

Kamnashish Sen

Rank : 289

Interview Marks : 216

Student of Mains Test series (Online / Distance Learning)

Personality Development Program for IAS Interview (Classroom)



Interview Board chairman : Mr. P K Mishra

Duration : 40-42 minutes

I was the last to be interviewed in the afternoon session. My turn came at around 4:30 PM. Even after attending 'n' number of interviews in my life, I was feeling a tad tensed and jittery. The attendant called me as the bell rang and said 'Sir aapka turn aa gya'.

I took the permission of the board before entering. There were a total of 5 members (M1, M2, M3) including the chairman (Ch) and a female member (F1). I was in complete awe of the setting for the first 10-15 seconds and then I recovered.

Me: Good evening Ma'am, Good evening sirs.

Chairman: Good evening. Please sit. (After a brief pause) So welcome Mr. Agastya Sen.

Me: (I was flummoxed) Sir I am Kamnashish Sen.

Chairman: I know you are Kamnashish Sen. So what's the meaning of your name?

Me: I told that whatever I wish, I get that as a blessing from God

Chairman: Ahh.. You are done then. I know what you have wished for. So, no need of this interview. You are already an IAS.

(Laughter all around and I was also smiling)

Chairman: Do you know why this reference to Agastya Sen

Me: Sir, I think I can decipher. He is the protagonist of English August.

Chairman: Who wrote that?

Me: Sir it is written by Upamanyu Chatterjee. It's a story of an IAS officer named Agastya Sen who is posted in a village. There was also a movie by the same name starring Rahul Bose.

Chairman: Correct. No difference between the character and you then. That's the reason I called you that.

Me: Sir, he was elite if I clearly remember. He studied in Stephens.

Chairman: Yes, and you studied in the Scindia school, NIT and IIM Ahmedabad.

Me: Sir, I may have studied in the best of institutions but my school has never been an elite institution. In fact, we had very less luxuries compared to other kids studying in a day scholars' public school.

Chairman: Hmnnn, I know about your school and I agree to that. Can you name some of your distinguished alumni? Only name those who have been in the civil services.

Me: Yes Sir. Mr. Shivshanker Menon (National Security adviser), Mr. Parashuram (Chief Secy. of MP), Mr. Bharat Vir Wanchoo (Governor of Goa), Mr. K Natwar Singh, Mr Pavan Kumar Verma and many others

Chairman: (Smiling) you have done clay modeling. Can you name me the famous person who carves in sand?

Me: Yes sir, He is Mr Pattanayak. Ah, Mr Sudarshan Pattanayak.

Chairman: Good. I see you have got very high marks in Physics. I will ask you some questions then

Me: Smiling. Sir, that was in class 12th. However I am ready to answer the questions.

Chairman: Take any law of Physics. And then convert the law into moral law. You get my question

Me: I think I can try.

Chairman: (Laughing) you are quick.

Me: I will take the 1st law of motion. I stated the law and gave a moral equivalent connecting an honest/corrupt person to an external force of motivation.

Chairman: Good one. Can you think about optics, say the mirror? See I am always helping you. Smiles all around

Me: Sir, I can try. I related the image and the reflection to the moral character.

Chairman: I see. Good line of thought. Then he explained his point of view also.

Me: Thank you sir.

Chairman: I am not over. I have my eyes on you. (Laughter all around)

Me: (smiling).

He signals M1 to take over.

M1: You are a member of MENSA I see. I have heard about it. It was in the news recently. Can you tell me what it is about?

Me: Sir, Mensa is a club of high IQ people in the world. I explained the concept/ethos of the club and the IQ test which one needs to clear to become a member. I explained the current context of an Indian origin girl who scored more than Einstein. I told them my perspective of IQ and how it's just a yardstick.

Some cross questioning followed. M1 seemed pleased with my answer. But he wanted to grill me. I could sense that.

M1: You have done your MBA from the best business school of the country. So are you prepared?

Me: (*I did not get his question.*) Sir I am sorry, I could not get you.

M1: Are you prepared or not?

Me: I was still wondering what he meant. (*I told myself to hell with the question.*) I said confidently, Sir I am well prepared.

M1: Ok, Let's start with finance. Can you explain the concept of NPV and IRR? How are they related and what is a good measure.

Me: I was smiling inside. Sir, Can I use a paper and pencil? I drew couple of graphs, took 2-3 examples. I explained it in a very lucid manner. I took my sweet 3-4 minutes.

M1: Good one. So your strength is finance.

(I was laughing inside now. I was least interested in finance and in fact quite weak in it)

M1: Let's take marketing.

Chairman: Yes yes, let's check him in marketing. Everyone was laughing and I also smiled.

M1: Now sell yourself to the board. The condition is 'you are unsuitable for this job and we should not take you'. He made one or two more points.

Me: Sir, I have done my education etc. from one of the best institutions of the country. I am working with one of the big corporate houses. I am doing exceedingly well for the company. I am contributing to their top-line and bottom-line. In this business, I am also contributing to the society in an indirect manner. So why should I waste my skills coming into the govt. sector where we have limited funds, lot of red-tape etc. I enumerated other points also.

M1: Very well. Now counter argue whatever you have said and sell yourself as a future IAS officer.

Chairman: I am watching you. (Again laughter all around)

Me: Fine sir, I will try doing that. Now this was my area where I had introspected at least 100 times. I made solid points very fluently.

M1: Fine, let's take an example. How would you bring you skills of b-school to play here? Take marketing for an example.

Me: Sir, I will take the example of the Mid-day meal scheme and Unilever as a corporate house. Now Unilever as a company spends millions of rupees on promotion and advertisement. I will rope in them to sponsor the Mid-day meal schemes in my district.

Me: Sir, (can I use Hindi). Sir the *chappatis* which would be sponsored, they would have a print on it stating '*Kya aapne lifebuoy se haath dhoye hai*'. It will serve a lot of purposes. I will change the language to cater to different regions in the country. It will serve 4 main purposes. Teaching hygiene to the kids, promotion for the company, CSR for the company and most importantly it will save the expenditure for the govt. so that it could be spent in some other scheme/program. Sir, it's just an example and there are many such avenues. My skills are very easily transferable to the government sector.

Chairman: Hmnnn, good. So do you have friends working in such companies?

Me: Yes sir, I do have many friends in such places.

The chairman now felt that M1 has exceeded his quota of time and passed the baton to the female member (F1) to take over.

F1 seemed to be a sociologist and wanted me to test on that as sociology happens to be my subject.

F1: You have lived in so many places. All India covered by now, right.

Me: Ma'am, North India is left. However I have lived for many years in Gwalior.

F1: Ok. Can you tell me what the problems of Assam are? It is your native.

Me: I mentioned 6-7 problems of Assam in a point-wise manner

F1: Take the main problem in Assam

Me: Ma'am it's the alienation of the people

F1: Can you give examples and the reasons

Me: I gave the example of last year where lakhs of people came back from Pune, Bangalore. I talked about the reasons and went ahead on how we can solve them.

F1: Very well. How did Marx define alienation? Was it just limited to the proletariat?

Me: *This was my territory with my fascination for Marx.* I explained taking examples that alienation was not just limited to a particular section.

F1: What about the other problems in Assam. I know you have couple of them. But you mentioned geography and location also.

Me: I talked about the chicken's neck, floods and how the disaster management needs a revamp. Now here I also talked about monitoring the waters of Tsangpo and then mentioned about Siang and Lohit danger levels as they meet in Dholla to constitute the mighty Brahmaputra. Cross-border talks would be helpful. I also mentioned about the condition of Brahmaputra management authority quoting figures, RISAT, Bodo paddy etc.

Chairman: These are good laid-out suggestions. I hope they get implemented and people's lives are saved.

Me: Yes Sir, Thank you Sir.

M2 took over

M2 seemed to be a difficult man to please. He gave me couple of situational questions and I did fairly well. There were a lot of cross-questioning and I stuck to my stand. One was pretty interesting when he asked me the difference between honesty and integrity and I gave couple of examples. Chairman seemed to be very interested and was also putting up questions.

M2 also questioned regarding the deemed university status of IIMs. I told that it was in the news since there were talks that IIMs in the near future could confer MBA degrees rather than PGDM

Now was the turn of final member M3. M3 seemed to be a bureaucrat by his posture.

M3: So Kamnashish, you are the DC of this poor village and they don't have many amenities. There are corporates who are willing to invest but that comes at a price. He went for 2-3 minutes explaining the situation and then posed the question that what would I do in the particular situation?

Me: Sir, I would do a stakeholder analysis and understand what the cost-benefit ratio is. This is easier said than done but I suppose it would be my first step. I stated couple of other steps favoring devolution of decision making.

M3: But you are from a corporate background and hence you would side with them. How would you ensure that you don't deviate?

Me: Sir, This is an aspect of development administration and I have always considered Gandhiji as an idol for that. I would recall his talisman and remember the poorest face I have seen in my district and how my decision is going to impact him/her.

M3: Fine. You have done an advertisement film also in Capgemini. Now-a-days there are hopeless detergent ads in the TV.

Me: Yes sir some of them are.

M3: What's your favorite detergent advertisement then?

By this time, my mind was completely exhausted with over 30 minutes of my interview. My lips went completely dry. Forget detergent ads I could not remember one detergent. Chairman turned to be my savior.

Chairman: Aree, have some water. This is for you only. Please have some.

Me: Thank you Sir and in flat 2-3 seconds finished the glass. Water did help and I felt energetic once again.

Me: Sir, I like the Surf ad

M3: which ad you are talking about?

Me: Sir, the 'Daag Achhe hain' campaign

M3: *(everyone was smiling)* Why is it so?

Me: Gave the reasons of freedom to the children to play, soil the clothes and let them be kids. And whatever they do to their clothes, Surf is there.

M3: Who is the creator of this campaign?

Me: Sir, Mr R Balki

M3: He is also famous for something else.

Me: Yes Sir, He made two Bollywood movies Paa and Cheeni Kum

M3: Recently, his wife also became famous.

Me: Sir, she is Gauri Shinde and she made her debut with English Vinglish

Chairman: *Aree.. tumhe itna time kaha se milta hai itne saare movies dekhne ka. Everyone started laughing and I was also smiling.*

Chairman: So you watch Hollywood films also

Me: Yes Sir, I have watched almost all the Top-250 movies of IMDb

Chairman: What is this IMDb? I have heard it somewhere

Me: Sir, its internet movie data base. Explained how the ratings work and how amazon is the owner etc.

Chairman: Today I will go and check some of the movies there. (Smiles all around) What is the Number 1 movie there in the list?

Me: Sir, its Shawshank Redemption.

Chairman: Accha it's the movie of that prisoner. Who is the lead and who directed it? You know that.

Me: With a broad smile. Sir, it stars Tim Robbins and is directed by Frank Darabont. He also made the movie Green Mile with Tom Hanks

Chairman: Now one last question and after that you can go and also watch a movie.

Everyone laughed again and I was also smiling

Chairman: What's your take on the Kumbh Mela.

(I was wondering how this Kumbh Mela question popped up)

Me: Sir, I have a different take on this apart from the mythological and religious angle.

Chairman: I am interested to know.

Me: I gave the scientific-geo logic of earth's radiations and immunity linking it with latitude and secondly told the socio-cultural aspect stating the elections of Akhara leaders etc.

Chairman: So Kamanasish. Your interview is over.

(Everyone smiling)

I thanked everyone and then the chairman said all the best and something to do with fire but I could not hear him.

I came out and asked the attendant what was the time. I smiled and said to myself that this is the best which I could have done. I was just myself in the entire process.

I was happy that I gave my best and the rest is DESTINY.