

Different Paradigms of Public Administration: The Sri Lankan Experience from 1900s to 1970s onwards

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Background

Public Administration as an academic discipline and as an activity has changed its appearance in order to fulfill the contemporary needs of the public sector. There are five basic paradigms from 1900s to 1970s and onwards. It has developed five different ways of responding the demands and the challenges of the public sector. Mainly there is a question in the field of public administration that what the locus and the focus of it. The “locus” refers to as where (institutional) it is being established as a discipline and “focus” refers to as what is the specific scope or the field of study of it. Thus, its locus and focus have been changed according to the challenges of public sectors which have sprung from different part of the world. The most important factor is that how it has adjusted its framework to secure its uniqueness. With the changes of the locus and focus of the public administration, there are basically five paradigms of public administration (Henry, 1975) such as; (I) Paradigm 1: The Politics / Administration Dichotomy (1900-1926), (II) Paradigm 2: The Principles of Administration (1927-1937), (III) Paradigm 3: Public Administration as Political Science (1950-1970), (IV) Paradigm 4: Public Administration as an Administrative Science (1956-1970) and (V) The Emerging Paradigm 5: Public Administration as Public Administration, 1970-?. The hard core of the public administration in Sri Lanka has been affected by the British colonial administrative legacies and constitutional reforms. One of the major sign post can be the Colebrook – Cameron Commission which was established in 1833. It introduced some crucial policy reforms and changes to Sri Lanka. In addition, public administration had to face two challenges after the independence in 1948; namely, country’s nation building and its rapid development. With the legacies and systems which were given by colonial rulers those, challenges seem to be serious for the national bureaucracy of Sri Lanka. In mid-1950’s, the government has changed and the new middle class has emerged with new ideas of nationalism. They entered to bureaucratic atmosphere and started a new conflict with traditional bureaucrats. It has affected to the whole political system of Sri Lanka in several ways. As mentioned by Navaratna-Bandara (2013:476), the political system entered into a period of turmoil in which the mismatch between the political leadership and administrative leadership became a visible feature. At the same time, a new set of social, political, economic, and cultural changes have been emerged. So it is clear

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that there are many changes which have been emerged in the public administration of Sri Lanka time to time. However, there is a doubt whether those changes have been occurring as parallel to above mentioned paradigms or if there are any differences. This paper has raised this issue.

Research Problem

The changes of the locus and the focus of the public administration in Sri Lanka can be seen in different times. Sometimes, those changes have emerged parallel to the so-called different paradigms which have been discussed in the background. In this study, the main focus was to analyze how the public administration in Sri Lanka has been responded with those paradigms.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper was to examine how the public administration in Sri Lanka has managed different kinds of challenges throughout its development process with regards to those different paradigms.

Research Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature. The secondary data was collected through the content analysis. The collected data has described by using the descriptive method.

Key Findings

The key findings of each paradigms of public administration in Sri Lanka can be pointed out as follows.

According to the scholars who have contributed to the first paradigm (1900-1926), have argued that the government has two distinct functions. Politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will, while administration has to do with the execution of policies (Henry 1975: 379). The Colebrook-Cameron Commission's recommendations haven't concerned about separation of politics and public administration of Sri Lanka. In this time the main functions of administrative organizations were the handling of law and order and the collection of state revenue in Sri Lanka (Navaratna-Bandara 2013: 473). It is clear that, those functions should be conducted by the power and authority of bureaucracy. Seemingly, there was no the struggle to separate both politics and administration.

In the second paradigm (1927-1937), the Donoughmore Constitution (1931) was adopted in Sri Lanka. Particularly, the political responsiveness became as an important principle to be followed by the members of administrative institutions (Navaratna-Bandara, 2013: 475). From this point, the main functions and principles have been changed from the protection of law and order and tax collection to

the welfare activities of the country. Especially, the Public Service Commission established and it provided an independent sense to the Ceylon Civil Service.

In the third paradigm (1950 – 1970), the education on public administration can be seen. In 1959, Vidyodaya University was established and it introduced undergraduate programs in economics, business and Public Administration. In 1964, it established a postgraduate program leading to master degrees in social sciences, with specialization in economics, business administration, Public Administration, politics, and Sociology (Navarane 1991: 183). It should be noted that the public administration as an academic discipline, was separated from political science. But it seems to be only a discipline; it has not provided the professional opportunities.

In the fourth paradigm (1956 – 1970), with the changes of political regime of Sri Lanka in 1956, the colonial administrative system was replaced by indigenous civil servants and it has exposed some ways to politicians to influence towards administrative service. Meanwhile, University of Sri Jayewardenepura has introduced a professional oriented postgraduate program in business and public administration in 1966 – 1967. Moreover, as the feature viable of the management, in 1966, the government established the Academy of Administrative Studies. The decision was influenced by the similar institutional changes introduced in Britain following the recommendations of the Fulton Committee (Navaratna-Bandara 2013: 484).

Finally, in the emerging paradigm (1970 –?), Sri Lanka has been experienced different kind of social, political and economic changes. In the early 1970s the first Republican Constitution has adopted and after one year, there was a youth insurgency in 1971. Besides, in the late 1970s the open economy reforms have been advocated by the government. By this time the traditional model of public administration has changed due to the new economic policies of Sri Lanka. Especially, the New Public Management (NPM) reforms, privatization policies, structural adjustment programs, decentralization initiations have adapted and the attention of International Donors Agencies (IDAs) paid to the country. Despite the disadvantageous of those new reforms, the role of the public sector has been changed and the important and necessity of the private sector in economic development has emerged. Otherwise, the political influence on public service has started in a new manner. In this time, the public and the private sectors started to work together. However, there can be seen some initiations in the field of public administration in many times after 1978 too.

Conclusion

In those five paradigms, Sri Lanka has gained different achievements in the field of public administration. In fact, each and every paradigm, the characteristics of the civil service have been changed and the politicization of the civil Service has reflected towards a massive variety. As an

academic discipline it has not changed in a tremendous way and it is still being developed. From the late 70s and 80s the role of the traditional public administration has been changed according to the new reforms which came as the parallel changes in public administration in different countries and regions. Accordingly, in the post-conflict conditions public administration has a crucial role and responsibilities to make sustainable peace and build reconciliation in the country.

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