

A Critical Analysis of Gender Inequality in the Bureaucracy

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Introduction

Women accounted for just 13% of all IAS officers from 1951, when the first woman entered the organization. Only 1,527 of the 11,569 IAS officials recruited into the public service between 1951 and 2020 were females. The Supreme Court has three women judges. The proportion of women judges in HCs is less than 15%.

India has gone a long way since Anna Rajam George, the first woman to pass the IAS test, was interviewed by the board, which deliberately discouraged her and advised her to instead seek the foreign or central services. Even the clause that stated "in the case of marriage, your employment would be terminated" was included in George's appointment letter. The regulation came after that, the law was changed, and she kept working even after getting married. But development has been gradual. Women made up 9% of IAS applicants in 1970; by 2020, that number had increased to just 31%. According to data from the National Informatics Centre, women make up 21% of

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currently employed IAS officer¹s.

History

Historically, Indian women faced numerous societal barriers that deterred them from pursuing careers in bureaucracy. These barriers were deeply entrenched in traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and systemic biases. Here are some key reasons why earlier Indian women might have been reluctant to enter the bureaucracy:

1. Patriarchal Society: Indian society has traditionally been patriarchal, with power and decision-making authority predominantly held by men. Women were often relegated to subordinate roles within the family and society, limiting their opportunities for advancement in professions like bureaucracy.

2. Limited Educational Opportunities: In the past, access to education for women in India was limited, particularly in higher education and professional fields. Without adequate educational opportunities, women lacked the qualifications necessary to enter bureaucratic positions.

3. Social Expectations and Family Responsibilities: Traditional gender roles dictated that women's primary responsibilities revolved around domestic duties and caregiving. The expectation to prioritize family

¹ Bhatia, S., & Chawla, A. (n.d.). Why There Have Been So Few Women In India's Administrative Services. IndiaSpend.
<https://www.indiaspend.com/gendercheck/why-there-have-been-so-few-women-in-indias-administrative-services-795991>

obligations over career aspirations made it challenging for women to pursue demanding bureaucratic roles that often required long hours and extensive travel.

4. Cultural Stigma and Discrimination: Women who challenged societal norms by seeking employment outside the home often faced stigma and discrimination. The prevailing belief that women's primary role was to support their husbands and families made it socially unacceptable for them to pursue careers in bureaucracy.

5. Lack of Role Models and Support Systems: The absence of female role models in bureaucratic positions further discouraged women from entering the field. Without mentors or support networks to guide them through the challenges of navigating a male-dominated profession, many women felt isolated and unsupported in their career pursuits.

6. Gender Bias and Discrimination in the Workplace: Even if women managed to overcome societal barriers and secure bureaucratic positions, they often encountered gender bias and discrimination in the workplace. This could manifest in various forms, including unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and exclusion from decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the Vishaka guidelines outlined specific measures for preventing sexual harassment, including the establishment of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) in workplaces with 50 or more employees, and the requirement for employers to provide a mechanism

for addressing complaints of harassment promptly and effectively. This case also emphasized the importance of awareness programs and training sessions to educate employees about their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual harassment. In essence, the Vishaka judgment played a pivotal role in raising awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace and promoting gender equality in bureaucratic and governmental institutions across India.²

Status of Women in India

India's society is cosmopolitan and diversified in many ways. Various indigenous and foreign causes, including as conflict, political instability, civil unrest, and natural disasters, have also shaped and defined its socioeconomic structure and political developments. Although the woman's status is in certain ways acknowledged, it is a largely patriarchal country culturally. But both the position of women and management as a whole are substantially impacted by the current cultural climate. Without this, it will be challenging to convey this to those who are unaware of the obstacles women confront in the public domain. This cultural setting has what has been called a "glass ceiling" for women in the literature. Despite the fact that state governments occasionally have made attempts to change the status of women in public life, but due to the pervasiveness of the cultural context, their efforts have not been very successful. The cultural milieu favours men over women, and this projection has an impact on family decisions

²Vishaka & Ors vs State Of Rajasthan & Ors AIR 1997 SUPREME COURT 3011

about who will receive an education, particularly in cases when there are limited resources. According to this viewpoint, women were encouraged to run the home while the men went to school since they were and, in some situations, still are seen as inferior to males. Accordingly, although while women's right to work was completely acknowledged in traditional society through customary laws, this right was restricted to household duties, which continued to hinder their ability to get formal sector jobs (Manuh, 1994). many women in The majority of women in India experience a variety of gender-related issues, making them well positioned to suffer the consequences of gender inequities. Although they may rise in rank and power as they mature, in this cultural setting women are essentially subject to the authority or control of men (usually their fathers or other male family members, as well as their husbands). Thus, women's ability to make decisions in India is limited in both the private and public realms. However, where women do hold political influence in the established system, it is typically through alternative organisations or by influencing male authority.

In the culture we currently live in, cultural norms and traditions continue to and encourage male dominance, which leads to the emergence of a masculine society and a sizable power gap that continues to have an impact on women's lives both in public and in private. In the overall hierarchical relationships that underpin all political, economic, and social processes, the reality of gender inequalities is a fundamental dynamic.

Administrative Structure

The first IAS and IPS competitive exams following Independence were held in 1948. In IAS, men held a monopoly until 1950; the first woman was admitted to the profession in 1951. Despite the fact that India's constitution guarantees equality, the 1954 Indian Administrative Service Rules discriminated against and disadvantaged women because they stated that "no married women shall be assigned to the service and resign from the service in the case of marriage." Married women were permitted to enter the service, and maternity leave was added as a result of the deletion of this provision from the IAS recruitment rule in 1972, which also removed the restriction and disqualification.

The number of women entering the IAS is not rising significantly and has been fluctuating. This is supported by a random review of data for a few years from the Civil List, which reveals that only one woman joined the service in 1951 and that number held true ten years later, in 1961. Only 9 women joined the Indian Administrative Service in the last ten years, or in the year 2000. Additionally, there are fluctuations in the number of women entering the workforce between years; this means that women's entry does not increase consistently. In the IAS officers who are women in the modern day are not prohibited from any types of posts inside the service. They occupy a range of ranks from senior most to junior most and are employed in all states and union territories. Less than 10% of women are represented in state and union territory assemblies, with 19 out of 30 having fewer than 10% and 8

less than 5%, while representation is comparatively better in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.³

Indian police officers who are female

Women were not allowed to join the IPS until 1971, when the discriminatory law was lifted. However, the data in the Police Lists issued by the Department of Home Affairs indicates that women still make up a smaller percentage of the IPS. Despite being fewer in number, several of them excelled in their performances and received honours like trophies and medals.

The Indian Forest Service employs women

In comparison to other All India Services, the entry of women into the IFS was very late; the first women entered the service only in 1980. The Ministry of Environment and Forest, the Government of India, and the Indian Forest Service Civil Lists all demonstrate how few women are employed in the sector.

The primary obstacles hindering women's participation in civil services stem from structural issues, including distant postings, patriarchal norms, and the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with job demands, leading many women to opt out of such careers.

³ India's gender gap: A look at women's participation in politics, Judiciary, Civil Services and Economy. The Economic Times. (n.d.).
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/indias-gender-gap-a-look-at-womens-participation-in-politics-judiciary-civil-services-and-economy/articleshow/103790933.cms?from=mdr>

Additionally, there exists a biased perception favoring women for "soft" ministries like Social Welfare and Women and Child Development, while certain roles within the IAS are implicitly considered unsuitable for women. In India, female civil servants are disproportionately assigned to sectors such as cultural affairs, education, and health, while being underrepresented in areas like urban development and law enforcement. Furthermore, societal stereotypes depicting politics as a male domain discourage women from pursuing such careers, with female IAS officers often encountering resistance from politicians who may impose limitations based on gender.⁴

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study demonstrates that, despite the efforts made to encourage women entrants, the number of women entering the workforce is not consistently rising and varies from year to year. The study identified the following strategies to improve the proportion of women working in IASs:

- (I) Raising awareness and dispelling myths about the services.
- (ii) Providing top-notch instruction and developing a curriculum suitable for civil service exams.

⁴ (2023, March 12). Women under-represented in politics and bureaucracy - current affairs. Current Affairs - NEXT IAS. <https://www.nextias.com/ca/editorial-analysis/13-03-2023/women-under-represented-in-politics-and-bureaucracy#>

(iii) Free and inexpensive coaching and financial aid.

(iv) Establishing a national academy to train female candidates from around the country.

(v) Colleges with career counselling services.

Reservations for underprivileged women (vi).

(v) Improving workplace policies to benefit women.

(vi) Bringing about changes in people's perspectives

(vi) Changing the mindset of society and parents, who still view women as inferior and push them to prioritise their families over their careers.

(v) Eliminating the harmful social norms that affect women

(vi) Showcasing the benefits of the services and the success stories of women who have used AISs.

women officers' primary challenge after joining AISs is juggling their duties at home and at the office. The researcher offers the following solutions: -

(i) Women should be explicit and clear about their duties both at home and at work. They must direct their time. For better understanding, building a favourable attitude in their husbands and other family members about their career, they need be self-reliant, have the proper attitude, and be transparent with family members.

(ii) Men's mindsets need to shift, and they must see their partners as equals, understand their struggles, and support them as they strike a balance between work at home and at the office in order to be fair to both their personal and professional lives.

(iii) The involvement of the in-laws and other family members facilitates the career advancement of female officers.

(iv) Female matrons for female officers with young children to minimise their obligation and ease stress associated with caring for kids at home. The role of government

responsibility in this regard by assigning such officers a female matron. Their ability to perform their jobs better is always a result of this sharing of responsibility. Particularly for those on tours and in field posts, this arrangement would be quite helpful.

(v) Families must recognise the challenges faced by women officers in juggling their job at home and at the office, and they must adopt a favourable attitude toward them by cooperating, sharing the workload at home, and fostering a joyful home environment.