

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

(a) Explain the ethical meaning of this statement.

(b) Analyse its relevance for civil servants in contemporary public administration.

Question Understanding - Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world. (GS Paper – IV)
- **Essential Instructions in GS Paper IV Answer Writing:**
 - Answer the question as a future civil servant, not as a philosopher. Clearly mention the ethical principles involved.
 - Best Writing Format is to use THEMATIC + BULLET format with formula: Thinker → Core ethical idea → Governance relevance.
- **Directive words:**
 - Explain → Bring out ethical philosophy and meaning
 - Analyse → Apply critically to present-day governance
- **Focal points of the questions:**
 - Design Contextualisation of Gandhian ethics
 - Humanistic governance perspective

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

Introduction Paragraph

- Contextualisation of Gandhian ethics
- Humanistic governance perspective

Body Paragraph

A. Ethical Meaning of the Statement

Focus on principles, not scheme names

- **Selflessness and Moral Purpose**
 - Ethics goes beyond self-interest
 - True identity emerges through altruism
- Ethics terms: Altruism, self-transcendence
- **Service as a Path to Self-Realisation**
 - Service cultivates empathy, compassion, and humility
 - Inner growth through contribution to others
- Link to Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya
- **Rejection of Ego and Materialism**
 - “Losing oneself” implies detachment from ego
 - Moral fulfilment over material success

B. Relevance for Civil Servants in Contemporary Public Administration

- **Foundation of Public Service Ethos**
 - Civil service as a service, not authority
 - People-centric governance
- Ethics terms: Public service, stewardship
- **Integrity and Resistance to Corruption**
 - Selfless service discourages misuse of power
 - Focus on public interest over personal benefit
- **Compassionate and Inclusive Governance**
 - Empathy towards marginalised groups
 - Responsive and humane administration
- **Example:** Service delivery in health, disaster relief, welfare schemes
- **Ethical Leadership in Complex Governance**

- Balancing efficiency with ethical responsibility
- Leading by example in times of pressure

Analytical Edge:

In an era of performance metrics and political pressure, Gandhian service ethics act as a moral compass.

Conclusion (max. 40 Words)

- Forward-looking synthesis

Dos & Don'ts

- **Do for Maximum Marks**
 - ✓ Explain the ethical philosophy behind the quote
 - ✓ Use ethics terminology (altruism, integrity, empathy)
 - ✓ Apply clearly to civil services and governance
 - ✓ Maintain balanced, non-preachy tone
 - ✓ Structure answers part-wise (a) and (b)
- **Don't do these Common Mistakes**
 - × Don't merely paraphrase the quote
 - × Avoid spiritual sermonising
 - × Don't ignore contemporary administrative challenges
 - × Avoid generic "civil servants should..." statements
 - × Don't exceed word limit with unnecessary quotations

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

Mahatma Gandhi's timeless assertion, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others," serves as a cornerstone of ethical philosophy, suggesting that true self-realization and fulfillment are not achieved through inward-looking egoism, but through outward-facing selfless action. It presents a paradox where "losing" one's selfish interests (ego, material greed, and personal ambition) allows a person to "find" their true, authentic self, rooted in compassion and purpose.

(a) Ethical Meaning of the Statement

The statement "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others" emphasizes that true self-realization comes not through ego-centric introspection, but through altruism and selflessness.

- **Transcendence of Ego:** "Losing yourself" means moving beyond narrow self-interest and personal ambition to connect with the larger human experience.
- **Self-Discovery through Action:** True identity one's values, purpose, and strengths is revealed when an individual is tested in the service of those in need.
- **Virtue Ethics Perspective:** It aligns with Aristotelian virtue ethics, where moral excellence is achieved by practicing kindness and compassion habitually.
- **Moral Growth:** Engaging in service cultivates essential virtues like integrity, altruism, and justice, which are fundamental to a person's ethical character.

(b) Relevance for Civil Servants in Contemporary Public Administration

In a modern era often dominated by individualism and materialism, this Gandhian principle provides a moral compass for public servants.

- **Spirit of Service (Seva):** It transforms the role of a bureaucrat from a "rule enforcer" to a "servant of the nation," ensuring that public welfare always precedes personal gain.
- **Humanizing Governance:** While modern administration relies on quantifiable metrics, service-oriented leadership ensures empathy and dignity in dealing with the most vulnerable citizens.

- **Ethical Decision-Making:** When faced with ethical dilemmas or systemic gaps, a commitment to service helps civil servants prioritize the "common good" over rigid legalism.
- **Building Public Trust:** Selfless actions by administrators (e.g., during disasters or pandemics) strengthen social cohesion and public confidence in democratic institutions.
- **Curbing Corruption:** A civil servant who finds fulfillment in service is less likely to be swayed by monetary temptations, thus upholding absolute integrity.

Example: IAS officers like Mohd. Ali Shihab or Armstrong Pame have demonstrated this by initiating community-driven projects (like the "People's Road") that went far beyond their official mandates to serve marginalized populations.

Gandhi's statement is a timeless reminder that in the face of modern individualism and materialism, the most sustainable, fulfilling, and ethical way for a civil servant to achieve personal and professional satisfaction is by losing themselves in the service of society.
