



GENERALIST - SPECIALIST CONTROVERSY IN THE INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM : AN APPRAISAL

ANANDKUMAR P. SHAH

Associate Professor in Political Science

M.N. College, VISNAGAR, Dist. - Mehsana

The issue of generalist - specialist controversy is one of the most complex internal problems faced by the Indian administrative system ever since its inception. At present, the agitations by various groups of specialists such as engineers, doctors, etc. are increasing day by day. Partly, this problem has been inherited to the present day Indian administrative system by history. It is, however, partly due to our political leadership also in the sense that they have tended to let things drift and have ignored the gravity of the problem. Let's first examine the historical roots of this issue.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE : Historically, the civil service in India has been designed as a generalist body set-up in 1854. This set-up laid emphasis on the superior positions in the civil service having "the most promising young men of the day, selected by a competing (literary) examination on a level with the highest description of education in the country." It was argued that "men capable of distinguishing themselves in any of the subjects we have named and thereby proving that their education has not been resulted in vain, would probably make themselves useful wherever they might be placed." This was the essence of the Report on the Indian Civil Service, popularly known as the Macaulay Report, submitted in 1854. Even today, the civil service in India continues to be constituted on the basis of what this 'gentlemen' recommended.

Unquestionably, the Indian Civil Service was designed and looked after as the elite service. It was the master of all it surveyed, and there was no inch of the Indian administrative territory which it could not and did not survey. In the days of the British, the experts and the specialists were fewer in number and, moreover, were kept out as a matter of deliberate administrative policy. The members of the Indian Civil Service were deployed in positions of administrative leadership practically in the whole field of public administration including the specialist posts like the Director of Agriculture, Inspector General of Police and Post-Master General. The only exception was the Chief Engineer of the province who also functioned as 'ex-officio' Secretary to the Government in the department of public works / irrigation. This arrangement, however, was cancelled soon after independence.

The predominance of the generalist, however, could not remain completely

unchallenged and unquestioned. Though independent India took over the predominantly generalist administrative culture, the voices of discontent and anger began to be heard from various quarters, slowly but unmistakably. In the 1950s, when India launched her first Five Year Plan, a large number of personnel possessing technical and professional qualifications were employed in the government at various levels. The number of such personnel inevitably became larger in the 1960s, as a result of bigger and bigger five year plans. In short, the number of experts and specialists employed in the government has increased since the launching of socio-economic planning in the country, and has been continuously increasing ever since.

The specialists have been directly engaged in carrying out the developmental and welfare functions of the Government. These are the persons who construct dams and bridges, cure patients, maintain hospitals, generate and distribute electricity, undertake research in the physical, biological and social sciences, etc. While engaged in the performance of these complex tasks, they have frequently felt restricted and restrained by the authoritarian manner of the Secretariat - Central or State. They have also not been very happy with the attitude and behavior of at least some of the personnel at the controlling levels of the Government. As the Secretariat has always been controlled by the generalist ICS or IAS officers, the specialists are always feeling discontent with the administrative system. They began showing signs of uneasiness at the role traditionally set for them. A demand for a basic change both in the structure and system of country's bureaucracy was raised. They derived strength from their ever expanding number in public administration and also from their increasingly significant role in the modernisation process of the country. Another important factor was the proud thought of a bright university career - brighter indeed than the scholastic achievements of many of the generalist administrators of the day who were 'bossing over' them. And yet, the specialists did not find the outer environment completely unsympathetic towards their demands. The former Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi observed in 1967 that :

"It is odd that the greatest doctors and engineers in the country, who would be rated as the leaders of the profession and who save lives or add permanent assets to the nation can rarely hope to receive the pay or status of Secretaries of Ministers. The brightest of our young men and women choose engineering and medicine. If they happen to go into government, they are very soon overtaken by the general administrator. This must be changed and I am trying to change it. The administrative system must reflect an individual's contribution to human welfare and economic gain"

WHO ARE SPECIALISTS ?

The specialists employed in the Central Government are presently grouped into a number of organised civil services. There are also a number of them who do not belong to any of the organised civil services and are clubbed together and deemed to be included in what is called the General Secretariat Service. The more prominent of the specialist services are :

Central Engineering Service
Central Health Service
Central Legal Service
Central Revenues Service
Survey of India
Botanical Survey of India
Geological Survey of India
Zoological Survey of India
Indian Economic Service
Indian Statistical Service
Telegraph Traffic Service
Telegraph Engineering Service

A definition of the term 'specialist' becomes necessary in the interest of a rational discussion of the present controversy. The 'specialists' are those who already possess recognized professional qualifications before their entry into government and are recruited to the public service on the basis of their professional qualifications. The examples are doctors, engineers, statisticians, geologists, etc. There are also persons who possess general educational qualifications and are, as a rule, inducted into the civil service on this basis. The members of the IAS, IPS and of the other non-technical civil services fall in this second group. This category may be further divided into two groups. Members of all the non-technical services except those of the IAS are uni-functionaries : they remain in the particular field of activity for which they have been selected and thereby acquire expert knowledge in that field. The IAS, on the other hand, has been an all - or general-purpose service and thus constitutes an altogether different service. Its members hold the higher positions in different fields of public administration.

ROLE OF THE GENERALISTS : It is a fact that no specialism today stands complete in itself in terms of the problems confronting the society. Several specialists require to be integrated and put into a defined relationship in order to fulfill any large-scale task. Besides, the specialists are not completely unpolitical beings. Thus, it is necessary that the specialist's judgements be evaluated in the larger framework of social, economic, political & administrative considerations. These call for consultation, synthesis, co-ordination and control - the processes which are the true functions of a generalist administrator. Viewed in this way, both the specialists and the generalists have contradictory, but nevertheless complementary, roles to play in public administration. Their roles are contrasting because they operate on generally different priority scales : to the specialist an administrative requirement appears to be only incidental whereas to a generalist the technical job is subservient to the administrative problem. The truth is that both of them are indispensable for successful administration and the 'part' ought to be seen in relation to the 'whole'.

It would be ideal to expect that the generalist administrator will wither away. But there are some reasons for the stay of generalism in Indian public administration. First, the Ministers are enabled to get two lines of advice - general as well as specific - on a given problem. Second, the specialist is an over-enthusiast and, to this extent, he disqualifies himself to take final decisions. Third, the 'ex-officio' secretariat status to a specialist may be workable only in an emergency - when, for instance, one particular project is concerned. Finally, the co-existence of the generalists and the specialists creates and maintains 'constructive tension' which should be helpful in matters of governmental decision - making.

However, the measures must be taken to make the members of the IAS more knowledgeable and competent in terms of their tasks. Career planning should be introduced in the IAS without any further delay so that there develop linkages in the experience of the members of this service. Indeed, the members of the IAS must specialize by choosing an area of administration, getting an in-depth specialized training in that area, and stay there sufficiently long to acquire the relevant experience. It seems that the future will demand its members to combine in themselves a modest measure of technical competence in one of the fields and a high degree of administrative skill - by no means an unattainable combination. Simultaneously, efforts must be made to make generalist administrators out of those specialists who have demonstrated an ability for administration.

Both the generalist administrator and the specialist will have to travel a long journey to arrive at such a stage. At present, the good generalists and the good specialists constitute but a portion of their respective numbers in the Indian administrative system.

RE-ADJUSTING THE RELATIONSHIP :No doubt, the specialists have to play a key-role in the process of country's modernisation and development. Therefore, not only their numbers will increase but areas of specialization will also become more diversified. Further, a new development is likely to characterize Indian public administration - the short-term appointment in Government of the technical personnel. And in this context the fear is voiced in some circles about the 'destruction of democracy by the technocrats'. However, the word 'specialist' has become a rather loose one, so much so that it has begun to be employed to refer to all the existing civil services other than the IAS. In the true sense of the term, only those who are recruited to the civil service on the basis of their specialist qualifications are specialists.

There are two major demands of the specialists : Firstly, parity with the IAS in the matter of pay-scales and service conditions. Secondly, access to administrative positions at the policy-making levels in government. The pay scales and service conditions of doctors, engineers, scientists, etc. have remained less attractive than those of the IAS, a situation that is illogical and indefensible. Indeed, a specialist ought to receive by way of salary, as much as, if not more than a generalist does. The

cost of social reproduction of his skill is admittedly high and, moreover, his ability and capacity to build permanent assets for the country is much greater. At the same time, the specialists, particularly the engineers, must evolve suitable professional ethics against corruption.

However, one is not very sure whether the specialists should occupy the administrative positions in the Secretariat on a large scale or not. The administrative positions in the specialist organizations (executive organizations) must, of course, be filled from amongst the specialist personnel themselves. The practice, though not very regular or widespread, of appointing members of the IAS as heads of executive organizations must be discontinued. Moreover, such of the specialists who have shown ability and capacity for administrative work must not be formally barred from secretariat posts. In this context, the Administrative Reforms Committee recommendations on this subject appear to be sensible and should be implemented. Besides, there is a need for the setting up of staff colleges. One of the tasks of such institutions should be to formulate suitable administrative and 'de-specialization' training courses for such specialist administrators.

At the same time, the role and authority of the Secretariat must be de-emphasized in the decision-making and decision-implementing process of the government. The Secretariat must remain as a slim and sleek organization performing its tasks of higher policy-making. There should be a parallel development of enhancing the status and authority of the various specialist positions. Also, the specialists must be always consulted by the Secretariat while formulating policies.

It follows that there must be massive delegation of power and authority from the Finance Ministry to the Spending Ministries, and from the latter to their executive organizations. As a result of the planned de-glamorization of the Secretariat, the specialists will find the administrative infrastructure helpful for the practice of their skills in the field and may not be tempted to Secretariat jobs.

REFERENCES

- Avasthi, Amreshwar and Shriram Maheshwari, Public Administration (Agra : Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, 1991).
- Basu, Rumki, Public Administration : Concepts and Theories (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2001).
- Bhagwan, Vishnoolal and Vidya Bhushan, Public Administration (New Delhi :S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1990).
- Bhalerao, C.N. (ed), Administration, Politics and Development in India.
- Bhambhani, C.P., Public Administration in India.
- Bombwall and Chaudhary (eds), Aspects of Democratic Government and Politics in India.
- Chanda, Ashok, Indian Administration.
- Chauhan, Haribhai N., Apnu Vahivati Tantra : Dasha Ane Deesha (Gujarati) (Ahmedabad : University Book Production Board, Gujarat State, 1996).
- Desai, Kirtidev D., Introduction to Public Administration (Gujarati) (Ahmedabad : Anada Book Depot, 1966).
- Jain, R.B., Contemporary Issues in Indian Administration.
- Maheshwari, Shriram, Indian Administration (New Delhi : Orient Longman Ltd., 1992).
- Pandya, Hasmukh, Basic Concepts of State Governance (Gujarati) (Ahmedabad : Mrs. B.S. Shah, 1966).
- Pandya, Hasmukh, Basic Concepts of Public Administration (Gujarati)

- (Ahmedabad : Anada Book Depot , 2016).
- Pandya, Hasmukh, Public Policies and Public Administration (Gujarti)
(Ahmedabad : Anada Book Depot, 2017).
- Rai, Hardwar and Sakendra Singh, Current Ideas and Issues in Indian Administration.
- Shukla, Gajendra B., Fundamentals of State Governance (Gujarati)
(Ahmedabad : University Book Production Board, Gujarat State 2014).
- Indian Journal of Administrative Science (Relevant Articles)
- Indian Journal of Public Administration (Relevant Articles)