EVOLUTION OF COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Even though comparative studies in administration date back to Aristotlian times where he sent scholars to different parts of world to study their political systems, Comparative Public Administration started off as a topic of interest post the Wilson (called the 1st comparativist) essay in 1884 where he very rightly stated that in order to know our own country's administrative weaknesses and virtues we need to compare with others. And, he stated that administration is the best and most safe prospect of comparative studies as administrative techniques and procedures are similar almost everywhere and in fact we can learn a lot by comparing.

However, it was not taken so seriously due to the emphasis on conceptualising and structuring as well as defining Public Administration at that time was the top priority. The theorists and administrators as well as governments were busy understanding their own administrative setup before they could set off on a comparison with others. So, while this was being contemplated the First World War erupted and with its end and the establishment of the League Of Nations there came about a lot of questions regarding the need to understand the needs of the countries who were not so developed because many of them came under the British colonialism as well as other imperialist countries in order to control these and draw maximum benefit.

This comparative study took a philosophical turn during the course of the second world war and its aftermath when there came the end of imperialism and colonialism and emergence of many independent states, a joint initiative by the developed countries under the United Nations (formerly called 'The League Of Nations') aegis to refurbish the developing an third world countries as well as to develop their own war damaged national economies. And lets not forget the beginning of Cold War between the two superpowers USA and Soviet Union which played a big part in this movement where both looked to hegemonise the world politics and economy.

USA took the lead here in administrative studies and also in providing financial as well as technical help to the developing nations in order to increase their market share and also to curb communism that was a product of the Soviet Union.
The USA was the hub of these studies since the Western countries lacked the institutional and administrative capacities to implement their development plans post world war 2. The government, United Nations and various private institutions as well as corporates sponsored varied technical assistance programmes that enabled the public administrators, lecturers of public administration and professionals to study the same in depth as well as travel abroad and gather hands on experience and build a universal comparative theory of Public Administration. Notable in these efforts were that of the American Society For Public Administration (ASPA) & American Political Science Association (APSA).

The first organisation formally formed to formulate a universal comparative theory of public administration was the Comparative Administration Group (CAG) in 1960 that was a division of the ASPA, funded by the Ford foundation to study methods for improving public administration in developing countries under the chairmanship of Fred W. Riggs. More than providing administrative techniques this group became a forum for intellectuals to understand why the developing countries differ so much in practise of administration and are not able to sustain the classical theory principles of administration in their systems even though Classical theorists of administration like Fayol & Weber, etc preached that their principles and models of administration were universal in their element and can be applied anywhere with greatest success.

CAG gave the idea of scientific studies and emphasised on empirical and ecological (social, cultural and historical factors) study of various administrative systems. Even though the CAG had to shut shop in the early 70's since various administrators and academicians realised that due to the highly complex setting which the group had provided for comparative Public Administration studies was resulting in failures in providing really empirical assessment of administration factors in a society. They stated that it provided a very good direction but the techniques were not being specified to execute the idea. And so the studies was transferred back to the Department of Comparative Studies.

Also in 1968, the first Minnowbrook Conference was held under the chairmanship of Dwight Waldo that also talked about the need for Comparative Public Administration study and analysis.
Sources of Comparative Public Administration

(1) The World War II brought about radical changes in academic and other fields and comparative public administration is one of them. During and after the War many eminent political scientists and administrators were appointed to the policy determination department of US government and especially in the public administration department. They observed that the public administration with which they are well acquainted and the public administration they have taught in colleges and universities has very little relevance to the practical side of public administration.

They desired to formulate new policies of public administration and studied the administrative systems of different countries. These two provided solid bases for a new approach to public administration which later on came to be called comparative public administration. These did not entirely provide the materials for comparative public administration, but major parts came from this new change.

(2) We know that World War II completely devastated the economic and social basis of Western European states and their rebuilding was badly needed. But at the same time it was felt that the existing structure of public administration was incapable in meeting this necessity. A new type of public administration must be built up. At the same time America came forward with large amount of financial help under the Marshall Plan.

The authorities of these states with the existing system of public administration could not handle the aids under Marshall Plan and its proper utilisation was beyond its capability. The planners and administrators proceeded to reformulate the general principles of public administration and this supplied materials for a new public administration.

(3) In building up a structure of a new public administration the role of United Nations cannot be overlooked. From the various types of the activities of UNO we come across the idea that the existing system of public administration of the developing nations of Asia and Africa do not possess the capability of handling the United Nations aid programmes and its activities in various countries. This new situation put a demand upon various authorities for overhauling the administrative system.” The old order changes the yielding place to new.”

(4) Under the pressure of new circumstances created by World War II and modernisation of economy caused by the War it was strongly felt that the existing form of public administration shall be changed to meet the needs of the new era. The old system of public administration was not aware of the modernisation of economic system and the advent of new
economic principles. The new situation called for a new structure and principles of public administration.

(5) Though Easton’s General System Theory is not directly related with Comparative Public Administration theory the indirect relation is not insignificant. Easton, in his theory, has stated that political system is an open system. Its implication is political system is closely connected with the other system, and environment. The implications in both political system and other systems or environment are interdependent. If so, the public administration of a political system or state can never remain unaffected if the forces of other systems put pressure on it.

Let us explain it further—being an open system the public administration of a particular state (or in Eastonian phrase political system) is bound to be affected by the public administration of other states. The classical theory of public administration was quite free from this factor. The analysis of comparative public administration in this way is claimed to be scientific, because it passes through the ordeal of various tests and scrutiny. Comparison also brings about perfection.

**Comparative Public Administration and Comparative Administration Group:**

Nicholas Henry observes: “Cross cultural public administration, as the comparative approach also is called, is a fairly new development in the field”. The comparative public administration and its rapid rise in popularity opened new vistas of thought and analysis. To put it in other words, cross-cultural relations among the nations inspired the administrative authority of states to open new avenues of comparative analysis.

The comparative public administration became highly popular in the high tide of cold war period. The top administrators of White House and other offices of Washington thought that the public administration must be made appropriate to meet the challenge posed by Cold War. Henry has given a very beautiful analysis of this in the following words: “As a result of the revised thinking, courses in comparative public administration began appearing in university catalogues, and by the early 1950s the American Political Science Association, the American Society for Public Administration, and the Public Administration Clearing House were forming special committees or sponsoring Conferences on Comparative Public Administration. The real impetus came in 1962 when the Comparative Administration Group (CAG founded in 1960) of the American Society for Public Administration received financing from the Ford Foundation that eventually totalled 500,000 dollar”.

We now have Comparative Administration Group along with comparative public administration. The top policy makers, during the Cold War period decided that in order to
streamline the public administration more money, material and energy are to be invested. The interest of the Ford Foundation reached highest peak at the height of the Cold War. In the sixties of the last century the Ford Foundation took special interest in the political and administrative affairs of the Third World states.

It is because the erstwhile Soviet Union took special interest in the political and economic affairs of states and the clash of interest and ideologies was aggravating day-by-day. So we find that Cold War was substantially responsible for the growing interest in comparative public administration and Comparative Administration Group. American administrative system in general and the Ford Foundation in particular were responsible for the renewed interest in comparative administrative system.

The Comparative Administration Group emphasised the following fields which are closely related with comparative public administration. Comparative Administration Group says that research work in comparative public administration and other related fields should be encouraged. In the second place there must be elaborate arrangement for teaching the various fields of comparative public administration. Thirdly, the principle devised or suggested shall have ample scope of application in practical fields. Finally, the Comparative Administration Group emphasised the building up of theory. We have already noted that the primary objective of Ford Foundation was to encourage the public administration research and investigation of the Third World states.

The authority of the Ford Foundation reminded the Comparative Administration Group of this purpose. It has been found that Comparative Administration Group sent number of researchers to the practical field to gather knowledge about the nature of public administration of the developing nations. By doing this Comparative Administration Group established a fruitful link between the public administrative of industrially developed nations and the developing states of Asia and Africa.

So far as comparative public administration is concerned the Comparative Administration Group performed a very important job and, subsequently, this enriched the contents of the comparative public administration. This attempt of Comparative Administration Group surely performed a seminal task and it is called intellectual emergence. **Comparative Public Administration is a Movement:**

The comparative public administration is now regarded by many as a movement. The public administration in its classical form was primarily concerned with the administrative system, principles and structure of any particular state. But today — after the rapid progress of liberalisation, globalisation and growing dependence among different nation states — the
public administration has assumed unprecedented dependence upon the administrative systems of different countries and this has brought the public administration in the forefront of administrative systems.

Here I quote a relevant observation of a critic—comparative public administration is the theory of public administration as applied to diverse cultures and national settings and the body of factual data, by which it can be tested and expanded. Hence we find that there is a difference between public administration and comparative public administration.

The general principles of public administration, when applied to particular fields or situations come to be known as comparative public administration. There is growing demand in various corners of the globe of the basic principles of public administration which ought to be tested through their application in various political systems and cultures. This demand first emerged in embryonic form in the United States and later on the demand spread its wings in various parts.

From the middle of the last century the comparative public administration as a movement is gradually gaining-momentum. A Conference on International Political Association was held in Paris in 1953 and in that Conference it was demanded that public administration should be studied comparatively otherwise its exact nature will never come out. The comparative public administration was not confined only in Paris.

The movement spread in many other states of Europe. It was due to the fact that no relations among nations were gradually increasing the comparative public administration was becoming more and more popular. The newly states of Asia and Africa in their zeal to build up a basis of a new and developed state were willing to modernise the public administration but they were not willing to adopt the policy of copycat. This practically resulted in the adoption or creation of new principles of public administration and this urge continues. Hence there is a movement of comparative public administration.

The Comparative Administration Group has inspired the comparative public administration movement in a considerable way. The general public administration has a theory and the sponsors of the Comparative Administration Group also demanded that the comparative public administration should also have its own theory and, in order to achieve this, the specialists must continue research work. The principles established by research shall be applied to practice in order to establish its acceptability and viability.

The administrative systems of all states especially of developing nations should be properly analysed and the differences between public administration of developed and
developing nations should be compared. In this connection the contribution of Fred Riggs should be remembered.

He thought that the administrative systems and principles of the developed nations cannot be profitably applied to the backward or developing nations. Riggs’s approach to the public administration “captured” the attention of a large number of persons interested in public administration. Referring Fred Riggs’s contribution to comparative public administration Henry says that his strenuous efforts brought comparative public administration to the limelight. He also said that while studying public administration of a country the ecology of a country must be carefully studied. Today Riggs’s suggestion has been accepted by all.

**Problems of Comparative Public Administration:**

The fate of comparative public administration was faced with a problem towards the first years of the seventies. In 1963 the Comparative Administration Group was formed and both comparative public administration and Comparative Administration Group made joint efforts for the progress of the former. But the comparative public administration “does appear to have reached a critical point of development. In 1973 the Comparative Administration Group was disbanded”.

The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) was founded in 1962 and the ASPA was the real source of finance for the functioning of CAG. But the ASPA thought that the separate existence of CAG was unnecessary and it was merged with ASPA. The separate existence and importance was felt unnecessary or it was made superfluous. The persons who were once interested in comparative public administration after the mid-seventies they lost their interest. In the seventies many persons were eager to have degrees in comparative public administration and by the end of 1990s only few persons displayed interest.

Several reasons have been adduced to the decline in the importance an interest of comparative public administration. One such reason is many eminent persons began to think that only Public Administration was enough. And, if so, why Comparative Public Administration. Many persons associated with the comparative public administration movement could not give any satisfactory reply to this question.

During the Cold War period and even after the relaxation of tension many top-ranking administrators of USA began to think of development administration and not about comparative public administration. This is a potent cause of the decline of comparative public administration. Again it was thought that only public administration was enough and comparative chamber or approach is unnecessary.
There is another reason. In order to be a separate subject and important discipline, it must have separate groups of research and its researchers must build up models and paradigms. Unfortunately, the comparative public administration has no such models. The Comparative Public Administration earned goodwill and wide publicity under the aegis of Comparative Administration Group and many organisations.

But in the eighties and nineties of the last century many showed their utter disinterestedness in the subject. The Comparative Administration Group and the financial help provided by the Ford Foundation made some people interested in the subject. But when the source of fund began to dry or dried people’s interest in it also began to dry slowly and steadily.

Nicholas Henry has called the ill-fate of comparative public administration as a “dilemma”. Henry quotes sporadically from two or three writers. He says: Public administration should take full notice of the fact that comparative administration’s failure rests substantially on a self-imposed failure experience. It set an unattainable goal, that is, in its early and persisting choice to seek a comprehensive theory or model in terms of which to define itself.

We, however, do not think that the comparative public administration is dead or the administrationists do not show any interest in the subject. While studying public administration it is required that it should be studied, if required, in a comparative way. But that does not mean that the comparative public administration should or ought to be given the status of a separate subject or paper of social science.

The students of public administration still study comparative public administration whenever any necessity arises. The meteoric rise of comparative public administration was due to the formation of Comparative Administration Group and financial help given by the Ford Foundation. Today, students of public administration do not display excessive interest in the subject. But sometimes they say that the administrative systems of different countries should be studied in a comparative way in order to have a full understanding of all aspects of the subject.