

Common sense in Civil Services-1

I know that my topic must have definitely shocked you. Of what use is common sense in civil services! One has to study for years to crack civil services. They have to study for many hours at a stretch. Read as many books as you can. Then only you can think of cracking the exam. But even then you can't be sure whether you will qualify the exam.

Because of the dangerous myths surrounding civil services you must think that a discussion on this topic is futile. My suggestion is that before you read this article you should get rid of this web of myths. For this, you just have to answer some questions that I have mentioned below. Your answers should be real, don't just ask other people and believe what they say.

The questions include:

1. Do all studious people succeed in the exam?
2. Who are those people who qualify in their first attempt at the age of 22?
3. Why do science students have a better chance of succeeding than those belonging to arts background even though they are not very good at essays and general studies?
4. What is the reason that in the list of successful candidates 50 percent students are those who have scored second or even third division during exams?

Correct answers to these questions will throw more light on what are the requirements of civil services. You need the correct equipment to operate a machine.

Many times students ask me, "Sir, do you think I will be able to crack the exam?" I tell them that they can crack the exam if they have two qualities. Firstly they should have the ability to analyse and secondly they should have common sense. They usually get surprised on hearing "common sense." What is the use of common sense in this special exam, they think. I feel it is this mistake that can cause their journey to become not impossible, but difficult. Now, it is up to you which way you choose – the knowledge-based difficult path or the path of analysis and common sense which is an easier way.

I have already discussed the ability to analyse in great detail. I will now discuss "common sense." This discussion will not be about the general aspects of common sense but only those aspects that are relevant from the point of civil services.

What is common sense? I know you are aware of what common sense is, even if you do not know this in detail. Not just you, but almost everyone knows about this. An average person illustrates this at least once a day when they tell someone, "You fool, you don't even know this?" Here, what the person means to say is this: 'You don't even have common sense.' This explains that everyone not only talks about common sense but also uses it. One expects that others are also using common sense. Now you know why it is called 'common' sense. You can now also understand why it is called 'common' sense and not 'general' sense. Is there no difference between common and general? If you know the difference, then you would know the difference between common sense and general studies. It is very important to differentiate between the two. This will be discussed later.

Now let me discuss 'sense'. Sense means our five sense organs: skin (touch), nose (smell), ear (hearing), eyes (sight) and tongue (taste). Our five organs connect us to the world. The sense that we are talking

about right now is connected to these but it is quite different. It is different in the sense that it is not one of the five senses; rather it is an amalgamation of all five senses. Let us understand this in detail.

All our five senses do their respective work. The smell of good food triggers hunger. We are mesmerised by beautiful sights and start humming and dancing to the beats of our favourite song. You can see two mechanisms at work here. First is the act of smelling. This was carried out by the nose. If your nose is not functional then you cannot smell. This sometimes happens when you catch a cold. The second mechanism is that of feeling hungry, mesmerised and humming and dancing. Who carried out this process? It is not the nose, the ears or the eyes. It is the job of the brain to do so. The brain first absorbs the smell, sights and sound and then converts it into signals for different body parts. The body part then obediently follows the orders. This is why we feel hungry, mesmerised and sometimes hum.

We need our senses to be fully functional. If even one of our senses malfunctions it could disrupt the entire process. You cannot smell when you catch a cold, similarly if the mind is tensed your appetite will be reduced. Have you noticed that during exams when the mind is stressed, you don't feel hungry? When we are depressed and grieving do we dance to the tune of our favourite song? No.

To enjoy all the five senses, it is important that

- All our senses are healthy
- Our mind is balanced and calm

The thing that I'm going to talk about now is not related to common sense directly but I think this is a good time to discuss it. I would like to apologise for digressing towards this short but important topic.

All of us are worried about our brains. We feel that it does as it pleases. It doesn't cooperate. We want to study but it suggests watching a film instead. It makes us wander. But is this a valid question? We need to find an answer to this.

For example, Anjali is pure vegetarian. She dislikes the smell of non-vegetarian food being cooked. She stays away from the odour. If she happens to smell fish being cooked she feels nauseated. Will her sister Pankaja, who loves meat, also react the same way to these situations? Pankaja loves fish the most, so much so that she is ready to cook it also. She likes to savour not just the dish but also the odour that emanates while cooking it.

These are both real-life situations. This is the science behind our senses and our brain. Think about this with sincerity and patience. You will find the truth. You will realise that the brains of both the sisters are signalling to the senses only what they actually want. Don't you think our brain is our truest slave? The problem lies not with the brain, but with us. It arises from what it is that we want. We want something else but pretend we want another thing. Our brain is super intelligent; it has many years of experience. It doesn't get fooled by our tricks. It can figure out what it is that we actually want and then do the same thing.

After explaining the above idea to you, now let me come to the meaning of sense that we all are familiar with. The sense that we are talking of here is not the one clearly derived by our organs. This happens in the case of animals but even then it is not very authentic. Our brain plays a major role in the 'sense' involved in 'common sense'.

We cannot experience any of the senses without our brain. But here the role of the brain is not limited to signalling body parts to carry out a desired task. What is this extra work that the brain has to do?

- Our brain stores all experiences of the senses.
- It converts the experiences into knowledge.
- It reaches a conclusion based on experience-based knowledge.

It is these conclusions and wisdom which we call common sense. We call it practical knowledge or common knowledge etc.

It is obvious that we don't need a formal education to attain it and we don't need to memorise books. This sense develops on its own after we understand nature, stay in society or struggle in life. We found this common sense in our illiterate grandmothers who understood the art of life better than anybody else. A farmer in a remote village may not know that agriculture starts with an 'A' but he does know all the tricks to get the best produce. You may not believe me, but I'm telling you the truth. I spent 18 years of my life in a village. I spent my days gazing at the sky and the clouds and I understood nature so well that I could predict when it would rain and for how long. As a result, the farmers would enquire me about it. In fact even my parents and neighbours would ask me about the weather so they could decide whether they should do laundry or wash the grain to make flour. Both these activities required a sunny day. I had gotten used to different hues of the clouds, their myriad shapes, and their behaviour so that it was easy for me to predict what would happen. This is common sense.

So if we want we can give common sense a better and more literary name. Should we call it 'realisation' (*Bodh*)? You decide this. Gautam Buddha's entire philosophy and his life were based on this realisation. This is why he was called 'Buddh', and not because he was very intelligent. This kind of common sense has no match.

The last thing that I want to mention is that this common sense would belong to one person i.e. it could be your common sense, my common sense, his common sense, but it is still collective. So you can safely say that though everyone has common sense, it is still a collective unit. I would liken its structure to an orange. An orange is a singular entity but it contains 10 to 15 slices which are all quite different. Common sense is common among all. This is what 'common' means here.

We will continue this discussion.

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