



Mains Practice Question

Q. “Compassion is a necessity, not a luxury. Without it, humanity cannot survive.” How can public servants institutionalize compassion without compromising on rule-based governance? (150 words)

10 Jul, 2025 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach:

- Introduce the answer by referring to a quote to justify the statement
- Give key arguments to the statement
- Give measures to Institutionalize Compassion Without Compromising Rule-based Governance
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction:

Indian philosophy teaches that all beings are interconnected (**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** - "The world is one family"). In this view, **compassion, that is the ethical impulse to empathize with others' suffering and take action to relieve it, is not optional, but essential** to ethical human action.

- In the context of public administration, this principle implies that **governance must blend legality with humanity.**



Body:

Compassion: A Necessity, Indispensable to Humanity:

- **Compassion Humanizes Governance:** In a world increasingly driven by procedures and metrics, compassion ensures that administration remains citizen-centric and humane.
 - This aligns with **Virtue Ethics (Aristotle)**, where compassion is a moral virtue that enables ethical conduct through character development.
- **Compassion Fosters Social Cohesion and Trust:** When citizens experience empathy and care from public institutions, they develop trust and cooperation, which are essential for democratic legitimacy and societal stability.

- **Utilitarian ethics** supports this by showing that compassionate governance leads to greater happiness and societal harmony—a key ethical outcome.
- **Compassion is Essential in Ethical Decision-Making:** Laws may not cover every moral dilemma; compassion enables **discretionary moral judgment**, especially in cases involving vulnerable or marginalized groups.
 - **Kantian ethics** holds that **treating individuals as ends in themselves (not means)** requires recognizing their dignity through compassionate actions.
- **Compassion Reflects Core Civilizational and Cultural Values:** In Indian philosophy, compassion is deeply embedded in traditions of dharma and karuna. It is not an emotional luxury but a civilizational duty.
 - This resonates with **Gandhian ethics and Buddhist moral thought**, which place compassion at the heart of ethical and spiritual living.

Institutionalizing Compassion Without Compromising Rule-based Governance:

- **Compassionate Interpretation of Rules:** Apply rules with a **justice-oriented mindset**, ensuring dignity and relief where rigid enforcement may cause harm.
 - **Example:** During lockdown, several DM offices arranged food and shelter for migrant workers beyond their immediate mandates.
- **Embedded Empathy in Policy and Program Design:** Design welfare programs with citizen experience in mind, especially for marginalized sections.
 - **Example: Telangana's KCR Kits for mothers**—responsive to health and emotional needs.
- **Ethical Training and Value Reinforcement:** Introduce compassion-focused training in administrative academies to strengthen emotional intelligence and moral reasoning.
 - Aligned with **Aristotle's concept of "phronesis" (practical wisdom)**.
- **Use Technology for Dignified Access:** Digital tools can help deliver services efficiently yet compassionately, reducing harassment and discretion.
 - **Example:** "Digital Life Certificate" for pensioners reduces burden on elderly citizens.
- **Grievance Redressal as Compassion in Action:** Empowering citizens to voice grievances creates responsive systems without legal compromise.
 - **Rajasthan Sampark Portal, Delhi's Mohalla Clinics** for real-time relief and care.

Conclusion

"A rule-based system without compassion becomes tyranny; compassion without rules becomes chaos." To truly serve the people, public administration must marry structure with soul. Institutionalizing compassion doesn't mean abandoning rules—it means applying them with sensitivity.