

**Aparna Gupta( IAS, Rajasthan)**



*Aparna Gupta, is currently working as the CEO of Smart City, Udaipur. She is an IAS Officer in Rajasthan from the batch of 2018. She completed her B.E. in Manufacturing Engineering from NSIT, Delhi and Masters in Public Administration from JNU. She was selected as a LAMP (Legislative Assistant to Member of Parliament) Fellow for the 2014-15 batch, and has previously worked with the Ministry of Railways and Save Life Foundation.*

**Interview:**

1. What motivated you to join the civil services?

**The diversity that the job offers was something that interested me a lot and I knew I wanted to join the civil services from a young age. You can do great work in civil services, but that exists in other professions as well. The diversity that civil services offers is unmatched. Every two to three years you get a different kind of exposure whether it is the education department, health department, or mining department. That is something that attracted me to the job.**

2. Have you faced any challenges being a woman bureaucrat in India? If so, how have you overcome them?

**In some ways, it is challenging to be a woman in any profession across the world. Yes there are challenges, especially when you are a mother it is even more difficult to strike a work-life balance. In bureaucracy there is still a stereotypical belief that if you are a woman or mother it will be difficult for you to do justice to “hard postings”. For instance, a woman collector will be expected to be at work all the time, and there is no concept of personal space for officers. But I still feel that conditions here are actually much better**

**than some corporate workplaces. In the USA, there is no maternity leave, but in bureaucracy there is paid maternity leave and childcare leave which provide a lot of support.**

3. What are some of the pivotal moments in your career that have left a lasting impression on you?

**I think it's still early in my career to say. I've only been in service for a few years, and have enjoyed all the wonderful experiences I've had so far. Hopefully, things will continue to get better.**

4. Could you elaborate on your experience as a Legislative Assistant to Member of Parliament (LAMP) Fellow? How did these insights into the legislative process influence your approach to policy formulation and governance throughout your career?

**I come from an engineering background so the LAMP fellowship really helped me understand the policy space, and more importantly the friends that I made, and the people that I met helped me enlarge my horizons and see things from different perspectives. As an engineer who studied in Delhi, this was the first time I had experienced good discourses on feminism and communism. Working closely with a Member of the Parliament helped me understand the legislative process of our country. This was useful for my preparation later on and helped me develop confidence in myself. More than the theoretical knowledge, I feel that my interactions with an interesting cohort helped shape my personality in many ways.**

5. Udaipur has ranked third in the list of Smart Cities for the year 2022. As the CEO of Smart City Udaipur, what are the key strategies you have employed to successfully execute development schemes aimed at transforming the city into a modern and sustainable urban area. Have you faced any obstacles in this regard?

**The government of India Smart City Mission had already been in force since the past seven years and a lot of development had already taken place in Udaipur when I joined. My focus was to complete the projects that had already been started and help the project come to an end in a streamline manner to develop that linkage with the urban local body so that all that Smart Cities have created in this time can be smoothly passed off to them, and a continuum of infrastructure development can be ensured.**

**The major challenge that we are faced with is implementation. In urban areas, you have to be very mindful of the different mix of residents as there is a lot of criticism given to local bodies. You have to take into account things like festivities, and sentiments of the people before beginning any kind of development work, and need to work around them to develop long lasting infrastructure.**

6. What do you believe are the biggest concerns being faced by policymakers in India today? How do you think these should be addressed?

**I think currently, the issue is that we are going to urbanize more as a country, and almost 50% of our population will live in urban areas, but our policy is still focused on rural development, agriculture marketing and rural-based schemes, and urban areas are neglected. India is the world's biggest IT hub, yet our policies on data-privacy concerns are not up to the mark. Things like cryptocurrency have started to gain popularity but are not addressed adequately. The landscape is shifting but our policies have not aligned with these shifts, which is a problem. The Smart City Mission has been one step that decision makers have taken to address these issues, and now that it is coming to an end next year, it is being decided whether to allocate more funds to these cities or pick new cities and focus more on IT development now. I know my department has started to focus on this, and we can hope to see more change soon in this regard.**

7. In your opinion, what steps should be taken to encourage more women to pursue careers in the civil services and policymaking roles?

**I think we really need to address our work culture. Our decision-makers, and those in position of responsibility, should try to make the process easier rather than more difficult for those following in their steps. They should have some committees that are focused on building a more supportive work culture for women once they have been selected. Basic facilities like creche facilities and working women bathrooms are not provided in most government buildings unless there is a woman collector or woman in a position of power who is making these changes. Men should themselves be thinking about these issues. Rather than trying to do things from the district up, I feel there should be support from the topmost leadership like the Chief Secretaries and District Secretaries to improve the working conditions for women.**

8. What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to pursue careers in policy and governance?

**I would say that it is a very good space to be in right now to get your voices heard, as well to be on the decision-making table and break the glass barriers surrounding women. More and more women should come into the public policy space, whether it is through**

**the civil society or NGOs or civil services. This is a space where women need more representation, and I would heavily encourage young women to pursue careers in this field.**