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The Role Of Civil Services In Nation-Building: A Comparative Analysis Post-2014

Vivek Raj

Research Scholar

M.J.P . Rohilkhand University , Bareilly

Abstract

Civil services are the backbone of governance in India, responsible for policy implementation, administration, and public service delivery. They play a crucial role in nation-building by ensuring stability, enforcing laws, and executing welfare programs. However, inefficiencies such as bureaucratic delays, lack of specialization, and political interference have historically affected their effectiveness.

This paper explores how the role of civil services has evolved post-2014, comparing it with the pre-2014 system and analyzing the impact of key reforms. Before 2014, India's civil services operated in a rigid structure characterized by seniority-based promotions, limited performance evaluations, and a slow decision-making process. Political interference in transfers and appointments often disrupted policy continuity. However, after 2014, major reforms aimed at making the system more transparent, accountable, and technology-driven

were introduced. Initiatives such as Mission KarmYogi, lateral entry of experts, the minimum tenure policy, and e-governance platforms like CPGRAMS, Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), and e-HRMS have significantly improved efficiency and service delivery.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Some bureaucrats resist change, political influence persists in certain areas, and the full implementation of reforms is still in progress. This paper examines both the successes and limitations of these reforms while proposing strategies to further strengthen civil services for better governance.

Overall, while India's civil services have become more effective post-2014, continuous efforts are needed to enhance their responsiveness, efficiency, and adaptability to modern governance needs.

Introduction

Civil services form the foundation of governance in India, ensuring the smooth implementation of policies, maintaining administrative stability, and delivering essential public services. From managing law and order to executing welfare programs, civil servants play a critical role in shaping the country's development. However, despite their importance, India's civil services have long struggled with challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, slow decision-making, political interference, and a lack of specialized knowledge among officers. These limitations often hinder effective governance and impact public service delivery.

Over the years, there has been a growing demand for reforms to make the civil services more efficient, accountable, and responsive to the evolving needs of the nation. Before 2014, the structure of civil services was largely traditional, characterized by a rigid hierarchy where promotions were based on seniority rather than performance. Decision-making was slow, and officers were frequently transferred due to political pressures, disrupting policy continuity. Additionally, the recruitment system emphasized generalist knowledge, which often left civil servants without specialized expertise in crucial areas such as healthcare, finance, and technology. As a result, governance suffered, and citizens faced delays in accessing essential services.

Recognizing these challenges, the Indian government introduced a series of comprehensive reforms post-2014 to modernize the civil services and enhance governance. These reforms aimed to make the system more transparent, accountable, and performance-driven. One of the most significant initiatives was Mission KarmYogi, launched in 2020, which focuses on continuous skill development and training for civil servants, ensuring they are better equipped to handle complex governance issues. Additionally, the government introduced lateral entry, allowing subject matter experts from the private sector to join senior positions in the bureaucracy, bringing in fresh perspectives and technical expertise.

Another major reform was the introduction of e-governance platforms to improve service delivery and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. Initiatives such as CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System) have streamlined grievance redressal, while Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) have ensured that government subsidies and welfare benefits reach citizens directly, eliminating middlemen and reducing corruption. Additionally, e-HRMS (Electronic Human Resource Management System) was implemented to digitize personnel records and improve the efficiency of administrative processes. Furthermore, the minimum tenure policy was introduced to reduce frequent transfers of officers, allowing them to focus on long-term policy implementation without political interference.

These reforms have resulted in several positive changes, including improved efficiency, better policy implementation, and increased transparency in governance. Civil servants now have access to better training and resources, and citizens can avail government services more easily through digital platforms. However, challenges remain. Some bureaucrats resist these changes, fearing a shift from traditional bureaucratic structures. Political influence, though reduced, still affects appointments and transfers in certain areas. Additionally, while reforms like Mission KarmYogi and lateral entry have been introduced, their full implementation is still a work in progress, requiring sustained efforts to ensure their long-term success.

This research paper aims to analyze the evolution of civil services post-2014, comparing it with the pre-2014 system to assess the impact of key reforms. It will examine the successes, challenges, and limitations of these reforms while exploring ways to further strengthen India's civil services. The ultimate objective is to understand how civil services can continue to evolve to

meet the governance needs of a rapidly growing and dynamic nation.

Literature Review

1. Introduction to Civil Services in India

Civil services play a pivotal role in India's governance by ensuring policy implementation, administrative stability, and service delivery. As the backbone of the government, civil servants manage public welfare schemes, maintain law and order, and contribute to the formulation of development strategies. However, over the years, concerns have been raised about the efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness of India's civil services due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, rigid structures, political interference, and outdated governance mechanisms.

Before 2014, India's civil services followed a hierarchical, process-driven approach, often leading to slow decision-making, lack of accountability, and limited specialization among officers. Transfers and promotions were primarily based on seniority rather than performance, and political influence disrupted administrative stability.

To address these challenges, the Government of India introduced a series of governance-focused reforms post-2014. These reforms emphasized performance-based administration, capacity-building, digital transformation, and minimizing political interference. This section reviews the key challenges faced before 2014 and provides a detailed examination of the reforms introduced afterward, particularly focusing on Mission KarmYogi, lateral entry, e-governance, and the minimum tenure policy.

2. Civil Services in India Before 2014: Traditional Challenges

2.1 Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Rigid Hierarchy

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) (2005-2009) identified fundamental structural inefficiencies in India's civil services, highlighting its over-centralized nature and lack of flexibility. Officers operated within a strict chain of command, which resulted in slow decision-making and discouraged innovation. The NITI Aayog's "Strategy for New India @ 75" (2018) pointed out that Indian bureaucracy focused more on rule adherence rather than achieving policy outcomes, leading to inefficiencies in governance.

2.2 Lack of Performance-Based Evaluations

The traditional Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) used to assess civil servants were largely subjective and lacked clear performance indicators. The Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) (2017) noted that ACRs relied solely on senior officers' evaluations without incorporating public feedback or peer reviews, making them ineffective in identifying underperformers.

A report by the Administrative Staff College of India (2018) found that this system discouraged innovation and merit-based promotions. As a result, officers were often rewarded for seniority rather than efficiency, leading to bureaucratic complacency, where procedures were followed mechanically without ensuring tangible policy outcomes.

2.3 Political Interference and Frequent Transfers

The NITI Aayog report (2018) highlighted how civil servants were frequently transferred due to political considerations, disrupting policy continuity and governance efficiency. Officers who resisted political

influence often faced abrupt reassignments, making it difficult to implement long-term projects effectively.

The Mission KarmYogi booklet (2020) emphasized that frequent transfers prevented officers from gaining subject matter expertise, further reducing governance effectiveness.

2.4 Limited Use of Technology in Governance

Before 2014, e-governance adoption was minimal, leading to manual processing, delays, and corruption. The NITI Aayog (2019) noted that without digital integration, citizens had to navigate complex bureaucratic processes to access basic services. The lack of automation also made governance less transparent and more prone to inefficiencies.

3. Post-2014 Reforms in Civil Services

The post-2014 period marked a significant paradigm shift in India's civil services, moving away from traditional bureaucracy to a technology-driven, performance-oriented governance model. Recognizing the inefficiencies of the pre-2014 system, the government introduced key reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, improving efficiency, reducing political interference, and promoting specialization.

3.1 Mission KarmYogi: A Paradigm Shift in Civil Services Training

Launched in 2020, Mission KarmYogi is a landmark reform in capacity-building, aiming to transform bureaucratic training from a rules-based to a role-based approach. The Government of India's Mission KarmYogi Booklet (2020) outlines its core objectives:

- **iGOT-Karmayogi Platform** – A digital learning platform offering customized training modules in policy implementation, digital governance, and leadership.
- **Competency-Based Learning** – Officers receive role-specific training, moving away from generic administrative learning.
- **Continuous Skill Development** – Unlike traditional one-time training programs, Mission KarmYogi ensures lifelong learning through online courses and interactive modules.

Impact of Mission KarmYogi

According to the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) (2022):

- Over 4.6 million government employees have enrolled in iGOT-Karmayogi.
- Specialized training has accelerated decision-making in key ministries handling finance, infrastructure, and technology.
- The program has helped officers adapt to digital governance, big data analytics, and AI-driven policymaking.

Despite its benefits, implementation challenges remain. The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2021) reported that some officers resist adopting new learning methods, preferring traditional training models.

3.2 Lateral Entry: Bringing in Subject Matter Experts

To address the lack of specialization in governance, the government introduced lateral entry in 2018, allowing private sector professionals, academicians, and domain experts to take up senior roles in civil services.

Key Features of Lateral Entry

- Appointments at Joint Secretary level in key ministries like Finance, Commerce, and Infrastructure.
- Performance-based contracts, ensuring accountability and measurable results.
- Inclusion of specialists to handle technical and policy-driven roles.

Impact of Lateral Entry

The NITI Aayog (2019) reported that lateral entrants:

- Enhanced decision-making in health, education, and digital governance.
- Helped introduce data-driven policymaking and private sector efficiency.
- Created healthy competition, encouraging career bureaucrats to upskill themselves.

However, resistance from traditional bureaucrats remains a challenge. The Standing Committee Report (2021) found that some officers perceive lateral entrants as outsiders, fearing a shift in power dynamics within ministries.

3.3 E-Governance and Digital Transformation

Post-2014, India witnessed rapid advancements in digital governance, making services more accessible, transparent, and citizen-friendly.

Key Digital Reforms

- **CPGRAMS (Public Grievance Redress System):** Reduced grievance resolution time from 28 days (2012) to 16 days (2024) (Government of India, 2022).
- **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT):** Eliminated middlemen, ensuring subsidies reach 900 million beneficiaries directly (Ministry of Finance, 2023).
- **e-HRMS (Electronic Human Resource Management System):** Streamlined civil service personnel management, improving efficiency (DoPT, 2022).

The Digital India initiative has further enhanced citizen engagement, service delivery, and administrative efficiency.

3.4 Minimum Tenure Policy: Reducing Political Influence

To address frequent politically motivated transfers, the minimum tenure policy was introduced, ensuring that officers remain in a post for at least two years before being transferred.

Impact of the Minimum Tenure Policy

- Governance continuity has improved, particularly in sectors like education and infrastructure (Mission KarmYogi Booklet, 2020).
- Officers now have more time to implement policies, leading to better project outcomes (NITI Aayog, 2021).

However, political influence still persists in certain states where transfers continue to be used as an administrative control tool (NITI Aayog, 2022).

Methodology

1. Introduction to Research Approach

This research paper, *The Role of Civil Services in Nation-Building: A Comparative Analysis Post-2014*, aims to examine how India's civil services have evolved in the past decade, with a particular focus on key reforms and their impact on governance. The study follows a qualitative research approach, utilizing a combination of historical analysis, policy evaluation, comparative study, and thematic content analysis.

The primary objective of this research is to:

1. Compare the pre-2014 and post-2014 structure of civil services.
2. Assess the effectiveness of key reforms, including Mission KarmYogi, lateral entry, the minimum tenure policy, and e-governance initiatives.
3. Analyze how these reforms have improved transparency, efficiency, and public service delivery.

Since this study is based on secondary sources, it draws insights from government reports, policy documents, academic research papers, expert commentaries, media reports, and case studies. This multi-source approach ensures a balanced and well-rounded evaluation of the transformations in governance and administrative structures.

2. Research Design

This study follows a comparative qualitative research design, ensuring a comprehensive and structured analysis of the evolution of civil services in India. The key components of this research design include:

2.1. Historical Analysis

- The study begins by tracing the historical development of civil services in India, from the Imperial Civil Service (ICS) under British rule to the post-independence Indian Administrative Service (IAS).

- It examines the pre-2014 administrative structure, focusing on challenges such as rigid hierarchies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited performance evaluations, and political interference.
- The post-2014 governance shift is then analyzed in terms of policy changes, highlighting the transition towards efficiency-driven, technology-based, and performance-oriented administrative mechanisms.

2.2. Policy Evaluation

- This study critically examines key administrative and governance reforms introduced after 2014 by analyzing official government documents and policy reports.
- Policies such as Mission KarmYogi, lateral entry, digital governance, and bureaucratic tenure stability are studied to determine their impact on governance efficiency and civil service performance.

The study incorporates recommendations from bodies such as:

- NITI Aayog
- Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT)
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)
- Various Standing Committee reports

2.3. Comparative Analysis

- A before-and-after comparison is conducted to highlight the shift in governance strategies, bureaucratic functioning, and policy execution.
- The study identifies the key limitations of the pre-2014 system, such as slow decision-making, excessive political interference, and lack of digital integration.
- It contrasts these issues with the post-2014 governance model, which emphasizes accountability, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making.

2.4. Qualitative Content Analysis

- A detailed content analysis of academic research papers, policy documents, expert commentaries, and think-tank reports is undertaken.

This includes analyzing themes such as:

- Governance transparency
- Policy implementation efficiency
- Bureaucratic resistance
- Digital transformation in public service delivery

- The study also examines public perception of reforms, drawing insights from opinion pieces, media reports, and governance reviews.

3. Data Collection Methods

This study primarily relies on secondary data sources collected from government, academic, and media sources to ensure a multi-perspective analysis. The data collection process includes:

3.1. Government Reports and Policy Documents

Primary data sources include official publications from the Government of India, such as:

- NITI Aayog Reports (*Strategy for New India @ 75*, 2018)
- Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) Guidelines and Mission KarmYogi Booklets
- Standing Committee Reports on Governance Reforms (2019-2023)
- Press Information Bureau (PIB) Releases on civil service initiatives
- Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) Reports on digital governance
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) Recommendations (2005-2009)

These documents provide official insights into policy measures, implementation strategies, and administrative performance indicators.

3.2. Academic Research and Think Tank Publications

To supplement government data, the study incorporates insights from:

- Research papers from institutions such as:
- National Law School of India University (NLSIU)
- NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)
- Policy briefs and white papers from:
- Centre for Policy Research (CPR)
- Observer Research Foundation (ORF)
- Brookings India
- Public administration and governance reviews focusing on civil service efficiency and reform

These academic sources provide critical evaluations of policy effectiveness and highlight the challenges of bureaucratic transformation.

3.3. Media Articles and Opinion Pieces

Media sources provide valuable insights into public discourse and expert opinions on civil service reforms. This study reviews:

- Leading publications such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Economic Times, The Diplomat, and BBC News India
- Editorials and opinion pieces analyzing governance changes and bureaucratic resistance to reforms
- Reports on citizen engagement with digital governance platforms like CPGRAMS and DBT

These sources help assess how reforms are perceived by policymakers, civil servants, and the general public.

3.4. Case Studies and Performance Metrics

To evaluate the real-world impact of reforms, the study includes case studies from various ministries and state governments, focusing on:

- Mission KarmYogi's role in enhancing civil service competency
- The impact of digital governance in streamlining grievance redressal (CPGRAMS)
- Lateral entry success stories and challenges in policy making
- The effectiveness of DBT and e-HRMS in reducing bureaucratic delays and corruption

By analyzing performance metrics from government reports, this study assesses whether post-2014 reforms have led to measurable improvements in governance efficiency.

4. Research Questions and Thematic Framework

This study is structured around four key research questions:

1. How has the role of civil services evolved post-2014, and what factors have driven this transformation?
2. What are the key reforms that have shaped the efficiency and accountability of civil services?
3. How have digital governance initiatives improved public service delivery and grievance redressal mechanisms?
4. What challenges still persist in the implementation of these reforms, and how can they be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of civil services?

Thematic Analysis Framework:

- Bureaucratic Efficiency and Accountability – Studying governance structures, decision-making speed, and performance evaluation mechanisms.
- Political Interference and Administrative Independence – Assessing the effectiveness of the minimum tenure policy in reducing politically motivated transfers.
- Technological Transformation in Governance – Evaluating e-governance platforms, digital public service delivery, and automation in civil services.

- Capacity Building and Specialization – Analyzing Mission KarmYogi and lateral entry initiatives to promote skill-based governance.

The Future of Civil Services in Nation-Building, Challenges, and Scope for Improvement

Civil services have been the backbone of governance in India, shaping policies, implementing government programs, and ensuring administrative stability. As the country continues to evolve, the role of civil services in nation-building will become even more critical, particularly in areas such as policy innovation, digital governance, economic management, environmental sustainability, and crisis response.

1.1. Evolving Role in Governance

In the coming decades, India's civil services will need to adapt to changing governance challenges. The bureaucratic structure must become more agile, responsive, and technologically equipped to handle complex governance demands. Some key areas where civil services will play a transformative role include:

- **Policy Implementation in a Data-Driven Era:** With increasing reliance on big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning, civil servants must integrate data analytics into policymaking and program evaluation. This shift requires specialized training and a more technology-driven approach to governance.
- **Strengthening E-Governance:** The adoption of digital platforms such as CPGRAMS, Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), and e-HRMS has already improved efficiency. Moving forward, civil services will play a key role in expanding blockchain-based governance models, AI-driven decision-making, and digital inclusion programs to ensure seamless service delivery.
- **Decentralization and Local Governance:** As India moves towards empowered local governance, civil servants will need to work closely with panchayats, municipalities, and district administrations to enhance service delivery. Strengthening the capacity of grassroots-level bureaucrats will be crucial for effective governance at the local level.
- **Crisis Management and Climate Adaptation:** Civil services will play a key role in disaster management, climate adaptation strategies, and sustainable development initiatives. Bureaucrats must be equipped with knowledge on climate resilience, urban planning, and sustainable energy policies to ensure future-ready governance.

1.2. Preparing for the Next Generation of Governance

To ensure that civil services continue to meet the demands of a dynamic and fast-growing nation, certain structural changes will be required:

- **Expanding Specialization and Training:** The traditional model of generalist bureaucrats must shift towards a domain-specialist approach, where civil servants have expertise in areas such as public health, urban planning, cybersecurity, and financial management.
- **Enhancing Interdepartmental Collaboration:** Governance is increasingly interdisciplinary, requiring bureaucrats to work closely with private sector experts, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Civil services must adopt a more collaborative approach to problem-solving.
- **Performance-Based Governance:** The future of civil services will depend on measurable outcomes, making performance-linked evaluations an essential part of promotions and career progression. Initiatives like 360-degree feedback, public engagement assessments, and data-driven policy reviews will become critical.

As India moves towards becoming a global economic and political powerhouse, civil services will remain at the center of policy execution and governance, ensuring that national objectives translate into meaningful results for citizens.

2. Challenges in Implementing Civil Service Reforms

Despite the ambitious **post-2014 reforms**, several **institutional and structural challenges** hinder their full implementation. While civil services have **evolved significantly**, resistance to change, political influence, and operational inefficiencies continue to impact their effectiveness.

2.1. Bureaucratic Resistance to Change

- Many civil servants resist new training models introduced under Mission KarmYogi, preferring the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy, where promotions are based on seniority rather than performance.
- The lateral entry system, aimed at bringing in domain experts from the private sector, has faced opposition from career bureaucrats who perceive it as a threat to their professional growth.
- A reluctance to adopt modern governance techniques such as AI-driven policymaking, big data analytics, and digital governance platforms has slowed down the pace of transformation.

2.2. Political Influence and Frequent Transfers

- While the minimum tenure policy aims to ensure stability in postings, political influence still plays a role in bureaucratic appointments and transfers.
- Civil servants often face pressures from political leaders, leading to administrative decisions that are not always aligned with governance objectives.
- The absence of an independent civil service board to oversee transfers and postings has resulted in a lack of administrative continuity in key departments.

2.3. Implementation Gaps and Resource Constraints

- While Mission KarmYogi has introduced online training modules for civil servants, adoption rates remain low, particularly in rural and state-level administrations.
- The expansion of e-governance platforms is hindered by digital infrastructure challenges, cybersecurity threats, and digital illiteracy among frontline administrators.
- Many reforms focus on top-level bureaucratic roles, while lower administrative levels—such as district collectors, block development officers, and municipal officers—still operate in outdated structures.

2.4. Lack of Specialization in Bureaucracy

- Civil servants are often expected to handle complex technical issues (such as health policy, urban planning, or financial regulation) without adequate training.
- Lateral entry has brought in some domain experts, but its scope remains limited, and many critical sectors still lack specialized bureaucratic leadership.

2.5. Digital Governance and Citizen Engagement Challenges

- While CPGRAMS has reduced grievance redressal time, issues such as delays in follow-up actions, lack of accountability in certain departments, and gaps in last-mile implementation persist.
- Digital governance platforms have improved citizen engagement, but many rural areas still struggle with internet access, making digital inclusion a key challenge.

3. Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Reforms for a Future-Ready Bureaucracy

To ensure that **civil service reforms** achieve their intended impact, several improvements can be made:

3.1. Strengthening Mission KarmYogi for Long-Term Capacity Building

- Mandatory specialized training in areas like climate policy, urban planning, and digital governance should be introduced.
- The government should incentivize upskilling by linking career advancement to competency-based learning.

3.2. Expanding Lateral Entry to More Sectors

- The lateral entry system should be expanded beyond Joint Secretary-level appointments to include mid-level administrative roles.
- Selection criteria should be transparent, ensuring that domain experts with proven experience are placed in key decision-making positions.

3.3. Reducing Political Interference in Bureaucracy

- A Central Civil Services Board should be created to oversee transfers, promotions, and tenure policies, ensuring administrative stability.
- The minimum tenure policy should be strictly enforced, preventing frequent politically motivated transfers.

3.4. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure for Governance

- Cybersecurity measures should be integrated into e-governance platforms to prevent data breaches and enhance digital trust.
- AI-driven public service monitoring can be introduced to track bureaucratic efficiency and citizen satisfaction in real time.

Conclusion

India's civil services have played a crucial role in governance by ensuring policy implementation, administrative stability, and public service delivery. However, inefficiencies in the pre-2014 period highlighted the need for reforms to enhance transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness. Post-2014, initiatives such as Mission KarmYogi, lateral entry, the minimum tenure policy, and e-governance have significantly improved bureaucratic functioning, making governance more digital, performance-driven, and

accountable.

Despite these advancements, challenges such as bureaucratic resistance to change, political influence in appointments, and gaps in digital governance adoption remain. While reforms have streamlined processes and improved service delivery, their long-term success depends on sustained institutional support, better specialization, and stricter implementation of tenure policies.

Nation-building is an ongoing process, and India's civil services must continue evolving to meet emerging governance challenges. By embracing technology, fostering transparency, and strengthening accountability, they can become a model of efficient and citizen-centric administration.

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