Public Administration, as a discipline, is witnessing dawn of a new era in its study, which now by stepping out of its orthodox/conventional mould seeks to create an independent space in Social Sciences. The overzealous endeavour at making Public Administration an instrumental and goal-driven technical exercise has taken out the dynamism of the discipline as an organic search for administrative solutions for socio-economic problems in the country. The discipline is reduced to efforts at building specific skills which are required to address the identified problems without recognizing their socio-economic and political roots. The discussion that follows revolves around those major issues which remain critical in the framing of syllabus and in class teaching.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION is a context-driven response to problems confronting a specific society. Hence it would be conceptually misleading to argue for a universal design for public administration. The basic problem that appears to have impeded creative thinking in this area of human inquiry is linked with our uncritical dependence on models/theoretical paradigms which are rooted in the Western experience. Given the obvious limitations of such thinking, it is but inevitable that the peculiar nature of public administration in non-Western hemisphere remains elusive or is sought to be defined in a very mechanical manner avoiding the real challenge in conceptualising the phenomenon in a specific perspective. This is a serious problem of our syllabi in Public Administration in most of the Indian universities. By choosing a relatively easy option, the academia responsible for teaching and transmission of knowledge seem to have stayed away from difficult questions concerning the unique evolution and nature of public administration in India. There is however emerging a new group in the academia which is involved in efforts at re-conceptualising public administration keeping in view its peculiar contextual nature. In such an endeavour, one cannot entirely be oblivious of the Western tradition and
its theoretical value in helping us understand the public administration in its most complex forms; by underlining the contextual nature of public administration, it is simply argued here that one-size-fits-all syndrome does not appear to be a meaningful theoretical formula in so far as public administration is concerned.

There is a related point here that has a universal manifestation even to the extent of taking away the basic thrust of public administration by underplaying the importance of ‘public’ in public administration. With the acceptance of the World Bank-engineered ‘governance’ to articulate public administration, Public Administration has perhaps received a serious jolt since it was formally conceptualised in the seminal 1887 article by Woodrow Wilson. Public administration is not merely a goal and process-oriented act, it has also a well-defined purpose of serving ‘the public’ – that cannot be captured by governance which focuses exclusively on: (a) goal, and (b) process and remains completely silent about the purpose of the public authority. There is thus a clear ‘disconnect’ between the instrument and the target group which is most critical in so far as public governance is concerned. In contemporary studies of public administration, the efforts have already been undertaken to highlight this serious lacuna in our effort at approximating to the World Bank guidelines; a theoretical search has already begun to unravel the theoretical limitations of the governance discourse which by seeking to take away the publicness of public administration, is a serious source of concern in contemporary thinking. Despite the obvious discomfort that the governance discourse has caused, there is no denying the fact that it has provoked a well-informed debate among those responsible for teaching and research in Public Administration. Our syllabi in the universities have taken into account the debate that appears to have reconfirmed viability of some of the major theoretical tools of ‘traditional’ Public Administration.

**Major Arguments**

(a) Public Administration is a contextual discipline and one should be sensitive of this to develop a meaningful theoretical design, and (b) Public Administrative is a purpose-oriented exercise and effort at delinking public administration from public is theoretically misleading and intellectually myopic.

**Supplementary Arguments**

(a) Unlike other disciplines in the field of social sciences, Public Administration is a practice-driven endeavour in which the role of politics is also evidently significant that cannot be wished-away, and (b) in the context of the rise and consolidation of ‘networked society’ (or global village, as some commentators prefer to argue), a scientific study of public
administration is possible once this dimension of a globalising world is appropriately captured and analysed.

**Nature of the Discipline**

Public Administration is an orphan discipline in India since it has not been properly mentored by the academicians who are otherwise keen to pursue their interests in other areas of social sciences. There are various factors. Prominent among them is lack of keenness to explore Public Administration as an organic discipline capable of persuasively explaining the peculiar public administration in India. In order to understand the complex nature of India’s system of governance, it is incumbent on the analyst to adequately grasp the context in which it has evolved. Besides the prevalent social, economic, political and institutional contexts, one needs to be sensitive of the colonial influences simply because they continue to remain decisive in the decision making in public administration. The task is gigantic, but not insurmountable because it involves: (a) an appropriate dissection of the context and (b) an anchorage in broader social science interactional field. Once this is taken care of, one is likely to evolve meaningful theories and concepts enabling the analysts to understand and explain the nature of Indian administration in a special socio-economic milieu.

The point that is made here is about the obvious methodological difficulty in comprehending an area of enquiry that one confronts while making a serious endeavour. Before embarking upon what is needed to develop a meaningful methodological package in, it is perfectly in order to talk about the root causes of our failure in this respect: of all the restraining factors, the prominent among them is a blind imitation of the Western conceptualisation while seeking to understand our public administration. By being clearly Weberian in their perception, the analysts tend to ignore the contextual influences shaping governance. Besides undermining the factors contributing to the peculiar nature of public administration, this sort of approach is intellectually limiting and hence shall not be adequate to serve our purpose of understanding the context-driven peculiarities of the system of administration. Now, the scene appears to be changing with the rise and consolidation of a group of analysts questioning the uncritical dependence on Western models by a fierce critique of the derivative wisdom from sources which are not organically linked with our reality. The intellectual discomfort over methodological bankruptcy is supplemented by efforts at building models by adequately emphasising the prevalent socio-economic circumstances. One notices such a change since the 1970s when the highly inspired group of scholars, affiliated with universities and institutes of social sciences all over the country undertook serious researches
on the intricate issues of the functioning of public administration in specific contexts. In two significant ways, these endeavours were different from the past: in view of the critical importance of the context, it was strongly felt, on the one hand, that the inter-disciplinary borrowing was an aid to grasp and conceptualise the unique nature of Indian public administration that was rooted in colonialism; and, since public administration is praxis in nature, one had to, on the other, sensitive of the contextual reality that remained a distinct influence in its actual shape. One had to, of course, guard against vulgar empiricism, and it was thus stressed that the empirical research needed to be theoretically well-informed to avoid the conceptual limitations, linked with excessive dependence on empirical facts. This led to remarkable changes in our approach to public administration as an organic reality which, given its contextual roots, was historically-conceived and determined.

As the above discussion reveals, the search that had begun following the intellectual unease resulted in re-conceptualising some of the methodological tools that were being used to seemingly analyse the nature of public administration in India. The discipline was less analytical and was confined to mere descriptive studies of governmental institutions without paying attention to their historico-social roots. There was no dearth of research though the outcomes were mere reproduction of easily available facts. Following the challenges in the 1970s, the weaknesses of such enterprises were exposed. In this sense, this was a watershed in the evolution of Public Administration as discipline in India. Two important points came out of such an endeavour: first, public administration was not merely a part of institutionalised form of governance, it was also integral to the processes that informed its nature of functioning; secondly, since public administration is enmeshed in the complex social, economic and political processes, the analyst is required to have an inter-disciplinary grounding; otherwise, the discussion was likely to be less persuasive and also intellectually less challenging.

How was the methodological limitation sought to be grappled? A scan of the literature that came out in the 1970s confirms that the analysts addressed the issues by undertaking empirical researches on the basis of the inter-connectivity of the areas of concern. In other words, it had dawned on those keen to unravel the mystique of Indian public administration that to remain in the reckoning the discipline needed disciplinary rigour and depth; otherwise, it would lose its academic credibility in no time. Moreover, it was also strongly felt that by focusing merely on bureaucracy, the contemporary researches were highly claustrophobic in character since institution-driven studies usually lacked the depth that was expected of
social science inquiries. In order to make the study of bureaucracy intellectually challenging and theoretically innovative, one has to understand bureaucracy in the wider social canvas which shape, if not determine, its actual nature in practice. Unless one is drawn to this, our understanding shall become anything but complete. What is argued here is the fact that without grasping the contextual roots of public administration any study shall be worth since it is devoid of those provocative questions that carry forward further research in the field.

What was the outcome of our sustained endeavour in exposing the limitations of the discipline of Public Administration, as it was conceptualised in the past? The challenge led a relook at the way Public Administration was taught in the universities. Given the obvious weaknesses of descriptive studies, serious efforts were made at various kinds of conceptualisations critiquing the uncritical applicability of what we derived from the Western sources. This was evident in the contemporary literature. It was a different kind of public administration which now talked about its nature as a practice-driven exercise which means that the discipline had an ideological character. One can argue here that perhaps the influence of the first Minnowbrook Conference (1968), which clearly defended that Public Administration cannot be but ideological by redefining its nomenclature as New Public Administration, was visible in these endeavours. In the light of the Minnowbrook tradition, the Indian scholars strongly argued for Public Administration with a clear ideological tilt which was sought to be captured by following inter-disciplinary methodologies. Less catholic in their approaches, these new breed of scholars were favourably inclined towards borrowing methodologies from other disciplines in social sciences in order to appropriately understand Public Administration that was being constantly reinvented for obvious reasons.

The Beginning of the Journey

As a discipline, Public Administration did not receive scholarly attention at the outset presumably because it hardly had takers in the academia though students were taught some of the theories of administration as part of Political Science courses. So, it had a silent beginning. Since it was part of Political Science the discipline was always conceptualised as integral to Political Science. As a result, it had the same weaknesses that Dwight Waldo had referred to in his address before the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference I by saying that “neither the study nor the practice of public administration is responding in an appropriate measure to the mounting turbulence and critical problems of the day”. This is perhaps the most apt

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description of the discipline of Public Administration in Indian universities and other academic institutions where the issues of public administration usually receive serious attention. While academicians do not seem to be zealous in pursuing serious researches in the discipline, the Government of India is far more enthusiastic, as evident in the growing number of reports on administration which are produced to address issues of governance and administration. There is a mismatch between the academic zeal and governmental enthusiasm in comprehending administrative malice and its possible solution. This mismatch also reveals that there exists a schism between government bureaucracy and the academicians seeking to understand its functioning. What is also striking is also the absence of dialogue between these two stakeholders who do not seem to have appreciated the value of mutual borrowing of concepts, theoretical tool and descriptive details despite obvious advantages out of this dialogical interaction. Nonetheless, it can safely be argued that the governmental reports on vital issues of public administration always remain an important source of conceptualisation and theoretical enrichment. In that sense, they are useful and intellectually provocative. The story narrating the evolution and gradual consolidation of Public Administration as a discipline cannot thus be complete without taking into account the importance of government reports in grasping the Indian administrative issues.

Evolution of the Discipline

Till 1937, Indian universities did not appear to be welcoming to Public Administration as a separate discipline which was usually taught as part of Political Science. The ice was broken with the decision by the University of Madras to offer a diploma in Public Administration from within the department of Political Science. Within a year in 1938, Allahabad University also formalised a course on self-government. In course of four years since the appearance of Public Administration as an independent discipline in 1937, four major Indian universities – Lucknow University, Patna University, Osmania University, and Aligarh Muslim University – began offering diploma in Public Administration. As is evident, these initiatives represented a watershed in the study of the discipline which now has gained an independent status in the field of social sciences. Given its intimate linkages with Political Science, Public Administration was, at the outset, usually considered as integral to Political Science, and, as a result, the courses in the discipline were generally structured around the institutions of governance, primarily local governance. The jinx was over in 1949 when Nagpur University established a full-fledged department of Public Administration independent of the department of Political Science. It was a remarkable development especially when the discipline was still
embryonic in its approach and methodologies. Nonetheless, the scholars keen to unravel the dynamics of Public Administration as a separate discipline believed that the training in Public Administration, besides imparting knowledge about intricacies of governance, would also equip the students to stand out in competition for jobs in government and private sectors.

In 1954, at the insistence of Paul Appleby, the Indian Institute of Public Administration was founded in Delhi. It was a watershed in so far as the study of Public Administration was concerned. Now, this Institute was charged with responsibilities for training and also keeping abreast the Indian civil servants of different seniorities in the art and theoretical tools of administration. Paul Appleby was also instrumental in creating separate Public Administration departments in the Universities of Jaipur and Chandigarh in 1956. With these major initiatives, several universities in the country were persuaded to include courses in Public Administration at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels since 1976. Now, a large numbers of universities in India offer courses in Public Administration. A major boost came in 1987 when Public Administration was included as an integral part of the syllabus for the all India Civil Services Examination, conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) of India which is responsible for recruitment to the elite Indian Administrative Service and other allied Central services through all-India competition. The linking of the discipline with job-related tests created an instantaneous demand of teaching in various universities. It was therefore not surprising that following the inclusion of Public Administration in the syllabus for competitive examinations for jobs by the UPSC and Public Service Commissions in different Indian provinces, the discipline gained immense popularity in universities across the country.

The trajectory of Public Administration as a discipline especially in the aftermath of Independence shows that it has grown in India under the patronage and academic supervision of the American scholar, Paul Appleby who was invited by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first premier following the 1947 transfer of power. It was Appleby who strongly felt the need of professionalisation in governance which was possible with proper training and tutelage. His main concern was to make administration efficient. As he argued,

“[t]he general idea is that professionalisation of public administration should be advanced in order to encourage more widespread and conscious study, reflection and exchange of learning and to establish certain instruments charged with special responsibility for administrative
improvement in terms not adequately covered at present’.²

This seems to have set the tempo of the study of public administration in India by insisting on ‘efficiency’ as the main goal of administration. Conceptualising public administration as a technical instrument for fulfilling predesigned-objectives, Paul Appleby, in a typical Weberian way, sought to create an all-pervasive bureaucracy responsible for attaining goals which remained integral to the socio-economic reconstruction through state intervention. From the point of view of the state, it was most efficient because the instrument was geared to the goal; whether the instrument was effective in India’s specific socio-economic milieu was the question that remained unanswered in Appleby’s scheme of things. Given the uncritical acceptance of the Appleby’s arguments, there had been a tendency to ignore the broader social science considerations in discussions on administrative problems. One of the reasons for the poverty of the study of public administration has been, argues Mohit Bhattacharya, “its narrow practical concerns and avoidance of broader social science theorising in allied disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science, Economics and History [and, as a result, the discipline] has busied itself with practical action intended to repair and reinvigorate administration without caring for an adequate understanding of the context and environmental conditions of such action”.³ Public Administration has thus become ‘vocationalised’ in which the macro social, economic and political concerns remain insignificant. Increasing vocalisation is evident with the recruitment of ‘mere technicians’ in transmitting the required technical skills to make administration efficient. The discipline is thus assessed on the basis of how efficient it is as a problem-solving device. It is therefore not surprising that the institutes of Public Administration prefer technicians to those well-grounded in the discipline. This is evident from the recruitment of ‘technicians in public administration institutes such as computer analysts, engineers, financial and budgeting experts’.⁴

Vocationalisation is client-oriented which means that the discipline needs to take care of the interests of the clients irrespective of the impact it has on the core of the discipline. Given the growing importance of the technicians, the discipline is sought to be designed in accordance with the needs of the client ignoring the wider social canvas in which administration has roots. Its impact on the growth of the discipline is devastating because

⁴Ibid., p. 66.
not only will it divert our attention away from the broader socio-economic and political issues it will also make the discipline more and more technical by taking away perhaps its kernel in the long run. The concern does not seem to be unfounded. As is evident now, several departments of Public Administration in various universities offer training programmes for those taking competitive examinations for jobs. This is most disheartening because Public Administration is reduced to a training-driven exercise in which the disciplinary concerns appear to have been undermined, if not seriously challenged, in contemporary India. Public Administration is thus likely to lose its distinctive nature as a discipline within the praxis tradition. Excessive emphasis of the technical aspect of administration will not only take away its core, it will also deprive Public Administration of its distinctive claim of being a praxis-discipline if the zeal for making it an instrument for technical efficiency in administration is not halted.

What are the problem areas in the study of public administration in India? The answer to this question is linked with the nature of the discipline which continues to remain intellectually crippled because of its failure to carve-out a specific domain of query for reasons connected with its growth as a discipline in the family of social sciences. In other words, in view of the inherent weaknesses associated with its evolution in India, Public Administration did never become an effective aid to understand India’s administrative reality since it did not pay adequate attention to the socio-economic environment in which it was located. This is a serious methodological lacuna which is usually explained as inevitable because of the efforts at conceptualising public administration in isolation. The other important area of concern is the absence of discussion of larger issues that impinge on the nature of administration. As a tool of analysis, Public Administration appears to have failed because of the inherent weaknesses. In order to become analytically meaningful, public administration needs to be understood with reference to the nature of the state, the specific administrative history, the constitutional structure and the form of the government, the political processes and social structure. These are influences which are enmeshed in the context and Public Administration is required to take them into account to sustain its viability not merely in the domain of societal problem, but in the field of knowledge generation. As a result of the disconnect between the socio-politically distinctive reality and administration, the discipline has ceased to become organic in character which accounts for its inability to comprehend the nature of public administration in a post-colonial context. What is most disappointing is the neglect of the dialectics that always exist between the text and context. In view of their uncritical acceptance of the Western paradigm in framing
the university syllabi, the experts appear to have pursued a line of thinking which clearly takes out the dynamism within the discipline. Attempts are being made now to address these weaknesses though the hegemonic Western influences cannot be so easily dispensed with for obvious historical reasons. Along with major theoretical constraints due to favourable tilt towards the Western ideas and concepts, there is also the debilitating factor stemming from the effort at reducing public administration to mere technical skills justifying the need to create more institutes of Public Administration.

Nonetheless, the study of Public Administration continues to flourish in India. What had begun in 1937 with the offering of a diploma in the discipline appears to have a permanent fixture in contemporary universities across the country, as is evident in a study that was conducted in 2005-06 in India. On the basis of response, procured out of the structured questionnaires that were administered to the stakeholders, it is evident that the discipline continues to remain handicapped because of the deficiencies which never were addressed conclusively. The survey confirms that the discipline failed to create an independent space in the field of social sciences and it has become, alas, a discipline in bondage for three important reasons: first, the majority of weaknesses in Public Administration in India stem from the ethnocentric bias of the American and European scholarship. So long as this remains, it will never be possible for the discipline to evolve as a persuasive explanatory area of enquiry; secondly, the overzealous endeavour at making Public Administration an instrumental and goal-driven technical exercise has taken out the dynamism of the discipline as an organic search for administrative solutions for socio-economic problems in the country. The discipline is reduced to efforts at building specific skills which are required to address the identified problems without recognising their socio-economic and political roots. Finally, taken together, these factors have contributed to the emergence of a comprador discipline which is neither capable of an independent response nor is equipped to take a call on the issue of contemporary administrative ills. The inevitable outcome is thus a clear distortion in the evolution and also nature of the discipline which fails to become a respectable area of Social Science enquiry. In other words, ridden with intellectual deficiencies, Public Administration, despite being integral to the university syllabi, remains handicapped for reasons connected with ‘the intellectual bankruptcy’ of the endeavours which were otherwise serious and well-meaning at evolving the discipline as a respectable member in the family of social sciences.

The survey findings reinforce the assumptions that have already been

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5The survey reports are available in V. Bhaskara Rao (ed.), Movements and Public Administration, Kalpaz, New Delhi, 2011.
made to explain the sorry state of Public Administration as a discipline. Are these teething problems, or are they linked with the lack of ability to pursue the queries with rigour and finesse which is usually the case in other social science disciplines? There is no doubt that the discipline has suffered on both these counts: while it failed to attract best minds in the country for reasons connected with its nature of being less provocative as a field of enquiry, it was not also distinct in terms of either methodological rigour or conceptual depth. What is striking is the fact that though there was a clear dearth of serious scholars in the field, some of the major areas of concern of Public Administration attracted scholars from other fields. For instance, the historians, sociologists, Political Scientists and also administrators have made significant contribution in unravelling the complex nature of India’s public administration. These works are very useful for research, for example, in local government, the changing nature of Indian bureaucracy and the impact of political structure on governance.  

This is not an argument to defend the urge of being boundary-conscious which is absurd in the context of appreciation for inter-disciplinary borrowing. The point that is made is about the limited appeal of what was pursued within the disciplinary focus of Public Administration by those being trained in the discipline. It is not difficult to locate the root cause of its declining importance given the obvious limitations that the discipline was never equipped to overcome. As a result, those with training in Public Administration shied away from areas other than the study of the institutions since it is less challenging than dwelling on the processes shaping the former in juxtaposition with their competing counterparts in extremely volatile social, economic and political circumstances. The trend towards uncritical study of the institutions seemed to have gained support and was thus not discouraged.

**Changing Stances**

Since the 1980s, there have been efforts at re-conceptualising Public Administration especially those associated with universities in India. A shift was noticeable in the areas of research which was no longer confined to the institutional studies of public administration. It was strongly felt that in order to understand the institutions of governance, one needs to comprehend the prevalent socio-economic milieu; otherwise, it would be

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a futile exercise. Public administration is not merely institution-driven, as the argument goes, but also a process sensitive endeavour for understanding and also meaningfully addressing societal problems which are seen to have had their roots in the administration. This is a complex task for which one needs to be receptive to the tools of analysis, developed in other sister disciplines in the family of social sciences. So the effort that was undertaken in the 1980s also led to meaningful inter-disciplinary borrowing which was not encouraged so zealously in the past.

A new era had dawned in the study of Public Administration as a discipline which now by stepping out of its orthodox/conventional mould sought to create an independent space in social sciences. It is therefore surprising that new areas of research received far more critical attention than in the past. This was also reflected in the university syllabi and also in the syllabus of Public Administration for various competitive examinations both at the national and state levels. The 1980s were a watershed in the study of Public Administration though one cannot designate the era as a break with the past. The studies that were undertaken now were far more analytical than mere structural descriptions of the institutions. It was felt that the study of institutions remained incomplete without judging them in the specific Indian politico-administrative and socio-economic context. This was undoubtedly a revolutionary change that radically altered the approach to the study of public administration with reference to the cobwebs of socio-economic and political processes. Administration is not merely an instrument, but a process-driven exercise which requires a thorough study of the context in which it is located and flourishes. In this sense, administration is a lived experience which can be captured by being sensitive to the existent socio-political reality shaping, if not determining, its actual manifestation. What is most critical in the entire exercise is to understand the contextual peculiarities of public administration for which the disciplinary-orthodoxies of the past needs to be shunted-out. It is evident from the growing interests in areas of concern which were never considered pertinent in exploring the public administration either as an activity or a process.

There are plenty of issues that figure in the study of the discipline in its contemporary manifestation. It will be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of issues. Furthermore, these issues are also critical because they remain significant in the making of syllabi in the universities which means that Public Administration as a discipline is receptive to new ideas which have already been tested by rigorous intellectual probing by the academicians and researchers. Since this piece is about the study of Public Administration in India, only those issues have been focussed which have a clear bearing
on the Indian social, economic and political contexts. This is however not to suggest that they are exclusively India-centric; instead, the argument hinges on issues which are reflective of the inter-dependent nature of the problems and their solution in a networked society. What is striking in the study of public administration in India is also the fact that while preparing the syllabi for regular courses in Public Administration, the university departments seem to have been guided by the government initiatives in the field of administration. It is not thus surprising that a significant part of the list of topics that are taught draws on the government reports which are always useful in conceptualising administration as organically-linked with the socio-economic circumstances. Along with the focus on the issues that are raised in the government reports, the other important source of inputs for the university syllabi, at least in their contemporary articulation, happens to be the specific global intervention seeking to provide a university design, especially in the aftermath of the collapse of the former Soviet Union and consequent rise of the hegemonic neo-liberal approach to public administration.

Given the pedagogical limitation of the study of public administration in the confines of class rooms because of its practice-driven nature, several universities have made field trip to government offices and other places which are integral to public administration as an essential component of the teaching of Public Administration in the universities.

One of the penetrating concepts in today’s discussion of public administration is governance which is not synonymous with the mere act of governing, but an ideological ploy to universalise the neo-liberal model of government-functioning. Governance as a model of public administration cannot be understood without reference to the context in which it has been conceptualised. There is no doubt that globalisation provides significant inputs to its epistemological articulation. Public Administration has basically been an inward looking discipline concerned with the management of a country’s domestic public affairs. It has now woken up to the need for focusing on the pulls and pressures of the on-going processes of globalisation and their impact on domestic-administrative management. Since then, the search has been on how to reinvent or reposition the discipline in the context of a newly emergent world order. Public Administration thus now represents ‘a decisive move away from direct provision by government agencies and their employees – the standard bureau model of the past’.  

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The purpose was to transform an aloof, impersonal, paternalistic bureaucracy into one which was to be citizen-friendly and sensitive to user-needs. The Government of India had appointed two Administration Reforms Commissions in 1966 and 2005 respectively. Their recommendations have revolutionary effects on administration. One of the important consequences of these recommendations happen to be the effort to shift our attention away from the steel frame of bureaucracy to other agencies which are equally crucial in public service, but have not been formally recognised so far. In this sense, it has also set in motion a powerful critique of Weberian bureaucracy that is strictly hierarchical and largely status-quoist. By recognising the importance of civil society organisations in public administration, these Commissions provide a formal recognition to a space of cooperation between the government bureaucracy and these organisations. Such cooperation was discouraged presumably because of the sanctity of the governmental domain in which the state bureaucracy appears to be the only legitimate agency in discharging responsibilities on behalf of the state. Underlying the importance of these agencies, not exactly linked with the government and its peripheral organisations, these efforts have not only redefined Indian bureaucracy but also expanded its sphere of influence by seeking to involve various non-governmental agencies, a role which was never recognised under traditional theories of public administration.

In the light of a general degradation of public administration, the importance of ethics in governance has acquired a significant place in contemporary theoretical discussion more so because of the growing decadence in governmental practices largely owing to a decline of ethical values in public administration which is perhaps singularly responsible for the rise of ‘corruption’ in a virulent form. The possible reason is located in the overgrowth of the state in which bureaucracy has become ‘rent-seeker’, ignoring its Benthamite role of being ‘a benevolent guardian’. The World Bank-sponsored solution is to downsize the state and allow free play of the market and civil society – consolidating the ideology of neo-liberalism. Whether this is an appropriate strategy for the developing and also underdeveloped nation is a challenging question that needs to be addressed keeping in view the importance of ‘public’ in public administration. This is a challenge that involves a thorough analysis of the circumstances and also the outcome in a historical context because dwindling of ethics in governance is not an overnight phenomenon, but an offshoot of a long-term process. As a sequel to the recommendation of the 1964 Santhanam Committee which was appointed to address the issue of corruption in administration, the Government of India introduced a series
of institutional measures to arrest administrative corruption. As a result, several new institutions solely responsible for combatting corruption were created: of them, the important being the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Central Vigilance Commission. Besides these major institutions, the zeal to fight corruption in public life also led to the enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2005 which allows citizens access to government information and a mechanism to seek to establish ethics in governance. It was reiterated in the 2005 Second Administrative Reforms Commission report by stating that “in our case, at times public office is perceived to be an extension of one’s property. That is why sometimes, public offices are a source of huge corruption and a means of extending patronage”. The Commission was thus asked to suggest measures to achieve a “proactive, responsive, accountable, sustainable and efficient administration for the country at all levels of the government”. What is striking about these commissions is the fact that they have provoked a fierce debate on the nature of public administration which cannot afford to be insensitive to the public needs in the context of the rising importance of right-conscious citizens in India.

As in the case of the above commissions which set in motion a new conceptual framework of public administration, the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 remain two revolutionary measures in local self-government: while the former deals with local government in rural areas, the latter is a specific step to meaningfully implement the ideas of democratic decentralisation in so far as urban governance is concerned. Besides directing significant structural changes in the institutional set of governance at the respective levels of administration, the 73rd Amendment is remarkable for having recommended reservation of one-third seats for women in the panchayats which is revolutionary for having provided a feminist perspective in public administration in India. By making the institution of local governance through direct election mandatory, these legal enactments created an environment in which local government no longer remained a personal fiefdom of the vested interests in rural and urban areas. There are efforts at meaningfully articulating devolution of power in a meaningful way. In other words, by making the stakeholders integral to local governments, these amendments besides translating democratic decentralisation in practice, have also contributed to refashioning the syllabi in Public Administration as a discipline that appears

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to have lost its momentum by being sterile in its approach to the rapidly changing public administration in India. What is fundamental here is the effort at re-conceptualising public administration as an outcome of the lived experience of the people in specific socio-economic and political contexts.

The above discussion is very important to reinforce the argument that the study of Public Administration in India draws heavily upon the government initiatives that have always set in motion new thinking on administration. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that discipline would have been handicapped without these significant government interventions in reinventing public administration in India. A scan of the syllabi of Public Administration in major universities in India confirms this: a large chunk of topics that need to be studied while pursuing courses in the discipline comes from the governmental practices and the reports that are prepared on the basis of thorough studies of the processes of governance at various levels of administration, as is evident, for instance, in the report of the 2005 Second Reforms Commission. Is this indicative of disciplinary weaknesses of Public Administration? This can be an issue of debate, but cannot be conclusively substantiated given the well-established nature of Public Administration being a praxis discipline, the core of which is a creative blend of theory and practice. It is perfectly possible that these reports lack solid theoretical basis, and are largely in the problem-solving mould. So the study that is dependent on these efforts which are generally technical in nature will reduce the discipline to a mere technical exercise. This is usually the argument that is often made in most of the meetings for syllabi-framing in Indian universities undermining the organic character of Public Administration as a field of social science enquiry. The major weakness of this argument stems from the fact that Public Administration, unlike other sister disciplines in the family of social sciences, is practice-driven. Unless the students are made aware of the actual functioning of administration, much of the fun for studying public administration shall be compromised to the detriment of its basic organic nature and its inherent ability, largely un-utilised or under-utilised, in conceptualising governance in specific historical perspectives. In fact, such a visible disconnect with the reality weakens the discipline of Public Administration which is not merely a theoretical exercise, but also a goal-driven design of action. Hence dissociation with the context in which public administration is located does not seem to be epistemologically appropriate for obvious reasons. In that sense, the government initiatives and reports remain critical in comprehending public administration as a practical endeavour which is also useful in developing a theoretical framework and
conceptual tools for pedagogical purposes.

So in the development of Public Administration as a discipline, the importance of the government reports cannot be wished away just like the growing interest of the students in studying the discipline. Students are being drawn to the discipline for understanding the processes of administration besides the fact that Public Administration by virtue of being integral to various competitive examinations for jobs has also ensured its popularity among them. Unlike other disciplines in Social Sciences, Public Administration is perhaps the most sought-after discipline presumably because it is both interesting as an area of study which help them understand the intricacies of public governance once they are engaged formally for jobs and also very scoring which will put them ahead of others taking other disciplines for these competitive examinations. It is therefore not surprising that several private Institutes have sprung-up to train candidates in Public Administration which may not have received adequate attention in the universities, including some major universities in the metropolis of Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai where the discipline is being taught even today as part of the under-graduate and post-graduate degrees in Political Science. Whatever may be the reason, the fact remains that Public Administration is now an established discipline in India that is no longer an appendage of other disciplines, but has an independent existence.

Concluding Observations

This reflective text on the state of Public Administration in India as a discipline identifies the sources of concern and joy at the same time for those involved in pedagogical exercise, particularly in the university system. There is no doubt that the discipline has not adequately provoked either the faculty members or the students to undertake sustained research in the field to develop the discipline despite its growing popularity in competitive examinations for jobs. Even the University Grants Commission which manages universities in India does not seem to be supportive to the extent it is evident in its Bangladesh counterpart. Some of India’s leading universities, like the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Allahabad University, Calcutta University, among others, do not have a full-fledged department of Public Administration and continue to offer courses in Public Administration as a component of BA/MA in Political Science. This is a matter of great concern since it continues to be identified as an appendage of Political Science which inhibits perhaps its growth as an independent discipline. What is however most encouraging is the sustained endeavour that the Government of India has undertaken in understanding public administration and also in evolving newer mechanisms to streamline and also make administration efficient.
How to address the disciplinary weaknesses of Public Administration in India is a million dollar question which does not have an easy answer. Nonetheless, while laying out some of the areas of theoretical concerns which are critical in making the discipline relevant and popular among the stakeholders, one can set the ball rolling for a very engaging discussion on its nature and impact on contemporary governance. As is argued above, Public Administration is an action-oriented, context-sensitive and practitioner-friendly field of Social Science enquiry. In order to sustain its disciplinary viability, the methodological catholicity has to be discarded, and the discipline needs to be appreciative of collaboration and meaningful inter-disciplinary borrowing. Given the complexities of governance especially in the light of the growing consolidation of the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) regimes following the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the consequent rise and strengthening of neo-liberalism, it would be conceptually erroneous to comprehend public administration in its traditional mould. One needs to be equipped to articulate the inevitable changes in administration which is, despite being context-specific, also subject to influences which are not exactly contextual. A strong argument is thus made for methodological diversity to capture the changed administrative reality in the context of the blurring of national boundaries following the emergence of the global village. This is surely a significant step towards redefining the methodological contours of the discipline which is very persuasive. But one is required to be sensitive of the problem that stems from the endeavour at providing ‘a universal design’ of public administration which the World Bank-sponsored Governance Model seeks to make. By defending the ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula, the neo-liberal thinkers have not only challenged the context-driven analysis of public administration while pursuing social Darwinism, but also sought to universalise the Governance model of administration by completely undermining the importance of public in public administration. The fundamental task is therefore to reinvent the discipline by reiterating its spirit of being public in the face of the obvious neo-liberal challenges, being sponsored by those proponents willing to sacrifice the fundamental ethos of the people-centric public administration. And, here the role of those involved in the pedagogical transmission of knowledge in public administration, both in the universities and institutes, cannot but be significant and critical for the future of the discipline of Public Administration in India.