980 to 2000, the average tenure of IAS officers at their posting was only 16 months (Iyer and Mani, 2012).

This working paper provides an overview of the reform discourse on the process of transfers of higher civil services officers in India. An analysis of various reform committee reports since the 1980s, shows that transfers are associated with two broad attributes of the higher civil services: the effectiveness of administration and governance, and the insulation of civil servants from political interference. In addressing the issues around transfers, recommendations of reform committees have been aimed at enhancing the former and restoring the latter. These recommendations include monetary benefits, fixation of a minimum tenure for officers, and the establishment of an independent body to oversee transfers.

The working paper includes information from the reports of the First Administrative Reforms Committee (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969), the Hota Committee (Hota Committee, 2004), Second Administrative Reforms Committee (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008), multiple Central Pay Commissions (Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh), the Civil Services Survey (2010) and the Sarkaria Commission (1988). It also references court cases on transfers, amendments to The Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954 and news articles relating to transfers of higher civil service officers. Among the aforementioned resources, the Hota Committee and the Second ARC have examined the issue of transfers in the most detail.

The timeline on page 4 contains an overview of the sequence of events and reports pertaining to transfers, elaborating on the trajectory as well as summary of major recommendations and reforms to address the issue.

Figure 1 A timeline of debates on transfers

	Reform Report/Event	Important Contributions
1966	Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Personnel Administration	<p>Argues that the system of periodic transfers are antiquated because it was no longer necessary for the government to be suspicious of its officers</p> <p>Recommends that transfers be an exception for all posts connected with development and management of programmes</p>
1988	Sarkaria Commission Report	<p>Identifies that transfers have been misused by politicians to discipline civil service officers</p> <p>Against the establishment of an independent body overseeing transfers</p>
1997	Fifth Central Pay Commission Report	<p>Identifies that transfers are used as a tool to punish civil servants</p> <p>Recommends a fixed minimum tenure of 3 to 5 years and the formulation of an independent Civil Services Board to oversee transfers</p>
2004	Hota Committee (Committee on Civil Service Reforms) Report	<p>Identifies that frequent transfers reduce the effectiveness of administration and governance, and erodes political neutrality</p> <p>Recommends a fixed minimum tenure of at least 3 years, and the establishment of an independent Civil Services/Establishment Board, that is statutory in nature, to oversee and investigate premature transfers</p>
2008	Second Administrative Reforms Committee Report on Personnel Administration	<p>Identifies that transfers reduce effectiveness and the officers' job satisfaction impede their career development, and erodes political neutrality</p> <p>Recommends a fixed minimum tenure of 2 to 3 years and the establishment of an independent Civil Services Authority to oversee transfers</p>
2008	Sixth Central Pay Commission Report	<p>Reiterates the necessity of a pay edge for IAS officers vis-à-vis other services to compensate for the hardships associated with frequent transfers</p>
2010	Civil Services Survey	<p>Highlights that officers view transfers as a politicised and non-transparent process, often used to harass and discipline honest officers, which results in low job satisfaction and motivation</p> <p>Officers suggest monetary benefits to compensate for the hardships of transfers, fixed minimum tenure and the oversight of an independent body</p>
2013	<i>T.S.R Subramanian & Ors vs Union of India & Ors</i>	<p>The Supreme Court ordered Union and State Governments to secure minimum fixed tenure for all civil service officers and establish independent Civil Service Boards in all states and at the centre</p>
2014	Amendment to The Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules, 1954	<p>Establishes a fixed minimum tenure of at least 2 years for all IAS officers and directs all states to create Civil Services Boards to oversee and investigate any premature transfers</p>
2015	Seventh Central Pay Commission Report	<p>Deliberates, but fails to come to a consensus, on the maintenance of a pay edge for IAS officers vis-à-vis other services to compensate for hardships of frequent transfers</p>

2. WHY TRANSFERS MATTER

Various reform committees highlight that frequent transfers due to a lack of fixed tenure is a pervasive problem among the higher civil services. They identify political interference in the functioning of the bureaucracy as the root cause of transfers, which leads to administrative and governance issues. The following section details the reasons, forms and consequences of this political interference and its attendant problems for administration and governance.

Political Interference

Political interference and the erosion of the political neutrality of the civil services, has been interpreted as both a cause and an effect of frequent transfers. Reports identify that changes in government are generally accompanied by a “wholesale” transfer of officers (Second ARC, 2008, p. 275). IAS officers particularly face these frequent transfers and intense pulls and pressures in their early careers (Sixth Pay Commission, 2008). The Hota Committee observes that with every change in government, there is a re-shuffling of officers, particularly in key postings in the district. As a result, the average tenure for District Magistrates/Collectors is less than one year in some states (2004). The Commission points out that in State Governments especially, officers are frequently transferred due to the “whims and caprices of local politicians and other vested interests, who prevail upon the Chief Minister/Minister to order such transfers” (2004, p. 54). These Chief Ministers often have to oblige powerful factions in their own political parties through these transfers. Similarly, the Second ARC (2008) argues that the Union and State Ministers are more concerned with administrative matters like transfers, rather than policymaking, resulting in the gradual erosion of the “political neutrality” of the higher civil services, which was its hallmark feature in the pre-Independence era as well as in the period right after Independence (p. 274).

As the 1988 Sarkaria Commission notes, transfers are also used in state governments as a method of “disciplining” officers to make them more “pliable,” especially when they are known to be uncompromising in maintaining the “probity and impartiality of the administration” which puts the officer in a direct “collision with his/[their] political superiors” (section 8.10.02). This view is echoed in the Civil Services Survey report which indicates that officers view transfers as being used as a means of “coercion and harassment” of honest officers (2010, pp. 53). The lack of transparency that allows for

such political interference, reduces the fairness of the system. The resulting “‘politicization’ of postings and transfer was mostly strongly felt in the states as pulls and pressures from local politicians were much more than at the central government level” (Civil Services Survey, p. 109). Officers note that they fear being posted in an obscure post—or even worse having a string of such postings—as a “price for their honesty and commitment” (Civil Services Survey, pp. 108-109). Similarly, the Seventh Pay Commission argues that an officer who is “uncompromising in the matter of maintaining the probity and impartiality of administration [often] finds [themselves] on a path of collision with [their] political superiors” (2015, p.190). These politicians then use the method of frequent transfers from one posting to another—with all its attendant inconveniences—in order to discipline officers into pliability.

Thus, these committee reports indicate that the politically motivated use of transfers dilutes the autonomy and authority of officers and their commitment to the values of honesty and impartiality. Frequent transfers are viewed as both disrupting the ideals of what the higher civil services should be, as well as enabling negative consequences for the long-term health of the system. This view is critical of politicians and the executive wing of states and the Centre (particularly ministers), and not of the officers themselves.

On the flip side, reform committee reports highlight that frequent transfers are also associated with corruption and lack of accountability of officers. It has been noted that officers can sometimes develop an “unhealthy nexus with power brokers and... not hesitate to resort to questionable means to get good postings in India or abroad,” thus utilising the instrument of transfers for their own benefit (Hota Committee, 2004, pp. 5-6). Similarly, the 2002 National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) notes that frequent transfers have “strengthened the temptation in services to collusive practices with politicians to avoid the inconvenience of transfers and to gain advantages by ingratiating themselves to political masters, which was at the expense of being fair and independent” (section 6.7.1). Respondents in the Civil Services Survey (2010) stated that “political blessings” influenced transfers (p. 113). Therefore, in such cases, political interference in the bureaucracy through transfers is brought in by the officers themselves, regardless of their requirement to be impartial and politically neutral.

In sum, reform committee reports indicate that politically motivated transfers are a product of a lack of fixed tenure, which allows for transfers to be used as a tool of disciplining officers into serving the interests of politicians and the executive wing of the government. Conversely, they are also seen to be associated with corruption among officers. While reform committees have focussed on mitigating such interference, they have also identified that such transfers can affect administration and governance, as detailed in the following section.

Administrative and Governance issues

Frequent transfers have been identified as one of the key reasons for the lack of effectiveness of higher civil service officers (Hota Committee 2004, Second ARC 2008). As the Hota Committee details, the “absence of a fixed tenure of officials is one of the most important reasons for tardy implementation of government policies... [and] for waste of public money because of inadequate supervision of programmes under implementation” (2004, pp. 53-54). The rapid turnover of officers prevents them from gaining adequate experience and knowledge at their job—especially about their posting’s particular socio-cultural context and the issues they need to redress—or institute and sustain reforms, particularly long-term ones (Second ARC, 2008). Thus, frequent transfers are seen as a hindrance to the development of expertise and understanding of local context, both of which are integral to the functioning of the higher civil services.

Reform committees also highlight that frequent transfers demotivate officers as they are unable to witness the fruits of their labour (Second ARC, 2008). They curtail officers’ incentive to specialise in their field as these transfer orders are not issued keeping in mind the needs of the officers with respect to their careers, and affects children’s education and family togetherness (Civil Services Survey, 2010). In sum, these affect the personal job satisfaction of officers. Together, reduced functionality, effectiveness, job satisfaction and motivation all hinder the ability of officers and the system to adequately deliver services to the public—they are unable to function as “effective instruments of public policy” (Hota Committee, 2004, pp. 5). The Second ARC notes, “that the higher the rate of personnel turnover, the lower the organizational efficiency” (2008, p. 182).

Thus, various reform committees have had to develop recommendations that address the two most important dimensions of frequent transfers. First, to re-establish

the officers’ insulation from political interference in the bureaucracy to protect them from unjust reprimands for their honesty and impartiality and mitigate corruption. Second, to restore and enhance the administrative and governance capacity of the civil services and the personal job satisfaction of officers. The following section details the recommendations proposed by these various reform committees to achieve these goals.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations of various reform committees to address the issue of frequent transfers broadly fall into two categories: monetary benefits to compensate for the hardships and inconveniences associated with transfers and the establishment of a fixed minimum tenure for all officers as well as an independent body to oversee and investigate premature transfers.

Monetary Benefits

The IAS has traditionally enjoyed an edge in compensation vis-à-vis the other services, which has been maintained right from the First Central Pay Commission in 1946. The Sixth Pay Commission maintains the need for such an edge for a variety of reasons which includes the fact that the initial postings for IAS officers are generally to “small places [where] they face frequent transfers as well as pulls and pressures that they need to stand up to early in their career” (2008, p. 167). Thus, the Sixth Pay Commission addresses the issues and hardships associated with transfers through monetary compensation in the form of an edge in pay, while also seeking to ensure that the “brightest candidates” continue to join the services (p. 167).

The Seventh Pay Commission (2015), on the other hand, maintained that such frequent transfers and postings to small places are common across all Services, not just the IAS. Yet, the commission records that after much deliberation, it was unable to reach a consensus on whether the IAS should receive an edge in pay. This suggests that members of the commission continued to hold the view that the particular hardships, including frequent transfers among the IAS, need to be monetarily compensated.

Monetary benefits to mitigate the hardships of transfers, especially cross-country ones, have also been suggested by officers who have an “All-India transfer liability” in the Civil Services Survey. Suggestions for these benefits include furnished accommodation, assured rewards for

hardship postings and free education for their children (2010). These reforms aim at easing the careers and personal lives of civil service officers. This is in alignment with the generalised guidelines for government transfers (including but not limited to the higher civil services) issued by the Fifth Pay Commission (1997). The guidelines state that transfer policies should be made detailed and comprehensive such that they account for officers' personal needs such as healthcare, their children's education, healthcare support for physical disabilities, intra-marriage between officers and more (Government of India, 1997).

Fixed Minimum Tenure and an Independent Body Overseeing Transfers

In order to address the issue of frequent and arbitrary transfers, particularly when politically motivated, most reform committees recommend a fixed minimum tenure for officers in their respective postings. The Fifth Pay Commission proposed a minimum tenure of 3 to 5 years in normal posts, and 2 to 3 years in sensitive posts where opportunities for the development of vested interests exist (1997). The Hota Committee recommended a fixed minimum tenure of at least three years in a post, and similarly, the Second ARC also recommended a fixed tenure, with retired civil service officers suggesting a minimum of 2 to 3 years in each post, especially for field postings (Hota Committee, 2004; Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008). All three reform committees note the importance of such a fixed minimum tenure to ensure the continuity and stability of administration, and to enable expertise and local knowledge accumulation among officers. None of them detail the reasoning behind the particular number of years recommended as the minimum tenure or the rationale for how the specified duration would guarantee improvements in administrative efficiency. However, they do concur that a fixed minimum tenure is only the first step in addressing the issue of political interference. In order to mitigate it altogether, all three committees recommend the formulation and establishment of an independent body overseeing transfers, that is, a Civil Services Authority or Board.

The debate around the presence of such an independent body has existed across several reform committees. The 1988 Sarkaria Commission considered the possibility of an independent tribunal to examine cases of politically motivated transfers, but finally found that such a body was unnecessary as officers of the All India Services could present their grievances to the Central Administrative

Tribunal. Instead, it simply recommended that the Union Government dissuade State Governments from using the powers of transfer, promotion, posting and suspension of All India Services officers in order to "discipline" them (Sarkaria Commission, 1988). The Conference of Chief Ministers, 1997, also identified the issues associated with frequent and arbitrary transfers, but in line with the Second ARC (2008), it held reservations about the constitution of a Civil Services Board. Yet, the Conference still recommended that such boards be established in State Governments to assist the political executive, which would maintain the final authority in facilitating transfers.

The Fifth Central Pay Commission examined the issue of transfers of senior duty officers in detail and recommended the establishment of a high-powered Civil Services Board (CSB) comprising three members, constituted by both the Centre and State Governments. The Commission recommended that consultation with this board would be compulsory before ordering any premature transfer. Reasons for the premature transfer of officers would have to be submitted to the CSB, whose report would have to be accepted by the government. Whenever such a report was rejected, all proceedings would have to be placed before the Table of the House at its next session as well as shared with the concerned officer should they choose recourse with the courts (Government of India, 1997). The Fifth Pay Commission also recommended that every department should have a high-powered board to review any premature transfers of Group "A" officers, as well as to act as an appellate body. The Commission emphasised the need for transparency in these transfers, proposing that the administrative reasoning behind them should be detailed in the order itself. It also notes that officers should have a right to appeal such orders (1997).

The Hota Committee reiterated the need for an independent Civil Services/Establishment Board composed of senior civil servants to oversee the transfers of civil service officers that is statutory in nature, set up under the Civil Services Act. In the Committee's proposed set up in the Government of India, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet would be the final authority for transfer of officers under the Central Staffing Scheme as well as other senior officers. In States, the Chief Minister would be the final authority for transfer of all Group "A" officers of State Service and AIS officers. Further, it detailed out a process of appeals: in case an officer is transferred before their normal tenure, even under the orders of the Chief Minister, they should have

the right to appeal the decision before a three-member Ombudsman (Hota Committee, 2004). It clarifies that the “Chief Minister as the highest political executive has the final powers to order transfer of an officer before his tenure is over” (Hota Committee, p. 56).

Finally, the Second ARC references the Hota Committee report in its recommendation that its proposed independent body—the Central Civil Services Authority—not only oversee transfers but also be charged with the responsibility of fixing the tenure for all civil service posts under the union government, with its decision being binding on the government. It emphasised that a State Civil Service Authorities for the states with similar responsibilities needed to urgently be taken up by state governments, as tenures there are even more unstable (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

Not only do these reform committees see the need for a fixed minimum tenure and an independent body to oversee transfers, but officers also hold the same view (Civil Services Survey, 2010). Together, these two measures aim to address the political question of frequent transfers by establishing mitigating conditions towards their arbitrary and non-transparent use by the executive wings of the State and Centre. In doing so, these recommendations also aspire towards preventing administrative and governance inefficiencies. It is clear that these recommendations hold the executive wing accountable for their political interference while protecting and empowering officers—especially by emphasising their right to appeal and oppose such orders. It is less clear whether these recommendations will adequately address the issues of internal corruption, where officers utilize political interference to their own benefit.

In October 2013, in the case *T.S.R Subramanian & Ors vs Union of India & Ors*, the Supreme Court of India referenced these very reports and their recommendations against the use of frequent transfers. In its judgement, the court ordered the government to issue appropriate directions to secure a minimum fixed tenure of service for all civil service officers as well as establish an independent Civil Service Board at the centre and state levels. In response, in 2014, the union government amended The Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules, 1954, to include a minimum tenure of at least two years in each posting for all IAS officers, and the establishment of a Civil Services Board in each state to oversee any transfers made before this specified tenure.

The Act, however, maintains that the State or Union government has the right to amend, modify or reject the recommendations of the Civil Services Board for reasons recorded in writing. Thus, while the recommendations of both fixed minimum tenure and the establishment of an independent body to oversee transfers have been implemented by the government, in practice, frequent transfers of civil service officers continue to be a pervasive problem. Several states have failed to set up Civil Services Boards despite the directives of the SC and the Act (Tikku, 2015). This indicates a gap in the uptake as well as implementation of these rules.

4. DISCUSSION

The fundamental problem in the debate about transfers is that higher civil service officers are expected to enact the will of the elected politicians while simultaneously remaining insulated from political interference in their functioning—protecting “[the civil service’s] integrity, its impartiality and its pervasive streak of honesty” (Hota Committee, 2004, p. 68). The Second ARC argues that the pursuit of stable tenure for officers needs to be balanced against the government’s “inherent right to transfer a civil servant” (2008, pp. 71-72). Within academic literature and international research on transfers, this contradiction has been dubbed the “independence versus responsiveness” debate. Civil service officers have to be “responsive” to the needs and demands of the government (i.e. ministers) in order to enact their vision, while retaining a degree of “independence” from these very political masters to ensure that public services are administered and delivered to all citizens, freely and fairly (Lodge et al, 2013). Thus, reforms in the civil services across the world aim “to avoid the extremes of a self-serving public service immune to political leadership, or an over-politicised public service hostage to patronage and serving partisan rather than national interests” (Matheson et al, 2007, p. 5).

In India, the failure of states to establish a Civil Services Board is rooted in this tension. In Punjab, the establishment of the Civil Services Board in 2020 was strongly protested by members of the ruling political party, who argued that officers did not grant them their “due respect,” as they were appointed by the former government. The Civil Services Board was seen as reducing the power and influence of these political leaders, even as the Punjab government noted that its establishment and protection of minimum tenure would enhance the administration of the state (Vasdev,

2020). A key reason for the failure of the Civil Services Board, even after establishment and the adherence to a minimum tenure, rests in this contradictory relationship between civil service officers and political leadership. An easy reconciliation of this tension may prove difficult—as the Hota Committee notes, “the relationship between the Ministers and the Civil Servants in a parliamentary democracy such as [India] is not amenable to any precise definition” (2004, p. 16).

This tension is further complicated by the fact that transfers in India may also be influenced by other factors such as caste, religion, and gender. For example, Iyer and Mani, in their examination of the issue of transfers, find that officers belonging to the same caste as the Chief Minister's base party are more likely to be assigned to important positions (2009). Reform committees make no mention of caste while detailing their recommendations to address frequent transfers. For this reason, further inquiry into the association between two, as well as other relevant factors, in future studies is extremely pertinent.

Recommendations of monetary benefits advanced by the various Pay Commissions allow for the issue of transfers to be addressed by bypassing some of these

more fundamental tensions. These benefits are intended to address and compensate for the inconveniences and hardships associated with transfers, since addressing the roots of the issue of transfers—its politicisation and its consequences for administration—are structural challenges beyond the scope of what commissions created for administrative reform can realistically address. Monetary benefits do not act as a means of preventing frequent transfers but equip officers with the material resources to manage them.

In conclusion, it is clear that transfers can neither be categorised as being an entirely administrative issue, nor an entirely political one. Reform committees over the years have utilised administrative recommendations to address the issue to various degrees of success. In order to effectively mitigate frequent transfers, reforms must lie in a continuum between administrative and political solutions. It is worth examining the potential role of the legislative at the Centre and in the states in mitigating political interference in the bureaucracy. Reforms will need to evolve as a means to not only restore the boundaries between the civil service and the executive, but also to re-examine and reconcile the dual and contradictory roles of officers.

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