

SOME REMINISCENCES AND REFLECTIONS

RANCHOR PRASAD



Edited by

Priyaranjan Prasad

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Designed by Sanju Rakshit

Dedicated to all the secular minded citizens of India.

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PREFACE

I had known Ranchor Prasad for about sixty years having met him first in 1935, and the last time only some days before his death. He was as composed, cheerful and friendly during his terminal illness, as he used to be in his youth. This was possible only in a life of fulfilment and contentment and freedom from any regret or sense of guilt.

My association with him, both personal and in working life, was very close. He was one of the few with whom I could exchange without any inhibition, thoughts and judgments about people and public affairs, and about personal concerns. It was taken for granted that he would keep one's confidence; one had never to mention that one was speaking in confidence. He had an innate discretion of the kind one rarely comes across.

His scholarship was both wide and deep. He never made an incorrect or imprecise statement. Whether he was talking about ancient Indian history or current affairs, his knowledge of demography was precise and up to date and extended to cultural and economic causes and implications of demographic phenomena. In discussing current politics, he never deviated into gossip or currently fashionable scandal stories. He was always fair in his judgment, if occasionally somewhat over-generous. He seemed to be temperamentally averse to entertaining an uncharitable thought. In all my long association with him, I never found him speaking ill of any person or entertaining ill-will towards anyone.

His knowledge and understanding of the people and problems of Bihar: economic, social and cultural was sometimes unsurpassed. I sometimes wondered whether his wide sympathetic, and his empathy for people of Bihar made him far tolerant of their shortcomings. However, his keenness to serve them in every sphere of life, and promote their progress, which continued to the end of his life, more than compensated for his tolerance of their weaknesses.

Because of extra ordinary conjunction of circumstances, he had missed appointment to the Indian Civil Service in 1935 by a single place*. But his intellectual abilities and the quality of his contribution to the public service were higher than those of many members of the Indian Civil Service. Whether a person belongs to a particular service has no intrinsic value; it is his personal worth and conduct and contribution to public service that determine his place in society. And these entitled Ranchor Prasad to take his place with the best in the Indian Civil Service.

Ranchor Prasad was among the worthiest and most honourable men I have had opportunities to know. With his death, one of my valued links in Bihar has snapped, but they have left behind the happiest memories of my association with him.

L. P. Singh
(I.C.S. and former Governor of Assam)

Note: * Mr. Ranchor Prasad was one of the fifteen successful candidates in the I.C.S. exams held in London in the year 1935; his rank being eleventh out of the fifteen candidates. However, as there was no British in this list, the (British) Government restricted the selection of Indian candidates to ten and British candidates from below were pushed up to fill up the remaining five positions. This led Mr. Ranchor Prasad to miss the I.C.S. by one position.



Ranchor Prasad
(1911-96)



PART-I

CHAPTER 1

Engagement with Civil Service

I was already holding the post of *Commissioner of Commercial Taxes (Government of Bihar)* when I was appointed early in 1950 to the newly created **Indian Administrative Service (IAS)** under the emergency recruitment scheme. I had earlier joined the Bihar Provincial Civil Service in January 1937. I thus served as a civil servant for *a little over a decade* during the last phase of British rule in India.

The provisions of the Government of India Act 1935 relating to 'provincial autonomy' had been brought into force in the previous year and the first Congress Ministry in Bihar was formed with Shri Sri Krishna Sinha, popularly called Bihar Keshri ('Lion of Bihar'), as the Premiere in July 1937, that is, within a few months of my joining service.



Sri Krishna Sinha (extreme right),
Chief Minister of Bihar in the Congress Ministry (1937-39)

Early Training under the District Collector

A good deal of care and attention was bestowed in those days to the in-service training of the newly recruited officers. I recall that on my first posting as a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector at the district headquarters of Monghyr, I was placed on training one after the other in different departments of the district office and deputed from time to time to make field enquiries, supervise flood relief or to accompany the Collector on his tours of inspection the flood relief centers and court of ward offices. As usual, I was vested successively with the powers of a Magistrate of the third class, second class and first class and required to try criminal cases.

I have mentioned all this because although there are now good arrangements for the formal training of new recruits to the I.A.S. at the national and the State Civil Services in the states, the same care and attention are not generally given to them in service training as before.

CHAPTER 2

“Kisan Agitation” and Rent Reduction

Farmers in Bihar had been hit hard by steep decline in the prices of agricultural commodities since the mid-1920s, and Kisan agitation led by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was beginning to gather momentum by end-1937 in the Barhaiya area and parts of Shekhpura and Barbigha Police Stations in the Monghyr district.

Much of the agrarian trouble that arose this time in south Monghyr and the adjacent south Bihar districts was because of claims made by sharecroppers and agricultural labourers belonging mostly to lower castes to “occupancy rights” over lands recorded in settlement papers as “Baksht” or ‘self-cultivated lands of big zamindars’ belonging to the high castes. The agitating sharecroppers/agricultural labourers had earlier enjoyed “occupancy rights” over these land but had lost their rights as they failed to pay rent on account of fall in prices of agricultural produce. [This issue has yet to be fully resolved and has given rise in recent years to large-scale violence and bloodshed in some areas].

I was deputed with a mounted military contingent and some static force to Barhaiya where I camped for about a month and visited all villages in the disturbed Tal area which helped to ease tension, and I did not have to make use of the armed forces placed at my disposal. I was deputed a little later to the Sheikhpura-Barbigha belt, the Premier's own home area, where also the agitation subsided fairly soon without there being any need for deployment of armed forces.

Rent Reduction Operations

The Congress Ministry had in the meantime enacted a law for the reduction of rent payable to landlords taking into consideration the extent of decline in the prices of agricultural products and fall in crop yields due to poor maintenance of irrigation works in areas where landlords were responsible for the maintenance of such works according to the ‘Fard ab pasi’ according to the ‘Survey and Settlement records. The rent reduction operations were well organized and carried out expeditiously within the period of a year and a half.

I conducted the rent reduction operations in the Jamui subdivision and adjacent areas in south Monghyr with the assistance of two temporary officers recruited from the bar. In most parts of south Monghyr, a second crop can be taken only where irrigation is available and even during the kharif or South monsoon season good crops can ordinarily be obtained only when irrigation facilities are available.

Field inspections showed that irrigation works which landlords were required to maintain according to settlement records had not been maintained properly in most areas and this had a very adverse impact on agricultural yields. I submitted a detailed report of my findings before winding up the rent reduction operations, but no meaningful measures could be taken until some years after the advent of independence in 1947.

CHAPTER 3

World War II, 'Quit India' and Threat of Japanese Air Raid

The Second World War broke out soon after in September 1939 and the Congress Ministry in Bihar, as in other provinces, resigned in protest against the declaration of war by the Government of India without any consultation with the people's representatives. Consequently, 'Governors Rule' was established by a proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. I should mention that although some controversies had arisen after the assumption of office by the Congress Ministry regarding the powers of the Governor versus the Chief Minister under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935 and the issue of circulars by the Chief Secretary on policy issues without obtaining the prior approval of the Ministry, it did not affect *the smooth functioning of the district administration* in accordance with the rules, procedures and precedents established from before.

Administration of Tribal Districts

After completion of the rent reduction operations in south Monghyr, I was posted for short periods successively to two tribal districts, namely, the Santhal Parganas and Singhbhum. The jurisdiction of civil courts was banned under special regulations in the Santhal Parganas and Singhbhum districts, which are inhabited mainly by members of the 'Ho tribe'. In the Kolhan, even the functions of 'sub-inspectors' and 'inspectors' of police are discharged by the 'Mundas' or village headmen and the 'Manaki', another tribal functionary with supervisory jurisdiction over a group of villages.

I was vested with the powers of a Subordinate Judge in addition to my powers of a Magistrate of the first class in both districts. Tribals in both districts were conscious of their rights and resentful of any outside interference in their customs and usages, and there had been several rebellions against the British in the 19th century. I soon found on visits to tribal areas that their trust and cooperation could be easily secured if they were handled with some amount of sympathy, patience and understanding.

In the Kolhan area, there was difficulty initially in establishing proper communication with the 'Ho's as they were generally unable to follow either Hindi or English. 'Santhals were generally bilingual and often trilingual, but ability to converse in the Santhali language was a great advantage to administrators in the Santhal Parganas. The Government gave monetary awards to officers posted in tribal districts for learning tribal languages. I had started learning first Santhali and then Ho, which is akin to Santhali, but could not acquire sufficient proficiency in either language as my stay in both the districts was of very short duration.

Although the system of giving rewards to officers for learning tribal languages is still in force, there are not many officers of either the I.A.S. or the various State Civil Services who have learned tribal languages. There is little doubt that the Government would be able to handle the growing unrest in tribal areas much better if they could post a sufficient number of officers say around one-third of the total, who are able to converse with the tribal people in their own mother tongue. This would, however, be possible only if

young officers posted to tribal areas are allowed to remain there for at least three years at a stretch, and rewards for learning tribal languages are made more attractive.

In parts of Kolhan area, young men have been in a state of virtual rebellion for some time. While firm action has to be taken for maintenance of law and order, enduring results can be achieved only by establishing better communication with them and a sympathetic approach to their problems. Some measures have been taken recently by the State Government in this direction with promising results.

Civil Defence and Air Raid Precautions

The Japanese forces had taken over Singapore and Malaya (1942) and were attacking Rangoon by air when I was deputed first to the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) training school at Calcutta and then to the Civil Staff College at Lahore. Thereafter, I was posted as ARP officer at Bhagalpur. As the Japanese had by then occupied Singapore, Malaya and Burma and were moving towards India, the Government attached considerable importance and urgency to the setting up of ARP and Civil Defence Organizations in important cities and in industrial townships in eastern India.

The recruitment and training of whole-time paid personnel for manning various ARP services did not present much difficulty. Civil Defence Organizations cannot however function effectively without close cooperation and willingness on the part of influential men who volunteer their services as 'wardens' of different areas. Most of the leading citizens of Bhagalpur were associated with the Indian National Congress which was disinclined to associate itself with war efforts. I was able, however, to persuade several leading citizens who held the important positions in the Congress party who joined the ARP organization in honorary capacities, and the district and provincial Congress Committees also did not eventually raise any objection to it.

The Quit India Movement (1942)

The Quit India Movement launched by the Congress in August 1942 hit Bihar like a tornado. There was almost a complete paralysis of the administration for some time, more especially in the far-flung rural areas of the Bhagalpur district, which then extended right up to the Nepal border on the north side of the Ganga and to the lower hills and plateaus of Chotanagpur on the south side. Rail services and ferry services across the Ganga were completely disrupted because of the Quit India Movement.

As telegraph and telephone services also stopped functioning, the northern part of the district became completely isolated from Bhagalpur township, the district headquarters. Bihar, being a permanent settlement area, there was no Government functionary at the village level, and indeed no administrative unit below the large-size Subdivisions other than a few Police stations or Thanas each manned by a Sub-inspector and a few constables.

The jurisdiction of Police stations was also large and as transport facilities were very undeveloped, only a few villages could be readily approached by either rail or road. Even in normal times, there was not much that the Sub-inspector could do to prevent serious rioting or looting of crops in the countryside because of land disputes or village feuds, and almost every landlord and well-to-do farmer employed musclemen for maintenance for his property rights and personal protection or as was sometimes the case for terrorizing his adversaries.

In normal times, Thana officers were held in considerable awe because of their powers vested in them under the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) regarding making arrests and conducting searches. The police stations also served as a base of operations for dealing with natural calamities such as floods and draughts. As the 1942 movement gathered rapid momentum, the Sub-inspectors and Constables hurriedly vacated the police stations of which they were in charge and withdrew to their Subdivisional headquarters in search of safety.

There were no armed forces available even at Subdivisional headquarters other than a few Treasury Guards. The Subdivisional officers were themselves very panicky and felt obliged to burn the currency notes kept in the Government Treasury after disbursing salaries to the government staff. One subdivisional officer actually left his headquarters and sought safety for himself and his family at the palatial residence of a friendly landlord twenty-five kilometers away. The upsurge that took place had not been planned or organized from before. There was also no unified command or direction as all important leaders of the Congress had been arrested immediately after the passing of the Quit India Resolution by the Congress Working Committee.

Although there was more violence at places, it was by and large an unarmed revolt. The 1942 movement subsided after some time except for underground activity that continued in some pockets for a long time. The 1942 movement brought out very clearly the serious weaknesses in the administrative structure and the inability of the administration to cope effectively of even an unarmed civil commotion in the countryside.

It demonstrated at the same time the people's keenness and determination to end British rule and caused a sense of fear in the minds of most British officers which distanced them still farther from the Indian masses. There was also a further cooling off relations between the British and Indian officers in the higher services as the latter were generally not in tune with the harsh, vengeful, indiscriminate and often illegal measures taken in some areas by armed forces units, some British Police Officers, and subordinated Police personnel against the local population after the movement had subsided.

Municipal Administration

The headquarters of the eastern command of the Indian army then moved to Ranchi towards the end of 1945 so as to be near the field of combat. [The Japanese had occupied Burma by 1945]. The improvement of public health and sanitary conditions in Ranchi city and its environs thus became a matter of considerable importance and urgency. The Ranchi Municipality was superseded and placed under my charge. Within a day of my joining there, I was asked to attend a meeting convened by the Governor (Mr. J. R. Rutherford) to consider the measures to be taken for bringing about necessary improvements in public health and sanitation at Ranchi.

The army representatives expressed serious concern over the unsanitary conditions prevailing in important market areas, the poor state of roads and drains and need for construction of sanitary slaughterhouses, meat, and fish stalls. I was asked thereafter to indicate as to what measures I proposed to take for meeting the situation. I stated briefly that I had only just assumed charge of my office and that while some improvement could be brought *with more effective supervision* of the Municipal health and sanitary services, it was apparent from what the army representative had said that it would be necessary to take up substantial programs for repair and reconstruction of roads and drains, besides construction of proper slaughter houses and meat and fish stalls, and I would need about a month's time to carry out necessary surveys, and have plans and estimates prepared for the various works to be taken up.

This was agreed to, and I was asked to submit necessary proposals within three to four weeks. At another meeting convened by the Governor exactly a month later, I presented a rough outline of my proposals specifying the main items or the works to be executed, and the capital expenditure involved. The plans submitted by me was approved without much discussion, and I was assured that the grants and loans asked for by me would be made available on demand and directed to go ahead with implementation of the program without waiting for the formal sanction of Government.

It was also agreed that the services of a suitable young officer would be placed at my disposal for carrying out of fresh assessment of Municipal holdings, which had become long overdue. There was no loss of time in either sanction or schemes or the release of funds by the Government. Building materials could also be easily requisitioned from stockists and kiln-owners under the Defense of India Rules. I was also lucky in having two capable officers heading the health and engineering departments of the Municipality. The entire works programme was thus executed satisfactorily according to plan within a period of six to seven months, and at a cost lower than what was provided in the original estimates.

There is little doubt that time and cost overruns which have become a common feature in the implementation of our development programmes over the past two decades or so could be reduced very largely by eliminating procedural delays in the sanction of plans and estimates and avoiding excessive bunching of schemes which inevitably results in slowing down the progress of implementation of projects because of insufficient availability of both finance and basic materials like cement and steel.

This is not to suggest that there was normally less red tape or a greater sense of urgency in the clearance and execution of government projects during the British regime, and now that we can possibly dispense altogether with procedures for examination and clearance of projects submitted to Government by corporations and departmental agencies, but there is undoubtedly constructive scope for both streamlining of procedures currently in force, and for display of a sense of urgency on the part of all concerned in the implementation of development schemes generally.

Municipal government is concerned with a large variety of matters including public health and sanitation, provision of roads, parks, and other civil amenities. Compulsory education had also been introduced in the Ranchi Municipality sometime before I joined there. My one-year stint with the Ranchi Municipality proved very rewarding. It brought me for the first time in close touch with many things that impinge on the lives of the people in urban areas but are often neglected or given low priority.

The significant improvements brought about within a short period of time in the state of roads, drains, and the municipal market gave considerable satisfaction not only to the military establishment but also to the general public. I had also the satisfaction of leaving the municipal finances in a much better state. Municipal revenues had risen almost four-fold with the carrying out after many years of a careful and judicious reassessment of municipal holdings (thanks to the excellent work done by my junior colleague Shri S. N. Chakravarty, who was also alleviated to the I.A.S. sometime later), introduction of new levies and fairly large rental income from the newly constructed shop buildings and stalls in the municipal market.

CHAPTER 4

Advent of 'Freedom' and Communal Tension

I was an Under Secretary in the Bihar Secretariat at Patna when in September 1945 soon after the close of the Second World War, the British Government announced its intention to hold "general elections" to the Central and Provincial Legislatures and expressed the hope that ministerial responsibility will be accepted by political leaders in all provinces. It was also announced soon after that step would be taken to bring into being a Viceroy's Executive Council, which will have the support of the main Indian parties and that 'a constitution making body' will be constituted in due course.

In the elections held subsequently, the Indian National Congress won with large majorities in both the lower House of the Bihar legislature and in the Central Assembly, and on 30th March 1946, the Congress formed a ministry in Bihar with Shri Sri Krishna Sinha as the Premier for the second time. When I met Shri Babu in a group with some other officers, he spoke of the difficulties which the people were facing and of his firm resolve to introduce measures for reform and economic regeneration.

He also advised that we should call on his other colleagues and, in particular, Shri Anugrah Narayan Sinha, another distinguished Congress leader who was Minister of Finance and Agriculture. Anugrah Babu on whom we called soon after, observed after some preliminary talk that he hoped we would all bear in mind that a public servant was a servant of the State, of law and not the servant of the political party, and that what he and his colleagues expected from us was that we would carry out our administrative duties without fear or favour.

Communal Tension (1945 to 1947)

The period 1st April 1945 to 15th August 1947 was one of uneasy transition. *Bihar had been suffering from some years past from chronic shortage of food grains and other essential supplies and prices had risen high.* Communal tensions were also rising because of a general impression that the final transfer of power to Indian hands was imminent. The call by the Muslim league for 'Direct Action' in Calcutta on 16th August 1946 resulted in the Great Calcutta Killing. This had, however, only minor repercussions in Bihar.

Hindus in Bihar were, however, greatly inflamed by later reports of continuing inhuman atrocities on Hindus in the Noakhali district and other adjacent areas in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), and there was a massive outburst of communal violence towards the end of October 1946, in several districts of the south Bihar planes including rural areas of Patna Sadar and Barh sub-divisions of Patna district, parts of south Monghyr and adjacent areas in the Bhagalpur district. The outbreak of communal riots on an unprecedented scale over far-flung rural areas, where transport and communication facilities were very inadequate resulted in a virtual breakdown of administration for some days and heavy loss of life of Muslim residents, besides damage and destruction of property.

This led to a sudden influx of large number of Muslim refugees mostly from the Barh-Mokameh, Bakhtiyarpur and the Jehanabad belts from 29th October onwards. I was on earned leave and chanced to visit the Patna railway junction at about 10 A.M. on Tuesday (29th October) and was dismayed to find nearly 3000 Muslims refugees on the

station platform. There was a general atmosphere of panic and tension in and around the station and a crowd of mostly Hindu sightseers had collected near the entrance to the station. As I was passing through this crowd, I heard some whispering about some Muslim refugees having brought with them and abducted Hindu girls.

Many communal riots are caused due to spread of exaggerated or utterly false and insensate rumours and I felt that the situation might take a very serious turn if it was not tackled promptly. My efforts to contact the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police over the telephone from the railway station proved unavailing. I had no magisterial powers or status. I decided, however, to take the situation at hand, and do what I could until a responsible officer arrived on the scene. Luckily, the Station Superintendent, the railway police as also the traffic constables near the Patna junction readily followed my direction without questioning my authority.

The refugees were very reluctant to leave the station premises on their own and many of them did not know where they could go for finding temporary shelter. There were four Muslim league volunteers at the station. With their help, I was able to contact a senior leader of the Muslim league at Patna who was known to me from before and he agreed to make arrangements for the temporary stay of the refugees at some large Havelis in the Patna city temporarily until the Government were able to set up a proper refugee camp but insisted on provision of transport by the Government for taking the refugees to various places in the city.

A number of buses and trucks were commandeered by the local police under my instructions, and they were moved thereafter in batches to different places. As many refugees had difficulty in buying food, I made arrangements for supply of cooked food to them from Halwai shops adjacent to the main station. Luckily Shri Anugrah Narayan, the number two man in the Bihar Cabinet came to the station at about 2:00 P.M. on getting a report that a large number of refugees were stranded at the Patna Junction. He was much relieved to see me there and learn of the measures taken by me already. He also took immediate action on my request for deputation of four magistrates and an additional police force for round the clock duty at the station, and to provide adequate cash for meeting contingent expenditure on the feeding and transport of refugees.

I was asked to carry on the work I had started with the help of the officers and staff placed at my disposal until proper arrangements could be made by Government for the reception and care of refugees coming to Patna from different areas. I have thought fit to mention this somewhat inconsequential episode because in a multi-lingual and multi-religious society where there are also age-old socio-economic inequalities, wide-spread poverty and illiteracy, it is by no means and unlikely that social tensions will erupt at times into large scale violence, and administrative offices will be called upon during emergencies to discharge responsibilities beyond their normal call of duty.

Communal violence subsided after a few days in the riot affected areas, and there was no fresh outbreak anywhere: thanks to the vigilance exercised by district officials, and visits by some leading public men to different areas. The situation continued, however, to be very tense generally until the visit to Patna by the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan and some other members of the Interim Government which had been formed at the Centre.

The sense of fear and insecurity, however, still persisted among Muslims in many areas, and it was only after Mahatma Gandhi's prolonged stay at Patna during March-April 1947 and his visits to the riot-affected areas and refugee camps that the situation began to show signs of normalcy.



Mahatma Gandhi visiting the riot affected areas in Jehanabad district together with Mridula Sarabhai and Abdul Gaffar Khan during his Peace Mission in Bihar (June 27, 1947).
(Photo by Jagat Mehta)



Mahatma Gandhi listening to a Muslim woman whose husband and children were all killed by the mob, during his Peace Mission in Bihar.
(Photo by Jagat Mehta)

Law and order had been restored, and there was communal peace throughout Bihar as the advent of independence on 15th August 1947. The people celebrated this occasion with great deal of joy and enthusiasm tinged with sadness caused by the fateful partition of the country and the migration of well over one hundred thousand Muslims from Bihar largely to Eastern Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the hope of finding better opportunities there.



Mahatma Gandhi taking a morning walk in Patna, accompanied by Manu Gandhi and Abdul Gaffar Khan, during his Peace Mission in Bihar, (March 24, 1947)
(Photo by Jagat Mehta)



Mahatma Gandhi visiting the riot affected rural areas, during his Peace Mission in Bihar (June 26, 1947).
(Photo by Jagat Mehta)

CHAPTER 5

Consolidation and Reforms

During the period from August 1947 to mid-1953, the Bihar administration was occupied to a large extent with what may be called problems of survival and consolidation. Over the past three decades, the British regime had remained largely pre-occupied with measures for combating the national movement and with war efforts and hardly any attention was paid to the problems of economic growth. There was chronic scarcity of food grains and other essential commodities, and ever-present threat of scarcity and famine.

The per capita revenue of Bihar was easily the lowest among all Provinces, and Bihar's finances was easily the lowest among all provinces. Bihar's finances had, furthermore, been seriously strained because of inflationary pressures and additional expenditure on maintenance of public order, food supplies and the relief and rehabilitation of Muslim refugees. The administrative structure was weak and the I.C.S. cadre became depleted with the departure of the British members of the service after independence. Priority had to be given in this situation to problems of law and order, arrangement for supply of food grains and other essential commodities, and relief of the distress of people hit by crop failures and prevalence of scarcity conditions.

Urgent steps had to be taken also for augmentation of financial resources and strengthening of the administrative structure. However, despite all difficulties, a number of measures of far-reaching importance were carried out during this period for bringing about socio-economic changes and administrative reforms and for strengthening democracy at the grassroots including abolition of zamindaris, separation of judiciary and executive, creation of 'anchals' or Circle Offices, formation of village panchayats, constitution of the Municipal Corporation and Improvement Trust at Patna etc.

Patna Municipality (1947)

The Patna City Municipality was superseded and placed under my charge in January 1947. I was appointed simultaneously as the Chairman of the Patna Administration Committee which looked after the municipal administration of the new capital area and also made Special Officer in the Department of Local Self Government for preparing detailed schemes and draft legislation for the establishment of a Municipal Corporation and an Improvement Trust at Patna. The Minister for Local Self Government Pandit Vinodanand Jha was himself keenly interested in problems of municipal administration, and he gave me all the support that I needed for the carrying out of my duties. I stayed in this post for a period of less than twelve months.

The Patna urban area is a saucer like formation surrounded by major rivers on three sides which makes it extremely difficult to maintain drains and sewers in a satisfactory condition or to prevent waterlogging over large areas during the rains. Hardly any very significant or enduring improvement could therefore be achieved within the very short period during which I looked after the administration of the Patna municipal area. The schemes prepared by me for the establishment of Municipal Corporation, Patna with jurisdiction over both the Patna City municipal area and the new Capital Area and a separate Improvement Trust for taking up major schemes of drainage, water supply and planned development of new housing colonies were approved by end of 1947 and implemented by the Government soon thereafter.

The population of Patna urban area has risen six-fold since 1951 and the Patna Municipal Corporation has not been able to provide on any adequate scale, even minimum civic facilities due largely to inadequacy of financial resources. Almost all municipal bodies in Bihar, as also in many other states, have been facing similar difficulties over a long period. The situation is bound to deteriorate further if this problem is not tackled soon and with a sense of urgency.

Department of Commercial Taxes

In December 1947, I was placed in charge of the Commercial Taxes Department, Bihar, which had been created only a year and a half earlier for administration of the *Bihar Sales Tax and Agricultural Income Tax Acts*. I was also appointed as a Special Officer in the Finance Department for formulating proposals for levy of new taxes and revision of existing levies. The administration of the *Bihar Entertainment Tax* was transferred to the Commercial Tax Department soon after. The total revenue derived from all the three taxes was only about one and half crores then.

Bihar was 'a permanently settled area' and the land revenue payable by landlords to the Government had been fixed permanently [in money value] as far back as 1793. Bihar's finance had, therefore, been seriously strained due to rising prices and wages, and additional expenditure incurred for some years past on arrangements for food supply, strengthening of the law and order apparatus and relief and rehabilitation of Muslim refugees who had left their villages during a serious outbreak of communal violence in some districts of south Bihar in October 1946.

There was also urgent need for raising additional revenues on a substantial scale for meeting the expenditure on the new social welfare and development schemes to which the government was already committed. Besides exercise of superintendence and control over the offices of the commercial taxes department, I was, therefore, called upon to explore possibilities for raising government revenues substantially. There were reports about growing corruption in some of the Commercial tax offices, and I felt that this problem had to be tackled first and foremost for plugging leakages of tax revenues.

Within a few weeks of my joining the Commercial Taxes Department, I learnt from a very reliable source that although there had been a record sale of jewellery during the busy marriage season that year, the Superintendent of Commercial Taxes, Patna had almost halved the Sales Tax assessment of three important firms of jewellers at Patna. I paid a surprise visit to the office of the Superintendent, Commercial taxes. Patna with the Superintendent of the Intelligence branch at headquarters and asked for the files relating to the assessment of the firms concerned. A perusal of the assessment orders passed by the Superintendent showed that in all three cases, the assessment for the current year was 40 to 50 per cent lower than the preceding year's assessment, and the Superintendent had readily accepted the accounts submitted to him by the assesses.

He was also unable to adduce, on further questioning, any reason in support of the decisions taken by him. I told the Superintendent, who was an officer on deputation from another cadre, that the orders passed by him were obviously collusive and insisted on his handing over charge of his office forthwith to the Superintendent, Intelligence Branch who was present there. I was aware that I was acting in excess of the authority vested in me, but I did not want to give him any opportunity for tampering with the papers or passing some more collusive orders. The suddenness with which all this happened had almost completely demoralised the Officer and he handed over charge without any fuss.

The action taken by me was supported by the Finance Secretary (Shri L.P. Singh). The chief Secretary told me that while he realised that I had acted in the public interest, I should have at least spoken to him or informed the Finance Secretary before actually relieving a Gazetted officer of his duties in anticipation of issue of Government orders. I had acted rather precipitately, and the Chief Secretary's verdict was justified. The immediate and drastic action taken by me for removing a corrupt officer did, however, send a tremor throughout the department and instilled a sense of fear in the minds of corrupt officers and staff in the commercial taxes department throughout the state, and it did help to reduce corruption.

One important reason why corruption has continued to increase over the years and corrupt officers have not been deterred to any very large extent by the vigilance proceedings instituted against them is that it often takes years and sometimes even a decade or more to dispose of such cases. I have little doubt that if prompt action is taken to punish the erring officers, even in a small number of cases, it would help greatly in discouraging corruption in Government offices and public undertakings.

My predecessor (Shri Sadashiv Prasad, I.A.S.) had already formulated detailed proposal for a thoroughgoing revision of the Bihar Sales Tax and the Bihar Agricultural Income Tax Acts, and necessary legislations were enacted in 1948. There was a quantum jump in sales tax revenues with tightening of the reins of administration and levy of tax under the provisions of the new Act on dispatches of minerals and industrial commodities such as coal, mica, steel etc. from Bihar to other parts of the country.

There was also a very substantial rise in income from agricultural income tax with the introduction of a progressive rate structure and the imposition of a super tax on the income of big zamindars and land holders. There was also an almost eightfold rise in entertainment tax revenue with amendment of the old Act and levy of tax on a specified percentage of the value of the ticket, as recommended by me.

Some of those gains were, however, short lived. Agricultural Income Tax revenue came down sharply after two to three years with the abolition of zamindaris. The provision made in the new Sales Tax Act for the levy of sales tax on dispatches to other parts of the country, became ultra vires after the commencement of the Constitution in January 1950. We had earlier represented to the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly that the levy of such tax on dispatches was necessary in the interest of mineral rich, but under-developed provinces such as Bihar, where the total volume of sales comprised regular dispatches of large quantities of minerals and primary industrial products such as iron and steel to other parts of the country.

The Drafting Committee, however, took the view. that it would not be in order for any state to levy sales tax on goods dispatched to other states for sale of consumption therein. The heavy loss of 'sales tax revenue' in Bihar and other similarly placed states, on this account, after the commencement of the Constitution has since been compensated partly with the subsequent introduction of a 'Central Sales Tax' on select commodities of which the proceeds are passed on to the states.

Two new levies, namely, one per cent 'electricity duty' and 'toll on bus passengers' were also introduced. Electricity consumption for industrial purposes and for lift irrigation were exempted from levy of 'electricity duty' under the scheme drawn up by me. But these exemptions have been withdrawn since, although it has remained one per cent throughout.

Population Census, Bihar (1951)

Early in 1950, I was appointed Superintendent of Census Operations, Bihar under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. I also continued to be in charge of the Commercial Taxes Department for some time additionally. The 1951 Census was the first decennial census held after the partition of the country and independence. The 1941 Census had been a truncated affair as the British Government was occupied then with the Second World War and many changes had taken place since the earlier Census held in 1931.

A new Census Questionnaire had to be formulated and suitable schemes drawn up for compilation and tabulation of the census data. At the Census Conference held at New Delhi in 1950, there was general agreement that apart from collection and compilation of data regarding the size and distribution of population and literacy, the main emphasis should be on collection and tabulation of data relating to economic status and occupational pattern.

We were told that the Government of India were inclined to the view that no caste data should be collected at this Census except for data relating to scheduled castes and tribes for whom special provision had been made in the Constitution. I argued that as the age-old caste system was not going to disappear for quite some time to come, there would be considerable advantage in having up-to-date statistics regarding the size of population, literacy levels and occupational patterns of different castes and tribes, particularly as no such data had been collected since 1931.

My view was supported by Census Superintendent of nine out of fifteen states which existed then. The matter was placed by the Census Commissioner before the Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel who, however, felt strongly that the Government of independent India should give no recognition to caste, which was a divisive factor. India had achieved independence after a long struggle, and this view was widely shared by almost all ardent patriots. It was not generally envisaged then that with the introduction of parliamentary democracy based on adult suffrage, the caste factor would become more important than ever in the political arena for a long time to come.

Although Census is a central subject, it has necessarily to be conducted, considering its nature and the size of the operation with the help and assistance of State Administration at every level. The work of census enumeration was carried out in Bihar with the help of more than 1,00,000 honorary enumerators and supervisory personnel consisting mostly of schoolteachers and subordinate police officers, besides municipal staff in urban areas.

A National Register of Citizens was prepared for the first time during the 1951 census for every village and township throughout the country, and District. Census Handbooks were published, giving village wise data recording number of households and houses, and population by sex, age occupation, among other things. The entire operation was conducted smoothly and according to schedule, for which the main credit must go to the District Administration and the concerned officials at different levels.

In 1951, Census figures showed that while the population of Bihar had increased by 11 million since 1921, the average rate of population growth being five times the pre-1921 rate, there had been no increase in either agricultural or industrial production over all these years. Dependence on agriculture had also increased since 1901 when only 73 per cent of the population of Bihar was dependent on agriculture against 86 per cent in 1951.

There had also been not much progress in literacy and education, and only 5 per cent of the population of Bihar was found literate in 1951. The situation was not very dissimilar taking India as a whole, but Bihar's plight was worse on almost all counts. The message was loud and clear for India and more especially to Bihar, that urgent steps would have to be taken for launching a program for all round development of the economy and family planning.

First Five-Year Plan (1951 - 1956)

Due to the Bihar administrations preoccupation with scarcity relief measures, and the depleted state of the State's finances serious attention could be given to implementation of the State's First Five Year Plan only from 1953. In March 1953, I was appointed Secretary to the Government of Bihar in the Development Department in addition to my duties as Superintendent of Census Operations, Bihar under the Home Ministry, Government of India.

The Development Department was then the administrative department for the Directorate of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Cooperation, Industry and Technical Education. *There were separate Cabinet Ministers for:* (i) Agriculture (ii) Animal Husbandry and Cooperation and (iii) Industries and Technical Education. There was also a good deal of Census work still remaining. The main Census Tables had been published and I had completed one chapter of the report, but the work of compilation, editing and publication of District Census Handbooks had only just begun. Luckily, I had a competent Deputy Census Superintendent (Sri Rameshwar Nath, I.A.S.) at headquarters, who cheerfully bore almost the entire burden of the remaining census work except for the writing of the remaining chapters of the main report.

As Development Secretary, my main task was to reorganise and strengthen the different wings of the Development Department for proper implementation of the development programs envisaged. I was appalled to find that all posts of District Agriculture Officers and Subdivisional Agriculture Officers were filled by deputations from the Provincial and Subordinate Civil Service cadres who did not have any qualifications in agriculture or in many cases, even such awareness of the problems which they were called upon to handle. The State Government readily agreed to my suggestion for sending these officers back to their departments to which they belonged and appointing agricultural graduates to these posts.

The State Government also accepted my proposal for creating separate Divisions of Agriculture Research Education and Extension manned by well qualified specialists. Arrangements were made for the post-graduate training of officers at the Department of Agriculture at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute and reputed institutions abroad. The Agricultural School at Sabour, near Bhagalpur was upgraded to degree level. Later, a new College of Agriculture was setup at Ranchi, besides seventeen Basics Schools of Agriculture, one for each district for training of village level workers and farmers. Four Regional Research Stations were also set up in different agro-climatic regions. The reorganization thus brought about over a period of four years has by and large stood the test of time.

The responsibility of conducting 'agricultural research' now vests in two Agricultural Universities which have been created since. This arrangement has not worked very satisfactorily, among other reasons, for lack of sufficient rapport between the Agricultural Department and the Universities over long periods. The liaison between 'agricultural research' and 'agricultural extension' has also been rather tenuous. Insufficient attention has been given generally to farmer's training programmes. The (basic) Agricultural Schools have been neglected and some have closed. There is clearly need for taking a fresh look at the entire set-up as it has evolved over the years, and for taking further steps for revitalising and strengthening it.

Agricultural Extension Service

The Grow More Food Enquiry Committee (1952) appointed by the Government of India with Shri T.T. Krishnamachari as Chairman had recommended the organization of a permanent nation-wide Agricultural Extension Service to assist in the implementation of a coordinated program for agriculture and rural development, with the willing participation and help of the local people for bringing about such large-scale expansion of agricultural production as will ensure to an increasing population and rising levels of nutrition. Under this scheme, National Extension Service Blocks were to be set up throughout the country each with a Block Development Officer and Agricultural Extension Supervisor, a Livestock Extension Supervisor, a Cooperative Extension Supervisor and two Social Education Organizers. The scheme was sanctioned by the Government of India in June 1953, and four such blocks were set up by me that very year with agricultural graduates as Block Development Officers.

There was, however, some rethinking on this issue soon after 'Zamindari' had been abolished in Bihar by this time, and the State Government was in the process of setting up of Anchals or Revenue Circle offices throughout the State. It was felt that it would be in the interest of economy, and also generally useful from the administrative angle if one and the same officer was placed in charge of the development block and the revenue circle. This meant for all practical purposes, that the development block would henceforth be headed by a junior officer of the Revenue Department instead of an officer with training in agricultural science.

This change was affected, it so happened, during a period of five months when I was abroad under a fellowship scheme of the United Nations. On my return to Patna, I submitted a note urging strongly that this decision should be re-considered as it was clearly desirable that the block development officer should be a person having knowledge of agriculture. and a commitment to the objective of extending the fruits of research in agriculture and animal husbandry to farmers, and the whole objective of creating the National Extension Service Blocks might be defeated if the local Revenue Officer with a heavy burden of work and responsibility for revenue work and general administration was appointed additionally as Block Development Officer.

I also pointed out that to succeed in its mission, the Agricultural Extension personnel at the Block level would have to function as a friend and guide of the farming community, and their role would be suspect if they are vested with administrative authority, and that there was also some risk that the Block Development Office would become gradually infested with corruption with its involvement in revenue and general administrative matters.

While the Government did not accept my recommendation that the two posts should not be combined, the orders issued earlier were modified so as to give a more positive role to Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Cooperative Departments in the formulation of programs in their respective fields and in technical supervision. The experience gained over the past three decades shows that the fears expressed by me regarding the likely consequences of combining agricultural extension and development work at the block level with revenue and general administration work were not justified.

Animal Husbandry and Fishery Development

Some veterinary hospitals and dispensaries and veterinary college had been setup in different areas and veterinary college had been established at Patna during the British regime. Programs for development of animal husbandry through genetic upgradation were, however, introduced for the first time during the First Five Year Plan. A livestock research station was also established soon after with a well-qualified veterinarian as Director.

Bihar has a large potential for fishery development and a fisheries Department was organised and fishery development schemes introduced on a fairly extensive scale. Preliminary steps were also taken for introduction of daily development programmes in selected areas.

Co-operative Credit Societies

Cooperatives in Bihar were facing a difficult situation because of accumulation of heavy overdues in many societies, due among other reasons, to recurrent crop failures. A large number of Central Banks had come into existence. Their financial structure was very weak generally, and they were also facing serious difficulties because of *the inability of the primary societies to pay back advances made to them later*. Schemes for reorganization of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies into multi-purpose cooperatives with enlarged jurisdiction did not make much progress, largely because of the opposition of leaders of 'the cooperative movement' in the State, who did not want any departure from the principle of "one Society, one Village".

The amalgamation of Central Banks as recommended by the *Reserve Bank of India*, also proceeded very tardily for similar reasons. The capital structure of the State Co-operative Banks was strengthened with a generous contribution of 40 lakhs by the Government towards share capital of the bank, and although this both helped initially, it could hardly provide a solution to the problems facing the **Co-operative Movement** in the State. The maladies from which the Co-operative Movement suffered in Bihar during the First Five Year Plan period have persisted by and large over the years, although there are silver linings on the horizon also as 'primary multi-purpose societies' are reported to be functioning viably and well in many areas.

There is a need for taking a fresh look at the whole question of organization and working of co-operative societies, I am myself inclined to the view that 'cooperatives' in Bihar, as in India, generally, have not developed on right lines due in a large measure to excessive government control and regulation, and that no enduring improvement can be brought about unless the situation is removed, and 'cooperatives' are left free, by and large, to function more or less as other registered Societies subject to rules and regulations enforced by quasi-judicial bodies functioning independently of the Government.

Industrial Development

The First Five Year Plan did not give much priority to industrial development. The provision made in the State Plan for industrial development has remained rather small even in subsequent Plans as in our scheme of 'Planning', the principal responsibility for development of large-scale industries devolves on the Central Government. The State Government's role is largely of a promotional character, although they are free to set up a few industries on their own, if they so desire.

During the First and Second Plan periods in Bihar, our main endeavour was to create an institutional framework for industrial promotion, conduct techno-economic surveys and studies for identification of large-scale industries in the State, and promote development of small-scale and cottage industries by making available to entrepreneurs "term loans" and other incentives. The State Industrial Development Corporation, the State Finance Corporation, and the State Small Industries Corporation, were thus established at Patna by the mid-sixties.

The Government of India, during this period, was planning to setup large scale Steel Plants and a Heavy Industries complex for manufacture of heavy machinery and heavy machine tools, besides a large refinery for processing of Assam crude. The south Bihar plateau is perhaps the most highly mineralised tract in India and contains vast reserves of coal including almost the entire coking or metallurgical coal deposits in the country and high-grade iron ore, besides other minerals such as copper ore, mica, other non-metallic mineral products. We decided to give high priority to the work of identification of suitable sites for location of these industries on techno-economic considerations.

The Industries Department had no technical wing then, and I was obliged to devote a good deal of my time and energy to do the task of compilation and analysis of the basic techno-economic data, and preparation of reports showing the economics of location of these industries at selected sites in Bihar state. I was, however, relieved of a good deal of the burden of this work when Dr Ajit Majumdar, I.A.S. joined the Industries Department as Director of Industries sometime later.

The conclusions reached in this reports prepared by us were supported by various Foreign Technology Missions and Technical Committees appointed by the Government of India, who finally accepted our recommendations for the establishment of a large steel complex at Bokaro alongside the rich coking coal fields of Jharia and the East-Bokaro coal-fields, a Heavy Engineering complex at Ranchi and an Oil refinery at Barauni Junction in north Bihar, which provided scope for transportation of refined products on both the metre gauge and broad gauge rail network.



Ranchor Prasad in conversation with Dr Zakir Hussain, Governor of Bihar

The Bokaro Steel complex and the Barauni Refinery have been functioning viably and earning good profits. The massive Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) complex at Ranchi has, however, been incurring substantial losses principally due to paucity of orders for steel plant equipment and other heavy machinery for which it was designed, and the inadequacy of measures taken so far for diversification of the product mix.

A 'Techno economic Survey of Bihar State', which was the first survey of its kind in India, was also taken up and carried out in 1957 at my instance, with the help of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), and financial assistance given by the Ford Foundation for meeting expenses on foreign experts employed on the survey work. Although we did not attach much importance to the establishment of industries in the state public sector, a **large modern superphosphate factory** was setup at **Sindri** for meeting the rising demand for phosphate fertilizers in the State and preliminary steps were taken for the establishment of a High-Tension Insulator Factory with Czechoslovak collaboration for facilitating the development of the Bihar power grid.

The development of cottage and small industries did not, however, receive sufficient attention due largely to our preoccupation with measures for promoting development of heavy Industries for which Bihar has a large potential. There was also lack of sufficient realization on our part of the importance of the small-scale sector in the socio-economic situation prevailing in the most parts of Bihar State and in India generally.

Not much attention was given until 1956 to creation of a Technical Wing in the Industries Department or any organization for industrial promotion at the district and block level. A final decision for establishing a Technical Development wing with two Industrial Advisors, one with specialization in chemical technology and another in engineering industries with development officers in each wing was created somewhat belatedly in 1957 largely on the advice of the then Union Minister for Industries and Commerce Shri V. T. Krishnamachari.

Well qualified District industries officers were also appointed thereafter towards the end of 1957. The scheme for establishment of District Industries Offices had not, however, been worked down in depth and there was hardly any provision for supporting staff. Most of the well-qualified District Industries officers resigned after a few years and joined other organizations or were promoted to higher course in the Industries Department itself, and the District Industries setup, which had been created virtually seized to exist after some time.

Technical Education

The development of technical education had received very little attention in Bihar during the British regime, and at the commencement of the First Five Year Plan, arrangements had to be made for recruiting engineers and overseers required for the execution of the multi-purpose **Kosi project from Madras and elsewhere in the country**. Before independence, there was one Engineering College in Bihar with facilities for training in civil engineering only, besides a diploma-level Institute. By 1953, good progress had been made in the establishment of the Bihar Institute of Technology (BIT) at **Sindri** with facilities for training of electrical and mechanical engineers.

There was need for further larger scale extension for technical education in almost all branches of specialization of different levels. A plan was accordingly drawn up by me, on a rough and ready assessment of the likely future requirement for ten years for introduction of mechanical and electrical engineering courses at the Patna Engineering College, and introduction of courses in telecommunication, metallurgy and chemical engineering at BIT Sindri, establishment of a new engineering college at Muzaffarpur and four polytechnics besides one Industrial Training Institute in each district. After some initial hesitation, the entire plan was approved by the Government and implemented according to schedule.

Other Achievements during the Plan periods (1951 to 1961)

In the foregoing paragraphs, I have given a brief account of the performance of only the departments with which I was concerned personally. Among major achievements of Bihar State in the first decade of freedom, mention must be made of **the multi-purpose Kosi project**, of which the first and most important phase was completed during this period under the dynamic leadership of Shri Tribhuvan Prasad Singh, I.C.S, thus affording flood protection to a vast area which used to suffer year after year from devastating floods, and providing irrigation facilities to about two lakh hectares in the districts of Saharsa and Purnia.



Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Governor of Bihar Dr Zakir Hussain,
and Shri T.P. Singh, I.C.S at the Kosi Barrage at Birpur.

Road development in Bihar during the period was also among the highest in all-India, and the total length of metalled roads was more than doubled. There was also a rapid

increase in the number of primary, middle and secondary schools and a big rise in enrolment of students belonging to Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes for whom special incentives had been provided by the Government, by way of grant of free studentships and stipends. A first class, residential public school, was established at Netherhat in the Chhotanagpur plateau which provided for admission of students on a competition basis and levy of school fees on a graded scale according to family income, with provision of free studentships and other concessions to students belonging to the weaker section of the population.

A number of institutes, including the Tribal Research Institute, the K. P. Jaiswal Research Institute the Nav-Nalanda Mahavihar, the Mithila Institute and the Bihar Rastra Bhasha Parishad were also set up during this period for promoting higher studies and research and preliminary steps were taken for setting up institutions for postgraduate students and research in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and Prakrit.

CHAPTER 6

Public Administration in the first Freedom decade

Bihar's achievements during the first decade after freedom was remarkable considering the difficulties, and Bihar's administration was justifiably rated very high in this. Dr. Paul Appleby, the well-known US expert on public administration who visited India at this time gave high praise to Indian Public Administration generally and considered Bihar alongside undivided Bombay State as one of the two best administered states in India. It can also be justifiably said that the quality and performance of public administration in Bihar during the first freedom decade was incomparably better than during the British rule.

For one thing, the British administration was concerned almost entirely with law and order revenue collection, relief works during famines and other natural calamities, or measures in support of British war efforts. The administrative structure had remained weak and was liable to breakdown in civil commotion as it actually happened in 1942 and again in 1946. After the advent of independence, public administration in Bihar, as elsewhere in the country was called upon suddenly to shoulder vastly increased responsibilities at a time when the Indian Civil Service, which had held the reins of administration, had become depleted with the departure of British officers; however, as we have seen, public administration in Bihar did meet the challenge well and truly.

We may well ask ourselves 'how did this happen?' For one thing, there was no longer any dichotomy between the Government and the civil service, and there was equal anxiety on the part of both to maintain a high level of efficiency and rectitude, and to push ahead welfare and development schemes with whatever resources were available. The Chief Minister and his senior colleagues were distinguished freedom fighters, held in high esteem by both the general public and the civil service. There was no credibility gap between the Government and the people, and public support and cooperation were generally assured in the implementation of welfare and development programmes.

The Chief Minister and other senior Ministers were also generally committed to the principle of civil service neutrality and did not discourage or take exception to free expression of views by civil servants in administrative matters. One of my deputy Secretaries (the late Shri Ramanand Sinha, I.A.S) had commented rather harshly on a suggestion to the Minister-in-charge to which the Minister rightly objected, but he accepted the advice given by the officer nevertheless and gave high praise to the officer for his competence and high sense of integrity in his annual confidential remarks.

Finally, credit must be given for Bihar's outstanding performance during the first freedom decade to the high quality of administrative leadership and guidance provided by the Chief Secretary and senior I.C.S. officers, and the generally high caliber, integrity of character and sense of loyalty to the country of officers of the newly constituted I.A.S. who were holding almost all posts of district officers in the state, besides a number of important secretaryships and other senior posts in the secretariat by the mid-1950s. Bihar was also lucky during this period in having at the helm of various technical departments, a number of others who were known for their ability and integrity of character, and this was no doubt an important factor contributing to the success of the development programmes that were taken up in different fields.

Some Adverse Trends in Public Administration

It would be, however, as well to mention here that some of the maladies which have seriously affected the functioning of our democratic polity during the past two decades had already begun to surface by the mid-1950s and were beginning to cast some shadows however faint and immaterial at this stage on the functioning of public administration. There was thus a growing practice of important group leaders collecting substantial funds in the name of the party, but keeping the funds thus collected in their personal accounts and utilising them at their discretion. There were also some indications of the growth of a tendency among some ministers to find ways and means of circumventing established rules or norms of public policy to benefit their friends, relations, influential party men or businessmen who had made generous contributions to their election funds.



PART-II

CHAPTER 7

Home Ministry, Government of India

In October 1957, I was transferred to New Delhi as a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs and placed in charge of the Directorate of Manpower. A Cabinet Committee on Manpower and the Directorate of Manpower had been created only year before at the instance of the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who rightly believed that of the various factors that contribute to development, the availability of trained and well-motivated scientific and technical manpower is the most crucial. Almost all Ministries, besides the Planning Commission, were concerned in one way or the other with problems of manpower development. The directorate thus functioned in the main as a coordinating agency, an adjunct to the Cabinet Committee.

An informal Steering Group consisting of two representatives of the Planning Commission, Shri Tarlok Singh and Shri Pitambar Pant, and one representative each from the Technical Education Wing of the Education Ministry, the Labour Ministry and the Directorate General of Employment and Training had been constituted for facilitating coordination. Representatives of other concerned ministries and departments were invited to attend meetings of the Steering Group as and when matters concerning them came up for discussion. My task was greatly eased as a suitable framework for consideration of manpower problems affecting different ministries and organizations had already been established and a comprehensive program of work drawn up by Shri LP Singh who had held charge of the Directorate earlier.

Manpower Directorate

The Directorate had thus initiated a series of studies bearing on the requirements and resources of scientific and technical manpower for satisfactory implementation of development plans in different sectors of the economy. Some of the work was entrusted to high level committees, such as the Agricultural Personnel Committee, and the Committee on Manpower for the Shipping Industry which was headed by Shri Ramaswami Mudaliar.

Studies which involved a good deal of research and investigation were carried out initially with the help of Shri Pitambar Pant who was the Chief of the Perspective Planning Division in the Planning Commission and also Secretary of the Indian Statistical Institute at Calcutta. Later, an Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR) was set up in 1962 with Ford Foundation assistance for continuing attention to this work. I functioned as the Director of the Institute ex-officio for a year when Siri R. A. Gopalswami (ICS-retired) who had earlier served as Registrar General of Census Operations and Special Secretary in the Home Ministry took over as Director on a whole-time basis.

The Manpower Directorate did not normally deal with the manpower requirements of scientific and technical personnel for defence. After the Chinese attack on our country in the north-east, there was, however, serious concern over shortages of doctors, engineers, technicians, artisans and drivers in the armed forces. To deal with the situation, an Emergency Manpower Committee was set up by the Cabinet with Professor M. S. Thakkar, Member Planning Commission and former Director General of CSIR as Chairman, myself as ex-officio Secretary and the Chiefs of the various Engineer-corps of the army, the Director General of Ordnance Factories and senior officers of the Defence Ministry as Members.

A detailed exercise was carried out by the Manpower Directorate of the additional requirements of engineering personnel in various categories and doctors on the basis of the data furnished by the authorities concerned. Necessary measures were taken thereafter for recruitment

of technical personnel in different categories, and for augmenting training facilities where necessary. The State Governments were also requested for help and there was very good response from several states, notably Punjab, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Constitution of the 'Scientist Pool'

Recruitment procedures are rather elaborate, and time taking. This was one of the major factors that discouraged Indian scientists and technologists abroad, particularly those who were employed there, from returning to India in the late 1950s. The Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, felt that India would need to utilise for its development the services of all available Indian scientists and technologists, including those who were working or studying in foreign countries and desired that a scheme should be formulated for facilitating their timely placement and utilization in India. With this object in view, a scheme for constitution of a Scientist Pool was formulated by me in consultation with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the concerned Ministries including finance, and the Chairman, Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

Under the scheme, CSIR sponsored well-qualified scientists and technologists for appointment to the Scientist Pool without waiting for any application from them. Selections were to be made by a Standing Recruitment Board presided over by the Chairman, UPSC or a member nominated by him, with the help of specialists in different disciplines, and well-qualified candidates sent offers of appointment without insisting on interview.

This scheme had attracted some attention also outside India, and in 1962, the Government of India agreed at the request of the Organization for European Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) to my visiting Greece for helping in the formulation of a suitable scheme for facilitating the return of well-qualified Greek scientists and technologists from other countries, where they were working or engaged in postgraduate and research work.

Over the years, this scheme has facilitated the return and early placement of thousands of Indian scientists and technologists who were employed or studying in foreign countries. About one-third of those who were thus appointed are, however, reported to have gone back mainly because the facilities available in the establishments to which they were attached, and the conditions of work were not altogether satisfactory. Their total emoluments were also much lower than what they were getting before their return. The trend towards flight of well qualified and talented Indian scientists and technologists to USA, Canada, Britain and other countries has gathered fresh momentum during the past decade, and there is certainly need at this stage to take a fresh look at the whole question so that suitable policy measures could be taken for effective utilization of well qualified and talented scientists and technologists in the development of the country.

Official Language of India

Soon after I had joined the Home Ministry as Joint Secretary, Manpower Directorate, I was appointed additionally as Secretary of the Committee of Parliament constituted under Article 344 of the Constitution to consider the recommendations made by the Official Language Commission headed by Shri B.G. Kher. This Committee consisted of 20 members of Lok Sabha and 10 members of Rajya Sabha with the Home Minister, Shri Govind Ballav Pant, as its Chairman. Language is an emotional issue, and some of the recommendations of the Kher Commission had given rise to a good deal of public controversy and even bitterness in some parts of the country.

Pantji attached very considerable importance to the development and propagation of Hindi as the medium of communication among people belonging to different linguistic regions in the country. He fully realized, however, that the time was not ripe for a change from English to Hindi as the official language of the Union and felt that language being a sensitive issue, appropriate decisions should be taken in this regard only on the basis of a broad national consensus. As the Chairman of the Committee of Parliament, he, therefore, endeavored throughout to arrive at agreed conclusions as far as possible on the various recommendations made by the Official Language Commission.

The membership of the Committee was drawn from all parts of the country and included such eminent personalities as Shri Ramaswami Mudaliar, Shri S.A. Dange, Professor Hiren Mukherji and Shri Purushottam Das Tandon. There was somehow a general but not very well-founded impression in the minds of people that there was a mandatory provision in the Constitution providing for change-over from English to Hindi as the official language of the Union on the expiry of 15 years from the commencement of the Constitution (January 26, 1950).

Sub-Section (1) of Article 344 of the Constitution lays down that Hindi shall be the official language of the Union. This is, however, qualified by Sub-Section (2) of the same Article which provides that English shall continue to be in use as the official language of the Union until the expiration of 15 years from the commencement of the constitution. This is further qualified by Sub-Section (3) which states that Parliament may by law provide for the continued use of the English language for such official purpose as may be specified in that law beyond the expiry of 15 years.

After detailed consideration of the problem in all its bearings, the Committee recommended that provision should be made by Parliament by law for the continued use of English in addition to Hindi beyond 26th January 1965 without any limitation of time or as to the purposes for which it may be so used.

The Committee also made various recommendations for development of Hindi and its propagation in non-Hindi knowing areas. These and other recommendations of the Committee were readily endorsed by all members belonging to non-Hindi States. Minutes of dissent were, however, received from some members including Shri Purusottamdas Tandon, Kumari Manibehan Patel and Dr. Raghuvira who were strong protagonists of Hindi and by Mr. Frank Anthony a strong protagonist of English, who was opposed to the introduction of Hindi as the official language.

During the debate on the Committee's report in the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru gave a categorical assurance that English will continue to be used in addition to Hindi for all official purposes of the Union until people in non-Hindi speaking States were ready for a change-over. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Pantji as Home Minister subsequently introduced a bill for the continued use of English in addition to Hindi beyond 26th January 1965 without any limitation as to time, or the purposes for which it may be used, and this bill was duly passed by the Parliament.

National Integration and Communal Harmony

Both the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru and the Home Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri were concerned over the recrudescence of Hindu-Muslim riots at Jabalpur and Aligarh in 1960, and linguistic disturbances in Assam in 1960 and again in 1961. The Prime Minister wrote to all Chief Ministers of States sometime in June 1961 inviting their attention to the need for adopting suitable policy measures for countering fissiparous tendencies and strengthening national integration. Different aspects of the problem were discussed at a conference of Chief Ministers held thereafter. It was generally agreed at this conference, among other things, that 50 per cent of the direct IAS recruits allotted to different States should be from officers coming from other States, and consideration should be given to the constitution of some more all-India services as this would help in the long run both to strengthen national unity and to raise the level of expertise in different fields such as education, public health, forestry, etc.

A four-day National Integration Conference was held subsequently towards the end of September 1961 to consider various aspects of the problem of national integration. This Conference was attended by well over a hundred invitees including not only eminent public figures such as Shri Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Shri C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar among others, and a large number of distinguished men in other fields of national activity e.g. education, science, industry, etc. A statement issued by the Conference was laid on the table of both the Houses of Parliament and circulated widely.

A standing body called the National Integration Council was also constituted with the Prime Minister as Chairman for continued attention to the problem. The Conference had recommended, among other things that a campaign should be launched calling upon people throughout the country to sign a pledge that they would not resort to violence for the settlement of civil disputes on account of differences in regard to religious, linguistic or regional issues. It was envisaged that a National Integration Day would be observed every year, and people all over the country would be called upon to sign this pledge.

Two high-level committees were also appointed, one with Shri Ashok Mehta as Chairman and Shri L. P. Singh as Secretary for dealing with the problems of communalism and regionalism and another with Shri C. D. Deshmukh as Chairman and myself as Secretary for making recommendations in regard to the measures to be taken in the educational sphere for strengthening national integration. There was, however, a strong upsurge of national feeling throughout the length and breadth of the country after the Chinese attack in the north-east in October 1962, and it was not considered necessary for these committees to continue their deliberations in the changed situation. In the years following, there was an armed conflict with Pakistan on the Sindh border, and a regular Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1966, and the issue of national integration became relegated to the background.

A suggestion had been made in the course of discussions at the National Integration Conference that there was need for a careful and objective study of the growth of social tensions in different parts of the country on a continuing basis. Social tensions which often erupt in mindless violence and bloodshed over extensive areas and cause immense bitterness in the minds of different sections of the population, and sometimes even a sense of alienation in the minds of immature young persons, have been on the rise in our country over the past two decades and there is certainly need for systematic empirical research to bring out all the relevant factors contributing to it by reputed research institutes who could be given liberal financial assistance for this purpose by the Central Government through an organization such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research.



PART-III

CHAPTER 8

The Bihar Drought (1966, 1967)

In August 1965, I was appointed Development Commissioner and Principal Secretary to the Government of Bihar. Shri K.B. Sahay, who was the Chief Minister then, had been the moving spirit behind the Zamindari abolition. He had also shown considerable interest in the development of tribal areas and in measures for promoting the welfare of scheduled castes and tribes. There were, however, clear indications of growing dissatisfaction with the Government, and there was public unrest in the State.

Within a few days of my joining at Patna, the Secretariat complex was surrounded by a large slogan-shouting crowd which indulged in heavy brick-battling when it was stopped from entering the gates. Several persons were injured including the I.G. of Police who suffered a head injury. There were similar occurrences at some of the district headquarters. The Chief Secretary was on leave on medical grounds. Under Government Orders, I visited the affected areas together with senior police officials by a government plane. The law-and-order situation was rapidly brought under control, but public discontent continued to simmer.

Bihar had been under Congress rule throughout since 1946. There was wide-spread talk about prevalence of casteism and corruption at both political and administrative levels. Although the allegations made were often vague and much exaggerated, they were not altogether without substance. As Development Commissioner, I was concerned principally with the task of monitoring of plan schemes, and formulation of a draft Fourth Five Year Plan for Bihar. It was the fag end of the Third Plan period and there was not much that could be done immediately to push ahead the projects which had fallen way behind the time-schedules. The draft Fourth Plan prepared by me was also shelved with the out-break of war with Pakistan in September 1965 and with the development of recessionary conditions in the economy.

The Bihar Drought of 1966, 1967

Kharif production declined sharply in 1965 due to failure of the Hathia rains in October. Bihar was a food deficit State, and over two-thirds of its total area was then dependent over-whelmingly on rain-fed kharif crops. By end-January 1966, scarcity conditions had appeared in many Bihar districts. There was insufficient soil moisture and virtually no winter rain and the prospects of the Rabi crop were thus also very grim. The K. B. Sahay ministry, which was in office then, had become seriously concerned over the developing situation by mid-February, and a draft memorandum was prepared by the Relief Department for submission to the Government of India for financial assistance of more than 160 crores for meeting expenditure on gratuitous food relief and, on hard manual labour schemes that had to be introduced for giving employment and thereby some purchasing power to agricultural labourers.

There was no knowing as to how the 1966 south-west monsoon would behave and relief measures would have to be continued for 12 months or more in most districts if there was also failure of the south-west monsoon later in the year (as it actually happened).

I therefore urged very strongly that: (a) well-coordinated measures should be taken for ensuring the optimum utilization of all available sources for irrigation, and an intensive agricultural production programme launched with arrangements for supply of the best available seeds and fertilizers in all areas where irrigation facilities were already available or could be contrived under emergency irrigation program and (b) that a massive program should be taken in hand under the Hard Manual Labour program for de-siltation of the large network 'ahars' (small reservoirs), 'pynes' (waterways) and tanks, more specially in the Magadh region and other south-Bihar areas, and for sinking of about one lakh 'kachha' (temporary) wells in low lying areas, dry riverbeds, and other suitable locations. I also proposed the sinking and commissioning of 15,000 wells in areas having groundwater potential and for installation of about 100 river pumps for irrigating fields alongside the Ganga, and various perennial streams in north Bihar.

Seven states had been struck by 'drought' in 1965 and six major states, including Bihar, were affected by famine of unprecedented severity in 1966. Bihar situation was considered particularly serious considering its very high density of population and the limitations of the state's resources. The Union Minister for Food and Agriculture, Sri S.C. Subramaniam and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Shri Ashok Mehta, who visited Patna for conducting and on the spot review of the situation in consultation with the State Government, readily approved of the entire plan of action drawn by me and assured the State Government that the funds required would be readily made available by the Government of India.

The entire relief program was implemented satisfactorily according to schedule within the 1965-66 financial year with a smooth flow of funds provided by the Central Government, and the care and vigilance exercised by the Relief Commissioner Shri S. N. Singh, I.A.S. and the District officers - all officers of the I.A.S. cadre. The guidance and supervision provided by Shri P. K. G. Menon, Advisor, Planning Commission who was deputed to Patna for about six months for maintaining close liaison with the State administration also proved very helpful. Credit must be given for the sinking and commissioning of over 15,000 tube wells during 1965-66, as against a total number of 10,000 tube wells commissioned in Bihar until 1965-66, to the officers and staff of the Minor Irrigation Department, and in particular to Shri P.S. Kohli, I.A.S. who was then in charge of this work.

The State Government had earlier approved of my proposal for taking in hand a Command Area Development Programme in the district of Saharsa and Purnia where water had started flowing in the newly constructed Kosi canals, but there were yet no field channels. Shri S.K. Chakravarthy, I.A.S. who was then Revenue Secretary at Patna and had earlier served as both District Officer and Settlement Officer in the area and was well known and highly respected by the people there, was appointed as Kosi Area Development Commissioner and vested with the powers of a Divisional Commissioner and also declared to be ex-officio Head of the concerned departments, including agriculture, animal husbandry cooperation and irrigation.

Shri Chakravarthy succeeded in persuading the local people, almost throughout the area where canal water had become available to construct kutchha field channels by their own efforts with some funds provided under the Hard Manual Labour scheme where necessary. A special allotment of fertilizers was made for this program by the Union Ministry of Agriculture. Both the Central Government teams, and groups of American Senators and others who visited Bihar later that year were highly impressed with lush crops they found growing in the Kosi Canal area, particularly as they had till then, seen only barren lands with little bits of greenery here and there in their visits to other parts of Bihar state.

Mass starvation could not have been avoided in 1966 in Bihar without import of millions of tons of food grains by the Government of India and their rapid transportation by rail to different destinations in Bihar and the ready and generous assistance given by the Central Government for launching a gigantic Hard Manual Labour Program for providing employment for the rural poor, and in the process renovating old minor irrigation schemes and developing new irrigation facilities which have helped to raise agricultural productivity and mitigate the rigours of subsequent droughts in the State.

There was no interference by politicians with the relief works undertaken in different areas, nor many complaints about corruption in the execution of the relief program and the entire administration functioned with a sense of purpose and urgency. Excellent coordination was also maintained throughout by the State administration, at both the state and district levels, with representatives of international agencies such as the UNICEF and more importantly with the Bihar Relief Committee organised by Shri Jai Prakash Narayan for relief works in different areas.



PART-IV

CHAPTER 9

National Coal Development Corporation

In July 1967, I was appointed Managing Director and subsequently also Chairman of the National Coal Development Corporation (NCDC) under the Government of India. The Corporation had been in a state of turmoil for some time. Its main offices at Ranchi and Calcutta, and the collieries in one of its major coalfields had been on a strike for nearly two months. There was also staff unrest and a downward trend in production also in other coalfields. The prestige of the Corporation had suffered due to a declining trend in production and continuing losses for some years, and highly exaggerated reports about prevalence of wide-spread corruption in the Management.

The Corporation had been hard hit by economic recession in the country during the mid-1960s and stagnation in coal demand. There was gross under-utilization of built-up capacity, and simultaneously, also accumulation of large coal stocks which could not be lifted due to long delays in the erection and commissioning of power houses or other projects to which the newly developed collieries were linked. The Corporation had well qualified and capable mining engineers and other technical and managerial personnel. The productivity of the collieries developed by the Corporation was also substantially higher than that of private sector collieries generally, and the old railway collieries which had been transferred to it in 1956.

The strike in the main offices of the Corporation and in the collieries was called off by the concerned Unions within a week of my joining there on a general assurance given by me that there will be no victimization of any worker for participation in legitimate union activities and their grievances to which I had given patient hearing would be looked into after termination of the strike. The recommendations of the **Coal Wage Board** had been published earlier and were implemented by me after some time without much modification. Some of the unions had raised fresh issues, but they were unable to get much support from the workmen.

The national economy was already showing signs of recovery when I took over as Managing Director of the Corporation. I felt certain that there would be significant rise in coal demand with further improvement in the tempo of economic activity in the country, and the commissioning of new power projects, which had been taken up earlier under the Third Five Year plan in different states. The Corporation had sufficient machinery and equipment besides trained manpower for raising its level of production by two-thirds or more with some advanced planning. I, therefore, got a detailed plan prepared for each coalfield for raising the total production of coal by 40 per cent by the close of 1969.

There were, however, complaints about short supply of wagons for movement of coal by the railways even at the existing level of coal production, and some of the senior mining engineers were doubtful about the feasibility of this plan. A copy of the detailed production drawn up for different coalfields was sent to the **Railway Board** with particulars of the destinations to which coal rakes were to be dispatched. The matter was subsequently discussed at a meeting convened at my request by the Chairman, Railway Board (Shri G. D. Khandelwal) at New Delhi, and we were assured that necessary arrangements would be made by the railways to ensure the supply of coal rakes required by us.

Coal demand rose even higher than was anticipated with the result that despite a substantial increase in wages and salaries of supervisory personnel under the Coal Wage Board award, the corporation, which had been in the red for some years started making significant profits from 1968-69. With rise in production and profitability, there was noticeable improvement in the morale of both officers and workers, and the prestige in public image of the company. NCDC employed about over 100,000 workers and about 2000 officers belonging to different disciplines. Its collieries and projects were spread over five states, and it had also offices elsewhere.

There was fairly adequate delegation of power to Colliery Managers and Area General Managers, but at headquarters virtually all powers were vested in the Managing Director. It did not appear to me to be a very satisfactory arrangement. Soon after my joining NCDC, I approached the Government for creating four posts of Functional Directors: one each for the technical, financial, marketing and personnel side. This was agreed to and the first three posts were filled up by upgrading existing posts of Deputy General Manager (Technical), Financial Advisor and General Manager (Sales). Shri Ramanand Sinha, I.A.S. who had been serving in Hindustan Steel Limited (HSL) with distinction in a top position on the personnel side for several years, was appointed as Director (Personnel).

The Functional Directors were left free to decide all matters concerning their portfolio without reference to me except where policy issues or departures from past precedents were involved or there were serious differences of opinion between two Functional Directors on some issue. I was able to concentrate my attention after this to major issues for planning and programming, monitoring of the production programme and development projects, periodic reviews of financial and cost analysis, besides inspection of different areas and projects.

As many as ten projects started by the NCDC during the Third Plan period had been suspended, and some other projects were slowed down with the onset of recession in the national economy and decline in coal demand towards the close of the Third plan. Necessary steps were taken for pushing ahead the development of the projects which were already underway and high priority was given to the task of coal development and further exploratory work in the Singrauli coalfield, which possesses vast reserves of quarriable coal suited for power generation.

NCDC had built up a good Planning Unit soon after its constitution in 1956, but this organization had virtually ceased to exist after some years. Coal demand was expected to be more than double within a decade with the commissioning of the new power projects and industries, and it was necessary, therefore, to set up a well organised Planning and Development Wing for taking advance action for preparation of coal mining and washery projects. NCDC had already a large staff with well-qualified geologists and engineers in mining and other disciplines. A new multidisciplinary organization called the Planning and Development Wing, was set up by me towards the close of 1969 with a distinguished Chief Mining Engineer as General Manager.

It became apparent, however, in another two years that coal development would have to be taken up on a much larger scale than hitherto envisaged. Before relinquishing the charge of NCDC in December 1971, I therefore suggested to the Government that an autonomous institute now be set up for planning and development of coal mines with the existing Planning and Development Wing as its main core or nucleus. This was agreed to and a registered company, the Coal Mines Planning and Development Institute (CMPDI) Limited was setup at Ranchi, soon after.

Coking coal or metallurgical coal is a scarce resource even taking the world as a whole. India's own reserves of prime grade coking coal are very limited and concentrated almost entirely in the Jharia coalfield. NCDC had taken up too large deep shaft coking coal projects in this field, and three new projects were under investigation, but the rest of the coalfield was exploited by private companies, mostly small collieries, which did not have adequate resources for undertaking deep mining or adopting scientific mining techniques, and about 100 underground fires had started as a result of unplanned mining operations and slaughter mining by them. The question of nationalisation of Jharia Coalfield had been mooted several times in the past, but no decision could be taken.

A detailed survey report of Jharia Coalfield, prepared by Dr A. Lahiri, Director, National Coal Research Institute, Dhanbad in 1969, showed very clearly that some of the most valuable coking coal reserves of the country had suffered irreparable damage due to unplanned development and slaughter mining by numerous small private sector companies and that if the Government did not intervene fairly soon, the limited prime grade coking coal reserves of the nation would suffer further damage making the task of reconstruction and development of the Jharia Coalfield an extremely difficult task. I raised this issue with the Union Minister for Steel and Mines (late Shri Mohan Kumara Mangalam) during his visit to Ranchi and as desired by him submitted a note together with a copy of the well documented report prepared by Dr. Lahiri for his consideration.

A Presidential Ordinance for 'nationalisation of the coking coal mines of the Jharia Coalfield' was promulgated after a year and a half in November 1971, and a new government company called the Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) was constituted for managing the nationalised collieries.

I had superannuated from the I.A.S. in December 1969, but my services were retained as Chairman and Managing Director of NCDC for another two years. I was requested by the Government thereafter to serve as a part time director of both NCDC and BCCL in the interest of continuity of policies, and I remained associated with the coal industry as a part-time director of various successor bodies, viz., the Coal Mines Authority and Coal India Limited until April 1977.

As I look back over the years, I feel that perhaps the only achievement for which I can claim some credit during my four and a half year's stewardship of NCDC was the build-up of the morale and motivation of the large stock of highly qualified technical and managerial persons who had joined the Corporation. If I am asked as to what were the major factors that contributed to the success of the NCDC management during my four and a half years tenure as Chairman and Managing Director of the company, I would say first and foremost, **non-interference by the Government in the working of the Corporation which enabled management to carry out its tasks**; secondly, the high quality of the technical and managerial manpower employed in the corporation; and thirdly, my broad-based experience of public administration which enabled me to look at the problems facing the Corporation in a wide perspective and to deal with the many complex issues that arose from time to time dispassionately.



Ranchor Prasad with wife (Sarda Prasad) and granddaughter (Vandana)



PART-V

CHAPTER 10

Bihar State Planning Board

My involvement with public administration and management did not altogether cease after relinquishing charge of NCDC. I served thereafter as Deputy Chairman of the newly created Bihar State Planning Board until March 1977, and also held charge during this period additionally as part time Chairman of the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC), a Central Government undertaking, and part-time Director of the apex coal Companies and the State Bank of India.

I was again associated with the Bihar administration as an Advisor during 1978 and 1980 and also served as a Member on the National Committee on Development of Backward Areas set up by the Planning Commission during 1980-81.



Ranchor Prasad at the 'Mandup' of his daughter's marriage. Others in the picture are his grandson Ashok and son-in-law Sunil Prasad (standing next to him) and Rajiva Verma, bridegroom, and son-in-law (sitting)



With members of his family and the Joint family. His widowed sister Mahamaya Devi, next to his wife Mrs Sarda Prasad, stayed mostly with him. The eminent professor of Ancient Indian History Prof. B.P. Sinha can be also seen in the picture (standing second from right).



PART-VI

CHAPTER 11

Public Undertakings

There is also serious concern in the minds of people over the unsatisfactory performance of many of our public sector undertakings. Considerable importance was attached to the development of these enterprises for strengthening the economic base, through large-scale development of infrastructural facilities and preventing concentration of economic power in private hands. What the public sector has achieved is by no means inconsiderable, and appears truly impressive when viewed against the backdrop of 1951, the year of commencement of the First-Five Year Plan.

Commendable progress has been achieved in many areas, including development of coal, oil, natural gas and electrical energy, iron and steel, non-ferrous metals, machinery, machine tools and fertilizers. There is, however, undoubtedly cause for public concern because the return on public sector undertakings has remained unduly low, and the development of the national economy has suffered because of poor performance of infrastructure, e.g., power supply, telecommunications, etc.

Many Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) have functioned well despite some handicaps because of the high quality of manpower employed by them, and the operational autonomy to their managements. The need for giving operational autonomy was recognised quite early by the Central Government and some positive steps were taken in the mid-1960s to give operational autonomy to them. However, with emergence of a strong inflationary trend from mid-1973 and the promulgation of 'Emergency' in 1975, many directives were issued to Central undertakings by the concerned Ministries which amounted in effect to curtailment of the autonomy enjoyed by them earlier. The Central Government is now reported to be taking necessary steps for giving full operational autonomy to their undertakings.

With a few honourable exceptions, State government undertakings have been functioning poorly for long. There is still insufficient recognition in the States of the general principle that if public enterprises are to run successfully, they must have the autonomy and flexibility to function on sound business principles. Many State enterprises do not presently have adequate powers even for disposal of matters affecting their day-to-day administration, with the result that frequent references have to be made to the government, and work suffers because of long delays in securing orders.

There is also considerable interference by ministers and bureaucrats in matters such as appointment transfers, postings, and disciplinary action against erring personnel. This has naturally resulted in a serious erosion of discipline in many undertakings. What makes it worse is, that in Bihar as also in some other States the post of Chairman and Directors of State public sector undertakings tend to be regarded as gifts or sinecures at the disposal of the Chief Minister and filled up by my appointment of influential members of the State Legislature or other influential politicians who cannot easily be called to account for their doings.

In one major public sector undertakings in Bihar which had started incurring small losses due to various factors, and there was urgent need for reducing surplus staff, two successive chairmen, both influential politicians, appointed instead an additional four-thousand men without any valid sanction and in total disregard for the procedure laid down for making such appointments. Although detailed reports submitted by two successive general managers, both senior officers of the IAS in regard to the irregularities committed by the chairmen, it resulted only in the transfer of these officers to other posts and no action was taken against the erring chairman. Similar things have happened also in other States in the country.

CHAPTER 12

Epilogue

Since the mid-70's, our country has been passing through a critical phase of transition from an age-old tradition bound caste-based society into a modern society which aims at securing justice: social, economic and political to all its citizens, and guarantees to them, equality before law, freedom of speech and expression, faith and worship, and gives every adult citizen the right to vote in elections to Parliament and state assemblies. Social tensions and conflicts which erupt from time to time in mindless violence have been rising in almost geometrical progression over the past one and a half decades. Fissiparous tendencies have also surfaced in some parts of the country.

There is, understandably, serious public concern in this situation over the growth of corruption at both political and administrative levels and marked deterioration in public administration almost all over the country. There are reasons to believe that corruption has now spread also among officers of IAS and other all-India Services who have a vital role to play in the maintenance of high standards of conduct and performance in public administration throughout the country.

Several factors have contributed to fall in the standards of public administration. The volume of administrative work has grown enormously since the advent of independence, due to a vast expansion of governmental functions and responsibilities. This was to a large extent unavoidable in the conditions prevailing in our country, and the Government had to assume the primary responsibility for promoting the all-round growth and development of the economy and the welfare of the weaker sections of society.

There has been considerable increase in the volume of administrative work and proliferation of bureaucratic structures due also to the introduction of a highly complex and elaborate system of regulation and control over industry, trade and other economic activities which have proved counterproductive and could have been avoided. The State Governments have also assumed direct control over many institutional agencies and educational institutions down to primary schools without giving sufficient thought to either the principles of policy involved, or to problems of organization and management that would need to be tackled. This had led, among other things, to a veritable explosion in the number of State Government employees, but no attention has been given over the years to problems of personnel management and organization, and there has been deterioration all-round.

There is a very close relationship between politics and public administration. Over the past two decades or so, there has been serious distortions in the working of our democratic polity, and this in my view, is the most important single factor contributing to the administrative malaise from which the country has been suffering for quite some time now. The younger generation of politicians who took over the reins of government all over the country in the early 1970s did not have the same commitment to the norms and conventions of parliamentary democracy as their predecessors, nor sufficient appreciation of the role that has to be played by the permanent Civil Service in particular. They also did not have the same stature as the political leaders of the older generation who had led the fight against British imperialism.

Most of them have remained concerned, therefore, largely with problems of their own survival and ways and means for maintaining their position and authority. The heavy cost that has to be incurred by candidates for elections to Parliament and State Assemblies has also made it more or less incumbent for leaders of political parties to secure substantial donations from government contractors and other affluent persons.

Many politicians have also been taking recourse to booth-capturing with the help of criminal gangs or hired musclemen, and in course of time, a close nexus has become established between many influential politicians, government contractors, smugglers and leaders of mafias and criminal gangs. This has resulted, among other things, in a very substantial increase in crimes of violence and widespread corruption among both politicians and bureaucrats. The introduction of an elaborate system of regulation and control over economic activities also gave rise to widespread corruption in government offices.

Political interference in the day-to-day working of public administration has grown enormously over the past two decades and has played havoc with public administration. It is only right that Ministers should look into the grievances that are brought to their notice by members of the public or legislators, but public administration suffers, and discipline becomes almost a total casualty. When decisions taken by officers are set aside or countermanded by the Ministers under political pressure or for personal reasons, ignoring both principles of public policy and rules, and what is not less important, the line of command.

Senior officers of high integrity who protested such matters have in some cases been shunted for long periods and made to suffer in other ways. A much-harassed Director-General of police in Bihar had submitted a note some years ago saying that every VIP wants an officer of his own choice at the Police Station, and that investigation of serious crimes such as dacoity and murder had become extremely difficult because there were many powerful criminals who had the backing of persons in high authority, and the investigating officer was in constant fear of being transferred, harassed and even killed if he did his job properly.

Mr Sarwar Ali, a distinguished former judge of the Patna High Court had observed in an article published by him in the Indian Nation (March 24, 1986) that most officers of impeccable character and unflinching devotion to duty had not been allowed to remain in the post at Dhanbad and were transferred soon after they had started tightening the screw on the coal mafia. Although corruption has spread also in the IAS and other all-India and Class-I Central Government Services, the number of officers of high intellectual calibre and integrity is still quite large. Reports published from time to time in the daily newspapers in Bihar indicate quite clearly that the common people as also the media representatives have still a good deal of confidence in the IAS officers, and many IAS officers serving in the State secretariat and at Divisional, District or Block headquarters are held in very high esteem by the general public. I believe that position in other states is not very dissimilar.

The IAS and other all-India and Class-I Central Services still remain, by and large a meritocracy. as direct recruitment to these services is made through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on the basis of competitive all-India tests. It would seem necessary for the future of public administration in our country to ensure that the basic character of these services should remain unchanged. There is some risk of dilution of the quality of direct recruits if there is a very large increase in the number of candidates recruited annually. There would also appear to be need for some tightening up of the arrangements for the scrutiny of the character and performance of officers promoted from State Civil Service cadres, as it is widely believed that in some cases officers whose record of performance was not fully satisfactory also managed to get promoted to the IAS and the IPS cadres.

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The 'memoir' by Ranchor Prasad, written in March 1989, provides a rare glimpse of the challenges of administration during the two decades before independence of India and three decades after independence.

Editor:

Shri Priyaranjan Prasad is a former senior civil servant and also the eldest son of the author.

Cover page:

The Photograph on the cover page is by Jagat Mehta.

Mahatma Gandhi is seen taking his morning walk during his peace Mission to Bihar, accompanied by Manu Gandhi and Abdul Gaffar Khan, in the compound of Dr. Saiyad Mohammed's bungalow in Patna (March 24, 1947).