

**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE GOVERNANCE
FRAMEWORK : BANGLADESH PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION AT FORTY***

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Introduction

Public Administration (PA) in Bangladesh both as an academic discipline and as a practice continues to suffer from a number of deficiencies. These deficiencies have contributed to the failure of PA to meet the expectations of the people after even forty years of independence. The failure of PA as an academic discipline is reflected by its inability to occupy a pivotal place among social science disciplines. This is primarily because of the narrow orientation in understanding, evaluating and suggesting policy options to the government of the day in the areas pertaining to public administration in particular and public sector in general. The paper is an attempt to analyze from governance perspective what ails public administration in Bangladesh as an academic discipline as well as practice and what remedial measures that can be adopted to overcome the present deficiencies. It is believed that viewing PA from governance perspective will enable one to examine malaise afflicting PA and to recommend appropriate measures from a wider societal perspective.

Understanding the present trends in PA depends to a large extent on clear appreciation of its surrounding social, political, economic, and cultural environment. This is easier said than done. One of the recurring themes in PA in the literature has been making it broad-based and freeing it from Western-culture bias (Khan 2013). Present emphasis in PA research, practice and teaching is on building, promoting, and integrating cross-country and cross-culture studies. This is evident from increasing collaboration in teaching and research among scholars in developed countries like USA, Canada, UK, and

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Australia with countries like China, India, Japan, and South Korea. The objective of PA in the global context is “transcending division among cultures and national boundaries ... to build and test theories outside country-specific contexts to study global issues of public administration” (Hou et al. 2011: i50). The role of public administration in governance is a continuing topic of discussion and debate. The current worldwide reassessment of the functions of the state and of public officials both elected and appointed arises from two major sources: one is globalization and its impact on what governments must do to adapt and respond to rapidly changing international economic, social, political and technological trends; the other is increasing dissatisfaction among citizens in many countries with the functions of government and the services that public administrations provide (Rondinelli, 2007).

The challenge facing all governments in the 21st century is to create a system of governance that promotes and supports efficient economic interaction and that, at the same time, advances the health, safety, welfare, and security of their citizens. Public administration must be strengthened, especially in developing countries, if governments are to perform the functions required to promote socially equitable and sustainable economic growth, create enabling policies for participation in a globalizing economy, and combat poverty. Among the most important of those functions are: a) developing human resources; b) protecting human rights and political freedoms; c) protecting security, health, safety and welfare; d) building social capital by strengthening civil society; e) protecting the natural environment; f) mobilizing financial resources for development; g) creating partnerships and collaborations with the private sector and non-governmental organizations for service delivery; h) democratizing and decentralizing government; i) providing or facilitating the provision of physical and technological infrastructure; and j) enabling private sector development. Studies show that public administration is like a machine which has specific tasks to perform in achieving the goals of governance. This shows how that public administration can be fitted within the governance framework.

Understanding Public Administration in the Governance Framework

The concepts in public administration (PA) have changed over the past fifty years. One of the key concepts that is widely utilized to measure and evaluate the role of PA in providing services to the citizens is governance and its derivative good governance. Good governance (GG) is now conceived of by theorists and practitioners as well by citizens as a reliable framework to monitor

measure and evaluate the performance of public servants. The GG framework can be utilized to make public servants accountable and transparent. Good governance is based on a system of checks and balances among executive, legislative, and judicial branches (Cheema, 2007) . In addition to providing a wide variety of services, public administration in a system of democratic governance protects the rights of minorities and the disadvantaged, enhances access to justice, facilitates the engagement of civil society and the private sector, uses the power of information and communications technology to increase citizens' access and participation in development, and seeks partnerships to achieve public objectives. Development of ICT has shaped public administration to perform well in the governance framework in which civil servants are to serve the people efficiently and effectively. Scholars and practitioners have identified means of increasing transparency in government and linking public administration to citizens that is being adopted widely around the world. They point out the beneficial roles of e-government in helping public administrators to serve citizens.

Borderless PA is also emphasized upon. This view of PA fits in with network governance. One of the suggestions in this regard is dissolving all boundaries so that government, non-profit and private institutions all shares the goal of human flourishing (Eikenberry 2009). It is ambitious and idealistic goal that might fit in well with a critical democracy approach to PA. It is well-known that critical democracy emphasizes on issues of substantive democracy. It is expected that a critical democracy-driven PA would challenge economic and political system that impede democratic outcomes and civic participation (Eikenberry 2009).

The days of public administrators playing the role of neutral umpires are long over. Time is ripe for them to play a more assertive and pro-active role in governance for the voiceless and the marginalized. Box (2008) suggests six areas of actions for those public administrators who want to be “agents of social change” with small acts of “radicalness” within a constraining environment. The six areas of action for public administrators are: gather and analyze information about current conditions related to organizational mission, and broader knowledge of best practices, alternative futures, and trends in social and environmental change; modify operating procedures within the organization to serve the goal of social equity; formulate recommendations for change to the ultimate decision maker; provide information to people; provide meaningful access of citizens to policy process; and seek to protect private lives and strive for both equity and protection of personal liberties.

The issues of ethics and morality continue to remain relevant for public administration in the era of governance. Governance framework has been supportive of ethical and corruption-free public service and administration. Surveys after surveys globally show how public life has been vitiated regularly by gross acts of violation of public trust by public servants both elected and appointed. Corruption has become so endemic in many countries that it has adversely affected all spheres of life. The consequences are there for all to see. People are compelled to pay bribes to public servants; all aspects of a career public servant's life are affected by partisan politics; income disparity between the beneficiaries of corruption and majority of the population increases at a frightening rate; distribution of the benefits of economic growth, however marginal, goes mostly to the well-to-do segments of the society; and major reforms in administration are resisted and remain non-implemented.

From a practitioner's (Wolf, 2000) perspective there are at present six trends which are important to understand governance framework during the last two decades or so. These are global innovation, holistic mapping, flexible government, web and networks, citizen engagement, and human dimension. Many countries have been and continue to experiment with innovations. This has become a global trend. In the 1980s and 1990s there was fascination with New Public Management (NPM) that focused on deregulation, downsizing, and privatization especially in such countries as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and UK. In the 1990s onwards there has been interest with civil service reform, decentralization, electronic tendering and procurement, electronic service delivery, restructuring of ministries, outsourcing and drastic reduction in the number of public sector employees and staff in such countries as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Mexico, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong of PRC, South Korea and Japan to name a few. Holistic mapping denotes a shift from government to governance to facilitate interaction and cooperation between government, market, civil society and citizen. This has enabled many countries including Denmark to study and debate different ways of organizing and regulating the politico-administrative interface to identify the consequences for democracy for broader changes in the power structures in society (Wolf, 2000). Flexible government in many OECD countries has resulted in reduced management rigidity and rules, adjusting structure to tasks and individual capacities and deregulating civil service to meet increase demands for individually designed careers. Public administration has become a part of multiple networks: organizational, human and electronic networks that are

instrumental in producing policies, services, and knowledge. Building citizen trust through transparent process and accountability and democratic dialogue is vital and been accepted in many countries. In France and Norway there has been increased attention to clarify and reinforce citizens' legal rights. The citizen is finally back as the source of inspiration for new policy developments in many European and North American countries. Human dimension involves substantial investment on public servants mostly in the area of training. Along with training emphasis is on effective knowledge management and fast-track mobility for the best and the brightest in the public service

Bangladesh Public Administration at Forty

The Pioneers

The development of Public Administration (PA) as an academic discipline is essentially the result of the work of one man, namely Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chaudhury. He led the fight to establish a separate department of PA on his return from London University with a Ph.D. in 1960. As Professor and Chairman of the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka in 1968-1969 he introduced MA in Public Administration (PA) Program within the Department of Political Science. Others who assisted Professor Chowdhury ably were Syed Maqsood Ali, Nur Mohamad Mian and Syed Giasuddin Ahmed all faculty members of Political Science Department, Dhaka University but taught courses in PA at the graduate level.

Achievements

Bangladesh public administration as a field of study has witnessed significant numbers of achievements. Numbers of Public Administration Departments have burgeoned in recent years. From a single Department in Dhaka University in 1972 the number of Public Administration Department in different public universities now stands at nine. There are now independent Departments of Public Administration in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Jahangirnagar and Sylhet Universities. In Islami University, Kushtia Public Administration co-exists with Politics Department. During last one year three public universities have opened Public Administration Department due to the initiatives taken by the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGCB). These are Barisal, Begum Rokeya (Rangpur) and Bangabandhu (Gopalganj) Universities. Two outcomes are noticeable as a result of this development. Many students are now getting opportunity to study this important discipline at the university –level. Also job opportunities for PA graduates are opening up. Public Administration graduates

have done well both in the academia and in different branches of civil service. Many among them teach in well-known universities in USA, Canada, England, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, UAE and other countries. They have also made significant contribution to the discipline of Public Administration through research and publications. In spite of limited opportunities, some scholars in Bangladesh continue to do academic research and publish in recognized and refereed professional journals and contribute to edited volumes published from abroad. A few of them have published quality works in Bangladesh and abroad. For some years now public administration journals are being published from Public Administration Departments in Sylhet and Jahangirnagar Universities. Journals are also published from Islami and Chittagong Universities from time to time. It needs to be added that the Center for Administrative Studies later renamed as Center for Public Affairs, located in the Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, was the first organization to bring out a journal titled *Public Administration* in 1977. A few years later the journal was rechristened as Politics, Administration and Change (PA&C). Both journals had international as well local advisory boards to assist the editors. Unfortunately, PA&C ceased to publish about a decade ago because of shortage of fund and lack of professional support from local scholars. One healthy trend is the return of young and capable teachers to their respective PA departments at different universities after obtaining higher degrees from established universities abroad. This has enabled them not only to meaningfully contribute in the arena of teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels but also to open up new vistas in the area of research.

Public administration in Bangladesh as a tool of government to deliver services to the people and to achieve national development goals has been applauded in terms of its adaptation to changes in the social, economic, and political environment of the country. Having understood the changing role of public administration in the present time challenges facing public administration and governance the Government of Bangladesh has adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for ensuring customer- friendly public service delivery and development policies. The Information & Communication Technology (ICT) has played a significant role in shaping the practice of public administration to be viewed in the governance framework. E-governance and network governance have been witnessed as ministries and service- oriented organizations are using online instruments to deliver services. Websites of public sector organizations have

been providing easier access to public services. A wide range of efforts have been experimented with to reform the civil service so that the public administration can be more accountable, efficient and transparent. These three key characteristics of governance framework are now being increasingly understood by key policy makers. Bangladesh public administration has so far coped reasonably well with the emergence of alternative service delivery providing organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Voluntary Organizations (CVOs). Public administration operating within the governance framework has successfully collaborated with these organizations. Although many major administrative reform initiatives have failed but efforts to enhance the skills of public servants is considered as one of the important achievements in the first forty years of Bangladesh's existence as an independent country. Human resource training and development has been institutionalized. Many international donor agencies have become partners in programs targeted to increase the leadership capabilities of the civil servants and continuously improving the system of public sector human resource management. Local level public service delivery by both civil servants and functionaries of local government has improved through the involvement of many third sector organizations.

Global governance and network governance have made a significant impact upon the Bangladesh public administration as many agencies and organizations from many diverse areas come to work as collaborator of the public sector in improving the citizens' life and establishing their rights to be developed. Introduction of Citizens' Charter in the public sector organizations is one of the achievements in this regard. The pace of implementation of public-private partnership has been increased in recent years. Utilization of governance framework in recent years in different countries of the world has stressed that public administration needs to be more flexible and citizen- friendly. Bangladesh public administration is striving to place it in the governance framework by introducing many new ideas and mechanisms to ensure citizen oriented service delivery.

Challenges

Public Administration in Bangladesh is a nascent discipline. It is still evolving and learning from relevant environment. Public Administration (PA) as a discipline and practice also faces a number of challenges. Some of these challenges can retard the development of PA unless appropriate remedial actions are taken soon.

In Bangladesh, governance has consistently been a central concern for government, civil society, and the donor communities (Al-Samarrai, 2009). A local think tank, the Centre for Governance Studies (2006, p. 6), briefly summarized widely held views regarding the quality of governance: political turmoil and violence, the politicization of public administration and concerns that corruption obstructs private sector investment and public service delivery are key elements of what is widely deemed “crisis of governance.” The situation in Bangladesh represents a distinct case where corruption has found a remarkably safe space in which to proliferate, despite the vigilance of control mechanisms. Corruption is so pervasive that it has evoked widespread condemnation, both inside and outside the country (Zafarullah & Siddique, 2001). Consequently, Bangladesh has been consistently ranked by Transparency International as one of the most venal among the researched countries (Khan, 2013). Along with corruption lack of political commitment, bureaucratic resistance, factionalism in public sector, ineffective public management processes and biased civil service management have provided challenges in diverse forms to the Bangladesh public administration to fit into the present governance framework (Sarker, 2004). Considering the culture of public administration in Bangladesh challenges can be difficult in the present governance framework. Administrative culture in Bangladesh portrays concentration of power at the top of the hierarchy and delay in giving decisions on important matters. Red tape is a regular phenomenon in Bangladesh public service. Communication flows usually downward. Rarely subordinates can give meaningful feedback to superiors. To keep the superiors in good humor and to facilitate their career path many subordinates indulge in sycophancy. This adversely affects development and maintenance of healthy working relation between officials at different levels in the hierarchy and encourages and perpetuates authoritarian tendencies within public sector. Removal of top heavy administration and vertical line of control are one of the major challenges in present era of network, citizen- based governance. Citizens are usually treated as subjects rather than customers. Transparent and accountable administration is yet to be achieved in the public sector. This implies that citizen- friendly, goal-oriented, transparent and accountable administration is badly needed to cope with the changes in governance framework. After forty years Bangladesh Public Administration has to consider these challenges to fit in with the rapidly changing governance scenario. In most cases Bangladesh Civil Service finds itself in a position where the important aspects of recruitment, promotion,

transfer and training are dealt on the basis of political motif. The conspicuousness of colonial bureaucracies and significant social and cultural status of the members of civil services, it is argued, has created an unhealthy imbalance in institutional development. This has resulted in premature growth of political agencies. Others argue that political rulers of developing countries are adequately in command of political power. The colonial and paternalistic socio-cultural legacy which exists in Bangladesh Civil Service is obstructing the policies and strategies to place more women in public organizations. This has been one of the prime concerns raised by many scholars of public administration in recent times as they urge for women empowerment in every sphere of the society. Another important trend found in the Bangladesh Civil Service is the number of people working in different positions. Downsizing has been proposed by many national and international agencies to make the civil service management efficient that will enhance the quality of the services delivered by bureaucrats in this modern globalized era. BCS (Administration) cadre officials occupy key positions within the civil service system and shape the policies and practices within the entire civil service. This unequal position and power of BCS (Administration) Cadre officials vis-à-vis other cadre officials creates tension among the cadres. Representation of this particular cadre in every decision making or higher position in the bureaucratic hierarchy diminishes the chances of empowering other cadre's officials and mitigating inter-cadre conflict. To achieve diversity in the civil service through the placement of officials according to their specialization and competency and introduction of cluster proposals was made by international donor sponsored administrative reform bodies but unfortunately these proposals were not implemented.

Further challenges to Bangladesh public administration can be sorted out based on the style of managing the civil service. Bangladesh public administration has to deal with politicization of civil service, elitist nature of the civil servants and conflict between specialist-generalist cadre officers.

Way Forward

Public Administration is a dynamic discipline. It is growing lips and bound in many developed and developing countries. This growth has taken many shapes and directions but in most cases Public Administration's core focus has remained the same, i.e. devising theories and models to understand the public sector and its linkages with private and third sectors to serve the citizens better.

If Public Administration as a discipline and as a practice has to move forward then the following measures needs to be implemented on a priority basis.

First, we need an apex forum of Public Administration in Bangladesh to discuss, deliberate, and evaluate the status of the discipline and the progress we have made so far. More importantly, we need to devise ways and means to lead the discipline to a greater height in coming decades. This forum can be in the shape of a new national organization styled as Bangladesh Society of Public Administration (BSPA). All heads of departments of Public Administration (PA) of public universities, selected senior civil servants having academic background and interest in PA need to be inducted as office bearers of BSPA. All individuals having academic degrees in Public Administration will be eligible for membership of BSPA. Distinguished individuals who have made significant contribution to the discipline and practice of Public Administration may be conferred honorary membership of the Society. Second, civil service management should be conducted on the basis of rules, regulations and neutrality. Third, clear cut governance agendas on the basis of people's demand and needs have to be formulated to guide the entire public service. During the last one decade or so MDGs have been adopted as one of the core guidelines to provide direction to the civil servants so that they can strive for and achieve national development. Fourth, institutionalization of democracy as a system of governance within the polity is essential to enable public administration to work without political interference in the daily work of administration. Political accountability of civil service should be strengthened. Fifth, policy formulation and implementation are two different sets of work. Public administration has to be responsible only for implementation rather involving itself into the policy formulation process unless specifically asked for by political leaderships in the government.

Sixth, partnership with third sector organizations and private organizations has to be appraised regularly so that civil servants can be accessed by people through partner organizations.

Seventh, accountability mechanisms and measures along with increasing transparency in public dealing as suggested earlier will facilitate the ushering in of an honest and clean public service. Horizontal accountability should be institutionalized.

Eighth, the training institutions should introduce a mandatory course or theme on public service ethics and standards so that the newly appointed officers get the proper understanding about the ethical practices of service delivery.

Finally, the Ministry of Public Administration should have more authority and responsibility in maintaining discipline within the administration. This ministry has to be manned both by the specialist and generalist civil servants so that it can work to deal with each and every cadre of Bangladesh Civil Service.

Conclusion

Bangladesh public administration after first forty years of its inception revolves around diverse issues of civil service management. Apart from the development of public administration as an academic discipline its role as an applied field tasked with national development and welfare is also crucial. Bangladesh Civil Service, managed by recruited civil servants, has always been a constant concern for the government and state. Civil service has been managed, over the years, based on political considerations and political ideology where the politicians try to manipulate the managerial practices of civil service and subsequently the bureaucrats turned them as the client to their political master (Zafarullah and Khan, 2001). The characteristics of civil bureaucracy look similar to that of bureaucracy of the colonial days. Very little has changed during last forty years of civil bureaucracy's structural arrangements buttressed by a rigid hierarchical system, close supervision, centralization in decision-making and emphasis on seniority for promotion and placement and in the values and norms of civil servants (Khan, 2012). Major administrative reform efforts intended to overhaul the bureaucratic system and its attendant norms and values were staunchly resisted and failed. Only minor adjustments have been made in the bureaucratic system to conduct the day-to-day administrative business. The result is there for all to see. Lack of political will for reform, political interference in administration, lack of professionalism among bureaucrats and prevalence of wide-spread corruption have all contributed in different degrees to the sustenance of an inefficient, ineffective, unresponsive and corrupt civil service.

Public administration in Bangladesh continues to be affected by many deficiencies and these have significantly contributed to the retardation of its healthy growth. These deficiencies need to be redressed soon in order to cope with the need of the 21st century turning it into a right kind of instrument to implement the Nation's policy of development including vision 2021.

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