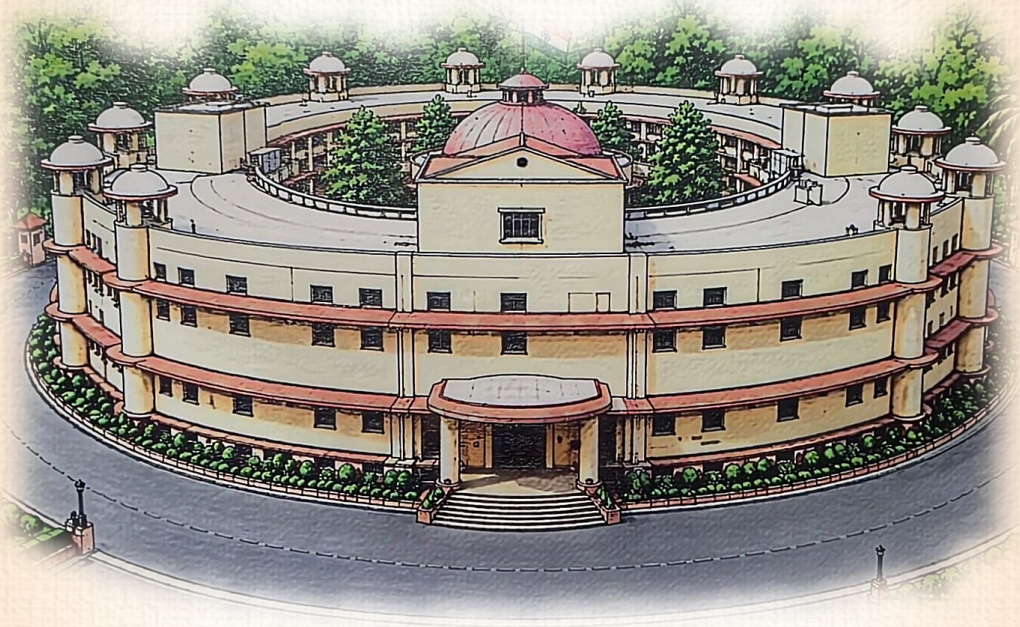
UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS "MANTHAN"

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Significance of Public Service Commissions as a Constitutional Body

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Respected Dignitaries on the dais, ladies and gentlemen

1. At the outset, I would like to thank UPSC for giving me the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. This is indeed a momentous occasion when UPSC has completed its 100-year journey in service of the Nation.

2. A century is not merely a measure of time; it is a testament to an institution's enduring relevance, credibility and contribution to nation-building. Over the last 100 years, UPSC has played a major role in ensuring recruitment to the public services in a **fair, transparent, merit-based manner**, which is free from political or executive influence.

3. Today is a day of celebration, but more importantly, it is a day for collective introspection. This year holds profound historical weight. On 1st October 1926, a modest Public Service Commission was born under Sir Ross Barker. It evolved into the Federal Commission in 1937, and finally, on 26th January 1950, it was formally enshrined within Articles 315 to 322 of our Constitution as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

4. When independent India's first Home Minister, the Iron Man Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, stood before the first batch of probationers at Metcalfe House on April 21, 1947, he famously termed this service the "**Steel Frame of India.**" He recognized that while political executives are temporary, our career bureaucrats represent the permanent, beating heart of state capacity.

5. Friends, it may be interesting to discuss about the history of civil services in India. In Kolkata, even now we have an iconic building called the Writers' Building. Under the British East India Company, recruitment to the Indian bureaucracy was an exclusive method for pillage and personal patronage. A tight-knit group of 24 powerful individuals within the Court of Directors used lucrative "Writer" positions which were basically junior clerks. They handed these roles to their sons, nephews, and extended family members to secure their private financial futures, completely erasing the line between public governance and private commercial greed. For many young men in the UK, a writer's job in India was a very lucrative proposition. You came as a writer and went back to the UK after amassing huge fortunes and as English 'nabobs' (anglicized version of nawab). Robert Clive was a notable example.

6. The turning point that saved our administrative fabric was the Charter Act of 1853, which fiercely institutionalized the competitive examination system by 1855. The historic Macaulay Committee established a sacred principle that remains the soul of the UPSC today: entry into public service would no longer be a matter of aristocratic favour, but a matter of right belonging solely to an individual's personal abilities, hard work, and industry. The exams were initially conducted in London and the syllabus was mostly European classics. Subsequently, the Indian Civil Service Act of 1861 firmly institutionalized the ICS, making it a standalone, merit-based civilian cadre detached from the command structure of the British Indian Army. Initially, the ICS was an all-white affair, but the elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, became the first Indian to qualify for the ICS in 1863.

7. Friends, it was in 1922, perhaps for the first time, that the Indian Civil Service (ICS) was described as the "steel frame" that maintained the Indian empire, and it was by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Before Independence, Pandit Nehru had once described the Indian Civil Service as "neither Indian, nor civil, nor a service". The final batch of ICS officers was recruited in 1944. At Independence in 1947, out of the 980 ICS officers, only 507 were Indians. Things have come a long way since then.

8. Friends, we must never take our institutional stability for granted. Let us look at history through a comparative lens. Pakistan and India inherited identical administrative machinery at partition in 1947, but their institutional trajectories diverged as Pakistan faced acute manpower shortages and rapid promotions of junior officers. Over subsequent decades of political fragmentation, this early structural challenge contributed to a civil service operating more independently of political leadership and diminishing democratic accountability. And now the difference between the two countries is for every one to see.

9. This historical collapse is a stark reminder of why our founding fathers deliberately entrenched the UPSC in our supreme constitutional laws, ensuring absolute immunity from arbitrary changes. Our steel frame held firm because it remained anchored in institutional discipline, rigorous training, and a deep-rooted respect for democratic oversight.

10. Friends, today UPSC is **not just a recruitment agency**. It is an institution that translates the core principles of the Constitution, such as (i) Equality, (ii) Meritocracy, (iii) Justice and Social Equity, (iv) Liberty, (v) Fraternity, (vi) National Integration, and (vii) Good Governance, into practice. In fact, its role extends beyond recruitment by advising the government on promotions, framing of recruitment rules, disciplinary and service-related matters, besides selection of specialized positions.

11. I am happy to note that over the years, the Commission has been adopting new and innovative measures such as the online recruitment system, digital application platform, technology-enabled examination management, transparent processes and enhanced security measures. This has enabled enhancement in efficiency while preserving fairness, integrity and public trust.

12. As you are aware, the Hon'ble Prime Minister has given a clarion call for Viksit Bharat @2047. As we look toward the horizon of Viksit Bharat 2047, we must have the courage to address the elephant in the room. The global landscape has transformed. The challenges of the 21st century are hyper-technical, hyper-connected, and deeply complex. Digital public infrastructure, cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence, climate-resilient agriculture, digital currencies, and intricate international trade laws cannot be effectively managed by an archaic, purely generalist framework.

13. Our current unified recruitment model generalizes what must be specialized. Consider the structural mismatch: we select our best and brightest, but we map them through a legacy system of broad preferences. We have brilliant diplomats who have never formally studied international relations or a foreign language. We have tax administrators and public auditors who may not have studied advanced mathematics or accounting since high school. Thus, the vast majority of our civil servants end up dedicated to branches they never originally intended to join. And when a public servant is assigned to a role they are neither specialized in nor deeply passionate about, demanding global excellence becomes an uphill battle. To achieve our national mandate of "Citizen-Centric Governance and Development at the Last Mile," we must boldly transition our bureaucracy from a "Rule-bound" mechanism of control to a "Role-based" competency-driven ecosystem. One way of achieving this could be by holding specific exams or interviews before assigning any specific roles, for instance in finance, accounting, law, IT, medicine, and so on.

14. There is, thus, an imperative need for domain-specific recruitment in a significant measure. Secondly, there must be systematic expansion of lateral entries at middle and senior levels. By injecting seasoned economists, IT and cyber security professionals, energy experts, educationists, and public health strategists into core ministries, we can blend private sector agility with public sector scale.

15. Besides, the era of archaic, opaque and top-down annual appraisal system is over. There is a 360-degree feedback mechanism that evaluates officers based on inputs from peers, subordinates and grassroots stakeholders. Seniority should no longer serve as a shield for underperformance; **merit and output alone should dictate upward mobility.**

16. Another aspect I feel is quite important. With a massive pendency of over 5 crore cases, there is a significant scope for inducting more people into judicial services. Should we, on the lines of the All India civil services, also have an All India Judicial Service with the same rigour as the UPSC selection process? I would urge UPSC to examine these aspects.

17. Friends, in future, UPSC has to ensure skilled and sensitive manpower not only at the Central level, but also at the State and Sub-State level. The Commission has a paramount role in nurturing our officers to navigate the complexities to serve the Nation in an honest, ethical and unbiased manner. There is an urgent need to overhaul State Public Service Commissions, which face much larger administrative challenges and public distrust. I request UPSC to comprehensively look at State Commissions also and advise on the reforms that need expedient action.

18. A developed nation isn't just about growth; it's about how we treat our people. When our government operates with empathy and respect, citizens are served with dignity, moving us closer to a Viksit Bharat where everyone feels valued and protected by a fair society.

19. Moreover, geopolitical uncertainties have put significantly more pressure on governments to ensure continuity. Going forward, it is likely that the world order may get more and more complex as the global economy, trade and governance evolve and adapt to the new order. I am sure the Commission is well aware of these challenges and shall adapt to meet emerging requirements, and ensure newer opportunities for contribution to the Nation.

20. The next chapter of UPSC needs to not only carry forward the traditions and culture built, but also ensure that the next few decades are more impactful and focused on outcome-oriented governance, with greater thrust on shifting from (a) procedural compliance to tangible impact, (b) generalized administration to domain expertise, and (c) preserving and optimizing human capital, one which is equipped to meet the aspirations of a new India and, above all, strengthens the trust between citizens and the Government.

21. Lastly, we need to keep in mind the human cost of UPSC's selection process. The gruelling process, where less than 0.1 per cent of India's brightest minds find a place, creates a major drain on our youth's finest years. While ensuring that the best talent is selected and enters the service, we also need to create robust systems prioritizing the mental well-being of youth who could not make it through. In this backdrop, should we have a relook at the number of attempts a candidate is permitted to appear? Besides, for those who were not selected, there must be clear career pathways for youngsters in other areas of society, including self-employment, so that their energies continue to be utilized efficiently in service of the nation. In this context, I appreciate the concept of the Pratibha Setu Portal, wherein candidates who cleared all stages but did not find a place in the final merit list can be considered on preference by Ministries, PSUs, autonomous bodies and even the private sector.

22. With these words, I congratulate UPSC once again on completing its 100 years of establishment and distinguished service as the bedrock of the nation, by developing the "steel frame" that sustained governance through the eras of major transformational change from Independence to now, as we look towards Viksit Bharat.

23. I thank you all for giving me this opportunity.