

MS-GROOM

(S. Jaikumar, Advocate)

"Though you rear cattle, rear Government cattle!"

- *A prevalent folklore*

Till early 1990s, every middle class family in our native had adopted the above adage, as their Eleventh Commandment! Like others, I too religiously inherited it and set my vision for a Government job, from my childhood! As Meera grew with the thoughts of Lord Krishna, I grew with the dreams of a Government job! After my college, on a rainy Sunday, along with thousands of such aspirants, I wrote the Staff Selection Commission exam for the post of Inspector of Central Excise, carrying truckloads of dreams in my eyes and tons of hope in my heart! Once I got through the written part and when I was called for the interview, there was fervent activity, all round my family! My Uncle traveled over 800 kms to come and advice about how to dress for the occasion. My nephew was conducting mock interviews to prepare me for the life-time event! On the day I went for the interview, the situation went to a feverish pitch! It was prayers, offerings and oblations everywhere! Owing to all these blessings, I finally got selected as an Inspector of Central Excise. The pride with which all my kith and kin were overflowing with the news shall beat the Brahmaputra in full floods! My case was only a sample of the hundreds of such families, who hailed a Government job as a god-sent boon! But that day, I never thought that I shall resign and quit such a dream-come-true job, within a decade!

Though the theme of this piece equally applies to each and every Government servant, I am approaching this issue with a main focus on my brother Inspectors, as I had always taken pride of having been an Inspector of Central Excise! First, let us understand the quality of the tests that an Inspector shall undergo to get selected for the said post. The Staff Selection Commissions' Objective tests on Language, GK, Arithmetic and Reasoning are nothing short of the prestigious entrance exams of CAT and GATE. Among the million aspirants who write the exams only few thousands qualify for the Personality Test (Interview). If not to the extent of UPSC, this Interview also tests the Intelligent Quotient (IQ) very deeply and extensively. Only after these grinding tests an Inspector is born! And it's not over with this! Even though it's a ritual, one has to walk like Mr. Chandaram and cycle like Mr. Lance Armstrong, to get physically qualified for this coveted post!

Thus these grinding tests make an Inspector with brown (uniform) and crown (achievement)! It is an age-old adage that, "A Revenue case is born at the Inspector's desk and concludes at the Supreme Court Bench", which speaks volumes of the power and glory of the "Men in Brown!" As an Inspector, one can investigate cases worth millions and can even interrogate the hottest man on the planet for such investigation! Moreover, he is statutorily empowered even to arrest the Managing Director or Chairman of a Fortune 500 Company, if found guilty of an economic offence! But my dear netizens, do you know what is the salary of such mighty officers! Pathetically peanuts and this is the bottom line of this article!

Transcending such grueling screening and passing out as a one-among-a-thousand candidate of this country, my beloved Inspectors get a handsome pay of around Rs.10,000/-p.m as a start pay. More pathetic is that, even after 15 to 20 years of service in the department, he may not get around Rs.20,000/-, with his annual

bonanza increments being around Rs.250/-. If the pay scale is pathetic, his promotional avenues are miserably wretched. Even after serving around two decades, there are officers who are yet to see the light of their first promotion, as a Superintendent. Once you get your first promotion as a Superintendent the situation is still worse. Even though he becomes a gazetted officer, duly qualified to sign with green inks, his pay scale remains to be alarmingly red! A person who is empowered to summon and can record a statement from none other than Mr. Narayana Moorthy, is today getting a salary, which could be much below the overtime allowance of his gatekeeper! It is nothing but a shame on the part of anyone who had devised such a pathetic pay scale!

The second son of my neighbour is an Intermediate dropout. When everyone including his family junked him as good-for-nothing, he applied and got recruited in a Call Centre, wherein, his entry pay was fixed around Rs.20,000/-p.m. The only necessary skill was to understand the US accent and the qualification required was to suit the US working hours. Nothing more and nothing less! When I had been in the department, he used to look up to me as an icon and respect me like his idol, for he had enormous admiration for my job. One day, when he saw my pay slip, he gave me such a pitiable look, which has frozen deep inside me and shall frustrate me for the rest of my life! Is an Inspectors' job that lousy and worthless than a Call Centre job? I personally know that this department has great professionals in it. There are Law graduates, Cost Accountants, Engineers, Chartered Accountants and Computer literates. More than the qualification, they were recruited after a rigorous and a thorough micro-filter process, whereby, only the distilled essence survives! Their IQ is nothing short of the best management brains of the country! That being the case, what is the justification in placing them on a pedestal pay scale as compared to the prevalent market pay! In my discretion, I personally feel that, the pay scale of an Inspector shall be fixed not less than Rs.35,000/- p.m , which would not only be a judicious compensation but shall also commensurate his skills!

There is also another possible angle! Today everything costs! Cabbage to garbage, education to entertainment! For any average Indian, the cost of living with bare minimum comforts would be between Rs 15000 to 20000 p.m, for a decent living! Such being the case, paying such a paltry salary to an Inspector of Excise or Customs is only a teaser. This below-the-par-pay is yet another reason which may tend an individual to resort to other unsavoury means, like accepting extra money. A researched survey says that there are three types of Government Servants. One is thoroughly honest which would constitute around 10% and the other one being thoroughly dishonest which also would constitute another 10%. There is a majority segment of around 80%, who vacillate between honesty and dishonesty. It is the onus of the Government to concentrate on this major segment, if it really wants to eradicate corruption from the system. Now the means adopted by the system to control this segment is by threatening or prescribing severe penalties against corruption. But unfortunately, we have not thought about the root cause of this evil and have not approached it in a practical manner. As Gautama said, even though the "desire" is the epicentre for corruption, this major segment is not hard-core corrupted but has reasonable conscience and are god-fearing. They oscillate between the extremes only because of their deficit in their basic wants and needs to which they are duly entitled to! I sincerely believe that, if they are given a handsome salary then the probability of such oscillation towards the evil may reduce to a larger extent. I don't advocate that this shall transform the entire segment to Gandhism. But it shall definitely make the sane individuals to think twice before falling into this bottomless pit of sin. Even after compensating with reasonable salaries, if someone

resorts to such evil, we can formulate draconian punishments to such sinners. But paying them peanuts when compared to the rest and asking them to be above board, appears to me, highly unrealistic and impractical.

Today, even a small organization having around 20 to 30 employees has an exclusive Human Resources department to manage their employees' welfare and redress their grievances. But the Government departments being such huge machinery employing millions of people, have never thought of such a funda and had all along remained to be only an asylum of gypsies. There are neither any formulated policies nor firm principles for either man management or grievance redressal. This lack of policy and principle has only developed a "survival of the fittest" cult and the system has already been mutilated by this cult beyond redeem. Be it an annual transfer or an employment on compassionate grounds, the present system creates nothing but mayhem. The root cause for such a pandemonium is primarily the lack of an organized Human Resources management in the system. Even though there is a portfolio called "Personnel", it only remains to be a mockery. In my view, it is an unforgivable sin on the part of the Government not to have a Human Resources Department for the Government servants.

True, that the Information Technology (IT) has brought a revolution in 1990s to this planet and India is a vital spoke in the global IT wheel. Today, every other individual is being sucked into this revolution, like a straw in a whirlpool. Be it a Civil engineer or a law graduate, Cost Accountant or a Masters in Botany, all are pulled by this IT magnet. As all roads lead to Rome, today, all professionals lead to the IT sector and the great Microsoft being the Pied Piper. I am not against my brothers and sisters storming into the IT industry but am pained about the other disciplines which are left as desolated orphans because of this IT tornado! I can bet on earth, save a few inspired and devoted, bulk of our youth look upto this IT stream ONLY for the treasure hunt in it.

The title of this piece is borrowed from Mr. Chetan Bhagat's sensational bestseller "One Night @ a Call Centre". We all know about the MS-Word, MS-Excel, and other acclaimed software applications of Microsoft Windows. But today, there is a famous hardware called MS-Grooms, who are the present generation bridegrooms, employed in various IT companies with fat purse. Today, these MS-Grooms are the most sought-after grooms in the Indian bridal market, ahead of the rest! My wife married me because, that day, I was an elite Government servant. I am really afraid today, whether she may choose me, had I been in the Government Service!

Before Parting...

Today, we all witness an exodus of creamy intelligence from the Government sector! If it is not arrested immediately, it shall only lead to a situation that, someday, the Government machinery shall be left only with the slag and refuse, leaving all the glory evaporate into history! This is the right time for our policy makers to think hard and take preventive measures against this brain drain! Cabinet has just approved the Sixth Pay Commission. Be graceful and reasonable in your pay fixations!