The Role of Bureaucracy in changing Administrative culture in India

Various measures have been initiated by the government to make bureaucracy more responsible and responsive. What is required now is not only to maintain this tempo but also to carry it forward vigorously with total sincerity and commitment. Such measures with the above mentioned suggestions, if implemented sincerely, can change the very administrative culture of our country. The concept of good governance can be realized. The government and bureaucracy will be in a position to deliver quality good and services to the people. Administration will become much more accountable, transparent, open, people and development-oriented.

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The nature of political system in a society determines the quality and character of its administrative system. Bureaucracy is influence by political, economic and socio-cultural environment and in turn, these factors are also influenced by administration. The object or target of administrative culture is public bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is a cohesive, well-organised and compact group with a network of continuing interactions. It is an instrument or arm of the government to operationalise programmes and policies meant for all-round development of the country. There is a strong need to identify the areas in administrative culture which have a bearing on the governance and development process. The research paper highlights the cultural traits of Indian bureaucracy and examines these against the backdrop of prevailing model of development. It offers suggestions for effective performance to ensure quality in governance and all-round development.

THE SEEDS of the term “Administrative Culture” were sown in 1963 when Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba published their path-breaking work, “The Civic Culture”. Culture refers to norms, attitudes, values, perceptions, interpretation and behavior of an individual. The administrative culture comprises values, beliefs, attitudes, etc., concerning administrative action and behavior. It connotes the mode and style of functioning of officials. Administration is culture-bound. It is shaped by the setting or the environment in which it operates. It develops specific set of features in different environments. A study of structures and functions of public administration in different countries reveals that there exists similarity in formal organizations but their informal and behavioural patterns possess considerable diversities. On account of these diversities, Fred W. Riggs classified social structures into three types viz., fused, prismatic and diffracted and outlined specific features of administration in each of these categories. In his analysis of prismatic society, the major focus is upon the impact of environment on administrative structures.

There exists a close and intimate relationship between administration and its environment. The administration continuously interacts with its environment. This interaction is not unidirectional. Rather, it is bilateral. Both administration and environment impact each other. In other words, there exists a two-way relationship between administration and its environment. For example, administration is influenced by political, economic and socio-cultural environments and in turn, these environments are also influenced by administration. It can be demonstrated by the following diagram.

![Fig. Ecology of Administration](image-url)

Administration and Political Environment:

Administration is most frequently influenced by the political system. The nature of political system determines the nature of the administrative system. For example, during British regime, Indian political system was centralized, exploitative, repressive and authoritarian. Therefore, administration too, was of that kind. But after Independence political system became decentralized, democratic, developmental, and people and welfare-oriented. Therefore, administration also became like that. Thus, political system impact son the administrative system.

Similarly, administration also impacts the political system. It helps formulate governmental programs and
policies. The administrators provide different types of data, information, expertise, suggestions, feedback etc., to the political executive on the basis of which realistic programmes and policies are formulated. Thus, administration and political systems impact each other.

**Administration and Economic Environment:**

Administration is influenced by the economic set-up. For example, in a country with limited economic resources, administrators are not in a position to implement governmental programmes and policies successfully. But administration of a developed country can successfully implement programmes and policies because of abundance of resources.

Further, in a country with a closed economy the scope for administration will be wider, whereas in an open economy administration will have less scope as here private entrepreneurs are the key players. Thus, economic environment impacts administration.

Similarly, administration can also influence economy by contributing to the formulation of various economic programmes and policies. Further, if administration is efficient and effective, development and growth will take place and thus, overall economy will be impacted positively. Thus, administration and economy affect each other.

**Administration and Socio-Cultural Environment:**

Socio-cultural environment affects the administration. If the society is infested with casteism, nepotism, favoritism, corruption and other ills, these ailments will also be found in administrators. It is mainly because of the fact that as the administrators have to operate in society. Therefore, they get affected with all these social maladies. Similarly, administration can also influence social environment by contributing to the formulation of policies for mitigating social evils. Thus, administration and social environment impact each other.

The preceding discussion makes it amply clear that the administration is influenced by the environment in which it operates and in turn, it also influences the environment. That is to say, there exists a two-way relationship between administration and its ecology.

Administrative culture, thus, must be compatible with its environment. It is, therefore, unrealistic to endorse and perpetuate the administrative culture that was operative during the period of the British Rule, in the Independent India. In other words, administrative culture is not static. Just as culture itself is not unchanging, administrative culture too, keeps on changing.

The subject of administrative culture is bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is a cohesive, well-organised and compact group with a network of continuing interactions. It is an instrument or weapon of the government to operationalise programmes and policies meant for all-round development of the country.

In the wake of the process of decolonization, Third World Countries (TWCs) emerged on the political map of the world. These nascent countries, including India were confronting several socio-economic problems such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inequalities, etc. The major responsibility for mitigating these problems rested on the shoulders of bureaucracy. Therefore, it amassed huge powers. But in the course of exercise of comprehensive powers bureaucracy started disregarding people's interests. It became omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. It became part of a system aptly termed as “New Despotism” by Justice Hewart. In short, it became a victim of various administrative ills some of which can be discussed as follows.

**Unresponsiveness:** Bureaucracy remains unresponsive to popular demands, desires and aspirations. It tends to regard itself as the self-appointed guardian and interpreter of public interests. It's members feel that they are doing a favour by providing a service to citizens, even though they are paid from the public exchequer to do so. The experience over the years shows that it has behaved more as a ruling class than a serving one as it is clear from its very functioning in India which is perceived by and large, as aristocratic, authoritarian, arrogant and oppressive.

**Red Tapism:** It refers to undue formalism. It puts too much emphasis on “Procedure through proper channel” and precedents. Left to itself, it tends to multiply the red tape till it almost smothers itself. Bureaucracy seems to forget that the community does not exist for the purpose of filling up forms or obeying regulations, but that forms and regulations exist for the service of the community.

**Self-Perpetuating:** Bureaucracy has become a victim of Parkinson's Law or the Rising Pyramid of bureaucrats. Parkinson's Law refers to a situation wherein staff in an organization outnumbers the volume of work. In other words, bureaucracy is self-perpetuating in the sense that the civil servants have a tendency to increase day-by-day in number, irrespective of workload. The reason for this phenomenon, according to Parkinson, is that the “Officials create work for each other.” Thus, bureaucracy has the tendency to multiply its work and create new jobs for itself.

**Self-aggrandizement:** Bureaucrats are supposed to be the servants of the people in a democratic set-up. But in reality, they have become their masters. Instead of serving the community, the average bureaucrats are engaged in fulfilling their own desires and aspirations. They disregard people's interests and opinions. They maintain distance from the masses. In the name of people and community they are involved in self-seeking, nepotism and favouritism.

**Corruption:** Bureaucrats are alleged to indulge in corrupt practices. Corruption has become all-pervasive. It is the greatest hindrance to excellence in public service. It flows from top to bottom like water. Political corruption is considered fountainhead/Gangotri of all types of corruption in India. Hence, political corruption needs to be curbed if administrative corruption has to be checked. Corruption today has become so much pervasive that it seems that honesty is the lack of opportunity for corruption.

**Lack of neutrality:** The administrators are supposed to be politically neutral. They should not be committed to any party, leader or ideology. Their commitment must be towards the Constitution, people and development. They have to be politically unbiased. Whichever party or leader comes to power, they have to serve with the same zeal and enthusiasm.

However, in actual practice, such things appear to be missing. The concept of “Political Bureaucracy” has emerged in India. The bureaucrats have been greatly politicized. They
don't believe in political neutrality. Political neutrality seems

to be withering away. The bureaucrats align themselves with

political leaders in order to serve their vested interests. They
extend only such suggestions to the ministers which are
palatable to them. They want to please ministers at any cost
so that they may remain in good books of ministers. They
are always keen to adjust themselves according to the wishes
of ministers.

Departmentalism/Empire-building: Bureaucracy encourages
the evil of splitting up the work of government into a number of isolated and self-dependent sections, each
pursuing its own needs without any adequate correlation
with the rest. There develops a tendency on the part of these
units to consider themselves as independent and isolated
units. They tend to forget that they are but part of a bigger
whole and regard their own little kingdoms as ends in
themselves.

Status-quoism: Indian bureaucracy is largely status-
quo oriented and is more devoted to the prevention of
progress. It loves tradition and stands for conservativism. It
resists reforms and innovations. One can hardly expect that
such a bureaucracy could be responsive to the growing need,
exceptions and aspirations of the people of the country.

In short, Indian administration suffers from maladies
like arrogance, nepotism, favouritism, complacency, inaccessibility, delaying tactics, obsession with rules and
regulations, lack of initiatives, ignoring human side of things,
parochial attitude, rigidity in outlook, indifference to
democratic institutions and processes and so on and so forth.
At the district level, three distinct administrative
environments can be discerned viz., the Hakim Culture of the
apex of district administration, the Babu Culture pervading
all the rest of district administration and the Neta Culture
which increasingly impinges on these two official cultures.
Which increasingly impinges on these two official cultures.
These are very common traits of administration in most of
developing countries. These traits have become parts of
administrative culture of these countries. In such countries,
though formally condemned, these are widely practiced and
enjoy latent social acceptance. In discussion of Prismatic
societies, Fred W. Riggs aptly regards these practices as
causes of formalism in public administration.

Bureaucracy, however, should not be used as a term of
abuse only or condemned per se. It plays a very important
role also. In a developing society like India, it performs the
following important function:

Policy Implementation: Administration is an instrument
of the government to operationalise socio-economic goals
of development. The government formulates different kinds
of programmes and policies for all-round development to the
country. The implementation of such programmes and policies
is the most important and fundamental function of
administrators. They execute laws and policies to attain the
goals of welfare state.

Policy Formulation: Formulation of policy is the
function of political executives. But the administrators also
play an active role in it. They aid and advise the ministers in
policy making. Political executives, being amateurs, do not
generally understated the technical complexities of policies
necessitating their dependence on the expert advice of
professional civil servants. They provide different kinds of
data, information, expertise, feedback, suggestions, etc., to
the political executive on the basis of which they formulate
realistic programmes and policies.

Public Welfare: The primary objective of administration is to promote community welfare. It is
characterized by service motive. Social service and
philanthropy are its hallmark. It is associated with almost
each and every aspect of human life. It is, therefore, said that
administration is with us right from “Womb to Tomb” or
“Cradle to Grave.”

Internal Security: Administration prepares the ground
for development and prosperity. No development can take
place without law and order, peace and tranquility in the
society. The administration establishes law and order and
thus, helps maintain internal security in the country.

External Security: Public Administration is also
engaged in maintaining external security by defending our
borders and protecting us from war and external aggression.

Disaster Management: Administration effectively
handles natural calamities like floods, droughts, earthquakes,
cyclones, etc., and also man-make calamities such as riots,
terrorism, naxalism, insurgency, etc. The District Collector is
the primary agent for disaster management. He becomes the
main co-ordinator during rescue and relief operations at the
district level.

Role in the Age of Liberalisation, Privatisation and
Globalisation (LPG): In the era of LPG we are talking in terms of
“roll back of the state”. That is, the state or government is
withdrawing and thus, the importance of public
administration (PA) is declining. But in reality, the importance
of PA is not declining. Rather, it has changed its style of
functioning. It has transformed itself from controller to
facilitator, from direct provider of services to indirect one
and from “rowing to steering”. It acts as regulator, guide,
friend and philosopher of private parties. Thus, the
importance of PA is still there in the age of LPG. What has
changed is its style of functioning. PA has to take care of
socio-economic needs of the people. It has to play an active
part in strategic sector. Therefore, even in the age of LPG the
complete roll back of the state is not feasible at least in
developing countries like ours. It has to stay in India to
protect the interests of poor, backwards, downtrodden and
other vulnerable sections of society.

On the whole, bureaucracy performs multifarious
functions. Its role and significance in development process
cannot be underscored. It is, in fact, a potent weapon of change
and transformation in developing societies. Willoughby has
rightly termed it as “Fourth branch of the government”.

Dunham says, “If our civilization fails, it will be mainly because of
a breakdown of administration.” Therefore, what is needed
is not to condemn it but to guard against its characteristic
defects and to subject it to effective criticism. It has to be kept
under control. It has to be made accountable, responsive,
efficient, effective, open, transparent, people and development
oriented. Several measures have been initiated in India since
the decade of 1990s to fulfill these objectives, for example,
Citizen’s Charter, Right to Information (RTI), Social Audit,
e-governance, tackling corruption and cleansing the
administration, effective and speedy grievance redressal
system, empowering local bodies and Administrative Reforms to mention a few.

The most important among these measures is the implementation of the Right to Information Act. Secrecy and lack of openness in official dealings lead to corruption besides being contrary to the spirit of an accountable and democratic government. RTI will ensure to the people an easy access to all types of information regarding operations and decisions of the government. This will ensure more transparency in administration by doing away with the traditional secretive bureaucratic style of functioning.

Another measure has been the introduction of the concept of Citizen’s Charter. Various departments and service agencies have published their charters. Though non-justifiable, these Charters aim at affirming the commitment of an organization to the people that it will deliver its services promptly, maintain quality and a redress machinery will be available where the services are not up to the mark. Definitely, citizen’s Charter leads to dissemination of information to the general people and thus, puts a check over the undue influence of bureaucracy.

For the success of Citizens Charter’s, an effective and efficient Public Grievances Machinery is imperative. The Government of India and the state Governments have set up such a mechanism in the form of Consumers’ Forums. District Grievances Committee, ‘Sarkar Aap Ke Dwari,’ ‘Jehangiri Bell,’ ‘Open Darbar System’, etc. Certainly, these arrangements contribute in making higher civil servants more responsive and responsible. Another move of the government is Appraisal System for fixing accountability, increasing efficiency and giving recognition to sincere officers. This system will entail drawing up a detailed list of key tasks to be accomplished by Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers. Not only the promotion, but also the very continuation of the officers in IAS should depend on whether they deliver goods or not. Their integrity, competence, attitude and personal qualities should constantly be under a scanner.

Similarly, the provision of Social Audit holds the administration accountable. India is a democratic country. People are master. Administration exists to serve the people. It is the primary duty of any master to take a look at the accounts of the servant and hold the servant accountable. Social audit or public audit is a step in that direction. People use RTI to obtain details of the works carried out by the administrators. The information contained in records is compared with field reality. This is public audit or social audit and is a very powerful tool in the hands of the people to hold the administration accountable. It creates public pressure on the political and the administrative establishments to take corrective steps.

The Union Government had also set up the Second Administrative Reforms Commission to streamline Public Administration of the country wherein the issue of civil service reforms is a priority area. The Commission has already submitted its recommendations. Now, it is upto the government to accept and implement them sincerely.

Similarly, e-governance can herald a new era of governance in India. The use of IT devices such as Computer and Internet in administration will make administrators more transparent, accountable, open, responsive, people and development-oriented. It has potential to change the very administrative culture of India. It will give rise to the concept of Good Governance which is nothing but an e-xcellent, e-ffective and e-nabled government.

Apart from the above measures, certain suggestions can also be extended to make administration more responsive and responsible. If administration is to function fairly and objectively and carry out the tasks assigned to it effectively, it must be unhindered by political pressures. For this, a positive attitudinal change on the part of politicians is indispensable.

The media also plays a key role in keeping a vigilant eye on the activities of the civil servants and exposing them wherever required. It also makes the people aware about the deeds of the administrators. Experience in this regard shows that at times it has played an effective role in highlighting their misdeeds and malfunctioning.

Likewise, the role of NGOs and citizen groups in this context can hardly be overlooked. They keep the government officials under constant vigil which furthers the cause of responsive and responsible administration.

Lastly, the people must also be made aware of their rights. It is true that the bureaucratic arrogance depends to a great extent on the ignorance and cowardice of the people. Well-aware people would certainly put brakes on the high-handedness and arbitrariness of the civil servants in any society. In fact the magnitude of awareness of the people would keep them on the right track and bring a change in their attitude.

Conclusion:

Various measures have been initiated by the government to make bureaucracy more responsible and responsive. What is required now is not only to maintain this tempo but also to carry it forward vigorously with total sincerity and commitment. Such measures with the above mentioned suggestions, if implemented sincerely, can change the very administrative culture of our country. The concept of good governance can be realized. The government and bureaucracy will be in a position to deliver quality good and services to the people. Administration will become much more accountable, transparent, open, people and development-oriented. We will have a government anytime, anywhere. People will get the services of a SMART government i.e. a government which is Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent.

References: