Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

“Mindless addiction to Form, ignoring the Substance of the matter, results in rendering of injustice. A perceptive civil servant is one who ignores such literalness and carries out true intent.” Examine the above statement with suitable illustrations

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Form versus substance, procedural justice, purposive interpretation, administrative discretion, empathy, public interest, true intent, perceptive civil servant

Model Answer

Introduction

Rules and procedures are essential for impartial administration, but excessive attachment to their literal form can defeat the very purpose for which they were created. Good administration therefore balances procedural compliance with substantive justice.

Body

For example, a welfare beneficiary may possess all substantive eligibility criteria but lack a minor document because of displacement or illiteracy. Rejecting the claim mechanically may comply with procedure but defeat the welfare objective.

Similarly, during a natural disaster, insisting on normal documentation before providing emergency relief can cause avoidable suffering. A perceptive officer can use lawful discretion to protect genuine beneficiaries while

maintaining accountability.

In procurement, an officer should distinguish between a substantive violation affecting quality or fairness and a harmless clerical error that does not alter the competitive outcome. Treating both identically may create procedural injustice.

However, ignoring form altogether can encourage arbitrariness, corruption and favouritism. Therefore, the civil servant must interpret procedures in light of their legitimate purpose while remaining within legal authority.

Conclusion

The ethical civil servant respects both **rule and reason**. Procedural safeguards should serve justice rather than obstruct it; where lawful discretion exists, sensitivity to the substance of a case ensures humane and purposive administration.

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