

Civil Services Examination: Easy or Difficult?

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If I were to ask how easy or difficult you thought the civil services exam was, I know not just you, but almost everyone would say – “difficult”. Yes, but if I were to question further and ask how difficult do you think is the exam, the answer won’t be unanimous. For some, it may even be hard to explain the level of difficulty. Let us think a little more on this situation.

Generally, the answers to some of the basic questions arise from our beliefs and notions. And the tricky part is that, what we call “our thoughts”, “our beliefs” and even “our experiences” is actually never “ours”. It’s what the society thinks or what a group of people around us believe. Most of the time, I am living under a misconception of conventional notions which I call “mine”, but I am actually not a part of it.

Now, try to apply the above statement to the question asked earlier. Some funny facts will certainly come to light. Don’t you think that since you have always heard about “the difficult civil services exam”, even you have started saying that it is difficult? Here, I am not talking about a layman who has no business with civil services. Despite that, even a common man knows that UPSC is difficult because it has been hammered into his head. Nevertheless, in this article, I am referring to the youth who are thinking about the UPSC exam, are struggling to get through, and some who have either won the race or have given up after grappling with the “difficulty”.

If you say that it is a difficult exam, can you give me some evidence to prove your point? For example:-

1. Are the jobs under it too powerful or extremely consequential?
2. Are there too many aspirants for this exam?
3. Is the syllabus too vast?
4. Is the exam difficult?
5. Is it hard to qualify the exam?
6. Does the preparation for the exam take a lot of time?

Friends, whatever your answer is, whether all of the above, a point or two, or various other reasons, none of it is completely true. If you were to ponder over every question seriously, you would find that the situation with civils is almost similar to any other competitive exam, except for the first reason that UPSC is one of the most revered and powerful jobs of this country.

I know of some youngsters for whom even the Madhya Pradesh exam for government accountants was really stressful and had almost become a headache. The aspirants appearing for this exam were so many in numbers

that the entire system of examination collapsed and the exam had to be discontinued. I think that now you would slowly understand the things that I am trying to point out.

I am just trying to say that the 'society's truth' is completely different from an 'individual's truth'. Sometimes both are even against each other. While considering both as one, we are unknowingly desecrating the structure of truth. When this happens, our challenges automatically multiply as we are unable to see the truth. This is almost like striking with a sword in the dark. You cannot see your enemy but you are continuously attacking with the sword. Don't you think it's a waste of energy?

When we are thinking whether UPSC is easy or difficult, extremely significant or less consequential, we, in fact, are distancing ourselves from the actual answer. And that's our biggest mistake. However, the correct answer is hidden in 'comparison of two points' – civil services exam and the person appearing for the exam, which is you. For others it can be a difficult exam, but you have to decide what is it for you -- easy or difficult, or somewhere between the two? You need to understand the proportional relationship between you and the exam. It's all about you and your abilities, you and your courage. Only after you understand this crucial point, you will be able to do justice with your preparation for the exam and also yourself.

In fact, this is what my dilemma is or this is where I get stuck. When I have to address the students preparing for IAS, I am unable to decide what should I say – is the exam easy or difficult, or is it neither too difficult nor too easy? When I tell them that it is easy, some aspirants start taking the exam lightly. On the other hand, when I say it is difficult, there is a fear that they may give up their weapons even before the fight begins. When I give them a midway answer, they don't even understand that. They feel the statement is misleading. So then what should we do? Let us try to understand it.

Every year, the Union Public Service Commission takes out a report, which includes names of previous year's qualifiers and their background. The report shows that nearly 50% of people who qualified the exams have secured second division in university-level exams. In fact, one of my juniors had got third division. If I were to keep aside my MA degree (where getting first division is not all that difficult), then throughout my life I have been mediocre in academics. I have sailed through with second division, except class eighth.

As a matter of fact, I know of some people who had got first division, were meritorious throughout their academic life, but could not even qualify the state civil services. Your academic background does not guarantee your success in the civils. There are many toppers, postgraduates and PhD students who take the examination but not all get through.

In such a scenario, you can better assess how easy or difficult is the civil services exam, which is popularly known as the IAS examination.

If you are still reading this article, I can somewhere assume that a seed of interest and curiosity towards this exam has been sown in your mind. Now, think that you have made up your mind to take this examination and nothing can change your decision. The trend of last seven years shows that the number of youngsters, who

have taken this decision, has shot up incredibly. The question is, have you or for that matter a thousand others like you have taken the right decision to take the UPSC exam? Let us now examine this.

In a hunt to find an answer to the above question, I would like to start with my established truth – ‘decisions are neither correct nor incorrect in itself; we have to prove that the decisions taken by us are correct’. Since the civil services exam takes along the vast comprehensions, perspectives and apprehensions, this significant truth applies to it even more. UPSC may state some eligibility criteria for the aspirants which may seem like restricting one’s potential but it’s neither unconstitutional nor illogical. This means that the organization which is holding this examination has certain norms that the aspirant should at least be a graduate, whether a topper or a third division holder that does not matter.

Please pay attention here. I am talking about ‘potential’. Why? I know of some aspirants, in fact many now, who are graduates but are not worth the degree. This means that lawfully they have their graduation mark-sheet and certificate, but when it comes to their knowledge and aptitude, you are forced to doubt their degree. And in such a scenario, the civil services exam not only becomes difficult, but extremely difficult, however, it’s still not impossible. There is always a possibility. The only condition is that one has to be fully prepared and determined to embark on an uncomfortable-but-successful journey.

I apologize for giving you some homework at the end of this article –

- ✓ First, ponder over the difference between ‘eligibility’ and ‘potential’
- ✓ Then, apply this thought to yourself and try to determine whether civil services exam is easy or difficult for you.

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