Changing Role of Indian Civil Services in the context of Globalisation

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India is a constitutional democracy and its functioning mainly depends upon four pillars – Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, and Free Press. Each one of these has been assigned its role in our democratic setup. First three of these are associated with the governance of the State. Effective and efficient institutions form the backbone of a successful development and governance process. In this context, the founding fathers had the foresight to create the necessary institutional framework for governance which has brought us thus so far. One of the basic elements of Indian governance architecture is the concept of an impartial, honest, efficient and fearless civil service which is the core of the Executive, be it the All India Services or the other Civil Services. They form the permanent structure and backbone of Indian Administration System.

Much had been critically discussed and written about civil services’ achievements in terms of expectations at the time of birth of Indian Republic and its fulfilments so far. So, in this paper, without much discussing about the past role of civil services we need to think whether this framework is adequate for years to come; whether past modes of functioning will address the demands of the future in fast changing world; whether skills and capabilities that were relevant in the past have outlived their utility and there is a need to develop new ones? By answering these questions, we would discuss that whether there are changes in the role of Indian Civil Services and if it needs reorientation in this regard. But before discussing these, a brief look at its evolution, history, and performance is required to understand present and future of civil services.
Evolution and History of Indian Civil Services:

Civil service refers to the body of government officials who are employed in civil administration that are neither political nor judicial. The public administration system in India has a long history, going back to ancient times. Hence, the concept of civil service was prevalent in India from ancient times. In the earlier era the civil servants performed the role of servants of the king. The Mauryan administration employed civil servants in the name of adhyakshas and rajukas. The examination for civil servants in those days too was very stringent as revealed by Kautilya’s Arthasastra. The expanse of the territory and the need to hold it intact made it imperative for the Mauryan administration to recruit civil servants based on merit. During the medieval period they became State Servants, who helped in the development of land revenue system during the Moghul period. The East India Company has a civil service to carry out their commercial functions. Later on, during the British rule they started as servants to the Crown, but gradually they started becoming ‘Public Servants’. The British Government set up the civil services, primarily with the objective of strengthening the British administration in India. In this period the role of civil services was to further the British interest and its role was totally regulatory. Later on they assumed developmental roles also. After the coming into force of the Constitution of independent India the civil services as we see today came into being.

The modern history of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) starts with the East India Company. It was as early as 1800 AD that Lord Wellesley realising that the administrators of the Empire required high education, expertise, and character established the College of Fort William where every employee of the company was to be sent for a three-year course of education of the standards of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Among other subjects taught were ethics and international law, and in addition, Indian history and oriental languages. The Directors, however, while accepting the proposal decided that the college should be in England. This is how that, for a whole half-century and more, all members of the Civil Service were educated and given special training at the East India College at Haileybury. The
method of recruitment was by competitive examination but the method of entry was by nomination of the Directors. In 1853, the competition became an open one.

The examination for the ICS took place in London and the curriculum, according to which the merit of the candidates was determined, was such that Indians had little chance of competing successfully unless they were rich and had studied at a school in England. The constant demand of the Indian National Congress since its birth in 1885 was to increase the number of Indians in the ICS. Consequently first the curriculum was widened and then in 1922, a parallel examination began to be held in India. The end-result was that at the time of the transfer of power, half the members of the ICS were Indians.

**Constitutional Protection:**

During the British rule in India, Civil Servants align themselves with their British masters. Hence, after Independence the loyalty of Civil Servant was suspect. Public opinion was generally hostile to them in view of its identification with foreign rule and its obstructing role during the freedom struggle. But it was Sardar Patel, the first Home Minister of Independent India, who advocated for administrative continuity for the stability of the country – so, institution of Civil Services was maintained in the new name – Indian Administrative Services (IAS) and other civil services.

The founding fathers of the Constitution wisely provided, by making provisions in Part XIV of the Constitution, for apolitical and independent civil services, with requisite protection for service matters. These provisions pertain not just to the union but also the states. One of the provisions of the Constitution (Article 312) which was hotly debated and faced considerable opposition, particularly from the provincial governments, pertained to the creation of All India Services (AIS) with recruitment based on All India competitive examination and dual control by the centre and the states. Such a constitutional protection was meant to enable the AIS to operate independently, freely, objectively and fearlessly. Unfortunately, political interference and administrative acquiescence has severely dented the professional fibre of the service.
Civil Services and Governance in Independent India:

The civil service system is the backbone of the administrative system which acts as most important tool for governance of our country. In post-independent India civil service was reorganised. There are three tiers of administration – Union/Central Government, State Government, and Local Government. At the central level, the civil service include the All India Services, namely the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Indian Forest Service (IFS), and Indian Police Service (IPS). Apart from these there are various other Central Services like the Indian Income Tax Service, Indian Railways Service, etc. at central level. The State Governments have their own set of services – State Civil Service.

Over the period the role of civil services has changed depending on the agenda of the governance of that particular period. During British period, enforcement of law and order and collection of revenue was the main concern of civil servants. In post independence India, when the Government has acquired the role of Welfare State, civil services act as an important tool for implementing national and state policies of welfare and planned development.

The Indian civil services, with its national character, have been a strong binding force to the Union of States. The institution of civil service has rendered service to the overall socio-economic development of the country. It has been at the forefront of the development process right from the ‘commanding heights regime’ to the ‘liberalization and de-regulation era’. It has acted as a force of unity among diversity. It has not only played a pivotal role in designing and activating policies, it has also ensured basic service delivery at the grass root level to the marginal section of our society.

The importance of the civil service to the Indian administrative system stems from the following:

- Service presence throughout the country and its strong binding character
- Non-partisan advice to political leadership in the midst of political instability and uncertainties
• Administrative and managerial capacity of the services
• Effective policy-making and regulation
• Effective coordination between institutions of governance
• Leadership at different levels of administration.
• Service delivery at the cutting edge level
• Provide ‘continuity and change’ to the administration.

Since civil services are considered as the most important element of Indian administrative system that has the responsibility to fulfil the development objectives of the welfare state, so, any failure or shortcomings in fulfilment of these objectives are attributed to the failure of civil services. It is said that India’s massive bureaucracy is maintained at huge cost by the country's taxpayer whose average income is among the lowest in the world. The public perception about the members of the civil service, who function at cutting edge, higher coordination and policy making levels, is that they are ‘burdensome low-performers' heading a highly bloated bureaucracy, which is, often, perceived to be corrupt and inefficient in governing the country.

Some of the criticism of Indian civil services is:

• Lack of professionalism and poor capacity building
• Alienation from the public and lack of understanding of what people want
• Inefficient incentive systems that do not appreciate upright and outstanding civil servants but reward the corrupt and the incompetent
• Outmoded rules and procedures that restrict the civil servant from performing effectively
• Lack of performance culture and focus on outputs and outcomes – inappropriate performance appraisal
• Systemic inconsistencies in promotion and empanelment
• Lack of adequate transparency and accountability procedures - there is also no safety for whistle blowers
• Arbitrary and whimsical transfers – insecurity in tenures impedes institutionalization
• Political interference and administrative acquiescence
• A gradual erosion in public service values, ethics and morale
So, on the basis of experience so far and some other developments of the present era like globalisation, coalition nature of polity, etc., it is well recognized that reforming the civil service is not only necessary but also inevitable.

**‘Good Governance’ and Civil Service Reform in Present Context:**

In recent times, several new phenomena have emerged in the field of governance which have far reaching consequences. For ‘Good Governance’ which is one of the most important goals of the modern welfare State, civil services have to be responsive to these changes. But for this response, reforms and reorientation of civil services are needed because with its present attitude and training civil services are not going to deliver good governance in the present complex world.

A well-functioning civil service helps to foster good policymaking, effective service delivery, accountability and responsibility in utilizing public resources which are the characteristics of good governance. ‘Good Governance’ is being used as an all-inclusive framework not only for administrative and civil service reform, but as a link between Civil Service Reform and an all-embracing framework for making policy decisions effective within viable systems of accountability and citizen participation. Administrative reform focuses on rationalizing structures and operations of government machinery. Governance reform tends to focus on facilitating the effective functioning of and interactions between the State, the market and the civil society. It refers to the improvement of legal, institutional and policy frameworks to create proper decision making and implementation environments for economic growth and distribution. It encompasses participatory systems for elements of civil society to become actively involved in formulation of policies and programmes and their implementation. It also includes effective and transparent systems and processes for accountability in government activities. Civil service reform cannot be seen in isolation and it has to be undertaken along with administrative and governance reforms for effective results.

Although comprehensive reform that involves governance, the civil service, administrative practices, and civil society is ideal, it requires sustained commitment from political and administrative leaders. It is also too complex to implement all at
once. Few countries have undertaken comprehensive reforms and there are mixed results. The challenge lies in finding linkages among the governance, civil service and civil society components, determining which require priority attention. However, without going into this priority debate, this paper would discuss some of the important factors affecting governance in present era and a need to prepare civil services to face the situation arising out of these factors.

Most important development of our times which has substantially changed the concept of governance is – Globalisation. In recent times globalisation has permeated every nook and corner of our country and its people. Reason being active trade and commerce across board; governance of which comes under the purview of civil services; thereby requiring greater mingling of civil services with the phenomena globalisation. Hence first let us try to understand this phenomena and the need for this mingling, hidden in spread and extent of globalisation in our country.

Globalisation:

Since its earliest appearance in the 1960s, the term globalisation has been used in both popular and academic literature to describe a process, a condition, a system, a force, and an age. Given that these competing labels have very different meanings, their indiscriminate usage is often obscure and invites confusion. Some theorist suggest the use of the term globality to signify a social condition characterised by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant (Steger, 2003). However, in this paper we would use the term globalisation in broader sense that – Globalisation is not a single process but a set of processes that operate simultaneously and unevenly on several levels and in various dimensions. For better comprehensive understanding of globalisation and its implications for reorientation of civil services it is desirable to briefly discuss different dimensions of globalisation.

The economic dimension of Globalisation or Economic Globalisation

Contemporary economic globalisation can be traced back to the gradual emergence of a new world economic order at a conference held towards the end of
World War II in the New England town of Bretton Woods. Here major economic powers of the global North agreed to reverse their protectionist policies of the interwar period (1918-1939). Apart from their firm commitment to expand international trade, the participant of the conference also agreed to establish binding rules on international economic activities. They also resolved to create a more stable money exchange system in form of ‘Gold Standard’. Within this framework States were allowed to set their own political and economic agendas.

Bretton Woods also set the institutional foundations for the establishment of three new international economic organisations – IMF, World Bank, and GATT/WTO. The International Monetary Fund was created to administer the international monetary system. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, also known as World Bank, was initially designed to provide loans for Europe’s post-war reconstruction. Later on, its purpose was expanded to fund various projects in developing countries. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was established in 1947 as a global trade organisation for promoting and enforcing multilateral trade agreements. The World Trade Organisation was founded as the successor organisation to GATT in 1995. For three decades, up to 1970s, the Bretton Woods regime contributed greatly to the establishment of the ‘golden age of controlled capitalism’ as called by some observers. Existing mechanism of state control over international capital movements made possible full employment and the expansion of the welfare state. Rising wages and enhanced provision for social services secured in the wealthy countries of the global North a temporary class compromise.

By the 1970s, changes in several political and economic factors were undermining the economic competitiveness of US-based industries, so, US President Richard Nixon abandoned the ‘Gold Standard’ system in 1971. The following period was characterised by global economic instability in the form of high inflation, low economic growth, high unemployment, public sector deficits, and two energy crises due to OPEC’s ability to control a large part of the world’s oil supply and its price. These developments, leading to economic hardships of the people during 1970s, gave emergence to a school of thought which criticised ‘controlled capitalism’ and advocated a ‘neoliberal’ approach to economic and social policy. By the 1980s, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan led the
neoliberal revolution against Keynesianism’s ‘controlled capitalism’, consciously linking the notion of globalisation to the liberation of economies around the world. This new neoliberal economic order received further legitimation with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during 1989-91. Since then, the three most significant developments related to economic globalisation have been –

1. **The internationalisation of trade and finance** – The internationalisation of trade means free trade. Internationalisation of finance means liberalisation of financial transactions which includes the deregulation of interest rates, the removal of credit controls, and the privatisation of government-owned banks and financial institutions. Globalisation of financial trading allows for increased mobility among different segments of the financial industry, with fewer restrictions and greater investment opportunities.

2. **The power of Transnational Corporations (TNCs)** – Transnational corporations are powerful firms with subsidiaries in several countries, their numbers increased from 7000 in 1970 to about 50000 in 2000. Largest 200 TNCs account for over half of the world’s industrial output. None of these corporations maintains headquarters outside North America, Europe, Japan, and South Korea. This geographical concentration reflects existing asymmetrical power relations between the North and the South. Rivalling nation-states in their economic power, these corporations control much of the world’s investment capital, technology, and access to international market.

3. **The enhanced role of International Economic Institutions** – Three international economic institutions most frequently mentioned in the context of globalisation are the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. As pointed out earlier the IMF and the World Bank started as Bretton Woods system, but starting in the 1970s, and specially after the fall of the Soviet Union, the economic agenda of the IMF and the World Bank has synchronized neoliberal interests to integrate and deregulate markets around the world.

**The political dimension of Globalisation**

Political globalisation refers to the intensification and expansion of political interrelations across the globe. These processes raise an important set of political
issues pertaining to the principal of state sovereignty, the growing impact of intergovernmental organisations, and the future prospects for regional and global governance. Obviously, these themes respond to the evolution of political arrangements beyond the framework of the nation-state, thus breaking new conceptual ground.

Political globalisation is most visible in the rise of supraterritorial institutions and associations held together by common norms and interests. In early phase of global governance, these structures resemble an eclectic network of interrelated power centres such as municipal and provincial authorities like the World Association of Major Metropolises; regional blocks like the European Union; international organisations like UN, NATO, WTO, OECD, etc.; and national and international private-sector associations.

The cultural dimension of Globalisation

Cultural globalisation refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe. Culture is a very broad concept; it is frequently used to describe the whole of human experience. In order to avoid the problem of overgeneralization, it is important to make analytical distinctions between aspects of social life. In this context, while talking about the ‘culture’, we are concerned with the symbolic construction, articulation, and dissemination of meaning (Manfred B. Steger, 2003). Given that language, music, and images constitute the major forms of symbolic expression, they assume special significance in the sphere of culture. The exploding network of cultural interconnections and interdependencies in the last two decades has brought cultural practices as one of the important element of globalisation. Media and shifting global pattern of language play an important role in this aspect of globalisation. There are two important aspects of cultural globalisation – firstly, the rise of an increasingly homogenised popular culture underwritten by a western culture industry, and secondly, a complex interaction of the global and local characterized by cultural borrowing, and the resulting expression of cultural hybridity.
**Cultural values of Globalisation and Environmental degradation**

Peoples approach towards natural environment depends to a great extent on their cultural values. Cultures steeped in Taoism, Buddhism, and various animist religions tend to emphasize on interdependence of all living beings - approach that call for a delicate balance between human wants and ecological needs. Judeo-Christian humanism, on the other hand, contains deeply dualistic values that put human beings at the centre of the universe. Nature is considered as resource to be used to fulfil human desires. The most extreme manifestation of this paradigm is reflected in the dominant value and beliefs of globalisation - **consumerism**.

The fact that people everywhere on this planet are inextricably linked to each other through the air they breath, the climate they depend upon, the food they eat, and water they water they drink, make nature of our ecosystem interdependent. And this interdependence in ecosystem makes environmental issues a global issue. Developmental model pursued in the era of globalisation is resulting in degradation of environment which has far reaching consequences for the health and life of human beings. Some of the most dangerous manifestations of the globalisation of environmental degradation are –

- Trans boundary pollution
- Food insecurity and diseases
- Global warming and climatic change
- Genetically modified organism
- Hazardous waste, industrial accidents, and warfare
- Loss of biodiversity

**The ideological dimension of Globalisation**

Similar to other social processes, globalisation contains an ideological dimension filled with a range of norms, claims, beliefs, and narratives about the phenomenon itself. There are five major ideological claims that are made by the proponents of globalisation –

1. Globalisation is about the liberalisation and global integration of markets.
2. Globalisation is inevitable and irreversible.
3. Nobody is in charge of globalisation.
5. Globalisation furthers the spread of democracy in the world.

**Civil Services in the era of Globalisation:**

So, having a detailed discussion on globalisation in this paper, now it can be said that globalisation has brought new challenges for the civil services. With present training and orientation, the civil services would not be able to deliver the desired results in the present context. Some of the important issues in the context of globalisation are –

- Fast pace of globalisation is mainly driven by the rapid advancement of communication technology. Due to this advancement of technology we are talking about ‘global village’. So, at present, for effective and efficient administration use of technology is must. Economic liberalisation has integrated the markets all over the world. Fast and efficient transactions between these markets are possible only through the use of technology. Monitoring of these transactions comes under the domain of public administration. And the use of technology in public administration makes it transparent and accountable. So, now it is necessary to develop our civil services technology savvy. However, recently some compositional changes in civil services are taking place - like increasing numbers of engineers, doctors, management degree holders, and agriculture graduates who are qualifying for these services. This would help in enhancing technical orientation of our civil services.

- In the era of globalisation, the role of the State has changed. Since economic liberalisation has led to – on one hand, the diminishing role of state and on the other hand, increasing role of private sector in the direct economic activities. This has resulted in the marginalisation of a section of society who is economically weak and can’t take advantage of the economic opportunities provided by economic liberalisation. The State will have to take care of this section by making provision of economic (employment programmes), and
social (health, education, etc.) services. Now, State’s main emphasis should be on social sector. For this the State has to change its approach towards governance - looking beyond himself as supreme provider of services to public-private partnership. Civil society can play an important role in this model for provision of services. Civil services have to change their mindset from ‘only government can do’ to ‘government in partnership with the people can do’. However, reservation for weaker section in the recruitment for civil services has made it more egalitarian in character and now we can hope that they would be more accountable and responsible towards the weaker section and the civil society.

- Globalisation has increased the importance of international organisations like UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO, etc. Now, we can’t ignore these organisations otherwise we would be isolated in the new economic-political-social world order. Dealing with these organisations needs professionalism, tough negotiating skill, manipulation skill, etc. So, to avoid becoming a looser while dealing with these international organisations, we have to train and reorient our civil services with skills required for this.

- One of the negative aspect of this globalisation is the phenomenon of terror has become global. Now, terrorism is not confined to a particular geographical location or its propagator are related or confined to a particular location. Our country is one of the worst sufferers of global terrorism. The activities of global terrorist networks have revealed the inadequacy of conventional national security structures based on the modern nation-state system, thus forcing national governments to engage in new form of international cooperation. Use of information technology by these terror organisations and cyber crimes are other aspects in this regard which needs urgent attention. To tackle these dimensions of crime, our civil services need special training.

**Changing Nature of polity and Civil Services:**

In Indian polity we have travelled from single party rule to coalition governments at both central and provincial levels. Without going into its merits and demerits, one can certainly say that – now ruling government has to deal with
conflicting interest arising out of different political aspirations. Different ruling parties try to mould policies to their advantage which may be contradictory. Apart from this, several problems due to their political implications take the shape of dispute which can’t be solved by the political rulers like inter-state water disputes, language dispute, religious dispute, etc. In these situations main responsibility comes on civil services to sort out these problems for unity of the country. Civil services have to be developed in such way that they can find amicable solutions in these circumstances.

**Conclusion:**

Right from the ancient times, civil services has played an important role in the Indian governance system. Modern history of Indian Civil Services starts from the British rule in India. There role has changed over the time. Due to vast power vested in civil services, the success and failures which we have achieved so far are attributed to them. At present, the context in which all the civil services are functioning has been changing very fast. Rapid economic growth has led to a manifold increase in the quantum of work. Performance expectations have increased in terms of both speed and quality. The Government is no longer seen merely as a law enforcer or a controller of national resources. It is increasingly viewed as a provider - albeit an efficient provider - of basic services and public goods. People expect the Government to facilitate growth and development. Globalisation has added different dimensions to the concept of governance. In this context, civil servants have to be prepared to face the challenges arising out of globalisation; they will have to shift their orientation from being controllers to facilitators and from being providers to enablers. They need to equip themselves with the necessary skills and capabilities to meet these new challenges. They need to master new technologies and new styles of functioning.

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References:


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