

Woodrow Wilson and his Contribution to Public Administration

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Abstract:

Public Administration is one of the important concepts of the study of administration. Therefore, before understanding the meaning of Public Administration, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word "Administration". The word "Administration" is derived from the Latin word "ad and ministrare" which means "to serve" or "to look after the people" or "to care for" or "to manage". Thus, literally the term administration means management of affairs- public or private. Administration is as old as the human civilization and human existence. It is the administration which controls and stabilizes the society. The whole society has been guided by the norms and values of the administration. So the society without administration is not effective. It is the administration which brings society from a set of ignorance to the brightened antiquity. The society is the best whose administration is the best. So knowledge about administration is very important for the students of Political Science.

Introduction:

Public Administration is to the state what a shadow is to the body. It is the front of the state. It is visible, standing manifestation of the state. Its importance depends on the stage of development of the society. As the society becomes complex and advanced, its public administration, too, becomes of crucial significance. Its role does not decrease- the nature of its work changes. Public Administration is a part of the administration and a contemporary concept of governance.¹ It is a collective activity to attain some specific goal. While coordinating with club, association or the company, the administration develops private administration and while relating with the

state and central Government this is developed as Public Administration. Public Administration has obtained a specialized position in the academic field. It is like any other administration which is carried out in public interest. It is centrally concerned with the organization of government policies and programme as well as the behavior of officials formally responsible for their conduct. In this regard, many public servants are considered to be public administrators, including heads of city, county, regional, state and federal departments such as municipal budget directors, Human Resources administrators, city managers, census managers, state directors, and cabinet secretaries. Public administrators are public servants working in public departments and agencies, at all levels of government.²

With the growing complexity of contemporary life, the importance of public administration has been increasing. This is because of the need for intervention by the State in the day -to-day activities of the citizens. There is hardly any aspect of a citizen's life which does not come into contact with some government agency or the other. In ancient times the needs of the citizens were limited. With the growing complexity of contemporary life, the importance of public administration has been increasing. This is because of the need for intervention by the State in the day -to-day activities of the citizens. There is hardly any aspect of a citizen's life which does not come into contact with some government agency or the other. In ancient times the needs of the citizens were limited. They could, therefore, live in more or less self-sufficient village communities producing in the village itself whatever they needed for their simple existence. The scientific and industrial revolutions have changed the situation. The industrial products require a degree of specialization which makes it necessary for the communities to live in bigger cities. The means of production have become rather complex and require a much greater degree of organizational effort. A number of activities can no longer be organized by the citizens privately or even by village or city communities. The national government and the State and the local governments have, therefore, to come forward to provide the necessary infrastructural facilities for organizing production as well as for facilitating community living. For example, roads and Railways have to be built to facilitate the transport of raw material to the site of production as well as to facilitate the distribution of the manufactured goods. These facilities are also required to meet the needs of the citizens in

moving over long distances required by modern day living.³ Similarly, communication facilities like the telephones; microwave transmissions, satellite communication etc. have to be provided to meet the needs of the communities. All these require massive investments in human and material resources far beyond the capacity of small village or even city communities. These investments have to be made by the national government and administered with the help of the local governments and the local communities. Apart from the financial investments, a lot of organizational effort is required to meet these needs of the citizens. The points of contact between the citizens and the government have, therefore, increased tremendously. The importance of public administration has been keeping pace with these developments. The interest of the scholars in the study of public administration has also been correspondingly increasing. Although the study of public administration as a separate discipline is of recent origin, the subject has been studied for quite a long time as a part of the discipline of the political science. Before taking up a study of the subject of public administration, it would be worthwhile to have an idea of the meaning and scope of the subject.⁴

Woodrow Wilson and His Contribution

According to Woodrow Wilson “Public Administration is a detailed and systematic application of law. Every particular application of law is an act of administration.” He further says “Administration is the most obvious part of the government. It is the government in action. It is the executive, the operative, the most visible side of the government.”⁵

Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of USA (1913-1921), the father of American Public Administration. Wilson and his contribution to the subject of public administration is widely read and referred to. He was one of the first political leaders who emphasized the need to increase the efficiency of the Government. Wilson argued that administration is the most obvious part of the Government and the least discussions happen around it. He further says that despite being the executive, the operative and the most visible side of the Government and being as old as the Government itself it has remain hidden from the scrutiny and inspection of writer, authors and subject matter experts where it should have been the centre of debates and researches. He shows little appreciation towards the obsession regarding the constitution of Government, the

philosophical approach towards the existence of State, the sovereignty or some greater meaning lying at the heart of the Government. Basically what he meant was the know-how of the actual business of Governing people and how that can be made more efficient.⁶

In the context of the early 20th century USA and the world in general, Wilson and his ideas regarding administration made sense. Life had changed much since the good old days of farms and cattle and now there were complexities of trade and commerce, stocks and bonds and financiers and then the national debts, the ever increasing conflicts between the capitalist class and the workers. In the light of these developments, ways the Government can function also needed a change which unfortunately was not assessed adequately resulting in inefficiency and wastage of resources. In addition to above aspects, the Government's sphere of work was expanding, like the postal service in America and rail-road lines in Europe. So, if the transition was happening at the grass root level say for example to manage rail-road, national commissioners were made in addition to older state commissioners, the resulting extension of administrative function became a matter which needed to be delicately handled and not carried out in haste.⁷ Wilson also clarified that the studies conducted in the field of public administration were mostly carried out by French and German academicians and were therefore not entirely relevant and suited to the needs of the American people and State in its original form. He suggested that any principle adopted from Europe would have to be Americanized and modified for the complex and multiform state and a highly decentralized form of Government in the USA.⁸

Wilson had carefully studied the administrative practices of not just France and England but a small nation like Prussia and praised the ruler Frederick the Great who regarded himself as the chief servant of the people and his office as a public trust. He also wrote favorably of Napoleon and his recasting of French administration after ending the monarchical rule. He however; wrote harshly about the ways of English administrators and those of his own country; pointing out that their history was not of administrative development but of legislative oversight. There were little progress made in Government organizations but vast leaps taken in law making and political criticism. While reading Wilson one cannot help but wonder that whether inaugurating public opinion in the matters of Government a wise decision at all? The dark side of it is that it becomes a larger obstacle to manage; since any change or reform proposed needs to get pass veto at so

many levels. To sum up, Wilson proposed a very no-nonsense and business- like approach to administration which should be free of shackles of political doctrines.⁹

Politics- Administration Dichotomy

Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) is acclaimed as the Father of the discipline of Public Administration. His seminal essay entitled, ‘The Study of Administration’ published in the Political Science Quarterly in 1887 running into 26 printed pages spells his vision of Public Administration. He believed in the separation of Public Administration from politics and therefore argued for its separate study. He emphatically emphasized, “The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics”. He further highlighted separateness by declaring ‘administrative questions are not political questions’. He said, ‘it is getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one’. The dichotomy was powerfully confirmed, even reinforced by James Goodnow in the year 1900 when he wrote Politics and Administration. Goodnow asserted that there are two distinct functions of government- politics and government. Politics has to do with policies, the expression of the state will, while administration has to do with the execution of separation of powers. The legislative expresses the will of the state and formulates policies, while the executive is the implementation organ. Politics- administration dichotomy, thus became a sacred concept in Public Administration.

While the dichotomy did strengthen to an extent the case for the separate study of Public Administration and contribute to its popularity, this view caused a feeling of uneasiness in certain quarters. The crisis in this belief occurred during the Second World War (1939-45). The U.S government began expanding its activities under the compulsions of the war and manpower consequently increased. In 1946, a new book entitled Elements of Public Administration edited by Fritz Von Morstein Marx was published. All 14 articles in the book were written by practitioners of Public Administration. They unanimously questioned the prevalent politics-administration dichotomy. They showed that matters regarded as questions of administration actually entailed value- laden politics. An important pillar of Public Administration was thus

shaken. Paul H. Appleby, regarded as the Plato of Public Administration emphasized the close, intimate intertwining of politics and administration in his *Policy and Administration* published in 1949. He declared the politics- administration dichotomy is irrelevant and dubious. In 1950, John Guas proclaimed in an article published in the leading journal *Public Administration Review*, 'A theory of Public Administration' means in our times a theory of politics also. The epitaph on the hitherto dominant belief in politics-administration dichotomy was finally written.

Characteristics of Public Administration

Public Administration as a unique subject differs from both Political Science and management in terms of developing certain facets of organizing theory and techniques of management. Accordingly, there are different characteristics of Public Administration on the basis of the exclusive public field and administrative efficiency. The chief characteristics are as follows.

- a. Due to the absence of the process of competition in governmental sphere the situation of monopoly arises. This process leads to the despotic ruler.
- b. There is a high degree of consciousness of community services.
- c. There is a high consistency of treatment.
- d. There is a sense of anonymity of by the officials carrying out the public business.
- e. There is a high degree of public responsibility.
- f. Availability of public information.
- g. There are the large-scale organization facilities.
- h. Formulation and implementation of public policies.
- i. Co-ordination, group activity and social relationship.¹⁰

Conclusion:

Woodrow Wilson is called the father of Public Administration because the genesis of the subject can be traced back to the Wilson's book "The Study of Public Administration" published in 1887. In this book, he made a distinction between Political Science & Public Administration. Before this, it was treated as a branch of Political Science. While commenting, he said that Administration is the most obvious part of government. It is government in action and the most

visible side of the government. He argued for a science of administration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government. Thus, Wilson projected the dichotomy view, which was picked up by other writers.

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