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Q1

(a) What are the basic principles of public life? Illustrate any three with suitable examples. (10 marks) (b) What do you understand by the term 'public servant'? Reflect on the expected role of public servant. (10 marks).

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS IV · 10 marks · Ethics and Human Interface

Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in-human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics - in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators; role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.

Core demand of the question

- (a) State the basic principles of public life and illustrate any three with suitable examples
- (b) Explain the term public servant and reflect on the expected role of a public servant

Revision summary

Public life needs selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Three working tests are selflessness in relief, integrity in contracts, and accountability in audit and speaking orders.

A public servant is anyone entrusted with public power and pay for a public duty.

- **The expected role is trustee:** implement law, advise frankly, refuse the illegal, and serve the person without a patron.

Conduct Rules and the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 give that role a legal edge.

Introduction

Public office is a trust, not a private shop. Part (a) names the standards that make that trust visible. Part (b) names the person who holds the trust and the work that person is hired to do.

Body**(a) Basic principles of public life**

- Public life is the space of government, parties, local bodies, and any office that spends other people's money or power.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life (the **Nolan Committee**, United Kingdom, 1995) listed seven principles that Indian training still uses: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.
- Selflessness means decisions serve the public, not the officer's family, caste, or party fund.
- **Integrity means the officer is not for sale:** no gift, land, or post-retirement job is allowed to buy a file.
- Objectivity means merit, evidence, and the rule, not a phone call from a patron.

- Accountability means the officer can be asked why, in a court, a legislature, or an audit.
- Openness means reasons are shared unless secrecy is strictly needed for security or privacy.
- Honesty means the books, the affidavit, and the speaking order tell the truth.
- Leadership means seniors live the same rules they print on the wall.
- **Indian public life also rests on the Constitution:** equality before law ([Article 14](#)), equal protection, and the oath to uphold the Constitution, not a person.
- The [Central Civil Services \(Conduct\) Rules, 1964](#) and the All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968 turn these values into daily bans on gifts, political canvassing, and conduct unbecoming.

Three principles, illustrated

- Selflessness. A District Magistrate who allots flood relief by damage list, not by the ruling party's booth, is practising selflessness. The opposite is a minister who parks a highway spur at a relative's land.
- Integrity. E. Sreedharan building the Konkan Railway and Delhi Metro on time, without a personal cut in contracts, is integrity in a public project. A coal-block or 2G-style allocation that treats a licence as a gift fails the same test.
- Accountability. The Comptroller and Auditor General's reports, a [Public Accounts Committee](#) hearing, and a District Magistrate's speaking order on a demolition are accountability. A file that never records who signed is the failure of that principle.
- Openness, as a supporting example, is a published ration queue and a Right to Information reply that does not hide a tender behind a false "secret" stamp.

(b) Public servant and expected role

- A public servant is a person paid from the public purse, or otherwise entrusted with public power, to perform a lawful function for the people, not for a private master.
- **The [Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988](#) defines a public servant widely:** government employees, judges, and many who perform a public duty, so that the label follows the power, not only the gazette.
- The expected role is trustee, not owner. The desk, the stamp, and the gun belong to the Republic.
- The role is to implement law and lawful policy with impartiality, courtesy, and speed, especially for the person who has no advocate in the corridor.
- The role is to advise ministers frankly, then carry out a lawful decision, and to refuse an illegal oral order in writing.
- **The role is to protect the weak:** a migrant at a police station, a widow at a pension counter, a child out of school.
- The role is to keep accounts clean and to face audit without a second set of books.
- **The role is representative of the Constitution in the field:** [Article 14](#) fairness, [Article 21](#) dignity, and [Article 51A](#)'s spirit of harmony in daily dealing.
- Example: a station house officer who registers a poor complainant's FIR without a bribe is doing the expected role. A collector who hides in the bungalow during a riot is not.
- Example: [T. N. Seshan](#) as [Chief Election Commissioner](#) treating every party as equal before the Model Code showed the servant as referee, not as a faction worker.
- **The expected role therefore joins competence with character:** know the rule, apply it without fear or favour, and leave the office poorer in gifts than when one entered.

Flow diagram

Public life -> Nolan seven principles
Nolan seven principles -> Selflessness integrity accountability
Public servant -> Trustee of public power
Trustee of public power -> Impartial lawful service
Impartial lawful service -> Citizen and Constitution

Conclusion

Public life stands on Nolan's seven duties and on the Constitution's equality. A public servant is a trustee of public power. The expected role is lawful, impartial, accountable service to the citizen, illustrated whenever a file is decided on merit and not on kinship.

Facts & figures

Nolan Committee, 1995

The **United Kingdom Committee** on Standards in Public Life listed seven principles: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964

Union service rules on integrity, gifts, political activity and conduct unbecoming of a government servant.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Defines public servant widely and criminalises bribery and related abuse of office.

Article 14, Constitution of India

Equality before the law and equal protection; the constitutional name for impartiality in public dealing.

T. N. Seshan

As **Chief Election Commissioner** he enforced the Model Code of Conduct against all parties, a public example of the servant as referee.

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