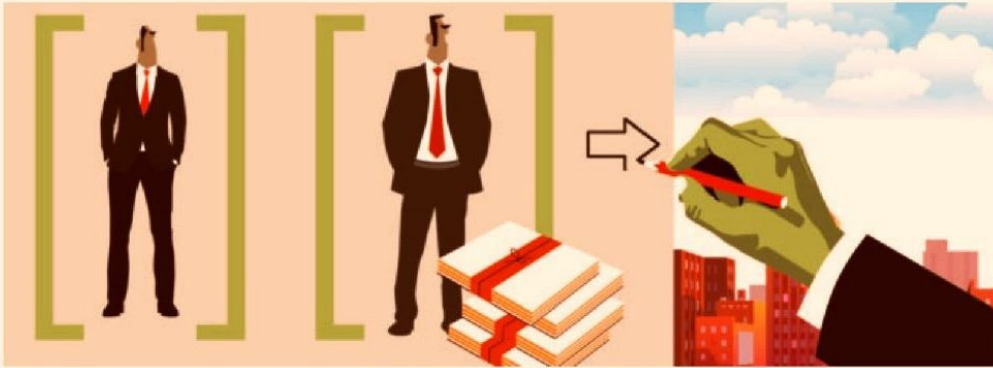


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The provincialisation of All India Services

All India Services were to be all India in character for a purpose. Any dilution of this central tenet should worry policymakers

In the constitutional foundations of the country, and in the actual working of the government, the All India Services (AIS) play a role that requires them to have a genuinely all India character. The extent of this all India character has declined in recent decades. This has adverse effects and has implications for our thinking about the government human resources process and decentralisation.

The working of the civil services loomed large in the imagination of our founding fathers such as Sardar Patel. While we ordinarily think about a Constitution as being about rights of the citizenry (i.e. putting limits upon the coercive power of laws approved by the legislature) and setting the three branches of the state into motion, the Constitution of India is unusual in writing details about the civil service.

The “higher” civil services in India are of three main types. The All India Services (AIS) are those whose members serve both the Union and state governments. Central services are those whose members work under the Union government only. State Civil Services are the higher services of state governments. There are three AISs: The Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Police Service, and the Indian Forest Service. The AIS officers are recruited by the Union Public Service Commission and are allotted to state cadres and have an element of dual control (by the Union and the state governments).

The AIS and its members were designed to be all-India—and not local—in attitude and thinking, for it was intended that the “common national interest

should always prevail over sectional and local claims”. For this reason, the AIS were to occupy key positions at both the national and state levels, and be a source of objectivity and neutrality rising above regional and local pressures, including language, religion, and caste. Officers in the AIS were expected to alternate between the Union government and state governments, so that policymaking at the Union was imbued with a strong sense of practicality gained by actual experience in the field, while policymaking and implementation in the state government was informed by a broader national perspective.

The cadre allotment rules and the central staffing scheme (the mechanism for filling up senior vacancies in the Government of India secretariat) were also respectively designed to serve this objective. The former ensured that a proportion of AIS officers in each state were from other states. The latter provided that officers alternated between the Union and state governments. For example, the Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) represents the number of posts in

the IAS which are meant to be occupied by IAS officers working in the Union government. There are similar mechanisms for the other AISs.

Let us turn to the evidence, and we see some features of the working of the AIS that are incompatible with these objectives. The first problem is the “utilisation of the CDR”. Most state governments have significant IAS vacancies and are not keen to send their skilled officials to the Union. Many officers are happy working in the states and are not keen to work in

Delhi. Overall, the number of IAS officers at the Union now is only about 30 per cent of what it should be with pronounced gaps at the middle management level.

Let’s drill inside the overall average number where about 10 per cent of all IAS officers work at the Union. Many large states have lower values, e.g. UP (6 per cent), Tamil Nadu (7.1 per cent), Rajasthan (5.9 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (7.2 per cent), Maharashtra (7.3 per cent). Smaller states, and north-eastern states, have disproportionately high values. This impedes the policy process to the extent that the big states should be deeply connected into the thinking of the Union with a two-way flow of knowledge and perspective.

In the original vision of the AIS, ideally every single official was expected to spend some time at the Union and some time in the states. In practice, what has worked out is that the AIS have become a dual track system, where certain officials repeatedly go to the Union government on deputation—including this author (!), and most other officials never do. This also reduces the extent of the connection between the Union and state governments.

These developments have an impact on our thinking about Indian federalism. The Constitution of India has an inbuilt federal character. India is a Union of states. By the “subsidiarity principle”, all functions of government are best placed at the lowest possible level, a village or a city or a state, rather than at the Union. From Jawaharlal Nehru onwards, there was excessive centralisation of the Indian state; the Union took on too much power.

In the best of times, the Union is far away from the diversity of India. On a given problem, it is biased towards one single solution, while India is highly diverse and requires a large number of diverse solutions reflecting local conditions. To the extent that the AIS has less of an all India character, this further diminishes the ability of the Union to wield the power that it has amassed. This hampers the policy formulation capabilities of the Union.

The solutions lie in two paths. On the one hand, more decentralisation will help. If the knowledge is in the states and cities, it is better to have them develop and run policy frameworks, instead of having policies designed at the erstwhile Planning Commission or at Union ministries. On the other hand, it would be useful to carry out reforms that improve the all India character of the AIS.

The former is the standard recipe of all thinkers on the Indian state, where excessive centralisation has always been identified as a flawed design. The latter is the subject of civil service reforms. We need to go to the root cause. Why do some civil servants prefer to never work at the Union? What impedes the career strategy of spending a few years in every decade, at the Union? Why is it wise for many chief ministers to not offer their best people to the Union?

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**AARTHIKAM
CHINTANAM**

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