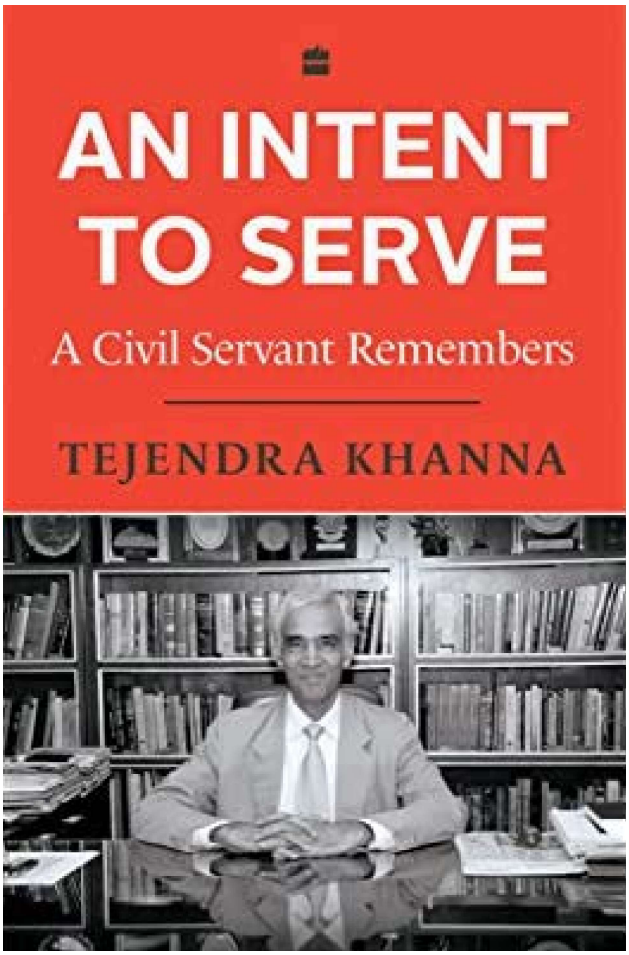
Book Review

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An Intent To Serve: A Civil Servant Remembers

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An Intent to Serve: A Civil Servant Remembers

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Tejendra Khanna

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There isn't any doubt that the Civil Service hires some of the best talents of the country through their services, though they largely lead anonymous lives, but make contributions, which impact the destiny of the nation. One such bureaucrat is Tejendra Khanna. While he held the more visible office of Lieutenant General of Delhi, post retirement for two terms, 1996-1998 and 2007-2013. It is in his tenure as Commerce Secretary, Government of India

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during 1993-1996, which will be long remembered. This was the period when PV Narshima Rao was unveiling financial reforms with Manmohan Singh as the Finance Minister, his main charioteer.

While Manmohan Singh and PV Narshima Rao took all the accolades, and rightly so, for the opening of the economy, the role of Commerce Ministry, then headed P Chidambram and Tejendra Khanna cannot be overestimated.

Khanna's biography - ***'An Intent To Serve: A Civil Servant Remembers'***, launched recently, while throws light on his journey as bureaucrat, but what is more interesting are his early years, which went a long way in making him a bureaucrat.

Not many would know that Khanna, though his parents came from undivided Punjab, he was born, brought and studied in Bihar, till he joined the Civil Services.

His father KL Khanna, who belonged to a well-respected landed family from Hafizabad, Gujranwala (now in Pakistan), had joined the Pusa-based research institute in 1929, specialising in the sugarcane crop and later becoming Director of Sugarcane Research and Development under the Bihar Government.

With initial education in a Hindi medium primary school at Pusa, Khanna was later admitted to the St. Xavier's High School, Patna as a boarding student in 1948. Having completed his Senior Cambridge examination in 1954 in the First Division, with high credits in mathematics, additional mathematics and physics. While leaving the school, the principal Father EH Niesen had advised him to opt for sciences for higher education as it required laboratory facilities and practical learning under the special guidance and oversight of teachers. With this advice, Khanna took admission in Science College, Patna and completed the Intermediate in Science programme in 1956 with a high university rank. Later after Masters in Science (MSc), Khanna appeared for UPSC and secured twelfth rank and joined Indian Administrative Services.

After his training at the National Academy, Khanna got posted at Amritsar as the Deputy Commissioner and got the opportunity of overseeing the distribution of cash grants by the Tahsildar and his revenue officials to farmers affected by floods in the Beas river.

Khanna has vividly touched upon his journey of early career and some of the extraordinary moments in various capacity in his career in the book. He talked about how through public governance, agencies are meant to serve the people, general public perception about the quality of services received remains negative. Persons holding public office assume

that they know best what needs to be done and do not bother to secure regular feedback from citizens as how public service agencies are actually serving or failing to serve them and how efficiently public resources are being deployed to achieve desired ends.

Khanna explains that to secure better governance from the standpoint of the people, institutionalised arrangements should be put in place to seek and respond to inputs from the people, on a continuing basis. Public governance agencies should be evaluated for the their degree of 'People- Friendliness' in terms of systems and process and those found to enjoy a lower degree of the 'People-Friendliness' should be mandated to improve their rating.

Khanna writes that besides, individual functionaries serving in public agencies / offices who interact with people on a day to day basis should be subjected to Exit-Poll type assessment vis-a-vis their honesty, courtesy and efficiency, and those found seriously wanting in these aspects should be clearly told that their continuance in civil service would hinge on adequate improvement in their performance. Incorrigible elements who failed to register improvements within a reasonable period should be weeded out from the Civil Service system to ensure better service orientation and greater accountability of public services.

The book is an insider's look into the functioning of Indian Bureaucracy, with enthralling details about the way government workings are transacted on the ground. Specially, the politics, the pressure, the lack of resources and the unvarying equilibrium a civil servant must uphold while trying to get things accomplished.