

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH SNEHA DUBEY, IFS - BATCH 2012

Civil Services are always be the dream jobs for millions of Indian Youth. Its stiffness along with incomparable transparency ignites the young buds of India to pursue a career in such responsible and highly talked platform. Every year lakhs of aspirants jump into the competition with fighting spirits but only a few could cross it with a flying clour. Unimaginable pleasure and satisfaction accompanied the success but when the very first attempt has the triumph, spirit of satisfaction and confidence soar to limitless, knew no-bound. Such an example is Sneha Dubey, glittering star of Chanakya IAS Academy. Her success inspired and drew many young brains to dream for such invincible success in broad day light. Her technique of preparation would truely be a pathfinder for many aspirants.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Congratulations and wishes for your success!

Sneha Dubey: Thank you very much.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How do you feel now after achieving your goal?

Sneha Dubey: I feel happy, grateful and excited to have cleared the UPSC, but this was an immediate goal- hopefully a platform to achieve bigger ones.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Why Civil Services and why you choose IFS?

Sneha Dubey: The idea of joining the Indian Foreign Service has always inspired me. My interest in global affairs nudged me to pursue the study of International Relations. I hope to represent my country and the foreign service would give me an opportunity to do that. Besides, I have always enjoyed traveling and this offers that- hence, going for the civil service was a natural choice for me.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Do you think one should have a fall back option or he/she should pursue his/her dreams of Civil Services single minded?

Sneha Dubey: I didn't have a 'fall back option'. I knew what I wanted and tried to work accordingly. AK Mishra Sir has often talked about "burning your boat" - giving up your alternative to concentrate single-mindedly on your goal- like the warriors in ancient times did, when they burnt their ships on attacking a new land, so that they fight whole-heartedly without considering going back. I agree with him- in giving all one has got and not thinking about a 'plan B'.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: When did you first think about Civil Services as your career choice?

Sneha Dubey: Ever since I was twelve, I wanted to be a part of the Indian Foreign Service and thought of Civil Service as a career option.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How did you get inspired for Civil Services?

Sneha Dubey: It was an amalgamation of interests I think- learning about international affairs, the thrill of travelling and discovering new cultures, representing my country, being part of important policy decisions and helping people- all inspired me.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please tell us about your family background. How did your family members support you while you were preparing for Civil Services?

Sneha Dubey: No one in my family is in the government service. My father works for a multinational company, my mother was a teacher and my brother runs a business. Although none had the background I was aiming for, they were extremely supportive during the preparation phase and I know I couldn't have done it without them.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: May we please know your education and the educational institutions you have attended?

Sneha Dubey: I finished my schooling in Goa, where I grew up; completed my high school and then got a bachelor's



degree from Fergusson College, Pune. Thereafter, I got my masters in Geography from Jawaharlal Nehru University and pursued MPhil from the School of International Studies in JNU.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Once decided, how did you go for preparation along with normal study schedules?

Sneha Dubey: The routine was quite hectic as I had to juggle the university studies, classes, coaching and studying for the UPSC Exam. Time management and prioritising are important- so that one can fit in a bit of everything in the day- including some time to just relax.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: When did you go for your first attempt and in which attempt did you get selected?

Sneha Dubey: 2011 was my first and only attempt, in which I got selected.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: There has been a change in Preliminary Exam. Optional has been removed & CSAT has been introduced. What is your opinion about CSAT?

Sneha Dubey: Since I do not have a mathematics background, initially I was a little worried when CSAT was introduced. But, I think it gave a lot of first-timers, like myself, an edge, as we were now at par with the candidates who had previously prepared for their Optional subjects.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What are the implications of the CSAT, as the aptitude of the candidate will be tested at the very first stage?

Sneha Dubey: I think testing the candidate's aptitude right in the beginning helps, as it separates out the ones who have an analytical aptitude from the crammers.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What impact will it have on rural and the hinterland students?

Sneha Dubey: A very basic knowledge of English is essential today. The level of English comprehension in CSAT is quite simple and should not be a problem with little effort. Besides, for the candidates who have selected IFS as one of their preferences, English becomes crucial.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How did you choose your Optional Subjects for the Mains Examination? Any suggestions for our readers?

Sneha Dubey: I had a masters degree in Geography- so choosing that as my first optional was natural. I chose Sociology as my second optional as the syllabus was not too vast and with the limited time I had to prepare for it, I wanted to study a subject that was not too technical to comprehend. Interest is the most important criteria while selecting a subject. Sufficient material or guidance is also a consideration.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Your strategy for preparation of Main Examinations?

Sneha Dubey: There was not enough time for preparing for Main Examination. Managing time became essential-trying to cover up all the subjects. Selective studying helped me, along with constant revision. I would really recommend reading the newspaper and making notes- it helped a lot with General Studies.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please suggest some books

to our readers for G.S. Mains and Optional subjects opted by you?

Sneha Dubey: The list of books can be quite elaborate. To cover GS, NCERT books are a basic read if one has time. Reading material for GS provided by the coaching class is very helpful. Economic Survey and Budget are important for GS Economy. DD Basu may be read for Polity, Savindar Singh, Khullar, for GS Geography. Newspaper, preferably The Hindu, along with a magazine should be read regularly. For my Optionals, I went through a detailed list of books for Geography, as I had some training in the subject at the Masters level. This included Strahler and Strahler, Thornbury, Khullar, Geography through Maps, Odum et cetera. Giving some time to studying the Atlas everyday was also required. For Sociology I referred to Harlambos, IGNOU Study material, Giddens and some online sources.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How to prepare for Interview?

Sneha Dubey: Interview is basically a Personality Test. Hence what you know is not as important, compared to how you present it. Confidence building exercises help to prepare for facing the board. AK Mishra Sir recommended looking into the mirror and talking out loud, so as to observe our body language. The bio-data form submitted at the time of Main Exam should be thoroughly prepared as many questions could be posed from here. Reading the newspaper and being up-to-date, especially in your own field is important. The most helpful of course is appearing for as many mock interviews as possible, to improve your performance.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please share in detail your Interview experience with the UPSC panel.

Sneha Dubey: I was placed in the afternoon session and got Prof. Purushottam Agarwal's Board. Besides him, the board consisted of a lady and three gentlemen. After I wished the Board and was invited to take a seat, Prof. Agarwal asked me questions about Jawaharlal Nehru University and the recent elections there. The topic then came to hover around my MPhil specialization in Political Geography. Related questions on India-Pakistan border issues were posed by the lady member. The member after her asked me about the different places I grew up in and if it was my strength or weakness to have moved around as much. I answered that it was definitely my strength and has helped in shaping my outlook, making me more adaptable. The next member was probably an IPS officer and threw me a situational question as an ACP posted in the a Naxalite affected area of Jharkhand, what would my action be if a person is abducted. I answered that a multi-pronged approach is required in such a situation, along with the help of the local police. Then there were a few very pointed questions asked about some news articles in that day's newspaper, after which the interview was over. I smiled, thanked the members and exited.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Some of the interesting questions asked during interview?



Sneha Dubey: I had changed many schools during my initial years of education due to my father's transferable job. One of the questions posed to me related to how difficult it was for me as a child to make such adjustments. To this I responded that traveling around helped me learn a lot- about people, cultures, languages- and shaped my outlook, making me more adaptable.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What is your opinion about Chanakya's Interview Guidance Program?

Sneha Dubey: The guidance program at Chanakya was extremely helpful. The panel for mock interviews were very professional. The setting at a five-star hotel gave a very real feel to the entire experience. As the interview was recorded and the CD provided after, I could view my performance and improve on it. A one-on-one discussion with AK Mishra Sir helped a lot- as I had my mistakes and weaknesses pointed out and told how to improve on it. The assessment was highly accurate and gave me the confidence to face the board.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please comment upon the frequent change in Option all amongst students.

Sneha Dubey: Changing the Optionals frequently could help if the candidate has given it the best and has not achieved the deserved marks at the Main Exam. However, according to me, revising the same subject over, is better than changing it.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How did you take the Essay section in the Main examination?

Sneha Dubey: Out of the options given, I chose the Essay topic related to terrorism. It was something I had read on and could state facts in. I think the selection of the theme is crucial. Reading articles in newspapers helps in his regard so that a fact-based and informed essay could be written.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How did you prepare G.S. for both Prelims and Mains?

Sneha Dubey: Initially, I tried to prepare for the subjects that were important from both the GS Preliminary and Main Exam- Polity, Economy, Geography, Modern History, Current Affairs, India Year Book. I read up on Ancient and Medieval History few months before the Prelims. The months following the Prelims, I started studying more of International Relations, Science and Technology and other subjects from the Main point of view.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Do you feel any need of giving more importance to the Interview than the written examinations or vice-versa?

Sneha Dubey: Both the Interview and the Main Examination have their own importance within the framework of the UPSC Exam and are marked accordingly. Besides, the Interview, is after the Main Exam has been evaluated. So its crucial to score well in it. At the Interview a candidate becomes more than just a number and her/his personality is assessed- so a different approach and adequate attention is required for doing well here too.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Does choosing of medium of examination play any role for appearing successfully in

CSE?

Sneha Dubey: I have now met a lot of people who have appeared for CSE in a language they are comfortable with. I believe expressing yourself correctly is more important than the language you express yourself in. From 2011, UPSC allows candidates to choose separate languages for writing the Main Exam and for the Personality Test. This is helpful for the candidates who prefer to appear for the Interview in their mother-tongue but write better in English.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How did you manage the stress that you might have faced during the preparation period?

Sneha Dubey: Taking some time out for yourself everyday and using this time to do something that interests you is important. During preparation, I listened music whenever I felt tired and took short naps to refresh myself.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: May you please tell us something about the time management tactics during the preparations?

Sneha Dubey: Dividing my day helped me in deciding what I wanted to do with it. I broke down the entire syllabus into smaller bits and set myself short term achievable goals based on that. Also I gave myself adequate time to sleep and took frequent breaks to make the monotonous routine more bearable.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please suggest some tips about how to utilize the resources in the newspapers and magazines?

Sneha Dubey: At least one newspaper needs to be read everyday. Set a time out to do so, so that you don't miss a day. I maintained a book, which I divided into different sections- Polity, Economy, Current Affairs, International Relation, Environment etc- and noted down the important points of the newspaper items under the related heads. It helped a great deal during the preparation of GS - Main.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Is the preparation of Civil Services Examinations different from that of University Examinations?

The approach to both University and UPSC is different. University studies are more specific and deal with a subject in great depth. UPSC expects us to have a basic knowledge of a vast array of things. Hence a wider variety of things need to be studied. With University exams a certain predictability is possible, whereas UPSC papers can surprise you.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Do you think parents play any role in preparation for UPSC? How?

Sneha Dubey: Parents have a major role to play. Without their encouragement and support it's not possible to prepare for these Exams. Due to my college and university education, I have not lived with my parents for the last ten years - but they have been a constant pillar of support, egging me on to go for my dream, although at times it seemed almost impossible and I was ready to give up.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What should the parents



do for the children aspiring for the UPSC?

Sneha Dubey: Encourage. First of all parents should believe in their children. Also, they need to constantly encourage their children and provide a comfortable, peaceful environment at home as far as possible.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Do you think that a Civil Services aspirant should begin his/ her preparation while pursuing Graduation?

Sneha Dubey: Yes, I think preparation can begin during the second/third year of Graduation if the candidate desires to appear for it right after Graduation.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: How does a coaching institute play important role in Civil Services exam preparation?

Sneha Dubey: Coaching institutes guide the candidate in the right direction, which is crucial while dealing with the endless maze that CSE could be. Coaching is essential for a better understanding of the subjects that the candidate is not familiar with, for providing easy-to-read material and notes that can be referred to during revision, for evaluating a person's preparation and for constant support.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Your role as a Civil Servant, anything in particular you would like to do?

Sneha Dubey: The list of things I hope to achieve runs rather long. But most important of all is to be true to my work as a Civil servant and serve the country and the people to the best of my ability.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What opinion do you have about contribution of Chanakya IAS Academy towards Civil Services?

Sneha Dubey: Chanakya IAS Academy has been consistently contributing to the Civil Services by providing a steady supply of candidates into the services. These officers are trained not only from the point of view of clearing the exams but also on how to become good and worthy officers. I am proud of being a student of Chanakya IAS Academy.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: What is your opinion about Chanakya Civil Services Today magazine?

Sneha Dubey: Chanakya Civil Services Today is ideal for getting an idea about current affairs from a GS perspective. The special issues are especially useful for economy, polity, history et cetera.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Are you aware about Success Guru AK Mishra' Art of Success program. If yes then what are your thoughts about the program?

Sneha Dubey: The Art of Success Programme conducted by AK Mishra Sir was informative as well as entertaining. Along with discussing the syllabus and pattern of the CSE, he also explains the true meaning of success through several aids including movie clippings. Interaction with successful candidates is also a very interesting and useful part of the seminar. I have been highly benefitted by this programme.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Group studies or lone study, what is your experience?

Sneha Dubey: For me a combination of both worked. I studied with some friends who were also preparing for the exam. Discussing certain topics and concepts, especially subjects that they had a better hold on, helped a great deal to clarify doubts. But for an intense study-session I preferred to study alone as the concentration is highest then.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Please explain difference between following pre fixed words in the Mains Exams: analyze, comment, examine, elucidate, do you agree with the view, critically evaluate etc.

Sneha Dubey: Analyze implies that you assess and give your own views based on facts, research. Comment involves elaborating on the statement offered, i.e. providing more information and furnishing your own views on the same. Examine comprises of studying the question and scrutinizing what's being talked about in some depth. Elucidate means to clarify the statement that is posed. In a 'do you agree' question it is very important to take a side and give your reasons 'why'. Critically evaluate expects a critical or analytical examination and intellectually stating your opinion on the matter.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Did you have any enabling influence or paralyzing influence during the course of preparation?

Sneha Dubey: My enabling influence was the support of my family and friends. I want to make a special mention of AK Mishra Sir who helped me out with the hitches on the way- that could have been a disabling factor.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Food regime during examination.

Sneha Dubey: I lived in a hostel, so didn't have too much of a dietary preference. But I tried not to skip any meals and included fruits and juices in my diet.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Sleep pattern during examination.

Sneha Dubey: I woke up early every morning, by 6 and tried to catch a short nap in the afternoon. I went to bed by 12 so that I could get 6 hours rest.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: – Yoga etc.

Sneha Dubey: The month before the Prelims when I increased the hours of study, I made it a point to swim for an hour every evening. It had a very calming effect. The months before the Main Exam I went for a run in the morning.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Your interest and hobbies.

Sneha Dubey: I like Reading books, listening music, swimming and dancing.

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Any suggestions or words of wisdom to our dear readers.

Sneha Dubey: Keep the faith!

Chanakya Civil Services Today: Thank you Ma'am for such a delightful interview, our readers would definitely be benefitted by your words.

Sneha Dubey: Thank you very much. All the best Sir. ☐☐

