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Civil Services in India

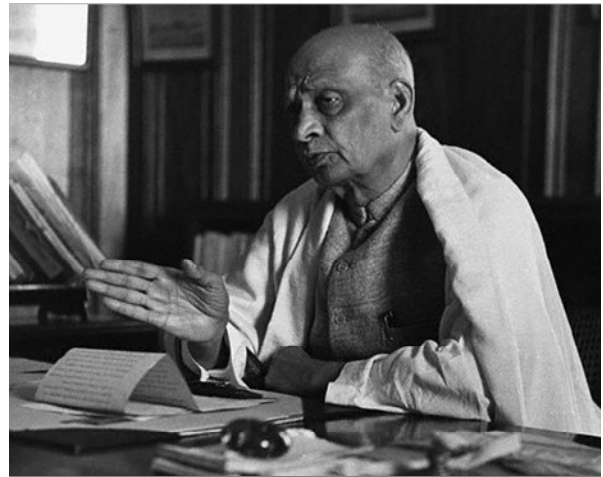
A brief on the Indian Civil Services that includes its history, the responsibilities and the lives of its officers. The article also discusses the career prospects in the civil services sector.

Growing up in a District headquarters, I have to mention the awe and respect I held towards the District collector, a member of the so-called *saahibdom* created by the British rulers of Imperial India. The collector's name would come up in many a different context. Someone invited to hoist the national flag at the district sports stadium on National holidays. The chief guest of honor at the school's annual sports day. He was just about everything – the celebrity, the administrator and the super cop – all rolled into one.

To put things into perspective, the District collector is really like the middle management in a regular corporation. He belongs to the cadre of officers referred to as the Indian Administrative Service or 'IAS' for short. The IAS and the other administrative wings of the Indian Government is one of the features left behind by the colonial administration. Previously referred to as the Imperial Civil Service, and later as the Civil Service of India and finally from 1911 as the Indian Civil Service, this group of officers was the tiny administrative elite of the British. These officers were appointed under section XXXII of the Government of India Act of 1858 in the post 'Sepoy Mutiny' era when the governance of India transferred from the East India Company completely to the Crown in England. Initially these positions

were restricted only to the 'British Sahibs' and the extensive selection process took place in London. The exam was completely in English and it required an extensive knowledge of both British Laws and Indian Geography and culture. It was not until much later that the selection exams were also held in Allahabad and it was not until 1922 when Indians were allowed to be a part of the civil service.

The IAS replaced the ICS and the pre-independence structure of all-India services, provincial or state services and central or Union government services was retained. Despite the initial resentment by Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel towards the arm of governance under the British Raj, at the time of drafting the constitution, the need for this arm was extensively felt. Sardar Patel argued for this wing of the bureaucracy referring to it as the 'Steel Frame' and proposed that this body should be vested with the authority to speak out freely, without any fear of persecution or financial insecurity. Article 312 of the Indian Constitution led to the creation of the All India Services Act of 1951



The IAS receives a constitutional guarantee and is capable of exercising its executive power without fear of persecution. Sardar Patel, a strong proponent of this 'steel frame', considered this an essential element in unifying the nation. (Source: Wikipedia)

and the officers who make it to the All India Services, on appointment by the government of India, will be deputed to different States and are at the disposal of the respective State Governments. These services include the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Police Service (IPS), the Indian Forest Service and the Central Service, which among others includes the most coveted Indian Foreign Service (IFS). Running the administration of a vast and diverse country like India requires efficient management of its natural, economic and human resources and that, precisely, is the responsibility of the civil services. Selection to the civil services in India has still not lost its imperial charm. Tens of thousands of young graduates even today are

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willing to rough it out and chalk their way into the Indian Administration.

Many distinguished bureaucrats who have done well in the services include foreign secretary of India, Ms Choklia Iyer, an Indian Foreign Services (IFS) officer and the first woman to occupy the post in the year 2000 as well as Ms Kiran Bedi, IPS, the super cop who mooted the concept of prison

reform in Delhi's Tihar Jail. Ms Vijayalakshmi Bidari was the topper of the Civil services exams in the year 2001. Dr P C Alexander and Mr. T N Seshan are other well-known IAS officers who rose to positions of prominence.

Civil servants not only rely on their intellectual ability but also on their people skills to be able to deal with situations. A lot of media attention adds enormous

pressure to the day to day work of a civil servant.

With rampant corruption in India, civil servants have to bring with them a lot of personal integrity to get through their job.

I would speculate that my sense of awe and my respect for the District Collectors are more than justified.

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NEWS | Mission to Mars... abort?

Kanna Rajan Quits NASA

Kanna Rajan has quit NASA and has joined the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute as Principal Researcher for Autonomy. The Sandpaper 2.0 team had the opportunity to speak with Dr Rajan about his decision as well as some of his prior experiences and about what lies ahead.

Why did you decide to leave NASA?

NASA is going thru some major upheaval currently. Early 2004 President Bush tasked the agency to return a wo/man on the moon by 2020 to build and ensure a sustained presence on the lunar surface in preparation to go to Mars by 2040. This is, in effect, the first time in 30 years that the agency was destination driven rather than looking around for a way to justify its large \$16 Billion budget in trying fiscal times.

With very large tasks at hand, in a tight fiscal climate with two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) to support and with a looming federal deficit, NASA will more than likely not be able to achieve some of these goals under tremendous budgetary pressure.

To cut a long story short, it seems to me, that in this climate any kind of basic research that NASA used to be doing (far less something like Autonomous Systems [my area of interest]) is going to get the short end of the stick. After a decade of service it seemed to me, I had run out of steam in having to depend on the whims of Congress to fund basic research like what I do, which was being cut across the board anyway.

How is the "Mission to Mars" program proceeding? What repercussions does this have for the broader society?

The robotic missions to Mars are going well. Spirit and Opportunity continue to (after 1.5 years in very hostile conditions) perform well doing excellent science and returning copious amounts of data. Future Mars missions might be in some jeopardy given the tight budgetary conditions. The next rover mission to Mars, the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) in particular is discussing ways to alleviate the financial strain with a potential 2 year postponement of launch (from 2009) by stretching out its monies. Beyond that period it is difficult to predict what the conditions will be like for future robotic missions.

For that matter, the President's vision to go to Mars also appears to suffer from this monetary strain. While the implication of current designs for the CEV are to make ensure it enables a future human-rated Mars mission, the agency is clearly not even thinking of that eventuality at this stage and simply focusing on getting the CEV off the ground by the 2010 dateline. While this is doable, there is widespread disappointment that the agency is squandering