

GENERALIST & SPECIALIST CONTROVERSY




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- Of late there has been considerable controversy over the place of generalist & specialist in the civil services with rapid growth of public sector undertakings covering a wide range of engineering & other industries, a large numbers of engineers, technicians, doctors, scientists & specialists of various other types have been brought into the public services.
 - There has however, been a growing complaint that most of the top jobs in the administration are treated as the preserve of the generalist administrators & that specialist possessing a high degree of professional expertise have to work in subordination to ICS & IAS officers who have no technical qualifications & who cannot acquire exyer knowledge in any one field because they keep moving from one kind of job to another.
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- However, in recent past, generalist versus specialist controversy has reached its climax.
- The specialist commonly termed as technocrats strongly feel that they are not being due place in administration though on account of their expertise & technical qualifications, they happen to be superior to the so called generalist



INTRODUCTION:


- A 'generalist' means an amateur administrator who had education in linguistics or classics and is a highly intelligent man with certain personal qualities of character.
- The Indian Institute of Public Administration conference on Public Administration defined generalist officer as “a bright young man who has received a liberal college education in any subject”.
- He is appointed at the middle level supervisory post for which no educational qualification in technical or professional subjects is prescribed.
- He receives some initial training in the field and in due course of time is appointed to higher administrative positions irrespective of his previous experience and training.



- A 'specialist' is an expert who has devoted time and studies to a special branch of learning and has acquired specialized experience in tackling problems of particular subjects or areas.
- He is excluded from posting in areas where his specialized knowledge or training does not find direct application.
- The present administrative system in India, as in Britain, is by and large generalist dominated in which policy-making and top administrative posts are occupied by generalist administrators belonging to IAS & State administrators in states.
- The specialists work within their specialized area or department and man the technical posts. They give the technical advice to the generalist administrators at the top.



THE MAJOR ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF GENERALISTS ARE:

- The philosophy of Macaulay Report (1854) and Northcote-Trevelyn Report (1853) states that “a person with liberal education and varied multifunctional experience is much better than the specialist who has deep knowledge of a very narrow field.”
 - It comes in direct contact with grassroots administration.
 - Administration in India is organized on area basis and it requires a generalist administrator to coordinate the activities of various departments.
 - By their education, training and experience, generalists have a broad view of problems facing the society; which the specialists lack.
 - In a parliamentary democracy, ministers need a generalist to advice in policy matters as he is responsible to parliament and has to work for party.
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- In USA, the specialists in their administration are facing the need for generalist coordinator.
- At higher level of administration, very little technical knowledge is required.
- When the specialists are required to do the job of a generalist, they lost both worlds.
- They neither remain specialists nor do they become good generalists.
- In any decision making process, technical inputs are taken from only a small part.
- Other matters like financial, administrative, political, legal etc. are more important.
- Generalists having a broad background of working in various departments are better suited to these jobs.



ARGUMENTS FOR GENERALIST

○ Agrument-1:

1. A generalist is known for broad vision & capacity for leadership.
2. He possess imagination, drive, initiative & enterprise for quick decisions.
3. He alone can advise the Minister-a layman, on political aspects of a plan the technical aspects of which have already been taken care of at comparative lower levels.
4. On the other hand, an expert or a technocrat has Myopic vision & a stereotyped mentality.
5. Hence, specialized knowledge may prove as a liability rather than an asset.
6. This may rob him of the proper perspective when envisaging the plan.
7. At the higher level general rather technical knowledge is essential for getting things done.


ARGUMENTS FOR GENERALIST

○ Agrument-2:

1. Even though a **generalist approach is portrayed as a layman's approach** is an asset to the administration, because **it enables him to express proposals & decisions in a way which is easily carried out by the lower administrative machinery.**



AGRUMENT-3:

1. A generalist clears the mess created by the ministers, the legislators & the experts & suppresses the mob fury which may be detrimental to the country.
 2. A generalist bears the burnt of the mob fury created by the false promise of a politician to the people which he does exactly the opposite.
 3. Likewise legislators pass a law which is not accepted by the people.
 4. The generalist is again faced with a predicament.
 5. In all the cases it is the generalist who comes to the rescue of the ministers by providing a viable n convincing answer.
 6. Which requires tactfulness, a broad angle of vision & flexibility, which the specialist lacks generally.
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AGRUMENT-4:

1. It is contented that a Generalist is comparatively more suited for the Secretariat & departmental posts in the States & at the Centre, as he has to play the role of advisor to the elected Government.
2. An adviser must be acquainted with the whole spread of problem before he renders advice to the Government on important policy matters.
3. It is emphasized that there are many specialist fields in the State where the adviser knows only his field of specialization & none others.
4. The Generalist understand the inter-play & political forces in the various parts of the State, having varied experience in the Generalist field of work in the state, serves as a better advisor then a specialist in the State.

AGRUMENT-5:

1. It is stated by the leading role of the generalists that an all India cadre approach alone suits our federal structure.
2. Because federation stands for the welfare of the people.
3. The States generally resent that Central policies, ignore the local difficulties & problems & not attend to area disparities.
4. A federation in a vast country like ours is apt to be a failure if the adviser at the Centre is not aware of the conditions in the field in his portfolio, in any part of the country.
5. A Generalist who is supposed to work in any part of the country possess a detailed knowledge of the field.
6. Hence, he will be able to cater to the needs of the masses more properly.
7. It is, however, admitted that in certain fields the Specialist may prove a better adviser because of his expertise & specialised knowledge.
8. Such fields are generally limited & Specialists in these fields have already been given due recognition.



AGRUMENT-6:

1. The generalist alone is competent enough to hold management positions in public sector enterprises.
2. He is more committed to the enterprise than a private sector entrant on a term contract.
3. The manager in a public sector, in fact, has to make use of only part of administration art of which Generalist is the embodiment.



AGRUMENT-7:

1. The Generalist is apt to prove better than non-technical Specialist as the field of the vision of the latter is narrow than the former.
2. Moreover, in-service training can enable the Generalist to be in turn with the times & cope with the ever-increasing field of operation.



ARGUMENT-8:

1. The Generalist suits a democratic set-up.
2. He is open to convictions.
3. As such, he will not have the tendency of aggrandisement.
4. He will be more co-operative with the ministers & accept the superiority of the political boss unreluctantly.
5. The specialist, on the other hand, will be less co-operative & have the tendency to assert.
6. It may affect efficiency of administration as the political bosses may remain at loggers-head with the specialist as the heads of the Department.



- In India, generalists are woven in entire fabric of administration and provide the necessary extension to its working.
- **The arguments in favour of specialist are:**
- (i) in the colonial period or even during early independence period the administrative tasks were relatively simple.
- But now it has become complex and cannot be comprehended by generalists,
- (ii) Specialists feel that generalist subjects not required to intervene between them and minister.
- In fact specialists have better knowledge of t subjects and can explain it better to the minister,
- (iii) Generalists always depend on advice of t specialists,
- (iv) The ARC of India (1969) recommended that the senior posts in functional areas should be held by specialist and non-functional posts should be thrown to all the cadres including specialism and generalists.



DIFFERENCE OF THEIR APPROACH:

- The approach of the generalist, though in the expanding fields he is in touch with a broad sector of the field, is always comprehensive.
- He goes down from the whole to the part.
- His training is in over-seeing & not in specialization.
- He has to see the interplay between several sectors that is to be developed to utilize the finding in any one of the sectors.
- Thus the approach of the generalist is coordinative as against the intensive approach of the specialist.
- The generalist may occasionally take to the study in depth of some particular sector of his field but that does not affect change in his normal approach.




- The approach of the specialist on the other hand is intensive & not coordinative.
- Some of the specialist who possess an inborn aptitude to keep abreast of the world around them may acquire coordinative approach of the generalist.
- However, this branch of specialists is a rarity.



ARGUMENTS FOR SPECIALIST



BACKGROUND OF THE CONTROVERSY IN INDIA

- However, the controversy over the role of generalist & the specialist in administration is as old as administration itself.
 - The generalist administrator is generally considered as the legacy of the 19th century British who used to employ young men of aristocratic families equipped with liberal education which could be expected to possess the necessary qualities of the leadership & managerial ability to deal with any kind of administrative responsibility.
 - The young men belonging ICS were thus the guardian of the Empire in its remotest corner.
 - They were trained to be aristocrats & keep up the dignity of their prestigious positions.
 - The ICS cadre of the British days has been succeeded by the IAS in the independent India.
 - The new cadre of these officers was, however, not visualized as a successor to the ICS in spirit.
 - They were supposed to be instrumental in promoting national integration & neutralizing the divergent regional pulls.
 - It was planned that these IAS officers would move from districts to state capitals, from there to the central secretariat to & then back.
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- It was decided from the beginning that at least half



WAY OUT

- No country can afford such a w between generalists and specialists.
- Some solutions are may be as follows:
- **(i)** Better status may be ensured for specialists by creating more All India Services and Class-I cent services;
- **(ii)** Appointment to top posts should be denied to specialists,
- **(iii)** Creation of parallel hierarchy (as in Australia) where both enjoy similar pay scales and status,
- **(iv)** Creation of unified civil service.
- In this system, at lower level the services should be organized technical lines.
- Entry to the top position should be opened for everyone by the process of selecting such a change has already been affected in Pakistan.

