

## **STATE SECRETARIAT: ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The functioning of the government is made effective with the help of task oriented Ministries. No Ministry can run smoothly without the support of a Secretariat at the Union as well as state levels. The Secretariat helps the government in policy making and execution of legislative functions. This Unit discusses the organisation and functions, of the State secretariat. It explains the pattern of departmentalisation in the Secretariat and brings out the distinction between the secretariat department and executive department. In addition, position and functions of the Chief Secretary in the state administration are also discussed.

### **MEANING OF SECRETARIAT**

The three components of government at the state level are: (i) the minister; (ii) the secretary, and (iii) the executive head. (The last one in most cases is called the director, although other nomenclatures are also used to refer to the executive head). The minister and the secretary together constitute the Secretariat, whereas the office of the executive head is designated as the Directorate. Literally, the term 'Secretariat' means the secretary's office. It originated at a time when what we had in India was really a government run by the secretaries. In the changed political situation, the term Secretariat has become a synonym for the minister's office. But because the secretary is the principal adviser to the minister, he needs to be in the physical vicinity of the minister. In effect, therefore, Secretariat refers to the complex of buildings that houses the office of ministers and secretaries. The expression Secretariat, it has been observed, is used to refer to the complex of departments whose heads politically are ministers and administratively are the secretaries.

### **POSITION AND ROLE OF STATE SECRETARIAT**

The following extract from the Administrative Reforms Commission's Report on State Administration gives a succinct expression to the position and role of the State Secretariat:

The State Secretariat, as the top layer of the state administration, is primarily meant to assist the state government in policy making and in discharging its legislative functions. It also acts "as a memory and a clearing house, preparatory to certain types of decisions and as a general supervisor of executive action". The main functions of the State Secretariat are broadly as follows:

1. Assisting the ministers in policy making, in modifying policies from time to time and in discharging their legislative responsibilities.
2. Framing draft legislation, and rules and regulations.
3. Coordinating policies and programmes, supervising and controlling their execution, and reviewing of the results.
4. Budgeting and control of expenditure.
5. Maintaining contact with the Government of India and other state governments; and
6. Overseeing the smooth and efficient running of the administrative machinery and-initiating measures to develop greater personnel and organisational competence.

The administrative philosophy to which the secretariat system owes its existence is that policy making must be kept separate from policy execution. Several advantages are claimed in favour of such an arrangement:

- i. Freedom from operational involvement makes the policy making apparatus forward looking and allows it to think in terms of overall goals of government rather than narrow, sectional interests of individual departments.
- ii. Policy making receives the time and attention it deserves, if different set of persons are charged with the functions of policy making as well as its execution. This is because, policy making, is a serious exercise in drawing up what would be a future course of action. It should not be treated as less urgent than policy execution, which involves routine, day-to-day administration.
- iii. Secretariat serves as a disinterested adviser to the minister. It is important to remember that the secretary is the secretary to the government and not to the minister concerned, which ensures objective examination of the proposals coming from the executive departments. It enables a more balanced scrutiny of proposals.
- iv. Policy making must be separated from current administration and day-to-day implementation should be left to a different agency with executive freedom, which ensures delegation of authority.

It should be in order at this stage to portray the broad dimensions of the Secretariat's role in some detail. The foremost of these is the Secretariat's role in policy making. It assists the ministers in the formulation of governmental policies.

This has many aspects. First, the secretary supplies to the minister all the data and information needed for policy formulation. Second, the secretaries sometimes provide the programmes, with content by working out their details, on whose strength ministers are voted to power. Third, the Secretariat assists ministers in their legislative work. Drafts of

legislations to be introduced in the legislature by ministers are prepared by the secretaries. Besides, to answer questions in the Legislature, the minister needs relevant information; the secretary supplies this information to the minister. Secretary also collects information required with respect to the legislative committees.

Fourth, the Secretariat functions as an institutionalised memory. This means that the emerging problems require an examination in the light of precedents. Records and files maintained in the Secretariat serve as an institutional memory and ensure continuity and consistency in the disposal of cases. Fifth, the Secretariat is a channel of communication between one government and another, and between the government and such agencies as the Planning Commission and Finance Commission. Finally, the Secretariat evaluates and keeps track of execution of policies by the field agencies.

### **STRUCTURE OF A TYPICAL SECRETARIAT DEPARTMENT**

Vertically, a typical Secretariat Department has two hierarchical formations; that of the officers and, what is described as the office.

#### **Officers**

Conventionally, the officers' hierarchy has had three levels. Under this, a typical administrative department is headed by a secretary who will have a complement of deputy secretaries and under assistant secretaries. But with growth in the functions of various secretariat departments, the number of levels in the officers' hierarchy has been on the increase. As a result, between the secretary and the deputy secretary, in some states, positions of additional /or joint secretaries have also been created.

#### **Office**

A unique feature of the Secretariat System in India has been the distinction between its two component parts - "the transitory cadre of a few superior officers" and "the permanent office". The officers in each department, because they hold tenure posts, come and go. It is the office, which is manned by permanent functionaries, which provides the much needed element of continuity to the secretariat department. Unlike officers, the office constitutes the permanent element in the secretariat system. The office component is comprised of superintendents (or section officers), assistants, upper and lower division clerks, steno-typists and typists. Office performs the spadework on the basis of which the officers consider cases and make decisions. Office supplies officers with materials, which constitute the basis for decision-making.

The structure of a typical department comprises:

Department	–	Secretary
Wing	–	Additional Joint Secretary
Division	–	Deputy Secretary/Director
Branch	–	Under Secretary
Section	–	Section Officer

The section is the lowest organisational unit and it is under the charge of a section officer. Other functionaries in a section are assistants, upper and lower division clerks, steno-typists, typists, etc. A section is referred to as the office. Two sections constitute the branch, which is under the charge of an under-secretary.

Two branches ordinarily form a division, which is headed by a deputy secretary. When the volume of work of a department is more than a secretary can manage, one or more wings are established with a joint secretary in charge of each wing. At the top of the organisational hierarchy is the secretary who is in charge of the department.

### **PATTERN OF DEPARTMENTALISATION IN STATE SECRETARIAT**

Each secretary is normally in charge of more than one department. The number of secretariat departments would therefore be larger than the number of secretaries. The number of secretariat departments, quite naturally, varies from state to state. Their number broadly ranges between 10 and 40 in different states. The number of departments in a particular state is not necessarily related to its size in terms of population. For instance, a small state like Mizoram had as many as secretariat departments in 1987, the corresponding figure for Andhra Pradesh (which is a much larger state), was 19 in 1982. Following is a typical example of the pattern of departmentalisation at the Secretariat Level:

General Administration Department

- Home Department
- Revenue Department
- Food and Agriculture Department
- Finance and Planning Department (Planning Wing)
- Finance and Planning Department (Finance Wing)
- Law Department
- Irrigation and Power Department
- Medical and Health Department
- Education Department

- Industries Department
- Legislature Department
- Panchayati Raj Department
- Command Area Development Department
- Transport, Roads and Buildings Department
- Housing and Municipal Administration and Urban Development Department
- Labour, Employment and Technical Education Department
- Social Welfare Department
- Rural Development Department
- Forest Department
- Environment Department
- Women and Child Welfare Department

Larger number of departments, in particular states, would result from restricting the scope of the functions and charges of those which may be created. Partly, such - increase in the number of departments may arise from the peculiar problems a particular state may face. There is a lot of criticism about the work allocation existing in the secretariat departments, which is: First, work allocation is lop-sided in that some departments are burdened with more work than others. Second, allocation is far from rational even in terms of homogeneity of work. Not only are the subjects handled by a particular department too numerous and therefore unmanageable but these are also too heterogeneous, causing problems of coordination. These are further aggravated when charges of particular departments are incomplete in scope.

#### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN SECRETARIAT-DEPARTMENT AND EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT: DISCRETE PROCESSES OR A CONTINUUM**

The Secretariat Department must be distinguished from the executive department. The Secretariat has the function of aiding, assisting and advising the political executive in arriving at policy choices. The heads of executive departments – who are in the main known as director (although other nomenclatures are also used to refer to them) - have the responsibility of implementing policies formulated by the political executive. Therefore, the secretaries assist in policy formulation whereas the directors' role lies in executing policy. Long ago, the Simon Commission had observed, that executive department is an administrative unit separate from the Secretariat, which reaches its apex, usually, in a single officer like the Inspector General of Police, or the Chief Conservator of Forests, outside the

Secretariat altogether. Such a head of a department will usually be concerned principally with a single secretary to Government and a single...minister of his orders and the funds which he has to spend.

Each secretariat department is in charge of a number of executive departments. This number varies over a wide range with some departments taking charge of a much larger number of executive heads than others. There is an average of 6 to 7 executive departments in relation to one secretariat department. However, it must be carefully noted that not all secretariat departments have executive departments attached to the. Some of the secretariat departments are engaged in advisory and controlling functions and therefore do not have executive departments reporting to them. Examples are Departments of Law, Finance, etc.

The Secretariat and executive departments organisationally express the policy formulation and policy execution processes involved in the functioning of the government; the two may be looked upon as extensions of the personality of the Council of Ministers. The former is a policy-making organ, the latter a policy executing organ.

The secretariat department is normally headed by a generalist civil servant (drawn from the IAS), the executive department by a specialist. The specialist (the head of the executive department) functions under the supervision of the generalist (the secretary or the head of the secretariat department). This can be illustrated with some examples, Director of Agriculture, who is a specialist, in that he is trained in and holds a formal degree in agricultural sciences, would function under the supervision of the Secretary, Agriculture (a generalist, an IAS). The latter represents agriculture department at the secretariat level, whereas the Director of Agriculture represents agriculture department at the executive level. The director is the executive head of the agriculture department - the Directorate of Agriculture. Likewise, the home department in the Secretariat has the Director-general of Police as its executive head of the department. . Similar correlation obtains between education secretary and education director, industries secretary and industries director, social welfare secretary and social welfare director, and so on.

We have emphasised the distinctness of the roles of the Secretariat and the Directorate by saying that, while the former is concerned with policy formulation, the latter is concerned with policy execution (or with administering policy or to put it yet more simply, the administration). The question which may, therefore, be asked is whether policy and administration are discrete processes. The answer is that at a conceptual level, the two are distinct; it is possible to identify and define them as two clearly distinguishable phenomena. But at a practical plane, the two are inextricably interlinked, even tend to become

indistinguishable and, therefore, it is difficult to say where the policy ends and administration begins.

Policy is concerned with political choices and involves questions of broader values, whereas administration is concerned with implementing programmes emanating from particular policy decisions. Administration, therefore, involves such details of execution as framing organisational structures, staffing of organisations, coordinating activities, directing, controlling, and motivating the personnel and so on.

That the two are dichotomous is the traditional view, which owes its origin to Woodrow Wilson's essay of 1887, 'The Study of Administration'. Politics, he said, is the proper activity of Legislature and other policy-making groups (e.g., political parties, cabinet, etc.). Administration is the sphere of administrators who carry out the policies stated in the laws. The context of the dichotomy was the civil service reform movement of the 1880s in the United States, which aimed to eliminate political interference in civil service. It was argued that civil service recruitment should, in the interest of administrative efficiency, be based on considerations of merit and fitness rather than partisan politics. In other words, politics should be kept out of administration. Max Weber further justified separation of policy from administration by arguing that the attributes of politicians are exactly the opposite of those of the civil servants. The essence of politics is to take a stand, to take personal responsibility for the policies decided on, and to admit the transitory nature of the political role. The essence of administration is to execute conscientiously the order of the political authority, even if it appears wrong to the administrator. The administrator is politically neutral. He simply does what he is asked to do and assumes no personal responsibility.

However, the complexities of governmental operations have increasingly required administrators to become involved in policy making or political decisions. As a result of this, it is in practice found to be difficult to draw a clear boundary separating policy and administration, or to say where policy ends and administration begins. This would be clear from the following:

### **Sources of Administrative Expertise**

There are several sources from which the modern day administrators have obtained a kind of expertise, which the politicians need to use when formulating policies as:

- (i) The administrators stay in office longer (they are career civil servants) than the politicians, who come and go with elections, the former have opportunities of giving sustained attention to problems. From this, they gain an invaluable kind of practical knowledge that comes from the experience of handling these very

problems day in and day out. This knowledge is conserved in records and transmitted to new generations of civil servants through training programmes. This monopoly of experience and practical knowledge coupled with continuity in office gives them a decisive edge over politicians in framing policies.

- (ii) (ii) The administrators are in possession of facts, figures, information and intelligence regarding the specific areas in which policies are to be framed. Politicians would need these data and statistics in formulating policies.
- (iii) Administrative expertise also comes pre-eminently from the fact that the governments of today employ a large variety of professionals (doctors, engineers, scientists, economists, etc.). They possess technical knowledge, which forms a vital, input in policy making.
- (iv) The advent of merit system has also helped to build up administrative expertise by attracting better talent in civil service and loosening the grip of politicians on civil service.

### **Administrators' Role in Policy Making**

The increase in civil service expertise, together with growth in the functions of government and growing complexity of administration, has resulted in an increasing dependence of politicians on administrators in the task of policy making. This is reflected in the following:

- i) Policy making exercise is done on the basis of facts, figures, information and data, which are supplied by the bureaucracy. In other words, politicians, in order to enhance the credibility of the policies they make, depend on the administrators' data support to their policies.
- ii) Civil servants based on their long administrative experience, tender advice to the lay politicians on the administrative, technical and financial feasibility of the various policy options under consideration.
- iii) Civil servants prepare the draft legislations (bills), which after ministerial approval, are placed before the legislature for its consideration. In other words, administrators initiate the process of public policy formulation, which in its final form assumes the shape of an Act passed by the Legislature.
- iv) Administrators formulate policy through the exercise of administrative discretion. When an administrator is required to choose between alternative courses of action within a policy frame, he is said to exercise discretion. In this sense, administrators are described supplementary lawmakers. Because here, the actual content of policy becomes entirely a matter for bureaucratic determination. Here



administrators actually decide how the power of the State shall be used in specific cases. In modern times, there has come about a tremendous increase in administrative discretion by virtue of an incessant increase in the volume of legislation to be enacted. Legislature is under the circumstances, compelled to confine itself to indicating broad framework of law, leaving details to be filled up by the administrative agencies.

The growing variety and complexity of laws to be enacted has further circumscribed the Legislature's competence. The legislators do not have the technical know-how and training to venture into the details of particular legislations. This further necessitates exercise of administrative discretion. And, at any rate, if the Legislature delves into the details of each law, this would be at the cost of other important duties and functions of the legislators and therefore an undesirable thing to happen. This, coupled with the assurance that it has the necessary means available to hold administration accountable to itself has, in fact, encouraged the Legislature in its attitude of not delving too deeply into the details of the enactments it formulates. And, it is not possible to work out the details of the enactments for another reason too. Ultimately, the policy is to be executed in the field where an administrator must necessarily face a bewildering variety of situations as he sets himself to the task of policy execution. For the law making agency, it is clearly not possible to visualise, at the point of legislation, the different variety of situations that may arise in the field. For this reason, once again, the policy makers must do no more than provide only broad guidelines in the legislations they frame.