
UNIT 7 INTERFACE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND ADMINISTRATION

Structure

- 7.0 Learning Outcome
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Modes of Interaction between Citizens and Administration
- 7.3 The State's Responses towards Participation
- 7.4 Norms Governing the Interaction
- 7.5 Research on Citizen – Administration Relationship
- 7.6 Institutional Devices and Strategies
- 7.7 The Indian Scenario
- 7.8 Conclusion
- 7.9 Key Concepts
- 7.10 References and Further Reading
- 7.11 Activities

7.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Appreciate the importance of interface between the administrators and the citizens in a democracy
- Identify the different modes of interaction between the citizens and administration
- Examine the different kinds of responses of the State towards participation
- Understand the norms governing the interaction
- Get acquainted with the researches on citizen-administration relationship
- Explain the institutional strategies and devices for building citizen-administration interface; and
- Discuss the Indian scenario on citizen-administration interface

7.1 INTRODUCTION

No system of governance can survive for a long time without the support of the citizens. It is evident from the history of the nations that longevity of their governments largely depended on the cooperation and support rendered to them by their citizens. Wherever this support was missing, the nations found themselves in deep trouble that made their future uncertain. The administration-citizen relations are significant because the support and consent of the governed is a prerequisite for the sustenance of a representative government like the one in India. The traditional theories of relationship between the State and society or government and the citizens, in different political systems, be it *laissez-faire* or democracy or military dictatorship are now inadequate to cope with the new and difficult dimensions of administration that are gradually emerging. Position of the public or citizens from being mere recipients of the administrative help has now shifted to their being the prime movers in the affairs of governance - a change from local 'beneficiary' status to active 'participant status'. This Unit focuses on the various modes of interaction between citizens and administration. It discusses the changing norms of their interaction and institutional strategies and devices that try to build a theoretical conceptual base for the interface. The Unit particularly discusses the Indian scenario in order to understand the different dimensions of the interaction between citizens and administration.

7.2 MODES OF INTERACTION BETWEEN CITIZENS AND ADMINISTRATION

Today, governance is all about efficient and effective provision of goods and services. Public Administration exists for the betterment of the public by providing services such as health, education, economic security, maintenance of law and order, national defence, etc. The public interacts more intimately with public agencies at the cutting edge level. Local government, for instance, affects people's lives in various ways. The encounters may pertain to water supply, electricity, garbage disposal and so on.

There are different ways in which the public interacts with the public administrative agencies in real life situations. These interactions could be in the form of:

- i) **Clients:** This is the most common form of interaction with the administrative agencies. In this form, citizens seek to obtain benefits or services from governmental agencies. For example, a patient visits a government hospital for health check-up or medical treatment.
- ii) **Regulatees:** As a regulatee, the public interacts with many public agencies viz., police, income tax authorities, licensing authorities, etc
- iii) **Litigants:** The harassed citizens turn litigants when they seek redressal of their grievances from the courts, tribunals and Lok Adalats. As litigants, public can hope to get justice for their complaints.
- iv) **Participants:** Democracy entails increased people's participation in governance. This is institutionalised through various means like community policing, guardian committee, beneficiary associations etc. In almost all programmes/projects, the people participate at the levels of planning, implementing and monitoring. People's participation democratises both administration and public, and also brings in new

inputs that help sound project designing, implementation, and facilitation of assets maintenance.

- v) **Protesters and those engaged in struggles and people's movements:** People often interact with government agencies on public policy as protesters, critically opposing the injustice in government policy and action. People's struggles like the one over Narmada Dam or forests in Uttar Pradesh (Now Uttarchanal), symbolise articulation of genuine grievance and demands and not just questioning of grievous faults in public policies faults.

7.3 THE STATE'S RESPONSES TOWARDS PARTICIPATION

State's (government in practice) responses to the varied interactions would be dependent on three crucial factors: (a) The overall politico-administrative culture which may be formally democratic but actually authoritarian or patriarchal (b) The capacity of the people evolved through democratic learning processes to articulate demands and put pressure for just administrative functioning, and (c) The status-fairly independent and impartial of other cognate institutions like the judiciary and the media.

In this connection James Midgley's typology of State's responses towards citizens' participation are worth mentioning. The four ideal typical responses suggested by him are 'anti-participation', 'manipulative', 'incremental' and 'participatory'.

These interactions take place daily and the ordinary citizens form an opinion about public administration out of these happy/unhappy encounters with public officials:

- i) The 'anti-participatory' mode explains that State in the capitalist system is not interested in ameliorating the conditions of the downtrodden. Power is concentrated and not dispersed to facilitate accumulation of wealth. People's participation is, thus, not politically acceptable.
- ii) The 'manipulative mode' seeks to neutralise political opposition by co-opting autonomous movements with the ulterior motive of gaining control over them. There is the rhetoric of participation but not its reality, as the State's motive is to prove to the people that the regime is accommodative merely to give legitimacy to the regime in power.
- iii) The 'incremental mode' has an ambivalent approach to community participation. There is no lack of government support to participation, but the policy is unclear and the general tendency is to muddle through. In theory, participation is not rejected but what actually takes place is bureaucratically managed development in the name of efficiency.
- iv) The 'participatory mode' is characterised by State's own initiative to create institutions of community participation to ensure effective involvement of the people in grass roots development. But, this mode works on the assumptions that there is a presence of a positive political will and the bureaucracy is also positively inclined towards development and participation (C.f Bhattacharya, 2002).
- v) Yet another response not included in Midgley's list, but which is important in the Third World context, is the 'repressive mode'. Very often, what is noticed is that the State reacts negatively and ruthlessly to people's movements and struggles. Instances are not rare when the people's genuine demands for basic needs like

water, forest, cheap food have been construed as anti-state and the regime in power has sought to unleash brutal force to suppress these demands.

In India where because of social and economic causes ‘women’ and the ‘poor’ are often discriminated against, the concept of citizen having ‘rights’ and enjoying political equality does not in reality prevail. We will discuss aspect in our next Units 8,9 and 10.

7.4 NORMS GOVERNING THE INTERACTION

In the field of development administration, the client is differentiated on the basis of target groups. There are projects that are meant for tribals, children and women, scheduled castes and other socially backward classes. Clientele differentiation increases the complexities of interaction between Public Administration and the public. In the developing countries, it is the poor and the underprivileged that constitute the majority of the population. National projects are implemented by the state concerned and mainly through the district administration. These implementers/bureaucracies treat the target groups as ‘beneficiaries’. Such a top-down delivery system has, in most cases failed to ameliorate the living conditions of the target groups, mainly because of hijacking of benefits and resources by the village elite.

The Centrally planned projects have often disregarded and misinterpreted the local needs and conditions. Interaction between people and government, especially in dealing with poverty, has generally been looked at from the government’s point of view, making the poor more and more dependent on the government for help. Field researchers are now forcefully arguing that developing people’s capacity to improve their lot is what is needed rather than repeated governmental efforts to design newer and newer projects.

As Frances Korten (1981) has stated “The very ability of the poor to survive under the most unfavourable circumstances suggests that they are quite skilled in meeting their own basic needs even if only at standards intolerable to a socially conscious society. Too often the government programmes seek to improve their lot, not through interventions intended to strengthen their own capacity for ‘self-help’ action, but through doing for them, what they previously did for themselves – with the government making the decisions and providing the resources. As a consequence, the people’s former self-sufficiency turns into dependence on the government leaving them even more vulnerable than before to the changes in the policies or lapses in the delivery systems”.

Participatory and people-centred development activities are now being advocated and actively undertaken for the real benefits of the people. It would also create good image of Public Administration in the minds of the poor and the underprivileged sections of the society. The relationship between Public Administration and the citizens raises a number of important issues regarding the role of the government machinery and its interactions with the public.

As Katz and Danet (1973) explain in their volume on *Bureaucracy and the Public*, the structure of bureaucratic organisations subsumes a set of guiding norms governing the relationships between the organisation and the clientele. These norms are identified as (a) specificity, (b) universalism, and (c) affective neutrality. *Specificity* refers to the strictly limited zone of interaction between administration and the clients as formally defined by the organisation. In a public transport, the passenger pays the fare and the conductor assures him a travel up to a definite distance. *Universalism* stands for equal treatment of defined group as organisationally prescribed. For instance, every bus passenger will have to pay the same fare for the same distance and the conductor is duty bound to behave uniformly in each case. *Affective neutrality* means exhibition of unbiased attitude toward

the client, and by implication, non-display of passions or feelings like anger, affection etc.

Besides, a certain set of factors assume importance in any government-citizen interaction. These are: the manner, the procedures, and the resources exchanged. *Manner* refers to the behavioural transaction in an interactional situation. How does the government officer talk to or receive a member of the public, say in a post office? *Procedures* refer to the administrative processes involved in an interaction. How many forms one has to fill up? How long does one have to stand in a queue before a bank counter, for instance? The *resources* exchanged denote the outcome of interaction. Could a person ultimately withdraw money from his savings bank account? Did a person get the building permission from the municipality? The structural norms and the three dimensions of interactions are useful conceptualisations for empirical examination of bureaucracy-client relationships in specific situations (Bhattacharya, 1987).

7.5 RESEARCH ON CITIZEN-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONSHIP

“The relational aspect of bureaucracy- its interaction with the public and its subservience to the public interest-is not properly articulated in Weber’s theoretical construct. As James D. Thompson (1962) has put it “Classic bureaucratic theory is preoccupied with behavioural relations ordered by a single unified authority structure from which client is excluded...” The bureaucratic organisation is a fixed monolith, which approximates a steady and depersonalised machine. An automaton works uniformly and with unfaltering regularity. The underlying assumption seems to be that the client for whom the machine exists has to be adjustable, as the machine itself is inflexible. The inevitable result that follows is what Robert Merton has called the ‘unintended consequences of the bureaucratic structure’. Even if the client would not be served due to procedural rigidity, the organisation would not shed its procrustean character. The Weberian theory is an inward – looking structural construct par excellence. Its face is toward the organisation and not the client (Cf Bhattacharya, 1987, *op.cit*).

There have been some important studies on the relationship between the bureaucracy and the client. Of these, special mention could be made of Peter Blau’s study (1973) of a public welfare agency, William Foote Whyte’s study of human relations in the restaurant industry, and the research on new Israeli immigrants by Elihu Katz and S. N. Eisenstadt concentrating on the orientation of case workers serving clients in a public welfare agency. Blau points out the rigidities that are produced by administrative procedures, the ‘rigidities shock’ which young case workers experience on their joining the organisation, the kind of peer group support that develops in the organisation, and how all these influence the relationship between the case workers and the clients.

Whyte’s study is much more illuminating as it delves deep into the delicate human relation problems in a restaurant considered as a combination of production and service unit which draws attention to a “high degree of social adaptability” of the worker and the need for client orientation of the whole organisation. The supervision in such a situation has to shed the *laissez-faire* attitude and look upon a restaurant or factory as an organisation of human relations, and as a system of inter-personal communication in order to improve client-organisation relationship.

Eisenstadt’s earlier writings on the conditions of development of bureaucratic organisations and the environment indicate that, “The (se) structural characteristics do not, however, develop in a social vacuum but are closely related to the functions and activities of the bureaucratic organisation in its environment. The extent to which they

can develop and persist in any bureaucratic organisation is sought to be explained more by referring to the environmental conditions.

In this connection, Eisenstadt uses the concept of 'debureaucratisation' to connote changes in bureaucratic organisation caused by close interactions between the organisation and the clients. "In debureaucratisation, the specific characteristics of the bureaucracy in terms both of its authority and its specific rules and goals are minimised, even up to the point where its very functions and activities are taken over by other groups or organisations"

Katz and Eisenstadt (1960) explored the changes in the bureaucratic organisation in response to the needs of the clients. As the new immigrants from the non-Western countries were pouring into Israel, the Israeli organisations had to adapt themselves to cope with the large influx of clients. On a theoretical plane, the notion of "Role impingement is a characterisation of bureaucratisation and debureaucratisation". This needs some elaboration. It has been suggested that the factors affecting bureaucratisation are many. For instance, when a public bureaucracy has a monopoly of certain goods and services, the client has little chance of making an effective protest and "Under such circumstances, bureaucrats may permit themselves an attitude of detachment and ritualistic formalism vis-à-vis their clients". Using the 'role' concept, Katz and Eisenstadt observe that as a special case of the notion of dependence of clients, and officials in an interaction situation might be looked at as a special case of the impingement for other role relationships on a given bureaucratic relationship". Debureaucratisation can be conceived "In terms of impingement of non-bureaucratic role relations... or, in its totalitarian form, as the imposition of bureaucratic relationship on relations outside the scope of bureaucracy".

The upshot of what Katz and Eisenstadt have said is that the theory of bureaucracy, *i.e.* Max Weber's bureaucracy does not so much explain the relationship between organisation and environment as it deals with the formal characteristics of the organisations. To quote Katz and Eisenstadt, "In effect, overbureaucratisation and debureaucratisation represent a disturbance in the relationship between an organisation and its environment that is not envisioned by classical model of bureaucracy. This model envisages the roles of both bureaucrat and client as segregated to some extent from their role and not completely independent of other roles; some outside roles may be clearly considered. If an old man, obviously unable to wait for his turn in a long queue, is given special attention by a clerk, this is not a case of an irrelevant role relationship being allowed incorrectly to impinge on the bureaucrat-client relationship."

Janowitz and others (1958) refer to the term 'balance' in public administration, which has significance for citizen-administration relations. Public administration will be in a state of imbalance if it becomes too overbearing or subservient. As it has been observed, "A bureaucracy is in imbalance when it fails to operate on the basis of democratic consent. Bureaucratic imbalance may be either despotic or subservient. 'Despotic' implies that the bureaucracy is too much the master; while subservient implies that it is too much the servant. The despotic bureaucracy disregards public preference and demands. It is likely to resort to coercion and manipulation to maintain its power. The subservient bureaucracy finds itself so concerned with the demands of special interest groups that it compromises its essential organisational goals and essentially sacrifices authority."

Bureaucratic dominance has been a constant theme in the literature on administration in the developing countries due to the legacy of imperial rule in most countries. Public administration in the ex-colonial countries like India used to have a private character because of its limited scope, insularity, inequity, and methods of operation. Maintenance of law and order and revenue raising were the prime considerations of administration.

The administrative operations were undertaken autonomously in the absence of public participation and accountability. The incidence of administration was iniquitous as the benefits accrued mostly to the influential and the powerful elite. In terms of methods of operation, administration was essentially coercive, formal and apparently procedure-oriented.

Citizen-administration relations were conditioned by the basic nature and operational peculiarities of administration during colonial rule. After winning freedom, the imbalance of a bureaucratic State was sought to be corrected by (a) Expanding the scope of government functions (b) Creating institutional infrastructure through Panchayati Raj to promote popular participation, (c) Encouraging political interventions in administration to modify the rigour of formalism, and (d) Instituting organisational and procedural changes in the interest of speed and public understanding of administrative action.

Research findings on citizen-administration relations in India reveal interesting trends. Based on extensive field survey, the findings of the study by Eldersveld, Jagannadham and Barnabas (1968) indicate: "The attitude of Indian citizens towards their government and its administrative officials is particularly a complex and paradoxical mosaic of support and hostility, of consensus and critique. From 75 per cent to 90 per cent view governmental jobs as prestigious, 90 per cent feel that health and community development programmes are worthwhile, and less than 50 per cent (20 per cent rural) are critical of the job performance of Central government officials. On the other hand, the majority feel that 50 per cent or more of the officials are corrupt, large proportions (60 per cent urban, 32 per cent rural) say their dealings with officials are unsatisfactory, and majority sense that their probabilities of gaining access to officials and being successful in processing their complaints with them are low. Over 50 per cent feel officials in certain agencies are not fair and the citizen can do little by himself, and from 60 per cent to 75 per cent feel that political pull is important in getting administrative action."

Thus, the statistics do not project a very satisfactory picture. Even though, the study mentioned above was undertaken long ago, the situation at the ground level still endorses the findings of the study. Studies on 'Police Administration' by David H. Bayley (1969), 'Rural Development' by Rakesh Hooja (1978) and 'Urban Government' by V. Jagannadham (1978), reveal citizens' perceptions about public administration in India. Certain common points that emerge out of these field studies are:

- Citizens' ignorance about procedures involved in getting things done.
- Unhelpful attitude of government officials, especially the lower level functionaries.
- Inordinate delay and waiting period.
- Prevalence of favouritism in administration.
- Rampant corruption among officials.
- Dependence on middlemen (brokers) to get things done.
- Urban dwellers being more critical about Public Administration than rural counterparts.
- The rich having easy access to administration. Officials generally avoiding the poor and underplaying their needs and interests.

7.6 INSTITUTIONAL DEVICES AND STRATEGIES

The Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption felt that discretionary powers exercised by different categories of government officials opened up “Scope for harassment, malpractice and corruption” in the exercise of those powers. The Administrative Reforms Commission took note of the general public complaint about all-encompassing corruption in administration and acknowledged the existence of widespread inefficiency and unresponsiveness of administration to public needs.

Institutional devices to remedy the defects of administration are of particular relevance for the developing countries. Public administration has a built-in tendency in these countries to bypass the needs of the people at large. The colonial legacy of limited government by an administrative elite stands in the way of universalisation of the benefits of governance. Decision-making on major issues of public policy remains a proud preserve of the small politico-administrative elite class. The social structure of the developing societies is characterised by numerous divisions along linguistic, ethnic, religious, castes and economic lines. More powerful groups in the society tend to bend the machinery and processes of government to their side and thus monopolise the fruits of administration. This process of capture of public administration by the powerful social groups is aggravated by the existence of endemic poverty and illiteracy.

Both economic incapacity and lack of education reduce the dumb millions into a position of passivity and subservience. Public administration, therefore, tends to become a very private affair as it usually responds to the demands of a small minority of social elite. The political process many a time fails to achieve integration of interests and tends to create instead rigid social divisions. A peril of coalition politics is that once a political party comes to power through the electoral process, Public administration becomes a captive agency in the hands of the party. The opposition parties are treated as enemies and not partners in the process of governance.

The colonial legacy, social diversity, poverty and illiteracy, and the peculiarity of the political process combine together to rob public administration of its publicness in most of the developing countries. There are three more reasons for this unhealthy transformation of public administration: (1) With more and more expansion of government activities, the lower level functionaries engaged in field administration come to enjoy a great deal of discretionary powers. Administrative discretion, when exercised without effective supervision, is sure to breed malpractices and corruption. (2) With the increasing complexity of legislative work, the legislatures have been granting the executive more and more discretionary powers and leaving the details to be filled up by the latter. Delegated legislation has the tendency to magnify executive strength and discretion. (3) The executive in many developing countries has increasingly been assuming the role of dispenser of justice also. Administrative adjudication and the use of Administrative Tribunals have been on the increase in many countries.

Administrative discretion, delegated legislation and administrative adjudication have the effect of increasing the powers of the executive. Institutional strategies are therefore necessary to check executive inflation and guard against corruption and administrative injustice. We will read more on this in Unit 13 of this Course. In the Western democracies, non-legal institutions like the political parties, the press and the public opinion have been traditionally exercising control over administrative action. In addition, the administrative agencies have developed their own internal norms and administrative ethics. Due to economic affluence, these agencies have been able to function quite fairly and efficiently in these countries.

By contrast, the developing countries like ours suffer from paucity of resources in a situation where speedy socio-economic development is imperative. To combat these conditions, strong political will and steady development of political as well as economic infrastructure are needed. There is a requirement today, in most developing countries, for effective checks on the administrative agencies that are proliferating in with the multiplication of 'development' programmes. One response to this situation has been to identify the different types of development activities that could be handed over to voluntary organisations.

Debureaucratising development activities has also been attempted by decentralisation of functions to the local self-governing bodies like municipalities and the panchayat institutions. It has further been strengthened by 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. Attempts are on in our country to debureaucratise much of the developmental activities and bring about people's empowerment.

Decentralisation and popular participation are attempts at decreasing the area of operation of the bureaucratic State apparatus. These are measures for *less bureaucracy*. Alongside these, other institutional devices have been recommended and instituted for *better bureaucracy*. Administrative reform has been a continuous concern of most developing countries in their search for efficient, effective and transparent administration. To deal with administrative corruption and redress citizens' grievances, procedural changes and institutional innovations have been made in many countries. But, two traditional institutional devices deserve special mention in this connection: the Ombudsman system, and the system of Administrative Courts:

The Ombudsman

Ombudsman is a Scandinavian institution. The office of Ombudsman has been in existence in Sweden since 1809 and in Finland since 1919. Denmark adopted the system in 1955. Norway and New Zealand introduced it in 1962, and the United Kingdom appointed the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the lines of Ombudsman in 1967. Several countries in the world have adopted the Ombudsman-like institution to protect the democratic government from the tyranny of officialdom.

Ombudsman, a Swedish word, stands for "An officer appointed by the legislature to handle complaints against administrative and judicial action." Although appointed by the legislature, the office of Ombudsman is a Constitutional post and the incumbent is politically independent of the legislature. Traditionally, the appointment is based on the unanimity principle with all political parties supporting the proposal. As an impartial investigator, the Ombudsman makes investigations, gets at the facts objectively and reports back to the legislature. The complainant has to simply write to the Ombudsman appealing against an administrative decision. The Ombudsman can of course also take the initiative and investigate on his own. It has the power to inspect the courts and the administrative agencies and can even take up cases on the basis of press reports.

The Ombudsman system has gained in popularity primarily because of the simple, speedy and cost-efficient method of handling appeals against administrative decisions. Its strength lies in the wide publicity that is given to its working in the press and other forums. The prestige that traditionally goes with the office and the objectivity and competence of the Ombudsman has contributed to the legitimisation of the institution and its world-wide acceptance.

As bureaucratic power tends to increase with more and more expansion of government activities, the search for countervailing mechanisms has been widespread across the nations. It is against this backdrop that Ombudsman should be regarded as an important

new addition to the armoury of democratic government. Like the legislative auditor, the Ombudsman enhances the control and prestige of legislatures in a world in which executive powers are consistently growing.

Parliamentary Commissioner

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in the United Kingdom investigates cases of alleged maladministration referred to him by members of Parliament. The Commissioner defines the domain of maladministration. The Commissioner is debarred from inquiring into the merits of discretionary administrative decisions that are taken legally in accordance with appropriate administrative procedure. He has free access to any information so long as it is not certified to be unavailable in the public interest. The local authorities, hospital boards, nationalised industries, the police, personnel questions in the civil service and the armed forces are also excluded from the purview of the Commissioner. In a sense, his powers are restricted. The Swedish system has much more powers (Bhattacharya, 1987, *op.cit*).

The Administrative Courts

The French system of Administrative Courts to deal with disputes between the administration and the individual citizens is a unique institution that has spread to many European and African countries like Greece, Belgium, Turkey etc. In France, the Administrative Courts are separate from the hierarchy of ordinary courts. A distinction is made between acts for which a government servant is personally liable and suitable in the ordinary courts (*Faute-de-Personale*) and those, which are the result of administrative faults for which service as an entity, is responsible (*Faute-de-service*). The administrative faults are referred to appropriate Administrative Courts.

The courts of first instance are called Administrative Tribunals, and at the head of the system of Administrative Courts is the Council of State (*Conseil d'Etat*). The Council is the government's advisory body on legislation; it is also the supreme Administrative Court. As the Supreme Court of appeal in all administrative matters, the Council exercises general supervision over administration and possesses ultimate authority over the discipline of civil servants.

7.7 THE INDIAN SCENARIO

The need for institutional innovation to deal with corruption and citizens' grievances has always been felt in India. Various committees and commissions to bring about administrative changes and create new controlling agencies have made many worthwhile suggestions from time to time. The Law Commission in its 14th Report drew attention to the wide field of administrative discretion in India where administrative authority may act outside the strict limits of law and propriety without the affected citizens being in a position to get effective redressal. The Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption thought that it was necessary to devise adequate methods of control over exercise of discretion by different categories of government servants.

As the Committee observed, "In the more advanced countries various methods of such control have been devised. We recommend that this should be studied and a system of control should be devised keeping in mind the vastness of our country and the basic principles which are enshrined in our Constitution and jurisprudence." As a sequel to the Santhanam Committee Report, Vigilance Commissions were set up at the Centre in 1964, and also in the various states later. Vigilance cells have been created in several government departments and public sector undertakings.

The Commission receives complaints directly from aggrieved persons. Other sources of information about corruption and malpractices are the press reports, audit reports, allegations made by members of Parliament etc. On receiving complaints, the Commission may ask the:

- i) Ministry/department concerned to inquire into it
- ii) Central Bureau of Investigation to make an inquiry
- iii) CBI Director to register a case and do the investigation

The nature of prosecution depends on the approval of the appropriate sanctioning authority. The jurisdiction of the Commission is presently limited to complaints against gazetted officers of equivalent status. The Administrative Reforms Commission set up in 1966 took up on priority basis the matter of redressal of citizens' grievances. The Commission felt that the existing institutions to deal with this problem were inadequate and found the Ombudsman to be a *sine qua non* of democratic functioning; and as an essential prerequisite of the progress and prosperity on which the fulfilment of our democracy depends.

The Commission recommended a two-tier machinery of Lokpal and Lokayukta for redressal of citizens' grievances. Lokpal would deal with complaints against ministers and secretaries to the government at the Central as well as state levels. The Lokayukta, one at the Centre and one in each state, would attend to complaints against the rest of the bureaucracy. The Lokpal would be appointed by the President after consultation with the Chief Justice of India, the chairperson of the Rajya Sabha and the speaker of the Lok Sabha. The legislations for the institution of Lokpal and Lokayukta were introduced in parliament in 1968 and again in 1971 and 1977. All of them lapsed with the dissolution of respective parliaments. The ill-fated Lokpal Bill has so far not been able to pass through the drill of parliamentary procedures. Lokayuktas in the states have also not been able to live upto the objectives for which they came into being. The Seventh All India Conference of Lokayuktas and Up-Lokayuktas held in 2003 suggested that Constitutional status be conferred on this institution to give it more teeth to fight corruption.

The institutional devices available in the world to redress the citizens' grievances are many and varied. In India, several institutional experimentations have been made at the different levels- Centre, state and local, but the problem still remains largely unresolved. Dissatisfaction with governmental operations, especially at the cutting-edge levels where government meets the people directly, namely post office, bank counter, railway booking office etc. is widespread. The issue of corruption in public administration has again and again come up for discussion at different levels and in different forms. Keeping in view the endemic inefficiency in the government and its general insensitivity to the clientele, the usefulness of Ombudsman or any other grievance-handling machinery would be of great help if implemented with sincerity. Already an Ombudsman has been created for the banking sector, and in Kerala, the institution of local government Ombudsman has recently been set up.

Citizens' Charters Initiative

The Citizens' Charter initiative is the latest mechanism to define the relationship between citizens and administration. It demands from the government and other service providers that a certain degree of accountability, transparency, quality and choice of services be made available to the people. The concept of Citizens' Charter was initiated following the Common Cause Initiative in U.K in 1994 during the regime of John Major. The Citizens' Charter is no doubt an innovative mechanism. However, its formulation and

enforcement is no easy task. Precise standards of performance have to be set. There has to be somebody or an authority to monitor performance and watch violations and maintenance. The citizens have to play an active role in giving timely and necessary feedback about services rendered by the government agencies. Within the organisations, the employees must be well-prepared to serve the public as per the agreed-upon standards.

The Prime Minister of India inaugurated a Conference of the Chief Secretaries in November 1996 on “An agenda for an effective and responsive administration” in order to restore the faith of the people in the fairness and efficiency of the administration at different levels. It was admitted that the public agencies had been inward-looking and alienated from the people. The Government of India has since introduced Citizens’ Charters in a number of departments and agencies with public interface like Income Tax departments, the LIC, the Railways; the CPWD etc. The Charter places the citizens at the centre of administration, instead of treating them as a passive recipient of services.

The Citizens’ Charter is usually framed on the basis of the following principles:

- Wide publicity on the standards of performance of public agencies
- Assured quality of services
- Access to information along with courtesy and helpful attitude
- Choices to and consultation with the citizens
- Simplified procedures for receipt of complaints and their quick redressal; and
- Provision of performance scrutiny with citizens’ involvement.

We will read more on Citizens’ Charters in Unit -of Course (013) on Public Systems Management. We also hope that in the coming years, the idea of Citizens’ Charters will spread to other organisations at the state and local levels. It has to be seen that the Charter does not remain a mere ritual and serious as well as sincere efforts are made to involve the citizens in government operations. Concrete actions need to be taken based on citizens’ perceptions about government performance. Right to Information Act is another measure that would ensure better citizens’ access to governmental practices and programmes, and facilitate the coverage and utility of Citizens’ Charters.

Greater concern for accountability to the public has led to innovative schemes in countries like the Philippines and Malaysia. In 1994, the Philippines Civil Service Commission launched a citizen satisfaction campaign called *Citizen Now, Not Later*. The campaign involved the adoption of standard norms of conduct and courtesy to clients. The Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) has designed the ‘Client’s Charter’, which is a written commitment aiming at the delivery of outputs or services to an agency’s clients. Should an agency fail to comply with the stated quality standards, as per its Charter, the public can use this as a ‘basis for complaints’ against non-compliance. In the same vain, several other ‘initiatives on citizens’-administration interface are taking place worldwide.

Another dimension of citizen-administration relationship that cannot be overlooked is the increased accessibility of citizens to the administration. This has been possible due to the recent accent on ‘e-governance’. The information age paradigm shift has redefined the fundamentals of administration and changed the institutions and mechanisms of delivery of goods and services forever. Knowledge-based society enables the sharing of vast amount of information on a global scale almost instantaneously, which consequently

helps in selecting, absorbing and adopting relevant technology and services. The focus today is on the user's needs. Many developed countries have already taken recourse to e-governance in order to increase the effectiveness of the interface between citizens and public administration and to improve the efficiency of administrative structures and processes (Chowdhry, 2003). Our MPA 2nd Year Course (017) on e-governance will discuss the benefits of e-governance in improving citizens and administration interaction in detail.

7.8 CONCLUSION

The essential ingredients of the citizen-administration relationship are adequate knowledge of administrative norms, practices and structures for both citizens and administration; positive evaluation of the job performance of government officials; and perceptions of administrative system as sensitive and responsive to the public, rather than inflexible and remote. In the present scenario where economy, culture and society are changing, the situations demand a forging of a new equilibrium between the bureaucracy and the citizens. The goal of the bureaucracy must be to create an administration-citizens interface based on participation, information, belief, confidence and action orientedness that tends to meet the expectations of the citizens. Simultaneously, the attitude of citizens, self-help groups, corporations, associations of all kinds, and private institutions must also be supportive of the public authorities when genuine public interest is being served. Various mechanisms such as Citizens' Charters, Ombudsman like institutions, and participatory devices have been introduced to facilitate redressal of citizens' grievances. These need to be revamped to strengthen the interface between citizens and administration in the positive direction. This Unit examined some of these issues.

7.9 KEY CONCEPTS

Debureaucratism

A Strategy for rightsizing and reforming bureaucracy in order to make it more responsive, transparent, effective and accountable. The bureaucracy is expected to simplify administrative routines and procedures as well as reduce costs in order to improve interactions with citizens and non-state actors.

The Right to Information Act

It is a comprehensive Act passed by the Parliament in 2005. It includes provisions for independent appeals, penalties for non-compliance, proactive disclosure, and clarity and simplicity of the information access process. The Act imposes obligations on governance agencies to disclose information, thus reducing the cost of access.

7.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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7.11 ACTIVITIES

1. Try to visit any nearby government office and note down the different types of interactions between administrative officials and the citizens that visit the office.
2. Based on Activity One, make a list of the nature of encounters (satisfactory and unsatisfactory) between the administrative officials and the citizens.