Development of Public Administration as an Academic Discipline

- As an activity of government, public administration is as old as organized society/government since people have engaged in the management of public programs for thousands of years.

- As an academic discipline or a body of knowledge, public administration is a relatively a young field of study. It is regarded as one of the newest disciplines of the social sciences.

- Public administration as an academic discipline originated/emerged in the USA and the US scholars continue to enrich it even today. It was the seminal essay entitled 'The Study of Public Administration' published in the 'Political Science Quarterly' in 1887, written by Woodrow Wilson that is considered to be its symbolic beginning of public administration as a field of study. It also stimulated interests and stressed need for the systematic study of public administration in the US context.

- It has passed several phases and many ups and downs since its symbolic beginning. Public administration as an academic discipline developed over time involves five major periods/paradigms (Nicolas Henry has suggested six paradigms in regard to the emergence of public administration as an academic discipline). These paradigms often overlap.

Phases /paradigms of evolution:

1. Politics-administration dichotomy (1887 - 1926)
2. The principles of administration (1927-1937)
   (The period 1938-1950 stood a challenge and reaction to challenge)
3. Public administration as political science (1950-1970)
4. Public administration as management (1956-1970)
5. Public administration as public administration (1971 onward)

1. Politics-administration dichotomy

The first stage of the development/evolution of public administration as an academic discipline begun with the Woodrow Wilson's seminal essay published in 1887. It is regarded as the most distinguished essay in the history of American public administration. In the essay, Wilson regarded administration as distinct from politics. So he stressed the need for a separate study of administration. According to Wilson, 'law making or farming a constitution is the concern of politics, while administration is concerned with the implementation of a constitution and it is getting harder to run a constitution than to farm one.'

Frank J. Goodnow (Politics and Administration -1900) further explored the Wilsonian doctrine of politics-administration dichotomy. He identified and distinguished the two functions of the government: politics and administration. According to him, politics has to do with policies or expression of the state will. Administration has to do with the execution of these policies. He further defined/identified the locations of two functions: the legislative and the higher authority of government where major policies are made (location of politics) and the location
of administration was identified as the executive arm of government i.e. the government bureaucracy.

Leonard D. White (Introduction to the Study of Public Administration -1926) dealt with administration comprehensively and systematically in government of the period. His premises were that politics and administration should be kept separate and efficiency and economy should be the concerns of administration.

In the first paradigm:

- Strengthened the notion of the politics-administration dichotomy;
- Public administration appeared as a distinct field of study;
- It received its first serious attention from American Universities and scholars.

This period is characterized as the lack of clear boundaries of public administration.

2. Principles of Administration

W.F. Willoughby (The Principles of Public Administration -1927) inaugurated a new principle approach in the development of public administration. According to Willoughby, there are certain principles of administration which can be drawn through scientific research and study of the phenomenon of administration. An administrator would be expert in his/her work if he/she learn how to apply these principles.

The principle approach advocated by Willoughby was further elaborated/described by other scholars: Henry Fayol, Mary Parker Follet and Luther H. Gulick and Lyndal Urwick. Most notably, Gulick and Urwick (Paper on the Science of Administration -1937) coined the acronym POSDCORB to promote principles of administration. Their work was an attempt to discover administrative principles of general applicability and to develop a value free science of public administration based on such principles. In this second phase, scholars developed principles of administration such as division of work, unity of command, coordination, scalar principle, span of control, etc.

The thrusts of this period were that there were certain principles of administration of general applicability and a body of knowledge was needed to prescribe them in an administrative process.

The Challenge and Reaction to the Challenge (1938-1950): The period 1938 -47 appeared as one of the challenges against the principles of administration. Chester Irving Bernard's 'The Functions of the Executive (1938) didn't uphold the views of the scholars of second paradigm. Similarly, Herbert Simon's article 'The Proverbs of Administration (1946) and Administrative Behaviour (1947) raised a question mark on the acceptability and applicability of the principles of administration. He labeled /termed principles of administration as mere proverbs. He also rejected the doctrine of politics-administration dichotomy and regarded decision making as the heart of administration. Moreover, Robert Dahl's essay entitled 'The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems' (1947) challenged the claim made by the principle of public administration. He opposed the traditional notions of public administration.
In the 1940s two directions/ dominant views appeared in the mainstream of public administration.

a. politics and administration can't be separated practically.
b. principles of administration cannot be applied consistently.

[This period created a challenge to the previous notion of politics-administration dichotomy and general applicability of administrative principles.]

Simon also revived previous foundation of public administration by offering an alternative view. According to him, there should be two kinds of public administration: a pure science of administration based on social psychology (social sciences provide the basis for understanding administrative behavior) and prescription for public policy (normative in its emphasis).

3. Public administration as political science

This period has been marked by the crisis of identity for public administration and the future of public administration appeared uncertain. Many scholars in public administration sought their linkages with political science. So they responded to the crisis of identity by returning to the field of the mother discipline i.e. political science.

As a result of growing concerns and attitudes towards political science in the late 1940s, the field of public administration was dominated by political science for about two decades. Despite substantial attempts made by scholars in public administration to develop a field/discipline of their own, leading scholars in political science of this period become successful to dominate the field of public administration under political science.

Dwight Waldo (The Administrative State-1948) urged the recognition of public administration within the context of a democratic governmental process and introduced the concept of administrative politics. Similarly, Paul H. Appleby (Policy and Administration -1949) argued that public administration should be thought of as a government in direction action and called for the reconciliation of policies and administration.

This third phase was largely an exercise of reestablishing the linkages between public administration and political science. Public administration was regarded as an emphasis of political science, an area of political science as well as a synonym of political science. During this period, political science not only let public administration separate itself from it but also curb its fostering and encouraging growth and development within its own field.

4. Public administration as management/administrative science

This paradigm occurred roughly concurrently with the previous paradigm (paradigm 3) in time. However, it didn't garner favor that political science received. Owing to undisguised contempt being exhibited by political scientists and political science departments, scholars in public administration began searching for an alternative way. They regarded management/administrative science as a viable alternative for its survival. Since the mid 1950s, a new view/idea appeared (with the publication of 'Administrative Science Quarterly') that private, public and nonprofit administration was a false distinction. This new intellectual movement
and its premises had a great impact on the curricula of universities. Thus, the idea of generic management appeared as a new unified epistemology in the study of institutions/organizations whether public, private or nonprofit.

This paradigm seemed to be as the second paradigm i.e. the principles of administration since focus had been given on often highly sophisticated techniques but institutional settings to apply those techniques were not identified.

In both paradigms (political science and management) public administration as an identifiable field of study began a long downhill spiral and it lost its uniqueness and identity.

Despite its crisis of identify, public administration was sowing the seeds for its renaissance. As a result, at the end of the third and fourth paradigm public administration revived its identity unconsciously in both academic and professional forms.

- The curricula of public policy appeared in the top academic institutions and universities in the political science departments. However, the programs were interdisciplinary in nature and were often dominated by scholars in public administration.

- The new public administration movement seemed to be a call for the independence of public administration from both political science and management.

These movements had an overwhelming influence on public administration to reconsider its traditional ties with both political science and management and to develop its own independent field of study.

5. Public administration as public administration

After 1970, public administration has emerged as an autonomous and a separate academic field of study with an enriched vision by escaping from the previous uncertainty and crisis of identity. A large numbers of universities in the USA have been offer MPA programs. Its separation from the field of political science and management become real. Thus, this paradigm refers to public administration as separate body of knowledge and can be characterized as a strong connection between the students, academic and practitioners to foster its academic heritage.

Since its separation, it has been able to enrich its identity gradually across the globe. The numbers of universities, departments, colleges, and institutions of public administration and public policy have been increasing. Similarly, the public administration program that have been taught and researched within the political science departments, department of business administration and other kinds of schools have declined in the recent years.

Today, a large numbers of universities, departments and schools across the globe offer public administration programs and their programs have got a higher level of accreditation. The public administration program is also taught in the joint departments of political science, management and public administration. Even today, United States has remained a single most important source of literature in the field of public administration.