

Challenges of the Civil Services Journey: A Study of Characters in I.A.S Today

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Abstract

Professor Vikas Sharma is a well acclaimed writer in the realm of Indian writings. He has written a number of novels which have been well received and appreciated all over the world. The novel I.A.S Today by Professor Vikas Sharma reflects various themes like Ambition and Perseverance, Sacrifices and Costs of Success, Youthful Aspirations and Modern Challenges, Moral Values vs. Material Ambition etc. Apart from these themes the novel also delves into the multifaceted journey of aspirants preparing for one of India's most desired and challenging examinations—the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). This paper explores the struggles faced by the characters in the novel, including personal sacrifices, social pressures, and psychological hurdles. By analyzing the characters' experiences, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the realities of IAS preparation and its broader implications for aspirants and society.

Keywords: Multifaceted, Acclaimed, Aspirants

Introduction

It has often been considered that the Indian Administrative Service is a symbol of power, fame, and a way to serve the nation. However, in this journey to becoming an IAS officer, one has to undergo endless hurdles and challenges. As per the report, titled Mental health matters: the psychological pressures of UPSC preparation, by Suhas Palshikar, Vibha Atri and Devesh Kumar published in "The Hindu" updated on 5th August, 2024, the academic and economic pressures on the aspirants end up taking a toll on their mental health. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)'s ADSI report 2021, an alarming 35 students end up taking their lives every day. Lokniti-CSDS data reveals that about a quarter of UPSC aspirants know someone who has either harmed themselves or attempted to commit suicide due to pressure.

Vikas Sharma's novel I.A.S Today reflects an intimate portrayal of these challenges through its characters, offering a narrative that resonates with the aspirations and struggles of countless individuals across the country. This research paper focuses on the portrayal of these struggles and analyzes how the characters suffer due to societal expectations, emotional strains, expectations from family and the grueling demands of preparation.

Methodology

The methodology integrates textual analysis, thematic exploration, and qualitative interpretation to provide insights into the struggles of civil service aspirants.

Discussion

Romesh, the central protagonist of IAS Today comes from a humble, lower-middle-class family. He is the perfect example of resilience and determination. Despite confronting financial constraints and societal pressures, he dreams of becoming an IAS officer to uplift his family and society. He is persevering enough to balance part-time jobs with his intense preparation for IAS that often leads him to sacrifice his personal comforts for his goal.

Another relatable character is Ananya, the Perfectionist who is a brilliant and disciplined aspirant who excels academically but struggles with self-imposed pressure. She comes from a supportive family but feels burdened by the expectations of being a "perfect" student. Ananya's character represents the ideal aspirant, showcasing the qualities needed to succeed in the IAS exam. At the same time, her challenges remind readers that perfection is not solely about academic performance but also about resilience and mental well-being. Her story portrays the psychological toll of competitive exams, including anxiety and fear of failure, despite her consistent hard work.

Rajat is the another significant character in the novel who is a working professional preparing for the IAS exam while supporting his family. His dual responsibilities highlight the challenges faced by aspirants who must juggle full-time jobs and study schedules. Rajat demonstrates extraordinary discipline and dedication, often sacrifices his sleep and leisure to manage his commitments.

Meera, the rebellious aspirant is a strong-willed character who defies societal norms and her conservative family's expectations. Her family pressurises her to get married, but Meera prioritizes her ambition to join the civil services. She studies in secret, facing ridicule and resistance, symbolizing the struggles of many women aspirants in patriarchal societies.

Kabir, the next character is Privileged Yet complacent by nature. He hails from an affluent background and has access to the best coaching institutes and resources. However, his complacency and over-reliance on external help hinder his progress. Kabir's repeated failures highlight the importance of self-discipline, personal initiative, and focused preparation, a must requisite for becoming an IAS.

6. Manoj, the rural aspirant represents the struggles of aspirants from rural areas who face resource and language barriers. Coming from a small village, Manoj has limited access to coaching and struggles with English, which is a significant part of the IAS syllabus. His story is one of resilience as he relies on self-study and free online resources to compete with urban aspirants.

Shivani, the Single mother is an ideal aspirant to become an IAS officer while raising her child. Her character embodies strength, resilience, extraordinary will and time management as she balances her caregiving responsibilities with rigorous preparation. Shivani's journey highlights the additional hurdles faced by women in challenging personal circumstances.

Next important character is Arjun, The Mentor who is a former IAS aspirant. After failing his final attempt, he becomes a mentor for other aspirants. His character is inspirational as he provides guidance, strategies, and emotional support to his peers. Arjun's journey highlights the importance of mentorship and learning from failures in the civil services preparation process.

Pooja, the overconfident aspirant is very intelligent who believes that her natural brilliance will ensure success. She underestimates the importance of consistent effort, revision, and test-taking strategies. Her eventual failure serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of complacency in a highly competitive environment.

All the aspirants, as a group showcase the camaraderie and conflicts that arise in study groups. While they support each other, differences in preparation styles and priorities sometimes create tension, reflecting the balance between cooperation and competition.

In depth textual analysis confronts us to some significant dialogues of the novel that reveal how all the characters are undergoing the mental turmoil due to social, familial and personal expectations during the IAS study which very well reverberates the state of mind of real life aspirants.

Mental Struggles

Romesh's statement "Every time I sit with my books, I feel this knot in my stomach. What if all this effort leads to nothing? What will I tell my family then?" reflects Romesh's anxiety and fear of failure, a common mental struggle among aspirants.

Ananya says "No matter how much I study, it never feels enough. I hear the ticking clock in my head, reminding me how close the exams are." The statement very well highlights the pressure of time management and the perfectionism that overwhelms Ananya.

As quoted by Rajat "Balancing a job and preparation isn't just exhausting; it's like fighting two battles at once, and sometimes, I feel like I'm losing both." shows the mental strain of juggling multiple responsibilities while preparing for the IAS exam.

Social Pressure

According to Meera, "People say, 'Why does a girl need to become an IAS officer? Focus on getting married.' But I refuse to let their words define my destiny." The statement illustrates the societal expectations Meera battles, especially as a woman trying to carve her own path.

The statement by Manoj "Coming from a village, they don't see my ambition. They only see a farmer's son trying to dream too big." speaks about the skepticism and lack of encouragement faced by rural aspirants like Manoj.

Kabir's stated "They think because I have money, my journey is easier. They don't see how the constant comparisons and expectations suffocate me."

This reflects how societal pressure impacts privileged aspirants in different ways.

Family Expectations

"My father sold his only piece of land to fund my studies. How can I face him if I fail?" a statement by Romesh captures the weight of family sacrifice and the emotional burden on Romesh to succeed.

Meera's Father's views, "IAS? That's not for girls. You should be preparing for marriage, not exams." represents the traditional mindset and lack of support that Meera defies.

Shivani's comment "When my child looks at me, I see both love and a question—'Will you make it, Ma?' That's what keeps me going, but it also terrifies me."

affirms the dual pressure of being a parent and an aspirant, showcasing Shivani's inner conflict.

Ananya's Mother's statement, "You've always been the brightest one in the family, Ananya. We know you'll make us proud." though is supportive, still it underscores the burden of high expectations that weighs on Ananya.

Combined Mental, Social, and Familial Struggles

Romesh says, "Everyone calls me a dreamer, but they don't know the nightmares I face every night—of

failure, of letting everyone down."

It is the reflection of how social and familial pressure intertwines with mental struggles.

Meera says to Romesh, "When the world is against you, the only choice is to fight back or give in. I've chosen to fight, but it gets lonely."

This acknowledges both the external opposition and internal loneliness that rebellious aspirants like Meera face.

Rajat's Wife's announcement, "We need you to earn for the family, but you're chasing a dream. How long can we wait?"

manifests the tension between familial responsibilities and personal ambition.

These dialogues convey the emotional depth of the characters in *IAS Today*, vividly portraying their battles with mental health, societal expectations, and familial duties. They also reflect the broader challenges faced by aspirants across various backgrounds, making the novel relatable and impactful.

Conclusion

The present research paper communicates the journey towards civil services is not merely academic but deeply personal, shaped by socio-economic conditions, gender dynamics, and emotional resilience. Characters like Romesh, Ananya, and Meera embody the perseverance required to overcome societal stereotypes, family expectations, and self-doubt.

Ultimately, "*IAS Today*" serves as both a mirror to the aspirants' struggles and a beacon of hope. The resilience and determination of its characters inspire readers to persevere despite overwhelming odds. The research concludes that success in civil services preparation is not defined solely by intellectual capability but by the ability to navigate external pressures and internal conflicts. The novel's relatable narrative bridges the gap between fiction and reality, making it a valuable exploration of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

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