

## Fundamentals of Main examination: Analytical ability-5

Friends, in the last four parts I have discussed in detail how students preparing for civil services, especially those aspiring to become IAS officers, should develop the ability to analyse. You have been told what analytical ability is, its various aspects and how much and what you should study to gain this ability. You have also been told the psychological aspects of preparing yourself for IAS studies. In this chapter, I will discuss another aspect of psychology. I will discuss practical elements that will help hone your analytical skills.

You should understand that whether you like it or not, whether you can achieve it or not, you have no option but to develop an analytical ability which will help you write correct answers and get your name on the list of successful candidates. If you develop this ability it is possible that even if you lack other skills, you may still get selected. But it is not possible for you to succeed if you lack analytical ability, even if you have all the other skills. The ability to give everything a personal touch of your analysis to make it shine through is what is most important in civil services.

In the last part we learned about Observation and Interaction in this context. Now let me talk about the third aspect – open-mindedness.

### Open-mindedness

This seems like a very simple thing. In fact it may seem funny to you that I'm mentioning it here. This is because everyone thinks that they are open-minded. But this is far from truth. If everyone had an open mind half the problems of this world would be solved. Think about this – is not terrorism which has threatened the whole world linked to mental state of the perpetrators?

To be open-minded while we are talking, reading, listening or socialising is a challenge. Our upbringing, culture, tradition and outlook towards life are just some of the things which affect the open door of our brain, pushing it slowly until it draws to a close. This leads us to have a set opinion on things and we evaluate everything based on this. Our thoughts are the sharp weapons that help us overcome tough circumstances. However, these weapons can also backfire and threaten us. We get affected by this but fail to notice due to the lack of an open mind. If there was only one way to look at a situation then why would the need for analysis arise?

There are numerous viewpoints that people will have on a given situation. These opinions set intellectual standards which decide how intelligent and strong someone is. This is the reason we find many and completely opposite opinions on the same issue. Let us take a recent incident as an example. A BBC director made a documentary on the Nirbhaya rape case. This divided people into two categories – those who thought it should be broadcast and those who thought it should not be broadcast. The Indian government as well as many other institutions believed that it should not be broadcast. The government banned the documentary from being broadcast in India. However, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the director of the documentary and some intellectuals in India and the Editor Guild believed the documentary should be broadcast. This happened because everyone has a different criterion to evaluate things. People assess everything using their own criterion and then come to a conclusion.

From the perspective of civil services, this raises a question. Should you agree with the first category of people or go with the second? There is also another option that you listen to both sides and carve out a third path for yourself. This is where the issue of open-mindedness comes in. You cannot deny being in one of the above mentioned categories, even if it may have happened subconsciously. You should think about it and try to

examine why you have sided with one category when you don't even have anything to do with the documentary. You are biased towards one category without even realising. This has happened without you putting much thought into the situation. When you try to understand why something like this has happened, you will then understand how open-minded you actually are. You might realise after this that if your mind is not completely closed it is on the verge of shutting down.

Friends, the challenge posed by civil service is that it can judge how open-minded you can be about a subject. You may forget that if you have decided to be a civil servant, you have not decided to spend your life doing a prestigious job with lots of comforts and perks; instead you have decided to accept public responsibility. If you ponder over this then you will understand the pattern of questions in civil services exams. Whether it is the government or the society, they do not want to hand over their life and future to someone who is so narrow minded that he is a slave to his own thoughts and habits, which leaves no scope for anything else. Would you want it?

Let us discuss what open-mindedness is and how it can be maintained. I would like to give you an example our former President Shankar Dayal Sharma would often give during his speeches and talks. Under 10 years of his tutelage I observed that he would not only tell this to other people but also live by this principle. He said, 'Let knowledge from the world flow in.' He believed that one should be open to all ideas. He said that you should never believe so deeply in a thought that it becomes the backbone of your thought-process. Knowledge is infinite. It has no end. Everyone perceives truth in their own way. For example if two people are facing each other and they are asked in which directions their right hands and left hands are facing, their answers will be different even though the directions are the same.

There is no culture so great that all the other cultures should be regarded inferior to it. There is also no culture so detestable that its followers should be regarded with contempt. When one realises that culture is formed not by people but by their geographical locations, their mind starts opening up.

Friends, I have discussed some methods that can help free your mind from the shackles of narrow-mindedness. Once your mind is free your conscience will see everything in a new light. Maybe for the first time you will be able to realise the power of your mind that lies hidden. For the first time you will also experience X-ray vision that can penetrate ordinary incidents and observe things that no one else can. Don't you believe that if this happens you will become unique? Whenever you write an answer it will be different than the answers written by other people. If you believe this is true then you should also determine that this is something you will have to do.

I would like to narrate a small incident regarding this. I prepare a 30-35 minutes daily audio lecture and upload it on the website [www.afeias.com](http://www.afeias.com). I get different responses every day. The most interesting reaction was by one person who said, "Whatever you tell us here, we already know that. What is new here? Why should we listen to this?" I would like you to ponder over this student's reaction with an open mind and analyse this seemingly ordinary event. Perhaps, you will understand the key motive of this article. For your convenience I will mention a few things.

Firstly, this audio is free. It is not mandatory for you to listen to it under some UPSC guideline. Therefore, there is no need to ask me why you should listen to it. It is obvious that this question has been asked in antagonism, reaction or protest. I also don't understand the meaning of 'we' here. Just because you know something does not mean that everybody knows. The third thing that I think is important in the context of this article is that "one who says I know, actually does not know anything." This phrase is a slight variation of the phrase by Greek philosopher Socrates who said – "Everyone in Greece is foolish. Only I'm intelligent because I'm the only one who knows that 'I don't know anything.'"

Since Socrates knew that he didn't know anything he was able to gain so much knowledge. A ripe mango starts rotting. A closed mind shuts down all possibilities of its development.

I would just like to tell you that you should keep your mind from falling prey to a particular belief. Let all the thoughts enter your mind. Once a thought enters your mind, analyse it. After a scientific process filter the thoughts that are of no use to you. But do not internalise the thoughts that you are left with so that you can never discard them. Let your mind adapt to change. You know that still water turns dirty even if it was very pure in the beginning. It turns into sludge which leaves a dark imprint on the ground forever. You know the nature of running water.

### **Tools of analytical ability**

You must have read a lot of books. You must have heard a lot of people speak. Why don't you think about which books have left an impression on you and which lectures influenced you. Focus on my words. I'm not talking about 'liking' something. I'm talking about influence. These are two different things. It is possible that the lecture you heard was given by an excellent orator. His language was interesting. The way he spoke was fascinating and he often cracked jokes and narrated anecdotes. You liked him in the way you like a singer at a concert. But this fails to leave an impression. This is a kind of entertainment. But influence goes deeper and directly stimulates the brain. It would leave you awestruck. After listening to it, you were compelled to think about it. You were full of respect for that person's talent. Our brain has observed some facts that it would remember for a long time. You were so strongly impressed that it reflects on your thoughts and behaviour.

Students who are sincere about preparing for IAS should imbibe the difference between 'liking' something and getting influenced by it. I'm not talking about merely understanding the difference but imbibing it. This truth about civil services should enter the depths of your soul. You will not get a good score if the examiner just 'likes' your answer, it needs to impress him.

Remember, you cannot impress a person with your good looks or sweet talking. You cannot use superficial knowledge or illusions to impress someone either. Your sweet tongue or a huge vocabulary is not going to help. The number of words you can write is also not going to matter. The only thing that matters in civil services is how you can capture the essence of something and present it logically. Forget trying to cajole the examiner just like parents try to persuade a stubborn kid. It's obvious then that you need logic and essence, and this is derived from facts. You can also refer to this as analytical ability or raw material. We will talk about this in the next issue.

**NOTE: This article by Dr. Vijay Agrawal was first published in 'Civil Services Chronicle'.**