

AIR 2, CSE 2017



Anu Kumari

"I BELIEVE THAT IF YOU START A YEAR PRIOR TO PRELIMS, IT WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO CRACK THIS EXAM."

Haryana's Anu Kumari, mother of a four-year-old boy, has overcome many hurdles before securing second rank in UPSC exam. She has achieved this feat in her second attempt. She had quit the corporate sector job and had taken the plunge in 2016, and failed in her first attempt. However, the failure had made her stronger, and more determined. And the rest is history now. Here are the excerpts from our conversation with Anu Kumari:

CSC: Heartiest congratulations to you from Civil Services Chronicle for your success. How do you feel about it?

Anu: It is a very warm and a nice feeling. I am really very very happy. Since a few days are gone now, along with the celebration mood, I'm starting to get a feel of responsibility.

CSC: What is your inspiration for becoming an IAS?

Anu: In life, I am generally inspired by Swami Vivekananda a lot, he is my inspiration. But, as such the thought of joining the Civil Services that came was when I was feeling very monotonous and drudgery had set in my private job in the corporate sector. I had begun to feel that if I continue doing what I'm doing for the rest of my life, perhaps I would not die a happy person. I wanted that if I look back in my life few years down the line, I should be able to have a fulfilling experience; for that I thought that Civil Services is the best platform and that is how I thought of getting into Civil Services.

CSC: Whom do you give credit to for your success?

Anu: A lot of people are responsible for my success- my father, my mother, my masi, my brother, mamaji, my husband's side of the family, almost everybody. Even my friends helped me a lot. There were girls whom I did not even know properly, even then they helped me a lot. And finally, God's grace.

CSC: What is the role of family and others, like teacher and friends in your preparation and success?

Anu: As I just said, these people have played an instrumental role in my success. It is only because I could leave my son to my mother's care, I was able to focus on my studies. I was contented that he would be taken care of even better than I would have cared for. I lived at my masi's place, she made me feel so comfortable that I did not even had to get up to get a glass of water. I was able to devote the entire day to studies. My brother used to help me out with small bits of information on whatever topic I needed. So, my friends, family, a lot of people have played an important role in some or the other way.

CSC: What was your source of preparation? Which books, magazines, newspapers and online resources were used by you during the preparation?

Anu: For the static portion, I had basically relied on the NCERT books and standard books. For Geography, for example, I used class XIth and XIIth NCERT books, for Polity I used Lakshmikanth, for Indian national movement I used Spectrum book, for Environmental Studies I used Shankar IAS, for economy I used Shri Ram printed notes, so on and so forth. When it comes to Current Affairs, for that I relied a lot on online sources and one single source that stands out is Insights on India website; from there I used to read the daily current affairs and attempt the MCQs and then I also did their online test series. Basically these are the sources I referred to, other than that I used to refer to compilations of some magazines to quickly revise the name of the schemes and what they pertain to.

CSC: How much time did you devote for this exam?

Anu: Today, with the benefit of hindsight I can say that 1.5 years of dedicated study is good to crack this exam. When it comes to my case, I started preparing for Prelims 2017 immediately after Prelims 2016 results were announced. I could not clear Prelims 2016 by 1 mark and after that I started preparing for Prelims & Mains 2017 in an integrated manner. I believe that if you start a year prior to Prelims, it will be sufficient to crack this exam.

CSC: How did you manage your time in both Prelims and Mains examination?

Anu: Time management is a very crucial thing and also very tricky. I focused on little things, for example when I used to go for morning walks, I used to listen to the All India Radio news, after coming back I listened to the Rajya Sabha TV programs; even while eating I would listen to one or the other program on Rajya Sabha TV. I used to devote my entire day to studies besides the sleeping time from 10 pm to 4 am; basically I am a morning person so I used to get up early and study. For effective time management, I deactivated all my social media accounts- Facebook, Whatsapp etc. Also, I cut down on my family and friends time; I did not attend any family functions because at that point of time, the priority was preparation.

CSC: Did you prepare notes?

Anu: I personally haven't done much of notes preparation, especially for the Prelims preparation, I haven't done it. When it comes to Mains, I had started preparing some soft copy notes especially for parts like important statistics- GDP of the country, growth rate, how much is being spent on education, health, names of important committees etc. On whatever important current affairs were going on, I prepared very small, precise and crisp notes so that I could revise them quickly on the day of the Mains exam.

CSC: Was it subject-wise or paper-wise?

Anu: It was subject-wise; I had four word documents- GS-I, II, III, IV. For essay paper also I prepared soft copy notes, wherein I had jotted down and compiled the quotes by important persons and important current affairs that could be linked to multiple essay topics. Similarly, for my optional, in order to relate the optional with the current affairs, I had prepared a soft copy for that also.

CSC: Students usually face problem in Ethics, Paper IV. Which books have you referred and what was your strategy for preparation?

Anu: I believe people face problem in GS-IV because they tend to ignore it. People believe that it is an easy paper and they'll be able to write it but I can tell you that I have devotedly prepared for GS-IV. I referred to the book named G. Subba Rao Ethics paper and practiced a lot of answer writing, I compiled the quotes and important proverbs and referred to them multiple times; I precisely focused on the content written in the syllabus. I prepared definitions of every word written in the syllabus and studied all the dimensions related to the words.

CSC: Tell us something about the preparation of the essay paper.

Anu: Essay again is a very crucial part and does not have to be missed. I practiced a lot of essay writing. On almost all the weekends, I used to write one essay and used to get it evaluated by my friends, sometimes by my brother. A few months before the Prelims, I was not writing anything but overall I would have written around 12-15 essays and got them evaluated continuously.

CSC: What was your style of writing in the examination?

Anu: I come from a science background so I have a habit of writing in bullet format. Mostly it was in bullet format

and I used to support that with a lot of diagrams and flowcharts.

CSC: How did you practice writing answers?

Anu: Generally, for most of the questions, I would want to follow the style of introduction, body and conclusion but due to paucity of time I had to skip some of the question and had to come directly to the main point. So, out of 20 questions say in around 12-15 questions I would have followed that style and in the remaining 4—5 questions I would not have.

CSC: What was your optional? What was the basis of selecting it?

Anu: It was Sociology. I selected Sociology just by chance. I did not know about the subject but I was told that it has got a smaller syllabus and can be prepared pretty quickly. Other than that I relied on availability of the material, notes were available in the market and then I thought that it would help me in the preparation of topics in GS-I which were related to society etc. That is how I took it.

CSC: How did you prepare for the interview?

Anu: For interview preparation, I had some background. Because I have worked in the corporate sector for 9 years, there was no hesitation and I was confident enough to face the board. But, in order to have a feel of variety of questions, I attended many mock interviews. That helped me boost my confidence and to assess myself on how I perform under pressure. Many times, there used to be questions that I could not answer so I learnt how to calmly handle the situation and smilingly say “No, I don’t know the answer”.

CSC: Which was the board for your interview?

Anu: It was Smita Nagaraj Maam’s board.

CSC: Which type of questions were asked in your interview?

Anu: The questions were not specifically related to my optional or particularly to current affairs. There was a variety of questions and the questions were related to a lot of fields.

I was asked questions on PPP, standards of education in our country, narcotics problem in the country, why there is corruption in schools in India. There were quite a few questions on my career in insurance sector and health sector. Certain questions were asked on the latest budget, the kind of schemes that have been launched in the budget, were they good or not. Then there was a set of pretty interesting questions, for example one of the questions asked by one of the honorable member was- “There are pink pajamas flying over the Red Fort today. What do you understand by that?” Because my hobby is drawing and painting, the other question was- “It is hugely said that artists have a third eye. What do you mean by that and do you have a third eye?” So it was a mix of some interesting questions, current affairs, my background and issues in our surrounding.

CSC: Were you able to answer all the questions?

Anu: No, I was not able to answer three questions.

The first question that I was not able to answer was “Who is the Cabinet Minister from your college i.e. the Hindu college who has been recently appointed?”

The second question was “Since you travel from Delhi to Gurgaon by Metro, what is the difference that you have found at the ground level if you compare Delhi metro with Gurgaon metro?” But since I have not travelled in the Gurgaon metro, I could not answer this.

The third question was the interesting pink pajama question to which my answer was “It’s a very interesting question but I’m sorry I don’t know its answer.”

CSC: Were there any specific areas that they emphasized upon?

Anu: During the interview, I wouldn’t say that there was a particular theme to it. But as I had said earlier, there was an emphasis on my work profile and my background, the sectors that I have worked in.

CSC: Were there any questions that you had prepared for but weren’t asked during the interview?

Anu: Oh of course. I had prepared thousands of questions and there were thousands of questions which were not asked to me. I had memorized a lot of statistics, comparison between Indian and Chinese economy, India and American economy, what does the IMF says, what does the World Bank say and a lot of questions on Haryana because Haryana has a lot of controversial topics- khap panchhayats, issue of women in Haryana, for that matter patriarchy and reservation issues, the latest Ram Rahim case. So ya, I had prepared a lot of questions, especially I was expecting question on Haryana but there was none.

CSC: What is the importance of coaching in the preparation of the exam?

Anu: I would say that coaching is not extremely crucial for success in this exam. I had not taken any coaching for GS or my optional preparation. I had relied on self preparation. What I took help for was for answer writing. For my optional, I had joined Nice IAS Coaching Institute to practice answer writing. Other than that I did not rely on coaching. But yes, again for interview preparation, For interview preparation, I gave mock interviews at Samkalp, Vajirao & Reddy, Vajiram, Khan Study Group, Rau's etc. Individual guidancereceived here helped me improve my score.

CSC: What is the role of Civil Services Chronicle in your success?

Anu: I had referred to the Civil Services Chronicle Annual Issues to quickly revise the schemes and what they pertain to. For some parts of current affairs, I have relied on it.