



GENESIS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS AN INDEPENDENT DISCIPLINE AND ITS EVOLUTION IN INDIA

*Dr. Sunita Dhaka**

ABSTRACT

The research paper seeks to describe and analyse the genesis of Public Administration as an independent discipline of social sciences in USA after the seminal Contribution of Woodrow Wilson to Political Science Quarterly (1887)). It explains how the emergence of administrative state had created the objective situation which proved functional in this context. But its primary focus is on its evolution in India which had begun during the colonial period as a result of its introduction by the University of Madras in 1937. However, the credit for its growth has to be given mainly to the efforts of Paul Appleby in the post-independence period. The global trends in the development of this discipline have also proved very useful for its growth in India. This paper also brings to the sharp focus the fact that Public Administration had acquired an inter-disciplinary perspective in the 1970's. The adoption of the policy of liberalization Globalisation and Privatisation in 1991 brought about a paradigm shift in this context, Information Revolution and the focus on governance instead of administration have also constituted to its development in India. The need for refining the discipline for emerging challenges too have been highlighted in the paper.

KEY WORDS

Public Administration, Private Administration, Inter-disciplinary Approach, Management, Political Science, Governance, e-Governance, Project Management, Research Methodology, Public Policy and New Public Administration.

* Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Government College, Sector-14, Gurugram (Haryana)



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

The emergence of Public Administration, as a discipline of formal study and practice in India, has been a vibrant initiative whose history dates back to more than 125 years. In fact, it has been even much more older and may be traced from the Ancient era. However, as a separate subject of study, Public Administration had gained its contemporary importance in USA after the emergence of administrative state, as has been termed by Dwight Waldo in 1948. However, this quest achieved only a varying degree of success in other parts of the world. The scholars and researchers in this field had been making a relentless pursuit since then for addressing significant problems, issues and challenges that had emerged in the functional domain of the state. Consequently, they have been able to make significant contribution to the development of Public Administration as an independent field of study. Their strenuous efforts have, as a matter of fact, brought about multifarious changes in this discipline.

However, the origin of Public Administration as an independent academic discipline has to be primarily attributed to the contributions of scholars from USA. As a matter of fact, the process of its development had begun as a result of the famous essay by Woodrow Wilson, 'The Study of Public Administration', which had been published in the *Political Science Quarterly* in 1887.

The discipline of Public Administration has since then, undergone numerous phases over the years. It has, however, witnessed a mix of acceptances, misgivings and identity crises during this span. But despite these constraints, it has succeeded in building several paradigms during the course of its journey. Nicolas Henry has aptly suggested the following paradigms in the evolution of Public Administration as an independent academic discipline¹:

- 1: The Politics-Administration Dichotomy, 1900–1926.
- 2: The Principles of Administration, 1927–1937.
- 3: Public Administration as Political Science, 1950–1970.
- 4: Public Administration as Administrative Science, 1956–1970.
- 5: Public Administration as Public Administration, 1970 - ?

The above paradigms or stages of development in Public Administration indicate the desired focus as well as the locus for the discipline.



THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

All great human events in history have been captured by this discipline. Although organization and administrative practices in public settings are as old as civilization, the transition from feudal to the nation-state has been made possible by the developments in policy sciences on one hand and by the fruition of policy execution on the other. The social sciences theory in general and that of Public Administration in particular has culminated in the ordering of factual material (history, events, cases, stories, measures of opinion and observation) so as to present evidence through definitions, concepts, and metaphors that have contributed in the promotion of our understanding in this context in a big way. The nature of theory in Public Administration `what ought to be'-is normative in character . It has helped in building bridges among the disciplines of Public Administration, Political Science, and Philosophy.ⁱⁱ

Dwight Waldo (1956) has, in this context, aptly emphasizes on the “art and science” of Public Administrationⁱⁱⁱ. Echoing the same view, Dimock and Dimock (1969) maintain that Public Administration as field of study is concerned with the “what” and “how” of government.^{iv} In this connotation, the “what” implies the subject matter and technical knowledge of the field, whereas “how” denotes the technique of administration and management. Both these aspects are imperative and together they form the concept which is better known as administration.

Consequently the discipline of Public Administration has been able to offer a number of welfare services to the people in the contemporary era. It has also contributed in a major way in promoting the democratic values, public interest, public policy and services to society (Spicer, 2005).^v The definition given to it by Nigro and Nigro (1989) has further widened its scope^{vi}. According to them, Public Administration encompasses the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of state and their inter-relationships. Since political process has an important role in public policy formulation, it sets Public Administration apart from Private Administration. But at the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that the difference between the Public and the Private Administration has become narrower over the years.

Be that as it may, for Simon, Smithburg and Thompson (1950), Public Administration refers to the activities of the executive branch of Government including the Government Corporations and the specialized agencies.^{vii} Corson and Harris (1963) have,



however, in this context, emphasized the “action” part of Government to operationalize its goals.^{viii}

Henry (1999) has significantly elaborated this argument by adding that Public Administration is a “broad ranging and amorphous combination of theory and practice; its purpose is to promote a superior understanding of government and its relationship with the society it governs as well as to encourage public policies more responsive to social needs and to institute managerial practices attuned to effectiveness, efficiency and the deeper human requisites of the citizenry.”^{ix}

THE EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS A DISCIPLINE IN INDIA

The study of Public Administration as an academic discipline in India is over six decades old and it has been constantly evolving over the years. A good number of universities are now offering both under-graduate, post-graduate courses and research programmes. Public Administration has also become the virtual choice of the majority of civil service aspirants at the national and state levels. The discipline has also been able to extend its domain to other areas like Management, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Political Science, Informatics and Electronic Governance. Advancements in the 21st century have altered the functions and processes of the organizations and governments worldwide. These changes are, however, yet to fully reflected in the study of Public Administration in India. The Public Service Commissions at the Union and State levels have been, therefore, revising their curricula from time to time.

Looking back at the initial years, it had only been after 1937 that Public Administration came to be recognized by the universities of India as a separate discipline. The University of Madras had taken the leading this context by starting a Diploma Course in Public Administration. It was closely followed by Allahabad University in the year 1938 when it launched a course on Local Self-Government. In spite of these early initiatives to recognize it as a separate field of study, this has also been the period of an identity crisis for the Public Administration as there were no discernible indications of its being accepted as an independent area of study and research. Even the scholars of Public Administration had kept on pursuing their interest in Political Science. So much so that even the resolution of the aforementioned crisis had been sought through the canons and the tenets of returning back to



the fold of Political Science. It was natural in such a situation that the discipline of Public Administration had to continue to progress and mature under the surrogacy and domination of Political Science for almost two decades. Professor Mohit Bhattacharya has put this crisis of the discipline's identity very succinctly: "Historically, the setting up of a new discipline has always been highly controversial. The current efforts to make Public Administration an autonomous discipline in our universities need to be debated purely from the standpoint of its academic status and substantive contents.^x

However, this period had also been privy to the national and international attention on the discipline. In the early years of 1940s, as many as four major universities, Lucknow University, Patna University, Osmania University (Hyderabad) and Aligarh Muslim University had started Diploma Courses in Public Administration. However, most of the established scholars of Political Science saw little substance in the claim of Public Administration to get recognized itself as an independent discipline. Consequently, the Political Science continued to dominate the arena of Public Administration. At this juncture in the history of the discipline of Public Administration, it was Dwight Waldo (The Administrative State-1948) who laid stress on the recognition of Public Administration within the context of a democratic governmental process and introduced the concept of 'administrative politics'.

His efforts were amply supplemented by Paul H. Appleby^{xi} (Policy and Administration-1949), who had advocated that Public Administration needs to be considered as a government in direct action and called for the reconciliation of policies and administration. With the opening of a full-fledged Department of Public Administration in 1949 at the Nagpur University, this impasse came to a welcome conclusion.

It is pertinent, in this context, to mention that Paul Appleby had also founded the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi in 1954. This was first of its kind of an institution for academic and professional pursuit in Public Administration. Professor Appleby was himself an ardent supporter of the Weberian model and had been outspoken about the exclusive responsibility and obligation of the bureaucracy for achieving state targets and for fulfilling socio-economic goals under direct state intervention. He took this mission further and had been instrumental in establishing separate departments of Public



Administration in the University of Rajasthan (Jaipur) and the Panjab University (Chandigarh) in the year 1956.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Immense potential of Public Administration as an academic discipline and as a field of research has gradually been appreciated by the institutions of higher learning in social sciences including in the universities across the world. The period also saw a perceptible paradigm shift in the Theory of Public Administration from Wilson's Administrative State and Weberian Bureaucratic Model to the Management Centric Processes and Structures. This change in focus also brought to fore the underlying essential and realistic aspects of Public Administration pertaining to various dimensions related to the performance of state's core functions. It also gave conjectural validation to the skills and procedures for negotiating complexities and real-time challenges of administration in the field.

The initiatives for establishing Public Administration departments were almost parallel to the phase of the development of the discipline as Management/Administrative Science. The efforts had also been made to develop its credibility as a methodical study based on certain well defined principles. Faced with disdain at the hands of Political Scientists, the scholars in Public Administration continued to pursue meaningful themes that may be able to accentuate the functional side of Public Administration and also kept on using these for evolving its curricula. Be that as it may, it will be grossly unfair to call the foray into Management and Administrative Expertise as coping mechanisms against the dominance of Political Science. This single-mindedness academic quest culminated in a long term bearing on the curricula of the discipline in the various universities.

After successfully emerging out of the crisis of identify, Public Administration has been rapidly evolving itself as a multi-disciplinary subject in its own right. It has brought into its ambit areas like economics, financial management, behavioral science, nuances of socio-economic interplay and research methodologies, etc. to develop skills for policy development and implementation. This has resulted in providing a firm root to Public Administration as an academic and professional discipline. It is now close to establish itself as an authoritative stream of Social Sciences which has become independent from Political



Science and Management. It is now having its own arena of development, research and study.

Presently, a large numbers of universities, departments and schools across the globe are offering Public Administration at the undergraduate and the post-graduate levels and their programs have got a higher level of accreditation. The Public Administration has also been included in the joint departments of Political Science, Management and Public Administration.

EMERGING TRENDS IN THE DISCIPLINE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA

As an academic discipline, the Public Administration has been developing rapidly. It has undertaken significant responses for tackling the emerging social realities. Public Administration in Indian academia has, as a matter of fact, undergone a remarkable evolution. It now mirrors the historical, political, and social changes in the country. It has also experienced significant trends and transformations over the years. It is aptly reflects the evolving nature of governance, societal needs, and global influences. The roots of the subject will, however, have to be traced from the British colonial era when the administrative practices were heavily influenced by British governance structures. During this period, the focus had primarily been on the understanding and implementation of administrative techniques imported by the colonial rulers.

There have been conscious efforts to indigenize the study of Public Administration during the post-independence period. Attempts have been made to develop administrative models that were context-specific and were aligned with the socio-political fabric of the newly formed nation. This marked the beginning of a transition from a borrowed administrative framework to a more indigenous and inclusive one. Visionaries like Nehru, Sardar Patel and B.R. Ambedkar had played an instrumental role in crafting it.

As a matter of fact, the indigenization became a defining trend and the scholars sought to infuse local cultural and administrative traditions into the study and practice of Public Administration. This led to emphasis on the importance of context-specific approaches and the acknowledgment of the unique challenges and opportunities that have been presented by India's socio-cultural diversity.



Consequently, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the establishment of institutions and the formulation of policies that aimed at shaping a unique form of an Indian Administrative Discourse. Serious efforts have also been made to develop a robust administrative system that could meet the challenges of a diverse and developing nation.

Another notable phase in the evolution of Public Administration had occurred in India in the 1970s and 1980s when there had been a growing recognition for the need of acquiring an interdisciplinary perspectives. The subject has, by now, as has already been stated, expanded its horizons beyond traditional administrative studies by incorporating insights from Sociology, Economics, and Political Science. This interdisciplinary approach has enriched the understanding of administrative processes by acknowledging their embeddedness in the broader social and economic contexts.

After the consolidation of democratic governance in India, emphasizes began to be laid on grassroots administration. Panchayati Raj Institutions have been strengthened to promote local self-governance by empowering communities and by fostering participatory decision-making. This trend is being fully reflected in the commitment for decentralization and inclusive governance.

The liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s has also ushered in a new era of challenges and opportunities for the scholars in the discipline of Public Administration. It has been required to adapt itself to the changing dynamics of governance in a more interconnected and technologically advanced world. Concepts like the e-governance and public-private partnerships began to gain prominence as scholars started to grapple with the implications of globalization on the practice of Public Administration as the administration had by then begun to explore innovative ways of enhancing efficiency and transparency.

Be that as it may, the 21st century has witnessed a transformative trend with a strong focus on technological integration and e-governance. The adoption of digital platforms and information technology has now become integral to administrative processes. Therefore, e-governance initiatives aiming at improving service delivery have been adopted for reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks and for enhancing citizen engagement.

Above all, emphasis on social justice and inclusive governance has also emerged as a prominent trend. Public Administration in India has begun to address issues of the



marginalized communities, gender inequality, and affirmative action. Therefore, the policies and practices have been so designed as to ensure that administrative processes are made equitable and become responsive to the needs of all the citizens.

As awareness of environmental challenges has grown on account of the problem of climate change globally, Public Administration in India has incorporated themes related to environmental sustainability and sustainable development too. As a result, the administrators have begun to study the ecological impact of policies and sought ways to integrate the goal of sustainability into the practices of governance.

Responding to the complexities of governance in a rapidly changing world, there has also emerged an increasing trend towards public-private partnerships. Collaborations between the public and private sectors is being explored as a means to leverage resources efficiently and to deliver public services in a more effective manner.

As a result, Public Administration in India has begun to embrace a more dynamic and responsive approach to governance. The curriculum has been evolved to address such contemporary issues as climate change, urbanization, and social justice. There has also been an increased emphasis on practical training and experiential learning and on the preparation of students for the complexities of real-world administrative challenges. As a result, the discipline of public administration has started demonstrating an adaptive and resilient character. This has also underscored the need for an agile administrative framework which is capable of addressing unforeseen challenges. The evolution of this discipline now aptly reflects the resilience and adaptability of India's administrative machinery in responding to the diverse needs of its citizens.

However, the subject of Public Administration in India stands today at crossroads. It has been trying to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing society. It is no longer merely a theoretical pursuit but has become an active engagement with the challenges of governance.

An important landmark in this context has been the emergence of the 'New Public Administration', which lays emphasis on social aspect in public policy formulation and its implementation as well as on the corporate governance, etc. Public Administration, as a university level subject of study, has also developed new branches like Development Administration, Comparative Public Administration and Democratic Decentralization, etc.



EMERGING TRENDS IN THE CURRICULUM OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

As has already been stated, the study of Public Administration as a subject and academic discipline has, as a matter of fact, developed in India with the tacit purpose of understanding, assimilating and applying learnings and outcomes from the processes that unfold on the ground during its practice. The subject has as a result become more demanding and open-ended because the role of government has become more complex. The correlation, in the context of theory and practice of Public Administration has by now assumed a unique character with the passage of time. This has become both its strength and weakness as an independent discipline. Mosher (1975) contends that “Public Administration has cross-interests with virtually all other social sciences. In fact, it would appear that any definition of this field would be either so encompassing as to call forth the wrath or ridicule of others or so limiting as to stultify its own discipline.”^{xii}

It is against this background that the disciplines of Public Administration as an independent subject has been trying to establish itself as an important subject of social sciences. The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the discipline of Public Administration is both a challenge as well as its forte—as it bolsters its claim as an independent scientific area of study. Accordingly, the syllabus and pedagogical approaches to make it steady and robust have also become equally challenging. The curricula in most of the universities offering Master’s degree in Public Administration have, besides papers on administrative theories and administrative thinkers; focus on essential concepts, analytical frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and organizational & decision-making environments, besides the processes that underlie public policy and administration. Syllabi in most of the universities aim at facilitating better understanding of conceptual framework of public policy within the precincts of Public Administration as well as newer trends in global governance perspectives and challenges.

The major modules offered by most of the universities in the Master’s programme, *inter alia*, as mentioned earlier, include Administrative Structure and Process; New Public Administration; Comparative Public Administration; Social Policy including Social Justice and Social Development; Democratic Decentralization; Rural and Urban Governance;



Human Resource Management; Public Financial Governance; Local Governance, Multi-Level Planning, Project Management, Research Methodologies and e-Governance, etc. Above all, the Multiple Applied areas are now being allied with the teaching of Public Administration in tune with the quest for the pursuit of social, political and governance transformation.

REFINEMENTS NEEDED IN THE CURRICULUM

To strengthen the basic understanding of the origin, evolution and changing dynamics of Public Administration, the syllabus should include the issues beyond classical formulations and major streams in administrative theory, public institutional theory, economic approach, socio-technical approach, stakeholders approach and multi-disciplinary analysis of administrative systems. Due emphasis has also to be laid in these on developing the inter and intra organizational context of Public Administration, study of Public Institutions, Non-Performance and Deficiencies of Government in action and Civil Service Reforms.

Adequate refinements will also have to be made to foster an understanding of the changing role of Public Administration for public and in democratic governance. Keeping in view the paradigm shift towards governance as the re-positioning of Public Administration, further explorations shall also have to be made on the capacities of governments for governance.

RESEARCH IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The trends and practices that mark the field of the discipline have been ever changing as per the needs of the scholars, the administrators and the policy makers. In the past 40 years, the Public Administration has developed more systematic patterns of enquiry about the substance of public organization, administrative, behavior, public management and public policy implementation. The work of public organizations is also being examined with the help of improved conceptual, methodological and theoretical forms of analysis. These seek to create knowledge that is retraceable, cumulative and, at some levels, replicable. The knowledge and discoveries of one generation form the foundation for the enquiries by the next generation. Knowledge, then, becomes collective as well as broad-based. The science and art of Public Administration has, undoubtedly become definable, describable, replicable,



expandable and open to reforms. Be that as it may, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research, the State Administrative Training Institutes like Haryana Institute of Public Administration and the department of Public Administration in various universities have an opportunity as well as a challenge for rising to the occasion in this context.

CONCLUSION

It may, therefore, be safely concluded that the discipline of Public Administration has gained a firm footing all over the world during the last six decades. Being a subject having significant multi-disciplinary elements, curriculum development in Public Administration has been trying to strive for a rational balance between theory and practice. Its evolution in India, in deed, has been a fascinating journey that spans the colonial era, the post-Independence nation-building period and the contemporary global phase. The trends in the discipline of Public Administration in India, undoubtedly, present a dynamic narrative of evolution and adaptation. Beginning with a narrow focus on British administrative models, the discipline has by no grown into a multidisciplinary field having an integrated and a diverse perspective for addressing the dynamic demands of governance of a complex society.

Starting from the early years of nation-building to the contemporary era of technological integration and sustainable development, it has been continuously responding to the evolving needs of Indian Polity. These trends are collectively going to shape the future trajectory of Public Administration in India by emphasizing its crucial role in the governance as well as societal progress.

Above all, Public Administration in India today has begun to reflect a dynamic interplay of theoretical and practical challenges of governance by adapting itself to the evolving needs of the nation. Hence, it has become imperative that its multidisciplinary nature is maintained. Concerted efforts also need to be made to leverage its interdisciplinary character with the emerging challenges for enriching its scholastic value. The richness and intrinsic significance of the discipline requires the adoption of a dialectic approach by the researchers in the core and the applied areas. Only then, it will be able to meet the constantly changing needs of society which has been making unceasing demands on the academia for



seriously and accurately defining the conduct of state on the one hand and for refining its apparatus on the other.

NOTES AND REFERENCES :

ⁱ Nicholas, Henry, Paradigms of Public Administration Public Administration Review Vol. 35, No. 4 (Jul. - Aug., 1975), pp. 378-386

ⁱⁱ The Public Administration theory primer / H. George Frederickson, Kevin B. Smith, Christopher W. Larimer, Michael J. Licari. 3rd ed. 2016 Routledge

ⁱⁱⁱ Waldo, D. 1956. *Perspectives on Administration*. Alabama, Ill: University of Alabama Press.

^{iv} Dimock, M.E. and Dimock, G.O. 1969. *Public Administration*. New York, NY: Rinehard.

^v Spicer, M.W. 2005. Public Administration enquiry and social science in the postmodern condition: some implications of value pluralism. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 27(4): 669-688

^{vi} Nigro, L.G. and Nigro, F.A. 1989. *Modern Public Administration*. 7th ed. New York: Harper and Row.

^{vii} Simon, H.A., Smithburg, D.W. and Thompson, V.A. 1950. *Public Administration*. New York, NY: AA Knopf

^{viii} Corson, J.J. and Harris, J.P. 1963. *Public Administration in Modern Society*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

^{ix} Henry, N. 1999. *Public Administration and Public Affairs*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall.

^x Bhattacharya, Mohit, Crisis of Public Administration as a Discipline in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 November 1987

^{xi} Appleby, P. H. (Paul Henson). (1949). *Policy and administration*. University: Univ. of Alabama Press.

^{xii} Mosher, F.C. 1975. American Public Administration: Past, Present, Future. University of Alabama Press