

AIR 5, CSE 2017



Pratham Kaushik

“THE JOURNEY NEEDS DETERMINATION, DEDICATION AND PERSEVERANCE”

Pratham Kaushik, the 5th rank holder has been able to make his family proud by fulfilling their overlong dream in his second attempt of the Civil Services Examination. Pratham has vehemently made his place for himself in the Indian Administrative Services and believes this will help him in fulfilling his generous and thoughtful vision of empowering people. Here are the excerpts from our conversation with Pratham Kaushik:

CSC: First of all, our heartiest congratulation to you from Civil Services Chronicle. How do you feel about achieving AIR 5 in the UPSC Examination?

Pratham: It's a very pleasant feeling. I feel very good that I have been able to fulfill a dream that my family had dreamt long time ago.

CSC: What was your inspiration to become an IAS?

Pratham: I drew inspiration from my father, who is a Haryana Civil Services Officer. As a whole, I feel, as an IAS you are most equipped to empower people and I definitely believe in the approach that one does not feed fish to someone, instead you teach them how to fish. I feel, to empower people and to provide them with more opportunities, IAS is the best way to do it.

CSC: To whom do you give the credit for your success?

Pratham: The credit lies with all my friends and family, all the teachers who have been with me during this journey and all the well wishers; but specifically I wanted to be a role model for my little sister, which constantly motivated me; so I give credit to her that I could be an example for her.

CSC: It has been observed in the last few years that people who are graduating from technical backgrounds have been more successful in the examination. What are the possible reasons behind this?

Pratham: Actually, if you see, Civil Services is the most diverse pool of human resources that India has had earlier and now as well. You will see that students from different backgrounds, not only from engineering background, but also from medical, humanities, law background as well are becoming bureaucrats. People with technical background are getting slightly more success which might change in a few years. It is not a permanent trend. It will definitely change.

CSC: Students coming from these technical backgrounds take Humanities as their optional and they achieve success in the exam. What may be the reasons for this and do you think it is the right way?

Pratham: In my opinion, UPSC offers you an optional subject to check your attitude to study any subject in great detail. For example, even I took Geography as my optional and I have an engineering background, but I do not see any correlation here. There are many engineers, many of my friends as well, who have taken engineering as their optional subject and they are getting success too. It lies in the personal preference of the candidate.

CSC: What do you think is the criteria for choosing an optional?

Pratham: Geography, in my opinion, is an optional that helps you in General Studies as well and it is an ever-evolving optional because every day the human geography is changing. It is an interesting optional, that is why I took it.

CSC: Is there any correlation between one's age and the preparation? When should one start preparing for the examination?

Pratham: I do not think that age is a factor in starting the preparation. The moment you feel that you want to be an IAS or that you want to be a Civil Servant, you jump in right there.

CSC: When did you start your preparation?

Pratham: I started casually, during my college to look at the sources and newspapers but I started serious and regular preparation right after my college.

CSC: It is often seen nowadays that students who enter class XIIth are starting their preparation for three years. Do you think this trend is a good thing for them?

Pratham: Civil Services is not only about the knowledge that you've gained through your preparation, it is also about your personality and one's personality is groomed right from their childhood. So, for students who are taking up coaching or who are taking specific subjects right after class XIIth, I think it is a bit too early; they should concentrate on their graduation subjects. During graduation or right after graduation, they should start preparing.

CSC: What was your strategy while preparing for the exam?

Pratham: The most important aspect of my strategy was to break the syllabus down in small parts because the syllabus is vast. Sometimes you get lost in there, so to streamline my preparation, I divided the syllabus into small parts and assigned a few days for each part and then started to prepare them and revise them.

CSC: Did you have a separate strategy for Prelims and Mains or is it possible to prepare for both simultaneously?

Pratham: Except for the month right before the Prelims, I think the preparation is collectively done because the syllabus is more or less overlapping, so except for some specific topics for Mains and the time right before the Prelims exams when you have to mug up certain things, the preparation is all inclusive.

CSC: What should one consider while selecting notes and books for preparation because it is often seen that there are a plethora of books and materials out there? So how should one go about it?

Pratham: There is a lot of guidance available. I looked for strategies adopted by the toppers earlier and through that you can very well analyze that which material is best for which topic because there is no material that is perfect for the whole syllabus. In fact, even in GS or in optional, you have to look for materials for that specific topic and you have to read it multiple times.

CSC: If you can delineate a strategy for preparation for the overall examination, what would it be?

Pratham: First of all, as I said earlier, you break the syllabus down to understand it better and so that the syllabus does not bug you down. The second thing is to gather few resources based on the advice by your seniors or by toppers, you look for the resources and find out the best resources and then you read it, re-read it and then revise it; reading one source multiple times helps. You can divide the syllabus on the basis of what is more important and what is less important, by looking at the previous year question papers. Things that are more important can be prepared in great detail and the rest of the topics can be just gone through quickly.

Beyond all these things, you need to have a very good opinion of yourself, good self confidence, and a belief that you will make it because eventually attitude and belief will take you through the examination.

CSC: In the Mains examination, one should follow an inter-disciplinary approach and the same is the case with the questions. So how can one develop the inter-disciplinary approach?

Pratham: My optional was Geography and it is an inter-disciplinary subject because it encompasses history,

geopolitics, political sciences and society. So, because of the optional, an inter-disciplinary approach was developed automatically which helped me in GS as well.

CSC: Can essay be prepared with the help of essay specific classes just like GS?

Pratham: Essay is a written test of your personality, according to me, because at the Mains level you get to write your thoughts for three long hours on just two topics, so essay preparation lies with two aspects- one, your thought process, and other is the material and content that you have. The content can definitely be taken from the GS preparation and the thought process and the structuring of your essay needs to be practiced repeatedly. There is no such correlation between essay specific classes and the exam.

CSC: Ethics paper which is a very dynamic paper but over the years it has been noted that the questions are very easy but scoring marks has been difficult. Can you state why?

Pratham: In Ethics paper, you basically write what you think because time crunch is there and the paper is lengthy. The difference in marks is definitely because of two reasons- first, it is the solution that you think of the case study or problem that is given and secondly, the way you write it or your expression.

CSC: Did you find it necessary to study the whole syllabus as the whole syllabus of UPSC is vast? Is it necessary to cover the entire syllabus? Is it possible?

Pratham: That's what I told you, that you divide the syllabus into different parts. You will see that some parts of the syllabus are very crucial and important and are repeated almost every year which should be prepared in detail. Among the rest of the topics, you can pick and choose. Definitely, you have to skip certain topics because either they are not very relevant as far as questions are concerned or they are too dynamic to be completely prepared.

CSC: Can you give some insights into how you prepared subject-wise for both GS and optional?

Pratham: Most of my preparation is based on the NCERT and core books; I have read NCERT books multiple times. For GS I, for example, History, Art & Culture, I prepared everything from the NCERT books. Geography was my optional so I didn't need to prepare specifically for it.

For GS II- Polity and Governance, I relied on the current affairs and I tried to find out the reasons and need for certain government policies and their impact. For International Relations, I prepared certain bullet points on which international relations depend and vary; along these lines I wrote my answers in GS II.

For GS III, Agriculture and the Indian economy were covered in my optional; for the rest of it, I relied on the newspaper because GS II and GS III can comprehensively be covered with the help of newspapers. For Ethics, I did not read anything specifically. For Geography optional, there are specific books for different topics and along with the books, various materials from teachers are available in this field, they helped.

CSC: Have you taken any coaching classes?

Pratham: Yes, I joined coaching for my optional subject and test series. Coaching has been an important part of my preparation.

CSC: Thank you so much.

Pratham: Thank you.