

General Studies – 2; Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy.

Lateral Entry into Civil Service

1) Introduction

- The Union government has invited applications for 10 Joint Secretary level positions through lateral entry.

2) Need for Lateral Entry

- Civil servants enter public service as generalists and have grassroots realities.
- Building specific domain expertise starts quite late for career bureaucrats.
- Economic and governance changes since 1991 require quick decision making.
- The private sector implementing big ticket projects, subject experts with industry-academia interface and managerial talent that governments must bank on.
- IAS monopolies in ministries like home, S&T, sports, etc and other cadres must also be considered.
- To bring in "fresh ideas and new approaches to governance".
- The present system of 'frequent and arbitrary transfers' hinder gaining of the relevant experience by incumbent officers.

3) Arguments in favour of Lateral Entry

- Expert advice and opinion for efficient administration and fulfilling the aspirations of people.
- Lateral entry into finance ministry produced illustrious public servants like Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Vijay Kelkar.
- They bring in a vast number of fresh & vibrant ideas.
- Outside talent from the private sector is more likely to be target - oriented, which will improve the performance of the government.
- When civil servants are made to compete with outside talent, the lethargic attitude will diminish and induce competition within the system.
- More competition will encourage career civil servants to develop expertise.
- NITI Ayog's experience with lateral entry has been extremely good.

4) Recommendations

- Lateral entry was recommended by Administrative Reforms Commission and various other expert groups.
- The ARC highlights that performance appraisals may be adopted from the armed forces, which could aid in weeding out non-performers.
- In the armed forces, only 3 per cent of officers make it to the grade of brigadier and above — and promotions are based entirely on merit, which fuels excellence.

5) Arguments against Lateral Entry

- Differences in work culture may often come in the way.
- The width and depth of field experience which the civil services provide is not available with outside talent.
- Interests and motivation vary from person to person. Therefore, short term entry of officers through lateral entry might lead to corrupt practices.
- The private sector who ran Air India, Indian Airlines and Vayudoot proved to be failures.

- Lateral entry into civil services undermines reservation policy.
- If a person from a private infrastructure company is appointed in an infra ministry it will lead to questions of morality, ethics and conflict of interest.”

6) Concerns / Challenges

- Lack of transparency, honesty and political interference in the selection process.
- Nobody knows why a particular individual was selected and why others more qualified were left out.
- It is difficult to assess the performance of a secretary to the government due to complex nature of the job. So it would be difficult to measure the performance of lateral entrants.
- If the selection is politically motivated, it may degrade the system.

7) Way Forward

- Lateral entry shouldn't lead to politicisation of bureaucracy.
- Government must also allow deputation of its officers to private sector as well so that they get exposure to market practices and fresh ideas.
- A good managerial system encourages and nurtures talent from within instead of seeking to induct leadership from outside.
- The remedy lies not through lateral induction but through more rigorous performance appraisal and improved personnel management.
- The government can consider lateral entry to head certain mission-mode projects and public-sector entities where private-sector expertise actually matters.
- The process of selection needs to be transparent.
- A credible statutory agency like UPSC should be entrusted with the responsibility of recruitment.