

Unit – I Chapter-1

Civil Services: Meaning, Features, Significance and Changing Role of Civil Services

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Objective

The objective of this chapter is to make the students understand:

1. Definition of Civil Services;
2. Features of Civil Services;
3. Significance of Civil Services in India
4. Changing Role of the Civil Services;
5. Problems affecting the Civil Services; and
6. Measures to overcome Challenges.

Introduction

Modern welfare-oriented governments are not only responsible for maintaining law and order but also for promoting the development of various sectors of the economy. This has led to a significant expansion in the functions and responsibilities of the government. The political leadership alone is unable to handle the wide range of complex and technical tasks involved in governance. As a result, civil services play a crucial role, even in legislative functions, which have become increasingly diverse and specialized.

Historically, during the era of monarchy, civil servants were considered part of the king's household and were treated as the monarch's personal attendants. However, in a democratic system, the civil service comprises officials employed in civil occupations, who are selected and promoted based on merit or seniority.

Definitions

During British rule, the East India Company first coined the term *civil services* to refer to its non-military civilian employees in India. These employees were primarily responsible for maintaining law and order, as well as collecting taxes. However, their role has significantly expanded to include developmental and welfare activities within the state. Following are some definitions of civil servants:

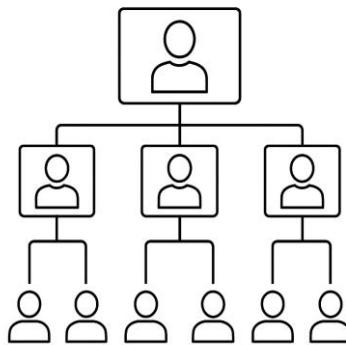
- **Herman Finer:** Civil Service is a professional body of officials' permanent paid and skilled.
- **Administrative Reforms Commission:** According to the First Administrative Reforms Commission's report on Personnel, society depends on its progress and well-being on personnel administration. For its efficient functioning, the government, whatever be its type, democratic or otherwise, depends on its personnel. Ultimately, the government will be as good or bad as the personnel make it.
- **Gladden:** Civil service is a body of neutral experts in the administration dedicated to serving the nation regardless of their own gains and without the reference to a party or political terms or class interests.

It implies that the Civil Services are primarily a body of professional administrators as distinguished from politicians. The Civil service thus covers a large number of permanent officials required to run the machinery of the government.

Features of Civil Services

Herman Finer has defined civil services as a professional body of officials, permanent, paid and skilled. It denotes that it is chiefly a body of proficient administrators/bureaucrats instead of the amateur legislators who formulate the state's policies. Following are the basic features of the civil services:

1. **Hierarchy:** The functions of civil services have expanded significantly with the growth of the modern welfare state. Civil servants perform their duties at various levels within the government and its affiliated organisations. The civil services are structured hierarchically, resulting in a scalar chain of command—i.e., a sequence of superior-subordinate relationships extending from the top to the bottom.



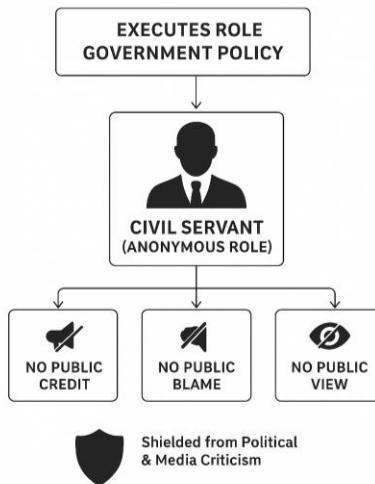
In this hierarchical setup, each member occupies a clearly defined position with specific authority, responsibilities, salary, privileges, and a structured path for promotion. Consequently, a government office features a hierarchy of officials, and similar structures exist at different administrative levels. This creates a multi-layered system, where each layer represents a particular grade of authority. The structure resembles a pyramid—broad at the base and narrowing to a point at the top.

2. **Political Neutrality:** The civil services are meant to serve the government, not the political party in power. Civil servants are expected to maintain political neutrality. They must perform their duties impartially, without being influenced by the political ideology or agenda of the ruling party. Even their private political beliefs should not affect their professional conduct or the delivery of public services.



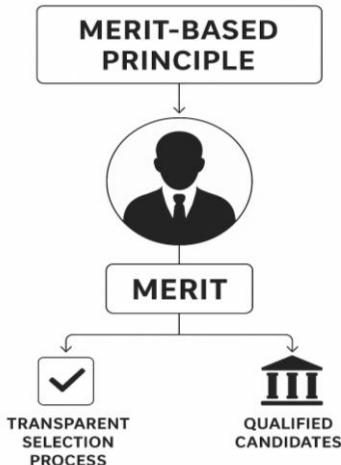
While civil servants have the right to vote as citizens, they are prohibited from actively campaigning for political parties or contesting elections. Their neutrality is essential to ensure fair, efficient, and unbiased administration.

3. **Anonymity:** The civil services act as a vital instrument for implementing public policies formulated by the political leadership. Civil servants operate behind the scenes, under a *veil of anonymity*, executing their duties in the name of the government rather than their own. This principle of anonymity is closely associated with the principle of political neutrality.



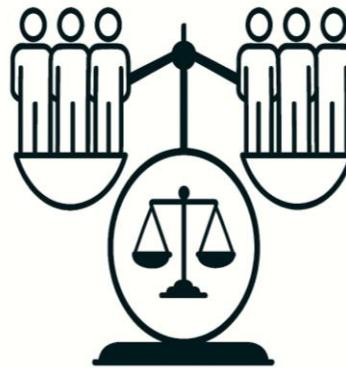
Civil servants are required to maintain strict confidentiality and are not permitted to express their personal views publicly or seek individual recognition. This veil of anonymity protects them from undue criticism by the media and opposition parties. As a result, they neither receive public praise nor face direct blame for the success or failure of any policy.

4. **Merit-Based:** Recruitment to the civil services is based on merit, and the political executive has no role in the selection process. The recruitment of civil servants is carried out through a well-established system managed by specialised personnel agencies at various levels. In India, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducts recruitment for the central services, while the State Public Service Commissions (SPSCs) handle recruitment for the state services.



A merit-based recruitment system helps to prevent nepotism, favoritism, and corruption within the civil services. In addition to recruitment, these agencies are also responsible for other personnel matters such as promotions, transfers, and placements of civil servants.

5. **Impartiality:** Civil servants are expected to perform their duties fairly and equitably, without discrimination based on class, caste, religion, region, gender, or political beliefs. Their actions must be guided solely by the rule of law and public interest.



6. **Generalist Bias:** The Indian higher civil services emphasise generalist administrators. Entry typically does not require specialised qualifications. Civil servants are trained to handle a wide range of administrative responsibilities and are transferred across departments, where they develop into versatile and capable administrators.
7. **Professional and Permanent:** Civil servants form a part of the career services. They are recruited through a structured system of examinations and interviews conducted by personnel agencies such as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and the State Public Service Commissions (SPSCs). They enjoy permanent tenure, hold various positions across the government machinery, and are experts in administration. Importantly, they serve the government as an institution, not the political party in power. Therefore, a change in the ruling party does not impact their position or continuity in service.
8. **Public Accountability:** Though civil servants are not directly accountable to the public or the legislature, they are responsible to the ministers under whom they work. Ministers, being elected representatives, are answerable to the legislature and the people. In this way, civil servants are indirectly accountable for their performance through the political executive.
9. **Administrative Continuity:** Civil services ensure administrative stability and continuity in governance. While governments may change due to elections, civil servants provide a non-partisan and consistent administrative structure, ensuring ongoing development, service delivery, and law enforcement.
10. **Commitment to Public Welfare:** Civil services promote the public interest and welfare of all. Their professional conduct aims to improve public service delivery, reduce corruption, and enhance the well-being of citizens.



Significance of Civil Services in India

As contemporary governments perform a variety of roles, their significance has increased manifold. The significance of the civil services can be discussed under the following heads:

1. **Implementation of Policies, Programmes and Legislation:** Civil servants are responsible for implementing policies and programmes formulated by the government. They act as a bridge between the legislature and the citizens to implement the laws formulated by the legislature.
2. **Permanence and Continuity:** Civil services provide the permanent steel framework. It provides continuity in administration despite the changes in the political leadership.

3. **Policy Initiation and Formulation:** Ministers seek the advice of the civil servants on matters related to policy formulation. They, being specialised in their respective fields, provide data-based insights. They also help in policy initiation by analysing the data available and interactions with citizens.
4. **Nation-Building:** Civil services play a significant role in the growth of infrastructure, poverty alleviation programmes, the provision of health and education facilities, rural and urban development and other areas.
5. **Crisis and Disaster Management:** Civil servants play a leading role in handling and managing natural and man-made disasters, epidemics and pandemics and other emergencies.
6. **Efficiency and Effectiveness in Administration:** Civil service personnel bring efficiency and effectiveness in the administrative machinery of the government as they have the required technical qualifications and are trained to handle even specialised work. They also have a code of conduct to follow for ethical and moral administration.
7. **Public Service Delivery:** Civil services personnel have a key role in ensuring that all citizens have access to public services in the fields of health, education, law and order, welfare schemes and other services provided by the government.
8. **Enforcement of Regulatory Framework:** Civil service personnel help in regulating sectors like environment, industry, taxation and labour to ensure compliance with laws.
9. **Accountability and Transparency:** Civil service personnel ensure that there is accountability and transparency in government operations.

Changing Role of the Civil Servants

In a Parliamentary form of government, the ultimate responsibility of running the government rests with the elected representatives of the people. The representatives are responsible to the Parliament/legislature and through the Parliament to the people of the country. The role of the civil services has changed with the changing times. Traditional and contemporary functions of the civil services include the following aspects:

- I. **Traditional Functions/Role:** The civil services perform the following conventional functions/role of the government:
 1. **Maintenance of Law and Order:** The most significant role of civil services is maintaining the law and order of a place/country. In India, the Indian Police Service and State Police Service are responsible for maintaining law and order. In the present times, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the police personnel have done exemplary work during the lockdown. They have not only maintained law and order but also worked to help the people in various ways. The personnel are recruited and trained to perform their duties.
 2. **Revenue-related Functions:** Another traditional function of the government is the Collection of Revenue. Financial services like the Indian Revenue Service are responsible for collecting and administering direct and indirect taxes in India. In addition, the members of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service under the Comptroller and Auditor General of India are responsible for auditing the accounts of the Union and State Governments and other public organisations.
- II. **Changing Role:** Due to the changing role of the civil services over previous times, the civil services are performing both the traditional and contemporary functions/roles. The changing role of the civil services are as follows:

1. **Role in Socio-Economic Development:** Civil services play a crucial role in the socio-economic growth of the nation. Their role is directed towards nation-building and economic growth, right from planning to implementing developmental programmes of the government under the relevant departments.

Examples: Some developmental programmes implemented by the civil services include - Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sinchai Yojana.

2. **Role in Providing Welfare:** The present governments take pride in being known as welfare states and provide welfare services to various sections of society. The Indian government provides welfare services to the people through ministries like the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Department of Labour, Department of Women and Child Welfare. Civil servants man various positions and help initiate and provide welfare services to the targeted groups of the general population.

Examples: Some welfare programmes run by the government through the civil services include - Ayushman Bharat Yojana, Midday Meal Scheme, Skill India Mission, Antyodaya Anna Yojana.

3. **Quasi-Legislative Role:** Due to the lack of specialisation of the political wing, the civil servants, besides performing the executive functions, also perform quasi-legislative functions. They advise the governments in matters of legislation and fill in the details of the bills passed by the legislature in skeletal forms. As a result, they have acquired many legislative powers, thereby performing multifarious and technical activities of the governments.

4. **Quasi-Judicial Role:** In the modern welfare state, as governments perform many functions, the chances of abuse and misuse of authority increase. As the courts are overburdened and approaching the courts is expensive, governments have set up administrative tribunals with civil servants as members to deal with matters arising out of the government's executive actions and provide speedy justice to the people.

Examples of Tribunals are: Railway Rates Tribunal, Income-tax Appellate Tribunal.

5. **Role in Public Sector:** Modern welfare governments require a substantial amount of money for providing developmental and welfare-oriented activities to the people besides carrying on the traditional functions of the government. They cannot raise this amount only by levying or regulating taxes, so public sector enterprises are set up to provide mass consumption goods and earn money to carry out their multifarious activities. The civil service personnel posted on the public enterprises play an indispensable role in setting up and running the enterprises.

6. **Role in Crisis and Disaster Management:** Civil services have a major role of providing relief and coordinating emergency response to natural disasters, emergencies, epidemics and pandemics.

7. **Role in Public Relations:** Another function of the civil servants is to interpret the policies of the government and present the same before the citizens in simpler forms to raise the awareness and understanding of the people. The citizens can benefit from the welfare programmes only if they are aware of such programmes and policies. The civil services perform this function with the help of print, social and electronic media.

Besides the above-stated functions, which are common to all the developing countries, we can also discuss the functions of the civil services under the following heads.

8. **Role in Policy Initiation:** Policy Initiation is the role of the political wing of the government. In developing countries, as the political wing, i.e. the ministers are advised by the civil servants to perform this work. To initiate policies, they also collect the views of the people.

9. **Role in Policy Formulation:** Policy Formulation is the function of the political wing of the government. Policy formulation is a specialised task requiring technical knowledge so the civil servants assist the political wing in the formulation of policies by providing specific details of policies.
10. **Role in Policy Implementation:** Policy Implementation is the fundamental function of civil services. It has to carry out the policies laid down by the political executive and passed by the legislature. It implements policies in all the fields, including law and order, welfare and development.
11. **Role in Policy Analysis and Evaluation:** The civil services perform the role of a policy analyser and evaluator. The civil servants analyse and evaluate various policies and suggest remedies if the policies need any reforms or changes.
12. **Role in Administrative Adjudication:** The modern state performs many functions, and there are chances of discrimination and abuse of authority at different stages. The governments have set up administrative Tribunals to provide justice to the people over their executive actions. The administrative and judicial members of the administrative tribunals provide resolution of such matters.

Problems/Challenges affecting the Civil Services

The civil services undoubtedly play a significant role in the governance of a country, but they face several challenges. Following are some problems/challenges faced by civil services:

1. **Political Interference:** There is political interference in almost all aspects – recruitment, transfers, placement and promotions. The civil servants, too, at times work for the benefit of the party in power. Too much political interference, especially at the state level, leads to inefficiency and corruption.
2. **Low Morale:** The morale of the civil services is low sometimes due to political interference, lack of incentives, insecurity of tenure etc. Low morale leads to inefficiency in the services.
3. **Corruption:** There is widespread corruption in civil services. Sometimes the political masters and the civil servants abuse their positions and are hand in glove in administrative corruption. Ultimately, it leads to inefficiency and breakdown in the services provided by the governmental agencies.
4. **Lack of Professionalism:** There is a general lack of professionalism and inefficiency in civil services. This laid-back approach leads to red-tapism, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the provision of even essential services and hampers the growth and development process.
5. **Lack of Skills:** The civil services are generalised in nature, hence a lack of specialised skills. When posted in departments requiring specific skills, their lack of specific skills or domain knowledge results in delays, inefficiency and ineffectiveness. In a highly technical world, periodic training of civil servants is required to update their skills.
6. **Lack of Co-ordination:** General lack of co-ordination between the departments and levels of the government lead to ineffectiveness. Each division or a department starts treating its work more important than the other or may even work at cross purposes to each other, thereby leading to a lack of co-ordination.
7. **Rigid Rules:** Even if the civil servants wants to usher in new ideas and ways to perform work, sometimes rules forbid them to do so, leading to frustration. Rigid rules, impersonality or the fear of being prosecuted forces them to conform to traditions rather than adopt innovative practices.
8. **Resistance to Change:** There is a general resistance to change in the civil services. Preference to the traditional mode of performing the work and not adopting technological changes lead

to inefficiency. It also leads to organisational conflict or strained relations between the employer and the employee.

Measures to Overcome Challenges

Some of the following measures can help in overcoming the challenges faced by the civil services and make them more effective and accountable:

1. **Curbing Bureaucratic Behaviour:** There is a dire need to curb the ‘bureaucratic behaviour’ of the civil servants as it leads to red-tapism, corruption and indiscipline. Bureaucratic behaviour is when there is undue rigid behaviour and impersonality in decision-making, irrational division of work.
2. **Increasing Competitiveness:** The government can increase competitiveness in the services by bringing in lateral entry into the civil services wherein the civil servants already working will have to improve their performance to be promoted to the higher positions. The government has introduced the concept of lateral entry into the higher civil services in India in the year 2018.
3. **Training:** Imparting periodical training to the civil servants at various stages of their service will help hone their skills and upgrade their knowledge. Pre-entry and post-entry training is imparted to the civil servants as per the training schedule. There is a need to introduce the concept of performance management, active planning through management techniques, monitoring techniques and Management Information systems in the training modules.
4. **Implementing Code of Conduct:** Strictly implementing the Code of Conduct in the civil services inculcates discipline in the services. Civil servants generally lack knowledge and understanding of the Code of Conduct and its implementation. Organisations or the training agencies must impart basic knowledge of the Code of Conduct and the disciplinary procedure to every employee after joining the civil services.
5. **Incentives:** Providing incentives to the higher performers will motivate the civil servants to improve their performance. Higher performers may be given out-of-turn promotions, placed in the decision-making bodies, or imparted specialised skill training to undertake technical work. Special incentives can also help in motivating civil servants to improve their performance.
6. **E-Governance:** The effectiveness and efficiency of the government-to-government (G2G) and government-to-citizen (G2C) services can be improved by adopting more digital measures. Removal of intermediaries helps improve the services provided by the government. E-Governance has also leads to speedy delivery of the services, bringing transparency and accountability.
7. **Strengthening Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Strengthening public grievance redressal mechanism will ensure effective delivery of services. The governmental websites provide for grievance redressal mechanism, and people can send their grievances through these portals.
8. **Performance Appraisals:** Promotions of the civil servants to the higher positions must be based on their performance measured through objective means. For crucial positions, merit rather than seniority must be the criteria.
9. **Compulsory Retirement:** Underperforming and corrupt civil servants may be given mandatory retirement.

Conclusion

Civil Services are a neutral body of experts who are permanent, paid and skilled. They are the backbone of the government and help in the implementation of governmental policies and programmes. They implement the policies and programmes and have an important role in policy formulation, policy analysis, and policy evaluation.

Important Terms/Terms/Information

1. **Definition Herman Finer:** Civil Service is a professional body of officials' permanent paid and skilled.
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Short and Long Questions

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Write one definition of Civil Service.
2. Write three features of the Civil Service.
3. Write a note on the Role of the Civil Service.
4. Write three points on the changing role of the Civil Service.
5. Write three problems affecting the Civil Service.
6. Write three measures to overcome the Challenges affecting the Civil Service.

Long Question

1. Define Civil Services. Give its features and Significance.
2. Define Civil Services. Give its Features and Changing Role.

Suggested Readings

1. Sharma, Vibha. Public Personnel Administration – with Special reference to India, Jalandhar: New Academic Publishing Co, 2025
2. R.K. Sapru (1985). Civil Service Administration in India, Deep and Deep, New Delhi.
3. R.K. Arora (2006). Public Administration and Civil Services, Rajat Publication, New Delhi
4. S. L. Goel (2003). and Shalini Rajneesh. Public Personnel Administration. New Delhi: Deep and Deep.
5. M. P. Sharma, B. L. Sadana and Harpreet Kaur (2011). Public Administration in Theory and Practice, Allahabad: Kitab Mahal.
6. Relevant reading material from Egyankosh - <http://egyankosh.ac.in/>
7. Relevant reading material from e PG Pathshala - <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>