
IAS in Perspective

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Presentation Outline

- Understanding Bureaucracy
 - Historical account of the ICS
 - Transition from ICS to IAS
 - Evolution of the IAS post-Independence
 - Civil Servant-Politician relationship
 - Challenges
 - IAS in the 21st century
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Defining “Bureaucracy” - 1

- **Bureaucracy** derives from French “*bureau*”, meaning a writing desk and Greek “*kratos*”, meaning to rule
 - **Max Weber’s ‘ideal’** bureaucracy - characterized by elaborate hierarchical division of labor directed by explicit rules impersonally applied, staffed by **full-time, life-time**, professionals, who do not in any sense own the 'means of administration', or their jobs, or the sources of their funds, and **live off a salary**, not from income derived directly from the performance of their job
 - Distinguishes ‘**legal domination**’ from ‘**charismatic or patrimonial domination**’
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Defining “Bureaucracy” - 2

- **Michael Crozier** sees bureaucracy as a form of an organization that evokes "... the slowness, the **ponderousness**, the **routine**, the complication of procedures and the **maladapted responses** of the bureaucratic organization to the needs which they should satisfy.” (*The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, 1964)
 - “A bureaucratic organization is an organization that can not correct its behaviour by learning from its errors...it is also **too rigid to adjust, without crises**, to the transformations that the accelerated evolution of the industrial society makes more and more imperative.”
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Historical Perspective

- Post conquest of Bengal - emergence of “**covenanted civil service**” – candidates signed a covenant for faithful performance of duties
 - Term “**Collector**” appears after the Act of 1773 and more frequently after 1784 - effloresced under Cornwallis around turn of century – contemporary accounts speak of Rs. 1500/- p.m. salary of British Collectors
 - Macaulay’s reform of 1853 gives birth to the ICS
 - ICS arguably the ‘highest paid job’ in the world
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The British District Officer

- District Collector became District Magistrate, District Judge along with other functions
 - Greater flexibility in non-Regulation provinces like Punjab, NWFP where armed forces officers performed civilian functions (*called Kutchery Kaptans*)
 - Incidentally, romantic association with “**Collectorship**” continues even two centuries later
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The Education - 1

- Initially, civil servants **learnt on the job**
 - Wellesley established in 1800 **College at Fort William** (Calcutta) – 3 years stint in Indian History, Oriental Languages, Law, Ethics and General History
 - Directors of EIC set up in 1806 **East India College** in Hertford Castle which moved in 1809 to Haileybury
 - A blend of school and college – entailed **two years training** – disciplines divided between “Orientals” and “Europeans” – prominent teachers at Haileybury included Malthus
 - 1833 Act introduced **nomination of 4 candidates** for each vacancy – rejects made it to EIC’s cavalry regiments - continued till 1857, after Act of 1855 ordered its closure
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The Education - 2

- Haileybury continued at the nursery for EIC's civil servants till its **closure in 1857**, after Parliament Legislation of 1855
 - The **Haileybury tradition** – fostered *esprit de corps*
 - Government of India Act of 1853 made for **open competition** - upon completion of schooling and entailed two years probation in a University in England for *competition-wallahs*
 - Discontinued in 1940 after outbreak of WW II
 - Training College functioned at Dehradun - 1941-44, replaced by **Metcalf House** in 1946
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The ICS pre-Independence

- Miniscule size of the ICS – around **1100 officers in the sub-continent**, around 50% in field charges, only 11% in GOI
 - Generalists placed at the top of technical experts – the Raj celebrated **generalist control** and **continuity** and not specialist expertise and innovation (Potter)
 - Governed by **remote control of Whitehall** – responsible to Governors and Governor General
 - ICS called “**an undiluted autocracy**”, yet “*..respected for its efficiency, its impartiality and its incorruptibility*” - inspired by Mill’s Utilitarianism
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‘The tryst with destiny’

- All-India Services replace Mason’s “...Men Who Ruled India” *mutatis mutandis*
 - **Sardar Patel championed** the cause of all-India Services in an atmosphere of general animosity against the ICS – seen as an agent of the British Raj
 - **Nehru critical** of the ICS – “... *no new order can be built up till the spirit of ICS pervades our administration ...quite essential that the ICS and similar services must disappear completely.*”
 - **Opposition by Provinces** and senior political leaders to all-India Services – argued for Provincial Civil Services
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Transition to IAS

- **Patel, father of All-India Services**, argued for an all-India administrative service highlighting need 1) to maintain highest possible standards of efficiency 2) to give the civil service “experience at the centre leading to efficiency and administrative experience of the district” 3) to serve as a liaison between the centre and provincial governments and 4) to introduce both in the centre and provinces “a progressive and wide outlook and freshness and vigour of administration”
 - Patel told Congressmen “*do not quarrel with the instruments with which you want to work...This Constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of Service which will keep the country intact.*”
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IAS – early days

- Rise of the *Brown Sahibs* - gradual transition from **colonial regulators** to **development administrators**
 - No attempt by our founding fathers to define relationship between politicians and bureaucracy
 - Indian political class and intelligentsia were generally critical of the IAS – “*generalist service par excellence*”
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Constitutional Framework

- Under Articles **53** and **154**, executive power of the Union and States vests in President and Governor respectively - *to be exercised by officers subordinate to them*
 - Council of Ministers appointed under Articles **74/ 75** in Union and Articles **163/ 164** in States
 - Indian Constitution (*perhaps only*) makes special provision for Civil Services. Part XIV - Articles **308 to 323** speak of Civil Services and safeguards to services
 - CAT created under Article **323-A** – protection to services from arbitrary action
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Relationship with Political Executive

- Westminster Model of **democracy** guiding principle of Government
 - Based upon conventional view of '**dichotomy**' of politics and administration
 - CoM frames policy, decides on legislations to be piloted, makes rules and regulations, lays down guidelines for officers to discharge executive functions
 - So, Government **policy undoubtedly based on political ideology**, goals and programmes of party in power; in implementation, expectedly no favour to followers or dis-favour to those who oppose it
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Minister - Civil Servant Relationship

(Immortalized by Jim Hacker – Sir Humphrey Appleby in *Yes Minister*)



Dichotomy – in theory & practice

- Weber contrasts ‘**status**’ and ‘**honour**’ of bureaucrat with ‘**responsibility**’ of politician
 - Principle of ‘**political neutrality and anonymity**’ – Indian planners follow Weberian concept
 - **Two conventional views** – one, civil servants are the real rulers, and; two, they are the servants of political masters
 - Holders of **second view** feel civil servants have not accepted this subordination and are devoid of political commitment – country’s failures laid at the altar of the civil service
 - Minister **cannot** stop a Civil Servant from tendering advice, **exercising powers** vested in him under the law or force him to implement orders which are illegal or improper
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The Breakdown of Neutrality

Major causes -

- **Swapping of roles** – bureaucrat now into ‘policy formulation’ and politician into ‘implementation’ – *real malaise of Indian administration*
- Rot set in from 70s, accentuated in 80s – criminalization of politics
- Decline of neutrality also attributed to the demands and pressures of **coalition politics**
- Neutral, value-free bureaucracy possible only in a society where consensus exists on values; but in transitional societies (like India) where **dissent** and **conflict** exist; **too much to expect strong neutrality**

Some thoughts on the IAS

- ***“Revolving door”*** American model might have suited the feudal and patrimonial Indian state better (Potter)
 - Politically-neutral meritocracy of career civil servants was like ***“an exotic species planted in an unfriendly soil”*** (Bagchi)
 - IAS emerged as ***“an acceptable and durable link between the States and central administration”*** (Sarkaria)
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‘The Objective Advisors’



If you cut down on these wasteful expenditures he is bound to notice it and you will get into trouble. Cut down on essentials, he won't know.

Why is the IAS important?

- Arguably, represents *crème de la crème* of the civil services
 - As All-India Service, played important role in providing **uniformity in country's administration** after Independence – strong unifying influence (Sarkaria Commission)
 - Greatest **public interaction** at all levels – experiential learning maximum among civil services
 - **Diversity of job profile** – generalist cadre with multi-sector experience
 - Closest **proximity to political executive**
 - General **perception of competence and fair play** – now gradually being undermined
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Challenges facing the IAS – 1

- Marginalization of institutional authority – office of Cabinet Secretary/ Chief Secretary; Centralization of power – emergence of PMO/ CMO as **quasi-presidential forms of Government**
- Influence of party cadres in day-to-day administration – **rent seeking** by confidants of CMs in States & **‘Reward and Punishment’** - use of transfer, complaints and favoritism in postings as weapons for submission
- Hyphenation of IAS with Political Executive - seen as a **supine ‘comprador’** – “**neta-babu raj**”
- Civil Servants no **‘Red Riding Hoods’** & Politicians no **‘Big Bad Wolves’** – locked in **‘tango-cum-wrestling’** match

Challenges facing the IAS – 2

- **Abdication of mandated and moral responsibility** by sections of bureaucracy – transformation of neutral leaders and reformers into ‘**pen-pushers**’, ‘**duckers**’ or ‘**committed**’ civil servants
 - Old, positive perceptions being undermined – neither “**civil**” nor “**servant**” – **LBSNAA study** of 1995 gives an unflattering account - officers short on enterprise and initiative; status conscious; traditional virtues found to be decaying & officers accepting a diminishing role for themselves
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'The Transfer Industry'



It's time to take firm action! Now I am shifting him to your place. You will be transferred to his. He will fill your vacancy and you will move over to his post

IAS in the 21st century

- IAS - **no longer the proverbial “Ford car”** – would need to eke out a place under the sun (ARC Report)
 - ***Raison de etre*** of premier, “generalist” civil service being increasingly questioned - in **competition** with other services and “outside world”
 - Erosion of “**exclusive**” domain of IAS set to increase
 - Strong thrust to democratic and administrative decentralization
 - People no longer “**allies**” - field officers key to public perceptions – improving delivery at grass-roots
 - Fast **declining threshold** against deviant behavior
 - Need for Government to **realign priorities**
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Further readings

- Bagchi, Sanjoy: *The Changing face of Bureaucracy: 50 Years of the IAS*
 - Das, S.K.: *Building a World-Class Civil Service for 21st Century India*
 - Mason, Philip: *The Men Who Ruled India, The Guardians*
 - Potter, David C.: *India's Political Administrators*
 - Sengupta, N.K.: *Inside the Steel Frame*
 - Subramaniam, T.S.R.: *Government in India*
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Thank You
