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GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMED

C.K. MATHEW, SURENDRA NATH TRIPATHI
C. SHEELA REDDY & A.P. SINGH

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Governance Transformed

C. K. Mathew, Surendra Nath Tripathi, C. Sheela Reddy, A. P. Singh, editors

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Chapter 2. The Institution of Civil Service in India

Dr. N. Ravi Shanker[1]

Introduction

The institution of civil service in India dates back over 2,000 years, to the times of the Mauryan Empire. Governance structures have existed in some form or another through ancient and medieval times. The Civil Service as we now know it owes its origin to the East India Company (EIC), with oversight exercised by the British Parliament for about 100 years, and subsequently governed directly by the Crown—often referred to as the British Raj—for 90 years. This framework has continued in independent India. The District Office, created by the EIC, is the enduring image and allure of the civil service, from then to now. The civil service in India, like elsewhere across the world, needs to re-engineer itself for modern times to stay relevant.

It was said of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) that it was "neither Indian, nor Civil, nor a Service." This was the view of the freedom fighters of that era. On the contrary, for the Raj, the ICS was the soul of the British administration in India.

[1] Dr. N. Ravi Shanker is Principal Advisor at DIT University, Dehradun

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Historical Background

Mauryan Period

Indian civil service had its origin in the Mauryan Empire in ancient India. The *Arthashastra*, written by Kautilya (Vishnugupta), lays down the principles of selection and promotion of civil servants, the conditions of loyalty for appointment to the civil service, the methods of their performance evaluation, and the code of conduct to be followed by them. Kautilya also suggested some checks and balances on the appointment of civil servants. He recommended a continuous watch on the functioning of the civil service and a briefing to the king on the performance of the civil servants on a regular basis. Kautilya laid down a code of conduct for the civil services, which prescribed swift promotions for efficient and effective officials and severe punishment for those who were corrupt (More, 2023, p. 1). For a study of public administration in India, one would need to go back to the Mauryan Empire (300–200 B.C.E.), where it was detailed at length in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Kautilya was the advisor and chief minister to the first Mauryan Emperor, Chandragupta. The *Arthashastra* became the first manual on statecraft and proper management of an empire. The empire was well-governed (Gupta, 2019, p. 2).

Mughal Period

During the medieval period, Mughal Emperor Akbar founded and nurtured the civil service. He introduced a number of administrative measures, including a land revenue tax collection system, local manufacturing of industrial goods, and exports of arts and crafts to other nation-states. His civil service had a welfare and regulatory orientation (More, 2023, p. 1). The

Mughal system was essentially a military despotism with the primary aim of ensuring its own existence, expanding its territories wherever possible, defending those territories, and collecting taxes and revenues to maintain itself. Higher appointments gradually tended to become hereditary. In Akbar's administration, each *subah* (province) was under a *subedar,* whose duty was to administer criminal justice and maintain law and order. Associated with him was a *dewan,* who was directly appointed by the government and was responsible for revenue administration and civil justice. The *subahs* were sub-divided into *sarkars,* each under a *faujdar,* who was the main executive functionary and military commander. The collection of revenue was the responsibility of the *amalguzar*. The district revenue officer did not hold the dominant position. The *faujdar* acted as a check on him. Every *faujdar*'s district was divided into a number of *thanas* (police stations) under the charge of a *thanedar* (police inspector), appointed by the *faujdar* (Gupta, 2019, p. 3).

British Period

The strength of the British Empire in India was largely based on its efficient system of administration, run mainly by the Indian Civil Service, also known as the Imperial Civil Service. The term "Civil Service" is comparatively recent and has come into use over the past century or so. Before that, the civil administration of British India was referred to as the Covenanted, or Superior Services, and Uncovenanted Services. In fact, the term "Civil Service" was used to designate the British administration in India. The British Empire called its employees working on the civil side "Civil Servants" in contrast to those employed for military and naval duties (Mohyuddin and Ali, 2021, pp. 81–82). *Civil service* is the generic name given in English to the administrative apparatus of the state. Historically, bureaucratic administrations were developed in Egypt and

China to serve the rulers or the dynasty. These bureaucrats were engaged in activities such as land registration, water allocation, tax collection, and, above all, war-related affairs. The emergence of the *modern* civil service is directly connected to the crystallisation of the European-style state. A professional, career civil service (based on entrance examinations) was first introduced in Prussia and France and subsequently in Britain and the United States (Galnoor and Oser, 2015, p. 695). The term *civil service* generally refers to administrators paid for implementing the policies of national governments. Under the British system of administration, which was divided into military and civilian administration, some officials performed civil duties and some military duties. Hence, the civil service is different from military service. Both civil and military officers are part of the state administration, but the functions of the two groups are different and, because of this, a distinction has been drawn between the two categories of officers (More, 2023, p. 82).

The British introduced a new paradigm in India which contributed to altering the culture of power in the country. An efficient and effective bureaucracy established by the British is considered among the best administrative machinery in the annals of history (Niaz, 2006, p. 187). The structure of the Indian Civil Service was gradually shaped. Originally, administration of the EIC was a mercantile service. Later, when the company became a territorial sovereign as well, its civil servants had to combine their commercial and administrative duties (Ghosal, 1944, p. 4). The Indian Civil Service, and indeed much of our present administrative system, is the product of the British rule in India. This developed initially to manage the affairs of the EIC as it transformed from being a mere trading company to becoming first an administrator, then successively a colonising force, an arm of the empire, and, finally, a ruler. Later, it became the instrument of the British government as it presided over an empire, first strengthening it and then stubbornly reluctant to let it go. The Civil Service managed unique conditions over a long period of time and, in the process,

became an institution in itself. The ICS became the premier service occupying all the senior positions in the government—administrative and judicial offices both at the Centre and Province levels. It played a major role in the administration of both civil and criminal justice. It was not merely an executive agency of the government but helped to formulate, legislate, and direct policy. Some of its senior members became governors of provinces and were members of both executive and legislative councils. It thus became, as some have termed it, the "ruling caste." It established its own traditions and acquired a formidable reputation. British rule also led gradually to the institution of the *District Officer,* which became the most visible symbol of the Raj and still survives as an important cog in the administrative wheel (Gupta, 2019, pp. 1–2).

Chinese Civil Service

The Chinese Civil Service, the administrative system of the traditional Chinese government, was one in which its members were selected by competitive examination. The Chinese civil service system provided the Chinese Empire with stability for more than 2,000 years and offered one of the major avenues for social mobility in Chinese society. It later served as a model for the civil service systems that developed in other Asian and Western countries.

The Qin Dynasty (221–207 B.C.E.) established the first centralised Chinese bureaucratic empire and thus created the need for an administrative system to staff it. Recruitment into the Qin bureaucracy was based on recommendations by local officials. This system was initially adopted by the succeeding Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), but in 124 B.C.E., under the reign of Han Emperor Wudi, an imperial university was established to train and test officials in the techniques of Confucian government. The Sui Dynasty (581–618) adopted the Han system and applied it in a more systematic way as a method

of official recruitment. The Tang Dynasty (618–907) created a system of local schools where scholars could pursue their studies. Those desiring to enter the upper levels of the bureaucracy then competed in the *Jinshi* exams, which tested a candidate's knowledge of the *Confucian Classics*. This system gradually became the major method of recruitment into the bureaucracy; by the end of the Tang Dynasty, the old aristocracy was destroyed, and its power was taken by the scholar-gentry, who staffed the bureaucracy. This non-hereditary elite would eventually become known to the West as "mandarins," in reference to Mandarin, the Chinese dialect which they employed. The civil service expanded to what many consider its highest point during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Almost all Song officials in the higher levels of bureaucracy were recruited by passing the *Jinshi* degree and the examinations became regularly established affairs. Under the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the civil service system reached its final form, and the succeeding Qing Dynasty (1644–1911/1912) copied the Ming system virtually intact. The examination system was finally abolished in 1905 by the Qing Dynasty in the midst of modernisation attempts. The whole civil service system as it had previously existed was overthrown along with the dynasty in 1911/1912[2]

Reflections in Time

The history of the world is the history of civilisations (Indus Valley, Chinese, Mesopotamian, Egyptian) and of empires (Roman, Persian, Mongol, Mauryan, Gupta, Mughal, Russian, British, etc.) until the dawn of the Industrial Age. What is characteristic of these institutions is that each one of them had a governance mechanism in place—a combination of military and non-military or civil components built into them. Maintaining

[2] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-civil-service

such a governing elite necessitated the empires to constantly be on the lookout for sources of revenue to sustain themselves and also to be in the quest for additional sources of revenue through the conquest of territories. Thus, empire building became an endeavour in itself. Bureaucracy, public administration, or civil service became a concomitant necessity to achieve it. The shape of this institution of civil service was dictated by the needs of the Emperor or King. Loyalty and kinship were the two important factors in choosing the men who would hold positions of importance in the administration. Alongside that came merit—the meritorious being given positions of importance—as the post of a Commander of the forces to a person of valour, the post of a Treasurer to a person of acumen and calibre, etc. So, in effect, the world over, it was a combination of the spoils system with some elements of meritocracy built into it. It was not open to all in the sense that we understand it today. Nevertheless, the attributes of civil service stood the test of time. The old world and the medieval world were predominantly run on those lines.

Timeline of the East India Company and the Creation of a Civil Service

It would help to draw up a timeline of the history of the East India Company (EIC) in India, as it provides a perspective on the evolution of the institution of civil service in India. Masulipatnam (1611), Surat (1613), Madras (1639), and Hugli (1651) were the locations where the EIC set up their factories. EIC gained control of Bombay in 1661, and a trade centre was established at Calcutta in 1690. This way the establishments on the west and east coasts of the Indian subcontinent paved the way for a mercantile company to truly set a base in India. This was in the 17th century (1600–1700). The period between 1700 and 1750 was one where the grip of the Mughal Empire was receding over its provinces. In the early 1750s, the mercantile company became involved in skirmishes in Arcot, Arni, and in

Kaveripak—all not far off from Madras. Robert Clive led the defence of Arcot in 1751. The capture of the Gheria Fortress (known as the Vijaydurg Fort) on the west coast in Maratha territory in 1756 by Robert Clive signalled the rising power of the military prowess of the EIC. The incident of the Black Hole of Calcutta in 1756 spurred the EIC to embark on a confrontational path. The EIC began to control its own territories in India. In early 1757, the 1st Bengal Native Infantry, the first sepoy battalion, was set up. The EIC was readying itself for battle. The victories in the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the Battle of Buxar (1764) were inflection points. They paved the way for EIC to change gears from a mercantile company to that of a conqueror. Its territories expanded with the passage of time when opportunities beckoned it.

The administrative organisation that Sher Shah had initiated, Akbar had revived, and the other Great Mughals had conserved came to pieces in the general anarchy which set in soon after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Between 1707 and 1750, many of the attributes of sovereignty slipped out of the hands of the Nawab and were usurped by the great territorial magnates, the Zamindars of revenue. The Battle of Plassey (1757) gave the final blow to a crumbling structure of organised government in Bengal. The Nawab of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa now became merely a puppet. The period from 1757 to 1765 thus saw the apotheosis of anarchy in the Premier *Subah* of the Mughal Empire. The little administrative organisation which had survived the ravages of the last 50 years also disappeared during this period when the old order had changed, but the new had not taken place. In 1765, the EIC at last thought it right to accept the *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa at the behest of the Emperor of Delhi. The administration of revenue and civil justice was vested in the Company's representative of this Presidency. The Company further made the Nawab a mere pensioner and transferred the *Nizamat* to a nominee of its own. Thus, the EIC became responsible both for *Diwani* and *Nizamat*, for the administration of revenue and civil justice, as well as

indirectly for the maintenance of law and order and the administration of criminal justice (Roy, 1935, p. 1–3).

The duties undertaken by the EIC, first in Bengal and then in other parts of the country, were onerous and required men of ability and energy to carry them out. Unfortunately, these officers were drawn from the ranks of the old servants of the Company—the writers, factors, and merchants who had been sent to keep the books of the Company's establishments or to manage their warehouses. Neither their early education nor their subsequent experience in any way fitted them for the administrative duties they were now invited to perform. The general mass of the Company's servants remained too saturated with the atmosphere of the factory and the warehouse to adapt themselves to the new field of work. None of the three Acts of Parliament, which attempted between 1773 and 1793 to regulate the Company's administration in Indian territories, were concerned in any way with the most important question of the education and training of civil servants in this country. The appointment of Lord Wellesley as the Governor-General of Bengal in 1798 opened a new epoch in the history of the Indian Civil Service. He himself was a finished classical scholar and was endowed with a large fund of constructive imagination. He thought that an arrangement must be made without delay for the general cultivation of the intellect of the Company's junior servants and also for their technical education in Indian languages, laws, and regulations. Accordingly, without waiting for the sanction of the Court of Directors, the Governor-General in Council issued a regulation in May 1800 for the immediate establishment of the Fort William College. A 3-year educational course was drawn up. It was of a mixed and comprehensive character. It provided for instruction in Liberal Arts—Modern History and Literature, Classical History and Literature, Laws of Nations and Ethics, and Jurisprudence. This side of education was meant for broadening and liberalising the mind and quickening the imagination of the future civil servants. The syllabus also included Indian subjects, like Sanskrit, Arabic,

Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and Marathi; the different codes followed in this country, the Regulations which had been passed from time to time by the Governor-General in Council, and the History of India from all stand points. It was enacted that all the new arrivals in the Civil Service would be admitted into the college and remain associated with it as students for 3 years. This rule was to apply not only in the case of junior civil servants on the Bengal establishment but also in the case of those of Madras and Bombay, who would likewise be compelled to undergo training in this college for the same period. Wellesley's ambition in insisting on Madras and Bombay civilians being trained and educated at Fort William was to break down the barrier of suspicion, rivalry, and jealousy between the three Presidencies and give their future administrators the same outlook and angle of vision. The college, as conceived by Wellesley, had been founded in anticipation of the sanction of the Court of Directors. But the Court set its face against the step already taken by the Governor-General in Council at Calcutta. The Fort William College was allowed to continue on a comprehensive scale only until 1805, when the Company's desire to establish in England a suitable institution for the training of its young cadets in its Indian Civil Service was fulfilled. The Haileybury College was started the following year, in 1806. It was enacted that young recruits to the covenanted Civil Service must spend 2 years at Haileybury, where their general education would be continued and strengthened and where they would also receive their first acquaintance with Indian languages, laws, and history. After retaining them for four terms in this institution, those of them on the Bengal establishment would be sent down to Calcutta, and here at Fort William they would add to their knowledge of Indian languages. The Fort William College was thus degraded to become merely a language school (Roy, 1935, pp. 8–18). It was whittled down to a school of oriental languages for Bengal alone. For many years, the young men who came to the Bengal service lived in Writers' Buildings until they had passed

examinations in these languages; this was all that remained of the Fort William College. There was a good deal at Haileybury that was borrowed from Fort William (Woodruff, 1954, p. 280). For 50 years, the Indian Civil Service was the product of Haileybury College. It had its unmistakable stamp on the outlook, ability, and character of all the covenanted civil servants who administered for half a century and more the British territory in India. The period of the Haileybury Rule represents the golden period of the patronage system. The Civil Servants of the Company had to be nominated as usual by the individual Directors. Each Director had at his disposal one nomination. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman were entitled to nominate two candidates each, and two such nominations were placed out of courtesy at the disposal of the President of the Board of Control. The Directors, as a rule, nominated their own sons or nephews or those of their cousins and friends. Membership was almost exclusively confined to the Anglo-Indian families in England and Scotland. A typical person at the time of nomination was on average about 16 years of age. The social life of the college was, according to all testimonies, one of the very best. The college became noted for its corporate life and excellent camaraderie of spirit which bound the inmates of the institution together. This corporate outlook and this spirit of comradeship were carried down to India by the Haileyburians. The honesty and integrity of some proved to be contagious and soon became the fundamental ideas of the whole covenanted service (Roy, 1935, p. 20).

It was in the century from 1757, when the EIC gained victory at the Battle of Plassey, until 1857, when the EIC lost the plot in governing the subcontinent, leading to the First War of Independence, that the Civil Service was established, first in a rudimentary manner and, with the passage of time, in a comprehensive manner. As the EIC took charge of the *Diwani* and *Nizamat*, it entrusted British civilians with the responsibility of being *Supervisors* in a district and handling all administrative functions. This was the precursor to the institution of the

District Officer. In 1772, the designation of *Supervisor* was replaced with that of *Collector*—the person responsible for the collection of land revenue in a district. Warren Hastings and Lord Cornwallis played a pioneering role in the establishment of the Civil Service. During the time of Lord Cornwallis, the head of the district was all-powerful, with the offices of collector, judge, and magistrate all concentrated in one individual. The role of Lord Wellesley in setting up the training college at Fort William in Calcutta deserves special mention. It was truly the first training effort with elements of Indian language training being imparted. The guiding philosophy was that the men who were to rule India ought not to rue the fact that they did not understand the local lingo. Haileybury served as the training school for the next 50 years, even as it borrowed several elements from Fort William. The period from the 1770s to the 1850s saw the EIC in an expansionary mode, through wars across several regions—Anglo-Maratha wars, Anglo-Mysore wars, Anglo-Nepal war, Anglo-Sikh wars, etc. Expansion of territories consequent to victories at war was followed by expanding the territories where the District Officer came to rule the roost. The military and the non-military or civil authorities worked in unison. This civil–military coordination works to this day, albeit mostly at the state level.

British colonial rule in India underwent a fundamental change in the 1850s. Not only were open examinations and merit introduced as the chief norms for recruiting British civil servants to the ICS, but sovereign control over British India was also transferred from EIC to the British Crown, and in particular to the newly created India Office and the Secretary of State for India (Kaminsky, 1986), following the Mutiny of 1857 (Cornell and Svensson, 2022). In 1853, Mr. Gladstone, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, appointed Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan to enquire into the condition of the civil service in England and recommend methods by which it might be thoroughly reorganised and made a more efficient instrument of public administration. After a detailed enquiry,

they submitted their report in which they suggested that appointments in the civil service should no longer be made by patronage. Instead, they should be made henceforth by some kind of open competitive examination. This provision for competitive examination was embodied in the Government of India Act passed in 1853. The Macaulay Report of 1854 recommended that 23 should be the highest age limit at which candidates should be allowed to compete, and 18 should constitute the lowest limit. The committee recommended that the competitive examinations should be concerned only with subjects of liberal study like European Sciences and Arts. Sanskrit and Arabic were also, of course, included in the syllabus, but they were only given half as much weight as Greek and Latin (Roy, 1935, p. 20). In Britain, the recommendations of the 1854 Northcote–Trevelyan Report were implemented in relation to the recruitment of civil servants. Since the merit reforms in India were introduced in a more comprehensive, unified, and decisive manner, many have considered the ICS as the blueprint and testing ground for gradual changes that were implemented in the Home Civil Service (Mueller, 1984, p. 197; Kerry, 2015;). The recruitment of civil servants to the EIC underwent a change in the first half of the 1850s. Open competition, available to "any natural born subject of Her Majesty being more than 18 years and less than 23 years old," was introduced in 1855 in the ICS as a direct result of the Charter Act of 1853 and Lord Macaulay's 1854 Report in the Indian Civil Service (Compton, 1967, p. 99). The first competitive examination was held in 1855 under the supervision of the Board of Control. It was not until 1858 that Her Majesty's Civil Service Commissioners were placed in charge of these examinations. From 1858 onwards, the recruits had to pass a period of probation in England before they were allowed to take up their duties in India (Roy, 1935, p. 38).

Perceptions About the ICS

The ICS did more than administer India: it represented the Raj and was charged with securing its dominance. ICS officers were responsible for enforcing laws during periods of civil disobedience, arresting nationalist leaders at particularly volatile times, and spreading pro-government propaganda. They had a large say in the formulation of policy and a great deal of discretion while executing it, often describing themselves as "rulers" rather than "servants" (Woodruff, 1954). For many people, the ICS— with its concentration of legislative, executive, and judicial power—was the Raj (Burra, 2007). For Indian nationalists, on the other hand, the ICS officers, were "neither Indian, nor civil, nor servants" (Potter, 1986). The ICS served as a backbone for the control of the British Empire in India. Selected on merit, it was the most literate and educated administrative service to rule a colony. The officers of the ICS made and executed policies in an efficient and effective manner (Niaz, 2006, p. 203). The dominant perception was that "the Indian civil servant exercised a power for good or evil which no English servant—*perhaps no functionary in the world*—possessed" (Cornell and Svensson, 2022, p. 538). An extract of British Premier Lloyd George's celebrated speech in Parliament in 1922, in the context of the role of ICS, opined that he could foresee no period when "they can dispense with the guidance of a small nucleus of British Civil Servants." They were the *steel frame* of the Indian constitutional structure. "I do not care what you build on it. If you take the steel frame out, the fabric will collapse" (Roy, 1935).

Indianisation of the Civil Service

The "Indianisation" of the service had been an early nationalist demand: the ICS was the pinnacle of aspiration for educated

Indians, and the social class from which the ICS was recruited also provided many nationalist leaders (Burra, 2007, p. 5).

The British did not rule all of India. They directly administered eleven provinces: Punjab, Bengal, Sind, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, Madras, Bombay, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the United Provinces (UP), and the Central Provinces (CP). But two-fifths of the total area of India consisted of some 583 princely states of varying sizes and British presidencies (Copland, 1997; Bandhopadhyay, 2004, p. 113).

Though the British did not directly administer the Princely States, in practice, they exercised a great deal of control through Political Agents (also called Residents) appointed by the Governor-General. Rulers who defied the Residents were, from time to time, removed from the throne. Political Agents were usually members of the "Political Department," the diplomatic service of the British in India. It was staffed almost entirely by the British: K. P. S. Menon was the first Indian to be taken into the Department (in 1921). He records with pride the fact (Roy, 1935, p. 49) that "he could win the respect of the '*wild frontier tribes*' just as easily as the British" (Menon, 1981).

The district was the primary administrative unit at the provincial level. It was headed by an ICS officer, variously known as the "District Magistrate" or the "District Collector," whose duties included the enforcement of law and order, the collection of land revenue, the administration of institutions such as municipal schools and hospitals, and certain kinds of judicial work. ICS writings are often very nostalgic about the life of the "District Office" (a term encompassing the collector and junior officials such as Assistant Collectors and Sub-Divisional Officers). This is not surprising, for the Collector had a great deal of power and discretion in running the affairs of the district, and it was in the districts that ICS officers had the greatest contact with the people over whom they ruled (Roy, 1935).

Because of the great size of British India, its administration was conducted by an army of Indian officials in subordinate

posts (Potter, 1986, p. 21). Provincial Civil Services (PCS) were created in the late nineteenth century as a way of accommodating the growing political demands of the educated Indian middle class, not only for representation in government but also for government employment. In addition to the PCS, the administration consisted of a variety of All India Services, so called because they were recruited and supervised by the Government of India rather than the individual provinces. These included the Indian Police Service, the Indian Medical Service, the Indian Forest Service, and the Indian Educational Service. At the apex of the administrative executive stood the Indian Civil Service, which was superior to all other All India Services in terms of pay, power, and prestige (Roy, 1935).

Factors that Facilitated the Enhanced Representation of Indians in Civil Services

With the administration passing from the East India Company to the British Crown after the First War of Independence in 1857, there was direct involvement of the British Parliament to exercise oversight. Following the implementation of the Macaulay Report recommendations, the first Indian selected for the ICS was Satyendranath Tagore in 1864. He sat for the exam in London. A development that had a significant bearing on the question of Indian participation in the Indian Civil Service was the establishment in 1857 of three universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras—the capital cities of the three Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras. Bright young graduates of these universities aspired to join the ICS, and nationalist freedom fighters were willing to support their ambition by sponsoring them for higher education in Britain, on the condition that they took part in the ICS exam held in London. Very few Indians, however, were able to succeed in that period, even as there was a clamour for holding the

examinations in India, as not many aspirants could travel to London to participate in the open competition. It took a long time for the Imperial authority to concede the demand for opening a centre for an exam in the Indian subcontinent. It was only in 1922 that Allahabad was given the honour of holding the simultaneous exam for the ICS. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 absorbed the attention of the British Government. A compromise was reached as a quid-pro-quo to gain the support of Indians for war efforts by granting more powers to Indians through the elections to local governments in various provinces. The Montagu–Chelmsford Report formed the basis of the Government of India Act of 1919 which led to the system of "dyarchy"—elected provincial governments to which the civil servants would report. All these developments increased the representation of Indians in the ICS. The need to report to elected Indian public representatives in the provinces caused disenchantment among the whites, and consequently, fewer showed interest in joining the ICS. With many vacancies available from the 1920s onwards, more and more Indians began to be recruited to the ICS compared to the previous decades. The British tried to improve conditions of service to encourage whites to enter the ICS. This, however, had a marginal effect. The Government of India Act of 1935 strengthened the provincial government system. This, combined with the gathering pace of the struggle for independence and developments leading to the Second World War, put the brakes on whites joining the ICS. In fact, sensing Indian independence post-War, many were preparing to leave the sub-continent to start a new phase of their lives in Britain and the Western Hemisphere.

Training

During the Crown's supremacy from 1858 to 1947, officers were given training at different institutions across the country and

abroad. Candidates from the services, both foreign and Indian, under covenanted and uncovenanted services, respectively, were trained at various colleges in Oxford, Cambridge, and at Trinity College, Dublin. In later years, they were trained at the historic Metcalfe House, New Delhi (LBSNAA, 2019, p. 7). The Public Service Commission in India was first established in 1926 in accordance with the provisions of the Government of India Act 1919. Its purpose was to protect the civil service from political influences and afford it stability and security. The Commission came to be known as the Federal Public Service Commission in 1937 as a result of provisions in the Government of India Act, 1935. In 1950, with the coming into force of the Constitution of India, it was renamed the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). It conducts the recruitment of civil servants through a competitive examination. A report published by the UPSC in 1957 documented some of the issues that the institution faced. Interestingly, a month after this report was released, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Minister of Home Affairs, expressed the need for the establishment of a separate training institution for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and other cadre services. He felt that the Metcalfe House in Delhi, from where training had hither to been imparted, would no longer suffice. In 1958, Pandit Pant formally announced in the Lok Sabha that the government would set up a National Academy of Administration where training would be given to all recruits of the Civil Services to work towards upholding the values enshrined in the Constitution of India (LBSNAA, 2019, p. 11).

The Services: Central Services and All India Services

Independence in 1947 saw the transition from the ICS to the IAS. While there was criticism about the role of the ICS, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, as the Union Home Minister, opined that a

strong civil service was essential to preserve the unity and integrity of the country. The IAS and IPS were created through executive orders. The need for an independent Civil Service was debated in the Constituent Assembly, and it was subsequently incorporated into the Constitution of India.

The Central Services (Group A) are under the administrative control of the Union Government. The broad categories of these Central Services are the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IA&AS), Indian Revenue Service (IRS), etc. The All India Services comprise the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), and Indian Forest Service (IFoS). The All India Services personnel are recruited by the Centre and allotted to various State cadres. They have the accountability to serve both under the State and the Centre. Overall, the structure and administration of the Civil Services fortify the nationalistic character among its personnel.

Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration

The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie has been training officers of the Civil Services of India since 1959. Since its establishment, this premier institution has played a critical role in nation-building by serving as an effective catalyst in the moulding of the country's administrators. Over the last 60 years, it has influenced hundreds of young minds, turning entrants to the services into capable officers who constitute the backbone of the country's administrative structure (LBSNAA, 2019, p. 4).

Motto

Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam

In Chapter 2, verse 50, of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna talks to Arjuna about "Sthitaprajna"—a person endowed with the wisdom of equanimity, who is firm in thought and action under all circumstances. The ideal person is not swayed by every gust of wind; he is committed to excellence in action. Perfection in action is Yoga. (LBSNAA, 2019, p. 31)

National Civil Services Day

The Government of India commemorates National Civil Services Day on April 21 every year to appreciate the officers engaged in various public departments in the country. On this day, civil servants are recognised for their hard work and dedication towards serving the people. It is also an acknowledgement of the important role they play in the country's administration. The first celebration was held on April 21, 2006, in New Delhi, and that day ever since has been celebrated as National Civil Services Day ever since. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first Home Minister of Independent India, addressed probationers of Administrative Services Officers in 1947 at Metcalfe House in Delhi, referring to civil officials as the "steel frame of India" (www.cnbctv18.com).

District Office

The District Collector is a traditional role in the Indian authoritative framework. The role was cut out by the colonial masters, and the officials designated as District Collectors were responsible for the appraisal and assortment of land revenue. This is where the "Collector" part in the designation of District

Collector originates. The office of the District Collector and Magistrate is the backbone of district administration in India. These officers are the essence of administration at the grassroots level. It is through their office that administrative plans are communicated to the public, law and order are maintained at the local level, and open public grievances are addressed. Their office serves as the channel of vertical and horizontal accountability for the organisation. The foundation of the Collector has been regarded as irreplaceable in achieving coordination among various departments, organisations (including NGOs), authorities, and so forth. The Collector is considered the key functionary, best equipped to foster collaboration across the entire spectrum of regional organisations. As the number of activities, institutions, and departments involved in rural development has increased, the organising and harmonising role of the Collector in the government's endeavours of the administration has multiplied and assumed greater significance (Pathak, 2021, p. 1022). It is well known that India owes much of its legal and administrative structure to the legacy left behind by the British when they left the country in 1947. Many of their statutes continue to provide an excellent framework for the administration of justice and maintenance of law and order. The most visible and effective element of administration, extant in the country for the past 250 years in an unbroken line of historical evolution, is the institution of the District Collector (also known as Deputy Commissioner in some states and, while encompassing the role of the District Magistrate, is ubiquitously translated as the District Officer). An office, invented in the days of the East India Company and strengthened when the British Parliament took over the reins of administration in 1858, has, over the years, grown into a crucial and indispensable element in the country's bureaucratic and administrative hierarchy. It is one on which the government, at both the state and central levels, is heavily dependent (Mathew, 2020, pp. 5–6).

The district administration, as evolved under British rule, had to perform various tasks like the maintenance of public order, management of public affairs, and revenue generation and collection. For this purpose, the institution of the Deputy Commissioner was created, and that system not only played a significant role in the administration under British rule but has also continued to play quite an important role in district-level administration in independent India. Although the administration at the district level evolved during the British period, the provincial administration system with its hierarchy and organisation had been in place even before British rule (Dubey, 1995). In the Mauryan period, the administration of a *Janapada* or District was under a triumvirate, namely the *Pradesika*, the *Rajuka*, and the *Yukta*. The Pradesika, equivalent to the modern Deputy Commissioner, was assisted by a subordinate official known as the *Rajuka*, or modern *Lekhpal*, whose duties and responsibilities were to survey and assess land for the prompt realisation of land revenue. The *Yukta* was basically a treasury officer (Kaur, 2022, p. 172).

The District Officer (District Collector/District Magistrate) holds multiple responsibilities. Once an incumbent is appointed by the State Government as the Collector-cum-District Magistrate of a district, they derive their powers from the provisions of various Acts passed by the Centre or State governments, wherein the designation of Collector/District Magistrate is mentioned. Prominent among them are:

1. Uttar Pradesh Land Revenue Act, 1901
2. Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (substituted now by Bharat Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2024)
3. Arms Act, 1959
4. Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976
5. Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995
6. Census Act, 1948
7. Consumer Protection Act, 1986
8. Essential Commodities Act, 2020 (it replaced the Essential Commodities Act, 1955)

9. Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (substituted now by Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2024)
10. Indian Forest Act, 1927
11. Indian Stamp Act, 1899
12. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
13. Land Acquisition Act, 2013 (it replaced Land Acquisition Act, 1894)
14. Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
15. The Mental Health Act, 2017
16. Motor Vehicles Act, 1988
17. National Security Act, 1980
18. National Disaster Management Act, 2005
19. Representation of People Act, 1951
20. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

The above list is not exhaustive. There are more Acts and Executive Orders, as old Acts are substituted by new Acts, or as new Acts are promulgated ab initio. Keeping in view the needs of the times, the District Officer comes more into focus. It would be evident that the duties and responsibilities are onerous. It is a *24-hour* job in the true sense of the word. In addition, the District Officer is the chief representative of the State at the District level. All petitions addressed to the high offices of the Chief Minister or the Governor of a State, or the Prime Minister or the President of the country, are submitted to the District Officer at the local level. When these dignitaries visit any region in the country, it is the District Officer, as head of the district administration, who is vested with the responsibility to liaise, coordinate, and manage all protocol functions. There is perhaps no other institution comparable anywhere in the world where one individual office is vested with so many responsibilities. As organisations and structures go, there is a large body of literature on modern corporates, and from the dawn of the industrial age to the Internet age at present, there have been quite a few transformations. The District Office as an institution

is unique: it was an institution or office created by a mercantile company to meet its objectives as it transitioned from a trading entity to a conquering entity. The British Raj under the Imperial Crown did not dispense with this institution; on the contrary, they strengthened it. In independent India, the institution has endured. The multifarious duties that devolve upon the District Officer only go to show that from a predominantly revenue-collecting and law and order maintenance authority, the development administrator role has now become prominent. In the age of technology, where information processing becomes the key, the District Office will continue to be relevant and a crucial component of good governance at the grassroots.

Perceptions on the District Office

> *The Collector's post is an awkward job because of it being an administrative nightmare. There is virtually no fixed responsibility for this post. The fundamentals of the system, created by the British 150 years earlier, for collectors of those times, remain the same for those in the present. I have worked at different types of government posts in my 36 years with the IAS—as secretary as well as cabinet secretary. I have also worked as the CEC, which is incidentally not part of the government. Of all these posts, working as a collector brought me far greater happiness than any other post I ever held. An individual in need can be directly and immediately helped by a collector. (Seshan, 2023, p. 47)*

The best example of a large and successful information-based organisation has no middle management at all. The British ran the Indian subcontinent for 200 years, from the middle of the 18th century through the Second World War, without making any fundamental changes in organisation structure or administrative policy. The organisation structure was totally flat. Each district officer reported directly to the

"COO," the provincial political secretary. Each political secretary had at least 100 people reporting directly to him, many more than what the doctrine of span of control would allow. Nevertheless, the system worked remarkably well, in large part because it was designed to ensure that each of its members had the information to do his job (Drucker, 1988, p. 6).

The focal point of district administration is the Collector and District Magistrate. He represents the government at the district level, and it is his job to address the grievances of the people and also to implement the policies of the government, ensuring that these policies do not remain on paper alone. He must lead, coordinate, push, and harmonise various departments and diverse aspects of government functioning at the district level. These responsibilities amply justify his pre-eminence in the Indian administration (Ranjan, 1994).

Civil Service Reforms

An important aspect of a modern bureaucracy is that civil servants are recruited and promoted based on their skills and merits rather than on the basis of political and other connections (Weber, 1978; Dahlstrom & Lapuente, 2017).

OECD Report

Today's civil servants are addressing problems of unprecedented complexity in societies that are more pluralistic and demanding than ever. At the same time, the systems and tools of governance are increasingly digital, open, and networked. Civil servants need the right skills to keep pace. This presents a double challenge: the first is to identify which skills will be needed for civil service that are fit-for-purpose today and into the future; the second is to figure out how civil service can invest in these skills—through attraction, recruitment, and development—to improve policies and services.

Public Sector Skills in the Search for Public Value

To assess changes in the skills needed in today's civil services, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a framework which identifies four areas, each representing specific tasks and skills required in the relationship between the civil service and the society it serves.

1. *Policy Advice and Analysis*: Civil servants work with elected officials to inform policy development. However, new technologies, a growing body of policy-relevant research, and a diversity of citizen perspectives, demand new skills for effective and timely policy advice.
2. *Service Delivery and Citizen Engagement*: Civil servants work directly with citizens and the use of government services. New skills are required for civil servants to effectively engage with citizens, crowd source ideas, and co-create better services.
3. *Commissioning and Contracting*: Not all public services are delivered directly by public servants. Governments throughout the OECD are increasingly engaging third parties for the delivery of services. This requires skill in designing, overseeing and managing contractual agreements with other organisation.
4. *Managing Network*: Civil servants and governments are required to work across organisational boundaries to address complex challenges. This demands skills to convene, collaborate, and develop a shared understanding through communication, trust, and mutual commitment.

The skilled civil service of the future: The capacity and capability of the civil service workforce are fundamental to the success of all public policy and reform. Public investment in the

skill sets of civil servants is required for the government to become humble, agile, and adaptable (OECD, 2016).

ARC (Administrative Reforms Commission) Report on Executive and Public Administration

Administrative Reforms and All India Services

The structural problem of two of the All India Services, namely the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, is that they were founded on the imperial idea of territorial control. It was at the district level that the Raj became an operational reality. The colonial idea was not abandoned when the country became independent, for reasons which clearly emerge from the Constituent Assembly debates. Thus, the present structure of the All India Services appears to be incompatible with the development of a full-fledged democratic representative government at the district level. In plain language, it means that "Law and Order" has not been brought within the ambit of the elected district panchayat which is constitutionally entrusted with responsibility for development activity. It is only thus that public service at the district level would acquire significance and be a real stepping stone for political leadership at higher levels.

The absence of a clear-cut relationship between the people and the State functionaries is responsible for much that has gone wrong. All this happened because, inadvertently or otherwise, we allowed the colonial legacy of administration to continue to hold sway in the post-independence era as well. For instance, the change of nomenclature from ICS to IAS did not even constitute a cosmetic change. The so-called "steel frame" of the British Empire became the role model for the fledgling

IAS fraternity. The "*guru mantra*" of the old guard, namely the ICS, was the maintenance of the status quo, and the new guard, the IAS, was only too willing to oblige and follow suit. It is a naïve hope to expect the status-quoists to initiate or welcome changes for a variety of reasons. First, they have a vested interest in perpetuating their dominant advantageous position along with the privileges flowing from it. Secondly, being bureaucrats rather than intellectual leaders, they lack the vision and imagination to devise new and innovative policies, preferring to tread the beaten track, follow precedents, and continue familiar programmes.

Recommendation

Above a certain level—say, the Joint Secretary level—all posts should be open for recruitment from a wide variety of sources, including the open market. We should specialise some of the generalists and generalise some of the specialists through proper career management which has to be freed from political manipulation and influence peddling.

Officials, before starting their careers, in addition to taking an oath of loyalty to the Constitution, shall swear to abide by the basic principles of good governance. This would renew the commitment of the executives to the basic tenets of the Constitution.

The specialist should not be required to play second fiddle to the generalist at the top. Conceptually, we need to develop a collegial style of administrative management where the leader is a facilitator, not an oracle delivering verdicts from a high pedestal (ARC, 2005).

Mission Karmayogi

In a young and continuously evolving democracy like India, civil servants have remained at the epicentre of all government

activities, both as the agents of policymaking and as the executive hand that delivers and implements those policies on the ground. Today, we are at another crossroads: a new world is emerging before our eyes. Three forces are shaping this new world. First, with the rise of information and communication technology, we are becoming more inter-connected globally. Young Indians living in small towns and villages are connected to the wider world, which is shaping their aspirations and desires. Second, this more informed citizenry is giving shape to a more mature political system, one in which politicians across the spectrum recognise the importance of delivering on their campaign promises of better health, education, and social benefits. Third, these two forces have led to a sharper focus on citizen-centricity, citizen engagement, and citizen partnership, which the Prime Minister has called *Jan Bhagidari* (public as a stakeholder is the third force).

Mission Karmayogi is heralding a new era in public administration in India. Mission Karmayogi—the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB)—encapsulates this transition: the first transition is a change in the mindset of government officials from considering themselves as *karmacharis* to considering themselves to be *karma-yogis*. The second transition is a change in the workplace, from assigning individual responsibility for performance to diagnosing the constraints of a civil servant's performance using the Means, Motives, and Opportunity (MMO) framework. The third transition is moving the HR management system and the corresponding capacity-building apparatus from being rule-based to role-based. An institutional framework is put in place, with oversight from the highest level of political office (Balasubramaniam, 2022).

The recent launch of the National Civil Services Capacity Building (NCSCB) initiative, aims at professionalising the bureaucracy to meet our future development needs, brings a breath of fresh air. The NCSCB (Mission Karmayogi) employs a multi-pronged strategy to achieve its objective, which includes,

inter alia, a comprehensive training programme for civil servants with active participation from eminent institutions of learning in both public and private sectors. The foundation of this multi-pronged strategy for change will be laid through the Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRAC). Through this framework, each individual position in government, whether at national, state, or local level, will be assigned a pre-defined role or set of roles, a task not undertaken with proficiency to date and urgently required for the rejuvenation of public organisations in India. This comprehensive role definition, apart from clarifying the premises for decision-making in complex administrative situations, will also provide much-needed direction to the careers of civil servants through its linkages with performance management, training, and promotions (Garg, 2022).

Civil Services: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Good governance is all about getting things done—efficiently, effectively, economically, and equitably. This has been the expectation of public administration, bureaucracy, or civil service through the ages. The civil service was the preserve of a few in both ancient and medieval times. In modern times, it is a fair and open competition all across the world. Civil services as a career choice are popular with graduating students from all categories of institutions across India. The same is the case with China. In both these populous countries, there is a lot of prestige attached to being a member of the Civil Service. With the pace of technology, it is imperative for civil servants everywhere to skill, reskill, and upskill themselves in order to ensure that the delivery of public services is of a high order. The public are customers of government services, and they have a right to its delivery in an efficient and effective manner. People, processes, public representatives, and public administrators

represent the *chaukambha* (four pillars) on which a society's well-being rests. It is incumbent on the civil service to be that strong pillar, the *steel frame*, to ensure that.

Personal Reflections

As a former member of the IAS (1980–2015), I have some reflections on both my personal experience and the public perception of what the Civil Service means to the people.

In 1982, when I was posted as SDM (Sub-Divisional Magistrate) in Amroha (then a part of District Moradabad, in Uttar Pradesh), a matter concerning a ration shop falsifying records came to me. On the recommendation of the Supply Inspector, I suspended the operation of that Fair Price Ration Shop. A day or two later, an elderly person, who had lost his vision due to old age, met me. He apologised for the wrongful act of his grandson, who operated the ration shop, and requested that I kindly revoke the suspension. He promised me that he would ensure no recurrence of the infringement that had occurred. The elderly person, Shri Bal Govind Gupta, was a freedom fighter and a Gandhian in his traits. Hearing him out and convinced that he meant what he said, I ordered the revocation of the suspension of the ration shop. A few weeks later, he came to make a courtesy call, thanking me profusely for my act, and mentioned how his grandson had turned over a new leaf. My small act seemed to have made a big impact on their lives. He visited me many times later on, merely to spend some moments with me. He had taken a liking to me. On one occasion, what he said amazed me. He stated that he recognised only three authorities: *Parganadeesh* (SDM), *Ziladeesh* (District Magistrate/District Collector/District Officer), and *Dwarakadeesh* (Lord of Dwaraka or Lord Sri Krishna). To the common man, the District Officer is not just a symbol of authority; there is an inherent faith in him that the authority will deliver justice. To

me, as a young person, it was a lesson for a lifetime—to live up to the expectations of the public at large.

In 1983–1984, I was posted as Additional District Magistrate (Development) in District Uttarkashi, a hill district in the north-western-most part of Uttar Pradesh. My office was in a tin structure which housed many offices. A room adjacent to mine was allotted to a group known as Seven Sisters. For most of the time, it remained locked. With the onset of summer in 1984, one day I heard some activity there. Puzzled, I desired to meet the people who came there. I met a group of young ladies who mentioned that they were driven by a common cause—trekking and mountaineering—and had formed the group known as Seven Sisters. They queried me about what work I did. I explained to them my development functions and the focus on promoting the socio-economic development of members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. One young lady, who belonged to the Bhotia community (a Scheduled Tribe in District Uttarkashi), was keen to avail herself of economic benefits. I wrote a note to the BDO (Block Development Officer) of Dunda Block, where she resided, and asked her to hand over the note to the BDO, with the promise that he would help. A few days later, the BDO came to meet me stating that the Branch Manager of a nationalised bank was reluctant to sanction a loan under one of the schemes, as the young lady needed it for the purchase of mountaineering equipment. I told the BDO that I would sort out the matter. A day or two later, the young lady met me and mentioned that she had been chosen for that year's Everest expedition. I quickly rang up the Lead Bank Officer of the District and said, "Sharmaji, how would you like the flag of State Bank hoisted atop Mount Everest?" Soon enough, the papers were processed, and the young lady was sanctioned a loan. It is another matter that once chosen for the Everest expedition, she got a major sponsor (Tata Group). As it turned out, the young lady, Ms. Bachendri Pal, was the first Indian woman to ascend Everest. We accorded her a civic reception in Uttarkashi town on her return. A few days later, I was in for a surprise—she

visited me at home and gave me an autographed photo of Everest (autographed by the full team). My only thought then was "benefactor turns beneficiary."

In 1988, when I was posted as Collector and District Magistrate of Muzaffarnagar district (in Uttar Pradesh), a trader met me one evening at my residence office and lamented that his son had fallen into bad company and that their family was aggrieved by this. What he requested stunned me—he wanted his son to be bumped off in a police encounter with bad elements. I politely told him that the District Administration works according to the rule of law, and that his request was both unethical and illegal. I, however, told him that I would like to meet his son one-on-one. A few days later, a young man, the son of the trader, met me. I told him that his father and family elders were unhappy about his wayward ways. I mentioned to the young man that while I have no legal right to interfere in a family matter, as the Head of the District, I felt that it was my moral duty to help a family in distress, as they sought my counsel. I advised the young man to disassociate from elements that had a bad influence on his personality and to focus on helping his father in the family business. A month or so after that, the trader met me and presented a wedding invitation. It transpired that his son respected my advice, focused his energies on the family business, and consequently, the elders found a nice match for him. I felt a great sense of satisfaction, individually and as the head of a venerated institution—the District Office.

In my public administration experience, I have always felt that those of us who are part of the district administration act as a release valve for the public to vent their anger against the government system. It is our ability to absorb their angst, lend an ear to hear patiently, and try to solve their problems in the quickest possible time that marks us out as efficient and effective administrators. Quoting rules and trying to hide behind them will not do. We have to constantly think "out of the box," and be able to justify our actions. My experience tells me

that "If administration is the art of the possible, then administrators are the artistes, who are expected to do the impossible" (quote is author's views).

Shakespeare's famous quote is: "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts" (*As You Like It*: Act II, Scene VII). To me, that person is the District Officer in India.

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