



Newsletter_5_Piyush_Kamal_Ex-IRS

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Today in my **fifth newsletter**, I'm analyzing the topic — **the crisis of conscience**.

Conscience

In matters of conscience, the law of the majority has no place. - Mahatma Gandhi.

Conscience is an inner space in your mind that tells you whether what you are doing is morally right or wrong. In other words, conscience is often used to denote the inner working of our mind.

A person's conscience acts as a moral compass that guides him/her to regulate his behavior. Our principles and values guided by that moral compass influence everything that we choose to do in our life.

Even things as small as not throwing the trash outside on the road or vacating a seat for a small kid, or throwing away the food after the party is a conscious choice of yours guided by the values you choose to believe in.

Crisis of Conscience

A crisis of conscience is when it is challenging to decide the right thing to do under particular circumstances. The term is also used when someone keeps

worrying about things because they think they have done something unfair or morally wrong.

There are occasions when we cannot act in a congruous way with our values and principles. Due to some external pressure or internal greed, we sometimes prefer to sideline our voice of conscience and act contrary.

And our choice to act on the contrary end up suppressing our conscience.

However, there are instances when we cannot act according to our beliefs due to some external reasons beyond our control. Such situations subsequently create a feeling of guilt and shame.

How does it manifest in the public domain?

- It manifests when a civil servant has to face a crisis of conscience about policies or actions he/she has been asked to carry out.
- It manifests in civil servants' decision-making process, where the decision can impact marginalized people lacking a voice. The problem often arises when civil servants are pressured under the political influence to make immoral or unethical decisions.
- It manifests itself in the conflict between ethics and the law. For example—
 1. Traffic police stopping a speeding ambulance (carrying a heart patient) violating the prescribed speed limit.
 2. A public official's inability to help a genuine old citizen because the latter cannot produce requisite documents.
 3. A life of dignity is denied to transgender people who face oppression, discrimination, and marginalization, despite being legally identified as a separate gender.
 4. Administrative officers executing the order for the displacement of local villagers for the construction of a dam.

Invariably an individual facing a 'crisis of conscience' s/he goes into sudden behavioral change. S/he may feel remorse for his/her action that may lead to depression.

'Crisis of Conscience' is quite a common phenomenon in civil service. Therefore, a civil servant has to be emotionally and ethically competent to counter them. This competence can be acquired with experience through the use of Emotional Intelligence and practical wisdom.

The Way Out

It is common to come across such crises of conscience in the public domain where lives and decisions overlap. The key to overcoming such a crisis of conscience for public servants is keeping all dimensions in mind, freeing themselves from desires or pressures, and staying calm & true to the ethical code and legal framework.

When we have a crisis of conscience and try to answer a hard moral question, we need to ask ourselves: What's fair and just? How could I be most equitable here? In fact, the same values are exemplified in Gandhi's Talisman.

Conscience is a reaction of ourselves to ourselves, the voice of our true selves' that guides us to achieve our full potential. Thus, it is imperative to tune our conscience with our value systems to minimize, if not eliminate, the feelings of remorse, guilt, etc.