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Exploring Emerging Research Prospects in Public Administration

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Abstract

The field of public administration is ever-evolving has seen many facet of growth. With the advent of liberalization, privatization and globalization era, the priorities of public administration have changed dramatically because of the required change and extension of administrative activities both nationally and internationally. In fact, public administration by nature and character has evolved as multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic. This article briefly explores the emerging research areas in public administration in the contemporary scenario. Six major research areas are briefly explored: innovations in Governance, role of ICT in Governance, collaboration and coordination with the private and voluntary sector, leadership and professionalism, gender equity and New Public Services. This study is a useful exercise, as it provides insight into the emerging research areas in field of public administration - vital to development of public administration academically and practically. In addition, it provides a way to move ahead for further research in public administration.

Keywords: ICT, Governance, New Public Services, Democracy

Introduction

With the advent of liberalization, privatization and globalization era, the priorities of public administration have changed dramatically because of the required change and extension of administrative activities both nationally and internationally. Though, during the Wilson era, the literature was characterized by political –administrative dichotomy and public- private administration dichotomy, but the fact can never be ignored that political-administrative relationships have never been marked by the contradiction. The relationship between the two has evolved with the time and the public administrators have always played a significant role in-shaping and implementing public policy that serves the public; delivering public services with a

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commitment to value, effectiveness and fairness; and managing resources efficiently and economically. All over the world, "now, it is increasingly realized that 'dichotomic' argument holds no ground. It is felt that the 'interface' and interdependency' thinking should be

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strengthened. Politics, administration, management techniques, ethics, economic events, socio-cultural dynamics, geographical dimensions, ecological changes, technology and international developments should be taken into account to understand an administrative system." (Bhoopati & Lingaiah, 2004:141)

In the contemporary scenario, the dichotomy between public- private administrations has also become outdated. The concept of the New Public Management has already gained global momentum. Ideas like customer choice, clientele orientation, Total Quality Management (TQM) are being emphasized in the domain of public sector. A strategic research and practice in the field of public administration is required to ensure that public administration can cope up with the recent expended role and the challenges ahead. Redesigning and restructuring the public administration for the tasks and challenges of the 21st century does not mean 'big government' but rather emphasis on quality of performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of functions, which represent the core of the responsibilities of Modern Welfare States. With the passage of time, public administration by nature and character has evolved as multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic.

So, here in the present study, an attempt has been made to trace the recent research trends in the field of public administration. This study does not sketch growth of public administration as there is plenty of literature available so far the evolution of the subject is concerned. The scope of the study is confined to the emerging research areas in field of public administration.
This study is a useful exercise, as it provides insight into the emerging research domains in field of public administration - vital to development of public administration academically and practically. In addition, it provides a way to move ahead for further research in public administration.

Emerging Research Prospects in the Field of Public Administration

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The field of public administration is ever-evolving has seen many facet of growth. A proper research strategy and agenda is inevitable both for policy practice and policy formulation, to establish a modern and responsible public administration. The working of public administration needs to be renewed and refurbished. Six major research areas, which are affecting public administration and likely to expand in the future are briefly explored in the present study.

- **Leadership and professionalism**

Professional, trained and skilled leaders are essential to the development of public policies. Committed and professional public servants bring distinctive competence and value to serve the public and the community. Mosher (1982:12) emphasized that "our dependence upon professionals is now so great that the orientations, value systems, and ethics which they bring to their work and which they enforce on one another are a matter of prime concern to those who would strengthen the democratic system" .

In a democratic scenario they are not supposed to work in closed bureaucracies but rather work in flexible organizations. Bryson and Einsweiler (1991:3) has introduced an alternative model of leadership, describe as "shared transformative capacity". Under this model, on the part of the leaders, there is "the need to be sure the move is politically acceptable, technically workable, and legally and ethically defensible; the need to have the move endorsed by a coalition large enough to support and protect it; and the desire to, keep as many options as possible open as long as possible" (Bryson and Crosby 1992:9).

Today, the public administrators have to be professional in their job - broad-minded, people-oriented, tech-savvy, proactive decision-making and efficiency driven. They must develop administration, management, analytical and policy-making skills.

In this context, there is a need to find out adequate answers to the following questions: How to build public leadership capacity for the future that is more responsive or representative? How the future leadership can be strengthened and adapted as a solution to national and international public challenges? What should be the definition of major roles and functions for future leaders? How leadership plays a significant role in socio-economic development of the society? How to bring an attitudinal change among the public officials – from masters to servants?

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- **Innovations in Governance**

The role and function of public administration is rapidly evolving as the needs and demands of citizens are ever expending. Today's public servants face different challenges as they deal with myriad political, social and economic factors that impact both public and private sectors. No doubt, the most important issue is- increasing demand for services and finite resources.

To address such issues, public servants should think 'outside the box' and employ innovative strategies. They must be able to adapt to their governments or organizations and the cultures. The innovation in the public sector refers to the (i) defining problems, issues and challenges and; (ii) development of creative ideas; and (iii) finding and implementing the new solutions. In order to serve the rising demands, innovative strategies that improve quality of the service delivery for the citizens and provide customized solutions at the low costs will have to be developed.

In recent times, there has been a great deal of researcher's interest in 'innovation in government sector'- as an important method for improving the performance of government. Moore and Hartley (2010) have pointed out that innovation in governance:

"go beyond organizational boundaries to create network-based financing, decision-making and production systems; tap new pools of resources; exploit government's capacity to shape private rights and responsibilities; redistribute the right to define and judge value; and should be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they promote justice and the development of a society as well as by their efficiency and effectiveness in achieving collectively established goals".

Regarding innovations in governance following are the important questions that are to be discussed:

(1) What are the possibilities to adapt innovative strategies from the private sector to the public sector?
(2) How to make the best use of the innovative strategies that is suitable to the local conditions?
(3) How to use indigenous knowledge to solve problems of public administration.
(4) How to reform the government and inject a culture of innovation into public officials?

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Shifts in management paradigms and emerging technologies influence innovation strategies. Research in this field can provide the knowledge and insights to address these ever-changing aspects.

- **Collaboration and Coordination with the Private and Voluntary Sector**

Ongoing reforms in the public sector and the process of democratic decentralization focus more and more on the importance of coordination. The purpose is to make better use of available resources, integrate the various stakeholders (public, private and civil society) in order to create coherence & effectiveness in public services and to provide citizens with better access to public services. The ever increasing problems – environment protection, combating the menace of corruption, fighting terrorism inside the country and at the borders requires apt solutions with the help of new alliances. Annan, (2000, p. 64) suggests:

> "Public administration must adapt to the realities of the new era. We need to form coalitions for change with partners beyond the precincts of officialdom. Mobilizing skills and the necessary resources has made it imperative for the state governments to form Loose and temporary alliances cutting the institutional, regional, national and disciplinary lines".

Public administration's role has acquired paramount significance in the context of an increase in the variety, number and complexity of functions performed by the modern welfare state. But there is a serious imbalance between aspirations of the people and performance of the administrative apparatus. Khan and Zafarullah (1987) have opined that "the government of developing country, however big with its tentacles stretched far and wide, is alone unable to look into every aspect of human life." In fact, the tasks of development, justice, welfare, security, law and order are herculean in nature, therefore, it is widely accepted that government alone can't tackle the problems of widespread poverty, illiteracy, increasing rate of unemployment and underemployment, alarming population explosion, malnutrition, child labour, pollution, gender inequality, violence and crime, etc. So, when the government functions are increasing in breadth and depth, popular participation of private organizations and numerous organizations carrying the tags of Third Sector- NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations), CSOs (Civil Society

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Organizations), Voluntary Organizations (VOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) - is becoming inevitable.

Report of the Steering Committee on Voluntary Sector asserts that: "it has been recognized that no development strategy can be successful unless a shared vision of public sector, private sector and voluntary sector is created and the civil society, having Voluntary Organizations as the key actors, can play a vital role in this strategy for development". Therefore, "when the government functions are increasing in breadth and depth, popular participation becomes inevitable and the rise of popular associations natural". (Roy, 1987)

But, we have to consider the implications of PPP model. How far it will be successful? As the motive behind the private sector is profit-making, will it be able to work with a service motive?

Again, if the government is working with voluntary sector, to ensure the accountability of this sector will remain a biggest challenge for the government. As the works of the government are multiplying day by day and becoming more complex, the collaboration is inevitable, but, a detailed research is required to look into this matter.

- **New Public Governance and Citizen-centric approach:**

Public administration in the 21st century is undergoing remarkable change, both in the developed and developing world. Since 2000, there is a remarkable trend towards an emerging paradigm variously termed as 'new public service', the 'new public governance' or the 'post-New Public Management'. Robinson (2015) has opined that "policy problems faced by governments are increasingly complex, wicked and global, rather than simple, linear, and national in focus. And yet the prevailing paradigms through which public sector reform are designed and implemented are relatively static and do not fully encompass the significance or implications of these wider changes". In fact, the New Public Management reforms fail to "understand the basic foundation of public administration in a democratic society i.e., what people want from government. The ideas of welfare society, citizenship, public interest, social responsibility and dialogue are treated a anachronistic. Whatever may be, there must be connection between public administration, governance and social life". (Richard, et.al. 2001)

In place of the earlier paradigms, Bourgon (2007) calls for a "New Public Administration theory that is grounded in the concepts of citizenship and the public interest, expressed as the shared

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interests of citizens rather than as the aggregation of individual interests determined by elected officials or market preferences. The centrality of citizens as co-producers of policies and the delivery of services fundamentally distinguishes the New Public Governance approach from both the statist approach associated with the old public administration and market-based NPM approaches, rather than simply proposing a new form of public administration".

While emphasizing the idea of citizenship and citizen's participation, Denhardt & Denhardt (2001) has rightly pointed out that, "The spirit of public service extends beyond those formally working for government, those we think of as public servants. Ordinary citizens have also wished to contribute. However, the avenues through which they might bring their many talents to bear have been somewhat limited, in part, we think, because over the past several decades we have severely constrained the citizenship role, preferring to think of people as customers or consumers rather than citizens."

A strategic research agenda is required to capture fully the complexity and diversity of 'New Public Service' approach. Researchers have to find out a practical answer to the question - How can the principles of the New Public Service and citizen centric approach can be put into practice? Osborne (2010) suggested a series of "new questions" about the fundamentals of the NPG. These new questions are, it is argued here, sevenfold:

- What should be our basic unit of analysis in exploring public policy implementation and public services delivery – and what are the implications of this for theory and practice? *(the fundamentals question)*
- What organizational architecture is best-suited to delivering public services in the plural state? *(the architectural question)*
- How do we ensure sustainable public service systems – and what does sustainability mean? *(the sustainability question)*
- What values underpin public policy implementation and services delivery in such systems? *(the values question)*
- What key skills are required for relational performance? *(the relational skills question)*
- What is the nature of accountability in fragmented plural and pluralist systems? *(the accountability question)*

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• How do you evaluate sustainability, accountability and relational performance within open natural public service delivery systems? *(the evaluation question)*

- **Impact of ICT on Governance:**

Rapid changes in information and communication technology during the past few decades can be considered both the cause and consequences of globalization, having tremendous effect on the functioning of the states, in general, and public administration, in particular. (Singh 2000) In fact, the use of ICT in public administration has given rise to the emergence of e-governance as an essential tool of good governance. E-governance facilitates the efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and responsibility in the delivering of public services. With the emergence of e-governance citizens has become more demanding and conscious, as "it has provided the citizens a choice and a possibility of easy access to governmental information and services…it also implies empowerment of the ordinary citizen if we believe in the dictum that knowledge means power". (Gupta, 2004)

Along with a number of benefits and opportunities the ICT has brought new issues, such as, 'digital divide' cyber crime and cyber security, financial frauds etc. Singh (2000) found a number of issues in application of e-governance in public administration: "the commitment on the part of top leaders is found missing or lacking, infrastructure for e-governance and technology based administration is invariably inadequate, the resources required for initial investment are not available, the political and administrative set up is not fit to be able to absorb the new technology successfully, heavy bias towards English as a medium of communication, lack of adequate awareness and technological skills among the masses and absence of desirable rules and regulations over the use of cyberspace, etc".

- **Gender Issues:**

No community can effectively develop without its women's equal, active and full participation in the process of socio-economic development. They cannot be placed out of the orbit of development program. The issue of gender equality needs to be tackled with socio-psychological perspective. UNDP has pointed out that "While there has been significant focus on different aspects of women's participation in public life, promoting women's participation and leadership

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in public administration has received less attention. Yet, advancing this critical issue is a cornerstone for ensuring peaceful, just, inclusive and prosperous societies. With women representing 51 per cent of the world's population, their equal participation in public administration is essential for ensuring national policies are reflective of all segments of society." To ensure women's participation in public administration, following research questions need consideration:

- ✓ How to ensure equal right and opportunity for women in all spheres to assess the fruit of development?
- ✓ What are the negative impacts of gender-based discrimination on the social status and position of women?

- **Future Research Agenda**

Any attempt to introduce administrative reforms blindly, without taking into account the local conditions of the country, will result into a failure. This requires an adequate knowledge and data base about the existing socio-economic, cultural, political and administrative conditions. In fact, necessary data and expertise to interpret and analyze them is indispensable. Valsan (2004) has emphasized the liberal attitude towards research. To him, "liberalization of research can release the curiosity of academics with a desire to contribute towards administration and socio-economic reform in any country." In the twenty-first century, public administration must have to contribute "for achieving a democratic polity, rising to societal level; confronting the complexity of instruments of collective action and encouraging more effective societal learning". (Kirlin, 1996) The research should be relevant and play a "positive and constructive role" in solving national issues and problems. At the same time, we must not ignore the earlier trends and issues, such as- models of public management, democratic decentralization, human rights, gender equality, good governance, e-governance, tribal development, social equity, environmental management, rural and urban development etc, as they play an important role in the public administration of the country. There is need to establish a link between researches and practice. The scholars and professionals of public administration should produce research to aid policy makers dealing with most important 'administrative' issues at the national and international level.

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