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# UNIT 1 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION : MEANING AND SCOPE

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you have read this unit, you should be able to :

- define Public Administration and state its characteristics
- explain the character of the discipline
- discuss the domain and scope of Public Administration; and
- distinguish between Business and Public Administration.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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You are our undergraduate learner. We appreciate your keen interest in learning Public Administration. We are sure you are anxious to learn all that is given in this Unit. This first unit in the course Administrative Theory, aims at introducing the discipline of Public Administration to you. It explains the meaning and characteristics of the discipline of Public Administration. Public Administration, as an aspect of governmental activity is very old. It is as old as human history. In European languages, the term Public Administration began to creep in during the seventeenth century to separate the absolute monarch's administration of public affairs from his management of his private household. It was a period ..... the church was separated from the state and the government was superimposed on all other societal institutions within a definite territory. In every society there are some activities like maintenance of law and order and defence which have to be undertaken in public interest. Public Administration as a system of organisation is mainly concerned with the performance of these activities. Political decision makers set the goals for the political system. It is the business of Public Administration to work for the realisation of these goals. At the present stage of man's evolution, Public Administration has proved to be indispensable. The scope of Public Administration has expanded with the rise of the modern administrative state. Its growing importance in the conduct of human affairs is evident in the birth of numerous public laws, growth of public profession, accumulation of huge arms and increasing coverage of taxes and public expenditure. The domain of state functions is almost all-comprehensive in socialist countries. Even the capitalist states have expanded their functions under compulsions of welfare considerations. The post-colonial 'third-world' countries have embarked upon Development Administration to speedily bring about state sponsored socio-economic reconstruction.

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## 1.2 SPECIFICITY OF ADMINISTRATION

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It terms of activity, Public Administration is an aspect of a more generic concept - administration. Administration has been defined as a cooperative effort towards achieving some common goals. Thus defined, administration can be found in various institutional settings such as a business firm, a hospital, a university, a government department, etc. As an aspect of this more generic concept Public Administration is that species of administration which operates within a specific political setting. It is an instrument for translating political decisions into reality, it is "the action part of government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realised". Nigro and Nigro (1980) have identified the following five important characteristics of Public Administration.

- It is a cooperative group effort in a public setting.
- It covers all three branches — legislative, executive and judicial — and their inter-relationships.
- It has an important role in the formulation of public policy, and is thus a part of the political process.
- It is different in significant ways from private administration.
- It is closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1) Why is the scope of Public Administration expanding?

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2) What are the important characteristics of Public Administration?

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## 1.3 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEFINED

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Public Administration is a specialised academic field. It essentially deals with the machinery and procedures of government activities. Administration has been defined as a cooperative human effort towards achieving some common goals. Thus defined, administration can be found in various institutional settings such as a business firm, a hospital, a university, a government department and so on. As an aspect of this more generic concept, Public Administration is that species of administration which operates within a specific political setting. It is a means by which the policy decisions made by the political decision makers are carried out. Public Administration is decision making, planning the work to be done, formulating objectives and goals, working with the legislature and citizen organisations to gain public support and funds for government

programmes, **establishing** and revising organisation, **directing** and supervising employees, providing leadership, communicating and receiving communications, determining work **methods** and **procedures**, **appraising** performance, exercising controls and other functions performed by government executives and **supervisors**. It is the action part of the government, **the means** by which the purposes and goals of the government are **realised**.

Some well known definitions of Public Administration are:

- 4 "Public Administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law. Every **particular** application of law is an act of administration" — L.D. White.
- Public **Administration** is "the art and science of management applied to the affairs of the State" — **D. Waldo**.
- "By Public Administration is meant in common usage the activities of the executive branches of the National, State and Local Governments" — **H. Simon**.

The 'Public' aspect of Public Administration gives the discipline a special character. It **can be** looked at formally to mean government'. So, Public Administration is government administration, the focus being specifically on public bureaucracy. This is the **meaning** commonly used in discussing Public Administration. Public **Administration**, in a wider **sense**, has sought to expand its ambit by including any administration that has considerable impact on the public. From this standpoint, a private electricity undertaking like the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation can be considered a fit subject of **discussion** under Public Administration. It is, however, in the first sense that Public **Administration** is usually considered.

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## 1.4 SCOPE AND DOMAIN OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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We shall now **attempt to** discuss the scope of the discipline of Public Administration. The scope can be studied under two heads:

### 1.4.1 The Domain

Public Administration is the complex of governmental activities that are undertaken in public interest at **different** levels such as the central, state or provincial (in a federal set-up) and local levels. The discipline of Public Administration aims at a systematic study of these activities. Government, as political authority, is the major regulator of **social life**. With the emergence of democracy and the concept of **welfare** state, the governmental activities have increased by leaps and bounds. The historical movement has thus been from regulation to **service** and welfare. The **police** state has gradually given place to popular governance in the interest of widest possible public welfare in close association with the people themselves. Expanding governmental activities have resulted in expansion of the bureaucracy, creation of different **forms** of public and semipublic organisations, raising public expenditure, and overall control over public life. Since government has come to have such widespread influence and control **over** public life, its organisation, basis of authority, functions, finances and impact on society have been subjected to intellectual examination.

The area chosen by Public Administration has generally been "executive action" or the activities of the executive organ of the government. **This** means really a study of the bureaucracy: its structure, functions and **behaviour**. But, the other organs of government such as the **Legislature** and the Judiciary have also been found useful in **Public Administration analysis**. The **policy-forming** impetus comes from the **legislature**, and the **legislative committees** very often undertake **important** vigilance and control **function**. The Estimates Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, Committee on **Public Undertakings** etc. could be **mentioned** as examples of such Committees.

Similarly, the judiciary often adjudicates on quasi-judicial issues and **passes** important **judgements affecting** executive operations. **Judicial** administration itself forms a major component of Public Administration. Thus, the study of Public Administration is basically focused on the **'executive'** no doubt; but an adequate **understanding** of **Public Administration** is **not** possible without taking into account the legislative and the judicial administration as **well**.

### 1.4.2 The Scope

It is widely acknowledged that the scope of the discipline of Public Administration has to be wide enough to respond to the complex social realities of today. Major concerns of the discipline are:

**Promoting (publicness):** In a democratic society, Public Administration has to be explicitly 'public' in terms of democratic values, power-sharing and openness. This calls for a new climate in the bureaucracy. Public Administration, in practice, has to absorb the principles of democracy as an overarching form of the government.

**Policy Sensitivity:** As governments are called upon to play increasingly active roles in times of rapid changes and social crisis, innovative and timely policy formulation becomes a prime necessity in the government. This would necessitate a new preparedness within the administrative set-up that had hardly any precedence in the past.

**Implementation Capability:** Effective policy implementation is going to test the coping capacity of the governments in today's complex situations. Goals have to be clearly set; planning, programming and projections have to be followed step by step; and project management in all its ramifications has to have top priority in government. The strength of administration and the legitimacy of the government itself would depend more and more on the administration's capacity to deliver the goods in time and in response to the demands of the citizens.

**Shared understanding of social reality:** The capacity to cope with social and administrative complexity can be enhanced by a deliberate policy of organisational openness. The underlying assumption here is the administration needs to understand the diverse interests and influences. In today's complex administrative world, construction of administrative reality has to be based on the shared understanding of its actors such as the men at the top, the middle managers, the employees and the citizens. The centralised, insular bureaucracy does not fit in with the contemporaneous socio-administrative reality.

**Administration as a learning experience:** Shifting social reality and complex environmental conditions impose certain rigours on Public Administration today. Rusted 'principles' of the past or the administrative recipes of bureaucratic routine are no longer appropriate tools for analysis and problem solving. Public Administration in modern times has to be proactive, innovative, risk-taking, and often adventurous. This new, entrepreneurial zeal is expected to transform 'bureaucracy' into a new kind of learning organisation, more adaptable to changes, more open to new insights and innovations, and more accessible to the clientele.

These are the major concerns of government in all democratic countries. In the developing countries, these have added significance, as Public Administration has a pivotal role to play in the socio-economic reconstruction of post-colonial societies. The discipline of Public Administration cannot live in isolation. It has to develop in close association with the dynamic social changes. As a body of knowledge, it must develop explanatory strength to analyse socio-economic complexity and assist in the ushering in of a new society free of exploitation and human misery, poverty and deprivation of the past era.

#### Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the scope of Public Administration:

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## 1.5 CHARACTER OF THE DISCIPLINE

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The discipline of Public Administration has been evolving over the years under the impact of changing societal conditions, and new developments in the allied Social Sciences. The original **disciplinary** interest was to improve Governmental performance: This led to its separation from its parent discipline of Political Science. In its enthusiasm to 'reform' government and make the administrative agencies more business-like and productive, Public Administration as a discipline has tilted markedly toward the "management sciences". The accent is on administrative and managerial tools and principles such as budgeting, management techniques, application of operations research methods, computer technology, etc. Such heavy management orientation has tended to rob the discipline of its social science character. It has necessarily parted company with Political Science and almost merged itself into management education. The discipline has gradually come to assume a vocational character, the objective being to produce public managers **much in** the same fashion as the management institutes produce a cadre of managers for the business world.

This shift of disciplinary focus has been questioned by many. While acknowledging the importance of borrowing knowledge from allied **disciplines**, it has been argued that Public Administration is essentially concerned with nation-building, social regulation and public service activities. Management science orientation and application of management **techniques to** Public Administration need not be a blind emulation of private management practices. The evaluative techniques of non-profit **public** organisations have to be significantly different, and the basic orientation and sensitivity of public organisations to **public** interest brings in certain necessary constraints in governmental decision-making and bureaucratic behaviour. Functioning under the compulsions of public law and under the glare of open public and legislative criticism, the bureaucracy has willy-nilly to follow certain administrative norms that have **hardly** any parallel in private management. A certain sensitivity to politics and a readiness to **appreciate** the citizens demands and multiple interests of the clientele are desirable qualities in a bureaucrat. The private manager, by contrast, may afford to be inward-looking and secretive, but not the public servant.

Golembiewski has posed this dilemma of Public Administration as a **discipline in terms** of choice of 'locus' and 'focus'. 'Locus' stands for the **institutional 'where'** of the field; **while** 'focus' is the specialised 'what' of the field. **As** an academic discipline, for a long time, the place (locus) of Public Administration was, in most **cases**, with Political Science and at times with subjects like History, Economics, **etc.** So far, the question of 'focus' is **concerned**, in recent years, there has been an increasing tendency to lay emphasis on **administrative** techniques and not so much on public policy.

As Golembiewski has observed, the shifting paradigms (substantive **concerns**) of Public Administration may be understood in terms of '**locus**' or 'focus'; while one has been sharply defined, the other has been **conceptually ignored** in **academic** circles in turns. Depending on the definition of the substantive concerns of the discipline, Public Administration can exist within the broader field of Political Science or, move away from the mother discipline in a search for a **more free-floating** professional career in the company of business management or the management sciences.

It may be said that since the 'New Public Administration' movement of the late sixties, there has been an increasing awareness of the basically social science character of the discipline of Public Administration. The vocational orientation of the discipline has been found to be somewhat misguided and supportive of status quo. In turbulent times when social problems cry out for innovative social analysis, a conservative, management-oriented discipline might be inadvertently reinforcing the forces of repression and social regression.

**Check Your Progress 3**

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain the character of Public Administration.

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### 1.6 DISTINCTION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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As earlier observed, the 'management' euphoria at one stage led to a blurring of distinction between public and private administration.

The distinction between the public and the private sector is however, greatly influenced by the political philosophy of each nation. In the USA, for instance, the private sector plays a very important role in the American economy and society. The public sector is in many ways dependent on the private sector for the supply of goods and services. Hence, the tendency in that country is toward a blurring of lines rather than a distinct bifurcation of responsibilities. In India, by contrast, the public sector is slowly emerging as the dominant sector in the context of mixed economy. The steady expansion of the public sector in India, if it continues unabated, is expected to draw a sharper distinction between the public and private management.

Considerations of general welfare should be the common concern of both public and business administration. Private management can ignore the larger public interest only at its peril. At the other end, Public Administration can hardly ignore the needs of efficient management. Yet, the two types are basically different, as discussed below:

- i) The major purpose of Public Administration is to serve the public; hence general welfare and, in specific cases, public satisfaction are the ends that Public Administration must serve. By contrast, business administration is basically oriented toward earning profit for the business proprietors. Inability to earn profit will soon drive a private enterprise out of business.
- ii) Public Administration has to operate strictly according to law, rules and regulations. Adherence to law brings in a degree of rigidity of operation in the public sector. There is always the fear of audit or accountability that acts as a constraint on performance. On the contrary business administration is relatively free from such constraints of law

and regulations. There are of course general laws regulating business, but individual business firms have considerable flexibility to adapt their operations to changing situations. This is possible because of their relative freedom from specific laws and rules that abound in Public Administration.

- iii) The actions of Public Administration are much more exposed to the public gaze. An achievement rarely gets publicity, but a little fault hits the newspaper headline. Organisations like the police have to be on their toes to make sure that their operations do not incur the public wrath. This wide publicity is not to be found in business administration, nor is it so very closely watched by the public and the media.
- iv) In Public Administration, any show of discrimination or partiality will evoke public censure or legislative commotion. Hence, the administrators are to be very consistent and impartial in their dealings with the public. In business administration, discrimination is freely practised due to competitive demands. In the choice of products and in fixing prices, business administration overtly practises discrimination which is almost a part of business culture.
- v) **Public Administration**, especially at higher levels of government, is exceedingly **complex**. There are many pulls and pressures, many minds have to meet and discuss, consultations go on in several rounds of meetings before decisions are taken. Activities in one department have ramifications that spread over several other departments. By contrast, business administration is, generally speaking, much more well-knit and **single-minded** in operation. There is much less complexity in organisation and operations. The pressures are certainly almost non-existent.
- vi) Public Administration as organisation is thus much more complex, compared to business or **private** organisation. Any unit of government administration is **tied up** with a network of **allied** public organisations and has to work in close interaction with them. A private organisation by contrast, has more compactness, insularity and autonomy of **action**.
- vii) Public Administration has overarching responsibilities in terms of nation-building, and shaping the future society. It is, therefore, much more **value** oriented. Business organisations have to follow the guidelines laid down by the public authorities.

Check Your Progress 4

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Distinguish between Public Administration and Business Administration.

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**1.7 LET US SUM UP**

All societies have their political systems and economic systems, so also they have their Public Administrative Systems. In contemporary societies, Public Administration has proved to be indispensable. Its scope is very wide, It includes all the activities undertaken by the government in public interest. Business Administration and Public Administration have much in common though there are several points of differences as well. In this unit we have discussed the character and scope of Public Administration, and the distinction between Public Administration and Business Administration. In the next unit we will study the importance of the subject,

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## 1.8 KEY WORDS

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Absolute **Monarch** : The King/Queen/Emperor who holds **unrestricted/complete** power for life.

Capitalist State : State where the ownership and **control** of capital is in private hands.

Police State: A state in which political stability seems to be dependent upon police supervision of the ordinary citizen and in which the police are given power suitable to that.

Socialist Country : **A** country where the community as a **whole** owns and controls the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Welfare State : **A** state which makes substantial provision through law and administration for deprived sections and those in 'need, e.g. the sick, poor, elderly, etc.

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## 1.9 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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Bhattacharya, Mohit, 1987. *Public Administration* (2nd Edition) Chapter-I; The World Press Private Ltd: Calcutta.

Gotembiewsky, Robert T., 1977. *Public Administration as a Developing Discipline*, (2 volumes); Marcel Dekker; New York.

Henry, Nicholas, 1975. *Public Administration and Public Affairs*; Chapter-I, Prentice Hall: New Jersey.

Nigro, Felix A. and Nigro, Lloyd G., 1980. *Modern Public Administration*; Harper and Row: New York.

Self, Peter, 1972. *Administrative Theories and Politics*, Chapter-I; George Allen and Unwin Ltd : London.

Waldo, Dwight , *Public Administration*, in *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

White, L.D., 1968. *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*; Eurasia Publishing House : New Delhi.

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## 1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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Check **Your** Progress 1

1) See Section 1.1

2) See Section 1.2

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Sub-section 1.4.2

Check-Your Progress 3

1) See Section 1.5

Check Your Progress 4

1) See Section 1.6