

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q14

"Traditional bureaucratic structure and culture have hampered the process of socio-economic development in India." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS II · 12 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- "Traditional bureaucratic structure and culture have hampered the process of socio-economic development in India." Comment

Revision summary

India's bureaucracy was built for order and revenue, then asked to run development.

Tall hierarchy, generalist IAS posting and frequent transfers slow schemes.

File worship, risk fear and petitioner culture keep the citizen at the door.

Licence and inspector habits, and weak city cadres, have hurt investment and welfare targeting.

Tenure, specialisation, local cadres and open delivery can keep rules against loot without blocking development.

Introduction

India inherited a steel-frame bureaucracy built to collect revenue, keep order, and report upward. After 1950 the same structure was asked to run farms, factories, schools and welfare. Structure means hierarchy, rules, and a generalist cadre. Culture means file worship, status, and distance from the citizen. Both have helped stability; both have also slowed socio-economic development when speed, local knowledge and risk-taking were needed.

Body**The traditional structure**

- A tall pyramid - secretariat, directorate, district, block - makes every new scheme travel through many desks. Delay is built into the chart.
- The Indian Administrative Service and allied **All-India Services** are generalist. A district officer may handle law and order in the morning and a nutrition mission in the afternoon. Depth in health, urban design or power is often missing.
- Cadre control, frequent transfers, and a confidential roll that rewards caution more than outcomes, push officers toward safe files.
- Vertical programmes from the Union cut across the collector's desk. Parallel societies and project units then bypass the line department, which weakens both the old structure and accountability.

- Colonial district primacy still concentrates too many licences in one office. Development needs many specialised desks that talk to each other, not one bottleneck.

The traditional culture

- The file is the work. Noting in elegant English can replace a field visit. The poor wait while the note is perfect.
- Mai-baap attitudes treat the citizen as a petitioner. Socio-economic rights under the Constitution need a service culture, not a durbar culture.
- **Risk aversion:** an audit para or a vigilance case is feared more than a school that never opens. Development requires pilots and honest failure; the culture punishes both.
- Status distance - the peon, the clerk, the gazetted officer - reproduces social hierarchy inside the office and outside it, which hurts targeting of SC, ST and women-headed households.
- **Rule-fetish without result:** the General Financial Rules and conduct rules are needed against loot, but they are also used to say no to a time-bound road or a teacher posting.

How this has hampered development

- **Licence raj before 1991 was the extreme form:** investment waited on a committee. Residual inspector raj still raises the cost of a small firm and of a farmer who wants a warehouse licence.
- Leakage in PDS, scholarships and housing is not only political; it is also a culture of the middleman who 'knows the office'.
- Implementation of land reform, tenancy protection and forest rights often stalled at the revenue office that was built to protect titles of the powerful.
- Urban development suffers when municipal cadres are weak and the State secretariat will not let cities hire or fire.
- Innovation in primary health and learning outcomes needs data and local managers. A secretariat that values control of budget more than outcomes will under-use ASHAs, SMCs and panchayats.

The other side of the comment

- The same bureaucracy ran elections, the census, disaster camps, and the constitutional transfer of power. Stability is also a development good.
- Many reforms - RTI, citizen charters, e-office, **Direct Benefit Transfer**, secession of some licences - show that structure and culture can change when the political executive insists.
- The comment is therefore largely right about delay, generalism, transfer culture and petitioner-treatment; it is too sweeping if it denies that a rule-bound service also limits arbitrary local power.

What would un-hamper development

- Longer tenures, domain specialisation after a few years, and outcome contracts rather than only process audit.
- Lateral entry for scarce skills, with a clear ethics code, and a stronger municipal and panchayat cadre.
- Digitised, faceless delivery where the rule is clear, so culture has less room to extract rent.
- Social audit and public dashboards so that the file is not the only memory of the State.

Flow diagram

Tall hierarchy generalist cadre -> Delay and weak expertise
File culture risk fear durbar -> Delay and weak expertise
Delay and weak expertise -> Slower socio-economic development
Tenure data local cadres -> Less hamper more delivery

Conclusion

• **The statement is fair:** a colonial pyramid, generalist posting, transfer fear, and a petitioner culture have slowed India's socio-economic programmes. The same steel frame also kept the Union intact and can still deliver when tenure, specialisation, local cadres and open data replace file worship. Development needs a bureaucracy that is rule-bound toward loot and result-bound toward the citizen.

Facts & figures

All-India Services

IAS, IPS and IFoS under **Article 312**; a generalist district tradition still shapes development administration.

Second Administrative Reforms Commission

Recommended domain competence, longer tenure, and citizen-centric process; implementation has been partial.

Licence raj

Pre-1991 industrial licensing was the clearest case of structure blocking investment and jobs.

Direct Benefit Transfer

An attempt to cut the middleman by sending money to accounts, reducing one cultural rent point.

73rd Amendment and parallel bodies

Panchayats were meant to localise development; parallel societies often recreated secretariat control.

WRAP Exams · Write. Read. Analyse. Practice. · <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/gs-2/2016/traditional-bureaucratic-structure-and-culture-have-hampered-the-process-of-socio-economic-development-in-india-comment/> · ask@wrapexams.com · wrapexams.com