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The state of public administration in India today:- Some observations

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Abstract

August Comte, the famous French Sociologist, was of the view of the social science are the most backward of sciences and the natural sciences the most advanced. The reason for such an uneven and lop-sided development of sciences was that the natural sciences were not interwoven with the lives of men and could be studied dispassionately and objectively and in complete insulation, ensuring scientific study, whereas social science are a bewildering mix of thought and action, interest and morality, reason impulse, passion and wisdom. Human lives with all their hopes and aspirations, strengths and infirmities, inconsistencies and contradictions constitute the warp and woof of social sciences. Political science, an appendage to political economy, Philosophy and History for centuries in England, to Law on the continent of Europe and the Ethics in the ancient civilizations and oriental countries emerged out of the shadows as an independent discipline in the first quarter of this century.

Keywords: administration, institution, democratic, government, society, challenges

Introduction

Public administration, an appendage to an appendage and overshadowed completely by political science emerged as a semi-independent discipline much later, around the late forties or after the Second World War. The independence or self-contentedness of a discipline can be judged by its outstanding thinkers and by the interest taken by the common man, not necessarily in an articulate manner but even mutely. Political Scientist dismissed public administration as inconsequential aberration which did not deserve an independent niche no less contempt that after all what the students of public Administration were seeking were changes of emphases on certain areas of study and certain institutions, most notably bureaucracy. It is true that Political Scientists concentrated on the political-legal institutions like the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and political parties and through calculated indifference allowed purely administrative institutions and ideas to recede into the background. No political thinker until the nineteenth century undertook a careful and systematic study of public Administration. There are passing references to administrative structures in some of the works. Even Marx who intended to study society almost in its entirety treated it rather cavalierly.

Max weber's pioneering contribution

It was Max Weber, the German Sociologist, a neo-Kntian and positivist who re-examined socio-economic phenomenon and the weight of his ideas was directed against Marxist teaching on Socio-economic formations. According to Weber the essence of any socio-economic formation is determined not so much by its objective aspects as by the viewpoint of the investigator and the cultural significance attached to any given process. Weber proceeded from the assumption that social sciences study only individual aspects of various phenomena and tried to substitute for scientific abstraction the notion of an 'ideal type'. This, Weber averred, had no basis in reality, but was only a means, a device, to systematize and understand individual facts. His theory of 'ideal types', his conception of the plurality of historical facts and the idea of rationality as the basis on which bureaucratic institutions function was a stunningly new contribution and the beginning of a world-wide study of bureaucracy and the administrative structures together with the controversies the theory spawned.

Weber was the pioneer, who through painstaking researches discovered that the burgeoning German State who was governed not so much by the glaringly visible institutions like

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Monarchy and the Bundestag but the sprawling new apparatus of the state, the bureaucracy. It was a new culture, administrative-political culture evolving a new work ethic as it grew. Weber's researches in Sociology were a trail-blazer and were followed by a host of writers, most notably in America. Woodrow Wilson's contribution to Public Administration in its most formative period was weightily enough to be taken note of by serious student of Public Administration.

Institutional efforts

Universities in the United Kingdom being very cautious and conservative were wary of the developments in America. Universities on the continent also dragged their feet instead of keeping pace with some of the most prestigious universities in the United States. In India, as well-known, the University of Madras was the first to have instituted a diploma course in public administration in 1937 followed by the University of Allahabad which started a diploma course in local self-government in 1938. Seven years later the Universities of Lucknow and Nagpur started a diploma course in Public Administration and in 1949 Nagpur University established the first full-fledged department of Public Administration, and Local-Self Government. Barring Nagpur, no other university founded a separate department of Public Administration, though diploma courses were taught in the universities of Osmania, Andhra, Calcutta, Aligarh and Patna. Public Administration came to be grudgingly accepted by being introduced in the form of a paper in some of the universities at the post-graduate level. Undergraduate teaching had to wait for quite some time. At the moment Public Administration at the postgraduate level with full-fledge independent departments is being taught at thirteen universities and undergraduate teaching is being done with or without separate departments in fifteen universities.

The progress has so far been frustratingly slow but the trend for expansion is distinctly visible. Expansion has been taking place in at least two ways. The departments of political science are being re-christened as departments are being opened with facilities for M. Phil courses and research. In the integrated departments, political science continues to be the major or mother discipline and public Administration usually takes a back seat. In the independent department of public Administration, however, there are no such hassles.

The growing relevance

The greatest impediment to the development of Public Administrations an independent discipline is the ingrained reluctance on the part of all social scientists to recognize it as a self-contained discipline because of its being relatively young and not yet in possession of works great distinction and traditions of thinking and writing. Its theoretical base is still wobbly and its debt to political science is so great and extensive that despite best efforts it still continues to languish under the foster care of the mother discipline. Despite these drawbacks, public administration had acquired an enormous relevance firstly from the state which has been undergone rapid transformation both in regard to its nature and its responsibilities and secondly on account of the complete transfiguration politics has undergone in the last fifty years or so both in the developing and developed countries, most noticeably in the former. The modern state

is no longer a merely welfare state. It has transcended practically all limits set by liberal democratic thought, the socialist doctrine and the exigencies of socio-economic development. It is total or near-total state bearing the burden of responsibilities in every conceivable area of human life and endeavor.

If responsibilities have increased, so have the powers and as a consequence of the expansion of responsibilities and powers, the state impinging upon the commonest of men more than ever before. It is indeed imperative that every citizen should know how the laws and administrative rules are made and implemented. How does the machinery of government operate must be made known to the people for whom it operates.

If people know how the government functions, they would be in a position to make it function within the four corners of the laws and rules and keep it from becoming highhanded and irresponsible. Ignorance of the working of government encourages willful arbitrariness on the part the government; knowledge of its working compels responsible behavior on the part of the man the government at all levels. The common farmer should know all that is relevant in the revenue administration and he should not look up to the village patwari like hungry sheep and be not fed. In fact every village school should teach all that is relevant administratively from the village upwards to the district. Some knowledge of public Administration in a condensed form must be made available to all those who are affected by it. Every school-going boy should know how from village upward to the state, administration is organized and carried on. Teaching of public administration, therefore, must not start in universities and colleges but at the secondary, higher secondary level by integrating a condensed course on district and state administration with social studies, Indian constitution, history and culture. All that is taught presently is a outline of the Indian constitution, leaving the most relevant part concerning the administration of India in the elementary, but most important segment, untaught. But more than half the population being still illiterate, effort should be made to teach the rudiments of administration to the common man through adult literacy centers, social and cultural organizations and political parties. As in the western countries evening cases can be organized by the universities, colleges and higher secondary schools. These measures, if adopted with sincerity and worked with determination, can go a long way to popularize public administration and equip common citizen with the necessary knowledge and information about the administration of the area or segment they are most concerned with.

Administration for development

The socio-economic development that is taking place has placed enormous responsibility on the bureaucracy or the civil services. So long as administration was merely holding operation designed to maintain law and order, collecting revenue, defending against foreign invasion and protecting against internal turmoil, the task of the civil services was simple. But to eradicate poverty and give people adequate social security and open up avenues of gainful employment the whole administration without the achieve desired results. But developmental administration without the achieve participation of the people at every stage is bound to result in undemocratic practices and uncontrollable bureaucratic

domination. Planned economy needs a vast bureaucratic organization, which if not controlled and made to respond to public needs, results in a totalitarian set-up. The perils that attend developmental administration and the vast bureaucratic expansion that is inevitable can be to a great extent checked and stymied by an up-to-date knowledge of public administration. Soviet Union and the east European countries, despite protestations to the contrary sank into dictatorship controlled by a vast and powerful bureaucracy. In a developing country, the temptation to set aside cumbersome democratic processes to achieve results is always great. In order to make sure that such practices as would inevitably of public administration and researches into every branch and aspect of it is absolutely essential. The consciousness generated by the acquisition of knowledge of public administration will go a long way in remedying the defects likely to arise as result of the expansion of the administrative machinery for developmental purposes.

Identity and interdependence

Besides the practical the utilitarian aspect dwelt upon so far, is the intellectual and the academic aspect of it. As a social science, public administration, cannot but draw upon all other sciences dealing with society and also the natural sciences which vitally affect life and demeanor of a society. The more it absorbs the knowledge dug up by other social sciences, the richer it becomes. No social science or natural science can develop in isolation, but a line has to be drawn between what is fundamentally and purely an inseparable part of public Administration and what is borrowed and absorbed form other social sciences for broadening its horizons and deepening its understanding of society. No social science can afford to ignore Economics and Political science. Public administration can ill-afford to ignore either of them because administration is squarely based on the economic activities of the people which, in turn, cannot be isolated from the political activities of the classes, parties, institutions and individuals. Those who believe that public administration has not been allowed to grow and expand fully on account of its excessive reliance on political science forget that to wean public administration from political science is to truncate both of them and make their growth impossible. But there are areas of study and specialization which ought to be clearly marked so that overlapping may be avoided as far as possible. Business management or administration, administration in government undertakings, in the corporate sector, in the private sector, in local self-governing bodies, recruitment of personnel and training, conditions of service, organization of government departments and their working, the bodies operating at different levels in the panchyati raj, administration of such bodies as universities, public service marked off as of public administration. All these areas have more or less been regarded tacitly by all concerned as the exclusive responsibility of the students of Public Administration. What is, however, need is that these areas should not continue to be only skeletally a part of the Public Administration curricula. These areas of study should be provided with firm theoretical foundation so that the charge of unlimited but rickety empiricism against Public Administration be laid to rest. All this can be archived if right-minded Political Scientists, Sociologists, Economists and scholars and practitioners of administration strive hard to give Public Administration the much need shot in the arm

and define comprehensively its parameters. Public Administration is more dependent on empirical research than any other social science. A modest beginning has been mad though in putting together some administrative theories, but to be candid, they lack sciences must of necessity rely more on empirical research but there must also be a well co-ordinate effort to coalesce together the results of such researches and to discover a pattern, if is based on viable theoretical foundation, a large part of which has to depend upon creative imagination, speculative thinking and constructive hunches. Public Administration's approach so far has been, to the regret of most of us, pedestrian and it has never tried to take off the ground. Parkinson's laws and management theories smartly put together might delight some and astonish others but they cannot from part of a discipline.

Need for genuie scholarly pursuit

In order to give Public Administration a new orientation and to remove the reasons which have put it in an inferior position, it is necessary that the U.G.C. set up a committee consisting of senior and enlightened professors of Public Administration and distinguished practitioners to design courses for all levels of instruction and identify areas of fruitful research, which the universities and other academic bodies may, with necessary adjustment and changes, adopt. This will provide the discipline with the much-needed uniformity and purposefulness and do away with the unnecessary and disposable innovations which unfortunately are the hall-mark of the current courses in Public Administration.

The Institutes of Public Administration at the Centre and State levels have done enough useful work as far as training the fresh recruits to the All- India and State Services and conducting refresher courses and seminars are concerned. But they have created a good deal of confusion too. Studying Public Administration as a discipline is one thing and providing training in the art and science of administration is quite another. The former operates within the well-defined parameters of academic relevance and propriety, the latter is concerned only with communicating some results of the studies to those whose interest in the subject is peripheral and whose orientation is different from the dedicated students of Public Administration. Institutes were meant to be centers of serious study public Administration. A university has the necessary ethos and temper for the scholarly pursuit of the subject; the institutes are good enough for transferring some of the rudiments of administration to a motely crowd of the practitioners of administration. Unfortunately, courses in the universities are designed to suite the requirements of the competitive examinations, for All-India and state services and usually scholars of public Administrations consider it an honor and a great boon to be appointed teachers at the national academy or state institutes for the training of officers. The union and state governments should look up to the universities for guidance and help instead of the other way round. The increasing influence and interference of administrators is perhaps one of the reasons why public Administration could not attain the status of an independent and self-contained social science and remained chained to men and institutions without the freedom to think and act independently.

Toward a vibrant science

But public Administration has a very important role to play in the not too distant future. The days of one-party dominant system are over and coalitions in the Centre and the states will become increasingly acceptable as years roll by. Not stability, but continuity and efficiency, will be what would be expected of governments. And, when political changes will be frequent and span of life of coalitional governments short, the civil services will have a great role lined up for them. Multi-party system in a parliamentary democracy cannot escape frequent changes and burden of administration will have to be borne by the civil services. Public Administration instead of continuing to be under the tutelage of political Science will come into its own. Larger number of better educated and better trained civil servants would be needed and scholars of public Administration will have much larger share of academic and social responsibility. Besides, in the coming years there is bound to be greater demand for the expert than the generalist.

Conclusion

A political scientist, to all interests and purposes, is a generalist and a student of public Administration is an expert and a specialist. One of the most infallible indicators of a progressive society is that it is guided and led increasingly by the experts and less and less by the generalists. Public Administration of course, while playing such a pivotal role will have not only to enrich its intellectual and academic resources but encourage purposeful research in every and in all its ramifications. A live and vibrant science cannot rest on its oars. Perpetual and unceasing effort to discover, to comprehend, to interpret, to analyse and to weed out the out-of-date and usher in new ideas and theories is what is needed by public Administration. Hopefully, it would perform its role well and live up to our expectations.

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