

Twelve months in Uttaranchal & Ten in Uttarakhand

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These twenty two months have been a great learning experience for me, a retired Civil Servant now entering his seventies. During my entire service in the state government of Uttar Pradesh I never had an opportunity to serve in these parts though as an officer deputed to Government of India between 1964 to 1968 I was posted in Joshimath for three years. I then had an opportunity to tour extensively in district Chamoli for up to 26 days in a month and occasionally visited Dehradun, Almora and Pauri Garhwal. During the first six months of my tenure as Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), I took the opportunity to visit all the thirteen districts, hold public hearings of the Commission as well as an intense dialogue with all the state government employees and the officers posted in the districts. What I had missed during the service period was more than made up by this experience. Briefly, I will only say that I was enchanted with what the future holds for Uttarakhand but not so enchanted with the manner in which we seem to be going about it.

There were great officers in the district who lifted my spirits once in a while. Shri G.K. Dwivedi was one such officer and others Rakesh Kumar, Amit Negi and G.S Joshi were examples which gave me a lot of hope. I do hope they retain their flair for public service as they advance in seniority and postings. The service takes a heavy toll of such officers though their devotion to duty earns them great public esteem. In spite of this very few retain it beyond ten years of service. A friend of mine had a beautiful graphic expression for this phenomena - "HIGHER the KAYAR", applicable to all government servants. Pandian who was C.D.O. in those days in Almora and who impressed me a great deal and Purushottam S.D.M. in Kashipur were busy innovating on their job. Harak Singh Rawat SDM, Srinagar is a class by himself. What he has done to keep Srinagar clean is worth emulating. I have always felt that an IAS or PCS officer who cannot innovate on his job in hand, not merely for the sake of change but for the better, is no good. To me a Civil Servant who is sworn to the Constitution of India has no problem in becoming a social activist for the preamble of the Indian Constitution as well as to the fundamental rights and duties. No power on earth can harm a Civil Servant who works with this ethics in mind; people solidly back him.

I have had the privilege to work with politicians of all shades and varieties. Naming some of them would be simple - Chaudhary Charan Singh, C.B. Gupta, Kamalapati Tripathi, Narain Datt Tiwari, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, Ram Naresh Yadav, Ganesh Datt Bajpai, Banarsi Das, V.P. Singh, Ammar Rijvi, Syed Sibte Raji, Sanjay Singh, C.P.N.Singh, Vir Bahadur Singh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chaudhary Devi Lal, Nitish Kumar, Balram Jakhar, Salim Shervani, A.R. Antulay to name a few. With the exception of Sri A.R. Antulay none of these politicians harmed me though I was inconvenient to many of them for which I was transferred from the job I was doing.

But they all continued to remain friendly with me including Shri Antulay. With hind sight, even the harm that came my way in the shape of heart trouble from Shri Antulay, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I had an heart attack followed by bypass surgery and I am kicking around at the age of seventy years, making up for what I had missed out in Uttarakhand earlier.

I cannot leave this piece without commenting on the state of the bureaucracy in Uttarakhand. I think the best of the lot came to Uttarakhand from U.P. The part of the bureaucracy at lower levels which was in Uttarakhand when it was part of U.P. has proved to be a big liability with exceptions. Even the good practices of U.P. days seem to have been given up under the new dispensation soon after the state was formed. While there was a reasonable level of delegation from LUCKNOW down to the Commissioner and district level in those days, all that evaporated when the new state was formed. I was appalled to learn that even a cabinet note was presented to the State Cabinet to do away with the post of the "Divisional Commissioner". Considering that the office of the Commissioner has such a glorious tradition in Uttarakhand if we remember Trailles, Ramsay, Whindham and a few others, it is surprising that the idea of abolishing the post occurred to the Senior Civil Servants in the state. In fact, the Commissioner needs to be declared the Development Commissioner of the Division with powers of H.o.D. for all departments. Apparently good political sense prevailed and that proposal fell through. However, that did not stop the powers that be to concentrate all powers and functions of governance in the State Secretariat. The Commissioners and H. O .Ds were systematically emasculated. With new found political power coming easily to many rising politicians of the level of Gram Pradhans and Block Pramukhs becoming [M.L.As](#) and ministers, the state began to witness a queer model of governance. There was political over-governance with the government orders changing faster than the speed with which they issued, the secretariat bogged down to working out what was the latest G.O. of the day; H. o. Ds sitting listlessly waiting on the ministers, Commissioners not knowing what was the latest from Dehradun and D .Ms frantically providing V.I.P. escorts to 56 odd ministers of all shades and variety touring all districts, from the point they entered the district to the point they left the district. Of course, the police and all government servants were merely escorting all the ministers who were issuing orders left, right and centre without the state secretariat knowing what the latest order of the concerned minister were. During the V.I.P. Season matters become even worse with V. I. Ps from other states demanding attendance of the high ranking district officers from the magistracy and police in the name of protocol. Literally, all decision making was centralized in Dehradun Secretariat and people had to rush to Dehradun for the smallest matter. It was often told to the ARC that Lucknow was closer to many parts of Uttarakhand, than Dehradun, that they were better off in U.P. days. The state government had provided government vehicles with red-beakon lights to 150 odd politicians who could waylay any government officer any where and get orders issued according to their wishes.

In short, there was no civil governance worth the name in the state. The state of the Gram Panchayats was even more shocking. There was a cold war between Gram Pradhan and the Khshetra Samiti members as well as between the block panchayats and the M. L. As. So, the Panchayat Raj system was effectively neutralized. The District Planning Committee chaired by the Cabinet Minister assigned to that district, had no representation from the Panchayat Raj bodies, in total violation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment, 1992. It is only recently that the newly elected state government brought a bill in the state assembly and the Uttarakhand District Planning Act, 2007 was passed in July 2007. In other words for full seven years after the new state was formed the District Planning Committee had no representation from the Panchayati Raj bodies. The implication of this massive constitutional lapse on the part of an elected state government is beyond comprehension. The consequences were apparent, in the sense that the ARC found a total mis-match between what the people desired as development and what the state government was delivering as development. That apart, there was no coordination between the different engineering departments doing the same kind of development work. The D. Ms were busy with the V. I. Ps. or coordination meetings with officers all most throughout the month, leaving no time to meet people for their day to day problems. The engineers had an alibi because they were attending some meeting called by the D.M. or the H.o.D. in Dehradun, not to inspect the works assigned to them wherever and whenever the quality of such works was questioned. Most district level officers who have their families in Dehradun left the district headquarters on Friday evening to return the next week, the D.M. not knowing who all were left behind in the district.

The working of the State Secretariat was far from being orderly. Each portfolio under a minister comprising of many departments must have a proper distribution of work between the minister and the Secretariat. The ARC kept on asking for these distributions of work but not a single one was shown to the ARC. I can only presume that they did not exist. In other words, all work of all the departments was being literally ordered by the minister in-charge (including the battery of advisors each of whom was a confidant of the minister), not envisaged under the west-minister system of governmental functioning. All initiatives shown by a number of secretaries in the early years of the formation of the state were scotched at the earliest at higher levels to leave the ground free for arbitrary decision making. This style of functioning was in total violation of the “Rules of Business” of the state government which have a constitutional validity and deviating from each rule of which is supposed to have the approval of the Chief Minister. Even the Chief Minister is not supposed to permit any deviation from the “Rules of Business” of government which may be construed as unconstitutional. With lot of promotions given to undeserving persons in the State Secretariat, the secretarial support to each Secretary was of the lowest possible standard; the private secretaries to senior officers leaving no stone unturned to prevent people from seeing the Secretaries or talking to them on the phone.

I cannot stop without mentioning some of the good things that have happened since the state was formed. The state’s Forest Policy is a considerable

advancement from the U.P. days but there is much that is lacking in its implementation considering that one third of the area shown as forests is without trees. The discipline of working plans seems to be on the decline though there were a plethora of instructions to implement them. Growing of fodder grasses in the Chir forests is a must if rain water has to be conserved in the state but little seems to have been done in this direction. I would like to salute Ms. Jyotsna Sitling for what she did as Director of the Nanda Devi National Park - her example needs to be emulated by other Forest Officers. R.N. Jha, Conservator Nainital impressed me a great deal - the manner in which the High Altitude Zoo there is being looked after and the care given to all the wild life in the Zoo is an example of devotion to duty rarely seen in Uttarakhand. The concept of F.R.D.C. is a bold initiative at the highest level and needs to be followed up with at least six more groupings of departments having similar or allied functions. Similar groupings would be required at the H. o. D. and district levels as well. This would also facilitate introduction of e-governance in which the state is sorely lacking and could be left far behind other states if it does not wake up in time. The fact of the matter is that e-governance alone is now capable of providing good governance and delaying it would delay advent of good governance in the State. Organic farming is yet another bold initiative though the Horticulture Department seems to be resisting it with determination. Use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the plain areas and the valley areas of the State is supposed to be big business for the State Marketing Federation and they too are loathe to go organic. Their devotion to chemical fertilizers and pesticides could spoil the show in an otherwise laudable initiative. The initiative relating to herbal plants is also a bold one, though the loose ends are still be tied up. A local newspaper described this initiative as "Birbal Ki Khichdi" - such is the confusion in the public mind about it. About one third of the forest area in Uttarakhand is without trees which appears to be a well kept secret. Why cannot these be developed into pastures to begin with and then afforested again with a large number of timber species which can bear fruits, in order to keep the monkeys inside the forests, in stead of their daily forays into human habitations for food.. The cost of afforesting them in this manner would come down drastically.

The state has a new progressive Co-operatives Act which needs to be promoted in order to become a reality, as it is an enabling mechanism only. There is a talk of amending the State Cooperatives Act of U.P. days - they could draw upon the Model State Cooperatives Act sent by the Ministry of Agriculture in the year 1994 to all the states. Considering that no two Indians can agree on anything, would it not be desirable to have "Family Co-operatives" which would have some semblance of cohesion and could also help in saving the "Joint Family" which seems to be in disarray due to "Nuclear Families". The Doon District Hospital has improved a great deal and traffic in Dehradun is quite an improvement on normal days (not during Uttarakhand bandhs). The surroundings of Mussoorie have become greener but Mussoorie town is in a mess. Nainital, in contrast has improved a great deal, perhaps thanks also due to the presence of the Hon'ble High Court there. The Bhumiadhar ridge continues to be barren and so do slopes before approaching Almora which are full of Euphorbia, a sure sign of advancing soil degradation.

Almora town is a monumental mess which seems to defy any improvement. Kosi river seems to be drying up and ARC tried to help prepare a Kosi Augmentation Project. Pithoragarh town is one of the most unplanned ones in Uttarakhand and I was told that in parts of the town the dead have to be carried vertically as lengthwise there is little space. In Lohaghat the drinking water source is located near the cremation ground and the Pey Jal Nigam water supply is thus not capable of giving potable water. Similar is the case for the Jal Sansthan Water Supply in Pithoragarh.

The ARC has given its report to the state government to enable it to take sound decisions in order to lay a system of working which will enable the state government to deliver good governance to the people of the state. The report is available on the website gov.ua.nic.in/arc for any conscientious citizen of the state. The work-culture of the state needs drastic improvement. The new State of Uttarakhand is out there for grabs and unless the state government wakes up in time the whole state would be bought up by some one or the other. Beyond the so called regulated authorities or local body areas, there seems to be no restriction on construction anywhere in the state. With large scale migration taking place from remote villages to district headquarters and from district headquarters to Dehradun and Haldwani, cultivable lands are being left fallow and are open for sale to the highest bidder, which is not so high in remote areas. The Millionaires with a guilty conscience and some Baba in tow, who want to have a resort deep in the mountains in Dev Bhoomi (simply heaven) have free access to such migrants through dalals located in each district head quarters. Soon, the original land holder is reduced to becoming a mere chowkidar or orderly in these resorts. Estate prices nami as well as benami in the plain areas of the State including the hill areas around Mussoorie and Nainital are already sky rocketing and most areas have been bought up and many built up as well, Unless the state promulgates a law like Haryana where the whole state is a regulated area, things will go out of hand in no time. Such a new law for Uttarakhand needs to associate the Land Management Committee at the Panchayat level in the regulatory process to be made user friendly by making it on- line and Interactive. Holy Ganga is grievously sick in Dev Bhoomi. With heavy flow of Coliform (from sewerage) into Bhagirathi at Gangotri and Alakhnanda at Badrinath, with 100% sewerage of Dev Prayag and 60% of it in Rishikesh and Hardwar entering it neat the RIVER OF INDIA which has for ages washed the sins of its people, now thanks to the “Ganga Action Plan 1986” presents a pathetic sight. The State Government and the Babas of Dev Bhoomi continue to be silent witnesses to this flagrant violation of the Environment Protection Act as well as the people’s faith by a state agency..

***Shri J.C. Pant : Chairman Administrative Reforms Commission in Uttarakhand
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