Civil Services Reforms

This article is based on **[Bhilwara model: How this Rajasthan district brought Covid-19 under control](#)** which was published in Business Standard on 10/04/2020. It talks about present day significance and challenges faced by civil servants in India.

Recently, the **Bhilwara model (in Rajasthan)** has become a successful example for the world to emulate in tackling the Covid-19 crisis because of the efforts of local bureaucracy. This earmarks the importance of the role of civil services in containing the spread of disease at community level.

Covid-19 is a negative fallout of Globalisation. Moreover, Globalisation has induced a changed policy of **deregulation, liberalisation and competition.** These far-reaching changes in the global economy have made it necessary to build a **competent, well-functioning civil service.** However, Indian civil services has been marred by several challenges like **structural issues, political interference, being status quoist etc.**

Therefore, changing times requires that the civil services must brace up for the rapid and fundamental changes taking place in wake of changing needs and the challenges faced by the societies.

Evolution of Civil Services in India

- **Ancient time: Kautilya's Arthasastra** stipulates seven basic elements - **Swamin** (the ruler), **Amatya** (the bureaucracy), **Janapada** (territory), **Durga** (the fortified capital), **Kosa** (the treasury), **Danda** (the army), and **Mitra** (the ally) - of the administrative apparatus.

    - According to Arthasastra, the higher bureaucracy consisted of the mantrins and the amatyas. While the mantrins were the highest advisors to the King, the **amatyas were the civil servants.**
- **Medieval period:** During **Mughal era,** the bureaucracy was based on the **mansabdari system.**

    - The mansabdari system was essentially a pool of civil servants available for civil or military deployment.
- **During British India:** The big changes in the civil services in British India came with the implementation of **Macaulay's Report 1835.**

    - The Macaulay Report recommended that only the best and brightest would do for the Indian Civil Service, so as to serve the interest of British empire.
- **Post-Independence:** After independence Indian civil services system retained the elements of the British structure like a unified administrative system such as an **open-entry system based on academic achievements, permanency of tenure.**

Challenges Faced by Indian Civil Services

Indian Bureaucracy is alleged to be Status Quoist

- As instruments of public service, civil servants have to be ready for change. The common experience, however, is that they resist changes as they are **wedded to their privileges and prospects** and thereby, have become ends in themselves.

    - For example, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution have brought about major changes. Rural and urban local governments have been enabled to become institutions of self government.
    - However, the intended vision has not been achieved, due to the reluctance on the part of the civil servants to accept the changes in control and accountability as well as the altered roles and responsibilities.

Rule-Book Bureaucracy

- By the rule book bureaucracy, it meant mainly following the rules and laws of the book without taking care of actual needs of the people.
- Due to rule book bureaucracy, some civil servants have developed the attitude **'bureaucratic behaviour',** which evokes issues like **red-tapism, the complication of procedures, and the maladapted responses of 'bureaucratic' organisations to the needs of the people.**

Political interference

- Civil servants at the regional level work in coordination with the political representative. They both are required to serve the common people by bringing development, welfare, well-being and peace to the society.
- The political representative for the sake of fulfilling the populist demand, influences the functioning of administrative officials. Hence, an administrative official has to adhere to the will of the political master.
- This interference sometimes leads to issues like **corruption, arbitrary transfers of honest civil servants.** Also this led to substantial inefficiency where the vital positions are not held by the best officers and ultimately this can lead to institutional decline.

Structural Issues

- **Civil services has been facing many structural issues**

    - **Generalist officers:** Civil Service are conceived primarily to deliver the core functions of the state such maintenance of law and order and implement government orders.

        - However, changing needs with the advent of globalisation, and economic reforms, the role of the state has changed.
        - Therefore, there are new challenges due to technological evolution (for example cyber security). Thus, there is a higher demand **(of specialist officers)** for domain knowledge at policy level.
    - Ensuring transparency and accountability along with participatory and representative decision-making are some issues that need to be addressed.
    - There are instances of lack of employment opportunities in some public services, while there are many vacancies in others.

Steps to be Taken

These constraints can be tackled through interventions in the following areas: **recruitment, training and evaluation, and governance.**

Recruitment

- **Rationalization and harmonization of services:** The existing 60 plus separate civil services at the central and state level needs to be reduced through rationalization and harmonization of services.

- - Recruits should be placed in a central talent pool, which would then allocate candidates by matching their competencies and the job description of the post.
  - **Encourage lateral entry:** Inducting specialists at higher levels of government will provide much needed expertise.
  - **Outsource service delivery:** Efforts need to be made to outsource service delivery to reduce dependence on the administrative machinery. Research is needed to identify possible services to be outsourced; various PPP models should be explored to determine the best possible mode of outsourcing.

Training

- There is a need to develop ongoing training and immersion modules on a district-by-district basis.
- There is a need to inculcate ethical underpinning in the civil servants by implementing **Code of Ethics.**
- Mid-career exams/skill assessment might be undertaken to evaluate and decide on future postings.

Evaluation

- **Institute goal setting and tracking:** There is an inherent need to set key responsibility/focus areas and progressively reduce discretionary aspects to evaluate civil servants.
  - Institute the online **Smart Performance Appraisal Report Recording Online Window (SPARROW)** template in all central and state cadres.
- **Compulsory retirement for underperforming officers:** Develop benchmarks to assess the performance of officers and compulsorily retire those deemed unable to meet the benchmarks.
- **Incentivization:** Review existing schemes and introduce new schemes of incentives for extraordinary performance.

E-initiatives

- **Robust Vigilant Mechanism:** Strengthen institutional mechanisms for prevention and detection of corruption. Thus, there is a need to review existing vigilance mechanisms.
- There is a need to strengthen implementation of a **Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMs).**
- **Implementation of e-Office :** Implementation of e-Office may be expedited in all ministries/ departments; all states/UTs may also be encouraged to adopt it.
- **Prompt delivery of services:** Every department should seek to simplify their processes to cut administrative delays and ensure participatory feedback mechanisms for efficient service delivery.

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Follow editorial analysis on our youtube channel. This editorial is based on "The Politics of Power in times of a pandemic", published in The Hindustan Times on April 21, 2020.

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