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CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS IN INDIA

~ *Muchkund & Ansh Shukla*

INTRODUCTION

In India, the civil service is the professional backbone of the administrative apparatus and is charged with carrying out the laws, policies, and initiatives that the political administration has developed. In a complex and diversified country, it serves a vital role in fostering socioeconomic development and maintaining administrative continuity. Indian civil services have been widely criticised for their lack of accountability, excessive political meddling, red tape, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption, despite their constitutional importance.¹ In order to maintain the civil services effectiveness, transparency, and focus on the needs of the public, it is now more important than ever to pursue structural, procedural, and ethical changes.

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The goal of India's civil service reforms is to establish a bureaucracy that upholds moral standards and good governance principles while being responsive to the needs of the populace and efficient in implementing policies. Recruitment, training, performance evaluation, ethical standards, and accountability are just a few of the topics that have been the subject of numerous high-profile committees and commissions over the years, such as the Santhanam Committee in 1964, the Hota Committee in 2004, and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission from 2005 to 2009.³ By striking a balance between the necessity of civil servant autonomy and oversight and accountability procedures, these reforms aim to boost public trust in administrative institutions.

Parliamentary supervision, judicial review, executive control, statutory vigilance institutions, citizen charters, e-governance programs, and public engagement tools like the Right to

¹ M.P. Jain, *Indian Administrative Law* (7th ed., LexisNexis 2019).

² I.P. Massey, *Administrative Law* (8th ed., Eastern Book Company 2020).

³ A.P. Sharma, *Bureaucracy and Governance in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012).

Information Act (RTI) are just a few of the many levels at which accountability systems function. ⁴This project explores India's civil services historical development, the legal and constitutional frameworks that have shaped them, reform efforts, accountability systems, obstacles, and opportunities for the future. In a democratic and citizen-centered governance system, the research seeks to offer a thorough grasp of how accountability frameworks and reforms may fortify the civil services.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SERVICES IN INDIA

The Indian Civil Service (ICS), which served as the administrative foundation of British rule in India during the British Raj, is where the Indian civil service got its start. The ICS was created mainly to serve colonial interests rather than the general welfare by guaranteeing central authority over a wide area. Administrative operations were centralised, rigid, and hierarchical, and recruitment was first limited to British nationals through a very competitive exam. Despite the final admission of Indians, the ICS remained exclusive, shielded from public scrutiny, and generally insensitive to local administrative requirements.

This centralised administrative structure was passed down to India after independence, but it was reoriented to conform to the Constitution's democratic ideals. The establishment of All India Services, including the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), and Indian Forest Service (IFoS), which would function under the jurisdiction of both the Union and state governments, was made possible by the All India Services Act of 1951. Implementing policy, preserving law and order, and promoting socioeconomic development while respecting democratic values were the duties assigned to these services. Merit-based hiring, training facilities like the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), moral principles, and administrative professionalism were all prioritised in post-independence reforms.

Early attempts at reform are also included in the historical progression. The foundation for ethical supervision was established in the 1950s and 1960s when the Santhanam Committee was established in response to worries about corruption, inefficiency, and politicisation. ⁵Subsequent reforms aimed to promote citizen-oriented services, integrate technology, and modernise administrative procedures. The ongoing battle to strike a balance between political

⁴ Rao, M.G., *Civil Services and Accountability in India* (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2010).

⁵ Santhanam Committee Report on Corruption (1964).

responsiveness, ethical governance, administrative efficiency, and citizen accountability is reflected in the development of the Indian civil services.⁶

KEY LANDMARKS IN THE EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS

The development of India's civil services did not occur in a single moment; it is the product of more than a century and a half of commissions, statutes, constitutional provisions and judicial interventions. Each stage responded to the administrative needs and political concerns of its time, moving gradually from a colonial instrument of control towards a constitutionally accountable and citizen-oriented institution. The principal milestones are summarised in the table below.

Year	Committee / Measure	Significance
1853–54	Charter Act of 1853 and Macaulay Committee	Introduced open competitive examination for the covenanted civil service, replacing nomination based on patronage.
1886–87	Aitchison Commission	Recommended the classification of services into Imperial, Provincial and Subordinate services.
1912–15	Islington Commission (Royal Commission on the Public Services)	Examined recruitment and the question of Indianisation; recommended reserving about one-fourth of superior posts for Indians.
1924	Lee Commission	Recommended the establishment of a Public Service Commission and a more balanced recruitment of Europeans and Indians.
1935	Government of India Act, 1935	Provided for Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions and statutory safeguards for civil servants.
1950	Constitution of India	Part XIV (Articles 308–323) established the constitutional framework for services, the Union Public Service Commission and State Public Service Commissions.
1951	All India Services Act; Gorwala Report	The Act created the IAS and IPS as common services of the Union and States; the report on public administration stressed integrity, neutrality and freedom from political interference.
1962–64	Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption	Led to the creation of the Central Vigilance Commission in 1964 and to the strengthening of departmental vigilance units.
1966–70	First Administrative Reforms Commission	Reviewed the machinery of government and recommended the institution of Lokpal and Lokayuktas for redressal of citizens' grievances.

⁶ Kohli, A., *Politics of Bureaucracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Year	Committee / Measure	Significance
1976	Kothari Committee	Recommended a three-stage Civil Services Examination (preliminary, main and interview), adopted from 1979.
1988	Prevention of Corruption Act	Consolidated and strengthened the law on corruption by public servants.
1993	Vohra Committee	Examined the nexus between criminal elements, politicians and bureaucrats and recommended stronger intelligence sharing and vigilance.
1998	Vineet Narain v. Union of India	Supreme Court directions on the independence of the CBI and the statutory status of the CVC.
2003–04	Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003; Hota Committee	Gave the CVC statutory status; the Committee recommended training, lateral entry and improved appraisal.
2005	Right to Information Act; Second ARC constituted	Created an enforceable right to information; the Commission produced fifteen reports on governance reform by 2009.
2013–14	Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013; Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014	Established statutory anti-corruption ombudsman institutions and a legal framework for protecting whistle-blowers.
2016	Baswan Committee	Reviewed the Civil Services Examination and made recommendations on the examination pattern and selection process.
2018–20	Lateral entry; Mission Karmayogi	Lateral entry at Joint Secretary level was introduced in 2018; the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (Mission Karmayogi) was launched in 2020.

Read together, these milestones show a clear trajectory: early reforms concentrated on recruitment and structure, mid-century reforms on integrity and neutrality, and more recent reforms on transparency, performance, technology and citizen participation.

CONCEPT AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF CIVIL SERVICES

Professional administrators chosen to carry out government policies, oversee public resources, and guarantee the provision of necessary services make up the civil services. While working for the public, civil workers are supposed to act impartially, remain politically neutral, and preserve moral principles. The legal and structural foundation for civil services is provided by the Indian Constitution, which aims to strike a balance between responsibility and autonomy. Parliament and legislatures in states have the authority to control hiring, appointments, and

terms of service under Article 309.⁷ While Article 311 offers protections against arbitrary firing or disciplinary action, guaranteeing procedural fairness, Article 310 sets the term of civil servants at the will of the Governor or the President. In the event of poor administration or a breach of legal rights, residents can seek remedies through the judicial review of administrative operations made possible by Articles 32 and 226.

The constitutional framework guarantees responsibility to the institutions of democracy and the public in addition to protecting civil personnel from capricious behaviour. This twin goal autonomy for effective operation and oversight mechanisms is necessary to establish a professional bureaucracy that can successfully carry out policies while upholding the values of justice, fairness, and transparency.⁸

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS: A CLOSER LOOK

Constitutional provisions

Part XIV of the Constitution (Articles 308 to 323) deals comprehensively with services under the Union and the States. Besides Articles 309, 310 and 311, several other provisions are significant. Article 312 empowers Parliament to create new All India Services if the Rajya Sabha declares, by a resolution supported by two-thirds of the members present and voting, that it is necessary or expedient in the national interest. Articles 315 to 323 provide for the Union Public Service Commission and the State Public Service Commissions, which conduct examinations for appointment to the services and are consulted on matters relating to recruitment, promotion and disciplinary action. Articles 14 and 16 guarantee equality before the law and equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, thereby placing recruitment and promotion within the discipline of non-arbitrariness.

Article 311 deserves particular mention. Clause (1) provides that no civil servant shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to the one that appointed him. Clause (2) requires that dismissal, removal or reduction in rank be preceded by an inquiry in which the officer is informed of the charges and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard. The second proviso to clause (2), however, permits dispensing with the inquiry in three situations: where the officer has been convicted on a criminal charge, where it is not reasonably practicable

⁷ Singh, A., *Bureaucracy and Accountability in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015).

⁸ Peters, B.G., & Pierre, J., *Comparative Governance: Administrative Reforms Across Democracies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

to hold an inquiry, and where the President or Governor is satisfied that it is not expedient in the interest of the security of the State. The Supreme Court examined these exceptions in detail in *Union of India v. Tulsiram Patel*, holding that the exceptions are constitutionally valid but that their use must be supported by recorded reasons and remains open to judicial review.

Statutory and rule-based framework

The constitutional scheme is supplemented by a body of statutes and service rules. The All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968 and the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969 govern the behaviour and the disciplinary procedure applicable to IAS, IPS and IFoS officers, while the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1965 apply to central civil servants. These rules prohibit, among other things, acceptance of gifts beyond prescribed limits, engagement in trade or business, participation in political activity, and conduct unbecoming of a public servant.

Anti-corruption legislation forms a second layer. The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, as amended in 2018, criminalises the taking of undue advantage by public servants, introduces the offence of giving a bribe, and, through Section 17A, requires prior approval before an inquiry or investigation into decisions taken in the discharge of official functions. The Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003 gave statutory status to the CVC, and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 created an independent ombudsman for allegations of corruption against public servants. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 provides a mechanism for receiving complaints of corruption or wilful misuse of power and for protecting complainants from victimisation, although questions about its full operationalisation and the scope of proposed amendments have been raised repeatedly.

Citizen-facing legislation completes the framework. The Right to Information Act, 2005 enables citizens to demand information from public authorities, while several States have enacted right-to-services laws which guarantee the delivery of notified public services within fixed timelines and impose penalties on defaulting officials. Madhya Pradesh was the first State to enact such a law, in 2010. The Citizens' Charter initiative, adopted by the Government of India after the 1997 Conference of Chief Ministers, and the Sevottam service-delivery model, introduced by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, similarly seek to make administrative agencies answerable for the quality and timeliness of their services.

NEED FOR CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS

There are still issues in spite of post-independence attempts to professionalise civil agencies and constitutional protections. Governance is frequently hampered by bureaucratic inefficiency, which is typified by rigid hierarchies, lengthy decision-making processes, and excessive procedural formalities. The public's trust in the civil service has been damaged by corruption, which can range from small-scale bribes to widespread embezzlement of public monies.⁹ The impartiality and efficiency of administrators are compromised by political meddling in hiring, transfers, and the application of policies. Furthermore, the demands of fast technological and socioeconomic change are becoming more and more difficult for old administrative processes to handle.

Therefore, reforms are required to create a civil service that is not just technically proficient but also accountable, responsive, and focused on the needs of the public. The objectives of these reforms are to decrease corruption, raise ethical standards, increase administrative efficiency, and integrate public input into government procedures. Additionally, they aim to integrate technology, modernise bureaucratic procedures, and maintain the motivation and performance-orientedness of civil personnel.

MAJOR COMMITTEES AND REFORM INITIATIVES

One of the earliest groups to suggest ethical and structural changes to fight corruption in the government service was the Santhanam Committee, which was founded in 1964. It placed emphasis on the establishment of vigilance units, the formulation of moral principles, and the lucidity of the disciplinary procedure. In 2004, the Hota Committee concentrated on strengthening training and capacity-building programs, modernising administrative procedures through technology, bringing subject expertise into bureaucracy through lateral entry, and improving performance evaluation.¹⁰ Merit-based evaluations, openness in hiring and advancement, and expediting administrative processes to cut down on delays were all emphasised in its recommendations.

A thorough foundation for modernising the civil services was provided by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, which operated from 2005 to 2009. It suggested structural changes to hiring and accountability procedures, performance-based appraisal

⁹ Gupta, R., "Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms in India," *Journal of Governance & Public Policy*.

¹⁰ Hota Committee Report, Department of Personnel & Training, Government of India (2004).

systems, moral behaviour standards, citizen-centric government, and openness through e-governance.¹¹ The Commission emphasised the significance of creating independent oversight institutions, encouraging public involvement, and integrating technology. Together, these changes aimed to bring bureaucratic operations into line with ethical governance, democratic norms, and public expectations.

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS IN CIVIL REFORMS

Accountability guarantees that the government, legislature, courts, and citizens are the ones to whom civil workers must answer. Executive control is implemented by disciplinary measures, departmental investigations under Article 311, and performance monitoring. Parliamentary discussions, enquiries, and committees like the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which examines government spending and administrative effectiveness, are all ways that legislative supervision is carried out. One essential tool for maintaining the rule of law and defending citizens' rights is judicial review.¹² The Supreme Court stressed in *Union of India v. Tulsiram Patel*¹³ that the protections provided by Article 311 against arbitrary dismissal must be closely followed. The Court upheld the idea that fair procedure and reasonable expectations are crucial in administrative decision-making in *A.K. Kraipak v. Union of India*¹⁴

Mechanisms for institutional oversight bolster responsibility even more. Although the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) looks into major administrative malfeasance, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) keeps an eye out for corruption and unethical behaviour. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas handle complaints against public officials and offer statutory, independent monitoring. Transparency and responsiveness have been improved by social and technological accountability systems, such as the Right to Information Act of 2005, citizen charters, and e-governance platforms. By giving citizens the option to file grievances, keep an eye on administrative performance, and take part in governance, these technologies promote an honest and accountable society.

JUDICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS SHAPING ACCOUNTABILITY

The judiciary has played a decisive role in defining the limits of administrative discretion and in strengthening institutions of accountability. Besides the decisions in *Union of India v.*

¹¹ Gupta, R., "Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms in India," *Journal of Governance & Public Policy*.

¹² Mohanty, S., "Challenges of Implementing Civil Service Reforms in India," *Indian Journal of Administrative Studies*

¹³ (1985) 3 SCC 398.

¹⁴ (1969) 2 SCC 262.

Tulsiram Patel and *A.K. Kraipak v. Union of India* discussed above, the following judgments have had a lasting influence on civil service governance.

E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu (1974) 4 SCC 3 arose from the transfer of a senior IAS officer and established that arbitrariness is the very antithesis of equality under Article 14. This principle has since been used to test administrative decisions on transfers, promotions and appointments. In **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India** (1978) 1 SCC 248, the Court further held that any procedure affecting a person's rights must be just, fair and reasonable, thereby reinforcing the requirement of fairness in administrative action.

Vineet Narain v. Union of India (1998) 1 SCC 226, popularly known as the *Hawala* case, addressed the failure of investigating agencies to proceed against persons holding high public office. The Supreme Court issued a series of directions to insulate the CBI from extraneous influence, recommended statutory status and a selection procedure for the Central Vigilance Commission, and struck down the 'Single Directive' that required prior government sanction before investigating senior officials. The case led directly to the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.

Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006) 8 SCC 1 laid down directions for police reform, including fixed tenure for key police officers, separation of investigation from law and order, and the establishment of State Security Commissions, to reduce political interference in policing. In **T.S.R. Subramanian v. Union of India** (2013) 15 SCC 732, the Court addressed arbitrary transfers of civil servants and directed the creation of Civil Services Boards, minimum tenures for officers and a practice of recording instructions from political superiors in writing. Together, these decisions strengthen the principle that civil servants should be guided by law and public interest rather than by individual political preference.

Centre for PIL v. Union of India (2011) 4 SCC 1 concerned the appointment of the Central Vigilance Commissioner and held that the integrity of the institution must be the paramount consideration in making such appointments. In **Subramanian Swamy v. Director, CBI** (2014) 8 SCC 682, the Court struck down Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, which required prior approval of the Central Government before inquiry into allegations against officers of the rank of Joint Secretary and above, holding that it violated the equality guarantee of Article 14 by creating an artificial classification among corrupt public servants.

Collectively, these decisions show the judiciary's attempt to balance two objectives: protecting honest civil servants from arbitrary or politically motivated action, and ensuring that those who abuse public office cannot shelter behind procedural protections.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING REFORMS

The development of an entirely accountable, open, and effective public service in India is nevertheless hampered by a number of enduring issues, notwithstanding the numerous reforms implemented over the years. Bureaucratic resistance to change is one of the main challenges. Many top officials are frequently hesitant to embrace new technologies or innovative methods since they are used in conventional hierarchical structures and established processes. Reforms, especially those meant to improve responsiveness and efficiency, are slowed down by this inertia. The effectiveness of reforms is compromised regardless of how policies are enacted if mid-level officials are not motivated to enforce them strictly or do not carry them out faithfully.

The impact of political influences on administrative operations is another major obstacle. Political meddling in job transfers, promotions, and policy choices is widespread in practice, despite the Constitution and legal protections protecting civil officials' neutrality. This damages the morale of committed officers and undercuts merit-based administrative procedures. Although the judiciary has acknowledged the necessity to protect civil personnel against capricious political demands, as seen by well-known judgements like *Union of India v. Tulsiram Patel* (1985) 3 SCC 398, the actual application of these protections is still unequal.

Additional difficulties include insufficient training and capacity shortages. The quickly changing demands of administration, particularly in areas like e-governance, public finance management, and citizen involvement, frequently surpass the current curriculum, despite the fact that training schools such as the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration offer comprehensive programs. Officers stationed in isolated and rural locations might not have access to modern training or assistance, which could lead to regional variations in administrative quality. This is made worse by the lack of focus on moral leadership and responsibility, and the fact that many civil workers are not given adequate training on how to properly handle conflicts of interests, corruption threats, or citizen complaints.

Adoption of technology is still inconsistent between states and districts, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas, even if it is improving in metropolitan areas and higher-level

administrative entities. Even though programs like digital performance tracking, online grievance redressal systems, and e-governance portals have showed promise, their effectiveness is diminished by implementation flaws, limited infrastructure, and low levels of digital literacy among citizens and civil servants. For instance, public involvement and social accountability are hampered in many districts by the low level of citizen understanding and use of RTI portals or online complaints procedures.

The structural problems of corruption and a lack of transparency persist. Effective accountability is frequently hampered by bureaucratic red tape, poor enforcement mechanisms, and delayed investigations, even in the face of vigilance organisations like the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and statutory oversight agencies like the Lokpal. Citizens are also prevented from actively using accountability mechanisms by social and cultural issues, such as deeply ingrained hierarchical views, fear of retaliation, and a lack of civic awareness.¹⁵

Furthermore, the implementation of change is made more difficult by the fragmentation of accountability structures. The very goal of various regulatory and monitoring processes can be undermined by overlapping jurisdiction, which can lead to misunderstandings, hold-ups, and inefficiencies. This issue is made worse by the absence of a common framework for performance reviews across departments and ministries, which results in uneven accountability standards.

To tackle these complex issues, a thorough and coordinated strategy is needed. Enhancing citizen participation, integrating technology with user-friendly interfaces, strengthening institutions, and offering ongoing, region-specific training programs are all crucial. Incentives for exceptional performance combined with a culture of openness and moral leadership can inspire government servants to support reforms.¹⁶ At the same time, encouraging public participation and awareness guarantees that people take an active role in holding administrators responsible. The Indian civil service can only develop into a really accountable and successful organisation that can provide effective governance by implementing a combination of structural, procedural, technical, and cultural reforms.

¹⁵ Central Vigilance Commission, *Annual Reports* (various years).

¹⁶ Planning Commission, *Report on Public Administration and Governance in India*, 2008.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Efficiency, openness, and accountability have become more and more important in India's civil service reforms in recent years, reflecting the changing expectations of the populace in a democracy. The implementation of performance management systems in government agencies has been one of the major advancements. With the goal of moving the emphasis from procedural compliance to quantifiable results, these systems include indicators of performance (KPIs), result-oriented assessments, and connected promotion schemes.¹⁷ Supervisors can evaluate individual and departmental performance thanks to the Performance Appraisal Reports (PARs) utilised by All India Services, which now place an emphasis on measurable accomplishments, contributions to the implementation of policies, and citizen satisfaction. These initiatives aim to reduce inefficiencies and bureaucratic slackness while inspiring civil officials to increase productivity.¹⁸

The quick development of digital governing platforms is another noteworthy improvement. Initiatives like Digital India, the Government of India's e-Government Program, and online grievance redressal platforms have increased openness, encouraged public involvement, and expedited administrative procedures. Digital systems make it possible to manage public complaints, keep an eye on service delivery, and report departmental performance in real time. By allowing citizens to file grievances and follow their resolution, programs such as the Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (PGRAMS) have greatly improved accountability while lowering the likelihood of corruption and delay. Better data collection and analysis have been made possible by technological adoption, which supports policymaking based on evidence and performance evaluation.

Another important change is the lateral entry plan, which was implemented to bring domain expertise and specialised knowledge to the bureaucracy. The government aims to fill knowledge shortages, encourage innovation, and improve policy execution by permitting experts from the commercial sector, academia, and civil society to hold mid- and senior-level administrative jobs. A move towards more adaptable and contemporary administrative procedures is reflected in this program, which empowers the civil services to tackle intricate problems in fields including environmental governance, technology, healthcare, and finance.

¹⁷ All India Services Act, 1951.

¹⁸ Institute of Public Administration (IPA), *Civil Service Reform Reports*, New Delhi, 2010.

Additionally, capacity-building initiatives have been given top priority, with officers receiving ongoing training to improve their leadership abilities, administrative prowess, ethical awareness, and flexibility in the face of changing governance issues. Organisations like the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), state-level training centres, and specialised courses on ethics, public administration, and e-governance give officers the skills and information they need to efficiently meet the demands of dynamic government. In line with the overarching objective of establishing a flexible and accountable bureaucracy, training programs are placing an increased emphasis on ethical governance, citizen involvement, and creative administrative practices.

Future reforms must prioritise fostering inclusive governance and increasing citizen participation. Promoting public participation in policy formulation, service oversight, and grievance resolution guarantees the administration's continued sensitivity to social demands and strengthens its credibility. Ensuring fair and efficient scrutiny of civil servant behaviour requires bolstering the autonomy and effectiveness of oversight organisations like the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Lokpal, and state-level Lokayuktas. Building public trust and reducing corruption also depend on promoting openness through programs like the Right to Information Act (2005), citizen charters, and open data projects.

Integrating technological advances, performance-based management, and changes in institutions is essential to establishing an accountable civil service, according to comparative studies with modern democracies. Successful implementations of e-governance platforms, citizen feedback mechanisms, and performance management frameworks have improved efficiency in administration and public trust in nations including the UK, Singapore, and Canada. India can learn from these models and modify them to fit its sociopolitical environment in order to preserve administrative autonomy and increase accountability. To guarantee fair and efficient execution across states and districts, reforms must also address structural issues such as unequal technological uptake, reluctance to change, and capacity gaps.

In conclusion, recent events show that India is on the right track to having a modern, accountable, and responsive civil service. To achieve the dual goals of governmental efficiency and ethical governance, it will be essential to maintain the focus on performance evaluation,

technological integration, specialised knowledge, capacity-building, public participation, and institutional independence.¹⁹ In order to ensure that civil services continue to be able to provide efficient, open, and accountable public administration, future reforms must also adopt flexible approaches that address new governance challenges like urbanisation, digital transformation, and complicated socioeconomic issues.

MISSION KARMAYOGI AND OTHER RECENT INITIATIVES

Several initiatives of the last decade deserve separate attention because they reflect a shift from rule-based to role-based and competency-driven administration. The National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, known as Mission Karmayogi, was launched in September 2020 with the aim of building a civil service with the right attitude, skills and knowledge, aligned to the vision of New India. The Programme is supported by a Capacity Building Commission and by the iGOT-Karmayogi digital learning platform, which allows officials at all levels to access courses at their own pace. Its competency framework identifies behavioural, functional and domain competencies for each role, so that training is linked to what a position actually demands rather than to seniority alone.

Performance monitoring has also been strengthened through technology. The PRAGATI platform (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation), launched in 2015, brings together senior officials of the Union and the States for the review of major projects and grievances. The Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) enables citizens to lodge complaints online and to track their disposal, while the Aspirational Districts Programme, started in 2018, uses data-driven ranking to encourage competitive improvement in health, education, agriculture and basic infrastructure. Digital delivery models such as Direct Benefit Transfer have reduced the discretion of intermediaries and thereby the scope for leakages.

Reforms in personnel management include the introduction of 360-degree appraisal for empanelment of officers to senior positions in the Government of India and the periodic review of officers' service records under the relevant service rules, which permit compulsory retirement in public interest after a prescribed length of service or age. Lateral entry was first introduced in 2018, when applications were invited for Joint Secretary level posts from outside the regular civil services. The scheme has attracted both support, on the ground that it brings

¹⁹ Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), Government of India, *Annual Reports on Civil Services* (various years).

specialised expertise, and criticism, on the ground that it may affect transparency, representation and career incentives within the permanent civil service. A 2024 advertisement for further lateral entry posts was withdrawn after the Government asked the Union Public Service Commission to cancel it, which illustrates that the policy continues to be debated.

COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

A comparison with other democracies helps to place India's reform efforts in perspective. No single model can be transplanted, but several features offer useful lessons.

United Kingdom. The modern British civil service traces its origin to the Northcote–Trevelyan Report of 1854, which recommended recruitment through open competition and the separation of political and administrative roles. The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act, 2010 placed the civil service on a statutory footing and established the Civil Service Commission to safeguard selection on merit. The Civil Service Code requires integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality, and the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership), formulated in 1995, apply to all holders of public office.

Singapore. Singapore's public service is widely regarded as a model of meritocracy and integrity. Its Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, established in 1952, has wide powers of investigation and reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office. Public officers are paid competitively, with remuneration benchmarked against the private sector, on the reasoning that adequate pay reduces the temptation of corruption, and strict penalties are applied to those who violate ethical norms.

Canada. Canada combines an independent Public Service Commission, responsible for protecting merit-based and non-partisan appointments, with the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, 2005, which provides a channel for reporting wrongdoing and protection against reprisal. The Management Accountability Framework used by the Treasury Board Secretariat assesses departmental performance against defined indicators.

United States. The Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 ended the spoils system in federal employment by introducing competitive examinations, and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 created the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Office of Personnel Management and the Senior Executive Service. Whistle-blower protection legislation provides further safeguards for employees who disclose wrongdoing.

The common elements in these systems are statutory protection of merit, an independent body to oversee recruitment, clear codes of ethics, protection for whistle-blowers, and published performance information. India's own framework already contains many of these features in some form; the challenge lies in strengthening their independence and consistent enforcement.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITY INSTITUTIONS AT A GLANCE

The institutions that together enforce accountability over civil servants operate at different levels and through different legal sources. The table below summarises their basis and principal function.

Institution	Legal Basis	Principal Function
Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and State PSCs	Articles 315–323, Constitution of India	Conduct recruitment examinations; advise on recruitment rules, promotions and disciplinary matters.
Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)	Article 148, Constitution of India	Audits government accounts and expenditure and reports to Parliament and State Legislatures.
Public Accounts Committee (PAC)	Parliamentary rules of procedure	Examines audit reports and the economy and efficiency of public expenditure.
Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)	CVC Act, 2003	Exercises superintendence over vigilance administration and over the CBI in corruption cases.
Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)	Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946	Investigates corruption, economic offences and other serious crimes referred to it.
Lokpal and Lokayuktas	Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013	Inquire into and investigate complaints of corruption against public functionaries.
Central and State Information Commissions	Right to Information Act, 2005	Hear appeals and complaints and enforce citizens' right to information.
Administrative Tribunals	Article 323A; Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985	Adjudicate service disputes of civil servants, subject to judicial review by High Courts.
Supreme Court and High Courts	Articles 32, 136 and 226, Constitution of India	Exercise judicial review of administrative action and enforce fundamental rights.
Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)	Executive allocation of business	Coordinates administrative reforms, citizen charters and the CPGRAMS grievance platform.

WAY FORWARD: DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the analysis of challenges and recent developments, the following measures may be considered for strengthening accountability and reform of the civil services.

1. Security of tenure and transparent postings. Civil Services Boards, as directed in *T.S.R. Subramanian*, and minimum tenure norms should be implemented uniformly in the Union and the States, with reasons recorded for premature transfers, in order to protect officers from arbitrary political pressure.

2. Objective and transparent appraisal. Performance Appraisal Reports should be linked to measurable outcomes, supported by multi-source (360-degree) feedback, and disclosed to the officer concerned to allow fair representation. Common appraisal standards across departments would reduce the present unevenness.

3. Independent and well-resourced anti-corruption bodies. The Lokpal and all State Lokayuktas should be provided with adequate staff, budgets and investigative capacity, and appointments to the CVC, Lokpal and Information Commissions should follow transparent, time-bound procedures.

4. Effective whistle-blower protection. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 should be fully operationalised, and secure channels should be created through which officials and citizens may report wrongdoing without fear of retaliation.

5. Faster and fairer disciplinary processes. Time limits for departmental inquiries, better use of technology in recording evidence, and more consistent follow-up of vigilance recommendations would prevent delay from defeating accountability while retaining the safeguards of Article 311.

6. Capacity building and continuous learning. Mission Karmayogi and training institutions such as LBSNAA and State administrative training institutes should emphasise ethics, public finance, data literacy, and sensitivity to citizens, with special attention to officers posted in remote and rural districts.

7. Technology with inclusion. E-governance systems should be interoperable, user-friendly and available in regional languages, and should be accompanied by digital-literacy programmes and assisted-service facilities so that disadvantaged citizens are not excluded.

8. Citizen participation and social audit. Social audits, public hearings, citizen report cards and right-to-services laws should be expanded, giving communities a formal role in monitoring the delivery of services and the conduct of officials.

9. A culture of ethics and leadership. Codes of conduct, conflict-of-interest rules and asset-declaration norms should be taught and enforced as living standards, and exemplary officers should be recognised to build an administrative culture in which integrity is rewarded.

10. Outcome measurement and independent evaluation. Departments should publish service-delivery indicators and outcome data, and independent evaluation of major reforms should be undertaken regularly so that policy is based on evidence rather than assumption.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As the enduring executive branch in charge of enforcing laws, implementing policies, and providing services, the civil services play a crucial role in India's democratic governance. Their responsibilities go beyond simple administration; they also have an impact on socioeconomic development, shape the connection among the state and its population, and guarantee that governance continues throughout political cycles. A number of reforms have been implemented throughout the years in an effort to modernise the bureaucracy and make it more accountable, transparent, and efficient. Merit-based hiring, legislated ethical standards, improved performance evaluation systems, citizen-centric service delivery, and structural inefficiencies have all been addressed by these reforms.

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A multi-layered structure that includes executive controls, statutory vigilance organisations, judicial monitoring, legislative supervision, constitutional provisions, and citizen-centric initiatives upholds the accountability of government workers. Constitutional provisions like Articles 309 to 311 balance public accountability with civil servant authority by guaranteeing procedural fairness and providing legal protections. Judicial interventions have strengthened the concepts of natural justice, legitimate expectation, and protection against capricious administrative conduct, particularly in cases like *Union of India v. Tulsiram Patel* ²¹ and *A.K. Kraipak v. Union of India* ²². Legislative supervision, which examines the executive's spending and performance through legislative concerns, debates, and committees like the Public

²⁰ Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), Government of India, *Annual Reports on Civil Services*.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

Accounts Committee, supports these procedures.

Statutory organisations like the Lokpal/Lokayuktas, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC),²³ and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) offer independent scrutiny of administrative behaviour and anti-corruption measures in addition to conventional accountability methods. Transparency and responsiveness have been further reinforced by social accountability measures such as the Right to Information Act (2005), citizen charters, grievance redressal systems, and e-governance projects. A move towards more democratic and participatory administration is reflected in these tools, which enable citizens to keep public officials accountable, guarantee service standards, and actively participate in governance.

Notwithstanding these developments, a number of obstacles still stand in the way of the establishment of a completely responsible and efficient public service. Persistent challenges include political meddling, corruption, uneven technology uptake, bureaucratic slowness, opposition to change, and uneven reform enforcement. These difficulties highlight the necessity of long-term, comprehensive reform plans that address administrative culture and behaviour in addition to structural and procedural issues. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to strengthen ethical governance, encourage meritocracy, and develop incentives for creativity and achievement.

Going forward, an integrated strategy that incorporates institutional development, capacity training, technological integration, and citizen involvement will be necessary for the effective implementation of reforming the civil service and accountability systems. Civil servants will be better prepared to handle the challenges of contemporary governance through ongoing training programs, professional development projects, and leadership development efforts. Furthermore, the development of India's bureaucracy can benefit from comparative observations from other democratic countries that have effectively adopted frameworks for citizen monitoring, e-governance, and performance-based management.

To put it simply, the civil services need to develop into a responsive, competent, and citizen-focused organisation that can handle the problems of modern governance. To achieve this, it is essential to fortify accountability systems, guarantee moral behaviour, incorporate technology,

²³ Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

encourage public involvement, and maintain institutional reforms. In the twenty-first century, India's civil service can only preserve public confidence, improve administrative effectiveness, and preserve the values of democracy, openness, and good governance by taking a thorough, multifaceted approach.