

Integrity in the Railway Board: Past and Now



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Past (1950s)

In the past, Indian Railways was one of the most revered institutions of the country with highest traditions of efficiency and public service. My uncle told me this story of an event that took place in 1954. He was a close friend and classmate at Roorkee University of the two persons in his story.

At this time, the Railway Board was being reconstituted, and its Chairman and Members were to be selected. Two persons were being considered for the Chairman's job. They were G Pande and K P Mushran.

K P Mushran was originally junior to G Pande. However, due to certain exigencies in past appointments, Mr Mushran had become a General Manager (of Western Railway) before Mr Pande became a General Manager. Looking at them from the viewpoint of holding the post of General Manager, now Mr Mushran was senior to Mr Pande. Hence, in this sense, Mr Mushran was ahead of Mr Pande in the competition for Chairmanship of the Board.

When the question of who should be appointed as the Chairman came up, the then Railway Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, recommended the name of Mr Pande, who was originally senior to Mr Mushran.

However, Mr Pande himself objected to being appointed the Chairman. He said that Mr Mushran had become a General Manager earlier and had a stronger claim to be the Chairman. Shastri ji was nonplussed and said that he would talk to Mushran. After that, Shastri ji came back to Mr Pande, saying that Mr Mushran conceded Mr Pande's original seniority and had no objection to Mr Pande becoming the Chairman.

Now, Mr Pande came up with one more objection. He said that there was one more person, P C Mukherjee, who had also become a General Manager before him. At this, Shastri ji put his foot down saying, "I have consulted one person whom you named; you cannot keep on tossing me about all the time."

So, Mr Pande became the Chairman, and K P Mushran had to be content with the post of Member (Staff) and ultimately retired happily as such. The two had a cordial time together in the Railway Board. I had an occasion to see this personally when they came together to attend my cousin's wedding (*Editor's note: P C Mukherjee became the Chairman in 1956 when Mr Pande retired.*)

Today (2013)

Today, a former General Manager of the same Western Railway who has been appointed as Member (Staff) has been arrested. The charge is that he has paid a bribe to be shifted to as Member (Electrical). It seems that a person who is Member (Staff) has limited opportunities to

illegally garner corruption money, while the opportunities are much higher for Member (Electrical) because of the large value of contracts issued by the Electrical department. In other words, pay a bribe to get a job where you can earn much more in bribes that you ask for and get. Incidentally, the accused is, like Pande and Mushran, a graduate of Roorkee University.

What a sorrowful change ... ❖

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