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POLITICAL EXECUTIVE AND BUREAUCRACY

The working of government rests on two pillars – political and permanent executive. The smooth working of this system depends on the harmonious relationship between the two.

In recent years, however, the administrative and political environment has changed which has produced tensions in the mutual relationship of the two groups. So, let us first understand the meaning and role of bureaucracy and then analyse the relationship between the political executive and bureaucracy and finally identify the recommendations of Administrative Reforms Commission for streamlining the relationship between the minister and the civil servants and reflect upon the present scenario in India in this respect.



Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to

- Explain the meaning of the term 'Bureaucracy';
- Recognize the role and importance of bureaucracy in development;
- Analyse the relations between the political and administrative wings of government;
- Identify the causes of stress and sources of confrontation between them;
- Recall the recommendations of the Administrative Reform Commission;
- Understand what is meant by politicization of bureaucracy and reflect upon the present scenario.

35.3 Meaning of Bureaucracy

The term 'Bureaucracy' lacks a definition that is universally accepted. Bureaucracy is sometimes used in a disparaging manner to mean unimaginative, rigid and inefficient government administrators. It is associated with red-tapism, delay and wastefulness. Many social scientists however, describe bureaucracy in a neutral way to mean a specific form



of social organisation involved in administrative efforts. It is a machine, which is needed to run the government of the day. It is the only tool available to any modern government to administer. We no longer live in simple Greek city-states or tiny Indian republics. Society has become more complex today. Accordingly, the government has become a huge complicated machinery which can be serviced and run only by a distinct group of officials known as bureaucracy. Some scholars have even given bureaucracy the status of “the fourth organ of the government”. Therefore, bureaucracy cannot be wished away.

Max Weber, the German social scientist who was the first to make a systematic study of bureaucracy, described it as rational and the most efficient form of organisation. He described an ideal-type of bureaucracy as one characterized by:

1. Officials organised in fixed jurisdictional areas,
2. A hierarchical arrangement of offices (organised in a pyramid like structure with each lower office under the control of a higher one),
3. Written documents (files) that contain rules to be applied in every case,
4. Anonymity,
5. Impersonality in applying rules uniformly.
6. Political neutrality

Bureaucracy with such formal characteristics is considered essential for running any large organisation. To quote Max Weber “the decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organisation has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organisation...precision, speed, unambiguity, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum level in the structurally bureaucratic administration”.

**Intext Questions 35.1**

Fill in the blanks :

- a) The parliamentary system rests on two pillars of _____ and _____ executive. (social / political / economic / administrative)
- b) The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers fall under the _____ category. (social / economic / political)
- c) Main function of the political executive is _____. (decision making / film making)
- d) Main function of the administrative executive is _____. (policy implementation / election campaigning)
- e) Bureaucracy is selected on the basis of _____. (wealth / merit)
- f) Concept of bureaucracy was first developed by German philosopher _____. (Karl Marx / Max Weber).
- g) Max Weber described bureaucracy as the _____ and most _____ form of government. (rotten / efficient / slow / rational)



Notes

35.2 Role of Bureaucracy in Development

Bureaucracy has become a universal phenomenon. It is a pre requisite of modernization of every society. Most developing countries are engaged in the process of nation building and bringing about rapid socio-economic development, i.e., providing social services such as health, education, infrastructure like roads, electricity, productive activities in agriculture, industry etc. The complex of such formidable activities connected with the development enterprise is essentially government's responsibility. Here, public administration becomes the key agency of development. Bureaucracy can immensely contribute to development by serving as an adviser, as an inventor, and a decision-maker. It can vitalize administration by building up a social environment emphasizing responsibility by creating incentives, by encouraging healthy competition and self-development, by organizing institutional management under competent and progressive leadership and by delegating authority to lower levels for maximizing development.

Bureaucracy constitutes the apparatus and mechanism through which the state realizes its purposes. It has been rightly said that a country's life is largely shaped by the quality of administration. A plan can succeed only if its administrative implications have been worked out in detail. Hence, a high degree of bureaucratic competence is essential to push through speedy development measures. In most developing countries, the problem is not the inability of the governments to devise rational programmes for development, but their incapacity to carry them out.



Intext Questions 35.2

Fill in the blanks :

- _____ is the main mechanism through which the state implements its development programmes.
- Bureaucracy no longer performs only _____ functions. It performs _____ functions too.

35.3 Bureaucracy and Politics

35.3.1 Politics / Administration Dichotomy

The conventional view of public administration is based upon the dichotomy of politics and administration i.e. administration and politics should be kept separate. Politics or policy making is the proper activity of the legislative bodies and administration is the proper activity of administrators who carry out policies. It is opposed to any political role of the civil servants. It visualizes the relationship between the administrator and the politician in terms of a neat division of labour – the politician formulates the policy and the administrator executes it. The bureaucrat acts as pure adviser to his political master, presents facts of the case, suggests lines of action and implications of alternative policies. It is the prerogative of the political master to decide the policy. The bureaucrat is expected to implement the policy faithfully, whatever the decision. He is to be anonymous and neutral in the discharge of his duty. He is expected to render impartial advice without fear or favour. The doctrine of neutrality and anonymity has been one of the fundamental tenets of the Weberian



model of bureaucracy. It insulates the bureaucrat from any politicization and makes him professional in his outlook.

The planners in India too subscribed to the Weberian ideal of neutral civil service. In our country, the Civil Service Conduct Rules prohibit the government employees from active participation in political activities. Except for the limited right of voting in secret, a government employee cannot participate in any way in any political movement or activity including election campaigns. He cannot join a political party even as an inactive member or contribute financially to its funds; he cannot express any opinion on political issues; and he cannot stand for election to any legislature.

An impersonal, strictly rule-bound, neutral bureaucracy was expected not only to provide the necessary administrative objectivity but also enhance the democratic principle of equality and provide protection from arbitrary rule.

35.3.2 Decline of Neutrality Concept

The traditional concept of neutrality, however, has been challenged on many grounds. The earlier concept of separation of politics and administration in watertight compartments is considered no more valid. The role of the Civil Service has been changing from being a mere agent of the political executive to that of collaboration with it. The involvement of bureaucracy in political arena is now widely prevalent.

The breakdown of the theory of neutrality has come about because of a number of reasons. Firstly, the processes of policy making are no longer confined to the political executive. The truth is that the bureaucrats play an important role in policy formulation, perceived to be the exclusive preserve of elected politicians. This has happened because the statutes passed by the parliament are not clear enough. The legislative behaviour follows no consistent pattern. Whereas, some measures are too detailed, some only identify the problem. The minister is rarely an expert in the work of his department or the techniques of public administration. He merely has general ideas in line with the political ideology of his party, but he often is not sure what is the best solution to a particular problem. He is therefore, forced to rely on his permanent staff for facts and advice. In effect then, it is the administrator who has a major role in framing the policy.

Secondly, the decline of neutrality can be attributed to the demands and pressures of coalition politics. In coalition governments, ministers are busy in the power game and maneuvering for their survival, and have neither time nor inclination to guide, direct and control their department or bureaucracy. Also at times, the legislative process is so stormy and full of diverse views that a statute passed incorporates a number of contradictory policy guidelines. The necessity of reaching a compromise solution to hold the coalition together leads the legislators to use vague language and the administrator has to use his own judgement to interpret the policy. Therefore, bureaucracy has clearly made inroads in policy making and despite the regulations governing the civil servants they have been politicized considerably.

Thirdly, according to some political commentators, the classical theory of civil service neutrality presupposes agreement on principles fundamental to democracy. In other words, neutral, value-free bureaucracy is possible only in a society where consensus exists on values; but in transitional societies like India, where dissent and conflict exist, it is too much to expect anyone to be neutral.



Political Science

For a developing country like India where speedy socio-economic development has to be steadily pushed through, the nature and character of bureaucracy assume special significance. The involvement of civil servants in numerous decisions be it the location of a steel plant or a school building in a village, makes them partners in development along with the politicians. Their value preferences get inextricably mixed up with technical advice. In the context of large-scale welfare programmes therefore, neutrality is not possible. In fact a certain commitment to the goals and objectives of the state on the part of bureaucracy is inescapable. Neutrality cannot be allowed to degenerate into disinterestedness. The successful carrying out of developmental tasks requires on the part of administrators not only qualities of initiative and leadership but also a sense of emotional integration with the policies and programmes and identification with the interests of the common man. The idea of bureaucracy as a neutral instrument in the conduct of public affairs thus stands refuted.

35.3.3 Committed Bureaucracy

Weber's model of bureaucracy was found inappropriate to effect the social transformation in many developing countries. In India, it received a good amount of criticism for its failure to meet the growing demands of social legislation. After two decades of independence, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, advocated the concept of committed bureaucracy. Not only did she express her dissatisfaction with the performance of bureaucracy, she expressed doubt about the relevance of the basic assumptions underlying the Indian bureaucracy that of neutrality, impartiality, anonymity etc. and she alleged that the bureaucrats lacked commitment. She disgustingly referred to the administrative machinery as 'the stumbling block in the country's progress' and reiterated the necessity of creating an administrative cadre committed to national objectives and responsive to Indian social needs. She found in 'committed bureaucracy' the answer to the ills of neutrality that crippled the development process in India. She had an earnest belief that only a committed bureaucracy can bring about the desired change.

The concept of 'committed bureaucracy' was much contested in the political and administrative circles. It was alleged that it would permanently damage the fabric of the services. It would create a breed of pliable civil servants who would always say "Yes Minister" and would be ready to crawl when asked to bend by their political masters. It was also alleged that in the name of commitment the ruling party was seeking bureaucracy's alignment with the party's ideology in order to perpetuate its rule. However, it was later clarified by the government that commitment did not mean attachment to the ideology of the party in power, but a commitment to the development of the country and personal involvement of bureaucracy in the tasks as opposed to ostrich like withdrawal and isolation from politics.

Thus, if committed bureaucracy stands for a non-partisan, socially sensitive civil service, which can empathize with the politician who is genuinely, interested in progress and development of the country, then a committed civil service is more appropriate for a developing nation than having an insensitive neutral one.

**Intext Questions 35.3**

Fill in the blanks :

- a) Conventional view of public administration is based upon the dichotomy of _____

and _____.

- b) The doctrine of _____ insulates the civil service from any _____.
- c) In India, Civil Service Conduct Rules _____ government employees to participate in politics.
- d) It is now an accepted fact that bureaucracy contributes to both, policy _____ and policy _____.
- e) Minister is rarely an expert in his field so he is forced to rely on the _____ for facts and advice.
- f) _____ referred to Indian Bureaucracy as a major stumbling block and reiterated the necessity of creating a _____ bureaucracy.
- g) Bureaucracy was criticized for not demonstrating enough _____ to development needs and programmes.

35.4 Sources of Stress

In practice however commitment has assumed the perverted form of politicization and sycophancy. Commitment to social objectives is one thing and dancing to the tune of a political party is another. Very often it is seen that bureaucracy simply acts according to the dictates of the political executive without any independent examination of issues. This trend can be attributed to the ever-growing political interference in the affairs of administration. Political interference and impartial administration cannot co-exist.

While the administrators do not perceive their role in policy making as subservient to the political leaders because of their knowledge and expertise, yet they have to conform to the prerequisites of representative politics. The political leaders claim to be the true representatives of the people and know what is good for them and because of their superior position succeed in dictating the terms to the bureaucrats. The bureaucrats who are not obliging enough soon find themselves in trouble. The political masters have many means of coercion – both overt and covert. Political interference in all matters including those where the statutory power is vested in the civil servants is a constant phenomenon. There are numerous instances of use of transfer, promotion, supercession and compulsory retirement from service by elected politicians as tools to silence the voice of dissent and expression of difference of opinion.

Well, politicization works the other way round also. Many administrators use political influence or forge alliance with the politician to brighten their own career prospects. They take advantage of the amateur politician; exploit his weakness particularly in times of a fluid political situation and turn out to be autonomous and irresponsible. This is an equally grim scenario.

What emerges out of the analysis is that whether there is collision or collusion between the political executive and the bureaucracy, in both cases it leads to organizational imbalance and ultimately the governance suffers.





35.5 Improving the System : Administrative Reforms Commission's Views

Expressing concern over the deteriorating administrative standards, the government appointed the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 1966 to conduct a comprehensive study of the administrative system and suggest remedies. The two most important areas touched upon by the ARC in its reports were: (a) Minister – Civil Servants relationship, wherein the ARC emphasized the need for the de-politicization of the services, and (b) the creation of a climate and culture of administration that would help assert the growth of unhealthy personal relationship between Civil Servants and Minister.

The ARC took cognizance of the fact that proper relationship between the political executive and bureaucracy is a matter of highest importance to the administrative performance of government. It observed that the existing pattern of relationship was different from what was envisaged. More and more cases of deviation were coming to notice. For instance the extent of bureaucratic involvement in politics was exceptionally high, there was frequent use of transfers and postings to manipulate bureaucracy, there was unholy nexus between politicians and bureaucracy etc. which was taking its toll on administrative efficiency. Therefore, corrective measures were required to restore the health of the system.

The ARC stressed the urgency to prevent bureaucracy's aggressive role in politics and also a need to check arbitrary interference of politicians in administrative affairs. It believed that both Minister and Civil Servants must appreciate rather than belittle each other's work and attempt maximum accommodation of one another's views. On the part of the political executive there should be, in the words of the ARC,

- (a) a proper understanding of the administrative functions and recognition of its professional nature.
- (b) as little interference as possible in service matters, e.g. postings, transfers, promotions etc.
- (c) no requests for departures from declared and approved policies to suit individual cases.

Similarly, on the part of the civil service it asserts :

- (a) there must be a sincere and honest attempt to find out what the political head wants and make the necessary adjustment in policies and procedures to suit his wishes.
- (b) readiness to fall in line with his political chief in all matters, unless strong grounds indicate a different course.

In other words, it means an emotional and mental acceptance by the bureaucracy of the ideology of the government policy to be executed by it.

35.5.1 Recent Developments

In spite of the valuable recommendations made by the ARC to streamline the relationship between the minister and the civil servants, nothing much seems to have changed because of political and administrative apathy. Making the matters worse is the growth in recent times of a nexus between the politicians, criminals, police and the civil servants rooted in the considerations of "mutuality of benefit". An increasing use of money and muscle



power by political parties in winning elections is common knowledge. Since the muscle power is mostly provided by the mafia and the criminals, a close nexus has come to prevail between the politicians and the criminals resulting in “criminalization of politics”. This has been the main conclusion of the Vohra Committee Report of 1993 submitted by the then Home Secretary, Mr. N.N. Vohra which was set up to look into the criminalization of politics. The report observed that the mafia and the criminals enjoyed the patronage of politicians and the protection of government functionaries. It pointed out how the nexus was virtually running a parallel government, pushing the state apparatus into irrelevance. Here the two elites – political and administrative, join hands and become not only thick friends but also grand thieves. Such a nexus is detrimental to public interest.

Therefore, it was felt that corrective steps must be taken to ensure that this evil nexus is curbed. With this objective in mind, the Prime Minister inaugurated a Conference of Chief Secretaries in November 1996 on ‘An Agenda for an Effective and Responsive Administration. The Conference emphasized the need for bringing about transformation in public services so as to make them more effective, clean, accountable and citizen friendly. The Conference also highlighted the necessity of adopting the code of ethics for public services which not only regulates the role of the civil servants but also specifies the relationship between the employees in public services and politicians, so that the basic commitment of the civil servants towards the welfare of the public and the principles enshrined in the Constitution is reiterated. We only hope that the implementation of the proposed Action Plan will be effective.

To conclude, a developing nation cannot afford contradictory ethos between the political executive and bureaucracy because it strikes at the root of a progressive administrative culture. The roles of political and administrative elite are complimentary and in the interest of public welfare they must work in harmony with each other.

**What You Have Learnt**

Political executive and bureaucracy are the two pillars of the government. Whereas political executive is temporary and usually represent the party in power, bureaucracy is a permanent fixture. Theoretically they play different roles, for instance, politicians make policies and administrators implement them. But, in practice their roles often conflict and overlap because the line separating development of policy and its implementation is quite blurred and hazy.

Bureaucracy is a body of permanent, paid and skilled officials. It aids and advises the government to make plans and carry them out. The role of bureaucracy has changed. It no longer performs only the regulatory functions but actively engages in development and welfare activities. Conventional image of civil servant has been that of an anonymous servant of the minister who is committed to efficient discharge of his duties and who offers his sincere advice to his master, irrespective of his political ideology. This advice may or may not be accepted by the minister, but once the decision is made, he is duty bound to implement it effectively.

This concept of anonymous and neutral bureaucracy was considered impractical and unsuited to meet the goals of social justice. Therefore, Mrs. Gandhi sought a ‘Committed Bureaucracy’. But commitment has degenerated into politicization of bureaucracy and the relationship between political executive and bureaucracy has deteriorated.

**Administrative System
in India**



Notes

Political Science

The administrators blame the politicians for their irrational, partisan and idealistic approach and for disturbing their service conditions through transfers and promotions. The politicians blame the administrators for their prejudice and flair for creating procedural difficulties. Such irritants have led to deterioration of administrative efficiency. The Administrative Reforms Commission was set up in 1966 to suggest measures to streamline their relationship. The relationship between the two elite is crucial to the smooth functioning of the government.



Terminal Exercises

1. Define Bureaucracy.
2. Explain the role of bureaucracy in development?
3. What are the major characteristics of Weber's model of Bureaucracy?
4. Explain the principle of politics-administration dichotomy?
5. Enumerate the factors responsible for the break down of the concept of neutrality?
6. What do you mean by 'Committed Bureaucracy'? Is it desirable for India?
7. Mention the causes of stress in the minister-civil servant relationship?
8. How does politicization of bureaucracy affect the political system?
9. Outline the various suggestions made by the Administrative Reforms Commission for improving the minister-civil servant relationship?



Answers to Intext Questions

35.1

- a) Political, Administrative
- b) Political
- c) Policy making
- d) Policy implementation
- e) Merit
- f) Max Weber
- g) Rational, Efficient

35.2

- a) Bureaucracy
- b) Regulatory, Welfare

35.3



- a) Administration, Politics
- b) Neutrality, Politicization
- c) Prohibit
- d) Making, Implementation
- e) Bureaucracy
- f) Indira Gandhi, Committed
- g) Commitment

Hints of Terminal Exercises

- 1. Refer to Section 35.1
- 2. Refer to Section 35.2
- 3. Refer to Section 35.1
- 4. Refer to Section 35.3.1
- 5. Refer to Section 35.3.2
- 6. Refer to Section 35.3.3
- 7. Refer to Section 35.4
- 8. Refer to Section 35.4
- 9. Refer to Section 35.5