

Teaching ethics to aspiring civil servants

The arrest in Chennai of an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer on probation, [for cheating during the civil services examination](#), raises questions on future recruitments to the All India Services and the training of officers. It is tellingly ironic that the incident occurred around the same time when the nation was [commemorating the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel](#), who stood for integrity in government and was considered the chief architect of post-Independence civil services. The incident also took place some months after the [government approved all the recommendations of the Seventh Pay Commission](#), which was done in the hope that more pay would mean greater levels of honesty and dedication on the part of public servants.

Unlike in normal criminal justice matters, the burden here of proving innocence rests with the offender, as long as the decision is to proceed against him in an internal inquiry and terminate his services thereafter. However, going by the severity of the offence, it is doubtful whether the ends of justice will be met by resorting only to departmental action. There is always a public perception that double standards are applied when punishing criminality in high places. This is why there is no option but to prosecute the officer in a court of law. Of course, he should be given every opportunity to defend himself, but the dice seems heavily loaded against him. The punishment aside, what needs to be revisited in this context is the provision in civil service rules that permits a serving officer to constantly look for opportunities outside the service to which he or she had been allotted in the first instance.

The question is, is this instance of misconduct by a public official, chosen on merit and pampered later with enviable perquisites, a mere aberration or is it symptomatic of a wider malaise? What is worrying is that there are growing accounts of dishonesty among public officials, especially in the State governments.

This is not to say that amid widespread corruption, senior civil servants cannot but yield to a dishonest political executive. Ultimately it is the moral fibre of an individual officer that counts. A substantial percentage of senior officials still stick to the path of virtue and act according to the codes of good conduct. It is this phenomenon that gives us hope that all is not lost.

The pride of the Indian Police is the National Police Academy in Hyderabad that trains IPS recruits. It offers comprehensive training to shape the profile of police officers. In recent years, some measures have been initiated to impart instructions in ethics. The Chennai incident throws serious doubts over the quality of such inputs aimed at character-building. It is not my case that a greater emphasis on ethics will measurably improve civil service conduct. However, we also cannot say nothing can be done in the matter; that would be disastrous.

The NPA faculty, including its director, must enhance the quality of instruction in ethics. The institution will receive ample support from the Home Ministry, which has been most generous in granting the finances needed to sharpen police training in the country. In sum, there must be indoctrination of trainees in ethical behaviour. Other training inputs take a back seat.

Further, supervisors in the State Police do not play the role required of them to train IPS probationers once they are assigned for field training after finishing the course at the NPA. Only a few senior officers take interest in instilling the right values in IPS trainees. This is not only because of sheer indolence and the low priority accorded to responsibility of monitoring training, it is also because of the declining moral standards of senior police officers themselves.

If the IPS stands somewhat discredited in the present time despite its glorious record in maintaining order in the most difficult of terrains, including in Jammu and Kashmir and Naxalism-

affected areas, it is because a large number of senior officers concentrate on their own careers at the cost of guiding trainees. A vibrant and well meaning national debate on the future of the IPS therefore seems appropriate.

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The definition of harassment needs to be constantly updated, and the process for justice made more robust

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