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# Who is afraid of an honest bureaucrat?

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by G. Vijayaraghavan


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Corrupt officers have the last laugh when investigative bodies pursue false complaints against honest bureaucrats

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Bureaucracy draws its strength from strong-willed and dedicated officers. Society is assured of an able administration only when visionary political leaders join hands with efficient and honest bureaucrats. Such officers are sure to face a lot of threats and below-the-belt blows. The easiest way to get even with officers who refuse to compromise with corruption is to weaken them by launching a tirade against them and accusing them of corruption. This has become a trend in our public life.

Honest officers are often able to defend themselves against threats and challenges with the strength of their characters. Their families, however, may not be able to do so. Kerala's administrative history is also the records of honest officers wrongly implicated in corruption cases on technical grounds. The tragedies that haunted them after that are not known to many.

The late M.K.K. Nair, an excellent IAS officer known for his integrity, was perhaps the first victim of such vested

interests. He had served in the top posts and helped Kerala in many areas but we paid him back with an array of false cases. Later, we shed tears for him. But the damage was done.

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of the Public Sector Restructuring and Internal Audit Board, was chosen to lead Malabar Cements Limited to check corruption at the state government undertaking. He was doing precisely that when the corrupt forces joined to implicate him in a case that led to his arrest and suspension. Unable to cope with the arrest, his mother died recently. She has been bedridden ever since he was arrested.

Former chief secretary P.J. Thomas and former additional chief secretary Zachariah Mathew have been involved in a politically significant corruption case. Everyone knows that they are innocent.

Mathew even lost his wife due to the case. He was, however, acquitted by the court a few months before his death. Thomas and family were brave enough to withstand the pressures of the case but the episode snatched the post of the chief vigilance commissioner from him.

Even K.M. Abraham, who took on a firm like Sahara Group after he spotted a scam worth Rs. 25 lakh crore as a member of the Securities and Exchange Board of India, is targeted. Abraham proceeded against the business house despite political pressures and intimidation. He could have pocketed a fortune for just turning a blind eye towards the irregularities he found.

Now, that officer is accused of earning assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. Abraham could withstand a surprise raid by the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau at his house. But nobody cared how that would affect his wife who was alone at that hour.

I am not saying an officer should be free to do whatever he pleases or corrupt officers should be protected. It is sad to see that ministers do very little to defend the officers serving under them even when they know that they are honest. Many honest officers are falling prey to false cases while a lot many corrupt officers continue in service without any threat. A situation in which even honest officers are branded as corrupt will suit the guilty ones. Unwanted enthusiasm results in a breakdown of administrative machinery.

Can the government sit tight when officers with a clean record are hunted down on the basis of complaints raised by vested interests. Can the rulers just abandon the officers until a court exonerates them some day. Isn't the government duty-bound to protect the officers from cases which are sure not to stand the test of law.

The government cannot wash its hands off such cases, claiming they were taken up as per the directions of a court. The government has to defend its officers before the court. This trend can only harm the morale of the bureaucrats and the future of Kerala.

*(The writer was the first CEO of Technopark, Thiruvananthapuram and a member of the Kerala Planning Board.)*

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