

# FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES IN INDIA: THE ABSENT POLICY

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The [State Capacity Initiative](#) at the Centre for Policy Research is an interdisciplinary research and practice programme focused on addressing the challenges of the 21st-century Indian state. The purpose of this initiative is to place the critical challenges of building state capacity at the heart of the field of policy research in India, where it has always belonged but remains surprisingly marginalised. We, therefore, start with first principles and ground ourselves in existing realities to deepen and expand the understanding of the challenges and possibilities of building state capacity in a democratic and federal India. Our programme of work focuses on the changing roles of the Indian state: institutional design, implementation and administrative capacity; the challenges of regulatory and fiscal capacity; and the complex and changing relations between society, politics and state capacity in India.

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# FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES IN INDIA: THE ABSENT POLICY

## ABSTRACT

In the context of a high level of dissatisfaction with the delivery of government services in India, this paper traces the evolution of policy regarding key actors in this process—frontline functionaries or street-level bureaucrats. Frontline functionaries form a special subset of the bureaucracy as they come in close contact with citizens, and negotiate government policy with specific citizen needs. The paper provides a historical background illustrating the continuity of colonial era ideas with the current policy regarding frontline functionaries, and also examines it against broader developments in policy and the administrative structure. The policy regarding frontline functionaries is scrutinised against their three roles: as government employees, as professionals or skilled workers in specific fields, and as workers serving the community.

The paper shows that frontline functionaries, only loosely connected to the government before colonization, subsequently became government employees, as the government sought to increase the efficiency of revenue collection from land and forests, and to maintain order. Because the colonial government minimized administrative costs, it paid frontline functionaries very poorly, placed them near the bottom of an extremely hierarchical bureaucratic structure and provided them with minimal promotion avenues. Frontline functionaries were not considered worthy of serious responsibility, expected to follow orders, had little education and training and were treated harshly by senior officials. Consequently, their performance was unsatisfactory. They were often corrupt and exploited the community.

After Independence, as socio-economic development became a key government priority, several policy documents highlighted the importance of frontline functionaries in achieving government goals and providing services to citizens. This paper shows that, while many changes came about post-Independence, several colonial ideas regarding frontline functionaries persisted in policy and practice, leading to suboptimal outcomes. New types of frontline functionaries were recruited, especially in sectors concerned with socio-economic development, their salaries increased substantially, and reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes led to greater representation of these groups. However, frontline functionaries continued to be placed low in bureaucratic hierarchy with few chances of promotion. Their roles were reduced to executing narrow, pre-defined activities and government orders, rather than working towards community needs. At the same time, after the 1970's, as the role of political patronage and rent-seeking in government grew, frontline functionaries were politicised and became even more corrupt.

The emphasis on the professional development of frontline functionaries varied widely across departments. While the formal qualifications of all frontline functionaries rose steadily, the benefits from this development were constrained by the poor learning levels in government schools. Though professional training was institutionalized well for a few frontline functionaries such as agriculture extension workers, as a rule, training institutions were poorly staffed, context specific knowledge was underdeveloped and the quality of training remained inadequate. At the same time, as frontline functionaries carried out pre-defined activities and obeyed detailed government orders, they had little space to act as per community needs. Rent-seeking added to the hostile relationship with the community. Their role as government workers remained paramount, leaving little room for development of their professional identities and relationships with the community.

During the 1990s, the government sought to contain expenditure on the bureaucracy, and a large number of frontline functionaries were recruited on contract on very low salaries. After the late 1990s, government revenues picked up and new programmes in the social sector were initiated. However, the emphasis on minimizing expenditure on frontline functionaries remained, and low paid, contractual frontline functionaries continued to be recruited. These frontline functionaries agitated and litigated frequently to improve their service conditions. At times governments gave in to their demands, but at other times took harsh action.

The formal qualifications of frontline functionaries continued to rise, and after the mid 1990s, more funds became available for in-service training. However, the poor quality of schools and training institutions, along with inadequate development of context-specific knowledge base, reduced the impact of these positive developments. There was an increase in emphasis on the role of frontline functionaries vis-à-vis the community, but their space for responding to community needs remained shrunken as earlier because of the tight control exercised by the state governments. Rent-seeking continued to increase, further vitiating the relationship with the community.

The paper argues that, if social services are to improve, a policy framework regarding frontline functionaries needs to be articulated after extensive consultation and deliberation. The significance of frontline functionaries and the complexity of frontline work needs to be re-examined, and the status, salary, promotion avenues for frontline functionaries need to be duly reformed. In-depth consideration is needed about the professionalization of frontline functionaries with a focus on the creation of an appropriate knowledge base and institutional structure. Their links to the community need to be strengthened by providing them adequate autonomy to act as per contextual needs and by strengthening modes of community interaction.

# FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES IN INDIA: THE ABSENT POLICY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of government services and effectiveness of policy implementation in India, but little analysis of the underlying causes in policy documents or academic literature. Situated in this context are frontline functionaries, such as police constables, school teachers and patwaris, who play a key role in delivering services and implementing policy, and have a significant impact on outcomes. However, making frontline functionaries more effective is not a major concern within or outside government. There is no comprehensive policy articulation about frontline functionaries and they are subjects of few studies. At the same time, a large network of frontline functionaries has developed over time. During this process, a host of decisions have been made at various points of time about them, their role, status in government, salary, required professional qualifications, training and so on. These decisions have often been taken in an ad hoc fashion, rather than as part of careful consideration about maximising effectiveness.

In the developed world, there has been growing academic interest in ‘street-level bureaucrats’ or frontline functionaries, as a distinct group of public employees, who have a high degree of interaction with citizens, and perform the complex task of combining the needs of individual citizens and policy frameworks, which may not complement each other. Frontline functionaries have been visualised as having a high level of autonomy in dealing with individual clients and situations, and as making policy on the ground through their decisions. However, the characteristics of frontline functionaries are determined by the specific socio-political context and policies regarding them, which tend to be very different in developed and developing countries.

The paper examines policies regarding frontline functionaries in India and how they impact such workers and their work. In this paper, the term ‘policy’ includes stated policies, as well as decisions taken from time to time without a clear articulation of the rationale, as these have the same impact. Notably, though frontline functionaries are state government employees, policies regarding them tend to be similar across states, because the central government has an important influence. Moreover, across different types of frontline functionaries, policies vary to some degree, there are also strong commonalities.

As administrative structures and processes tend to be stable across long periods of time, the paper includes a historical background, from which continuities and changes can be traced and examined in light of new contexts. Additionally, given that policies regarding frontline functionaries are propelled by the broader policy context and administrative structure, especially field administration and the bureaucracy, major developments in these areas are also discussed. Further, policy regarding frontline functionaries is analysed in terms of their three key aspects— as government employees whose role,

status, working conditions and so on are determined by the government; as professional workers, with specific qualifications, training and skills; and as community workers, with specific ways of serving and relating to the community.

## Frontline Functionaries Pre-Independence

Before the colonial era, in the Mughal empire, frontline functionaries existed in a decentralised administrative system in which power was vested with the emperor's bureaucracy and local zamindars. The emperor's bureaucracy comprised several ranks of officials, but they were appointed as per the emperor's preference and not on merit. Most officers did not get a salary but kept a share of the revenue that they collected. Zamindars derived their authority from their rights to collect revenue. On the ground, the key governance functions were revenue collection, maintenance of order and dispensation of justice.

Parallel to the emperor's bureaucracy and zamindars, villages were self-governing in several aspects through panchayats or village councils, with headmen and chowkidars or guards performing key functions. While several workers provided services to villagers, they were not 'frontline functionaries', as their ties to the state or even zamindars were weak or non-existent. For example, the patwaris served as accountants for peasants and assisted in maintaining land records, but were often farmers as well. The post was usually hereditary and villagers paid patwaris small sums and prerequisites for services.

This system changed in the colonial era, as the government sought to maximise revenues, especially from land and forests, and maintain order with greater efficiency. Minor attention was also paid to socio-economic development and provision of social services. In this period, the public administration system became more complex as several departments were established to address a range of subjects at the central and provincial level. In the field, the district emerged as the key unit of administration, with the district collector as its administrative head. A centralised and salaried bureaucracy developed, which was organised into various higher and lower services, which were in tandem with the cleavages of race and class. While a few attempts were made to establish partially elected local governments, these remained weak and ineffective.

In this framework, frontline functionaries began to emerge as government employees rather than agents of zamindars and community service providers. Patwaris came to be paid from government coffers, their records were systematised and supervision tightened. The government also recruited police constables and forest guards. There were few or no frontline functionaries in the sectors for socio-economic development and social welfare, as this was not a priority of the government. Here, government initiatives were minor, and if they existed, various means, such as aided schools, voluntary activity and more, were employed.

An important concern for the colonial government was to keep administrative costs low. Consequently, while the higher bureaucracy was extremely well paid, frontline functionaries were paid a pittance. Moreover, they were placed at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy and had very few avenues for promotion. They were given little responsibility, looked upon with suspicion by senior officers, monitored stringently, and disciplined punitively with fines and demotions. Yet, they often worked in harsh and risky conditions. With these working conditions, they resisted against the state in various ways, including being absent from duty, working in a lax manner, sometimes even quitting their jobs. They also formed unions and associations.

As the spread of school education was extremely limited in colonial India, frontline functionaries usually had poor educational qualifications. They were also poorly trained for their role. In the case of police constables and forest guards, specialised training was not seen as necessary, as they were simply expected to follow orders. Training schools were set up for patwaris as well as school teachers, though these were few in number and of poor quality.

Frontline functionaries were expected to follow government orders rather than serve citizens as per their needs. They often acted against ordinary people. For instance, police constables sought bribes from the weak, while protecting the interests of landlords and the wealthy. They were very corrupt and turned to blackmail, extortion and petty embezzlement. At the same time, the government established a degree of control over village workers like the village headmen and chowkidars.

Towards the end of the colonial period, as ideas about citizen welfare developed in the freedom movement, a new type of worker, the 'gram sevak', or village worker came into existence in various developmental projects started by Gandhians and other social workers. Gram sevaks worked for the citizens, introducing community initiatives in health, education, hygiene and so on. At the same time in the alternative vision of India that the nationalists were constructing, numerous initiatives in the social sectors were planned, along with frontline functionaries to implement them.

## Frontline Functionaries After Independence

### The Context

After Independence, government goals shifted radically, from collecting revenue and maintaining order to socio-economic development, leading to numerous programmes in agriculture, education, health, poverty alleviation etc. With the emphasis on socio-economic development, the number of government departments and organisations grew rapidly. Moreover, in the new democracy, citizens were guaranteed fundamental rights. However, in the regulatory sector, there were several continuities from the colonial era, with the police retaining their preventive powers.

In the field, the district remained the key unit of administration. There was an initial attempt at empowering local governments and promoting the holistic development of villages through the Community Development (CD) programme. However, this initiative was abandoned as a new agriculture policy, focused on technology and on areas with potential for high productivity, was

adopted. Subsequently, socio-economic development was promoted through various departmental schemes that specified the activities to be undertaken as well as other criteria, and the number of departmental offices in the field grew. Moreover, in most states, local governments were disempowered and numerous departmental officials implemented programmes for socio-economic development under the supervision of the district collector. In 1993, local governments were given constitutional status, but most states did not devolve significant powers to them. Through this period, the number of grassroots institutions such as schools and health centres grew steadily.

As numerous government programmes were initiated, the types and number of government employees increased substantially. But there was significant continuity from the colonial era in the organisation of the bureaucracy into higher and lower services, with few promotion avenues for junior employees. However, reservations for scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) were introduced. In many states, reservations for other backward castes were introduced as well, and in 1993, in the Government of India too. Additionally, the difference between the salaries of the highest and lowest paid government servants was reduced substantially. At the same time, from the 1970s onwards, there was a continuous increase in patronage-based functioning and rent-seeking. Transfers of officials were based on their ability to please those in power, and the bureaucracy became increasingly partisan and corrupt, a trend that has continued to date.

After 1991, along with the speeding up of economic liberalisation, there was an emphasis on reducing government expenditure, especially on the bureaucracy. Recruitments slowed down and several posts remained vacant as personnel retired. In the late 1990s, economic growth picked up and government revenues began to rise. Consequently, several new developmental programmes were undertaken. However, the emphasis on minimising expenditure on the bureaucracy remained. With growing outlays in the social sectors, more personnel had to be recruited. To reduce expenditure, they were often recruited on contract and on low salaries, especially at the lower levels. In addition, as social services remained unsatisfactory, laws to ensure transparency in government functioning and citizens' rights for elementary education and employment were passed. The emphasis on the use of technology in government began in the mid-1980s, and after 2014, picked up speed.

## **Frontline Functionaries: Independence to 1990**

### Growth of Frontline Functionaries

Post-independence, the ambitious national goal of socio-economic development demanded a greater outreach of the state into society. Consequently, as several policy documents show, frontline functionaries acquired a new significance, being the key link between the government and citizens. Initially, in the CD programme, multi-purpose village level workers were recruited for a group of five villages or so to address various subjects, such as agriculture, school education, sanitation and more. However, as the CD programme was abandoned, various departments began to recruit their own frontline functionaries separately. As new programmes were launched, new types of frontline functionaries including agriculture development workers, auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs),

and Anganwadi workers (AWWs) were recruited. In addition, the number of existing frontline functionaries such as police constables and school teachers grew significantly.

## As Government Employees

The role of frontline functionaries was defined narrowly in terms of mandated activities under development schemes, rather than in terms of broad policy goals or the needs of the community. Moreover, their role changed with different government programmes. Frontline functionaries were not mandated to study and analyse the context and develop appropriate strategies, but to simply carry out scheme related activities. Additionally, the role of frontline functionaries in the regulatory sectors was not reconceptualised. For example, in spite of recommendations of the Police Commission (1979-81), police constables were kept away from investigative work and were envisaged as doing mechanical tasks as per orders from seniors. In some cases, such as for AWWs, the workload was unrealistically heavy.

Reservations helped increase the number of SC and ST recruits into frontline positions. More women were recruited as well, especially as programmes for women and children were launched. However, in cases where the required qualifications were high, such as for school teachers, SCs, STs and women remained under-represented. Moreover, they faced discrimination within the bureaucracy.

In continuation with the colonial practice, frontline functionaries were placed at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy and had very few chances of promotion, many retiring without even a single promotion. For some frontline functionaries, there was an improvement in salary and other benefits received. However, there were variations across frontline functionaries depending on their prescribed qualifications as well as the extent to which departments supported higher salaries for them. They did enjoy the security of tenure. The combination of job security and lack of promotion avenues produced a flat incentive structure, with little to be gained from excelling in work. An important exception here was the AWW, who was recruited on a very low salary on a temporary basis, with no possibility of promotion.

Many frontline functionaries continued to work in difficult conditions. For example, police constables worked an average of 13 hours a day and were rarely allowed holidays or leave. Infrastructure at the grassroots developed slowly and a large number of schools, Anganwadi centres and sub-health centres lacked even a building. Frontline functionaries worked in a centralised and hierarchical working environment. At times they were set targets that were difficult to achieve. Their opinions were rarely given weight and senior officials treated them harshly. As with the rest of the bureaucracy, transfers were used to manipulate frontline workers. With increasing rent-seeking within government, frontline functionaries too were politicised and became complicit in rent-seeking rackets.

In this scenario, the relationship of frontline functionaries with the state remained fraught with conflict. Unlike the colonial era, given their comfortable salaries, few left their jobs. Still, they formed unions and associations and demanded improved working conditions, as was witnessed in widespread and sometimes violent police agitations in the 1970s. Often, state governments responded positively to the demands, but at times they resorted to punitive action.

## Professionalization

The degree of skill with which frontline functionaries perform their role depends on their qualifications upon recruitment, training after recruitment, and professional growth through their career cycle. Three underlying factors impact the extent to which learning takes place at each stage, namely, the importance attached to skill-building of frontline functionaries, the extent to which context-specific knowledge is developed in their area of work, and the existing institutional structure for developing and systematising knowledge and training.

The stated importance of the professional development of frontline functionaries varied across departments. For instance, it was emphasised for school teachers and agriculture extension workers, but was less visible in case of AWWs. ANMs, on the other hand, worked independently and were envisaged as being less qualified than hospital nurses who worked under supervision.

The development of the knowledge base and the institutional structure was uneven too. It was developed most in agriculture after the mid-1960s. A network of research and training institutions was set up, which developed context-specific technologies and engaged with agriculture extension through district institutes. This ushered in the green revolution. However, it was a top-down structure, and could not address the needs of rain-fed areas.

In school education, an institutional structure for research and training was set up but remained poorly staffed. Context-specific pedagogic research and strategies remained underdeveloped. In many departments, the approach to creating research and training infrastructure was casual. In the health sector, social and public health remained underdeveloped as a field of knowledge, and the number of institutes to address it remained inadequate. In case of police constables, training institutes were set up but lacked adequate staff and infrastructure. For AWWs, the institutional structure remained poor.

All frontline functionaries were required to have some level of school education, usually high school or higher secondary, on recruitment. In addition, school teachers and sub-engineers were required to have specialised qualifications. A positive trend during this period was that, as the school system grew, the formal qualifications of frontline functionaries improved. However, the gains from this development remained limited as the quality of school education was poor. Moreover, in some areas, especially those with a large ST population, education levels remained low and adequately qualified candidates were not available. Similarly, as the education of women lagged behind that of men, the qualifications of women frontline functionaries such as ANMs and AWWs were insufficient in many areas.

While there are few studies regarding the induction training of frontline functionaries, available studies and commentary indicate that for most frontline functionaries, the training was inadequate in terms of duration and quality. In-service training for frontline functionaries was meagre, and few other opportunities and incentives were provided to them to continue learning throughout their career. Agriculture extension workers, who were provided regular technical inputs, were an exception.

## As Community Workers

After Independence, as the services provided by the state expanded and citizens' expectations rose, frontline functionaries grew in importance for citizens. Additionally, as the state penetrated more deeply into society, regulatory frontline functionaries had a greater impact too. Notably, the clients or beneficiaries that frontline functionaries interact with are not passive subjects but play an important role in shaping the interaction—they 'co-produce' the services delivered. Research shows that citizens with high socio-economic status are more likely to co-produce than citizens with low socio-economic status. Consequently, the social context of poverty and low educational levels posed special challenges for frontline functionaries.

Departments varied in the extent to which they emphasised the community-related work of frontline functionaries. AWWs were seen as embedded in the community, and regular contact with farmers was built into the agriculture extension worker's role. But in this phase, the role of school teachers vis-à-vis the community was not emphasised. Irrespective of the emphasis, all frontline functionaries followed the departmental agenda, rather than a context-specific one set by local governments, and had little space to address community needs outside departmental priorities.

The degree to which frontline functionaries were aligned with powerful sections of society was driven by two factors. One, generally, their mandate was to serve citizens from poorer social strata and studies showed that they did. At the same time, rent-seeking aligned them with powerful people as they could pay bribes, and several frontline functionaries befitted them at the expense of legal and social justice. Moreover, as frontline functionaries had secure jobs and salaries much above the earnings of average citizens, their status within the community was high. Consequently, some showed disdain for the people that they served. Moreover, frontline functionaries often resisted serving in areas with inadequate social infrastructure, where the poorest people lived. At the same time, the community too viewed frontline functionaries through its own lens and at times harassed women as well as SC and ST workers.

## The Emerging Picture

After Independence, the types and number of frontline functionaries increased. Frontline functionaries became more important to the state to fulfil its developmental goals, as well as to citizens, providing an increasing number of services. However, the potential of the increase in the number of frontline functionaries was not exploited adequately. The role of frontline functionaries as government agents was paramount, while their professional and community worker roles were sidelined. Their professional skills remained under-developed, while government orders took precedence over community needs. Notably, where all the three roles were given importance, such as in the case of agriculture extension workers, the outcome was the best. At the same time, the rising rent-seeking in government impacted frontline functionaries too, resulting in a deteriorating work ethic and an alignment with powerful sections of society.

## Frontline Functionaries from 1990s Onwards

### Introduction

Policies regarding frontline functionaries described above continued in most aspects after the 1990s. However, the concern with containing public expenditure impacted frontline functionaries significantly, as they were the most numerous among government employees and in many sectors, their salaries formed a significant portion of government expenditure. In addition, government services remained unsatisfactory, and often, frontline functionaries came to be seen as the root cause of the problem.

In this context, a few frontline functionaries, such as agriculture extension workers, were reduced in number and other mechanisms for technical support were attempted with limited success. The main strategy, however, was to recruit frontline functionaries on contract with very low salaries and no retirement and other benefits. For example in several states, the recruitment of regular teachers was stopped and 'para teachers' began to be recruited. Though this policy was reversed from 2012 onwards for teachers, contractual, low-paid frontline functionaries began to be recruited as gram panchayat secretaries, sub-engineers and others. Such frontline functionaries were often promoted as community workers and recruited from within the village or block. Many policymakers and advisors argued that not only did this save costs, but that community workers would also work hard for the local area.

As government expenditure in the social sector increased, most frontline functionaries increased in number as well. In addition, new types of frontline functionaries were recruited, though expenditure on them was sought to be minimised. The two most important new types of frontline functionaries were the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), who was paid on a task basis and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Rozgar Sahayak, who was recruited on contract at a very low salary.

Though contractual low-paid frontline functionaries were promoted as 'community workers', studies showed that they were motivated primarily by the need to earn a salary. Consequently, after recruitment, they formed associations that agitated for better service conditions and approached the courts for justice. From time to time, governments increased their salaries, though the trend varied across departments. In addition, a complex maze of litigation regarding contractual low-paid frontline functionaries developed.

Notably, policy developments regarding frontline functionaries after 1990 contained several contradictions. For instance, the number of frontline functionaries increased in most departments with some exceptions not because frontline functionaries were not needed, but in an effort to cut costs. Further, in many cadres, frontline functionaries who did the same work got different salaries depending on whether they were regular or contractual. Moreover, governments often changed their stance and increased the salaries of contractual frontline functionaries, but these changes varied across various types of frontline workers.

## As Government Employees

Though contractual frontline functionaries were conceptualised as ‘community workers’, their role was defined as narrowly as previously done with full time functionaries to simply reflect the mandates of development schemes and other government goals. When frontline functionaries were recruited under a specific scheme, the role was imagined even more narrowly. The low paid contractual frontline functionaries were usually technically the employees of local governments. But this measure was mainly a safeguard against implicating state governments in litigation and justifying their low salaries, as they were subject to the same level of control from the state government as regular frontline functionaries. In fact, to safeguard against litigation, some state governments even began to hire them through private agencies.

An important trend during this phase was the increased representation of women among frontline functionaries, as the cadres of women frontline functionaries expanded and education among girls increased. In a few instances, state governments reserved posts for women. Much like before, frontline functionaries remained low-status employees in departmental hierarchies. For regular employees, promotion avenues continued to be sparse and for contractual employees, they were non-existent. For regular frontline functionaries, salaries increased along with those of other government employees, but the number of low paid contractual frontline functionaries increased substantially as well. Consequently, it could be argued that the salaries of frontline functionaries declined overall, in spite of increasing government revenues. At the same time, little changed in the postings and transfers of frontline functionaries, which continued to be patronage-based.

One positive development was that as government revenues grew, physical infrastructure of grassroots institutions, where frontline functionaries worked, such as schools and police stations, improved significantly. Though in some cases, such as Anganwadi centres, the improvement was modest. Moreover, as government programmes increased, several posts remained vacant, leading to an increase in the workload of many frontline functionaries. There was little evidence of any change in the work culture. The supervision of frontline functionaries remained punitive, and patronage-based functioning and rent-seeking within government continued to increase.

## Professionalisation

In this phase, there were three positive developments regarding the professionalisation of frontline functionaries, but each was negated by unresolved problems. One, the number of resource institutions and training capacity increased. However, once again, the institutional quality remained poor and context-specific knowledge inadequate. The second positive development was that the education level of regular frontline functionaries continued to rise. Though, the gains from this development remained limited because of the persistence of poor learning levels in schools. Moreover, in some instances, poorly qualified frontline functionaries were recruited as para workers. Finally, the scale of in-service training of frontline functionaries increased significantly in many sectors. Of course in some sectors, it remained grossly inadequate. Despite lacking adequate information regarding the quality of in-service training, it can be expected that the limitations of the institutional structure and knowledge

base impacted it adversely. In sum, it can be argued that in this phase, while financial resources for professionalisation were available to a greater degree than earlier, they were used exceptionally poorly

## Community Relations

As noted above, in this phase a large number of ‘community workers’ were recruited. These frontline functionaries differed from their regular counterparts in three key ways. They were drawn from within the community, paid very low salaries, and lacked the security of tenure. Notably, there was no attempt to recruit workers from within the community at reasonably good salaries. Though community workers were closer in socio-economic status to the average citizen compared to regular workers, the more important issue for their relationship with the community may be that like regular frontline functionaries, they were bound by rigid formats of developmental schemes and government orders, and had little space to address context and citizen-specific needs.

A second development in this phase was that in several departments, community-based organisations (CBOs) were formed, of which frontline functionaries were usually secretaries. This provided new forums for frontline functionaries to interact with the community, though most CBOs were inactive. Finally, during this period most frontline functionaries were assigned a larger number of community-oriented tasks than earlier, of which acting as secretary of CBOs is one example. How this has changed the relationship of frontline functionaries to the community, is a subject for investigation.

## Summing Up

After 1990, to contain government expenditure, the government attempted to minimise costs of the bureaucracy. This approach was retained even after government revenues began to grow in the late 1990s and the government stepped up expenditure on social services. Consequently, frontline functionaries grew in types and numbers, a tacit recognition of their importance.

However, meaningful attempts to make frontline functionaries more effective were lacking. Low-paid contractual frontline functionaries were recruited and labelled as ‘community workers’. As these frontline functionaries organised protests and litigated, the government increased their salaries from time to time in an ad hoc fashion. The flawed incentive structure for frontline functionaries to perform well worsened as avenues of promotion for regular frontline functionaries remained limited, while contractual frontline functionaries could better their salaries not by working hard, but by unionising and agitating. During this period, though physical infrastructure improved, the workload of several frontline functionaries increased. Moreover, frontline functionaries continued to be manipulated for dubious ends through patronage-based postings and were part of the rent-seeking that was rampant at all levels of government.

Though the formal qualifications of frontline functionaries rose, and more in-service training began to be provided, the actual gains in their skills were not commensurated because the general quality of schools, as well as resource and training institutions, remained poor and the context-specific

knowledge base remained shrunken. The community-oriented tasks of frontline functionaries increased and they became secretaries of CBOs. However, their relationship with the community, whether regular or community workers, was circumscribed by the fact that they were expected to prioritise government orders and not citizens' needs, as well as by the rampant rent-seeking.

## Key Policy Questions

A policy framework to promote effective action by frontline functionaries can contribute significantly to better governance. The absence of such a framework has led to ad hoc decisions that lead to suboptimal performance, as well as conflict between frontline functionaries and the state. This policy framework needs to be framed at two levels. At the first level, some general questions need to be posed for all frontline functionaries, such as whether the aim is to optimise their professional skills or minimise expenditure on them. At the second level, these questions need to be considered again for specific frontline functionaries, looking at the nature of their work.

An important issue that needs consideration is the significance of frontline functionaries in governance; whether they are a necessary evil to implement programmes, or important negotiators of government policies and citizens' needs. Moreover, the gains and losses that accrue to citizens and the state if frontline functionaries are capable of high or poor quality work, need to be assessed. A second issue is an assessment of the complexity of frontline work, such as whether it is a matter of simply following orders or requires an analysis of the situation followed by appropriate strategies. An important point of scrutiny is the extent to which frontline functionaries should be department or citizen-oriented, and whether frontline functionaries should be state or local government employees.

The importance of professionalisation of frontline functionaries has been recognized only partly in Indian policy and needs to be revisited anew. Moreover, while designing strategies for professional development, the creation of context-specific knowledge and vibrant professional institutions need to be at the forefront. In addition, professionalisation should not be identified only with formal qualifications and training. Along with training, learning needs to be promoted in several ways through the career cycle. Equally important is the creation of an appropriate incentive structure for frontline functionaries. Here, the practice of recruiting contractual frontline functionaries at very low salaries and then increasing them in response to agitations and litigation is clearly inappropriate. Moreover, a question that needs consideration is whether placing frontline functionaries near the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, with no or minimal chances of promotion, is a productive incentive structure. Additionally, the type of supervision needed to promote good performance needs deliberation, especially whether it should be punitive or supportive.

The restructuring of the relationship of frontline functionaries with the community is a critical matter for future policy. In particular, the assumption that simply belonging to the community automatically leads to citizen-centric behaviour needs scrutiny. An important question here is that of the autonomy to act as per the needs of citizens, and the skills to do so. There is a need to learn from the various methods of community interaction that the best frontline functionaries have developed, and make these available to all.

While this paper has been written from the perspective of formulating a better policy regarding frontline functionaries, policy regarding frontline functionaries has implications for wider questions, such as the fulfilment of the constitutional mandate, the practice of democracy and so on, which need to be investigated.

# BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a policy that does not exist, at least as a coherent, written document. India has a large army of frontline functionaries such as school teachers, police constables, extension workers and so on, who provide a wide range of social services and whose actions have a significant impact on citizens. At the same time, public dissatisfaction with frontline functionaries is high, criticism in the media is frequent, and scholars and policy makers regularly comment on the unsatisfactory implementation of public policies (Kapur, 2020; Pritchett, 2009; Saxena, 2012). Yet, frontline functionaries as a group are rarely considered comprehensively in Indian policy. At best, there have been sporadic declarations, varying in the number of issues addressed, for some frontline functionaries, often in the context of specific government programmes. There is no stated vision that elucidates the type of manpower the Indian state aims to put in place for its day-to-day interaction with citizens. As illustrated in this paper, the consequences of this approach have been damaging.

The act of 'implementing' public policy, for which frontline functionaries are a critical link, is a complex phenomenon. Many scholars view implementation as an integral and continuing part of the political policy process, shaped by power interest structures as well as interactions among participants. In this framework, policy implementers mediate, negotiate and modify policy rather than just 'carry out orders' (Barrett, 2004; Hill & Hupe, 2014). As the key interface between state and society, frontline functionaries play a crucial role in this process. In their everyday actions, they present the state and its policies to the citizens and the needs and demands of citizens to the state.

Notably, there has been growing academic interest in 'street-level bureaucrats' or frontline functionaries, who were first identified as constituting a very specific type of bureaucracy by Michael Lipsky in 1980. Lipsky characterised street-level bureaucrats as having a high degree of interaction with citizens. Moreover, they perform complex tasks, as they address the needs of individual citizens and also follow policy guidelines, which may not complement each other. In this sense, street-level bureaucrats may be visualised as making policy on the ground through their decisions (Lipsky, 2010). In this scenario, the calibre and commitment of frontline functionaries is an important issue for the actual impact of policies.

At the same time, how frontline functionaries serve citizens and implement policies depends on their specific socio-political institutional environment. In particular, ideas about street-level bureaucrats that have taken shape in the developed world need to be re-examined in the specific context of the developing country in which they are situated (Lotta et al., 2021). Moreover, the socio-political institutional environment of frontline functionaries needs to be examined thoroughly to understand their actions. On the one hand, the overall political and administrative structure and its relationship with society frame the actions of all government servants, including frontline functionaries. On the other hand, the specific policy vision regarding frontline functionaries helps create their environment. For example, although Lipsky (2010) highlighted that street-level bureaucrats have substantial discretion in the course of their work, the amount of latitude offered may vary widely across countries. This paper attempts to tease out how this vision has developed in India over time and its implications, keeping in view the larger context.

## THE EXISTING 'POLICY'

Despite the lack of a clear policy or vision, a large network of frontline functionaries has developed in India. During this process, a host of decisions regarding the training of frontline functionaries, their status in government, and so on, have been taken at various points in time. The extent to which these decisions have been deliberated and made explicit has varied across different types of frontline functionaries and across time for specific frontline functionaries. In some instances, these decisions are policy statements, in the sense that they are preceded by analysis and consultation, and their rationale and details are explicitly elucidated. At other times, the logic of the decisions is not stated overtly. The latter types of decisions may be seen as 'de facto' policy, as in practice, their impact has been the same as that of stated policies. Consequently, the existing policy regarding frontline functionaries comprises explicit policy statements as well as less transparent decisions. In this paper, 'policy' refers to both these developments, that is, the de facto policy.

Another feature of the existing policy regarding frontline functionaries is that it is not a single policy, but a set of policies. Policies vary for different types of frontline functionaries, though there are significant similarities as well, such as in terms of the status of frontline functionaries within the bureaucracy, professional preparation, level of autonomy granted and so on. Such variation is necessary because the work of different frontline functionaries varies. However, as this paper shows, the variation is not only based on the nature of work but also comprises several aspects that were poorly thought through.

In addition, as a vast majority of frontline functionaries are state government employees, policies also vary across states. However, as illustrated in this paper, state policies have very strong common features. The types of frontline functionaries that exist in various states are very similar, with respect to their salaries, promotion avenues, qualifications and so on. One reason for these commonalities is the fairly even structure of administration and bureaucracy across the country. In addition, the influence of the central government on policies regarding frontline functionaries is substantial, as it provides funds for most socio-economic development programmes, which, in turn, provide for the salaries of

several frontline functionaries. Moreover, the central government commissions reports for sectors handled by the states, and these reports become important reference points.

## ABOUT THE PAPER

This paper focuses on the development of policy regarding frontline functionaries post-Independence, which in turn is scrutinised against constitutional directives and the overall stated goals of the state. This scrutiny is intended to lay the groundwork for a more considered and effective policy framework. Moreover, the commonalities in the policies for different types of frontline functionaries across various states will be emphasised, as these are based on critical assumptions about frontline functionaries, which, as illustrated, have been stable across long periods of time. These assumptions need to be elucidated and scrutinised to arrive at a more rational policy. However, variations are noted as well, as they reveal parallel ideas that are, at times, similar to the dominant themes, but challenge them at other times. In particular, the variations in policies regarding different frontline functionaries and across different periods deepen the insights into policy assumptions.

In studying any aspect of public administration, an important point to be considered is that administrative structures and processes tend to be stable across time, even when regimes change. This has been the case in post-colonial India. Consequently, the historical legacy becomes important in understanding subsequent developments. Therefore, in this paper, policy regarding frontline functionaries during the colonial period has been discussed briefly before moving on to the post-Independence period. Moreover, the policy after Independence has been analysed in two parts. The first part covers the period from Independence to the mid-1990s, when key decisions regarding frontline functionaries were taken, most of which have become stable aspects of public administration in India. In the second part, developments after the mid-1990s, when some important changes regarding frontline functionaries were introduced, have been traced.

Policies and decisions regarding frontline functionaries are not stand-alone events but have been propelled through larger policy thrusts, in the broad administrative framework. Three aspects of this larger context are especially important. The first aspect is the overarching government goals and policies, such as the approach to socio-economic development, social services provided to citizens, the extent of citizens' rights and so on. The second aspect is the policy regarding the bureaucracy as a whole, in terms of its structure, skills, salaries and so on, as frontline functionaries are a subset of the bureaucracy. The third and final aspect is that the field-level administrative structure has an important bearing on policies regarding frontline functionaries, for it is in this structure that they work.

In this paper, for colonial as well as independent India, relevant aspects of the context, that is, overall policy thrusts and public administration, bureaucracy and field administration, have been discussed to delineate the background against which the policy regarding frontline functionaries has developed. This discussion is not comprehensive but is necessarily restricted to aspects that have impacted frontline functionaries.

Against the above background, the policy that developed for frontline functionaries is presented and analysed. The starting point of this analysis is the three key features of street-level bureaucrats identified by Hupe et al. (2016, p. 16), that is, street bureaucrats have close contact with individual citizens during the course of their work, do their work while in public service and perform specific tasks for which they have likely had training. Following this description, the analysis is focused on three key aspects of frontline functionaries. One, they are government employees, and the policy needs to define their role, status, salary, sphere of authority and autonomy and so on as government servants. Two, they perform specialised work, and the policy needs to focus on the development of appropriate professional skills. Finally, frontline functionaries serve communities, and the policy must articulate the relationship between frontline functionaries and the community, to foster frontline functionaries' responsiveness to the community.

Following this analysis, the final section of the paper addresses the broader goal of this study: to build a knowledge base and analyse policy regarding frontline functionaries to enable a shift in policy towards optimal results in the provision of social services to citizens and implementation of government goals. From the analysis of the policy in the previous sections of the paper, key questions that need to be asked to frame such a policy are delineated. No attempts have been made to seek out comprehensive answers to these questions because policy formulation is an important exercise on its own, requiring intense deliberation and consideration of a range of factors, for which a separate process is required. At the same time, these have been mentioned to the extent that the analysis in the paper does bring out possible directions for future policy.

This paper is based on documentary research, drawing upon a variety of sources, such as government policy statements and reports, scholarly studies, and articles. An important constraint here is that though academic work on frontline functionaries in India and considerations in policy documents are available, these are not comprehensive, and there are significant gaps in factual and analytical knowledge. This paper attempts to address the gap by pulling together information from a variety of sources, which has not been attempted before. However, the paper is also constrained by the gap, as some relevant information is not accessible. Further, the information available is uneven across different types of frontline functionaries and various states. These are limitations that will be addressed by field studies that will follow this paper.

# FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

## INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the present-day administrative structure and bureaucracy in India was laid during the colonial period (Abedin, 2013; Misra, 1970). This period saw frontline functionaries emerge as employees of a centralised state. Several assumptions and calculations underlay this development, which remained influential in independent India. This section of the paper attempts to delineate the dynamic of the policy regarding frontline functionaries in colonial India, in terms of the stage it set for subsequent developments.

Notably, the colonial administrative system varied, across space as well as time. At Independence, around three-fifths of today's India was under direct British rule, where colonial public administration developed, while the rest of the country was governed by semi-sovereign Indian princes who followed varying administrative systems. Temporally, the colonial era encompassed a series of administrative systems, as changes came about through a long process of repeated trials. This part of the paper focuses on the administrative system in British India, as it evolved towards the end of the colonial rule, which served as a starting point for post-Independence India. Moreover, as described below, the administrative system across British provinces varied as well. Here too, greater attention is given to administrative systems that were influential after Independence.

When colonisation began, an administrative structure and bureaucracy were already in place. These were an important influence on the decisions taken by the colonists, who first attempted to work with the existing systems and then brought about changes slowly when the existing system did not suit their goals. In the following sections, the administrative system and its frontline functionaries, as they existed just before colonisation, are described briefly, following which the developments in the colonial period are elucidated.

## THE COLONIAL INHERITANCE

### **The Pre-Colonial Administrative System**

When the East India Company launched its career in governance by obtaining the diwani (rights to revenue collection) of Bengal in 1765, a plethora of administrative systems existed across various kingdoms and principalities in what was to become India. In the largest of these, that is, the Mughal empire, a highly organised administrative system was set up by the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542–1605). However, it was based on discretion and the personality of the emperor was critical to determining government policy and ethos.

The empire was divided into provinces (subahs), which were further split into districts (sarkars). The district was subdivided into tehsils or taluks. There was a hierarchy of officials, called ‘mansabdars’, where the ‘mansab’ indicated the rank of the officer. Most officials were not paid salaries but were assigned a portion of the land revenue (jagir). The line between public property and officers’ personal property was fuzzy, and personal orders of superior officers, rather than the law, were given precedence. Official competence was not defined; there were no fixed recruitment rules or necessary qualifications. Appointment depended on the whims of the ruler. At the district level, the amaguzar (or amil), quazi and mir adl and faujedar were responsible for revenue collection, judicial functions and executive functions, respectively. At the tehsil level, there were tehsildars and kanungos<sup>1</sup> who performed these roles (Abedin, 2013; Government of India, 1905; Jha, 2015; Misra, 1970).

However, actual administration was carried out with the help of zamindars and local communities<sup>2</sup>. Zamindars collected government revenue, retaining nearly 10% for themselves (mahal), were responsible for securing peace and maintained a body of militia.<sup>3</sup> Their appointment was usually hereditary, but they were not actual landowners. Instead, their rights arose from tax-farming and in the form of military and fiscal fiefs of the state. In many zamindari estates, other persons, called talukdars, also possessed inheritable and transferable properties and shared in the profits from revenue. The local bureaucracy was accountable to zamindars and fairly independent of the bureaucratic control of the emperor (Misra, 1970).

Along with the administrative system of the empire and zamindars, there was a system of village governance with several regional variations, though the extent of this system is a matter of debate among scholars. Notably, villages were largely self-sufficient, and centralised governments lacked rapid means of communication to intervene in village matters. The council of elders or ‘panchayats’

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1 The kanungo was the state's repository of information concerning revenue receipts, area statistics, local revenue rates, practices and customs (Abedin, 2013; Jha, 2015).

2 Territories directly administered by the emperor's officials, that is, ‘crown lands’, were limited (Misra, 1970).

3 In large towns, police administration was entrusted to an officer called ‘kotwal’, who was paid a large sum as salary, from which he paid for establishment expenses, and retained the remaining amount (Misra, 1970).

and the village headman performed administrative functions. The functions performed by panchayats included the provision of usufructuary rights to individual villagers on land that was held commonly by the village, administration of justice, maintenance of peace and order, construction and maintenance of irrigation works, representation of village interests and on occasion, even the defence of the village against outsiders. Policing was the joint responsibility of villagers and was enforced by the village headman, who was assisted by one or more village watchmen (Government of India, 1905; Jha 2005–2006; Srinivasan, 1956; Venkatarangaiya, 1941, 1943).

As the Mughal empire began to degenerate, the influence of the Mughal bureaucracy diminished. By the time the East India Company took on governance functions, local zamindars and amils had come to dominate the official apparatus, arrogating judicial and executive functions to themselves. The emperor's bureaucracy was increasingly confined to superior levels of administration and cities (Abedin, 2013; Misra, 1970).

## Frontline Functionaries

In the above administrative system, while several workers provided social services to villagers, they were not strictly 'frontline functionaries', as their ties to the state or even zamindars were weak or non-existent. This situation can be understood by examining the precursors of today's frontline functionaries. For example, the patwari was an accountant for peasants and assisted the kanungos in carrying out their duties. The patwari's post was usually hereditary. Villagers paid patwaris small sums and prerequisites for services, and as this did not provide a full living wage, patwaris had other means of subsistence as well (Jha, 2015; Moreland, 1911).

Similarly, in education and health, a few services were provided to villagers by individuals. For example, in the village schools for boys, which existed unevenly across the country, teachers served the community. They did not charge fees but received gifts from the community (Ghosh, 1995; Government of India, 1929; Kumar, 1991). Midwifery was, for the most part, a hereditary occupation of lower-caste and lower-class families (Lal, 1994). The village watchmen kept vigil at night, found out about all arrivals and departures and informed the village headman of suspicious activities (Government of India, 1905).

## THE COLONIAL POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

### Colonial Policy and Public Administration

Public administration in colonial India developed against the main policy goals of the government, which were to maximise revenue, especially from land and forests, and maintain order. Citizen welfare was a very low priority. As the colonial rule began, the East India Company, while taking over numerous governance functions, promoted a commercial style of administration. However, the increasing involvement of the British Crown, culminating in its direct rule from 1858 onwards, led to the introduction of several practices more suited to governing, rather than profit-making.

Nevertheless, the public administration system that evolved remained situated in the continuing goals of revenue maximisation and maintenance of order. In addition, the colonists attempted to minimise the cost of public administration (Abedin, 2013; Arnold, 1976; Chandra, 2009; Misra, 1970).

Over the colonial period, the organisation of the government grew increasingly complex. The land revenue assessment and collection system was elaborated and systemised, and in the late 19th century, a forest administration system, mainly to maximise revenue, was established. A professional police force, with wide repressive powers to stop anti-government activities, was developed to maintain order, along with the rationalisation of legal codes.<sup>4</sup> For reasons of economy, there was no separation between crime investigation and law and order arms, and the police focused mainly on the latter (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Misra, 1970; Schug, 2000; Singh, 2002; Verma, 2007).

Modest attempts for socio-economic development and social welfare were made as well. The railway and road networks were developed to provide the government with greater access to natural resources. Modern agricultural technology was introduced and irrigation canals were constructed to boost the production of exportable cash crops such as cotton, tea, coffee, jute, rubber and spices. Moreover, towards the latter part of colonial rule, in the context of severe famines, attempts were made to provide social services such as drinking water and sanitation, and after 1854, the outline of a public education system was laid out (Abedin, 2013; Arnold, 2008; Chandra, 2009; Government of India, 1929; Misra, 1970; Parayil, 1992; Thiessen, 1994).

However, the investment in socio-economic development remained minimal. For example, the commercial exploitation of forests for revenue was far more important than peoples' needs for forest produce (Schug, 2000); mass schooling was promoted 'in principle', but parsimonious strategies of decentralisation were adopted, the establishment of private schools was encouraged and the outreach of primary education remained very limited<sup>5</sup> (Ghosh, 1995; Government of India, 1929, 2012); a laissez-faire approach to health was followed till 1938 (Amrith, 2007); the percentage of the population that went to hospitals was, at best, only 2.5% (Lal, 1994).<sup>6</sup>

With these initiatives, the organisation of government changed in two important aspects. One, a number of new departments and other administrative structures were established. For instance, the Directorate of Education and the Public Works Department were established in 1855, the Department of Forest in 1861, the Department of Revenue and Agriculture in 1871, followed by a separate department for Agriculture in 1905 and another for Irrigation in 1906, the Department of Medical and Sanitation in 1896 and so on.

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4 The Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860 contained the substantive criminal law, while procedural law was provided in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1872 and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

5 In 1911, G. K. Gokhale introduced a bill for compulsory primary education in the Imperial Legislative Council, but this was rejected because of a perceived lack of popular demand and the reluctance to raise taxes to fund them. In 1927, 42.1% of boys and 10.4% of girls of school-going age received primary education in British India. The drop-out rate was high; and in class 5, it was 11% boys and 6% girls of the relevant age group (Ghosh, 1995; Gol, 1929).

6 The chief concern of the British health policy was the army and the European population. Attention to the Indian population came primarily during epidemics of cholera, smallpox and the plague. The percentage of the population who went to hospitals was extremely low, at the very most, 2.5% (Lal, 1994).

Two, a two-tier government system, but quite centralised, was developed. Until 1877, governance was almost entirely centralised, with the provinces lacking independent resources. Over time, however, especially with the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, the provinces began to exercise limited legislative and financial powers. Moreover, new departments were established in provincial governments as well. For example, in the 1940s, in the Central Provinces, there were 22 departments, addressing subjects such as revenue, police, jails, registration, excise, agriculture, forests, industry, labour, cooperation, fisheries, education and engineering, with similar structures in other provinces (Government of India, 1909; Misra, 1970, 1983; Potter, 1996; Sapre, 1924; Venkatarangaiya, 1943).

## Shifts in Field Administration

On the ground, the diffused and decentralised field administration of the pre-colonial times morphed into a far more centralised system, with revenue officers and the police as the most important government agencies (Misra, 1983). This shift began as income from land revenue was sought to be optimised. In Bengal, the East India Company first attempted to collect land revenue through the existing zamindar-based system with some added supervision<sup>7</sup> but could not control the local officials and incurred losses. Consequently, in 1772, the Company undertook revenue collection directly by appointing its own collectors. With this, the foundation for a district administration, with the district collector as its administrative head, was laid.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, several experiments with the land tenure and revenue collection system were undertaken. Ultimately, two main systems developed: the zamindari system (also called permanent settlement) where the revenue liability of a village or group of villages lay with the zamindar, who effectively had property rights, as he could dispossess tenants who did not pay rent; and the ryotwari system, in which revenue settlement was made directly with the cultivator. In addition, a third system, the mahalwari system, where village bodies jointly owned the village land and were responsible for payment of land revenue, existed in some parts of the country<sup>9</sup> (Abedin, 2013; Banerjee & Iyer, 2005; Misra, 1970).

In 1792, the policing duties of local zamindars were abolished and came to be overseen by district collectors. Subsequently, after several experiments, the Police Act 1861 introduced a consolidated police force. During this period, the role of the district collector underwent several changes. The post was abolished at one point of time, and the extent of the district collector's functions, especially control over the police and judicial powers, changed from time to time. However, ultimately, the

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7 A 'dual system' for revenue administration was established. Two naib diwans remained in charge of revenue collection, while zamindars collected land revenue from cultivators under the supervision of the Company. Subsequently, in 1769, two supervisors of the Company were appointed but encountered resistance from zamindars and kanungos (Abedin, 2013).

8 The collector had emerged earlier, in 1668, when the Company had obtained zamindari rights in three villages. In 1700, the official in charge of the administration of these areas was given the title of collector (Abedin, 2013).

9 The zamindari system existed in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, modern Madhya Pradesh and parts of modern Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh; the ryotwari system existed in most areas of Madras and Bombay Presidencies and in Assam; and the mahalwari system existed in the North Western provinces and Punjab.

district collector, also called district magistrate, district officer and deputy commissioner in different areas, became the accepted administrative leader in the district, though his responsibilities varied somewhat across provinces (Abedin, 2013; Government of India, 1909; Misra, 1970).

Below the district, a varied structure of administration across provinces and land tenure systems emerged. In the ryotwari areas, a centralised administrative system was established, which later became the model for the administrative system of independent India. In this system, revenue officials played a key role in dealing with general administration as well as land-related matters. The tehsil, along with the tehsildar in charge, remained an important unit. In addition, two new units were created: a sub-division headed by a sub-divisional magistrate between the district and the tehsil and, below the tehsil, a circle with a revenue inspector. In the zamindari areas, administration below the district varied. In some zamindari estates, British ideas of management were influential, and the administrative structure acquired characteristics akin to British administered areas. However, as noted in the first five-year plan, in some permanently settled areas, there was no revenue machinery below the sub-division at all (Government of India, 1952, 1909; Misra, 1970; Venkatarangaiya, 1941).

Like the central and provincial governments, the complexity of field administration increased as well. As a professional police force was established, its management in the district was entrusted to a district superintendent of police, while the subordinate officials included inspectors, head constables, sergeants and constables, with the head constable being in charge of a police station. In addition, armed police were provided at district headquarters and grew in strength over time (Arnold, 1976; Government of India, 1905; Misra, 1970, 1983). As new departments were created in the provinces, some established their own agencies in the district. For example, from 1877 onwards, a civil surgeon of the district was made responsible for the medical and sanitary arrangements, and district forest officers began to be appointed (Misra, 1983; Rai, 2014; Ribbentrop, 1900).

However, for all the complexity acquired by field administration, the outreach of the colonial government to villages was limited, because few services were provided to the people. For instance, proper rural policing was never developed, as it required additional financial investment to expand the size of the police force. Consequently, the police did little in terms of detecting crime and focused on maintaining order. Nearly every village continued to have its own non-official voluntary watchman (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Venkatarangaiya, 1941). Although adequate grassroots governance structures did not develop, the autonomy and importance of village communities and panchayats declined as the locus of control shifted away from them. Similarly, the forest administration steadily tightened its hold over the forest produce that had earlier been managed by communities. Partially democratic local governments were sought to be introduced after 1864, but these remained disempowered and did not play a significant role in field administration<sup>10</sup> (Chandra, 2009; Sapre, 1924; Schug, 2000; Venkatarangaiya, 1941, 1943).

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<sup>10</sup> Local bodies at the district level were first formed between 1864 and 1868 and charged with providing local services such as education, health, sanitation and water supply, by raising their own finances through local taxes. They comprised mainly nominated members and were dominated by officials, although in 1882, a small number of local body representatives began to be elected. However, non-officials gradually became chairpersons of municipal committees (Chandra, 2009; Venkatarangaiya, 1941, 1943).

It is worth noting here that along with the above formal systems of field administration, at the grassroots level, a new style of field administration focusing on the socio-economic development of citizens was being tried out by Gandhians<sup>11</sup> and other activists. A small number of community initiatives were launched to enhance the income of the rural populace, set up cooperative societies, promote village industries, improve sanitation, build model villages through collective decision-making, provide vocational training and so on. These projects attempted to reach out to rural communities through programmes for their benefit rather than extracting from them (Sinha, 2008).

## Changes in the Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy underwent significant changes, acquiring Weberian-like characteristics, but slowly and only partially. Initially, as the East India Company became a territorial power, its servants assumed governance functions. Their wages were low, but they were permitted to trade privately. Appointments were based on patronage, and the Company's servants were extremely corrupt (Chandra, 2009). Pressure from the British Crown for a meritocratic bureaucracy and reduction of rent-seeking was resisted by the Company's officials. As the British Crown took over, recruitment became more meritocratic<sup>12</sup> (Chandra, 2009; Fukuyama, 2014; Misra, 1970; Thiessen, 1994).

However, race and class remained critical organising principles of the bureaucracy, which was structured to free British officers, who were few in number and had a high cost because of their sizable salaries, from routine and menial tasks, which were performed by Indian officials of lower ranks (Singh, 2002). In 1870, a law divided the civil service into two halves, an administrative class requiring a liberal humanistic education for entry and a lower executive class with less exalted qualifications.<sup>13</sup> The bureaucracy was now divided into various higher and lower 'services', belonging to different departments (except the Indian Civil Service). While theoretically, the higher civil services were open to all, in practice, the kind of education required to pass the entrance examinations restricted the entry of Indians (Chandra, 2009; Fukuyama, 2014; Misra, 1970; Potter, 1996).

The services can be seen to be of three types: one, the higher or 'imperial' civil services, which had an all-India character and consisted mainly of officers of British origins and, two, the 'provincial' services', composed mainly of Indians of middle-class origin. The third component was the 'subordinate' services that comprised swathes of Indian frontline functionaries and some of their immediate supervisors, drawn from modest social backgrounds, as well as office workers. Chances of promotion

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11 Gandhi emphasised constructive work, that is, communal amity, elimination of untouchability, prohibition of liquor, promotion of khadi, village industries, village sanitation, new or basic education, adult education, emancipation of women, general education in health and hygiene, welfare of farmers, urban labour, amelioration of living conditions of tribal people, care of lepers and so on (Srinivasan, 2006).

12 Some headway was made in 1833 as the board of control, a body of the British parliament, began to make regulations regarding recruitment, but the actual appointments were made by the Company as before. Reform of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) occurred after the Northcote-Trevelyan Report called for an end to patronage-based appointments and for civil service examinations as a gateway into government service in 1854. The report was not accepted until 1870 (Misra, 1970; Chandra, 2009; Fukuyama, 2014).

13 The influential Northcote-Trevelyan Report proposed splitting routine clerical duties from higher administrative grade functions and setting high educational requirements for the latter.

for these services were very small (Potter, 1996; Schug, 2000).<sup>14</sup> Each province had its own set of provincial and subordinate services (Government of India, 1909).

The difference among these three components with respect to status and salary was sizable. Furthermore, a conscious class distinction between the superior and subordinate officers was enforced, and initiative at lower levels was minimised. For example, the Police Act 1861 and subsequent departmental rules were framed so that the authority of senior officers could not be questioned. Moreover, the status of senior officials was exalted through the daily parade and salute to the commanding officer, a sentry at the superintendent's gate and an armed escort for British officers' tours (Verma, 2007).

In addition, a distance was deliberately created between the bureaucracy and ordinary people. For instance, the police were housed in barracks away from the general population. Officers were not encouraged to mix with civilians, and police officials were transferred every three years. If there was a serious complaint about police behaviour, it was referred to an official enquiry, and citizens were not involved (Arnold, 1976; Verma, 2007). Similarly, civil surgeons were no less than 'gore rajas' or 'gore sahib' (white kings) to ordinary people. Moreover, colonial officials often indulged in royal activities such as hunting and convivial parties (Rai, 2014). The forest administration steadily tightened its hold over forest produce to protect people from their own supposed improvidence, on the assumption that villagers were incapable of managing the forest resources on which their livelihoods depended (Schug, 2000).

## COLONIAL FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES

### Introduction

Compared with today, the types and number of government frontline functionaries in colonial India were small. Frontline functionaries were recruited to fulfil the main goals of the colonial government, where the government deemed comprehensive and systematic work and regular interaction with citizens necessary. Consequently, frontline functionaries were recruited in the regulatory sectors to realise land revenue, maintain order and exploit forest resources. In sectors concerning socio-economic development and social welfare, government efforts were partial and half-hearted, and frontline functionaries were sparse. If activities were at all undertaken in these sectors, the means of execution used were cheaper and less intensive.

In other words, frontline functionaries were recruited to serve government interests, while more casual methods were used to provide services to citizens. This orientation was visible clearly in the case of police; for instance, sufficient police personnel to detect crime and prosecute criminals in rural

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<sup>14</sup> For example, at the turn of the century, all of the executive and protective staff in the forest department were Indian, but they could not rise to senior levels, which were the British sanctum (Schug, 2000).

areas, that is, to serve citizens, were not recruited.<sup>15</sup> The police mainly maintained order, which served government ends (Arnold, 1976; Chandra, 2009; Government of India, 1905; Giuliani, 2015; Misra, 1970). Similarly, the government ran very few primary schools directly and, instead, provided grants to private or 'aided' schools (see Table 1 in Annex), which it controlled indirectly by prescribing curricula and textbooks and through supervision (Ghosh, 1995). The specific types of frontline functionaries that emerged in the colonial period, as described in the next sub-section, were situated in this context.

Moreover, the recruitment of frontline functionaries entailed numerous government decisions about their authority, service conditions, professional preparation, role in the community and so on. These decisions reflected, along with the policy goals of the government, the structure of the bureaucracy and field administration that the frontline functionaries were a part of. Through these decisions, frontline functionaries acquired certain characteristics as government employees, as personnel exercising specific skills and as workers in the community. These characteristics are delineated in the subsequent subsection.

## Old and New Frontline Functionaries

A critical frontline functionary of the colonial period was the patwari. Patwaris continued from the pre-colonial times, but in ryotwari areas, they ceased to be village workers controlled by zamindars and became part of a centralised government bureaucracy. This change came about slowly. Initially, as the Company began to collect land revenue, patwaris were put under the control of zamindars, who regularly appointed and dismissed them, without any or nominal reference to district authorities. However, in this arrangement, zamindars had control over land records, which restricted the Company's access to accurate information regarding land revenue dues. Consequently, from the mid 19th century onwards, the Company increased its control over patwaris. To begin with, patwaris ceased to be connected to zamindar estates or workers situated in a single village. Instead, four to five villages were grouped in 'circles', with one patwari in charge of a circle, leading to the displacement of several existing village patwaris. (Jha, 2015; Moreland, 1911).

In addition, patwari records began to be systematised. A 'record of rights' originated in the United Provinces<sup>16</sup> in 1833 and was subsequently elaborated to include details about not only landholders and rents for revenue collection but also the rights of cultivation. It became an extremely important document for establishing land rights. Concurrently, the powers of patwaris to make settlements and decide on the record of rights were curtailed. Rules were drawn up to guide their work and supervision (Jha, 2015; Moreland, 1911). Finally, patwaris became salaried employees. Proposals to this effect had been made as early as 1815 to ensure greater control over land records but had been rejected because of the additional burden on the public exchequer and the fear that patwaris would conspire with cultivators to reduce government revenue. However, in 1871, district collectors in Bengal and

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<sup>15</sup> The Police Commission (1902–03) expressed the view that it was best to let people handle petty crime and involve the police only in serious crimes (GoI, 1905).

<sup>16</sup> As part of the first regular land settlement in Agra (Moreland, 1911).

Bihar were authorised to regulate the remuneration of patwaris though the patwaris still received a percentage of the revenue collected instead of a fixed salary as well as customary dues from villagers. However, many patwaris could not collect all their dues, especially from villages to which they did not belong, and petitioned the tehsildars. Subsequently, a district collector in the United Provinces made landholders deposit the patwaris' fees along with the land revenue to pay the patwaris, a practice that spread later on (Jha, 2015; Moreland, 1911).

With these developments, the tehsildar's authority and government control over patwaris became stronger. For instance, in Agra, the Revenue Act of 1873 imposed a cess on cultivators to pay patwaris and declared them public servants and their records as public property. However, patwaris continued to be drawn mainly from families that had hereditary claims to the post (Jha, 2015; Moreland, 1911). Notably, in several permanent settlement areas, patwaris remained employees of zamindars. For example, in a large zamindari estate called Raj Darbhanga, patwaris functioned as part of the estate and were recruited from among sons and relations of employees and families that had long associations with the estate (Henningham, 1983).

Like patwaris, government police constables emerged as policing was brought under government control and systematised. Initially, as policing shifted from zamindars to district collectors, 'darogas' were appointed to assist them, with each daroga having 15–20 armed personnel, and watchmen of the villages were made subject to their orders.<sup>17</sup> This system, however, was not successful, and there was a marked increase in crime. Several experiments ensued till a homogenous civil constabulary was created with the Police Act 1861 (Government of India, 1905; Giuliani, 2015). In addition, a new frontline functionary, the forest guard of the forest department, came into existence, whose duties comprised forest protection activities. Initially, forest guards were appointed in an ad hoc fashion, but after 1896, with an overall staff reorganisation in the forest departments, their recruitment became more systematic (Government of India, 1909; Ribbentrop, 1900; Schug, 2000).

Among the social sectors, school teachers underwent a significant transformation. As modern style education and schools were introduced, specialised teachers for different levels of education and subjects emerged (Ghosh, 1995; Kumar, 1991). Moreover, subordinate engineers, supervisors and overseers began to be appointed in the public works departments. In the health sector, an auxiliary nursing service was started in 1942, but its work was restricted to the provision of nursing care in military hospitals (Government of India, 1909; Lal, 1994).

## Key Characteristics and Analysis

### As Government Employees

As a rule, frontline functionaries were employees of the provincial governments, and provincial governments took decisions regarding them (Government of India, 1909). Yet, there were only minor differences among provinces regarding the role of various frontline functionaries, their status, salary and

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<sup>17</sup> Darogas were paid on a task basis: a sum of money for every dacoity apprehended, 10% of stolen value received and so on. In cities, kotwals were continued, and darogas were appointed for each ward (Gol, 1905)

so on. Usually, frontline functionaries formed the 'subordinate' provincial services, and barring manual workers, occupied the bottom rung of the bureaucracy, such as forest guards forming a subordinate service of the forest department (Schug, 2000).<sup>18</sup>

While the low status of frontline functionaries was not unique to colonial rule, what stands out is that their status was extremely low and fixed to a great degree, as frontline functionaries had hardly any prospects for promotion. For example, police constables could generally not rise higher than the head constable position in a lifetime. When the police force was established, they were promoted up to the rank of inspectors. However, subsequently, sub-inspectors and inspectors came to be recruited directly, and the promotion avenues of constables were jettisoned (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015). Similarly, forest guards had the lowest prospects of advancement in the forest department and could, at best, get one promotion, up to the deputy ranger level (Ribbentrop, 1900; Schug, 2000). Further, school teachers were assigned a low status as well. While teaching in colleges was perceived as an intellectual job, teaching in schools was treated as being at par with low-ranking office jobs (Kumar, 1991).

This low status stemmed partly from a concern for keeping administrative expenditure to a minimum. The salaries of frontline functionaries were very low. For example, in Madras Presidency, in 1900, the salary of the Inspector General of Police was Rs. 2500 per month, whereas constables and head constables were paid Rs. 7 and Rs. 25 per month on recruitment, respectively. There was a small increase in salary after the First World War because the government did not want a dissatisfied police force that could be exploited by politicians. However, salaries remained quite inadequate, and most constables were in debt. Moreover, government housing was in short supply and very cramped in any case, and police constables were forced to rent accommodation, which cost more than their housing allowance (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Singh, 2002).

Similarly, at the end of the 19th century, the average primary school teacher earned Rs. 5–15 per month, school inspectors Rs. 100–500 and the Director of Public Instruction over Rs. 2000. Teachers' salary was apparently fixed based on their income in the indigenous school. However, the gifts they received in kind were not factored in; thus, their pay was actually much lower than their earnings before colonisation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, there were delays in the payment of salaries, and teachers were transferred from place to place at their personal expense (Government of India, 1929, 1966; Kumar 1991).

Due to their low status within the government and inadequate salary, frontline functionaries were usually drawn from the lower socio-economic strata. For example, though the government constantly made attempts to recruit police constables from among upper castes and educated sections of society, there were few applicants (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Singh, 2002). Consequently, the social class divide exacerbated and cemented the low status of frontline functionaries in the bureaucratic hierarchy.

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18 In the forest department, at the apex were superior or controlling staff, such as conservators of forest presiding over an entire province or circles forming parts of provinces. Circles were divided into divisions in charge of deputy conservators and assistant conservators, who saw to the day-to-day operations and delegated various supervisory and management tasks to rangers (Schug, 2000).

19 In the 1920s, the average monthly salary of primary school teachers varied at Rs. 8 and 6 anna in Bengal, Rs. 15 and 4 anna in Madras and Rs. 47 in Bombay (Gol, 1964).

The poorly paid, low-status frontline functionaries were not considered worthy of serious responsibility. For example, while head constables were placed in charge of police stations initially, later on, as per the recommendations of the Police Commission (1902–03), police stations were entrusted to sub-inspectors. Moreover, the constables and head constables were not allowed to do investigative work, a principle that was codified in the Criminal Procedure Code and police manuals. The duties of the constable included escort, guard and patrol work; making of arrests as per limited powers; suppression of disturbances (under orders); regulation of traffic and so on (Government of India, 1905, 1979).

Further, frontline functionaries were seen as needing constant guidance and supervision and were given little autonomy. For instance, as the school supervision system was set up in the mid-19th century (Government of India, 1929, 2012), school teachers who, in pre-colonial times, had decided on things such as what they would teach and the teaching pace for each pupil, were required to follow government curricula, textbooks and teaching schedules (Kumar, 1991). Similarly, rules were drawn up to guide the work of patwaris and their supervision (Moreland, 1911).

Frontline functionaries were also required to work in harsh conditions. For example, police constables were exposed to high risk when assigned duty in cholera and plague-infested areas. During the First World War, they were expected to work long hours, perform extra duties and go without holidays and leave (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Singh, 2002). Similarly, forest guards worked in remote and difficult areas with barely any facilities (Schug, 2000).

Within the bureaucracy, lower-ranked Indian officials were looked upon with suspicion, and an elaborate system of checks, inspections and record-keeping was set up for them (Sircar, 1988). Moreover, senior officials often treated frontline functionaries harshly. For example, senior police officers were contemptuous of the work of the constabulary and treated them with disdain. There was a punitive system of departmental punishment, comprising fines and demotions, and the rate of dismissal was high (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015; Singh, 2002). The dismissal of forest guards was also not uncommon (Schug, 2000). Moreover, school teachers were intimidated by inspectors and constantly feared punishment (Kumar, 1991).

Given this scenario, the relationship of frontline functionaries with the higher echelons of the state was fraught with conflict, and they resisted the state in several ways. For example, police constables took sick leave, were frequently absent from duty or performed their duties in such a lax manner that they were dismissed. Many police constables and forest guards quit their jobs (Schug, 2000; Singh, 2002). They also formed unions and associations. For example, in 1921, a police association was formed to improve the pay, status, morale and so on. of its members. In addition, police protests occurred during this period, and many subordinate policemen went on strike, demanding better service conditions. The fraught relationship between frontline functionaries and the state can further be assessed from the fact that many nationalists in Bihar took a keen interest in the problems of police subordinates, and the non-cooperation movement succeeded in striking a sympathetic chord with the lower rungs of the police (Singh, 2002).

## Professionalisation

The professionalisation of frontline functionaries needs to be seen against the highly inadequate spread of schools in the colonial period, on the one hand, and their role and status within the government, on the other. Most frontline functionaries, drawn from modest backgrounds, had had little basic education. For example, in 1927, a mere 28% of trained primary school teachers had completed middle school (Government of India, 1929). In addition, for several frontline functionaries, specialised skills were not considered important, as they were largely seen as being executors of orders, performing simple tasks. Notably, the first Inspector General of Forests<sup>20</sup> emphasised the professionalisation and training of senior officers; however, regarding forest guards, he opined that what was 'necessary in order to ensure efficiency are local knowledge, a strong constitution, active habits, honesty and general intelligence' (Schug, 2000, p. 232). Similarly, police constables were also given little training (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015).

Some initiatives were taken for a few frontline functionaries, to provide job-specific training. For instance, training schools for patwaris were started (Moreland, 1911), and attempts were made to provide pre-service training to school teachers by setting up 'Normal' (teacher training) schools across India<sup>21</sup> (Government of India, 1929, 2012). Yet, the quality of training left much to be desired. For instance, in the case of school teachers, while the need to train them was noted in several government reports, the actual investment in such training was small, and the academic challenge involved in educating children was not recognised. In 1927, only 44% of the teachers in boys' primary schools had been trained. Moreover, in teacher training colleges, the period of training was short, the curriculum was narrow and the teaching staff was inadequately qualified. Moreover, training colleges had little intellectual focus, with the main focus being the craft of teaching, especially classroom management (Government of India, 1929; Kumar, 1991).

## Community Relationship

Placed at the bottom of a rigid bureaucratic hierarchy, with little autonomy at work, the frontline functionaries of the colonial period were fashioned as agents of the state rather than servants of the people. They followed orders, rather than serving the community. Consequently, though frontline functionaries had many similarities with the mass of the people, it did not necessarily follow that they empathised with ordinary people. For example, in the case of police constables, Singh (2002) argues that their role as police set them apart from the people.

Frontline functionaries often acted against ordinary people, rather than for them. For instance, police constables used the power of their official position to extort bribes from the weak and protected the interests of landlords and the wealthy. They were very corrupt and turned to blackmail, extortion and petty embezzlement (Arnold, 1976; Giuliani, 2015). Consequently, instances of anti-police riots were frequent (Singh, 2002). Similarly, patwaris could be 'a terror to cultivators' and continued to receive grains from cultivators at harvest time in addition to their salaries (Moreland, 1911, p. 76).

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20 The forest administration structure was created by Dietrich Brandis, a German botanist (Schug, 2000).

21 By 1882, there were 106 'Normal' schools across India (Gol, 1929).

At the same time, the government established a degree of control over community workers who were not government employees, such as village headmen and chowkidars. The policy intention here can be discerned from the following statement in the Police Commission (1902–03) report: ‘the point is not whether a village can claim to control its own police, but whether the cooperation of the village community in police work is not of the highest value, is not indeed absolutely essential...’ (Government of India, 1905, p. 35).

Giulani (2015) has shown that in Bengal, despite the policy of letting villages do their own policing, the police executive managed to establish a system that outwardly protected the idea of village autonomy but entwined the village with the district police through layers of supervision. Initially, as per law, village police were under the control of the village panchayat. However, the panchayats were seen as inefficient and disinterested, and police officials supervised the village chowkidar despite the existing law. Over time, the police lobbied to get the law changed and came to supervise the village chowkidar through the district collector (Giuliani, 2015). Similarly, village headmen began to receive money from the colonial government in exchange for performing services such as collecting revenue (Jha, 2005–2006; Sapre, 1924). As a result, community workers too became more aligned with the government.

## A New Paradigm

Along with the official network of frontline functionaries described above, another type of frontline functionary that was not yet aligned with the state was developing. As nationalists and freedom fighters called for social reform, in the context of Gandhi's ‘constructive work’, a social activist, the gram sewak or village worker emerged. Gandhian village workers, who could be from any walk of life, were expected to fight caste oppression and introduce community initiatives in health, education, hygiene and so on. They were envisaged as exemplars, displaying qualities of empathy and sacrifice (Sinha, 2008; Srinivasan, 2006).

The alternative vision of India that the nationalists were constructing required a different relationship between the state and society that often called for frontline functionaries for socio-economic development. For example, in 1940, the Health Sub-Committee of the National Planning Committee (set up to develop a national plan by Congress) made proposals to include community health workers in public health services. It envisaged a community health worker trained in practical community and personal hygiene, first aid and simple medical treatment for every 1000 people in the population (Bhatia, 2014; Banerjee, 2005; Qadeer, 2008).

As India became independent, it inherited the frontline functionaries of the colonial period, as well as ideas about them that had developed during the freedom struggle. Policies regarding frontline functionaries developed in both these contexts, as illustrated in the next part of the paper.

# FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES AFTER INDEPENDENCE

## INTRODUCTION

As is well known, after 1947, the stated goals of the government of independent India differed radically from those of the colonial government. The new Indian constitution mandated a parliamentary democracy with full adult suffrage, and, through its directive principles,<sup>22</sup> set socio-economic development and social justice as the broad goals of the state. Further, as per the constitution, citizens had fundamental rights that included freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, practising the profession of choice and moving and residing throughout India. No person could be deprived of life and liberty except according to a lawful procedure.<sup>23</sup>

As the first and second Five Year plans emphasise, post-Independence, the stated policy goals of the government changed from mere revenue collection and enforcement of law and order to economic growth, redistribution and social welfare, with an emphasis on delivery through the public sector (Government of India, 1952, p. 56). As the role of government expanded to these newer areas, and the public sector took centre-stage, public administration, including field administration and the bureaucracy, began to change as well. Yet, as is illustrated below, there were significant continuities from the colonial era. Policies regarding frontline functionaries took root in this framework of continuity and change.

In the 1980s, modest shifts in government policies began as the government adopted a more pro-business stance to spur economic growth (Bhalla, 2018; Kohli, 2012).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, after the mid-1980s, not only scholars and the media, but government reports too began to comment on the unsatisfactory implementation of government programmes (Dreze, 1990; Government of India 1985a, 1985b; Shah, 1996; Swaminathan, 1990). These trends crystallised in 1991, as a structural adjustment loan was taken from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the economy was opened up to

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22 The directive principles of the constitution mandate the state to take measures to provide adequate livelihoods, universal elementary education, public health, protection of rights and promotion of educational and economic interests of deprived groups, and so on.

23 The fundamental freedoms are not absolute, and 'reasonable restrictions' can be enforced to protect public order, decency or morality. At the same time, over time, the idea of 'personal liberty' has been given a progressively wider interpretation by the Supreme Court (Arzt, 2016).

24 The pro-business orientation followed a sharp deceleration in industrial growth between 1965–79, and a GDP growth of a mere 2.9% per annum. Subsequently, the annual GDP growth rate graduated from 3.5% in the 1970s to 5.2% in the 1980s (Bhalla, 2018; Kohli, 2012).

encourage private enterprise. Two general policy developments of this time are important from the point of view of this paper. One, as the budget deficit was sought to be reduced, the containment of government expenditure became far more important than it had been earlier. Two, echoing a global trend towards the adoption of principles of New Public Management (NPM),<sup>25</sup> a greater role of the private sector in the provisioning of social services began to be envisaged. Both these had a crucial impact on frontline functionaries.

Below, the relevant features of the broader context in which policy regarding frontline functionaries developed, that is, the general policy and public administration, the bureaucracy and field administration, are described. Subsequently, the policy regarding frontline functionaries is delineated and analysed in two separate sections, that is, from Independence to the mid-1990s and after the mid-1990s.

## THE POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT AFTER INDEPENDENCE

### Policy and Public Administration

An important context for policy regarding frontline functionaries is that the Indian constitution mandates a federal polity of elected governments with law-making powers at the state and central levels. Notably, as per the constitution, most subject areas where frontline functionaries are employed, such as general administration, land management, police,<sup>26</sup> agriculture, rural development, school education, public health and social welfare, are domains of state governments. However, the central government, through its control over a large share of financial resources as well as its policy prescriptions, has exercised considerable influence on state subjects. This feature of Indian federalism has meant that although frontline functionaries are state government employees for state subjects, state policies regarding frontline functionaries tend to be very similar, in line with central prescriptions.

A second, extremely significant development has been the burgeoning of government interventions for socio-economic development and social justice. These have taken the form of progressive social legislation, such as regarding the abolition of zamindari, untouchability, bonded labour, the specification of minimum wages and the ceiling on agricultural and urban land holdings as well as a range of programmes in agriculture,<sup>27</sup> poverty alleviation,<sup>28</sup> school education,<sup>29</sup> public health,<sup>30</sup> the

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25 NPM was associated with the 'New Right' of the 1980s, but was subsequently adopted by several more left-leaning governments. It comprised of a set of administrative measures encompassing greater managerial autonomy and private sector-style management in public organisations, performance measurement and linked rewards for personnel, contracting services on the basis of public tendering and discipline, and parsimony in use of resources (Hood, 1990).

26 The constitution places police, public order and prisons in the state list, i.e., state governments have the jurisdiction to legislate on them. However, criminal and criminal procedure laws are placed in the concurrent list, i.e., the central as well as state governments can legislate on them, with central laws getting precedence in case of conflict between central and state laws.

creation of infrastructure, and so on. These have led to sizable expansion of the public administration system. There has been a proliferation of ministries, departments and technical institutions at the central and state levels as well as the establishment of grassroot organisations to provide social services and facilities such as schools, public health centres, and Anganwadi centres (Amrith, 2007; Connelly, 2006; Ghosh, 1995; Government of India, 1961, 1969, 1985a, 2009a, 2009b; Parayil, 1992; Potter, 1996; Sandhu, 2014; Sinha, 2008). This concern with socio-economic development has propelled policies regarding frontline functionaries.

A third important background is the manner in which initiatives for socio-economic development have been structured. Initially, with the first major initiative for socio-economic development in rural areas, that is, the Community Development (CD) Programme in 1952, the goal was to promote the holistic development of villages, addressing various aspects such as agricultural productivity, school education and sanitation. However, in the mid-1960s, as the country came to the brink of famine,<sup>31</sup> an agriculture policy focussing on selected areas where prospects of growth were good along with reliance on technology was adopted and the CD Programme was abandoned. For public administration, this was an important juncture, as socio-economic development came to be promoted separately by different departments through specific 'schemes', rather than holistically as per village needs. The various development schemes comprised of one or more activities to be undertaken such as digging wells, upgrading school infrastructure, building specified rural infrastructure etc., as well as other specifications such as unit costs, criteria for selecting beneficiaries, dimensions of the assets to be created, the quantum of wages to be paid and the process for fund disbursement.

A fourth important point to note is that while initiatives for socio-economic development marked a break with colonial policies, the regulatory sector was characterised by substantial continuity. Significantly, the police continued to have several 'preventive' powers of arrest, search and restraint on public assembly,<sup>32</sup> considered by many scholars to open the door to the abuse of fundamental rights

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27 The Intensive Agriculture Development Programme was launched in 1960 in selected districts, 'areas of quick response', followed by the Intensive Agriculture Areas Programme, and the High Yielding Varieties Programme in 1965 (Gol, 1985; Parayil, 1992; Sandhu, 2014).

28 In the 1970s, addressing poverty became a priority, and accordingly, several anti-poverty programmes were taken up. These programmes were of four types: individual beneficiary programmes aimed at small and marginal farmers, of which the largest was the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), in which loans were provided to persons below the poverty line to purchase productive assets; programmes to provide additional wage employment opportunities through the creation of public infrastructure such as the National Rural Employment Programme; programmes for ecologically disadvantaged areas, such as the Drought Prone Area Programme and Desert Development Programme; and programmes to enhance living standards by providing social infrastructure such as the Minimum Needs Programme (Gol, 1985; Parayil, 1992; Sandhu, 2014; Sinha, 2008).

29 Through this period, the public education system was expanded, although a significant number of children below the age of 14 remained out of school (Ghosh, 1995; World Bank, 1996).

30 Beginning with an emphasis on malaria eradication after Independence, initiatives were taken to promote public health and family planning (Amrith, 2007; Connelly, 2006; Gol, 1961). Moreover, in 1975, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) to address the nutrition and health of children under the age of six, and pregnant and lactating mothers, as well as pre-school education, was started (Sinha, 2006).

31 The economy grew at a modest rate of 3.7% per annum; agricultural growth remained sluggish and poverty remained high, while population continued to grow (Bhalla, 2018; Connelly, 2006; Kohli, 2012). In the CD Programme, better off people often cornered the resources, while the poor masses remained unenthusiastic (Sinha, 2008).

(Arzt, 2016). Further, with the rise of labour agitations, political extremism, communal tensions and so on (Bayley, 1983; Government of India, 1979), maintenance of order, rather than crime detection, remained a priority for the police (Government of India, 1972; Raghavan 1986; Verma, 2005).<sup>33</sup> Significantly, the five-year plans that commanded a large share of the central government's attention and were prepared after a great deal of study and deliberation by policy makers and experts, did not address regulatory administration. Consequently, the practice of assessment and reflection that existed in sectors concerned with socio-economic development through the five-year plans was absent in the case of regulatory sectors, leading to the unquestioning continuation of several practices.

A fifth critical development for public administration was that from the late 1960s onwards, there was an increasing centralisation of political power, accompanied by an intensification of patronage-based functioning and rent-seeking (Kaviraj, 1988; Kohli, 2012; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). For example, police officials were pressured to drop cases against politically powerful people and file trivial charges against political opponents, and local politicians sat in police stations to act as a buffer between their supporters and the police (Bayley, 1983). Public ethos began to deteriorate, and public organisations became increasingly partisan and corrupt.

The focus on containing government expenditure and the emphasis on privatisation of social services that followed the liberalisation of the economy in 1991 was set against the above context. During the 1990s, a reduction in expenditure was achieved mainly at the expense of social spending and public expenditure (Kohli, 2012; Shariff et al., 2002). At the same time, criticism of government institutions sharpened, and privatisation came to be seen as a preferred alternative more often, both within and outside the government. For instance, in the health sector, critics argue that public health centres and officials were de-legitimised and labelled as inefficient, lethargic and corrupt (Qadeer, 2008). However, in the late 1990s, the growth rate of the economy picked up, although employment opportunities remained stagnant and inequality increased<sup>34</sup> (Bhalla, 2018; Kohli, 2012). Moreover, government revenues began to grow. Subsequently, financial investment in the development of physical infrastructure and the social sector picked up (Shariff et al., 2002), and new schemes for school education,<sup>35</sup> public health,<sup>36</sup> rural employment,<sup>37</sup> and so on, were launched.

32 The substantive criminal and procedural law as contained in the IPC, CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act continued from the colonial era.

33 While police strength increased, the number of detectives remained almost constant (Raghavan, 1986; Verma, 2005).

34 From 1993–94 to 2004–05, the GDP growth accelerated to 6.3% per annum but employment growth decelerated to 1.8%. GDP growth peaked at 9% between 2004–05 to 2009–10, while employment growth collapsed to a mere 0.22%. The share of non-agriculture private capital in the economy rose sharply, and urban population grew from 27.5% in 1991 to 31.16% in 2011 (Bhalla, 2018; Kohli, 2012; Marshall & Randhawa, 2017).

35 The central government launched the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1993 to make primary education universal, with financial assistance from external agencies. By 2000, DPEP was merged into a larger, mainly domestically funded programme, called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which included upper primary education as well, and the funds available in the programme expanded steadily. In 2009, a new initiative for secondary education, i.e., the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was initiated. In 2018, the two programmes were merged in the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), covering the entire school cycle

36 The National Rural Health Mission, a major health programme, was launched in 2005.

37 The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Scheme, a wage generation programme, began in 2006.

However, this expansion of social services was very different from the one that began after Independence, as ideas about what constituted legitimate and productive government expenditure had changed. Importantly, as reflected in the discussion below, expenditure on manpower was strictly controlled to reduce government liabilities towards salaries and pensions. Additionally, private sector participation in the provision of social services continued to be sought. As the economy grew, the availability of privately provided social services, such as schools and health facilities, kept rising.<sup>38</sup> In addition, several government policies and programmes encouraged private participation. For example, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, a programme focused on improving urban infrastructure and services, launched in 2005, promoted public-private partnership in water supply and solid waste management as well as user fees (Kingdon, 2017; Marshall & Randhawa, 2017, NUEPA, 2016; Qadeer, 2008).

At the same time, with the increasing clout of business as well as increased spending in the government, rent-seeking increased further and a series of high-profile corruption scandals emerged from 2010 onwards (Bardhan, 2001; Chadda, 2013). Moreover, government social services for low-income groups continued to be inadequate and unsatisfactory. Several civil society actors began to push for greater transparency in government functioning as well as legal rights to social services. This was followed by a spate of rights-based legislation, which included the Right to Information Act in 2002, guaranteeing citizens the right to get information from the government, as well as legislation guaranteeing rights to employment, education and food.<sup>39</sup> From 2010 onwards, several state governments began to pass acts that guaranteed the delivery of public services in a stipulated period.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the use of technology in government had begun to increase since the mid-1980s.<sup>41</sup> In 2013, the government began to transfer funds from various subsidies directly into citizens' accounts, and the focus on the use of digital technology subsequently intensified. Several government processes and citizen interfaces were digitised. This was followed by an emphasis on transferring funds in various schemes directly into the accounts of the beneficiaries. These developments had a significant impact on frontline work as well.

## Field Administration

Along with the general shifts in public administration described above, some specific developments took place in field administration. To begin with, after Independence, as zamindari was abolished, the varied administrative set-up below the district was replaced with an administrative system

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38 Between 2010–11 to 2014–15, the number of government schools rose by 16,376, and the number of private schools by 71,360. In addition, student enrolment in government schools fell by 1.11 crore, whereas enrolment in private schools rose by 1.60 crore (Kingdon, 2017).

39 The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed in 2005, followed by The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 or Right to Education Act (RTE) and The National Food Security Act in 2013.

40 The first of such an Act was passed in Madhya Pradesh (Thulaseedharan, 2013).

41 Digitisation of land records began during the 1980s (Government of India, 2008–09). In 2004, a project called Common Integrated Police Application (CIPA) was introduced to digitise crime and criminal records at police stations. Another program called Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) was created to enable linkages across police stations (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019).

based on the ryotwari areas throughout the country.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, government-employed civil servants replaced various non-government actors such as zamindars and village headmen. The district remained the key unit of field administration, with the district collector as its administrative head. The units of sub-divisions and tehsils continued (Government of India, 1952; Misra, 1983; Potter, 1996; Venkatarangaiya, 1953).

At the same time, the role of field administration changed from mainly regulatory to encompassing a wide gamut of developmental activities (Government of India, 1967). As social legislation grew, new areas for regulation emerged at the field level. In the 1950s, policy documents gave considerable attention to the appropriate structures at the field level for the new tasks and emphasised two important points: first, various aspects of village development were interconnected, and all had to be addressed by a field-level organisation holistically; second, people's participation was needed for development (Government of India, 1952a, 1956, 1957). In keeping with these ideas, the CD programme aiming at holistic village development was introduced, and a new, sub-district administrative unit, that is, a block, comprising around 100 villages, was created as a unit to plan for socio-economic development and to support holistic village development. The prescribed staffing pattern comprised

of a block development officer (BDO) as the head, assisted by 'extension officers' and multi-purpose gram sewaks or village-level workers.<sup>43</sup> Notably, the block was around the size of an average tehsil; although the size of tehsils varied and blocks were more even-sized.<sup>44</sup> To elicit people's participation, a three-tier structure of elected local governments or Panchayats, that is, the zilla parishad at the district level, the block panchayat at the block level and the gram panchayat for one or more villages were envisaged to lead socio-economic development and established in most states (Government of India, 1957, 1985; Mathew, 1994; Sinha, 2008).

However, in the mid-1960s, as the CD Programme and the idea of holistic village development were abandoned, panchayats were disempowered in most states. Instead, programmes for socio-economic development began to be implemented through departmental bureaucracies (Government of India, 1978; Jain et al., 1985; Mathew, 1994). As new programmes for socio-economic development were taken up, various departments set up their own offices and staff at various levels in the district (Misra, 1983). The block survived as a unit, but ceased to be a unit of area planning; instead, it became a site where offices and institutions of several developmental departments were created. In other words, field administration expanded, covering a wide range of new subjects. However, this change followed the pattern of regulatory administration in British-governed India, and a separate model suited to socio-economic development did not take root.

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42 For example, in Bengal, sub-divisions were created where there were none (Venkatarangaiya, 1953).

43 In the CD programme, the recommended staffing pattern included 8 extension officers for agriculture, animal husbandry, cooperation, panchayats, rural industries, engineering, school education, and programmes for women and children; 10 gram sewaks or village level workers; 2 gram sevikas, programme assistant, a storekeeper-cum accountant and ministerial staff (Gol, 1985).

44 In the CD programme, a project was established over a 'unit' of approximately 300 villages and a population of 2 lakh, and each unit was divided into three blocks (Gol, 1985; Sinha, 2008).

Consequently, an important characteristic of field administration in India is the existence of weak and disempowered local governments in most states. In some states, such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala, local governments have been empowered at various points in time (Crook & Manor, 1998; Ghosh & Kumar, 2003; Sharma, 2009a, 2003; Westergaard, 1992).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in 1993, with the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, regular elections for panchayats and municipalities became mandatory. However, the devolution of functions, funds and manpower to local governments remained for the states to decide. In most states, local governments lack manpower, funds and autonomy, and play a minor role. Numerous departmental offices and other agencies implement departmental programmes separately.<sup>46</sup> In most states, the district collector, and not elected governments, provide leadership and coordination for socio-economic development. The question as to what role elected governments should have in field administration remains unresolved to this day.

Though local governments have remained disempowered, since the mid-1990s, there has been some emphasis on community participation. However, this too has been attempted departmentally, as several departments have created their own community-based organisations (CBOs). For example, in 1990, the forest department directed the setting up of joint forest management committees, which were assigned the responsibility of the protection of adjoining forests and given a share from the sale of forest produce obtained from the protected tracts (Schug, 2000). Similarly, village education committees were set up in the mid-1990s, which subsequently morphed into school management committees. The criteria for membership to these committees varies from simple nomination by the department to informal elections. Studies show an uneven performance of such community-based organisations, with most taking little initiative (Murali et al., 2003; Sharma, 2019).

## The Bureaucracy

### Introduction

It is useful to examine the developments that took place in the bureaucracy in two phases, before and after 1991, when the approach of the government towards bureaucracy shifted. Notably, policy documents of the 1950s and 1960s show significant trust in the bureaucracy to deliver on government policy, and appear to view its expansion as necessary. However, a shift in this trust in the bureaucracy is apparent in the policy documents of the 1980s (Sharma, 2009).

Actual policy shifts regarding the bureaucracy began after 1991, with a heightened focus on reducing government expenditure. Notably, the highest expenditure in the delivery of services is usually on personnel (Osborne et al., 2014). Consequently, a reduction in the financial resources expended on bureaucracy can enable significant savings. Moreover, although India did not formally adopt NPM, many of its ideas, especially regarding replacing the permanent bureaucracy with less expensive alternatives, took hold.

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45 In Gujarat and Maharashtra, strong zilla parishads developed at the district level and played an important role in socio-economic development. In the 1970s, in West Bengal, gram panchayats were empowered to undertake several developmental activities. Post Emergency, in 1979, the Asoka Mehta Committee was set up to review panchayats. The committee's report stressed on the role of zilla parishads as leaders of socio-economic development. Subsequently, zilla parishads were empowered in Karnataka (Crook & Manor, 1998; Ghosh & Kumar, 2003; Sharma, 2009, 2003; Westergaard, 1992).

46 For example, in the 1970s, separate agencies were created to implement different poverty alleviation programmes, which morphed into the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), responsible for various rural development programmes. A District Industries Centre was set up to promote small-scale industries, and so on (Government of India, 1985a).

## Before the 1990s

Post-independence, a rapid expansion of the bureaucracy took place. Several new services were created in the technical and socio-developmental sectors and additional personnel were recruited to existing services (Government of India, 1969). With high population growth and an increasingly complex polity, personnel in regulatory administration increased as well. For example, in 1947, the strength of police in states and union territories was 3.81 lakh, and by 1991, this figure increased to 11.52 lakh. In addition, several types of central police forces, focussing on specific problems or geographical areas, began to be set up<sup>47</sup> (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, n.d.; Kamtekar 2017; Raghavan, 1986; Verma, 2005).

However, the basic structure of the bureaucracy in terms of division into numerous higher and lower services belonging to various departments (except the Indian Administrative Service that replaced the Indian Civil Service) at the central and state level remained. In fact, this structure was strengthened further by systematising the services, salary structures and so on (Government of India, 1969). Importantly, promotional avenues from lower to higher services continued to be limited. For example, the Police Commission of 1979–81, envisaged a radical restructuring of the police force, with recruitment at only two levels: the police constable and the Indian Police Service (IPS), instead of 4 levels: constable, sub-Inspector, deputy superintendent of police and the IPS, so that police constables would be promoted quickly and become potential investigating officers. However, no action was taken on this recommendation (Government of India, 1979, 2015).

However, some mitigating shifts were visible within this structure. One change was that the social base of the bureaucracy began to widen, as not only did race cease to be relevant, but posts began to be reserved for scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) candidates in proportion to their population. At the same time, however, the lack of promotion avenues for junior officials meant that different social classes aspired for different levels of services, and no amount of ability and hard work could enable junior employees to achieve more than one or two promotions. The second important change was in the salary structure, which became less iniquitous. Up to the 1990s, there was a steady decline in the ratio of the highest government salary to the lowest (Government of India, 2015). Moreover, apart from a few exceptions, government employees were 'permanent', that is, they served till they retired and could be removed only for dereliction of duty after a due process of enquiry. Moreover, they had housing, medical and other facilities as well.

It is important to note the very significant impact of the deteriorating public ethos on the bureaucracy that began in the 1970s. While bureaucrats could not be hired and fired casually, patronage in transfers and postings of officials began to be used liberally to politicise and manipulate them, changing the character of the bureaucracy. For example, Bayley (1983) sees the Emergency in 1975 as a turning point for the police, when the level of politicisation increased substantially. The National Police Commission (1979–81) too was extremely concerned about politicisation, and specified areas where directions to junior officials were and were not appropriate. Bureaucrats began to increasingly succumb to illegitimate political demands, and, along with the political class, indulged in rent-seeking (Dwivedi et al., 1989; Potter, 1996a).

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<sup>47</sup> The Central Reserve Police Act 1949 was enacted.

## Post 1991

Since 1991, two strategies have been adopted to reduce the expenditure on the bureaucracy. One, a reduction in the number of government personnel employed has been attempted, mainly by freezing recruitment to replace retiring personnel. However, in the new millennium, as government revenues and programmes increased, this became more difficult. In some instances, extra work was simply transferred to existing personnel. At other times, new employees became necessary. In such cases, the approach was to hire them on contract so that the government did not incur liabilities on pensions, house rent allowance and so on. They were usually paid less than the permanent bureaucracy.

At senior levels, the impact of these changes was limited, as the permanent bureaucracy remained the bedrock of government human resources, and contractual employees were simply added as experts, project managers, and so on. However, at junior levels, the contractual workforce grew rapidly, replacing permanent employees. Along with the structure of higher and lower services, a new distinction between permanent or 'regular' employees (read fairly well paid) and contractual or 'temporary' employees (read poorly paid) became important, increasing inequality within the bureaucracy. In addition, as salaries at the managerial levels rose significantly in the private sector, the differential between the highest and lowest salaries in government showed a modest rise, reversing the declining trend of the past (Government of India, 2015). Moreover, the increasing number of contractual employees lacked benefits such as pensions, compensation of medical expenses, and so on.

Around the same time, in 1993, the Government of India (GoI) introduced additional reservations at a broad rate of 27% in government jobs for other backward classes (OBCs) (Government of India, 2016), though such reservations had already been made in several state governments. While this change broadened the social base of the bureaucracy further, it came in the context of increasing inequalities within the bureaucracy. Further, the patronage-based management of the bureaucracy via transfers and postings continued unabated (Zwart, 2010). This is vividly illustrated in the trajectory of a public interest litigation (PIL) filed before the supreme court in 1996,<sup>48</sup> to enforce the implementation of the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1979–81). In spite of repeated directions from the supreme court to rationalise transfers and postings, state governments did not comply. Instead, in 2013, three state governments raised constitutional objections against the 'interference' by the supreme court

## FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES: SINCE INDEPENDENCE TO THE MID-1990S

### Introduction

The policy and public administration context described above shaped the frontline functionaries in India after independence, just as it had shaped them in the colonial period. The shifts that came about in this context were uneven. On the one hand, the policy context changed radically for socio-economic development, but much less so in the regulatory sphere. On the other, the public administration system expanded significantly, but showed remarkable continuities in structure, especially in field administration.

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48 The public interest litigation, known as Prakash Singh versus Union of India, was filed by two retired Indian Police Service officers.

In parallel, policy regarding frontline functionaries developed on the basis of assumptions and ideas, both overt and tacit, specifically about them, i.e., the nature of their work, their appropriate place in the bureaucracy, the skills they need, their relationship to the state and the community, and so on. These ideas too, in turn, were embedded in the mutually contradictory colonial inheritance, new post-Independence ideology and a smattering of Gandhian thought.

In this section, an attempt is made to delineate the stated policy as well as key underlying assumptions about frontline functionaries post-independence. Notably, the types of frontline functionaries that exist in India today are very large. At the same time, various types of frontline functionaries differ in the extent to which they interact with ordinary people. Some frontline workers, such as Anganwadi workers, school teachers and patwaris, have wide public contact. Others, such as workers in agriculture demonstration farms and armed constables, in contrast, deal with a few people, and ordinary people come in contact with them only occasionally, or not at all. As it is impossible to discuss all the frontline functionaries, the focus is on the former category of frontline functionaries, who exist in large numbers, and with whom ordinary people interact often.

## Emergence and Expansion of Frontline Functionaries

### Increased Significance

Post-independence, the ambitious national goal of socio-economic development demanded a greater outreach of the state into society. Consequently, as the key link between the government and ordinary people, frontline functionaries acquired a new significance that was acknowledged in several policy documents. For example, in the report by the Kothari Commission on education (a key policy document), as well as the National Policy on Education 1968, education was seen as critical to achieve national goals, and the teacher was viewed as a significant contributor to this end. Moreover, the Commission's report highlighted the need for competent and motivated teachers to provide good quality education (Government of India, 1966, 1968). As per the National Policy of Education 1988 (revised in 1992):

'The status of teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The Government and community should help to create conditions which inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines (Government of India, 1988, p. 31)'

In the same vein, the Police Commission (1978–81) report emphasised the importance of police constables for good policing, stating that:

The crux of effective policing...is the effective and amiable presence of a well-qualified, trained and motivated constable' (Government of India, 1979, p. 18).

Moreover, as the colonial goal of administration at minimal cost was replaced by one of providing a host of administrative services evenly across the country, frontline functionaries were seen, not as an unnecessary burden on the exchequer, but an essential investment to achieve these goals. Severe financial limitations remained as government revenues in India's underdeveloped economy were highly inadequate, and social services increased slowly. But as shown by several policy documents, the

financial constraints were lamented (Government of India, 1966, 1967), and with the modest growth in the economy, government social service expanded steadily. Moreover, the types and number of frontline functionaries increased as well.

## Spread of Frontline Functionaries in the Regulatory Sector

In the regulatory sector, key frontline functionaries of the colonial era, that is, the patwari, police constable and forest guards, remained the backbone of frontline administration and grew significantly in number. One reason for this increase was that field administration became the domain of personnel employed directly by the government, rather than zamindars, village headmen, chowkidars and so on, resulting in government-employed patwaris, police constables and forest guards becoming the norm across the whole country (Government of India, 1952). In some states, village chowkidars continued to receive small compensations from the government to perform very minor roles, such as providing information to the bureaucracy and assisting during field visits by officials. However, they lost their status and authority (Government of India, 1967, 1972).

In addition, the scope of regulatory frontline work expanded because of the steady growth in population, as well as the increasing range of regulatory work. For example, in the case of police, the number of recorded cognisable crimes under the Indian Penal Code rose significantly as the population increased (Government of India, 1979).<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as the economy grew and the polity became more complex, vehicular traffic in urban areas grew, labour agitations increased and incidences of rioting per unit population doubled between 1960 and 1983. Added to this was the task of implementing new social legislation (Bayley, 1983; Government of India, 1979). Further, the government attempted to provide adequate rather than the bare minimum of administrative services, as is illustrated by the establishment of new police outposts in police stations with large areas (Government of India, 1980). Consequently, the strength of the police force in different states and union territories grew from 3.81 lakh in 1947 to 11.52 lakh in 1991 (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, n.d.; Kamtekar, 2017; Raghavan, 1986).

## Growth of Frontline Functionaries for Socio-economic Development

As the scope of frontline work in socio-developmental sectors increased, several new types of frontline functionaries emerged. In the 1950s, the 'village-level worker' (VLW) emerged in the Community Development Programme and National Extension Service. The concept of a VLW as a worker for the community was influenced by Gandhian ideas, pre-Independence rural development projects and external funding agencies. The VLW worked as part of the development administration structure at the block, with each VLW being in charge of a group of around five villages. The VLW's role was extensive and included facilitating village organisations; mobilising cooperation for soil conservation; developing water supplies, livestock and forestry; improving marketing, education and health; initiating community activities and mobilising unutilised and under-utilised labour and natural resources (Government of India, 1985a; Sinha, 2008).

Further, as gram panchayats were set up, they required secretaries for administrative work, that is, to organise meetings, record minutes, recover taxes and so on. However, the cost of providing each gram panchayat with a secretary was considered too high, and alternative arrangements were made instead.

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49 The number of recorded cognisable crimes under the Indian Penal Code rose from 5.56 lakhs in 1954 to 13.54 lakh in 1977 (Gol, 1979).

For example, in Maharashtra and Gujarat, patwaris were made gram panchayat secretaries. While this practice continued in Gujarat, in Maharashtra, patwaris reverted to the revenue department by the late 1960s, as it was perceived that their transfer to the gram panchayat deprived the district collector of an important local source of information required to handle various types of crises. Moreover, local politics were seen to interfere with neutrality in the maintenance of land records. The influential Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended the VLW be made the gram panchayat secretary, but it was feared that this would reduce the time spent by the VLW on actual developmental work (Government of India, 1967). Over time, state governments began to recruit gram panchayat secretaries separately. However, in most states, gram panchayats ceased to be important with the end of the CD programme, and one secretary was given charge of several gram panchayats.

In the 1960s, as the government began to encourage farmers to adopt modern agriculture practices, VLWs of the CD Programme began to focus on agriculture, informing farmers about new agricultural practices, linking them to banks and so on, resulting in other aspects of their work being side-lined (Sinha, 2008). Subsequently, in 1974, a World Bank-funded project introduced the 'Training and Visit' system<sup>50</sup> of agricultural extension, which was adopted by several major Indian states. The proponents of this system viewed the VLW's work, handling several aspects of development, as unfocussed, with poorly defined goals leading to ineffective performance. The Training and Visit system, on the other hand, emphasised a unified agricultural extension system, with an agricultural extension worker under the command of the agriculture department, rigorously trained and devoted exclusively to the dissemination of agricultural expertise to farmers (Benor & Harrison, 1977; Cernea, 1981).

As the Training and Visit System spread, thousands of VLWs were transferred from the block panchayat to the agriculture department. Over time, agriculture extension workers, trained in agricultural sciences, began to be recruited in most states. Though there were variations across states, an agriculture extension worker typically covered a group of 700–800 farming families. In each group, about 10% farmers were selected as 'contact farmers' and regularly visited by agricultural extension workers to provide advice.<sup>51</sup> During these visits, other farmers were expected to attend as well (Blum & Isaak, 1990; Sulaiman & Holt, 2002; Feder et al., 1987; Feder & Slade, 1984).

The shift in agricultural policy proved an important turning point, not just for agriculture extension workers, but for all frontline functionaries. As noted above, panchayats were disempowered and replaced with department-based administration. Subsequently, each department began to recruit its own frontline functionaries. Frontline functionaries now emerged as departmental employees, working for specific state government departments, instead of a local government. Their goals were set as per departmental priorities, rather than the needs of the area and its citizens. In this sense, they became more agents of the state than of the citizens.

Moreover, different departments adopted varied geographical administrative units for their frontline functionaries. Consequently, there were no headquarters below the block-level, where all or several frontline functionaries were located (Sharma, 2019). This added to the identification of frontline functionaries with separate departments, rather than with the citizens that they served. Another important outcome of frontline functionaries identifying with their departments was that, within

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<sup>50</sup> The Training and Visit System, backed by the World Bank, was one of the most influential extension systems in development. It originated in Israel, developed in India, and subsequently spread to several countries (Blum and Isaak 1990).

<sup>51</sup> West Bengal abandoned the system of contact farmers in favour of one on which all farmers came to the meeting (Blum & Isaak, 1990).

the broad bureaucratic framework, each department developed its own vision of its frontline functionaries. Departments differed in the extent to which they focussed on the frontline functionaries' professionalisation, status, service benefits and so on.

An important outcome of department-based functioning in the socio-developmental sectors was that frontline functionaries in these sectors came to be organised on the same principles as their counterparts in the regulatory sectors. They were a part of a departmental hierarchy instead of a local government. The Gandhian-style 'village worker', working for the community, albeit paid by the government, was abandoned in favour of a junior departmental employee. However, as described below, Gandhian ideas about village workers continued to emerge from time to time or be used to justify policy shifts concerning frontline functionaries.

When poverty alleviation and rural development programmes began in the 1970s, frontline functionaries, often called gram sewaks or village level workers, were recruited. However, in spite of the common nomenclature, these gram sewaks were different from the VLWs of the CD Programme. The new gram sewaks were part of the rural development department, and their role was to implement the schemes of the department. Moreover, as rural infrastructure such as irrigation works, roads, drinking water facilities and school buildings were created, a large number of sub-engineers and technicians were recruited by the various departments handling different types of infrastructure. Though the work of sub-engineers and technicians was mainly concerned with the construction and repair of physical infrastructure, work concerning rural development, drinking water and minor irrigation departments brought them into a fair degree of contact with people.

One frontline functionary that continued from the colonial era was the school teacher. However, as the number of government schools expanded,<sup>52</sup> most teachers became direct employees of the government, as opposed to working in government aided schools. Notably, the distinction in the salary and status of secondary, upper middle and primary teachers was retained. The number of school teachers grew rapidly at every level. For example, between 1951 and 1992, the annual growth rate in the number of teachers was 2.8% for primary teachers and 6.3% for upper primary teachers, though this was well below the requirement for universal elementary education, as mandated in the directive principles of the constitution (World Bank, 1997).

In the health sector, immediately after Independence, a range of national health programmes for malaria control, family planning etc. were started. These ran almost independently of each other. Health workers were recruited and trained for specific programmes such as malaria worker for malaria control, vaccinator for the immunisation programme and so on (Bhatia, 2014; Jesani, 1990). As primary health care centres (PHCs)<sup>53</sup> and sub-health centres were established, they were provided with temporary female workers with preliminary education, called 'auxiliary nurse midwives' (ANMs), for family planning and maternal care; these workers were trained and placed in sub-health centres, and they gradually became permanent staff in the health system (Mavalankar & Vora, 2008).

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52 Between 1950 and 1985, there was a 136% increase in the number of primary schools, while there was an eight-fold increase in the number of upper primary schools (Gol, 1985b)

53 As per the 1971 census, a PHC catered to a population of 80,000 to 1,50,000, and a sub-health centre to a population of 10,000 to 15,000 (Gol, 1973).

Since the 1950s, several non-government organisations (NGOs) in the health sector had been working through 'community health workers', who live and work closely with the community on health-related issues (Bhatia, 2014; Joshi & George, 2012). In the 1970s, the World Health Organization (WHO) began to promote the concept of community health workers (Perry et al., 2014). Subsequently, in 1973, the Kartar Singh Committee set up by the government recommended that workers of different health programmes be replaced by multipurpose community health workers.<sup>54</sup> As a result, one female multipurpose worker, that is, an auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), and one male multi-purpose worker (MPW) began to be recruited for a population of 3000–3500 and an area with a maximum radius of 5 kilometres, and placed at sub-health centres and primary health centres. The ANMs were responsible for maternal and child health care and family planning services, while MPWs focused on disease control and sanitation (Bhatia, 2014; Government of India, 1973; Jesani, 1990).

Another important development for frontline functionaries was the initiation of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1975 with the support of United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and World Bank (Bhatia, 2014; Sinha, 2006). With this scheme, Anganwadi centres catering to the nutrition and health of pregnant and lactating mothers and children under the age of six, as well as pre-school education began to be established. Anganwadi workers (AWWs) were appointed to manage the centres and were assisted by a helper. An AWW was required to run the Anganwadi as a pre-school education centre, provide supplementary nutrition and ensure vaccination for children in the age group of 0–6 years as well as pregnant and lactating mothers, identify malnourished children and monitor them, and provide referral services.

## Key Policy Features and Analysis

### Frontline Functionaries as Government Workers

#### Introduction

The fact that frontline functionaries are public, rather than private, employees has important repercussions for their role, work, service conditions, working context and so on. A comparison of school teachers in public and private schools illustrates this difference. In India, along with their teaching duties, government school teachers have been tasked with ensuring universal enrolment, overseeing midday meals, distributing various types of student benefits and performing non-educational tasks for elections, census and so on. Private school teachers, on the other hand, do not perform these tasks. Moreover, against the job security and systematic remuneration system of government teachers, private school teachers have extremely variable service conditions. Additionally, as public servants, government teachers are accountable to a range of actors such as officials, local governments, politicians and people, while private school teachers are accountable mainly to their management and clients. Further, government school teachers have to follow a host of guidelines and norms that cannot be changed and negotiated easily, while this may not be the case for private school teachers. In addition, working in a government system entails reporting, attending meetings and so on, at a much larger scale than in the private sector.

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<sup>54</sup> In 1977, about 4 lakh male community health workers called 'swasthya rakshaks' (health protectors) were recruited to provide basic health care in villages. However, they were disbanded as funds for the scheme came to a halt (Bhatia, 2014).

Although there is a clear distinction between government bureaucrats and private employees, there is no single theoretical approach to understanding bureaucrats and bureaucratic behaviour, and consequently, the 'government employee' aspect of frontline functionaries. In the classic Weberian conceptualisation, the rule of law and neutral, impartial behaviour are key tenets of bureaucratic behaviour, while meritocracy and hierarchy are the key principles of functioning. In this approach, frontline functionaries may be expected to stick to rules, follow orders and treat citizens impartially. Another highly influential approach is the 'public choice' orientation, whereby public servants, like all human beings, are seen as being motivated by self-interest. In this framework, frontline functionaries may look mainly for increases in salaries and promotions (March & Olsen, 1989).

A third approach, using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, is to view public servants as existing in a distinct habitus, such as valuing public good, accountability and impartiality, working with others anonymously and so on (Hugre et al., 2015; McDonough, 2006; Wise, 2004). Here, frontline functionaries may be expected to embody and act on these values. Another somewhat related approach is based on the recognition of a 'public service motivation', which is, 'an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisations' (Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368). The public service motive is seen as comprising rational motives such as the satisfaction obtained from participating in policy formulation and commitment to a public programme or advocacy for a special interest; norm-based motives include loyalty to the country, and serving the public interest and social equity; and affective motives refer to a love for and desire to protect people within a political boundary<sup>55</sup> (Perry & Wise, 1990).

The following section describes and analyses policies regarding the employment of frontline functionaries in government. Rather than adopt any one of the above approaches in the analysis, the discussion attempts to recognise insights offered, as they all contain grains of truth. The premise here is that specific configurations of policies and the working ethos may promote one or other types of bureaucratic behaviours highlighted in different theoretical approaches. For example, studies show that public service motivation does not preclude self-interest, such as value attached to a higher pay, which remains important for public sector employees, and may be more important than the public sector motive (Perry et al., 2010). It could be argued that some policies and working ethos may promote self-interest behaviours, while others may foster more public-spirited ones.

## **Frontline Work and Role Definition**

As described above, after Independence, policy makers understood the importance of frontline functionaries in achieving the ambitious government goals seeking to change the economy and society. This was also indicated by the rapid growth of the various types and number of frontline functionaries. Yet, the complex strategies needed to give shape to government goals on the ground appears to have been inadequately understood, as is indicated by the proliferation of developmental 'schemes' that prescribed the same activities in widely varying contexts. An example of this mismatch of goals and actual activities on the ground is the attempt to address child malnutrition. One activity of the ICDS

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<sup>55</sup> Research has shown a positive association between public service motivation and preference for government instead of private sector jobs. Several studies have found that external incentives such as higher pay are more important for private sector employees than public sector employees. Public sector employees are strongly motivated by security and stability (Buelens & van den Broeck, 2007). Further, studies indicate a positive relationship between public sector motivation and individual performance in public sector organisations (Perry et al., 2010).

scheme was the provision of specified supplementary nutrition to small children and their mothers. There was no attempt to locate the local causes of malnutrition, and formulate and act on strategies based on local eating patterns.

Through such schemes, orders and so on, the role of frontline functionaries was conceptualised very narrowly, mostly in terms of precise activities, with no flexibility to suit the context. For example, an AWW provided specified supplementary nutrition to children, irrespective of whether they ate it. Similarly, in case of school teachers, not only were the syllabus and textbooks prescribed, but state governments issued detailed instructions for day-to-day matters, such as prescribing timetables. A school could not change its schedule to adapt to local festivals, harvesting season, etc. The agricultural extension workers also conveyed centrally formulated recommendations to farmers (Feder & Slade, 1984). In addition, the role, or rather activities, of frontline functionaries changed as new government priorities emerged, rather than in response to needs arising from the context. For example, while in the 1960s, ANMs provided delivery and basic curative services to the community, in the mid-1970s, their involvement in family planning became dominant, and subsequently, immunisation became an important activity (Mavalankar & Vora, 2008).

This narrow conceptualisation of the role of frontline functionaries is in sharp contrast to the one in academic works in the context of developed countries. Lipsky (1980) argued that though street-level bureaucrats are usually junior employees, they enjoy a fair degree of discretion. For example, teachers have to decide how to transact a particular lesson, deal with specific students and so on. Moreover, street-level bureaucrats usually work alone and do not sit in offices, so they cannot be supervised closely. In fact, the discretion enjoyed by street-level bureaucrats has possibly been the most discussed theme in academic literature. Whether such discretion is seen as a positive or negative attribute depends on how the process of implementation is perceived. From a top-down perspective, where street-level bureaucrats are seen as implementers of policy directions, discretion is not welcomed, as they may use it to pursue their own goals. From a bottom-up perspective, discretion is viewed as aiding the employment of general rules and norms to specific situations and improving the effectiveness of policies, by optimising resources and building public support (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014).

In defining the role of frontline functionaries, Indian policy has clearly followed the 'top-down' perspective of policy implementation. Yet, studies in more liberal contexts show that rules often come in the way of providing the right response to problems (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Moreover, the Indian experience itself shows that to implement government policies effectively, intelligent strategies are required not only at the national and state level, but at the local level as well. For example, the provision of elementary schools and teachers did not automatically result in the universal enrolment of children. Many children remained out of school due to non-school related factors such as child labour, early marriage of girls, de-valuing girls' education, as well as the inadequate quality of schools (PROBE Report, 1999; World Bank, 1997). To achieve policy goals, government teachers needed to form a rapport with the community and adapt teaching strategies to suit the students they taught.

Additionally, for some frontline functionaries in regulatory sectors that continued from the colonial period, a reconceptualisation of the role was required in the changed context, which did not take place. For example, the Police Commission (1979–1981) noted the following:

With the transition from foreign rule to independent, socialist, democratic and welfare State, the style of police handling of public order situations has had to change from an aggressive mailed fist attitude to peaceful and persuasive handling of agitating groups.....This has, in turn, meant the deployment of a larger number of Constables for interacting with the public and securing their cooperation by persuasion and appeal for public order. This is a job which the Constabulary visualized by the 1902 Police Commission was not expected to perform..’ (Government of India, 1979, p. 10).

The Police Commission (1979–81) recommended that the constabulary, the most visible face of the police, be given a different role. Constables needed to behave like officers and be recruited and trained accordingly (Government of India, 1979). Yet, there was little attempt to adapt the role of police constables to these changes. Moreover, as the importance of land revenue as a source of government income declined steadily over time, the role of the patwari shifted to mainly a keeper of land records. At the same time, gram panchayats began to levy minor taxes and levies, including house tax, in several states. Yet, land revenue for agricultural land continued to be collected by patwaris, and gram panchayat taxes by the gram panchayat secretaries, when the two could possibly have been combined. Additionally, land records in the residential areas of villages remained in no man's land. There were clearly several overlaps between the role of the gram panchayats and the patwari, but these were not addressed.

Another problem was that in many cases, the role of frontline functionaries was defined unrealistically, possibly driven by the inadequacy of financial resources. For example, the number of tasks that an AWW was expected to perform were beyond the capacity of most workers (Sinha, 2006). In addition, even if impossible tasks were not built into stated policy, frontline functionaries were handed unmanageable work in practice. For example, in 1987, 30% primary schools were schools with single teachers, that is, one teacher was expected to handle all five classes at the same time, and more than half the schools had more classes than teachers so that one teacher had to handle more than one class. The ratio of students to teachers was way above acceptable levels (World Bank, 1997).

## **Diversity**

Regarding the bureaucracy in general, because of reservations, the representation of SCs and STs, and in some states, other backward classes as well, increased among frontline functionaries. However, in many instances, the actual number of frontline functionaries from reserved categories remained below the mandated level. For example, while the percentage of SC and ST primary school teachers increased through this period, it remained below their share in the population (World Bank, 1997).

Moreover, as the government addressed issues related to women and small children, women frontline functionaries such as ANMs and AWWs were recruited in large numbers. However, in jobs where both men and women could be recruited, the growth in the number of women frontline functionaries was modest as there were no reservations for women. For example, in 1993, 31% primary teachers and 35% upper primary teachers were women, up from 15% in 1950, but men continued to outnumber women by two to one. In addition, wide variation was observed across states; the share of women teachers in Bihar was 20% whereas that in Kerala was 67% (World Bank, 1997).

## **Status and Service Conditions**

Frontline functionaries were recruited on the basis of merit, as were other government employees. For example, elementary school teachers were recruited by selection committees at state, district and

block level, on the basis of qualifications, written test and interview (Government of India, 1985c). Frontline functionaries usually formed district-based cadres, that is, they were recruited to work in a particular district and could be transferred within the district (Jesani, 1990). Consequently, as a rule, frontline functionaries were not drawn from the community that they served. AWWs were an exception to this rule, as they were recruited for specific Anganwadis and could not be transferred.

An important continuity with the colonial system was that frontline functionaries were placed low in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Among the four classes of government employees, most frontline functionaries were placed in the second lowest category, that is, class 3, along with office clerks and stenographers, while helpers, drivers, and so forth were placed in class 4. Additionally, the colonial practice of sparse promotion avenues continued for a majority of frontline functionaries. For example, police constables were at best promoted once to head constables, and a large number of police constables retired without even one promotion<sup>56</sup> (Government of India, 1979). The Police Commission (1979) noted that this promotional structure was not conducive to fulfilling legitimate career ambitions, and recommended restructuring the police force to enable constables to rise to the level of assistant sub-inspector in five to six years, and subsequently to higher ranks. Yet, little changed. Similarly, patwaris, ANMs and primary school teachers also had minor chances of promotion. Furthermore, contract workers such as AWWs were not entitled to any promotion at all. Promotional avenues were reasonable only for a small set of frontline functionaries, who had the best professional qualifications. These included secondary school teachers, who could become principals and, in most states, be promoted to administrative posts in the education department; and agricultural extension workers, who could get up to three promotions and rise to supervisory ranks.

Though promotional avenues remained unsatisfactory, other service conditions of frontline functionaries changed for the better. They were permanent government employees, that is, entitled to their job till the retirement age, excepting some, such as Anganwadi workers. They could not be removed from service or punished without a departmental inquiry. Further, after the departmental process, they could approach the courts against the decisions. In fact, because the procedures for punishing errant frontline workers were long drawn out and contestable, it was quite difficult to remove them even in case of serious misconduct. The salaries of regular frontline functionaries increased substantially after Independence.

It is important to note here that the fixed, comfortable salaries, matched by minimal chances of promotion on the one hand, and the difficulty of punishing employees for misconduct on the other, produced a flat incentive structure. As per the classic Weberian conceptualisation, after recruitment, the aspect of 'meritocracy' is missing, and if bureaucrats are viewed as mainly self-interested actors, then frontline functionaries had no incentive to work at all. In addition, departments varied in the extent to which they emphasised better service conditions for their frontline functionaries. For school teachers, better status and salary were focused upon to attract talented people to the profession (Government of India, 1966, 1968, 1985c). Consequently, between 1950–51 and 1987–88, the average annual salary of elementary school teachers increased 3.2 times in real terms, along with benefits such as a fixed medical allowance or reimbursement of medical expenses, retirement pensions, and so on. (Shah, 1998; World Bank, 1997). In contrast, police constables were categorised as 'lower semi-skilled' workers, equated with drivers, peons and so on, in class 4 category, by the

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<sup>56</sup> The number of posts available for promotion was very limited because of direct recruitment of sub-inspectors (Gol 1979).

Second Central Pay Commission (1959). Consequently, candidates from urban areas were reluctant to join the constabulary (Gol, 1972). The Third Central Pay Commission (1973) took constables out of the class 4 category and recommended a pay increase considering their authority, hazardous work, public interaction and so on. There was, however, little change; at times, constables were paid less than drivers and even peons (Government of India, 1979). Moreover, more than 50% lower-ranking police personnel had not been provided any government accommodation, even though provision of free housing was recognised as a government responsibility.<sup>57</sup> Further, even among those who were provided housing, a very small number of police personnel had family accommodation while the rest were lodged in barracks (Government of India, 1979, 2015; Rao et al., 1980).

Variation in the departmental approach meant that the improvement in the salaries of frontline functionaries was uneven, which was not necessarily because of the varying demands of work, but due to the extent to which departments saw them as deserving higher salaries. This led to dissatisfaction among those who benefited less. In addition, a colonial style approach was adopted in case of non-permanent employees, who were conceptualised as ‘voluntary’ or ‘community’ workers. AWWs had no job security and their salary was paltry, often less than the minimum wage (Sinha, 2006).

## **Work Environment**

As noted above, the workload of several frontline functionaries was excessive, either because the expectations were unrealistic or because an adequate number of frontline functionaries were not provided. Though studies regarding the working hours of various frontline functionaries are not available, for police constables, government reports and independent observers note that they worked for 12–13 hours a day on an average, and were denied holidays and leave enjoyed by other government servants (Government of India, 1972, 1979; Rao et al., 1980). In addition, some frontline functionaries worked in contexts that posed a danger to their lives. For example, forest guards worked alone and were unarmed, but were expected to deal with smugglers and poachers (Vasan, 2002).

Furthermore, frontline functionaries often lacked basic required infrastructure and equipment. For example, in the 1970s, the police wireless network was confined to the district headquarters and important police stations. Most police stations had no vehicles, and many did not have telephones (Government of India, 1972). Similarly, in 1987, more than 8% of primary schools lacked buildings, almost 6% operated in thatched huts and 14% operated in kuccha (mud) buildings. Inadequate number of classrooms, and lack of water supply and toilets were common, while libraries and other classroom equipment such as maps, charts, educational games, and so on were non-existent (World Bank, 1997). In the same vein, as per a study in Maharashtra, most health sub-centres lacked buildings and residential quarters for ANMs (Jesani, 1990). Notably, patwaris were not even envisaged as having a building to work in.

The extremely hierarchical structure of the bureaucracy was matched by a centralised, command-based and often authoritarian working ethos. Consequently, frontline functionaries had little voice in the government system. For instance, commentators noted that in the forest department, the controlling staff rarely sought the advice of those in lower ranks (Schug, 2000). In the same vein,

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<sup>57</sup> The Police Commission (1979–81) also recommended that the conveyance allowance and washing allowance be increased, subsidised rations and food be provided to police personnel when on duty for more than 8 hours, and family welfare of police families be emphasised (Gol 1979).

a proper system to address the grievances of police personnel was not developed. Weekly 'orderly rooms' were held at district and sub-division levels, where individual policemen could represent their grievances to the commanding officer, usually the superintendent of police. However, over the years, this system acquired a punitive character and was used for awarding punishments<sup>58</sup> (Government of India, 1979; Rao et al., 1980).

Frontline functionaries were often put in difficult situations, as they were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and expected to deliver as per government goals while not being heard. For example, a study in Maharashtra showed that to fulfil family planning targets, health workers made extra efforts that were not part of their formal duties, such as taking care of the patient's family, providing transport for relatives, maintaining good relations with prospective cases and even providing them with extra cash, food and alcohol (Jesani, 1990). Moreover, frontline functionaries continued to be treated with suspicion, and sudden 'inspections' were part of the administrative style. While regular employees could not be dismissed easily, they were often casually 'suspended' from duty for very minor infractions. This working ethos ran contrary to the theory widely accepted and espoused by managers and management writers that employees perform better under managers who advance self-direction and self-motivation (Lawter et al., 2015; McGregor, 1957).<sup>59</sup>

Though the social base from which frontline functionaries were recruited expanded because of reservations, within the bureaucracy, there was discrimination against personnel belonging to SCs, STs and minorities, as well as women. For such frontline functionaries, the official and social hierarchies could combine and produce vicious behaviour from seniors. For example, in a study in Maharashtra, ANMs from SC and minority communities reported being harassed and insulted by doctors. Further, though male multi-purpose workers and female ANMs had the same professional status, several male multi-purpose workers looked down upon ANMs, and saw them as having questionable morals (Jesani, 1990). Similarly, female teachers also reported being harassed by male teachers (World Bank, 1997). An important corollary of the hierarchical and authoritarian ethos within government was that frontline functionaries could easily be taken off their core task through a simple government order. School teachers were often employed in a plethora of activities such as conducting elections and census, campaigns of various types, gathering information and so on. The 'orderly system' in the police reflected this lack of respect for the work of frontline functionaries and an authoritarian functioning style. Formally, constables were attached to senior police officers at their residence, to work as orderlies to attend to official visitors, take telephone calls, pass on messages, accompany officials during fieldwork, assist officers in maintaining their uniform and so on. However, constables posted as orderlies were misused for housework (Government of India, 1979; Rao et al., 1980).

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58 The Police Commission (1979-81) recognized the need to develop a grievance redressal system for police constables and other junior officials (Gol 1979, Rao, Rao and Rao 1980).

59 McGregor (1957) advanced the idea that all managers work as per theories of human work motivation, whether or not they can explicate it, and their enacted work behaviours reflected these theories. Moreover, there are two diametrically different views about the nature of people at work. Theory X assumes that people are lazy and try to avoid work; people are irresponsible and need to be monitored closely; and most workers have little to intellectually contribute to the task at hand. This belief leads to providing limited work and detailed instructions. On the other hand, Theory Y assumes that people can find work enjoyable; people are not inherently irresponsible, but capable of self-direction and self-control; and people have the potential to make important intellectual contributions to the work they perform. With this belief, managers would provide higher levels of encouragement, delegation, responsibility, and general rather than close supervision.

## The Informal System

Along with the above formal aspects of the working system, frontline functionaries also existed in an expanding informal system of patronage and rent-seeking in bureaucracy. The informal system operated mainly through transfers. An important concern for many frontline functionaries was to get postings in areas with good physical and social infrastructure. This was exploited to the hilt. Several frontline functionaries formed alliances with political actors to get postings of choice, as was noted in the Report of the National Commission on Teachers in 1985. The extent of problems caused by patronage-based transfers can be gauged by the fact that the National Policy of Education 1988 commented on this matter, a routine administrative procedure, stating that guidelines would be formulated to ensure objectivity and transfer of teachers (Government of India, 1988, p. 32). Similarly, a study of the Training and Visit (T&V) System in agriculture noted 'widespread and disruptive' staff transfers of extension workers (Feder & Slade, 1984). Ironically, transfers that were meant to prevent frontline functionaries from developing 'vested' interests, were used by the vested interests to put in place personnel who would further their agenda.

While this was not a policy, the influence of this system was policy-like, which becomes apparent when examined from almost any theoretical perspective. For instance, in the Weberian conceptualisation, when rent-seeking is organised from the top, hierarchical functioning would bestow a degree of legitimacy to it. On the other hand, if government servants are conceptualised as focusing mainly on their own interest, it would have been logical for frontline functionaries to seek rewards through rent-seeking or neglecting work to enhance leisure. The expected personal costs of getting caught and punished would be reduced, because of the participation and protection of the higher echelons of government in rent-seeking. It could also be argued that frontline functionaries existed in a habitus that incorporated rent-seeking or that it became difficult for them to exercise their public service motivation.

Another useful concept here is of a 'corruption threshold', that is, a point at which corruption becomes so widespread that it characterises the organisation as a whole (Pinto et al., 2008). In such organisations, a 'social cocoon' with rent-seeking norms develops, and newcomers are socialised to adopt corrupt practices. Further, when employees engage in corruption, they employ various types of rationalisations, of which two are important when the whole organisation has become corrupt. One rationalisation is that 'everyone does it' and the second is, 'I have to do what the boss says' (Anand et al., 2004). Consequently, the overall context of rent-seeking was an important context for understanding frontline functionaries.

## Frontline Functionaries and the State

In the above scenario, though the relationship of frontline functionaries to the state changed since colonial times, it remained fraught. As noted above, salary and other service conditions of regular frontline functionaries improved, and unlike the colonial period, there are no reports of frequent resignations or desertions by frontline functionaries. However, their status within the government remained low, and promotional avenues limited. Their working conditions were abysmal and grievances were not attended to. Furthermore, improvements in salaries were uneven across frontline functionaries, and were a pittance in case of temporary frontline functionaries. Consequently, frontline functionaries remained dissatisfied. Their unions and associations focussed mainly on grievances

regarding salary, promotion, working conditions and so on. In the face of continuous agitations, governments reluctantly acceded to some of their demands from time to time, but did not address basic issues of poor promotion avenues, harsh working conditions and so forth adequately.

This dynamic was illustrated dramatically in the police agitations that took place across the country in the 1970s. Notably, unlike other government employees, police constables cannot raise grievances through associations as they need sanction from authorities to form associations.<sup>60</sup> However, the police rank and file began to protest and stage demonstrations in the late 1960s, which was followed by a ‘mutiny’ by the provincial armed constabulary in Uttar Pradesh in 1973. The army was called out and exchanged fire with police units in several cities. The causes of unrest were poor pay, paucity of promotion opportunities, lack of housing, a dearth of holidays, long hours and constables being asked to perform menial duties. In 1979, the government raised the salary of policemen in Punjab following an agitation in the state. Subsequently, the agitation spread to almost all states.

The agitators demanded the right to form associations, right to representation, increase in salary and allowances, reduction of working hours, abolition of orderly duties, cordiality of relations between superior and subordinate officers, adequate promotional avenues and better medical and housing facilities. The policemen adopted a variety of methods that included peaceful dharnas (sit-ins), processions and demonstrations, but also violence, insulting senior officers and raising slogans against politicians. State governments reacted in various ways, addressing several grievances through positive actions such as increasing pay and allowances, improving housing and providing more holidays, but also by arresting police personnel on strike (Bailey, 1983; Rao et al., 1980).

## Professionalisation of Frontline Functionaries

### Introduction

While there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of ‘profession’, a specific body of knowledge is recognised as the most basic criteria,<sup>61</sup> as professionals address existing problems using their knowledge base (Nishimura 2013). Frontline functionaries work in a range of professional domains, such as education, health and so on, which is the most significant distinguishing feature among various types of frontline functionaries. In academic literature, although the importance of the professional domain of frontline functionaries has been recognised, little attention has been paid to it (Aa & Berkel, 2016; Hupe & Hill, 2007). In the context of developing countries, the professional aspect of frontline functionaries takes on a whole new dimension, as their skill levels can be very underdeveloped, and therefore, critical areas for policy.

Skill building of frontline functionaries, as in case of all government personnel, takes place in several stages. The first is the recruitment stage, wherein required minimum qualifications—which can

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60 In 1979, associations of state police personnel existed in UP, Bihar, West Bengal, MP, Orissa, Tripura and Delhi. Some were formally recognised (Gol, 1979).

61 In sociological studies, the criteria to identify ‘professions’ include: a body of knowledge, strong associations, assurance of monopoly on work by law, and a code of conduct and ethics. Researchers also highlight community sanction, colleague control of behaviour and autonomy as markers of professionals. Among the above criteria, a knowledge base is the most basic criteria of a profession, as without the appropriate knowledge base, the community is unlikely to recognize a profession, and autonomy too is based on the knowledge base (Nishimura, 2013).

be general, such as a high school certificate, or specialised, such as a teacher training diploma—are specified. The second stage is immediately after recruitment and is called ‘induction training’, which is the training of new recruits. This is important especially for those frontline functionaries who are not required to have professional qualifications prior to recruitment. The last stage of professionalisation runs throughout the career cycle. It can take several forms, including in-service training, encouragement and incentives to up-grade skills in different ways, encouragement of peer learning through seminars and discussions and so on.

Policies regarding each stage of professionalisation are important determinants of the level of skills that frontline functionaries acquire. At the same time, these policies ride on three more fundamental and inter-related policy features. The first is the importance attached to the professionalisation of frontline functionaries, that is, the extent to which their skill-levels are seen as important factors for serving the community and achieving government goals. If the importance of the professionalisation of frontline functionaries is not recognised in policy, then their abilities and skills are unlikely to be optimised.

The second underlying aspect is the type of knowledge base that exists in a particular professional field. Notably, for frontline functionaries, the knowledge base does not concern formal professional fields such as medicine and medical skills, but concerns professional knowledge in the context of the local area and people, embracing disciplines such as community and social health, and applying them to their specific communities. In other words, contextualisation of the professional field is as important as its sophistication. Notably, frontline functionaries themselves acquire significant local knowledge and context-specific skills as they work, and consequently are important producers of professional knowledge. If the local knowledge and skills acquired by frontline functionaries are not encouraged or systematised, then contextualisation of professional knowledge does not take place.

Finally, an appropriate research and training institutional structure, linked to frontline functionaries is necessary to translate policy statements regarding their professionalisation into reality. For example, international experience shows that successful agricultural extension systems require parallel research systems, along with linkages between the two systems (Blum & Isaak, 1990). Professional institutions are needed to generate an appropriate knowledge base, prepare resource persons and interact with frontline functionaries for pre-service, induction and in-service education. While, ideally, all professional institutions should perform all these functions, extensive outreach usually requires some separation between resource institutions focusing on knowledge creation and preparation of resource persons, and training institutions for extensive training and contact with frontline functionaries. The quality of both these types of institutions plays an important role in the professionalisation of frontline functionaries.

The discussion below begins by describing the importance attached to the professionalisation of frontline functionaries in Indian policy, and the development of a knowledge base and an institutional structure. Subsequently, the policies for professional development at the above mentioned three stages are delineated.

### **Stated Importance of Professionalisation**

As noted above, in colonial India, professionalisation of frontline functionaries was either considered unnecessary or given minor importance. In Independent India, the stated concern with professionalisation varied across frontline functionaries, depending on the extent to which

professionalism was considered important in a government department, and for the frontline functionaries of the department.

In some sectors, there was a general emphasis on professionalisation, which extended to frontline functionaries. For instance, in agriculture, there was intense focus on the development of appropriate technology, as well as dissemination of technical knowledge. Consequently, professionalisation of agricultural extension workers received attention along with other technical and professional up-gradation (Feder & Slade, 1984; Gulati et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Holt, 2002). In school education as well, policy statements reflected a high degree of concern regarding professionalisation in general as well as for school teachers in particular. The Kothari Commission, National Policy on Education 1968 and 1988, and The Report of the National Commission on Teachers 1985 saw teachers' professional education as essential and potentially yielding rich dividends (Government of India, 1966, 1968, 1985b, 1998).

In the case of the police, the Police Commission (1979–1981) stressed on professionalism and a professional constabulary, and recommended that constables be trained as potential investigating officers (Government of India, 1979), but this recommendation was not followed by state governments. Notably, according to the Gore Committee, there was a lack of genuine conviction in the higher echelons of the police force about the importance of training of the constabulary (Government of India, 1972). The professionalisation of police constables thus remained an ambiguous space. Further, the approach to ANMs, as community health workers, needs to be viewed against the fact that the very conceptualisation of community health workers is premised on workers having some, but limited, training (Jesani, 1990; Perry et al., 2014). In tandem with this approach, some attention was paid to the professional preparation of ANMs and MPWs in policy documents, but the bar was kept low (Government of India, 1973).

An important point to be noted here is that in Indian policy, 'community' and 'professional' workers are often disassociated. For example, regarding health workers, the Srivastava Committee (1975) remarked that the 'huge cost of the (developed country) model and its emphasis on over-professionalization is unsuited to socio-economic conditions in a developing country like ours' (Government of India, 1975, p. 5–6), and added that: '*...the old tradition of part-time semi-professional (italics added) workers...*, with certain modifications, will have to continue' (Government of India, 1975, p. 7).<sup>62</sup>

Though all frontline functionaries exercise professional skills in the community, for many, Indian policy appeared to assume that frontline functionaries can either be professionally competent or be motivated to serve the community, and not both. Consequently, where a frontline functionary was visualised as a community worker, their professional skills took a back seat. For example, the emphasis on professionalism was all but invisible for AWWs, whose activities encompassed a range of disciplines, such as nutrition, health and pre-school education, and who was seen as a 'community worker'.

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62 The Srivastava Committee suggested that in every community, there be trained local workers, semi-professional workers, part-time workers, or dais, family planning workers, persons to dispense medicines for common ailments, persons trained in programmes of communicable diseases and persons to help with promotional and preventive health activities. These skills could be imparted to selected people such as school teachers, educated housewives and so on. These people were not to be organised into a cadre, and the government should only pay for their training (Gol, 1975).

## Institutional Structure and Knowledge Base

Just as departments varied in the importance they attached to the professionalisation of frontline functionaries, they also varied in the scope of the institutional structure that they set up, and the contextualised knowledge base that such institutions created, codified and disseminated. The most intensive efforts were visible in agriculture, possibly because of the urgency of resolving the food crisis in the 1960s, when several agricultural research institutes and universities began to be set up. These institutions developed context-specific technologies, trained agricultural scientists and engaged with agricultural extension. In addition, technical centres such as Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK-farm science centres) were set up at the district level, which further facilitated extension activities. With the introduction of the Training and Visit system in the mid-1970s, the intensity of interaction between agricultural extension and research increased further (Gulati et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Holt, 2002; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002).

While these initiatives succeeded significantly, leading to the ‘green revolution’ and food self-sufficiency for the country, they had their limitations, such as lack of success in rainfed areas. The shortcomings of the strategy included a top-down approach and lack of feedback mechanisms to change research priorities (Gulati, et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Holt, 2002; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002). In other words, the professionalisation in agriculture was based on hierarchy, local knowledge centres remained underdeveloped, and the contextualisation of knowledge was partial.

Resource institutions were set up in school education too. These included the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), set up in 1961, followed by five Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs), as well as State Institutes of Education (SIEs) set up from 1958 onwards, which some states expanded into State Councils for Education and Training (SCERTs) (Government of India, 1985b). These institutes prepared school curricula and textbooks, but did not develop a context-specific body of knowledge, one that reflected global advances in classroom pedagogy but adapted to the special Indian context, as had been the case in agriculture (Sharma, 2000).

The number of teacher training institutes to provide pre-service teacher education, which were inadequate up to the 1960s in several states, expanded significantly. Attempts were made to maintain educational standards in teacher education by setting up the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in 1973. NCTE developed the first ever ‘curriculum frame-work for teacher education’ in 1978, which influenced teacher education across the country. However, the quality of teacher education institutes remained unsatisfactory, and they continued to lack qualified staff and infrastructure<sup>63</sup> (Government of India 1966, 1985b). A large majority of teacher education colleges were not linked to universities and made little attempts at advancing context-specific knowledge and practice in school education.

A new thrust came towards the end of this period, as the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 recommended an overhaul of teacher education to give it a professional orientation. Subsequently, from

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<sup>63</sup> The Kothari Commission recommended staffing teacher education institutes with personnel with double master degrees, such as MA/ MSc and M Ed., along with specialists in subjects like psychology, sociology and so on, as well as the selection of the best and most competent persons. The Commission also recommended an increase in hostel facilities, libraries, labs and so on, in training institutes (Gol, 1966). In 1985, the Report of the National Commission on Teachers once again recommended that teacher education institutes be provided with specialists, including good primary school teachers and staff with higher qualifications, along with better infrastructure. It recommended that a separate cadre of teacher educators be created (Gol, 1985b). However, these suggestions were not followed up.

1988 onwards, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) were established at the district level (Government of India, 1989, 2012). DIETs were intended to conduct pre-service training for elementary school teachers, undertake in-service teacher training, provide support to schools and adult education centres in terms of guidance, develop materials, evaluation tools and so on, and undertake action research. DIETs were expected to have 24 academic faculty, along with instructors in art, craft and so on, and office staff, as well as buildings with teaching and residential facilities (Government of India, 1989). At the same time, provision for the upgradation of selected B. Ed. colleges as Centres for Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs) were made.

However, in most departments, the approach towards the creation of an appropriate institutional infrastructure remained casual. In the case of the police, by the 1970s, there were 60 police training institutions across states, which the Gore Committee (1972) noted as inadequate. Moreover, the institutes had meagre budgets and their instructional staff was highly inadequate. Several training institutions were accommodated in an ad hoc fashion, in buildings constructed for different purposes, which were poorly maintained and had inadequate furniture, library facilities and so on. The Gore Committee found that in one institution, as many as 80 constable trainees were accommodated in a barrack with broken doors and windows and a leaking roof. In many institutions, classes were held in the open for want of a building (Government of India, 1972).

In the health sector, during this period, the number of medical colleges grew significantly, along with national research and referral institutions (Government of India, 1972). However, public and social health, the professional field of ANMs and AWWs, remained underdeveloped. The inadequate development of public health as a discipline had been recognised in the 1950s, and so, departments of preventive and social medicine were established in medical colleges and the faculty was sent abroad for training. However, the discipline did not develop significantly and acquired a lower status than clinical medicine, and medical colleges remained disassociated from public health. In 1977, new attempts were made to reorient medical education for health services in rural areas but had limited success (Banerji, 1973; Rai & Tulchinsky, 2017; Thakur et al., 2001). Moreover, in spite of policy recommendations to establish public health schools, hardly any were set up, and the few that existed had inadequate manpower and facilities (Government of India, 1996). At the same time, training centres for ANMs began to be established. The number of these centres expanded rapidly in the late 1970s, however, their quality deteriorated with this expansion (Government of India, 1961; Mavalankar & Vora, 2008).

In the same vein, the National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development was set up in 1966, and three of its regional centres were established between 1978 and 1982, followed by a fourth in 2001. Training facilities for AWWs spread slowly in the states, but the training institutes were inadequate. For example, as per a study of Anganwadi training centres in Bihar, Rajasthan and UP conducted in 1990, nearly half of the 45 centres included in the study were without full-time instructors, and several instructors did not have the required specialised qualifications. Because of the temporary nature of the job, the turnover of instructors was high. Hostel and toilet facilities in the buildings were inadequate, and in some training centres, trainees slept on the floor as there were no beds (Kumar, 2009).

## **Qualifications at Recruitment**

Prior to recruitment, some level of school education was required for all frontline functionaries, but college or specialised education after school was required for only a few, such as school teachers, sub-engineers and, over time, agricultural extension workers. While the pre-recruitment requirement

of professional qualifications for sub-engineers accorded with the highly technical nature of their work, for school teachers and agricultural extension workers, it indicated the greater emphasis placed on professionalisation compared to several frontline functionaries such as ANMs, AWWs and rural development workers, who were only required to have school education. For example, ANMs were registered with the Nursing Council but they did not command an equal professional status with other nurses (Jesani, 1990).

An important development during this period was that the availability of secondary education grew substantially.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the minimum general qualifications of nearly all frontline functionaries were sought to be raised, and candidates with requisite qualifications became increasingly available. For example, in 1966, the Kothari Commission recommended a minimum education of up to class 10 for primary school teachers (Government of India, 1966). By the mid-1980s, 67.6% of primary school teachers in the country had a class 12 education. Subsequently, in 1985, the Report of the National Commission on Teachers recommended a minimum qualification of class 12 for elementary teachers (Government of India, 1985c). By the mid-1990s, most states had raised the requirement accordingly. In the same vein, till 1972, the educational requirements for police constables changed from basic literacy to high school, across states (Government of India, 1972). By 1979, the minimum qualification for constables had been raised to matriculation or senior secondary in 9 states and union territories, and several graduates began to join as police constables (Government of India, 1979). The Police Commission (1979–81) proposed that police constables have a minimum qualification of class 10. By the mid-1980s, the education level prescribed for constable recruits varied from class 7 to higher secondary pass across states (Raghavan, 1986).

This general trend of rising qualification was, however, not uniform across the country. The school system developed faster in South India than elsewhere, and remained sparse in areas that were difficult to access, especially tribal belts. Consequently, the education level of frontline functionaries varied across states, as well as areas within states. Further, education of women trailed that of men, and among cadres comprising women frontline functionaries, such as ANMs and AWWs, several workers had extremely low levels of education (Tikku & Jain, 1989). Moreover, people from SC and ST categories lagged behind the general population in education. Consequently, the qualification requirements for candidates from these groups were often kept low. The most critical problem, as highlighted by the Report of the National Commission on Teachers, was that the benefits from this rise in formal qualifications were limited, as academic standards in government schools, from which most frontline functionaries were drawn, were poor (Government of India, 1985b). Thus, the impact of rising educational levels of frontline functionaries may have been smaller than anticipated.

Pre-service professional education for school teachers received considerable attention in policy documents. Elementary school teachers were required to have a Diploma in Education (D.Ed.), for which varied types of courses existed across states up until 1985.<sup>65</sup> Attempts were made to provide a more even structure to these courses. For secondary school teachers, the required qualification was a Bachelor of Education degree, which took one year to complete and was obtainable after a bachelor's college degree (Government of India, 1966, 1985c). Up to the 1960s, a large proportion of teachers had no pre-service education. However, as the number of teacher training colleges grew, by 1985, for elementary teachers,

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64 The enrolment in classes 11 and 12 increased from 12 lakh in 1950-51 to 70 lakh in 1970-71 (Gol, 1972).

the total supply of trained teachers matched the demand, though it was not adequate for universal elementary education. For secondary teachers, supply exceeded demand by 25% (Government of India 1966, 1985c).<sup>66</sup> However, the quality of pre-service teacher education remained sub-optimal, and the skills acquired by teachers inadequate. The required specialised qualifications for agricultural extension workers increased as well. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, till 1990, agricultural extension workers were required to have a higher secondary education with biology as a subject, but after 1990, they were required to have a Bachelor of Science in agriculture.

## **Induction Training**

Induction training was critical for frontline functionaries who were not required to have specialised qualifications before recruitment. Yet, there are hardly any studies or even comments about it. Available commentary indicates a casual approach. In some cases, frontline functionaries did not even receive induction training. For example, a 1993 World Bank report stated that several forest guards received no training whatsoever (Schug, 2000). Similarly, as per the study of Anganwadi Training Centres quoted above, only a fraction of the training centres had organised all the training programmes that they were mandated to (Salil, 2009).

In other cases, induction training was instituted more systematically, but its quality was inadequate. For example, in 1977, a two-year induction training programme was instituted for ANMs, in contrast to hospital nurses who acquired their degree in three years. Subsequently, the training period was reduced to 18 months as a large number of ANMs were recruited. The training programme itself was inadequate and did not prepare ANMs for the realities of the field, where they worked alone, managing complications and dealing with the rural population (Mavalankar & Vora, 2008, p.16). Similarly, the expenditure on training of police constables was meagre, and the approach slipshod (Government of India 1972).

Further, in case of AWWs, the induction training period itself was brief (one to two months) in spite of the wide range of their work. While studies showed that AWWs benefitted from the training, there was evidence that the quality of training was inadequate. Training programmes were often hastily organised so that some AWWs could not attend. Some trainers did not have clarity on concepts, and consequently, the trainee AWWs had several misconceptions after training. In addition, lack of adequate training materials limited the training methods that could be used. Studies showed that the learning during the training programme was inadequate (Tikku & Jain, 1989; Paul, 1988).

## **In-Service Education**

During this period, the in-service education of frontline functionaries was meagre. Agricultural extension workers were an exception, because the T&V system blueprint required their fortnightly and even weekly orientation (Blum & Isaak, 1990). For school teachers, while several government reports stressed on the need for in-service training, regular in-service training of teachers remained a challenge till the end of this period, given the large numbers, (Government of India 1966, 1985c).

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65 The duration of the D.Ed. course varied from one to two years across states. While in some states, D.Ed. could be obtained after class 10, in others, it could be pursued after class 12 (Gol, 1966). In 1985, there were one year courses after class 10, two year courses after class 10 and two year courses after class 12 (Gol, 1985).

66 However, there were significant regional variations, with north eastern and eastern states lacking the capacity to train an adequate number of teachers. In these states, most seats in teacher training institutes were reserved for untrained government teachers (Gol, 1985).

Further, little encouragement was provided to frontline functionaries to hone their professional skills through other means. For example, in 1985, the Report of the National Commission on Teachers suggested that in addition to formal pre service qualifications, teachers be allowed to study for degrees through correspondence courses, given study leave and visiting fellowships to do research, as well as travel facilities to attend useful programmes and so on (Government of India, 1985c); however, these recommendations were not put into practice. In case of police, the Police Commission recommended special pay for policemen who acquired a university degree after entry, or knowledge or skills such as proficiency in driving, handling wireless equipment, computers and so on, (Government of India, 1979), but the recommendation had little impact.

## Frontline Functionaries as Community Workers

### Introduction

The critical dimension in which frontline functionaries differ from other bureaucrats is their much wider interaction with citizens, who have specific, individual needs. Yet, like other government employees, frontline functionaries are bound by laws, rules and policy directives. This dichotomy is a source of tensions, because policies may not address client needs, and rules may come in the way of providing appropriate services (Lipsky, 1980; Hupe & Buffat, 2014).

Consequently, frontline work involves a constant negotiation between government directives and citizens' needs. This negotiation can take place in myriad ways, and forms a critical quality of the 'community worker' aspect of frontline functionaries. Frontline functionaries may strictly adhere to government directions and ignore citizen needs when the two do not fit, or, as Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) have demonstrated, they may function not only as state agents, but also as 'citizen agents', at times going well beyond mandated requirements to help clients. However, the extent to which frontline functionaries take initiative to address citizen needs depends a great deal on the definition of their role in policy. In addition, the level of their professional skill is important in determining whether they can actually address the varied demands that citizens make.

Notably, the clients or beneficiaries that frontline functionaries interact with are not passive subjects, but play an important role in shaping the interaction. This interaction has been conceptualised as 'co-production', whereby citizens influence the content of public services through their participation in service delivery (Whitaker, 1980). For example, citizens co-produce by requesting or not requesting for assistance from, say, medical personnel; by assisting or not assisting public programmes, as in the case of parents sending children to school regularly; and by mutually adjusting expectations with service delivery agents.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, along with the frontline functionaries themselves, co-production depends on the characteristics of the citizens and society. For example, several studies show citizens with high socio-economic status tend to co-produce more than citizens with low socio-economic status, as the latter may lack the knowledge or material to engage in co-production (Jakobsen & Anderson, 2013). Consequently, when examining frontline functionaries as community workers, the hierarchical nature of Indian society, its numerous social cleavages, as well as a high degree of poverty and illiteracy need to be kept in mind.

## Importance of Frontline Functionaries to the Community

As the role of the state expanded, the importance of frontline functionaries to ordinary citizens increased, because frontline functionaries played a critical role in the extent to which they could benefit from government services. This was the case especially because of low literacy levels of the community. For example, a study showed that of all the various sources of agricultural knowledge available, individual advice from an agricultural extension worker was the first choice for a vast majority of farmers (Feder & Slade, 1984). Additionally, poverty added to the importance of frontline functionaries. For example, as most students could access only government schools, how well a government teacher taught could have a significant impact on students' future earning capacity. Further, well-organised immunisation programmes could promote children's health and even save their lives, and so on.

As the penetration of the state into society deepened, the regulatory powers of frontline functionaries acquired greater significance as well. For example, though police constables were not empowered to investigate offences, they could make arrests without a warrant and seize property suspected to be stolen<sup>68</sup> (Government of India, 1972). Forest guards recorded forest offences and, in some cases, decided on the fine. Similarly, patwaris maintained land records that were closely related to people's livelihoods. In these roles, mala fide intentions as well as slipshod work on part of frontline functionaries could potentially change the course of a person's life.

## Place of Community Role in Policy

As the government attempted to address a range of perceived privations and wants of people, frontline functionaries were, in general, expected to address a host of community needs. At the same time, with increasing political mobilisation and the continuous expansion of government activity, citizens' expectations increased, and being their first point of contact, frontline functionaries came under increasing pressure from citizens. However, the fact that frontline functionaries belonged to specific departments and not local governments broadly oriented them towards departmental goals over community needs.

Against this broad orientation, the emphasis on the role of various frontline functionaries as community workers was varied. During this period, AWWs were seen as local and embedded in the community. They were assigned specific tasks, such as visiting mothers, that led to a direct reaching out to the community. Similarly, while agricultural workers were not local, their work was structured around extensive community contact. Each agricultural extension worker was expected to make contact with various farmer groups once in two weeks, and a structure was provided for such interaction (Feder & Slade, 1984). The emphasis on community contact is also indicated by the fact that a separate directorate of agricultural extension was established in each state.

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67 Alford (2002) situates public sector clients in the context of the social exchange theory, where, as distinct from a simple market exchange, a broad set of things can be exchanged, and the exchange can be between more than two parties. In this conceptualisation, agencies responsible for welfare of the recipients provide them benefits, not in the expectation of getting money in return, but to fulfil a mandate endowed on them through the political process by the citizenry. In case of regulatory agencies, the 'client' provides compliance, which enables the organisation to get ongoing compliance. Thus, clients and beneficiaries participate in this social exchange in several ways, and influence it.

68 As per section 54 of the CrPC and section 34 of The Police Act 1861.

In contrast, during this period, the role of school teachers in the community, in general, or with parents, in particular, did not receive any special emphasis in policy. Similarly, there was no conceptualisation regarding how patwaris or gram panchayat secretaries would interact with citizens, and they were provided with no special tools or training for such interaction. Consequently, it can be argued that in policy, the 'community worker' role of these frontline functionaries was neglected.

Yet, irrespective of the extent to which different frontline functionaries were envisaged as community workers, all worked under rigid government directions, such as scheme specifications, orders about day-to-day functioning and so on. This frame reduced their space to address community needs and act as citizen agents. For example, a social forestry programme to meet villagers' needs was initiated in the mid-1970s, but senior forest officials did not place it high on the agenda. Consequently, forest guards did not give it any significant attention (Schug, 2000). Similarly, AWWs supplied supplementary nutrition as directed by the department, even if children did not want to eat it. Moreover, school teachers could not change school timings to suit children, who often worked in family farms, and attended school less often during times of important agricultural activities.

### **Power Relations in Society**

The proclivity of frontline functionaries to favour the powerful is often a subject of comment in the Indian media and for scholars. For example, Gupta (2012) has argued that the structural inequality that exists in Indian society is reproduced in the actions of frontline functionaries. Yet, the reproduction of power relations in frontline work during this period was not universal or complete. To begin with, frontline functionaries worked against the broad stated policy thrusts to counter existing inequities. The role and activities of many frontline functionaries, especially those concerned with socio-economic development, such as provision of assets to persons below the poverty line, measures for malnourished children, teaching in government schools and so on, themselves countered power relations.

Moreover, when frontline functionaries did act in favour of powerful persons, they did so because of specific reasons. One obvious problem was that people with no or limited education had difficulty dealing with rules and regulations, paper-work and so on. As noted above, children who worked in family fields did not attend school regularly. In other words, the very poor found it difficult to access services that were available, and reaching out to them required extra effort, which frontline functionaries may not have been willing to make. However, this did not mean that frontline functionaries always neglected the poorest people. For example, a study showed that agricultural extension workers, while identifying 'contact farmers' selected farmers who were wealthier, more educated, had better irrigation facilities and higher social status more often. However, though very small farmers were underrepresented among contact farmers, their share was not negligible: it was 12%, compared to 30% in the total population (Feder & Slade, 1984).

The real problem, however, was rampant rent-seeking across the government. This meant that many frontline functionaries collaborated in diverting resources to the better-off sections of society for monetary gain. Moreover, frontline functionaries in the regulatory sectors, who were expected to provide justice through their actions, came into direct conflict with powerful persons. The impact of wide-spread rent-seeking was especially damaging, as it often aligned these functionaries with powerful groups. Moreover, the fear of transfer often kept frontline functionaries from acting fairly and ethically.

## Status of Frontline Functionaries vis-a-vis the Community

An important dynamic in the interaction of frontline functionaries with the community was their status vis-à-vis the community. While little information about the socio-economic background of frontline functionaries is available, indications are that posts for which the required entry qualifications were low, frontline functionaries came from the lower and middle strata of society, and when entry qualifications were high, they were more likely to belong to more privileged backgrounds. For example, a study conducted in Maharashtra showed that a majority of ANMs belonged to lower sub-castes among Marathas, and came from families of landless or small and marginal farmers (Jesani, 1990), although school teachers in low literacy districts came from more advantaged backgrounds than the general population (World Bank, 1997).

However, whatever their background, once frontline functionaries became government servants, their relatively comfortable salary and permanent job tenure set them apart from the very poor and marginalised communities that they often served (PROBE Report, 1999). For example, the study in Maharashtra cited above showed that the parents of a majority of ANMs had lower educational qualifications than them, and 95% of ANMs earned more than their fathers. The importance of a government job in the context of lack of employment opportunities is indicated by the fact that though the spouses of most ANMs were better qualified than them, they earned less (Jesani, 1990).

The superior status of most frontline functionaries vis-à-vis the people that they served certainly created some challenges. For example, school teachers were often not willing to work in small villages and remote areas, as the lack of physical and social infrastructure in small villages impacted their lifestyle adversely (Government of India, 1985b). Similarly, it was difficult to get agricultural extension workers to work in remote areas (Sulaiman & Hall, 2002). In fact, Indian policy struggled constantly with the 'remote area problem'.

At the same time, the community perceived and related to frontline functionaries through its own patriarchal and caste biases. For example, the above mentioned study in Maharashtra showed that though the male MPW and female ANM had equal status and salary in government, in the community, the MPW enjoyed higher status and respect. Villagers gossiped about ANMs and kept tabs on them. A majority of MPWs as well as ANMs themselves thought that ANMs were not respected by the community. ANMs also felt physically insecure. Moreover, villagers did not allow SC ANMs to go inside their houses and an earlier SC ANM had been stripped and beaten by villagers (Jesani, 1990).

## The Emerging Picture

The frontline functionaries that emerged after Independence were an outcome of the policy framework, its statement and its execution, as well as the wider socio-cultural context. As the Indian state extended its outreach, new types of frontline functionaries were recruited, and existing cadres were expanded. Through this period, citizens came into contact with frontline functionaries on matters that had earlier been their private concern, such as agricultural practices and maternal care; and, compared to the colonial period, many more people encountered frontline functionaries. In sum, frontline functionaries became a far more significant part of the state and society than before.

The importance of frontline functionaries is brought out sharply in the green revolution, which, whether or not one agrees with the policy per se, was a fair success in terms of policy implementation.

At this point, agricultural extension workers, supported by appropriate research, and in regular contact with farmers, were instrumental in bringing about a significant shift in farmers' agricultural practices, thereby changing the country's status in food self-sufficiency. However, in sectors such as health and education, the full potential of the vastly expanded number of frontline functionaries was under-exploited for several reasons.

Frontline functionaries were, first and foremost, agents of the state, rather than professional or community workers. If one compares policies, along with their execution, regarding the three roles of frontline workers, that is, as government employees, as personnel with specific competences, and as community workers, the importance of their role as government employees wins hands down against the other two. This imbalance was built into the administrative structure as well as the manner in which sectoral policies were envisaged. Frontline functionaries carried out pre-designated activities as per 'schemes', and citizens whose needs did not correspond were simply ignored. They were not part of a local government, which could have taken more differentiated activities to suit the context, occupied a low place in a rigid bureaucratic hierarchy and were constantly subject to orders.

Moreover, the importance of hierarchy in government functioning ensured that in case of conflict among the three roles, frontline functionaries would follow government orders. For example, the study in Maharashtra cited above showed that ANMs listed their work priorities in accordance with government priorities, and allocated their time accordingly. The lop-sided emphasis on government priorities was also indicated by the fact that the ANMs wanted their work to be made more holistic, and family planning targets be done away with (Jesani, 1990). At times, if the government so directed, frontline functionaries even abandoned their professional role to undertake unrelated activities.

At the same time, frontline functionaries' professional skills remained under-developed. In some cases, such as AWWs, the emphasis on professional skills was low in the policy itself, while in others, such as school teachers, appropriate resource institutions were not set up, and creation of context-specific knowledge was neglected. This reinforced the role of frontline functionaries as 'implementors of government orders' rather than workers who used their professional skills to address citizens' needs. Moreover, the less their skills were developed, the more limited their capacity to resolve real problems became, thereby reducing the efficacy with which activities were carried out.

Returning to the higher degree of success in agricultural extension, a greater emphasis on the professional and community-based roles of agricultural extension workers, compared to other frontline functionaries, is apparent. However, even here, knowledge creation was centralised, which limited the systemic capacity to adapt to varying contexts, such as rain-fed areas. Additionally, with an increasing emphasis on carrying out government orders, the technical support system deteriorated. Agricultural extension workers, though envisaged as providing technical advice to farmers, became more involved in input and subsidy distribution (Blum & Isaak, 1990; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002).

Frontline functionaries reflected the spread of patronage-based functioning and rent-seeking within government in their approach to work. However, it is impossible to know to the extent to which frontline functionaries neglected their work or engaged in rent-seeking. For example, a study showed that agricultural extension workers visited contact farmers regularly, and their outreach extended significantly to non-contact farmers as well (Feder & Slade, 1984). At the same time, the numerous reports of the deteriorating work ethic cannot be discounted, such as the comment in the Report of the National Commission on Teachers that citizens were disillusioned with teachers because of their preoccupation with private tuitions and income generating activities (Government of India, 1985b).

Similarly, policemen who were drunk, insolent or corrupt were saved from disciplinary action using political influence, leading to a general decline in the working ethos (Bayley, 1983).

## FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES FROM THE 1990S ONWARDS

### Policy Shifts

#### Introduction

The policy regarding frontline functionaries that developed post-Independence continued after the 1990s in most aspects. Some important shifts were, however, propelled by the increased concern with reducing government expenditure and the changed approach towards the bureaucracy. The impact of these developments was sharpest among the lower echelons of the bureaucracy, where the frontline functionaries were placed. Notably, frontline functionaries are the largest in number among government employees, and their salaries form a significant part of government expenditure in several sectors. For instance, in the 1990s, around 90% of the budget of the state education departments was spent on teachers' salaries (World Bank, 1997). Consequently, reducing expenditure on frontline functionaries can lead to significant diminution of expenditure on the bureaucracy, as well as overall government expenses.

In addition, government services remained unsatisfactory. For example, achievement levels of students in government schools were extremely poor (Shukla, 1994), health services were plagued with poor quality care (Hammer et al., 2007) and so on. During this time, frontline functionaries who actually delivered these services, very often came to be seen as the problem, rather than the tail end of a larger flawed structure. For example, 'teacher absenteeism' became a popular topic for research studies (Kremer et al., 2005). Similarly, the Report of the National Commission on Teachers saw a greater focus on discipline for teachers as necessary, and suggested doing away with 'over-security', where bad behaviour was not punished (Government of India, 1985b). This perception was to have important repercussions on policy regarding frontline functionaries.

The changes that came about did not affect all frontline functionaries in the same manner. In the regulatory sectors, policies regarding frontline functionaries such as patwaris and police constables, did not change in any significant way, possibly because of the sensitive nature of their work, and its legal implications. However, in the development and social sectors, there were several shifts, as described below.

#### Thinning Down Frontline Functionaries

An extreme manifestation of the concern with economy in government expenditure was in agriculture, where the number of agricultural extension workers reduced in several states. In the early 1990s, World Bank funding for the Training and Visit system, which included the salaries of agricultural extension workers, stopped. Subsequently, the central government did not provide these funds, and several, though not all, states ceased to recruit agricultural extension workers (Gulati et al., 2018; Sulaiman

& Holt, 2002; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002). Instead, policy documents emphasised the need to go beyond the public sector to fulfil the complex technical needs for agricultural extension. For example, a recent government report on agriculture states:

‘Active deployment of ICT (information & communication technology) can, to a great extent if deployed intelligently, address the concerns of manpower deficit’ (Government of India, 2017, p. 7).

A new approach to agricultural extension was the Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA), a district-level registered society, established through a World Bank-funded project, bringing together key stakeholders from the public, private and non-government organisations to provide services to farmers on the basis of projects as per local needs. Further, in some states, additional contractual staff was provided at the block level, and in others, a ‘farmer’s friend’, a part-time functionary selected from among farmers, was identified for extension work. While these approaches have worked in some areas, other areas lack adequate extension services. Moreover, coordination between different types of initiatives across different agencies has been poor. Additionally, agricultural extension workers continue to be the main source of information for farmers (Gulati et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002; Sulaiman & Holt, 2002). For example, a recent government report on agriculture states:

‘On account of various reasons including the absence of an institutional mechanism, the farmers across the country are deprived of access and benefits from an array of technologies developed by multiple research institutions dotting the country’s land scape’ (Government of India, 2017, p. 7).

An important outcome has been that the private sector has begun to provide extension services to farmers. This works well when the interests of the private sector and farmers coincide. However, there are also instances when private firms have pushed their interests at the expense of farmers, such as selling unsuitably expensive products. (Gulati et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Hall, 2002).

## Low-paid, Contractual Frontline Functionaries

In most government departments, while frontline functionaries were not disbanded, new frontline functionaries were recruited on very low salaries and contract-basis, without security of tenure or retirement benefits, which was similar to the recruitment pattern of AWWs. Till this period, low-paid contractual workers had been exceptions to the norm, but now they became more mainstream. For example, to make primary education universal, which was a key goal at this point, more schools and teachers were required, but the finances of state governments were stretched. As noted above, a discourse around the lack of teachers’ commitment had begun as well. Several educationists and policy makers argued that the ‘social distance’ between the teachers, who were much better paid than the families of children in government schools, was one cause of the former’s lack of commitment.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the lack of teachers’ accountability to the community was seen as a significant shortcoming (Kingdon & Malini-Rao, 2010; PROBE Report, 1999; World Bank, 1997).

The policy solution to the problems of finance and teacher commitment appeared in the form of ‘para teachers’, that is, teachers from the community, usually with modest educational qualifications and training, who were paid very low salaries and hired on an annual contract basis. As para teachers belonged to the community, they were expected to show greater commitment while the lack of job

security would keep them on their toes. Moreover, the lack of employment opportunities meant that such low-cost workers were easily available (Kingdon & Malini-Rao, 2010).

It is important to note here that the 'para teacher' bundled together several disparate issues. For instance, it was possible to employ teachers from the community with similar qualifications and salary as those recruited as part of a central cadre. Qualified personnel were available in most parts of the country, and where they were not. It was also possible to enhance community control over teachers without lowering their professional qualifications. As it was, the ideas of low salary, limited professional qualifications and community belongingness and control were bundled together.

Between 1995 and 2000, more than 200 thousand para teachers were recruited. While some state governments were cautious, recruiting a small number of para teachers as a temporary measure, in a few states, regular teachers ceased to be recruited at all and were declared a 'dying cadre'.<sup>70</sup> Except in a few states, para teachers were not required to have pre-service training, but were provided an induction training of 20 to 40 days. In the year 2000, the salary of para teachers varied between Rs 900 to Rs 3,000 per month against the regular teachers' salary of about Rs 5,000 per month. Initially, para teachers were recruited to teach primary classes, but over time, in many states, contractual teachers began to be hired in upper primary and secondary schools as well (Kingdon & Malini-Rao, 2020; Sharma, 1999).

As discussed below, the para teacher policy began to shift again around 2012, and regular teachers began to be recruited. However, the idea of low paid frontline functionaries hired on contract had come to stay. Money spent on human resources was seen as wasteful and not as an investment towards implementing programmes well. Added to this was an inadequate visualisation of the complexity of frontline work. Hence, high calibre frontline functionaries were seen as unnecessary. In many states, several departments began to replace regular frontline workers with low paid contractual staff. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, low paid contractual sub-engineers in the public health engineering department, and contractual gram panchayat secretaries were recruited, replacing the previous regular cadres (Sharma, 2019). This trend was strengthened as new central government programmes began to mandate low-paid contractual frontline functionaries as well.

## New Frontline Functionaries

As government revenues grew and new programmes were launched in the social sector, new types of frontline functionaries became necessary and were recruited. The two most important of these were the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Rozgar Sahayak and the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), both recruited from 2006 onwards. The role envisaged for MGNREGS Rozgar Sahayaks was simply assisting in the implementation of the scheme. They did not

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69 In programmes targeted especially towards hard to reach children, such as Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan, as well as the national scheme for alternative education for children who did not attend school, teachers from the community, paid a modest honorarium, had been employed.

70 In Gujarat and Maharashtra, para teachers were appointed to educate children in habitations that did not qualify for formal schools, or as additional teachers in single teacher schools or in schools where the pupil teacher ratio was high. Madhya Pradesh was the first state to stop recruiting regular teachers altogether, replacing them with para teachers, recruited through panchayats (Kingdon & Malini-rao 2020, Sharma 1999).

have a broader mandate, such as aiding rural development and livelihood initiatives in gram panchayats. The ASHA was visualised as a female health worker and a resident of the village, with multiple job responsibilities to promote good health, including universal immunisation, referral, escort services for reproductive care and other health programmes, and construction of household toilets and was provided a drug kit to deliver first contact health care.<sup>71</sup>

In both these cases, the idea of minimising expenditure on frontline functionaries remained important in spite of increasing government revenues. MGNREGS Rozgar Sahayaks were hired on contract-basis wherein the contract was renewed annually, given very low salaries and had no career path. ASHAs, interestingly, added a new twist to the story of frontline functionaries in India, as they are paid per task instead of a fixed honorarium (Bhatia, 2014; Joshi & George, 2012), thus marrying ideas of performance-based incentives and community service.

The low paid contractual frontline functionaries were usually technically the employees of local governments. However, this measure was mainly a safeguard against implicating state governments in litigation and justifying the low salaries, rather than providing human resources to local governments. In practice, not only were the numbers and service conditions of contractual frontline functionaries laid down by state governments, but they also followed departmental guidelines in the same manner as regular employees. Moreover, as the legal picture grew complicated, several state governments began to recruit such employees through private agencies.

Another frontline functionary that emerged during this period was the 'community mobiliser' to form and support women's self-help groups (SHGs) oriented towards saving, credit, livelihood generation, fighting for women's rights as well as other social and governance activities that they might choose to undertake. Community mobilisers, originally deployed by non-government organisations (NGOs), appeared in various small-scale government projects at first, and became widespread from 2011 onwards, as the National Rural Livelihood Mission was launched.<sup>72</sup> Community mobilisers differ from other frontline functionaries, as their links to government are tenuous and uneven. They are part of a government programme and conduct its activities and are usually paid indirectly through the government. However, they are often drawn from among members of federations of SHGs, and are paid by these federations on a task basis, or as trainers. Unlike ASHAs, there are no settled rates of payment. It is important to note that their work is defined in terms of the community, that is, forming and nurturing self-help groups, to a much greater extent than other frontline functionaries.

## Growing Numbers

Even as some functionaries, such as agricultural extension workers reduced in numbers, most increased as expenditure in the social sectors increased. For example, new schools were set up to make elementary education universal, and between 2003–04 to 2012–13, the teacher workforce in elementary schools in India almost doubled (NUEPA, 2016, p. 18). Moreover, the strength of the state police grew from 11.52

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71 A precursor to the ASHA, community health workers known as 'Mitanins,' were recruited in Chhattisgarh starting from 2002. Mitanins were selected by the community, where facilitators made sure that the community made an informed choice. No incentives or honorariums were paid to the Mitanins in the first three years of the programme (Joshi & George, 2012).

72 See 'Framework for Implementation', National Rural Livelihoods Mission, and Swarnajayanti Gram Rozgar Yojna Guidelines.

lakh in 1991 to 14.49 lakh in 2001 (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, n.d.). The number of female health workers and ANMs grew from 1.33 lakh in 2005 to 2.34 lakh in 2019, an increase of about 75.9% (Government of India, 2018–2019).

## A Shifting Policy

The low-paid contractual frontline functionaries were a highly dissatisfied workforce. Though promoted as ‘community workers’, such employees wanted to be adequately compensated for their services. For example, a study of ASHAs in Maharashtra showed that they came from modest backgrounds, more than 90% had taken the job to supplement their family income and this income was important to them. Moreover, there was a strong relationship between the incentive amount and the types of activities that ASHAs undertook (Joshi & George, 2012). Similarly, a recent study of AWWs in Bihar showed that they were motivated primarily by the need to earn a salary, though many also wanted to impact the As a consequence, contractual frontline functionaries formed new associations and unions that pressed for higher salaries, and above all, permanent employee status. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, para teachers began to form unions almost as soon as they were recruited, and agitated for better service conditions; they also approached the courts (Sharma, 1999). Similarly, ASHAs have also formed unions, and agitate regularly for a basic fixed wage (Bhatia, 2014).

The result was that governments were compelled to change the service conditions of frontline functionaries from time to time. For example, in most states, the salary of contract teachers increased significantly, and they were enabled to become regular teachers after an initial probationary period. An all-India reversal of the contract teacher policy was visible after 2012. Contract teachers formed around 7.1% of the teacher workforce in 2003–04, which rose to 12.2% in 2011–12, but dropped back to about 7.3% in 2012–13 (NUEPA, 2016). In Madhya Pradesh, the salaries of contractual teachers rose steadily over the years till they began to approximate those of regular teachers (Sharma, 2019). Further, the orientation of the central government changed with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, whereby it became mandatory to provide an adequate number of trained teachers in elementary schools (see Table 2 in Annex). Similarly, in 1994, the honorarium of contractual gram panchayat secretaries in Madhya Pradesh rose from Rs. 500 per month to the pay scale of Rs. 2200–3700 (around Rs. 13,000 per month) by 2017, when another increase in remuneration of Rs. 6000–8000 was announced, as per the demand of the federation of gram panchayat secretaries.

In addition, as associations of contractual frontline functionaries approached the courts, a maze of litigation regarding contractual government employees began to develop. For example, some activists and AWWs litigated and received favourable court orders (Bhatia, 2014). In Rajasthan, recruitment of contractual teachers came to a halt as per a court directive (Sharma, 2020). In Delhi, as per a court judgement, all contract employees are entitled to the same wages as regular employees, though without increments, as well as leave. The court also directed the government to frame a one-time policy for the regularisation of contract employees. An earlier Supreme Court judgement directed that illegal (read contractual) appointments could not be absorbed into government pay rolls, and a proper process had to be put in place. Moreover, the Delhi government has taken several measures to increase the salaries of contractual employees (Basu & Barria, 2018).

Nevertheless, the trend of improving the service conditions of contractual frontline functionaries remains variable across departments and states. For example, even as the trend of contract teachers

has reversed, several states have begun to hire 'guest teachers' in schools, who are paid a very small honorarium to teach specific classes (Sharma, 2020). In Bihar, contract teachers have continued to agitate for better service conditions, and at times, police have been deployed against them<sup>73</sup>.

## Key Features and Analysis of Policy Shifts

### Introduction

The policy shifts after the 1990s formed a curious mix. On the one hand, as government expenditure increased, the types and number of frontline functionaries grew, indicating their continued importance and centrality in the state-society interaction. On the other hand, expenditure on their salaries was viewed as unproductive and sought to be reduced. As a consequence, the changes that came about often worked in mutually contradictory directions. For instance, while the number of frontline functionaries in most sectors increased, they declined in agriculture. This decline was led not by debates and considerations about farmers' needs, but by the unwillingness of the central and state governments to pay the salaries of agricultural extension workers.

Another anomaly during this period was that, with the recruitment of low-cost, contractual frontline functionaries in large numbers, two distinct types of frontline functionaries, the regular and the contractual, existed side by side. At times, as in the case of school teachers, the two types did the same work, in the same institutions, but their salary and other service conditions were very different. A new categorisation of frontline functionaries thus became critical now, the regular and the contractual.

A third important feature of the policy at this time was its ephemeral and constantly drifting nature. Often, these changes were abrupt. For example, while regular teachers were declared a 'dying cadre' in Madhya Pradesh, the para teachers that replaced them were paid not just less than regular teachers, but a fraction of their salary (Sharma, 1999). Moreover, as illustrated above, many such decisions were reversed at least partially, but only for some frontline functionaries, not all. In contrast to school teachers, the policy regarding the service conditions of AWWs and ASHAs did not shift, except for minor increases in their remuneration (Bhatia, 2014).

In other words, the policy was ad hoc and often a knee jerk response to a crisis or a decision taken with an eye to the elections, rather than based on analysis, consultation and reasoned considerations.

### As Government Employees

#### Role Definition

After the 1990s, though a large number of contractual, low-paid frontline functionaries were recruited as 'community workers', their role was conceptualised in the same narrow terms as before, limited to a few activities as per departmental schemes and subject to numerous government guidelines and directions.

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<sup>73</sup> See <https://thewire.in/labour/bihar-school-teachers-contract-strike>, <https://www.thequint.com/news/education/bihar-strike-by-4-lakh-teachers-brings-schools-to-a-standstill>.

In fact, for frontline functionaries recruited specifically to implement schemes, such as MGNREGS Rozgar Sahayaks, the conceptualisation of the role was even narrower.

Moreover, the concern with an emphasis on serving the community should have led to a different definition of the role for regular frontline functionaries as well, but there was no evidence of this. For example, in 2019, as per a survey of nearly 12,000 police officers across 21 states, 75% of the constabulary said that they were permitted to do only the tasks directed by their seniors (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019).

## Diversity

An important trend during this phase was the increased representation of women among frontline functionaries. One reason for this was the creation and expansion of cadres of women frontline functionaries, such as ANMs, AWWs, and ASHAs. In addition, as an increasing number of women began to access secondary education, their numbers spread in other cadres as well. For example, in 1993, 31% primary teachers and 35% upper primary teachers were women, but in 2013, women comprised 46% of all elementary school teachers (NUEPA, 2016; World Bank, 1997).

In a few instances, state governments sought to increase the representation of women actively. For example, in 2020, 27 states and union territories had reserved posts for women in the police<sup>74</sup> (Bureau of Police Research and Development, 2020) (see Table 3 in Annex). Similarly, from 1996, Tamil Nadu began to recruit female teachers as a rule for classes 1 to 5 (up to 10% male teachers are recruited if female teachers are not available), while in Rajasthan, 30% posts were reserved for women (NUEPA, 2016).

The representation of persons from SC and ST categories among frontline functionaries grew as well, though unevenly across different types of frontline functionaries. Among police constables, in 2020, the percentage of SC and ST constables at 25.1% and 21.3% was higher than their percentage in the population, which was 16.6% and 8.6%, respectively, as per the 2011 census. However, among school teachers, in 2012–13, 21% of government elementary school teachers and 17% of government secondary school teachers in India belonged to SC and ST categories, respectively, against these groups' total share of 25.2% in the population (NUEPA, 2016).

## Status and Service Conditions

As before, frontline functionaries remained low-status employees in departmental hierarchies. For regular employees, promotion avenues continued to be sparse. For example, in 2000, the Padmanabhaiah Committee was still recommending a minimum of three promotions for police constables before retirement, which the Musherno Committee endorsed in 2015 (Government of India, 2015a). At the same time, regular frontline functionaries benefitted from the secular increase in the salaries of all government servants that took place in this period. However, the consistent reduction in the difference between the highest and lowest salaries that began after Independence ceased, and after 2005, there was even a small increase in the gap (Government of India, 2015).

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74 Among police constables, women comprised 21.3% of the strength in 2020 (Bureau of Police Research and Development, 2020)

In parallel, as noted above, the number of low-paid contractual frontline functionaries increased substantially. Their status was even lower than that of regular frontline functionaries, salaries were meagre and avenues for promotion non-existent. As several existing cadres of regular frontline functionaries began to be whittled and replaced with contractual employees, it can be argued that during this period, the status and salary of frontline functionaries declined overall.

At the same time, little changed in the postings and transfers of frontline functionaries, which continued to be patronage-based (Sharma 2019, Vasani, 2002). For example, studies showed that politicians helped teachers get postings of choice in exchange of help during elections, as well as pecuniary compensation. In fact, in several states, teachers approached middlemen to facilitate postings on payment of a fee. A notable exception were the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, where transfers of school teachers were made transparent and systematic. However, most states did not adopt this pattern (Beteille, 2015; NUEPA, 2016; Sharma, 2020; Sharma & Ramachandran, 2009).

### **Working Conditions and Ethos**

An important development during this period was that the workload of several frontline functionaries increased. One reason for this was that government programmes and interventions grew, but without the parallel provision of extra manpower. Consequently, many frontline functionaries were expected to handle a much larger number of tasks than earlier, and at times, the workload was irrational. For example, in 2006, AWWs were made responsible for several new interventions, such as a new scheme targeting adolescent girls, that is, the Kishori Shakti Yojna (Sinha, 2006). Experts have argued that it is impossible for a single AWW to provide all the services expected of her, and that two AWWs<sup>75</sup> along with a helper, were required at each centre (Working Group on Children under Six, 2008). Unfortunately, such recommendations did not find place in policy.

Similarly, in schools, as the government began to provide more benefits for students such as midday meals, bicycles for girls and so on, school teachers played a role in delivering these as well, as no extra administrative staff was provided (Sharma, 2019, 2020). The responsibilities of ASHAs too increased over time, as states added new responsibilities, such as fighting gender-based violence in Kerala, and cancer detection in Punjab (Bhatia, 2014; Joshi & George, 2012).

At the same time, police constables continued to be overworked as before, though in 2000, a Group of Ministers again recommended that they not be asked to work more than eight hours a day and six days a week, which the Mushernoo Committee reiterated in 2015 (Government of India 1979, 2001, 2015a). As per a recent country-wide survey, the civil constabulary and the armed constabulary worked 14 hours and 13 hours a day on average, respectively. Further, 20% worked 13–16 hours a day, and 23% worked more than 16 hours a day. Moreover, 50% of the constabulary reported getting no days off during the week and 26% reported getting one day off. (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019). The workload also increased as posts remained vacant, and frontline functionaries were given additional charge of such areas. For example, in 2019, the number of posts sanctioned for ANMs were 3.9% less than the population and area norms required. Of these, 8.9% posts were vacant. Further, in the case of male

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75 The suggestion was that one AWW would focus on community-based services such as monitoring malnutrition, counselling mothers, facilitating immunisation and so on, while the other one ran the Anganwadi centre for children in the 3–6 age group, focussing on pre-school education (Working Group on Children under Six, 2008).

health workers, 35.5% posts were vacant in health sub-centres. Consequently, 9.2% of sub-health centres lacked a female health worker, while 54.1% lacked a male health worker (Government of India, 2018–19). Similarly, a case study of district administration in Madhya Pradesh showed that, overall, 20% of posts for grassroots workers were vacant in the district, and in case of some types of grassroots workers, more than 50% posts were vacant (Sharma, 2019).

A positive development was that as government revenues increased, significant improvement came about in the physical infrastructure of grassroots institutions such as schools and police stations. For example, the building infrastructure and equipment in elementary schools improved a great deal (NUEPA, 2016). Moreover, the percentage of sub-health centres that lacked government buildings dropped from 55% in 2003 to 25% in 2019. Further, in 2003, 78% sub-health centres did not have tap water, but by 2019, more than 80% had regular water supply (Mavalankar & Vora, 2008; GoI, 2018–19). In addition, funds available for police infrastructure and equipment increased substantially from 2000 (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, n.d.; Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019; Raghavan, 1986). In 2018, 98% police stations had vehicles, 94% had telephones, and 99% had wireless sets, though 13.4% police stations still operated out of hired buildings (Bureau of Police Research and Development, 2018).

For some frontline functionaries, however, the improvement in physical infrastructure was either modest or non-existent. For example, a recent study of AWWs in Bihar showed chronic deficiencies in infrastructure, supplies and registers (John & Srinivasan, 2019). Patwaris continued to work without offices, sometimes renting out office space jointly with other patwaris at their own expense (Sharma, 2019). In 2019, more than 40% of sub-health centres lacked housing for ANMs (Government of India, 2018–19).

There was little evidence of any positive change in the organisational culture within the government. As in the previous phase, frontline functionaries worked in the context of extreme centralisation and hierarchy. For example, the orderly system in the police remained, and in 2015, the Musherno Committee reiterated the need to end it. The Committee commented that the excessive hierarchy led to the misuse of police constables' time, reducing their work output. It added that the work environment did not encourage open, two-way communication, so the quality of work suffered (Government of India, 2015). Additionally, in the above-mentioned survey of police personnel, 39% respondents reported use of harsh or bad language by seniors, and 61% of the constabulary reported that junior officers were asked to do senior officers' personal or household tasks. Moreover, four out of five respondents reported that they did not get paid for overtime (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019). The practice of not paying frontline functionaries the due travel allowance continued, forcing them to use their own money to travel to meetings and other departmental events. (Sharma, 2019).

Similarly, a recent study of AWWs in Bihar showed that the supervision system was mostly punitive and audit-focussed (John et al., 2019). Anganwadi supervisors focussed mainly on registers, attendance, salaries and numbers, rather than processes (Working Group on Children under Six, 2008). Supervision of school teachers occurred in fits and starts, with the entire government machinery visiting schools at times (NUEPA, 2016).

With the continuation of old styles of functioning, even positive developments had unintended outcomes. For example, frontline functionaries were usually the last to get the benefits of improved infrastructure, even though they needed it the most. During the COVID-19 pandemic, though frontline

health workers, such as ANMs, AWWs and ASHAs were given additional responsibilities, few were provided protective gear or transport facilities, while the higher-level staff were better equipped (Sinha et al., 2021). Further, as the use of digital technology increased, the provision of infrastructure and equipment was very inadequate at the frontlines. Consequently, the workload of frontline functionaries increased, as many worked in areas with poor connectivity and had to travel to block headquarters to file reports online. Moreover, with digitisation, several supervisors began to monitor frontline functionaries more intensely (Sharma, 2019).

Furthermore, there was no abatement in patronage-based functioning and rent-seeking. In a survey of 17 Asian countries by Transparency International, the overall rate of bribery in India was the highest—39% of people who had accessed a public service had paid a bribe. The bribery rate within the police was even higher, at 42%, which was a mere 2% in Japan and 8% in South Korea (Transparency International, 2020). In 2015, the Musherno Committee noted that:

‘The impact of the political executive on the police organisation has been, often, problematic. With declining standards of public morality, Police is often used as a convenient tool to subserve partisan interests, with scant regard for rule of law. As a result, the police establishment, instead of functioning independently as a professional law enforcing body, tends to become a part of political game playing.’ (Government of India, 2015, p. 28).

In the same vein, the above mentioned case study of district administration in Madhya Pradesh showed rampant rent-seeking in the field (Sharma, 2019).

## Professionalisation

In this phase, there were three positive developments regarding the professionalisation of frontline functionaries, but each was negated by unresolved problems. One, the number of resource institutions and training capacity increased. For example, in school education, DIETs were established in almost all districts. In the health sector, the number of institutes offering degrees and diplomas in public health increased (Rai & Tulchinsky, 2017). In the context of police, several academic departments of criminology were started in universities (Thakre & Jaishankar, 2018). In Himachal Pradesh, there had been only one training school for forest guards till 1993, but subsequently, two more were established (Vasan, 2002).

However, as earlier, institutional quality remained poor and context-specific knowledge inadequate. For example, in school education, SCERTs and DIETs were poorly staffed in most states. Studies of elementary and secondary education systems showed the absence of an academic discourse across the school system (Diwan, 2009, Sharma, 2009b, 2020). In addition, private teacher training institutes began to proliferate, and several offered highly inadequate programmes, bordering on scam (Government of India, 2012).

In public health, the focus remained on post graduate degrees. Unlike in Europe and the United States, India did not attempt to institute under-graduate programmes in public health, which could have played a significant role in professionalising frontline functionaries. Moreover, the number and quality of public health professionals remained inadequate (Rai & Tulchinsky, 2017). Similarly, research in criminology was heavily influenced by the work in developed countries and the use of new policing techniques was limited to a few pilots, while forensic science in India remained static and stunted (Baggi, 2011; Thakre

& Jaishankar, 2018). In police constable training camps, the number of qualified instructors was few and no training was provided to instructors. Moreover, most instructors were sent to train as punishment and were disgruntled (Verma, 2005).

The second positive development was that as the school education system continued to expand, the basic general qualifications of regular frontline functionaries increased. For instance, in the case of government school teachers, for whom systematic data regarding qualifications is available, in 2016–17, only a little over a quarter of government teachers did not have graduate degrees, and just 8.3% of government teachers had not completed higher secondary education. Further, nearly 85% of government school teachers had teacher training diplomas or degrees (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2018). Even contract teachers had good formal qualifications (Kingdon & Malini-Rao, 2010). The above-mentioned case study of district administration showed that among the 31 frontline functionaries interviewed, 64.5% had college education, including 25.8% with postgraduate degrees, and 9.7% had diplomas after school (Sharma, 2019). However, at times, the bar was set very low for paid contractual workers. For example, ASHAs need merely to be literate with a minimum qualification of class 8, which can be relaxed if no suitable person is available (Bhatia, 2014; Joshi & George, 2012).

Juxtaposed against this development was the fact that poor learning levels in school education continued (National Council for Educational Research and Training, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Consequently, the extent to which the increase in formal qualifications of frontline functionaries indicated a corresponding increase in abilities and skills is debatable. Moreover, where frontline functionaries were required to have specialised pre-service qualifications, the quality of training was inadequate, due to poor institutional infrastructure and lack of contextual knowledge base.

As training institutions remained below par, induction training remained unsatisfactory as well. For example, a former police officer noted that during their induction training, police constables learn to march in unison, carry arms properly and execute the commands of the leader. There are a few rudimentary classes on law and departmental procedure. Training sessions are interrupted to fill in vacancies and provide manpower during law and order disturbances. After training, police constables are posted to armed wings of the district police, where the training is limited to drill and the proper wearing of uniform. Later in the service, when they are posted to police stations, they learn from their seniors (Verma, 2005). Similarly, in case of AWWs, the induction training was brief; the training curriculum, syllabus and materials were centrally determined and the training system remained divorced from field reality and practitioner experience (Working Group on Children Under Six 2008).

The third development was that the scale of in-service training increased across several sectors. In school education, in-service teacher training of elementary school teachers began to expand from the mid-1990s. Subsequently, with the availability of adequate funds, it became a regular feature. In the above-mentioned case study of district administration, elementary teachers, forest guards, ANMs and AWWs received regular in-service training (Sharma, 2019). Similarly, in Himachal Pradesh, up until the late 1990s, most forest guards had received no professional training, but by 2002, nearly 80% of the guards had been trained in an externally funded project (Vasan, 2002).

However, for some frontline functionaries, in-service training remained grossly inadequate in light of their role. For example, between 2012–2016, an average of 6.4% of the police force received in-service

training, and the percentage of the constabulary that received training was much below that of higher-ranking officers (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019). A study of two states in 2019, showed that in-service training for secondary teachers remained very limited (Sharma, 2020). Moreover, though adequate data regarding the quality of in-service training does not exist, it can be expected that the existing limitations of the institutional structure and knowledge base impacted it.

It can be argued that in this phase, while financial resources for professionalisation were available to a greater degree than earlier, they were used exceptionally poorly. Long term aspects of professionalisation, such as a good school system for general education and appropriate resource institutions to collate and develop a context-specific knowledge base in various subject areas, and develop trainers were neglected. This meant that on the one hand, the impact of improved formal qualifications of frontline functionaries was whittled, and on the other, the increase in short-term in-service training was bogged down by the unsatisfactory quality of training institutions.

## Community Relations

As noted above, after the mid-1990s, new types of 'community' workers such as para teachers and ASHAs were recruited. These workers were recruited from within the community, paid low salaries, and thereby, were closer in socio-economic status to the average citizen, and lacked security of tenure. The bundling of these three aspects makes it difficult to comment on the impact of any. For example, some studies have found that compared to regular teachers, contractual or para teachers were less likely to be absent from school, and increased the school access for marginalised communities (Kingdon & Malini-Rao, 2010). However, it is impossible to say why this is the case.

At the same time, a study of ASHAs in Maharashtra showed that people in the community did not listen to them. ASHAs were young, with little experience, and women often preferred experienced dais. The caste-class power relations reduced people's proclivity to listen to ASHAs. Moreover, the most common activity of ASHAs was referral for pregnancy, which had the highest incentive amount. If the community was small then becoming an ASHA was not considered worthwhile as there were very few pregnancies. Thus, incentive-based payment skewed priorities (Joshi & George, 2012).

The more important issue may be that frontline functionaries remained bound by rigid formats of developmental schemes and government orders, and the space to address context and citizen-specific needs remained small. This was as true for community workers as for regular workers. In practice, community workers were departmental, rather than citizen agents. For example, the above-quoted study of ASHAs showed that they were attached to public health centres, and supervisors and senior officials saw them not as people working in the community, but as lower-level staff of the health system (Joshi & George, 2012). Similarly, the district administration study referred to above revealed that along with the curriculum and textbooks, the timetable and pace of teaching for school teachers were fixed, and innovative activities were discounted and frowned upon. Teachers spent a great deal of their time doing administrative work, as well as work unrelated to education (Sharma, 2019).

A second development was that in several departments, community-based organisations were formed, of which frontline functionaries were usually secretaries. This provided a new forum for frontline functionaries to interact with the community. However, many CBOs were dysfunctional. For example, in the case study of district administration mentioned above, it was found that most CBOs, such as

the 'Tadarth Samiti', to supervise the activities of ANM, ASHA and AWWs, the 'Gram Raksha Samiti', to prevent alcoholism, and the 'Shaurya Dal' to sensitise the community about women's rights and address violence against women and other types of drug abuse—existed only on paper, and undertook no activities. The two most significant CBOs were the joint forest management committees and the school management committees. In the above-cited case study of district administration, the school management committees were generally found to be functional. Their activities comprised mainly of approval of various activities proposed by the school and teachers lecturing to parents, though occasionally, the citizens in the committee became active as well. The forest management committees too functioned after a fashion, but their meetings were not regular, because of lack of enthusiasm on the part of citizens and the high workload of the beat guards. Moreover, the agenda of these meetings revolved around the priorities of the department, rather than the needs of the people (Sharma, 2019). While the forum of CBOs can be an important mechanism of interaction between citizens and frontline functionaries, its placement in the overall centralised context reduces its effectiveness.

The third development during this period was that most of the frontline functionaries were assigned a larger number of community-oriented tasks than earlier, of which acting as secretary to CBOs is one example. Another example was the greater involvement of school teachers with the community as they began to conduct surveys of out-of-school children, undertook enrolment drives, exhorted parents to send children to school regularly, and so on. Similarly, ASHAs were expected to mobilise the community, conduct meetings etc. (Joshi & George, 2012). How this has changed the relationship of frontline functionaries to the community is a subject of investigation.

## Summing Up

After the late 1990s, as the government stepped up various social services, new types of frontline functionaries were recruited, and most of the existing frontline functionaries grew in number. While this was a tacit recognition in policy about the importance of frontline functionaries, meaningful attempts to make frontline functionaries more effective were lacking. The dereliction of duty by frontline workers came into focus, but the dynamics of this dereliction remained under-explored.

Yet, the need to look beyond actions and even the immediate environment of frontline functionaries themselves became apparent in studies where a wider set of factors was considered. For example, a recent study of AWWs in Bihar showed no evidence that they did not expend the expected effort to provide services. Anganwadi centres were open, services made available as per mandated guidelines, and required processes such as eligibility surveys were conducted. However, there were several problems related to lack of infrastructure, overly large catchment areas and non-supportive supervision that impacted the performance of AWWs (John et al., 2019). Similarly, the above-quoted case study of district administration did not find widespread dereliction of duty by teachers, AWWs, ANMs and other frontline functionaries. Instead, the factors that resulted in inadequate performance were related to larger, systemic shortcomings (Sharma, 2019).

As the government sought to reduce expenditure on the bureaucracy, it resorted to drastically reduced salaries of frontline functionaries, often paying them below the minimum wage, and providing them with no job security, pensions or medical benefits, creating 'gig' workers within the government set up. These policies became a site of struggle between the government and low-paid, contractual frontline

functionaries, with two important deleterious consequences. One, there were frequent policy reversals, so a coherent direction did not emerge. At times, salaries of some contractual frontline functionaries increased, and at the same time, new types of workers were recruited on very low salaries, setting in motion a new cycle of conflict. Consequently, the current scenario may be described as one of a drifting policy regarding frontline functionaries. Two, the flawed incentive structure for frontline functionaries to perform well became even more so. Avenues of promotion for regular frontline functionaries remained limited so they had little motivation to excel. In parallel, contractual frontline functionaries could better their salaries and other service conditions not by working hard, but by unionising and agitating.

As has been argued above, though the formal qualifications of frontline functionaries rose, and more in-service training began to be provided, the gains were not commensurate. This was because the general quality of schools, as well as resource and training institutions, was inadequate, and the context-specific knowledge base remained shrunken. For example, the above-quoted study of the AWWs in Bihar showed that they had limited technical knowledge, and scored on an average, a third in a basic composite knowledge test, despite a relatively high frequency of training. Moreover, the supervisors' knowledge levels were no better (John et al., 2019). At the same time, attempts to develop greater linkages between the community and frontline functionaries were whittled by a working culture that relied on centralization and extreme hierarchy. Frontline functionaries, placed at the tail end of this system, had little space to take up context-specific activities and serve citizens as per their needs.

During this period, the workload of several frontline functionaries remained excessive, while that of others expanded to unreasonable levels, which resulted in shortfalls in their performance. For example, in the survey of police officials quoted previously, 76% of the constabulary agreed with the statement that their workload made it difficult to do their job well and 73% said that the workload affected their physical and mental health (Common Cause and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019). The excessive hierarchy detracted from meaningful work as well. For instance, in the district case study mentioned above, AWWs coped with excess work by focusing on tasks that the senior officials could inspect, and where there was high government emphasis (Sharma, 2019). Similarly, police constables tended to ignore important duties to attend to matters of personal interest to politicians or senior officers (Jauregui, 2013).

Moreover, frontline functionaries continued to be manipulated for dubious ends through patronage-based postings and were part of the rent-seeking that was rampant at all levels of government. For example, the previously quoted study of AWWs in Bihar showed that they appropriated programme resources as a coping mechanism for the delay in salaries (John & Srinivasan, 2019). Another study in Andhra Pradesh showed that supplementary nutrition was sold by AWWs to farmers as feed for buffaloes. This practice was so common that during festivals, people asked for the Anganwadi jaggery to make sweets, as it was of good quality (Sinha, 2006). The case study of district administration cited above showed that forest guards routinely extracted money from villagers, and received 'cuts' in various project funds, along with the rest of the administrative hierarchy (Sharma, 2019), and so on.

To sum up, even in the context of increasing government income and rising educational levels in the population, the tottering policies regarding frontline functionaries, after the 1990s, set in a faulty administrative system, achieved little to enhance the professionalism and responsiveness to citizens of frontline functionaries.

# KEY POLICY QUESTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Though frontline functionaries play a critical role in the provision of citizen services and implementation of government policy, they have received little attention from policymakers or scholars. So far, there has been no clear policy articulation regarding frontline functionaries, though for specific frontline functionaries, several policy issues have been highlighted from time to time. But these have been sporadic and usually limited in scope. Academic interest in these government workers, who form a critical interface between state and society, has been inadequate as well.

The first question that arises is whether an overall policy regarding frontline functionaries is needed at all. The answer to this question becomes clear if the impact of the absence of a considered and stated policy is examined. As this paper has shown, this absence has led to ad hoc decisions, varying from one department to another, in response to various pressures, rather than concerns about making frontline functionaries effective. At the same time, the conflict between frontline functionaries and the state has grown, while the incentive structure for frontline functionaries has become divorced from optimal performance. Resources have been spent on setting up professional institutions and training, but the impact on the actual professional capacities of frontline functionaries has been unsatisfactory.

Yet, frontline functionaries are the 'face' of the state for ordinary citizens, whose actions have a critical impact on their lives. At the same time, the delivery of every government policy is enhanced or constrained by the capacity and motivation of frontline functionaries. Clearly, ad hoc and drifting decisions regarding frontline functionaries deprive citizens of important services and lead to the sub-optimal use of government resources. Consequently, a broad policy framework that promotes effective action by frontline functionaries can contribute significantly to better governance.

This policy framework needs to be framed at two levels. One, some questions need to be posed generally, for all frontline functionaries, such as whether the aim is to optimise professional skills or minimise expenditure on frontline functionaries, or whether frontline functionaries need to be provided a high or low degree of autonomy at work, and so on. At the second level, these questions need to be considered again for specific frontline functionaries looking to the nature of their work. At the same time, it is important to recognise that such a policy framework needs to be based on learnings from practice and research within the country, as well as from across the world.

The development of this policy framework is a complex task, in which a range of stakeholders needs to be involved. There is no attempt to frame such a policy in this paper, but in this section, the key policy questions regarding frontline functionaries in India are highlighted.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES

Post-independence, the significance of frontline functionaries was recognised in policy at least to some extent, especially as the orientation of the government changed from maintenance of order and revenue collection, towards socio-economic development and social justice. However, over time, and particularly since the 1990s, the inadequacy of government services, a consequence of several factors, began to be laid at the door of frontline functionaries. Their salaries and other benefits came to be seen as a financial 'burden' or 'waste'. However, as the government spending in the social sector increased, frontline functionaries became critical, because social sector spending can be fruitful only with extensive outreach to the community, for which frontline functionaries are pivotal. Yet, in various sectors, the importance of frontline functionaries was not recognised in policy.

Consequently, the first point that needs consideration is the place of frontline functionaries in fulfilling government goals and addressing citizen needs. It is important to ask if frontline functionaries are a necessary evil for implementing programmes or important mediators who negotiate government policies and citizen needs. Moreover, there is a need to assess the gains and losses that accrue to citizens as well as the state if frontline functionaries are capable of high or poor quality work. A critical question here is whether there is a need to focus on developing capable and committed frontline functionaries or as many studies and reports after the 1990s have suggested, spend more resources on monitoring frontline functionaries. A more specific example of this question is whether intensive monitoring can redress poor teaching in the classroom or whether a capable and committed teacher is essential.

## VISUALISING FRONTLINE WORK AND ROLE OF FRONTLINE FUNCTIONARIES

In Indian policy, the complexity of work that needs to be done on the ground, i.e., 'implementation' has been ignored. For example, if AWWs are to address child malnutrition, they may need to understand local nutrition patterns, availability of nutritious food, intra-family distribution of food etc., and formulate context-specific strategies to address these concerns, rather than simply providing standard supplementary food to children of specific age groups. Similarly, teachers may need to tailor their teaching pace to suit students, adjust the time allotted for a particular concept to children's needs, and try a range of teaching strategies for best learning outcomes, rather than simply 'complete' the syllabus in a particular period. These are complex tasks, requiring a high level of analysis, planning and innovation.

This is a very important question for Indian policy, where, as illustrated above, the norm is to view frontline work in terms of a few predefined activities, or following orders. There is a tacit assumption about frontline work here, i.e., that it comprises a uniform set of activities across different contexts, for all citizens. This tacit assumption ignores the basic character of frontline work, i.e., addressing context-specific and individual needs in a broad policy framework. Here, activities would change across contexts and individuals, though the intent of the activities would remain the same.

Yet policies and orders that function as de facto policies often define the role of frontline functionaries quite narrowly and allow them little autonomy. However, if the complexity of frontline work is

recognised, then policy directions to frontline functionaries would shift from prescribing specific activities to suggesting a range of strategies to address contextual and individual needs as per broad policy goals and putting in place processes for supporting innovative solutions. The role of frontline functionaries would then change from carrying out specific activities to assessing the situation, selecting the best among available strategies, and at times innovating as per the context. As the role of frontline functionaries begins to correspond to the varying needs on the ground, the level of autonomy allowed to them will need to be widened.

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The placement of frontline functionaries in the field administrative structure needs to be considered anew. At present, the structure of field administration does not facilitate work at the frontlines. Frontline functionaries of different departments have their headquarters in different geographical areas and carry out their work independently. For example, the ANM and ASHA of the public health department, and the Anganwadi worker of women and child development do similar work, often with the same clientele. Yet, they receive separate orders. Moreover, since each department recruits its own frontline functionaries, in smaller departments, such as animal husbandry and fisheries, the frontline functionaries are sparse, and government outreach in these sectors is very inadequate. As illustrated in this paper, the strong departmental affiliation of frontline functionaries cuts into their role as community workers. Frontline functionaries are expected to focus on achieving departmental targets, not serving community needs.

Notably, in many countries, frontline functionaries tend to be employees of local governments, rather than only part of centralised bureaucracies. In a country as large as India, this is a question that needs serious consideration. Affiliation to local governments is one way of forging closer links between citizens and frontline functionaries. Moreover, if the departmental affiliation of frontline functionaries ceases to be the key organising principle, more productive arrangements can be made. For example, frontline functionaries can be part of teams located in local governments, rather than employees of different departments. In such a scenario, the ANM, AWW and ASHA can form a coordinated team, possibly a single unit in a local government. Similarly, the roles of the patwari and gram panchayat secretary have several commonalities, and a general administrative team can be considered as well. At the same time, processes need to be designed, whereby frontline functionaries can assist local governments to analyse local needs and improvise strategies to address them.

## PROFESSIONALISATION

The quality of delivery of government services depends on the level of professionalisation of frontline functionaries. Unless teachers are aware of teaching and learning strategies and principles, they will not be able to bring out the best in students. Public safety and justice will be possible if police constables understand the law and have the skills to handle situations lawfully. Moreover, once a job has been performed badly, no amount of supervision can improve it. The skills of frontline functionaries really matter, because only when they are proficient, can high quality government services be provided routinely.

Yet, as this paper shows, the importance of professionalisation of frontline functionaries has been addressed only partly in Indian policy, and largely on paper. This is a corollary of the fact that the complexity of the work at the frontlines is not given its due importance, and frontline functionaries have been seen as mere 'followers of orders'. This lack of apprehension of the importance of the professional

skills of frontline functionaries opened the doors to the recruitment of less skilled personnel at the frontlines from the 1990s. Even when the professionalisation of frontline functionaries has been recognised, it has been largely in terms of their educational qualifications and training. In recent years, formally well-qualified frontline functionaries are easily available in most of the country, and there has been a significant focus on in-service training of frontline functionaries. However, this merely skims the surface of the issue, and there are more basic questions at play that have not been addressed.

The first issue is that contextual knowledge regarding frontline work such as addressing child malnutrition in a specific area, teaching first-generation learners etc., has not been built adequately. Consequently, even when efforts are made towards professionalisation, they can be contextually meaningless. Notably, many frontline functionaries themselves have important context-specific knowledge and skills, but little attempt has been made to document them and share them widely. Nor have there been adequate attempts to integrate this knowledge base and skillset into more formal bodies of knowledge.

The second issue is regarding the creation of appropriate institutions to generate, codify and impart knowledge. The institutions where frontline functionaries get their professional education usually lack appropriate staff and infrastructure, and undertake little or no professional work. Consequently, training in such institutions is often perfunctory. Finally, frontline functionaries themselves are not encouraged to adopt an analytical approach to their work, so they are unable to address situations in a context-specific manner, and often miss the rich learning opportunities that work itself provides. Consequently, policy regarding the professionalisation of frontline functionaries needs to be oriented towards these deeper questions, rather than a few days of in-service training.

## AS GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Several important questions need to be asked about frontline functionaries as government servants. The first is regarding the concept of 'community worker' that haunts Indian policy from time to time. Notably, in Indian policy as well as in development literature in general, four traits are usually clubbed together in the community worker: belonging to the community, limited professional preparation, low pay, and lack of security of tenure. Of these, the logic of several frontline functionaries being drawn from the community is fairly clear. In fact, in India, transferring frontline functionaries from one place to another, allegedly to prevent them from developing vested interests, has become a tool for harassment and rent-seeking.

However, whether frontline functionaries from the community also need to be low-skilled and poorly paid is debatable. Notably, such 'community workers' have been recruited in the context of a reasonably well-paid bureaucracy, where regular frontline functionaries have higher salaries than their private-sector counterparts. Moreover, studies show consistently that the earnings of community workers are important to them. Experience shows that they invariably agitate and litigate for better service conditions. In fact, the idea that 'community workers', often drawn from socio-economically disadvantaged families, should do voluntary work, while the rest of the bureaucracy is paid well is curious, to say the least. Though the Gandhian vision of volunteerism is often invoked in the case of community workers, set in the context of a well-paid bureaucracy, their 'volunteerism' actually derives from highly restricted employment opportunities and livelihood sources for a very large section of Indians.

Consequently, the concept of the 'community worker' needs to be re-examined. While persons from the community may be more effective, reduction in their salary, status and professional qualifications are separate issues, and compromises on these are often based on an incorrect assessment of the complexity of frontline work. The lack of security of tenure also needs re-conceptualization. While there can be no argument in favour of continuing the services of government officials and workers who act in a mala-fide manner or are not committed to their work, whether the answer lies in casual firings or punishment is doubtful. Notably, rent-seeking and the lack of commitment to work are part of the larger problem of patronage-based transfers and the widespread rent-seeking in government. In such contexts, casual processes of hiring and firing can also be used to promote dubious ends. Consequently, while the processes by which frontline functionaries can be punished or sacked need to be tightened, they also need to be fair and transparent.

A key question regarding frontline functionaries is whether their placement near the bottom of a rigid and immutable bureaucratic hierarchy, with zero or minimal chances of promotion is appropriate. To begin with, the status of frontline functionaries has been equated with office workers in India, though the type of work that frontline functionaries do is far more complex. Frontline functionaries work on their own, engage with complex issues, need extensive skills in handling people, take decisions on the spot and some even face risky situations. This is not true of office workers at all, who process papers and work under supervision. There is an anomaly here that needs redressal.

The negative implications of the policy of minimal promotion avenues for frontline functionaries are all too obvious. On the one hand, there is no incentive, except the lack of other employment opportunities, for well-qualified and capable people to become frontline functionaries. On the other hand, there is little motivation to excel when on the job, as even when capable and hardworking, frontline functionaries gain nothing except personal satisfaction. This becomes a policy then of reducing the likelihood of really good work by frontline functionaries. For example, in many countries, all police personnel join as police constables and can rise to the very top. Police constables in such countries are very different from the police constables in India. The former look forward to a bright future, and are motivated to work hard. The latter are in dead-end jobs and have little incentive to do their best. Consequently, the career progression of frontline functionaries needs serious attention.

Moreover, frontline functionaries are often subject to autocratic and rude behaviour, as well as punitive disciplinary measures by supervisors and senior officers. This adds to the poor incentive structure. Punitive disciplinary measures can motivate employees to perform up to a bare minimum level, but not to excel. There is no code in existence regarding how supervisors and senior officers should treat frontline functionaries, leaving the field clear for various types of unproductive management and supervision styles. While appropriate management and supervision are important in all work situations, for frontline functionaries, it is especially significant, as their work ethos gets reflected in their relationship with citizens.

## LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY

The policy regarding the relationship of frontline functionaries to the community is obscured in cliches. Frontline functionaries are sometimes labelled 'sevaks' (servants) of the people or even activists. This evokes the image of frontline functionaries as citizen-agents. However, in actual practice, as this paper has shown, frontline functionaries are organised to achieve narrowly defined departmental goals,

and ignore community needs if these do not fit, no matter how pressing. This is as true of 'community workers' as the regular employees. Consequently, the first requirement is a broader and community-oriented role for frontline functionaries to create space to address community needs. It is important to recognise here that recruitment of local persons as frontline functionaries does not automatically result in a more productive relationship with the community, especially if the role defined does not permit responsiveness to community needs.

An important issue that needs to be addressed here is the extent to which the community contact by frontline functionaries needs to be structured. In some instances, attempts have been made to provide such structure through processes such as home visits by AWWs or organisational mechanisms such as placement of frontline functionaries in various community-based bodies, and other means. In other instances, however, no modalities are provided, and individual frontline functionaries are left to devise their own ways of community interaction. Here, studies regarding the extent to which it is useful to suggest modalities for relating to the community and what such modalities can be, are needed. Finally, the skills and tools that frontline functionaries need to interact with the community have to be considered. It needs to be recognised that several frontline functionaries across the country have developed a vast set of such strategies. The best of them probably know more about community interaction in their specific context than any expert. Much can be learned from how the most competent frontline functionaries relate to citizens, and these learnings can be shared widely. At the same time, new strategies can be suggested, and frontline functionaries can be given access to a variety of tools for community interaction, such as films, picture books, etc.

## BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The focus of this paper has been on the analysis of policies regarding frontline functionaries, to enhance the government's administrative capacity to provide social services and achieve policy goals. The assumptions made in policy regarding frontline functionaries and the questions not asked have been identified, so that they can be examined and considered to create an improved governance structure that is responsive to citizens.

At the same time, policies regarding frontline functionaries have wider social and political implications as well. For example, one question is regarding the relationship between the type of frontline functionary promoted by the state, and the overall constitutional mandate for the state to promote social equity and welfare. If frontline functionaries lack the autonomy and skills to undertake meaningful activities towards this goal, then the policy regarding frontline functionaries negates the constitutional mandate. In other words, the relationship between the policy regarding frontline functionaries and constitutional goals needs to be analysed.

A related question is regarding the meaning and intention, in India, of sectoral policies, such as in education and health. If the capacity to implement policy at the frontlines is inadequate, sectoral policies remain statements on paper or empty exercises. For example, universal elementary education means little if learning levels are poor because teachers lack the requisite teaching skills and the organisational structure and ethos do not encourage or recognise commitment and effort. Consequently, statements of sectoral policy need to be examined anew, in terms of what they really mean, in light of the characteristics of frontline functionaries.

There are also important questions about the rule of law and democracy. For instance, poor training and inappropriate treatment increase the likelihood of police constables using extra-legal means. This results in the routine violation of the rule of law, and transgression of citizens' rights. Similarly, the fact that the role of frontline functionaries is so defined that they follow departmental orders rather than respond to citizen needs, implies that in Indian democracy, the state focuses on achieving the goals of its political elite, without caring about ordinary citizens, except to the extent that they help fulfil its goals.

The scope of this paper does not extend to addressing these and other such questions. However, it is important to point out that the existence of school teachers unable to foster learning, police constables who use brute force often, patwaris who can be bribed to fiddle land records, and so on, all have critical implications for Indian democracy, which are little understood and analysed. Policies regarding frontline functionaries are not merely policies regarding low-level government personnel. They reflect the intent of the state to carry out its constitutional mandate and deserve far greater attention than they have received so far.

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## ANNEXURE

TABLE 1: Number of Primary Schools by Management in 1927

Management	Number of Schools	Percentage of Total Schools
Government	345	1.29
District Board	4,396	16.48
Municipal Board	1,442	5.40
<b>Sub-total Government Schools</b>	<b>6,183</b>	<b>23.17</b>
Aided	17,149	64.27
unaided	3,350	12.56
<b>Sub-total Private Schools</b>	<b>20,499</b>	<b>76.83</b>
<b>Total Schools</b>	<b>26,682</b>	

SOu RCe: Government of India (1929)

TABLE 2: Teacher and the RTE Act 2009

Stage of Education	Number of children admitted	Number of teachers
Classes 1–5	Up to 60	2
	Between 61 and 90	3
	Between 91 and 120	4
	Between 121 and 200	5
	Above 200	Pupil-teacher ratio should not exceed 40
Classes 6–8	At least one teacher per class so that there is one teacher each for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Science and mathematics</li> <li>● Social studies</li> <li>● Languages</li> </ul>	
	At least one teacher for every 35 children.	
	Where the admission of children is over 100: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A full-time headteacher</li> <li>● Part-time instructors for art education, health and physical education and work education.</li> </ul>	

SOu RCe: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009

**TABLE 3: : Reservation for Women in States and union Territories as on 1.1.2020**

Percentage Posts Reserved	Names of States and union Territories in which Reserved	Number of States
0	Goa, Haryana, Himachal, Kerala, Mizoram, West Bengal, Ladakh, Lakshadweep	8
6	Meghalaya	1
10	Arunachal, Tripura	2
20	Karnataka, UP	2
30	Assam, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand	5
33	AP, Gujarat, Jharkhand, MP, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Telangana (for civil), A & N Islands, Chandigarh, D & N Haveli, Daman & Diu, Puducherry, Delhi	16
35	Bihar	1
Not Available	Manipur, J&K	2

**Source:** Data on Police Organisations, Bureau of Police Research and Development (2020)

## ABBREVIATION LIST:

PHC: primary health care centres

ANM: auxiliary nurse midwives

NGO: non-governmental organisations

WHO: World Health Organization

MPW: Multi-purpose worker

ICDS: Integrated Child Development Services

UNICEF: United Nations Children Fund

AWW: Anganwadi Workers

PROBE: Public Report on Basic Education in India

T&V: Training and Visit

NCERT: National Council for Educational Research and Training

RIE: Regional Institute of Education

SIE: State Institute of Education

SCERT: State Council for Education and Training

NCTE: National Council for Teacher Education

NPE: National Policy of Education

DIET: District Institutes of Education and Training

CTE: Centres for Teacher Education

IASE: Institute of Advanced Studies in Education

D.Ed.: Diploma in Education

**ICT:** Information and communication technology

**ATMA:** Agriculture Technology Management Agency

**MGNREGA:** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

**ASHA:** Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)

**SHG:** self-help groups

**NUEPA:** National Institute of Education Planning and Administration

**BPRD:** Bureau of Policy Research and Development

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**NPM:** New Public Management

**CD:** Community Development

**BDO:** Block Development Officer

**CBO:** Community-based organisations

**IPS:** Indian Police Service

**SC:** scheduled caste

**ST:** scheduled tribe

**GoI:** Government of India

**OBC:** other backward classes

**PIL:** Public interest litigation

**VLW:** village level worker



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