

## From Past Precedents to Future Possibilities

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*You have been selected for the premier service of the country, assuring you of a decent livelihood and security. Remember you are going to occupy important positions in the future. Now it is your duty to serve the people of our country to the best of your ability, Be fair, be polite and firm, prepare yourself well for the job in hand, and complete it successfully.*

- Sardar Patel's address to the 1948 batch of the IAS

*The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom corrupt the world.*

- Lord Alfred Tennyson

*The Civil Services Examination (CSE) continues to inspire a million aspirants annually and is the toughest public examination in the country. Those who make it to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) rise to the highest echelons in the Union and State Government hierarchy. However, the expectations of the political executive and "we the people" have risen exponentially as India strives to be a five trillion-dollar economy in a democratic polity in which equity and social justice are equal determinants. Two recent interventions in the training of civil servants: Aarambh, which is embedded in the Foundation Course (FC) at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) and Mission Karmayogi (MK) which envisages 'life-long' learning is positioned as game changers in the governance of the country in the Amrit Kal of India's independence. Will the IAS take these in its stride, and ride the crest of the new order, or lose its salience in governance on account of its reluctance to read the writing on the wall?*

### **A Million Aspirants!**

For the last three years, over a million aspirants filled the form for Civil Services Examination (CSE) application conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) About fifty percent of them sat for the Preliminary qualifying exam (prelims). The vast drop in numbers is on account of the limitation on the number of attempts, and if the preparation

for the Prelims is not up to the mark, aspirants avoid taking the exam as it counts as an attempt whereas filling of the form is not. Of these half a million candidates, just about ten thousand qualify for the ‘mains’ exam. One fourth will make it to the interview stage, and of eight hundred odd candidates who get the offer letter, less than one fourth will be offered a placement in the Indian Administrative Service. Based on their merit and preference, candidates are allotted the All-India Services, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), and sixteen central services including the Indian Foreign service, and five group B civil services. It may be mentioned that the ‘mains’ for the third All India service, the Indian Forest Service is held separately, and the Railway services will also have a separate examination from 2022. This is a departure from the extant policy of having a common exam for all generalist services. The background to a common exam for all services can be traced both to administrative precedent and convenience. It was firmed up in the meeting of the Premiers of the then eleven provinces of India with Sardar Patel, the Home Minister in the Interim Cabinet in October 1946.

After Independence, Nehru<sup>1</sup> wanted to induct foreign service officers directly but this was opposed by the Home Department, which argued that all top positions on the government, including the superior central services should be filled in through a public examination. For a fledgling nation, it was perhaps the best decision in the context of the times.

### **A Common Foundation Course (FC)**

As training institutions for different services were dispersed, it was not until 1960 that all those selected by the UPSC were brought together for the Foundation Course. As the then Home Minister G B Pant said in his Lok Sabha speech of April 15, 1958 *‘we have, since the achievement of Independence, and some of those who were associated with administration even before that, made earnest efforts to bring about a suitable change in the outlook and approach of our services. We propose to set up a National Academy of training so that the services, wherever they may function, whether as Administrative officers, or as Accountants or as Revenue officers, might imbibe the true spirit, and discharge their duties in a manner which will raise their efficiency and establish concord between them and the public*

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Nehru held the External Affairs portfolio with himself, and personally conducted interviews among the successful candidates for their induction into the Foreign Service. To date, not one has questioned the propriety, or otherwise of a Cabinet Minister interviewing candidates for selection to an organized service.

*completely*'. This was a clear departure from the colonial- era practise of training ICS and IP<sup>1</sup> officers in their respective training academies with little or no interaction.

It was felt that an *esprit de corps*<sup>2</sup> among all services will be the '*sine qua non*' of the administrative apparatus of the new India. In addition to all the Group A services selected through the CSE, officers of the Indian Forest service<sup>3</sup> and Indian Economic Service were also brought together for the Foundation course held at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA).

### **The FC: '*Sheelam Param Bhushanam*': Character is the Supreme Embellishment**

Immediately after their selection, the dominant feeling is that of 'an elation and a celebration': each individual officer trainee has put in several months, (in some cases years) of demanding work. Many become local celebrities as their accomplishment is feted by families, friends, all educational institutions they studied in, and of course the coaching centres<sup>4</sup>. They have achieved a major milestone and their academic merit, rigour and commitment have been certified by the UPSC: but is this an end in itself, or the means to an end? Are they to rest on their laurels, or take it as the stepping stone to a meaningful and productive life in the service of the nation?

This is where the motto of the LBSNAA~ *Sheelam Param Bhushanam: Character is the Supreme Embellishment* drives home an important point. Taken from a *shloka* of the *Bhartrhari Nitisaktam*<sup>5</sup>, the English translation reads 'Affluence is adorned by goodness, valour by not boasting, knowledge by control of the senses, scholarship by modesty, wealth by giving to the deserving, tapas by the absence of anger, power by forgiveness, and Dharma by truth. Character is the Supreme embellishment'.

### **Core values of the Academy**

This is emblazoned on the course manual and the writing stationery, besides being emphasized by the 'course team' as well as the Director of the Academy in the Inaugural

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to Independence, the IP officers were trained in the respective provincial police academies. From 1948, the IPS officers were sent to Mt Abu for their training.

<sup>2</sup> A feeling of pride and mutual loyalty shared by the members of a group.

<sup>3</sup> Although the All-India recruitment for Forest Service was discontinued from 1935 after the GoI Act, it was revived after a gap of three decades in 1966

<sup>4</sup> <https://theprint.in/opinion/not-just-kota-factories-we-need-to-talk-about-delayed-induction-of-state-officers-to-ias>

<sup>5</sup> A book on universal values prescribed by Dharma Sastra. Among others, DD Kosambi has also explained the verses of this text

program. Officer Trainees are also apprised of the five core values of the Academy: Serve the Underprivileged, Integrity, Respect, Professionalism, Collaboration. The civil service is not just a job, but a calling: officers are expected a proactive stand in addressing any injustice against the underprivileged. Integrity is much more than financial integrity – it includes courage of conviction and speaking ‘truth to power’. In the context of public service, respect stands for embracing the diversity of lineage, religion, caste, gender, age, region, and socio-economic status. Professionalism is the key element – for unless civil servants master the statute, rules, and procedure, they would cut a sorry figure. The Academy also expects civil servants to seek partnerships and collaborations – for gone are the days when officers thought of themselves as ‘knights in the shining armour’. They must work in partnership with civil society, elected representatives, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), media and academia to ensure not just Ease of Doing Business (EODB), but also Ease of Living for the common citizen – ensuring that the Rights to Work, Food, Education, Information and Services are implemented in letter as well as in spirit.

An extract from the Academy publication, *Karmasu Kuashalam*<sup>1</sup> illustrates the transition ‘the core structure from the initial years is yet relevant, especially the daily physical fitness regime, the much-awaited Winter Study Tour (still fondly referred to as the Bharat Darshan) with its various attachments and the involvement in various activities. However, the subjects, contents and the methods of learning have undergone a tremendous change to become more interactive and inclusive’. The new approach has looked at minimising lectures and incorporating case studies, role play and field visits to enable greater empathy towards prevalent issues. ‘A changing world has necessitated an engagement with issues such as acid attack victims, transgenders, sex workers, victims of forced marriages and child sexual abuse, among others.

### **Working for a Higher Cause**

The message is clear: the individual academic brilliance of the individuals who constitute the civil services is the means to the much larger end of societal development. As such, in addition to the academic inputs on law, economic policy, management, public administration, IT skills and languages, the major focus is on ‘working together’, ‘solving problems’, ‘lateral

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<sup>1</sup> Large format (coffee table) book published by the Academy to mark the sixtieth anniversary of its establishment at Mussoorie

thinking’ and looking at issues from multiple perspectives. Thus, economics is not only about world trade and budgets, but also about the impact of food and livelihood security on rural economies. History is not just about achievements of heroes on whom stamps and first day covers have been issued: it is also about ‘sheroes’<sup>1</sup> and the freedom fighters who languished in the Cellular jail. These are collaborative and group learning projects in which officers re – enact episodes, dig out local histories, oral narratives, and curate exhibitions. The emphasis on the development of an ‘*esprit de corps*’ – a lifelong camaraderie- is fostered and strengthened through the Himalayan trek, the Village visit<sup>2</sup>, the celebration of state, zonal and India Days, theatre, and literature festivals.

### **Embedding ‘Aarambh’ at Statue of Unity (SoU) in the FC**

However, from 2019, the highlight of the FC has been the Aarambh program, held at the Statue of Unity (SoU)<sup>3</sup> at Kevadia in Gujarat. While reviewing the training of civil servants, the Prime Minister was not entirely pleased to learn that even though LBSNAA was the anchor institution for CSE training, officers were spread across three campuses – the other two being the Dr MC Reddy Human Resource Development Institute (MCRHRDI) at Hyderabad and the RCVP Noronha Academy of Administration at Bhopal. He felt that this ‘approach to training civil servants in three locations was reflective of the silo- based mind set, which must end immediately.’ It was decided that all civil servants of the 2019 batch should be trained together for at least four weeks, at the innovative module ‘Aarambh’ to make civil servants ‘future ready’. From 2020, the FC is being held only at LBSNAA. While Aarambh for the 2020 batch was a virtual event on account of Covid, Aarambh for the 2021 was held at Kevadia on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January.

Anchoring Aarambh at SoU was also symbolic of the connect which Sardar Patel had with the civil services. Often called the ‘Bhishma Pitamah’<sup>4</sup> of the civil services on account of his defence of the civil services and insistence on Article 311, Aarambh is meant to

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<sup>1</sup> When the focus is on women in heroic roles and leadership positions

<sup>2</sup> An exposure visits to officers to remoter villages to study the effectiveness, or otherwise of government programmes and development interventions

<sup>3</sup> The Statue of Unity is the world's tallest statue, with a height of 182 metres, located in the state of Gujarat, India. It depicts Indian statesman and independence activist Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the first deputy prime minister and home minister of independent India. He, along with VP Menon are credited for the integration of 562 princely states into India

<sup>4</sup> Bhishma, also known as Pitamah, the grand patriarch of the Kauravas – the forbear to both the Pandavas and the rival cousins – the Kauravas

coincide with his official birthday on 31<sup>st</sup> October<sup>1</sup>, which is also celebrated as the Rashtriya Ekta Divas<sup>2</sup> – to mark the integration of all the 562 princely states into India within the first eighteen months of India's independence. Not only did he get the Rulers of the princely states to sign the Instrument of Accession<sup>3</sup> (which gave the Union only powers over defence, communications, and foreign affairs), he coaxed, cajoled, and took decisive action when required to get them to sign the Merger agreements<sup>4</sup> through which the administration of the princely states was taken over in lieu of a privy purse. Thus, the theme of 'unity and integrity' of India was an important leitmotif of Aarambh.

### **Aarambh 2019: From Incremental to Exponential**

Aarambh – literally 'the beginning' 'was an event that dismantled the artificial barriers between technology, human resource, and the environment'. It was designed to be sync with a new and resurgent India: an India in which technology was the driving force in all domains – from agriculture to health to school education and urban mobility. Officers interacted with global thought leaders to learn from global best practices and delve into case studies from the leading management institutions and policy think tanks. It was not just about incremental interventions in a particular field – it was to be the exponential game changer.

The Academy worked with the World Bank team to curate a program which brought together the 'best of the best', with the World Bank President David Malpass addressing the officers on the need to balance a high growth trajectory with equity. *'India has been a development success story. This country cut extreme poverty in half within a generation and is transforming itself into one of the world's fast-growing economies. The goal of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 is both worthy, and achievable with strong economic reforms. to stay in the forefront, India's civil service needs to shift from a focus on enforcing compliance to finding ways to ensure high quality services and regulation.'* He went on to add 'you will

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<sup>1</sup> Hindol Sengupta writes that this was not his real date of birth. As he was once asked to fill a form in which the date of birth was mandatory, he wrote 31 October as the date based on his approximate assessment

<sup>2</sup> Day of National Unity. From 2019, it is marked with much fanfare, march past and police bands from across the country at SoU

<sup>3</sup> A standard agreement designed to facilitate the process of integration. Copies of the Accession documents of several states is on display in the Museum

<sup>4</sup> In lieu of privy purses, the Rulers of states agreed to hand over the administration of the state, including the state armed forces to the Union of India, or a neighbouring state, or Union of states. For details, read Integration of Indian states by VP Menon

*need skills in communications and negotiations, and to work across units and ministerial boundaries to address the complex challenges that you will face in your careers’*

Civil servants who had distinguished themselves in the United Kingdom (UK) (Suma Chakrabarti)<sup>1</sup> Australia (Peter Varghese)<sup>2</sup> and South Africa (Ebrahim Rasool)<sup>3</sup> discussed how civil servants had to bring their professional expertise to help the political leadership incorporate policy, institutional, technological changes to match the expectations of the stakeholders in this day and age of Information Technology and transparency.

Another highlight of Aarambh -1 were the sessions with the faculty from Singularity University, which believes that ‘exponential technology can give anyone, anywhere, the ability to create a positive impact in which people and planet work in harmony rather than at cross purposes. Rather than worry about ‘disruption’, it advocates looking at the future from the point of view of disruptive technologies, and their impact on products, services, and entrepreneurship.

### **A Five Trillion Dollar Economy**

The second Aarambh focused on the related themes of Ek Bharat – Shresth Bharat: Cultural diversity and synergy in India as an Influencer; Economic diversity and oneness as strength, Atma Nirbhar Bharat: in Energy, Health and building large systems for handling black swan events and Naveen Bharat: Research & Innovation in Education, Industry and Administration. Officer Trainees made presentations on these themes to the Prime Minister. After witnessing these presentations, the Prime Minister urged the probationers to follow Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel’s dictum: ‘serving the citizens of the country is the highest duty of a civil servant’.

‘Moving towards a sustainable five trillion-dollar economy’ was the theme for the third Aarambh held at SoU on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January. The program had to be rescheduled and curtailed because of Omicron but could be seen as a continuum of the earlier programs. The keynote address was delivered by the World Bank chief<sup>4</sup> in India. The other themes included drivers and constraints to growth, strengthening the Infrastructure pipeline, scaling up the

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<sup>1</sup> Career civil servant in the UK, and later head of the European Development Bank

<sup>2</sup> Australian diplomat of Indian origin, posted to India as the High Commissioner of Australia

<sup>3</sup> South African politician and diplomat, with his family roots in Gujarat, served as the South African Ambassador to the United States from 2010 to 2015, and was elected as a member of the National assembly

<sup>4</sup> Junaid Kamal Ahmad, an economist from Bangladesh was the then head of the World Bank, India



investment in the private sector, new education policy and skilling and a holistic social protection infrastructure.

In all the three Aarambh programs, the key message was that while it is good to keep the past precedents in mind, it was equally, if not more important to look at the possibilities which the future held. Thus, even as the country celebrates the Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav<sup>1</sup>, the next twenty-five years are envisioned as the Amrit Kal<sup>2</sup> – the dawn – for India’s century 2047-2147 which would see the resurrection of India as the knowledge hub and thought leader of the world.

### **Phase 1: *Yoga Karmasu Kaushalam*<sup>3</sup>: Yoga is Skill in action**

This phase marks the beginning of an IAS officers’ professional training in the Service. In addition to the traditional attachments with the armed forces, the public sector, municipal bodies, voluntary agencies, tribal areas, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) officers also see new age infra projects in PPP mode. Thus, even as Yoga Karmasu Kaushalam (YKK) remains the leitmotif – the platforms and agendas are totally different: while at Bengaluru (then Bangalore) the 1985 batch trained with the Hindustan Machine Tools HMT<sup>4</sup> (which is now moribund), the 2020 batch were attached to the Bengaluru International Airport Limited (BIAL), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created with L&T, Siemens, Zurich airport and 13% share each of the Union and Karnataka governments to establish a world class airport in the PPP mode.

In this phase, officers are expected to develop actionable skill sets to discharge administrative responsibilities in the first decade of their career. This is usually as field functionaries in the District Administration, or as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Zilla Panchayats (ZP) or Municipal corporations. The focus is on partnerships, working with people, non-adversarial communication, and technology driven public systems which offer transactions at near zero costs and a guaranteed time frame.

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<sup>1</sup> Celebration of seventy-five years of Independence

<sup>2</sup> The twenty-five years leading up to hundred years of India’s freedom

<sup>3</sup> The motto of the IAS. It is taken from the fiftieth verse in the second chapter of the Bhagwad Geeta

<sup>4</sup> Hindustan Machine Tools. In its heydays, it manufactured a wide spectrum of products – from wrist watches to tractors.



### **The District Training: Learning by Seeing and Doing**

Over the years, district training has become more structured, and while the role of the DM as the mentor to the officer trainee continues as before, institutional training at Administrative Training Institutes (ATI), attachments at the Secretariat and independent charges have ensured that they get a 360-degree view of the district administration. After a series of attachments with the Collectorate, Zila Parishad, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Tehsildar, Superintendent of Police (SP), District & Session Judge, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Public Works Department (PWD), Municipal Corporation/ Council, Block Development and Panchayat Officer (BDPO), officers are given two to three independent charges, viz. that of BDPO (ranging anywhere between 4 to 8 weeks), Tehsildar (ranging again from 4 to 8 weeks), and in some cases those of Executive Officer in a Municipal Council.

Officers also work on assessing the ground level implementation of programs like Swachh Bharat<sup>1</sup> or Poshan Abhiyan<sup>2</sup>. The 2018 batch studied the status of brick kiln workers<sup>3</sup> to understand the gap between the legal norms and entitlements for migrant workers and their children, and the ground reality. From 2019, officers have also been assigned the responsibility of identifying commodities, products and processes which have / can have the Geographical Indication (GI)<sup>4</sup> tag, document the forward and backward linkages

### **Phase 2: Public Management Professionals**

Having spent a year with an 'ear-to-the-ground', this phase is designed to 'analyse individual and collective experiences of District Training through a process of structured reflection'. They also make a presentation of their action research reports in the district which are evaluated by their peers, internal faculty, and an external domain expert.

An important highlight of this course is the 'effective Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) seminar'. It involves bringing one SDO from all cadres from batches immediately prior to the

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<sup>1</sup> Campaign launched by the Prime Minister to ensure cleanliness and sanitation across the country.

<sup>3</sup> Now being published as a book 'Breaking the Mould'

<sup>4</sup> Geographical Indications of Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999 has come into force with effect from 15th September 2003.

one being trained. They share their experiences and provide a nuanced view of the problems likely to be seen in the field.

Till the outbreak of Covid, Officer Trainees also went on a week-long Foreign Study Tour (FST) to the Civil Services College, UK, and the Korea Institute of International Development (KDI) at South Korea to understand global best practices. On return, they write a group paper highlighting the administrative practices that can be adapted or replicated in the Indian context. The Academy awards a Masters' Degree in Public Management (recognized by the Jawaharlal Nehru University) to Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer Trainees on completion of their two-year long induction training.

### **Making Sense of the Jigsaw: The Assistant Secretary's Attachment Program (ASAP)**

From 2015, the Department of Personnel and Training has been entrusted with ASAP on completion of their phase II Training at LBSNAA, Mussoorie. It must be clarified here that the ASAP – is not training, but an on-the-job assignment. The idea was to expose officers to the actual implementation, monitoring and review of policies and programmes of Government of India implemented at the district and sub- district levels. Officers are assigned important Desks in the Ministries and report to Deputy Secretaries/Directors. For the 2019 ASAP, the then Secretary Drinking Water, Parameswaran Iyer engaged them in the rollout of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA) being implemented in all the Water Stressed Districts/Blocks of the country. Officers undertook three field visits during the campaign period to see for themselves the actual roll-out. Their task was to analyse the water use efficiency by farmers and showcase solutions in the scheduled Krishi Vigyan Kendra Melas.

It must also be placed on record that several state governments, including West Bengal, Telangana and Tamil Nadu had expressed initial reservations on this training as they felt that younger officers are best sent to the field after the Mussoorie training.

### **The Mid Career Trainings (MCTPs)**

All officers are expected to participate in three Mid-career Trainings curated specifically to meet their changing functional requirements as they grow in service. These are offered in the seventh to tenth year, sixteenth to eighteenth year and the twenty eighth to the thirtieth year. This brings officers from three batches together, an occasion to share experiences beyond the

batch. These MCTPs also involve an element of the FST at civil service and government training institutions in UK, Singapore, South Korea, and USA.

The first of these is called the Phase Three. For many officers, it is their first visit to the Alma Mater after their induction into the Service. In the first few years, as an SDO, CEO of ZP, and even as a District Magistrate (DM), the officers function as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the government and work hard at implementing programs. There is certainly scope for innovation in the implementation – especially in terms of outreach, resource optimisation, community mobilization and engagement with multiple stakeholders. Officers are now at an inflexion point and ready to make the transition from field administration to higher level responsibilities as Head of Department at the State level and Deputy Secretary / Director in the Government of India.

### **Training to be Joint Secretaries**

By the sixteenth year, officers have reached the mid-point of their careers: they have equal number of years behind as well as ahead of them. Officers are now Joint Secretaries to the Government of India, or secretaries to their state governments. They have helped draft cabinet memorandum, replies to parliamentary /assembly questions, and responded to the queries of the Finance Department for release of funds. They have also fielded questions from Right to Information (RTI) activists and faced a few contempt petitions at the High Court. They have also witnessed how their Secretaries have been grilled by the Parliamentary and Assembly committees. They now need to understand the conceptual framework in which the government operates. Thus, the focus in the fourth phase is on the ‘political economy and institutions in public policy and governance.’ This is also the time when analysis and interrelation of big data equips them to support the policy spectrum.

The pedagogy for this cohort includes a mix of lectures, case studies, discussions, individual assignments, and syndicate work. This phase is driven by the participants rather than the faculty. In that sense, training only nudges the learning process in a more planned and focused direction. The principal objective of the programme is to provide training in a peer-group situation and preparation for the next higher level of responsibilities. Negotiation skills, team building exercises and case studies of recent successes and failures are also imparted in this phase.

### **The Last Phase of Formal Institutional Training**

When officers attend the last ‘formal institutional’ training in Phase V, they are on the verge of becoming Secretaries to Government of India and Additional/ Special Chief Secretaries to the State governments. They are now the ‘strategic’ core of their organizations. While the Minister does provide the political mentorship, the actual task of running the Ministry or the Department falls upon them. They attend inter-ministerial meetings, lead negotiations at bi-lateral and multilateral platforms in their sector, speak at industry forums, press conferences, business meetings and think tanks where they spell out the medium to long term vision of their department. Guest speakers for this phase include the Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Chairman of National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)<sup>1</sup>, CEO of National Institution for Transforming India (NITI)<sup>2</sup>, Secretaries to Government of India. Issues covered in the last few training programs included Governance, Political economy, Economic Development, Public Finance, Foreign Policy, Trade, Environment, Energy *etal*.

Participants also submit a Policy Paper/Syndicate Report based on their readings and professional experience. These are then shared with the concerned ministries and become an integral input in the strategic directions of that Ministry. The report ‘Produce in India, Feed the World’ prepared by this author’s group in the course of his Phase V contributed in no small measure to the final report of Doubling farmers Income<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, recommendations from the report on urban infrastructure are reflected in the Smart City program of the Urban Development Ministry.

### **Mission Karamyogi**

Prior to 1947, the colonial state in India existed to perpetuate its own power and raise resources for the ‘mother country’. As such, all laws were designed to ‘extract the maximum

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<sup>1</sup> National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development is the apex financial institution for agriculture finance and rural infrastructure

<sup>2</sup> The NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog serves as the apex public policy think tank of the Government of India, and the nodal agency tasked with catalysing economic development, and fostering cooperative federalism through the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.

<sup>3</sup> The Committee on Doubling Farmers’ Income (DFI) recognizes agriculture as a value led enterprise and has identified seven major sources of growth viz., (i) Increase in crop productivity; (II) Increase in livestock productivity; (III) Resource use efficiency or savings in the cost of production; (IV) Increase in the cropping intensity; (V) Diversification towards high value crops; (VI) improvement in real prices received by farmers; and (VII) Shift from farm to non-farm occupations.

possible surplus’ and run the administration at the ‘least possible cost’. Immediately after independence, the welfare state looked at the citizen as a ‘beneficiary’: but the state thought it knew what was best for the citizen. While the objectives of the welfare state were different, they continued to use the same apparatus to deliver welfare. However, after seventy-five of Independence and in the Amrit Kal, the citizen is now centre -stage, and the defining element of governance is that of Trust: and it is time for the old order to change!

It is, therefore imperative that the civil services transformed themselves to become citizen-centric and entrepreneur friendly to ensure that India achieve its goal of a five trillion-dollar economy. It is true that post liberalization, and especially in the last decade, India has made its mark as an economic power to reckon with. Already by 2021, India was the sixth largest economy in the world, besides being the second largest producer of steel and mobile phones, third in the production of electricity. More significantly, it had improved its ranking in the EODB<sup>1</sup> from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2021 and was striving to improve this position with a slew of investment friendly policies It had also pipped China in terms of growth. All this called for a new architecture of governance: one in which the civil service reimagined its role as a facilitator and co-creator, rather than as a controller and regulator. The focus had to shift from Rules which were ‘limiting the scope for action’ to Roles which empowered the officer to ensure effective delivery of the tasks at hand.

### **The transition from ‘Rule to Role’**

This marked shift from ‘Rule to Role’ had three direct implications for the IAS. The first was that ‘the context is more important than the text’<sup>2</sup>. The second is that ‘rules’ are not sacrosanct. They can be recast. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Rules are milestones, not goalposts. Thus, attested copies and documents have been replaced by self-certification. This simple intervention has not only saved time and resources, but also given ‘dignity’ to the individual who is now responsible for whatever he affirms. And last, but not the least, if an officer cannot fit into the earmarked role, he can, and will be replaced by one who can, either from within the system, or through a lateral entry<sup>3</sup> if a person for this role is not available from within the system.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ease of Doing Business (*EoDB*) index is a ranking system established by the World Bank Group.

<sup>2</sup> Address by cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba to an MCTP program at LBSNAA, March 2020

<sup>3</sup> Refers to induction of specialist officers in the Departments and Miniseries of Government of India at the level of Joint Secretaries

This is certainly easier said than done. Under the extant system in which ‘rules’ were treated as commandments, the resistance to change was quite pronounced. This was the context in which the Prime Minister announced the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building - Mission Karamyogi (MK) in August 2020. As the Prime Minister said: Mission Karamyogi is aimed at ‘making the civil servant more creative, constructive, imaginative, innovative, proactive, professional, progressive, energetic, enabling, transparent and technology-enabled’. It was felt that empowered with specific role-competencies, the civil servant will be able to ensure efficient service delivery of the highest quality standards.

### **Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRAC)**

Ever since its announcement, MK has been discussed in almost every newspaper, TV channel, social media as well as in academic journals connected with governance, public administration, and political economy. From the numerous reports, commentaries and editorials available in the public domain, including the websites of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), LBSNAA, Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) and the World Bank, the following key points emerge: the focus is on ‘How and Now’, Stakeholder engagement, Understanding the Framework of Roles activities and Competencies (FRAC), comprehensive coverage of all employees with committed resources and the establishment of an Integrated government online Training platform (iGOT) linked to the human resource management portal.

Unlike the earlier Administrative Reforms Commissions, which were excellent in intent and purpose, and listed the Do’s and Don’ts, MK gives equal, if not more emphasis on the how, with the caveat that the change must begin now. Clear timelines have been drawn up and displayed on the website of the DoPT so that each stakeholder is aware of what is expected. The six interconnected strands include strengthening existing institutions, refreshing policy, detailing competencies that are required for each role and activity related to each position, and creating a strong push for a culture of life-long learning among civil services.

This is followed by the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) which provides a detailed overview starting from Stakeholder identification and their engagement in the project, to identification of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, besides a grievance mechanism to address any issues that may crop up in the process of implementation.

However, the real driving force behind MK is the Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRAC). This involves mapping of three constructs (roles, activities, and competencies, supported by knowledge resources) for each individual position within all government Ministries, Departments and Organisations (MDOs). Before identifying requisite competencies, an organization will also have to question the logic and rationale of its own existence. Why is it doing what it is currently doing? Is there any duplication of effort, or redundancy on account of technology? This Framework is ever evolving, capturing new competency needs as and when they arise. It establishes a clear theory of change by first identifying a core group of ‘reform champions’ who will look at the extant rules and procedures and recast them to meet the challenges. FRAC mentors will also identify world class universities, institutions, and individuals to deliver the skill sets, competencies and knowledge resources to each and every employee in the organization.

### **Each and every employee under iGOT Karmayogi**

The emphasis on *each and every employee* is indeed a salient feature of the MK. Unlike earlier interventions in which only those at the helm were given the best possible training, MK extends to all the 4.6 million employees of the GoI in the first instance, with possibility of extending it to all state government, Zilla panchayats, Municipal and public bodies in the next phase. A transformation at this scale had never been envisaged earlier, and it is the most comprehensive learning experiment for government employees ever. It is also important to note that a sum of Rs 510.86 crore has been committed to MK for the five year 2020-21 to 2024-25. The expenditure is partly funded by multilateral assistance to the tune of \$50 million.

Underpinning all this is the iGOT Karmayogi, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013. The SPV will create, own, and operationalise the content, marketplace and manage key business services of iGOT-Karmayogi platform, relating to content creation and validation, independent proctored assessments, and telemetry data. All digital e-learning courses of world-class content will be uploaded on this platform for civil servants and all government employees for each of the roles identified by the MDOs.

This will free the training institutions as well as the civil servants from the necessity of spending time on the ‘information content.’ The LBSNAA has been able to shift a lot of its FC syllabi – to the iGOT- thereby giving more time for Aarambh and other innovative



projects. Likewise, in the MCTPs: the readings and case studies have been moved to electronic platforms thereby encouraging participants to engage with the faculty and each other in sharing perspectives, best practices, and lateral thinking for innovative solutions.

### **Issues of critical importance**

Civil servants will have to take online courses and evaluated on their performances in each course across their service span. Along with the online courses, services like confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignment and notification of vacancies etc would also be integrated on the platform. In fact, the FRAC will give an officer greater clarity about the role, as well as the resources that are required to ensure effective delivery. Officers will also be able to ensure that those who work with them also receive the required competency sets. Political discretion in postings will be reduced as postings will depend on the performance in both online and offline training programs, officers will also get an opportunity to take up courses in their chosen field of specialization, which will also help them in their professional growth trajectory.

### **Addressing Key Questions**

Before closing, it is important to ask ourselves a few questions. What are the key lessons for India? Is the model replicable in countries which have a similar system of governance? What is the significance of political helmsmanship for reforms in civil services? Do we need the intervention of multilateral agencies like the World Bank to assist the process, or is it better to learn from successful interventions at the grassroots?

There are some clear learnings from the civil service reforms in India. First is that civil servants must understand why expectations are rising, and what can be done to address them. This is driven not just on account of urbanization, but also because citizens are now comparing their transactions with government to those with the corporate sector. Why should a certificate from the government take longer than a typical online transaction? Secondly, citizens are now claiming service from the government to be a matter of right. The Right to Service Act clearly stipulates the timeline for each service – from a driving license to a ration card to the sanction of a building plan. Then there is the social media which highlights citizens' concerns and issues which are unresolved. Last but not the least, if a citizen does not find redress the local level, she escalates the issue to the CM or even the PM portal. Mission

Karamyogi may not be the silver bullet, but it certainly empowers and assists the civil servant to meet the expectations of the people. Because the focus is not just on domain knowledge, but also on attitude and technical ability, there are several examples of successful interventions across the country to make citizen services user friendly – from the access of land records to property documents from a municipal office.

Is the model replicable in countries with a similar model a permanent executive and a political leadership which is elected with regular periodicity?. Yes. And it is a matter of immense satisfaction that at least three neighbouring countries, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives are regularly sending their officers to train at the LBSNAA and the National Centre of Good Governance on citizen services and public systems. The feedback received from the participants indicates that it is indeed possible to replicate best practices across geographies and national boundaries, especially in South Asia where countries have strong cultural and civilizational links.

The answer to the third question – that of contribution of political helmsman to reform is fairly nuanced. It must be mentioned that many reforms are driven by the professional civil servants as they represent the section of society, which in Arnold Toynbee’s classification may be called the ‘creative minority’. If this group receives political support, the pace of reforms is accelerated, but if the political leadership is undecided and vacillating, the reform process faces major roadblocks, and can even get stuck.

Then there is the question of whether multilateral agencies should be involved in the process. In the considered view of this essayist, a knowledge exchange and partnership are welcome, but a nation which wants to reform its civil service must be willing to pay for it. Solutions offered by multi-lateral agencies are often non contextual and are driven more by technology aficionados than by practitioners. But having said this, knowledge sharing must be welcomed, but it should be a two-way traffic, for some of the best practices come from innovations undertaken by grassroot level administrators.

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