
UNIT 27 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AND PERMANENT EXECUTIVES

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27.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the relationship between political and permanent executives, in the light of policy-administration dichotomy;
- Describe the principles which govern their relationship;
- Outline the areas of cooperation and conflict; and
- Examine the impact of rising popular consciousness on the relationship.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit deals with one of the important issues of Public Administration in India, viz., the relationship between political and permanent executives. The former derives authority from the people while the latter derives strength from its administrative positions and technical expertise. It is the political executive that the permanent executive is subordinated to, because the political executive represents the people. The concept of policy-administration dichotomy, in which is rooted the basic distinction of the two executives, has been dealt with in this unit. Moreover, the principles which govern their relationship in the context of the growing popular consciousness have also been discussed in the unit.

27.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ever since the state came into being it is associated with power and dominance, for the state originated primarily to maintain law and order. The monarchy of the ancient and medieval times represented the unchallenged and unrestricted power of the monarch and in turn the state. Human history witnessed the exercise of the naked and arbitrary power. Power has an inherent propensity to get centralised. As the capacity of human beings to produce has grown and their overall

consciousness started undergoing change, the structure and the modes of exercise of power could not remain the same. The most important landmark in this evolution was the industrial revolution which paved the way for capitalist development. The capitalist development gave rise to pluralism, liberalism, market-oriented development, the rule of law and so on. Of all the developments the major one has been the rise of the nation state.

The concept of nation is not new to human history. It existed as the symbol of cultural and social life of a society for a long time. The concept of the state is also not new to history. It existed even when there were attempts to establish a social order. But the state and nation have become coterminus only with the arrival of industrial revolution. The nation-state has been experiencing considerable changes. There have been serious attempts to preserve pluralism and consolidate power. In the process it has been realised that concentration of power in any form or in any institution in the long run tends to be counter productive. It was in the wake of this realisation that the system was sought to be built on the concept of separation of powers. It was Montesque, a political philosopher, who advocated the concept of separation of powers with checks and balances so as to ensure that naked power is checked and its abuse is reasonably restricted.

The clear-cut separation of powers between the three branches of government – the legislative, the judiciary and the executive – marks a significant beginning of a new system of power distribution. The sole attempt in this system is to impose proper checks on each branch of the government and more so the executive branch of the government. The executive branch of the government consists of two branches: a) political executive, b) permanent executive. The political executive exercises power by virtue of its elections and the constitutional position. Theoretically they derive power from the people. The permanent executive derives its strength partly from its administrative positions but largely from its technical expertise. As the political executive represents the people and modern governments are based on the concept of popular sovereignty, the permanent executive is subordinated to the political executive. In fact in the parliamentary system of government, the political executive is responsible to the legislature which in turn is accountable to the people. In this arrangement there is also judiciary to ensure that the governance is based on the constitutional provisions on the one hand and the executive, both political and permanent, confirm and enforce the laws passed by the legislatures without violating their spirit. While it would be interesting to study the relationship between the various branches of government, the scope of this discussion is confined to the relationship between the political and permanent executives.

27.3 POLICY-ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY

The basic distinction between the political executive and the permanent is rooted in the concept of policy-administration dichotomy. It was Woodrow Wilson, in 1887, made a distinction between politics and administration in his paper “The Study of Administration”, which we have studied in Course I of this programme. He considered politics as concerned with policy formulation which sets tasks for administration. Administration was said to be concerned with execution of policies which is the domain of career civil servants. Policy making is the function of popularly elected representatives. This dichotomy at that time basically arose due to the prevalence of spoils system in American politics which led to governmental inefficiency. This view gained support by other scholars, such as, Willoughby, Pfiffner, L.D. White, etc. This dichotomy implies that the policy process is entirely different from its implementation. The policy is supposed to be the primary function of politics and the politics in turn are

supposed to be rooted in an ideological structure. Ideology is a set of priorities that a given political party prefers from the available alternatives to solve different problems that people of a society confront. The difference between one political party and the other is based on the differences in preferences. On the contrary, the permanent executive deals with the collection of factual information about the concrete situation. It furnishes the information necessary for the policy outcome. Once the policy is made, the administration or the permanent executive needs to initiate action and take all the measures to accomplish the tasks that the policy sets for the administrative machinery. The permanent executive is expected to equip itself with the necessary technical and managerial expertise both to administer people and things. As they are permanent they also possess the experience with the help of which the pitfalls can be avoided and the goals realised with economy and efficiency.

There has been a considerable debate on this dichotomy. There have been arguments for and against such a theoretical position. While theoretically such a separation is conceivable, it is argued, operationally it poses a number of problems. There is a question about the separation of facts and values: when the permanent executive furnishes the factual information, does it not get mixed up with their values. Is it possible for the individuals to separate their values from the facts that they collect? Then it is asked: whether the permanent executives implement the policies if they do not subscribe to those preferences? In other words, how can any individual implement a programme which he does not subscribe to. Further is it correct to believe that the members of the permanent executive do not have value preference? These questions are not discussed in detail. However, those who maintain that dichotomy is feasible, argue that policy preferences involve more of values and political processes while the administrative process involves more of technical details and facts and less of values. It would not be possible for the same agency to do both the functions simultaneously with economy and efficiency. The separation of these two functions is not only theoretically desirable but also operationally essential.

27.4 PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE RELATIONSHIP

Once the premise for separation of these two wings is agreed upon, the two wings must operate based on certain basic conditions. The conditions become all the more necessary when the distinction in activities is delicate and overlapping. It is this necessity that gave rise to two important norms, viz., neutrality and anonymity. Let us try to understand the implications of these two norms.

27.4.1 Norm of Neutrality

The norm of neutrality assumes three conditions: 1) changing of political parties in power, 2) meritorious bureaucracy; 3) permanent bureaucracy. Let us now try to understand these three conditions. Firstly, in a liberal democracy with pluralistic nature of political parties, particularly with electoral mechanism, there is bound to be a change of parties in power. That is, in fact, the logic of the system. In United States, there used to be spoils system before the Pendleton Act was passed. Under this system the political parties coming to power had complete discretion to change the administrative personnel from top to the bottom. This means the political values of the party coincided with the values of the administrative system. For the administrative personnel were chosen mainly on the basis of their values. This system did pose its own problems giving rise to the passage of Pendleton Act which brought in the concept of merit.

This leads us to the second condition, viz., recruitment of the members of administrative system on the basis of merit of the individuals. Here we are not

going into the question of what is merit. It is sufficient to state that the criteria evolved for selection is uniformly applied to all the candidates aspiring to join the administration. Here care is taken to avoid political valuation, in the narrow sense of the term.

This leads to the third condition, viz., recruitment on a permanent basis. This means the persons chosen for the service become life members of the service. This implies that changes in the fortunes of political parties have nothing to do with the continuation or otherwise of the members of the civil service. In fact it is these factors which have brought in the concept of permanent executive.

The recruitment of the personnel on a permanent basis in a changing political climate calls for neutrality of the permanent members. This means the members are not supposed to commit themselves to any political values. They are expected to cooperate and assist any party in power irrespective of the political preferences. This implies that members of the permanent executive either do not have clear preferences or do not allow those values enter their day-to-day work. There have been several debates on this question. But the existing theoretical position is that the permanent executive and their individual value preferences cannot go together. With the result neutrality has come to be accepted as one of the governing norms of the relationship between the political and permanent executives.

27.4.2 Norm of Anonymity

The second principle – anonymity flows from the norm of neutrality. The principle of anonymity emphasises that permanent executive works from behind the screen. In other words, they should avoid public gaze. This implies that the political executive takes the total responsibility for omissions and commissions. The executive takes the credit for the achievements and discredit for the failures. The people through electoral mechanism punish or reward the political executive or the political party that the executive represents. The permanent executive has to work under the overall guidance and direction of the political executive. The political executive will have all the powers not only to extract work from the permanent executive but reward or punish them. Under this arrangement the pattern of accountability is so distributed that while the political executive is solely accountable to the people, the permanent executive is also accountable to the political executive. It is precisely the reason why anonymity has come to be considered as one of the governing norms of political-permanent executive relationship.

The discussion on these two norms can raise the question: how do we reconcile these two norms? For while the first norm advocates neutrality, the second advocates accountability. If the permanent executive is totally accountable to the political executive, can the latter afford to be neutral? If it means that they should be committed to the political executive in power, is it possible for the permanent executive to go on changing its commitment from regime to regime? Otherwise the members of permanent executive should maintain neutrality in such a way that they may even grow indifferent to all the regimes. However, it is assumed that technical and managerial skills are not political. It is often noted that Lenin welcomed Taylorism which was the product of industrial development in America. The skills and the technical knowledge which are assumed to be non-political can be used by any political party in power.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) "The basic distinction between political and permanent executive is rooted in the concept of policy-administration dichotomy." Explain

- 2) Why is the norm of neutrality essential in the relationship between permanent and political executive?

27.5 AREAS OF COOPERATION AND CONFLICT

This separation has certain built-in advantages and strengths. The political executives devote their time for political mobilisation of the masses and also for political education of the masses. In addition to mobilising the masses, they can formulate the value preferences by comprehending the popular moods and changing aspirations. They can also discuss various alternatives at a fairly higher level. The permanent executive can continuously evaluate its own field experience and draw meaningful lessons for subsequent programmes. They can also monitor various schemes at day-to-day or step level. They can also devote greater time to improve their own managerial and technical skills for better and effective realisation of the goals. Thus, this separation of functions can lead to division of labour which in turn can contribute to a higher level of efficiency in the society.

There are several reasons for cooperation between these two executives becoming less. The following are some of the important reasons for this deteriorating situation.

- 1) Firstly, the cooperation between the political and permanent executives, depends upon the societal consensus on the goals pursued. This is the advantage of some of the western capitalist societies where there is considerable consensus on the goals of development. There is also a certain degree of homogeneity in the societal formations. This gives an added advantage to those systems. In other words the conditions existing in the society provide the base for a better pattern of relationship between the political and permanent executive. In the third world societies like India where the consensus on development goals has not yet been achieved, there are bound to be certain problems. The heterogeneity of the society is shared by both the political and the permanent executives. The political executives, in the absence of consensus on development and absence of socio-political homogeneity, are subjected to political uncertainty. The absence of long-range view of the society weakens the ideological base. This, in turn, leads to a lot of ambiguity in policy preferences. The leads to

what has come to be popularly known as adhocism. Adhocism cannot provide direction to the permanent executive. On the contrary political processes start occupying even the technical and managerial space. This leads to narrowing down of the distinction between the political executive and permanent executive. This can strain the relationship.

- 2) Secondly, the conflict between these two executives, partly emanates from the historical process and partly from the socio-economic development. Historically speaking the permanent executive during the colonial period not only performed the administrative role but political too. In fact during the colonial phase these two functions converged to a point that to make a distinction between the two would be difficult. It was the anti-colonial movement, aiming at political power for elected representatives, which led to the demarcation of the roles. While the freedom movement presented the aspirations of the people, the bureaucracy appeared as a counter-force. Thus the political elite had their own doubts and suspicion. The bureaucratic elite, deeply rooted in the colonial administrative culture, had an exaggerated view of themselves. They suffered from ego and arrogance. The achievement of freedom should have resulted in redesigning the whole bureaucratic system so as to make them fit to perform the new tasks. But the political elite hesitated to recast the system. With the result the bureaucracy which was used by the colonial masters against the freedom fighters was the very same instrument which the political elite of Independent India had to depend upon. The differences embedded in historical process rendered cordiality between the two branches a bit difficult.
- 3) Thirdly, there is another dimension which leads to conflict. The social origins of the political and administrative elite in India do present a difference. While both the elites do not come from the large masses, they differ in their middle class origins. The political elite have got to be relatively more heterogeneous than the middle and higher level administrative functionaries. While a bulk of the members of the political executive, particularly at the state level, have been drawn from the rural and agricultural background, the top and middle level administrators are from the urban middle and upper middle classes. These differences are manifest in their style of living, mode of communication, ways of looking at things and their mannerisms. Thus the differences get preserved and accentuated. Although the character of bureaucracy has been changing, it has been changing rather slowly. The nature of political elite is also undergoing change. Yet one cannot say that they are comparable or identical. In other words the urban, industrial middle class on the one hand and rural agrarian upper or middle strata on the other dominate the permanent and political executives respectively. The relationships are also partly shaped by these factors.
- 4) Fourthly, there are also institutional mechanisms which accentuate or widen the areas of conflict. The political institutions normally are empowered with greater discretion and flexibility. They have to be relatively more responsive as they are in constant touch with the social system. The political executive, in parliamentary system of government, takes even the legislature for granted. In a number of instances they take the decisions to the legislature or Parliament only for ratification. In fact in the parliamentary form of government, the initiative does not rest with the legislature. The whole process is reduced to either the ratification or rejection of what has been brought before the legislative houses. Thus the political executive has become quite strong. In fact it is observed that

parliamentary governments over a period of time have become the cabinet system of governments which in turn are turning into prime ministerial governments. Thus the executive branch has appropriated the powers of the legislative organs and became quite powerful. With this enormous power, they want the matters to move faster. They feel no constraints in exercise of power. The permanent executive has also gained greater power by virtue of being an integral part of the executive branch of the government. However, due to long colonial background and the rules and regulations and established procedures, the permanent executive tends to be less flexible. They also do not appreciate the political expediency. For them precedent is very important. The very nature of the institution is such that their authority is located in the law. As a result they do not feel enthusiastic about experiments and innovations. The political executive does attempt to change these institutions through administrative reforms. There are a number of instances to show that the permanent executives do not welcome the reforms. In fact at the first instance they try to hold back the reform measures. The strong habit of clinging to the rules and regulations continue to influence their approach. Thus the conflict arises between flexibility and rigidity, expediency and experience, purpose and the process.

Lastly, in developing countries like India where there is scarcity of resources and intense competition for those limited resources, the political executive is subjected to enormous pressure. The impact of pressure group on the administration shall be discussed in the Unit on Pressure Groups. The political executive in turn puts pressure on the bureaucracy. In a number of cases the tendency is to violate the norms, which they themselves formulate. The norms become necessary for lawful governance but pressures are built in scarce situation. As a result the permanent executive is pressurised to violate the norms and the other rules and procedures. They resist these trends as they are rooted in the rigid rules and regulations. This gives rise to tensions. A section of them may make compromises. This process may end up in public offices being used for private purposes. This may land these officers in various controversies and sometimes enquiries etc. These are some of the important reasons that had given rise to a number of tensions in the relationship within the executive branch of the government.

27.6 INCREASING POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS

In the recent past it is increasingly noticed that rising consciousness of the people can also lead to greater strain in the relationship between the political and permanent executive. In most of the developing economies like India, the resources are limited and are disproportionately distributed. The masses who were under the grip of culture of silence have started coming out of it. This has happened partly due to the freedom movements or anti-colonial struggles. During these struggles the aspirations of the masses have been raised. They have taken part in the movements with new hopes and dreams. This has definitely contributed to greater demands on the system. The consciousness also started changing due to the electoral or political processes. The competitive politics went on further triggering the hopes of the people without matching performance. A number of countries in the third world have put an end or abandoned competitive electoral politics and opted for military dictatorships. But those societies like India which continued to have electoral politics go on making promises to the people. The logic of this political process is that the masses at one stage start insisting on performance, for every promise must end up with performance or frustration. The political systems which developed

higher skills in policy-making have not simultaneously equipped themselves with the necessary capacity to fulfil those promises. This wide gap leads to unrest and sometimes even violent outbursts. It is in this context that we should understand the rapidly changing patterns of relationship between the political and permanent executives.

The political executive, in the situation mentioned above, passes through two distinct changes: the first is the stage of manipulation and the second is the stage of repression. In the stage of manipulation they resort to rhetoric, populist slogans, ad hoc solutions and shifting the blame on to the others. It is this process in which the political power moves away from the people. The permanent executive has to remain at various field levels and the day-to-day interaction with the violent people cannot be avoided. The failures of the system are seen as failures of the administrative machinery and the failure of the permanent executive.

It is these developments which gave birth to the notion that policies are good but the implementation is bad. The question that one has to raise is that can there be good policies which are not implementable? Supposing the political executive sets certain unattainable targets and blames the permanent executive, does that get justified. In other words, failure at the level of implementation need not necessarily be an administrative failure. In fact a good policy is the one which is effectively and successfully implemented. For the problems of implementation must be discussed at the stage of policy formulation itself. The strategies of implementation cannot be planned at the implementation level itself. At this level certain technical details can be worked out. Certain minor modifications can be introduced. But the issues like adequate resources, necessary technologies, institutional infrastructure, need to be developed at the policy making level and not at the level of implementation.

The notion that policies are good and implementation is bad has an implicit assumption that political executive is committed while the permanent executive is lazy, indifferent and noncommittal. The logic is that those who formulate good policies should necessarily be good and those who fail to implement those policies are bound to be bad. Here the principle of neutrality can become a negative factor. That is why we must see the policy and implementation as an integrated process.

The major outcome of this whole process is the strain that it imposes on the patterns of relationship. The political executive which is in no position to face the tides of increasing consciousness would not know how to tide over the situation. With the result there would be a strong tendency to blame the permanent executive. In fact here may be occasions when the political executive may openly criticise and attack the permanent executive. In such a situation the permanent executive governed by the principle of anonymity may not be in a position to publicly defend itself. The people may express their resentment against the permanent executive more directly, aided and encouraged by the political executive. Thus they may have to face the public wrath in the early stage of public unrest. When the political executive chooses to press the coercive arm into action, the gap between the permanent executive and the people gets further widened. This is a stage where the relationship between the political executive and the people touches the lowest ebb. That is why the relationship of permanent and political executive should be studied in their larger context.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:**
- i) Use the space given below for your answers.
 - ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) Why in India, cooperation between the two executives is increasingly becoming less?

- 2) How does the rising consciousness of people lead to greater strain in the relationship between the two executives?

27.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AND PERMANENT EXECUTIVES: A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

The politico-administration dichotomy propagated earlier is now undergoing a change. The nature of traditional concept of civil service neutrality is transforming. The policy formulation and implementation are now considered as activities complementary to each other. Hence, for efficient government administration, co-operation between the political and permanent executives is considered imperative. The Administrative Reforms Commission in India also laid down certain norms as:

- a) the obligation of every public servant to implement faithfully all policies and decisions of the ministers even if these be contrary to the advice tendered by them;
- b) the freedom of public servants to expose themselves frankly by tendering advice to their superiors including the ministers; and
- c) the observance by public servants of the principles of neutrality, impartiality and anonymity.

Policy implementation also needs the consultation and guidance of the political executive. Also certain operational decisions taken during implementation of policies have policy implications. In the present day globalisation era, the tasks of administration are getting specialised and policy formulation has become an activity that needs specialised inputs from administrators. Administration is also becoming professionalised. The implementation activities also need the co-operation of political representatives as they acquire the necessary feedback, which is helpful for policy formulation. The earlier held view about the conceptual distinction between policy and administration cannot hold good in present times.

27.8 LET US SUM UP

Thus, in this Unit, the relationship between political and permanent executive has been analysed. The principles governing their relationship, viz., norm of neutrality and norm of anonymity have also been discussed. The Unit made an attempt to highlight the reasons behind the strained relationship between the two. The areas of cooperation between the ministers and secretaries have been explained too.

27.9 KEY WORDS

- Liberalism** : It is the belief in gradual social progress by reform and by changing laws, rather than by revolution.
- Nation-State** : A state organised for the government of a nation whose territory is determined by national boundaries, and whose law is determined at least in part, by national custom and expectation.
- Pendleton Act** : The reform of Civil Services in U.S. began with The Pendleton Act (1883). Its aim was to promote appointment on the basis of merit through open competitive exam and assure the appointees security of tenure. It recommended the establishment of a United States Civil Service Commission. The Act was concerned with classified positions only. Labourers, workmen and persons nominated for confirmation by the Senate were excluded from the purview of the Act.
- Populistic Slogan** : A slogan made to win the will of the people irrespective of the fact that the promises therein may be too "high" to achieve.
- Pluralism** : The existence of a variety of different people, opinions or principles within the same society, system or philosophy.

27.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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27.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer must include the following points:
 - The policy, being the primary function of politics, is rooted in an ideological structure.
 - Permanent Executive deals with factual information about concrete situations.
 - Need for separation of facts and values.
- 2) Your answer must include the following points:
 - Changing of political parties in power.
 - Meritorious bureaucracy.
 - Permanent bureaucracy.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer must include the following points:
 - Absence of consensus on development and socio-political homogeneity.
 - The bureaucratic elites' exaggerated view of themselves.
 - Factor of social origins of the members of the political and permanent executives.
 - Institutional mechanisms, widening the areas of conflict.
- 2) Your answer must include the following points:
 - Freedom movements and then Independence leading to new hopes and dreams.
 - Competitive electoral politics raising the aspiration of the masses.
 - Political executive's emphasis on populist slogans.
 - Failure to meet the promises and blaming of each other.