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The All India Services  
in India, with Special Reference to  
Their Role in Promoting Inter-  
government Co-operation  
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THE ALL INDIA SERVICES IN INDIA, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
THEIR ROLE IN PROMOTING INTER-GOVERNMENT CO-OPERATION

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The All India Services

The Indian Constitution makes a specific provision for the creation of two All India Services, viz. the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS). No other Services in the civil administration area are referred to in the Constitution.

In the days before India's Independence in 1947, there existed two predecessor-Services to the IAS and IPS, which were the Indian Civil Service (ICS) and the Indian Police (IP). While the IP had specialised work usual to the policing of the country and the maintenance of law and order, including the prosecution of offenders, the taking of preventive action in the face of apprehended political or communal disturbances, gathering of criminal as well as political intelligence, etc., the ICS had a much wider role to play. The present discussion really pertains to the ICS and its successor, the IAS.

The ICS was the source for manning the Central and the Provincial Secretariats (the word 'Provinces' is now obsolete, and the units are called 'States') at all the senior levels as well as for the field posts, particularly the posts in each district of the Collector and District Magistrate (DM) and of the District Judge

\* The Paper contains personal views of the author.

(DJ). The DM was specified as the officer to 'represent government' as a whole at the spot and had general administrative responsibility for ensuring good government and as such also exercised a reserve power to oversee work in governmental departments not directly under him; he discharged duties inherently his own relating to law and order (as a colleague of the district police superintendent, or as his supervisor, in some States), emergency relief, supervision of the magistracy, maintenance and updating of land records, collection of land revenue and State excises, etc. The ICS recruits were divided between the 'executive' and the 'judicial' streams after a five year period or so of experience of governmental working at levels subordinate to the DM. Those assigned to the 'judicial' stream rose in the judicial set-up to the several Provincial High Courts, and subsequently to places in the Federal Court. Those in the 'executive' stream handled district responsibilities as described, or served as Deputies in the State Secretariats, and subsequently rose in their field. It is important to remember that at this stage the Secretaries did not work under any representative political authority and exercised quite absolute powers under the various Government Codes and Rules, and policy guidelines laid down by the India Office in London; being senior members of the ICS they were able to exercise considerable influence over their juniors working in the field posts for ensuring effective implementation of government policy. The ICS was commonly referred to as the 'Iron Frame'. Fortunately, a majority of the members of the ICS (and their predecessors of the East India Company) visualised their roles in very constructive terms and (in the words of the respective subtitles of the two volumes of the standard work by Philip Woodruff

on 'The Men who Ruled India') graduated with success from their earlier role as 'the Founders' of the British Empire in India to their more positive role later as 'the Guardians' of the security and to some extent the welfare of the Indian people. In the later phase, they were substantially responsible for developing in the country a unified administrative system with such features as: common Criminal and Civil laws, mapping and settlement of land and recording of rights over land, the taxation, excise and accounting system, the local administrative units of the district (now there are about 350 districts in India) and the sub-district levels discharging everywhere a more or less standard set of basic tasks, and so on. The basic structure still exists and stands the country in good stead, though obviously important changes have taken place since the time of Independence, particularly relating to developmental functions.

The other major Services in the area of civil administration during the same period were (a) for the Provinces, those relating to education, health, public works, irrigation, forests, administration, etc., and (b) for the Government of India, those concerned with the railways (through an autonomous Railway Board), audit and accounts, the political department (dealing with the Princely States), central public works, and so on.

Operating at the several levels of local, provincial and central government, the 'Iron Frame' of the ICS (with a subordinate role being played by the IP) bore the main brunt of the onslaught of the National movement, in the shape of civil disobedience, non-co-operation, strikes and demonstrations, and acts of sabotage (mostly before the Gandhi era). As Indians had been recruited to

the ICS since the end of the nineteenth century, it was particularly galling to see many of them side with the Imperial power, and the Service was roundly criticised for this among other reasons by the Nationalists. There was a part-social reason also, as the life-style adopted by the Indians in the ICS perhaps inevitably at that time changed rapidly to become highly Anglicised (and was, therefore, regarded as un-Indian). In fact, on many an occasion it was clearly and loudly stated by various political leaders that it was one of their objectives to bring down the edifice of the ICS. Yet, it was decided, while framing the Constitution, that the IAS and IPS, modelled on the ICS and the IP, should be constituted after Independence. This phenomenon calls for an explanation.

The factors which may explain why All India Services were considered necessary after Independence may summarily be noted as follows:

- (i) The initial situation in 1947, when the newly-independent country had an extraordinary political and administrative transitional problem, with large-scale communal riots and the problem of handling millions of refugees from Pakistan and of transit of millions in the reverse flow; the continuing shortages of food, cloth and other essential articles; the hostilities over Kashmir; the question of integrating over 500 large and small Indian Princely States, and so on. It was the administrative experience and maturity of the ICS which proved particularly valuable at the time, and

the good work then done was seen and duly recognised by the new leadership.

(ii) The need for a degree of continuity in administration, accepting the unified administrative system which had come into being, the basic district organisation, the provincial autonomous governmental structures which had evolved over a period of 30 years or so, and so on. The Indian National Congress was not in this matter a 'revolutionary' party which sought to overthrow the existing system, but was firstly a nationalist party seeking popular Indian control over the State apparatus. Commentators have shown that Free India's Constitution (1949) borrowed heavily from the structure underlying the pre-Independence Government of India Act (1935).

(iii) The appreciation (or realisation) on the part of the new leaders that though the structure of civil administration had resisted them and suppressed them, it could be redirected to work towards the new objectives laid down by a national government, through a process of re-orientation of the older functionaries and a large-scale infusion of fresh recruits.

#### Certain Features and Live Issues

Certain features of the system of recruitment and management of the All India Services may be highlighted here to further explain

their continued acceptability. This is not to say that the status of these Services remains unquestioned today. It is relevant therefore, also to discuss certain live issues which have arisen in regard to the present place of these Services in the administrative system in India.

### Recruitment

This is done through an open general examination (as distinct from separate examinations held for individual technical services, or posts) conducted for University degree holders in the age group 21-25 years (extended to 28 years for the first time, for the 1979 exam) by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), a body set up under the Constitution and enjoying a high, independent status. A single examination is held at a very large number of centres throughout the country for recruitment at officer level to (a) the All India Services, i.e. the IAS and the IPS; (b) the Indian Foreign Service and a large number of 'Central' Services, e.g. Railways Transportation and Commercial Services, Railways Accounts Service, Indian Audit/Accounts Service, Defence Accounts, Income Tax, Customs, Economic/Statistical Services, etc.; and (c) certain Central Secretariat Services. The total number annually recruited may go up to 100 in IAS, 20 in IFS, 50 in IPS, and 500 in all Services together; about 30,000 candidates usually take the examination in a year. While the standard of examination (inclusive of two extra papers of an advanced standard in subjects of the candidates' choice) was higher for the IAS and IFS until 1978, from 1979 uniform standards have been announced in a two-phase examination consisting of a preliminary qualifying examination and an

actual recruitment examination for candidates qualifying at the preliminaries. There is a viva-voce test also for about four or five times the number of candidates to be recruited. This UPSC examination is rightly regarded as representing an 'equal opportunity' for obtaining public employment and access to highest bureaucratic levels at the Central as well as the States' levels, by all sections of society and all regions of the country, and it arouses country-wide interest on a sustained basis.

#### Management of the All India Services

The Centre's Department of Personnel handles the All India Services and a very few of the other Services. Typically, Service Heads (or Boards) under individual Ministries handle the training and assignment of the officers in the different Cadres. There is an initial basic training course run by the Department of Personnel for all recruits to the different Services (at the National Academy of Administration), while specialised training institutions for the separate Cadres also exist under the Ministries. Officers of the Central Services ((b) in previous paragraph) are often allocated to Area Divisions for postings and assignments up to middle-management levels. Cadre strengths and development are reviewed about once every two years.

The All India Service officers are directly allocated to one or another State of the Indian Union, and continue to be borne only on the Cadre-strength of that State through their careers. While candidates' preferences for specific States are obtained at the time of applying (and they usually opt for their own States), the allocation is made on a prescribed system of rotation and at least

50% of candidates are 'outsiders', i.e. they are not permanent residents of the State to which they are allocated. The candidates going to a State are given instruction in and pass examinations in the regional language during the national level training as well as later on the job in the State. Cadre-strengths of each State are redetermined every two years with reference to demands which arise from a broad-based assessment of the prospects of expansion of general administration over the long term. In each case, the specific 'Cadre posts' are listed out and earmarked to be filled only by those borne on the Cadre; various 'quotas' for secondment, promotion from State Services, etc., are fixed while arriving at the strength. All this is settled through a process of consultation between the Centre and the individual States.

Since these officers also man posts in the Central Ministries and the affiliated/attached Organisations, each State has a 'quota' for secondment to the Centre; this is firstly an obligation on a State to supply officers for the Centre's needs, but is equally a 'claim' of a State to have a certain number of officers in the government at the Centre. Officers deputed to the Centre work for a limited period there, varying from four years for Deputy Secretaries, five years for Directors/Joint Secretaries, seven years for Additional Secretaries, to ten years for Secretaries (this last is hardly ever reached as retirement intervenes, at the age of 58). They have to spend a 2-3 year 'cooling off' period in their State before they can be re-deputed to the Centre. Annual lists of officers 'on offer' are sent by each State, and their acceptability for circulation to Ministries is first checked by the Department of

Personnel with reference to performance record, integrity, etc. At the first senior administrative level, i.e. of Joint Secretaries, a stage reached after 17-18 years of service, a fairly drastic screening is done by the Centre in respect of all officers who complete this period of service and acceptability is usually restricted to 50%; similar screening goes on at each higher stage. Officers who stay back in the States usually do not lag behind in reaching Joint Secretary-level equivalent posts in the States in the normal course, but certainly stagnate thereafter as higher posts are available in very limited numbers in the States; this arrangement tends to 'divide' the Cadre and does create complexes, which adversely affect motivation and efficiency, particularly for the reason that in India the dissatisfied have no opportunities available for a shift out from government to any other employment.

The system of secondment and recirculation is of great value in bringing about an exchange of experience between the Centre and the States, and in giving to the Centre access to the most recent experience of policy-making at the State level and the ground level situation in different areas. This informal, personal insight into regional conditions becomes available to the Central Ministries and serves as a valuable supplement to the information obtained through formal communications, reports and reviews, as well as assessments made in the course of discussions in inter-governmental conferences. For States, the access to a broader perspective and experience of Central policy imperatives and the development situation in the other States is a parallel gain. Of course, this mutual reinforcement of experience is of direct value mostly in respect of

the work done by these officers in fields of common or joint endeavour of the Centre and the States.

It would be right to note at this point the importance of the mere fact of the existence of the All India Services. In dealings between States, particularly where regional co-operation or action in one form or the other is called for, the presence of a Service counterpart on each side of the border is a real advantage. The same is true of the much wider area over which the Central Government and the different States interact. In all such cases, spontaneous rapport is established, a certain common attitude and comparable background of experience prevails in assessing the administrative or political aspects of a problem, and the nuances of the jargon used are easily understood. However, it may perhaps be that the balance of advantage in these dealings tends to tilt in favour of the Centre, as more influence or prestige may reside there, or more of the Service seniors gravitate towards the Centre, or simply because more specialised and skilled persons may be available on individual subjects in view of the existing division of labour in the larger organisations at the Centre.

#### Certain Issues Concerning the Current Role of the IAS

Generalists 'vs' Specialists. The debate as to who should be 'on top' has been going on in India - as elsewhere. As a whole, there is in the Indian administrative system today a more open acceptance of the role of the specialists. However, those with engineering or other technical degrees who choose to join one or the other of the technical services in government resent the fact that their pay-scales and long-range career prospects are somewhat poorer

than for the recruits to the IAS; the Heads of technical departments are usually paid less than the most senior officers in the Secretariat, presumably to emphasise their lower status *vis-a-vis* the Secretariat. A partial solution has been provided by increasing the number of senior jobs in the Secretariat with a technical content, but it is obvious that this can be done only on a very small scale as compared to the size of the technical establishment. It may perhaps be added here that very few technical degree holders compete for the IAS, either because they do not fancy administrative work or because they find themselves ill-equipped to prepare for the test, which calls for a good grip over two or three major subjects. By and large, generalists continue to be considered by training and instinct more useful in dealing with the political or public issues which arise in government decision-making, in the discharge of obligations to the Parliament and its Committees, etc., and in the dealings between the Centre and the States.

#### All India 'vs' Central Services

Personnel management at the Centre involves not only the handling of the All India Services, but also the questions of Cadre management, promotions, status and morale of a range of Central Services. From the latter, demands for parity with the IAS in pay and promotion opportunities have regularly been made, sometimes in a bitter tone. The basic problem here is that being relatively 'young' Services, the recruits to the Central Services of say the early 50's are by now coming up to claim consideration for the senior-most levels; these Cadres, however, do not have the requisite posts within the departmental structure, and their

acceptability in general posts in the Secretariat tends to be restricted in view of their limited range of past experience; they have also to compete there with the 'generalists' of the IAS. A promotion lag therefore tends to start operating for members of the Central Services when compared with the IAS, by about the sixteenth to seventeenth year of service, and this leads to considerable resentment against the IAS, and also to demoralisation within the Central Services Cadres. The problem for these services, as for the specialists' services discussed in the previous paragraph remains unsolved in theory or practice, though one suggestion made is that certain time-scales of pay should be made operative in the Central Services and the Technical Services to apply to individual officers irrespective of the post held, so that at least the financial disadvantage is neutralised.

#### Relations between the All India and the State Services Personnel

Like the Union PSC examination, the State PSCs hold open general examinations for State residents for appointments to a large number of State Services, including the Executive, the Judiciary and those concerned with Taxation, Transport, Education, etc. The officers of the State Civil Service Executive category work at sub-district levels and in junior State Secretariat posts in the first 15 years or so of their service; thereafter, they look forward to absorption after due selections into the State Services quota of the IAS, constituting 33% (or 40%?) of the total IAS Cadre strength in their State. Problems, however, arise when the State Services quota does not have enough vacancies, and promotions get delayed; experienced officers have then to mark time at their old posts, sometimes for

unduly long periods. On absorption, the State Services officers are placed alongside the IAS 'regular' recruits in a combined seniority list, getting partial credit (roughly half) for the years spent by them in their original Cadre and thereby dropping down in their 'year of allotment' to places beside the 'regular' recruits who entered government service seven to ten years later. Officers of the State Services thus tend to be envious of the younger IAS lot, but really the more awkward issue is about their dependence on the IAS officers for their promotion prospects, which sometimes inhibits initiative. Another aspect of the comparative modes of working of the State and the All India Service officers is that the former, being permanent residents of the State and having less interest in being deputed out to the Centre, tend to develop links with local or State level politicians (and here the situation is often fluid) for mutual benefit, whereas this is far less likely, at least at ground levels, in the case of the latter (the All India Service) officers. However, State politicians normally have use for each kind of official, depending on the nature of action they desire in a particular post, at a time. In a situation of extreme political maladjustment in the case of IAS officers, secondment to the Centre is always available as a convenient expedient to tide the situation over. This 'reserve' opportunity to withdraw from having to work in the State acts as a spur to independence and objectivity, but at the same time reflects a kind of 'dual' allegiance. There is also a duality in matters of disciplinary control; the Central Department of Personnel has to be consulted for concurrence before a major punishment can be awarded by the State to an IAS officer. In fact,

because of this peculiar situation, one State Chief Minister last year went to the extent of branding the All India Service officers as 'agents of the Centre'. Notwithstanding all this, the arrangement has worked reasonably well and has served the interests of the States as much as those of the Centre.

#### Linguistic and Regional Pressures

As recruitment is by merit, certain States have not had proportionate representation, or certain others have been over-represented in the All India Services. This position reflects educational disparities, the relative degree of access in different areas to literature suited to the competitive examination syllabus, and the state of development of supplementary private tutorial instruction in different localities (Delhi is highly specialised in this matter, and scores well). There is also the question of the relative standards attained by students in regard to the English language, and this varies between regions. A demand has therefore been raised in political circles that certain regions are being left out because of the incapacity of their candidates to compete on equal terms at all-India levels, in a type of examination. The 1979 examination is based now on the report of a Committee which looked into the question of reform of the examination systems, etc., and it is believed that candidates educated in a regional language may henceforth have a fairer chance to compete. Whether this will make a difference remains to be seen. It can, however, be said that the integrating role of the All India Services would be seriously compromised in concept and in practice if, on a failure of the 1979 innovation in the examining system, actual regional quotas were to

be decided upon at a future date.

#### Features Relevant to Inter-government Co-operation

From the foregoing account, it appears possible to isolate features of the All India Services which seem to be relevant from the point of view of inter-government co-operation in India. These may be listed as follows:

- (a) Recruitment through an open examination conducted on an all-India basis promotes the feeling in all States that their residents have a chance of obtaining positions in the All India (as much as in the Central) Services.
- (b) By allocating officers to each State with a proportion of at least 50% non-residents, including people from other regional, linguistic or cultural groups, national integration and mutual tolerance are promoted.
- (c) The enlistment of 'Cadre posts' and the determination of Cadre strengths of each State is done by the Centre in consultation with the States. Certain across-States uniformities are also accepted in the process, to ensure that similar posts are generally encadred in all States, the respective Cadre structures are attuned to current and potential demands, and that nearly equal career development prospects exist in all the States. The management of the All India Service Cadres also enables the States to arrive at common upper limits being observed in

some sense 'nationally' in the regulation of the Civil Services, and this helps them in arriving at reasonable norms for pay-scales, career development, etc. of officers in a wide variety of Services of their own. (It may be useful to recall here that degree-holders are usually eligible for recruitment at the 'officer' level and they tend to seek employment in a national market, so that these parities are very relevant.)

(d) The width of the range of 'Cadre posts' enables comprehensive experience of government to be available in at least a set of officers. It also provides an administrative network of a type, across the nation.

(e) The system of regular secondment and circulation of officers between the Centre and the States enables exchange of experience between district, State and Central levels.

(f) The absorption of a certain percentage of State Services officers into the All India Services helps acceptance in the States of persons selected by an agency outside the States (the Union PSC) and ultimately under the disciplinary control of the Centre; this is a particularly important consideration since key supervisory posts in the States are enlisted as 'Cadre posts' to be filled by All India Service officers.



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