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***Public Policy & Administration in India***

**TOPIC: Significance & Demerits of** **Decentralization:**

**Advantages (merits)**

In modern administrative system different forms of decentralization play active roles in widening participation of people in socio-political and economic activities. Decentralization provide the opportunity to the people in decision making that are often caused by Central Government planning and control of important economic and social activities.

Decentralization helps in reducing complex bureaucratic procedures by increasing government officials' sensitivity to local conditions and needs. Again, decentralization provide ample opportunity to central government ministries to reach larger numbers of local areas with services; allow greater political representation for diverse political, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups in decision-making. Decentralization may lead to more creative, innovative and responsive programs by allowing local experimentation. It can also increase political stability and national unity by allowing citizens to better control public programs at the local level. Following are some the major points of advantages for which it have been advocated by the supporters of decentralization:

1. **Strengthens democratic ideals:** Decentralization is always pro-democratic. It leads to the strengthening the foundation of democracy. Majority of the people actively participate in the functioning of the government. It leads to closer of people-administration contact leading to greater participation in administrative process and thus strengthens democracy at the grassroots level.
2. **Local involvement in decision-making process:** It increases unity and stability by giving groups the ability to participate more directly in development decision making at different section of the society. It makes administration more responsive as the field unit act with the knowledge of local conditions and requirements. Close contact between government officials and local population is possible. This helps in maintaining and running the administrative system more smoothly.
3. **Greater representation:** Decentralization ensure greater representation of political, religious, ethnic and tribal groups in development decision-making that could lead to greater equity in allocation of resources. It can allow better penetration of national policies to areas remote from the national capital. It encourages the expansion and diversification of the organization for effective goal-achievement.
4. **Prompt decision making:** Decentralization facilitates effective control and rapid decisions. It enables to measure the work according to standard easily and quickly.
5. **Resolving local issues:** Decentralization can serve the interest of the people better. It proves fruitful in resolving the local issues. It is because the local officials have the authority to take quick decisions according to the requirement of the situation. It makes administration more responsive as the field unit act with the knowledge of local conditions and requirements. This obviously enhances the capacity of local institutions.
6. **Increases administrative efficiency:** Decentralization increases administrative efficiency by reducing delays, curbing red-tapism and encouraging faster action.
7. **Promote employee’s motivation:** Decentralization helps to increase employee’s morale because it involves delegation. The employees are motivated to work. Moreover, it will lead to better supervision and motivation of the employees. Again, it develops self-respect among the subordinate officials by enabling them to take decisions with greater responsibility.
8. **Reduces burden:** Decentralization reduces the burden on top executives. It enables the top executive to share his burden with others at lower levels, because here authority is delegated. This facilitates the executives to concentrate on vital issues like policy formulation, examining major problems and so forth.
9. **Develop administrative skill:** The decentralisation process questions officials judgement and techniques, when responsibility and challenges to develop solutions are given to them. This questioning method grows confidence, encourages self-reliance, and makes them a good decision-maker resulting in the development of the organisation.
10. **Personal adequacy:** According to J.C. Charlesworth, “Decentralization has a more important justification than mere administrative efficiency. It bears upon the development of a sense of personal adequacy in the individual citizen; it has spiritual connotations”.

**Disadvantages (demerits) of decentralization:** The concept of decentralisation is not a panacea and it does have potential disadvantages. Decentralization may not always be efficient, especially for standardized, routine, network-based services. It suffers from the following disadvantages:

1. **More expensive:** Decentralization is costly because it encourages duplication of functions and equipment. As it is costly, it cannot be adopted by small organizations.
2. **No uniform action:** It becomes very difficult to maintain uniformity in action because routine and methods differ from organization to organization and department to department. Each of the unit starts functioning in their own way.
3. **No specialization:** Specialization suffers in decentralization because everyone becomes jack-of-all-trades but master of none. So specialization is affected.
4. **No equitable distribution of work**: It becomes very difficult to distribute workload equitably among different employees working at lower level. It makes communication among various levels difficult and thereby reduces its effectiveness and authenticity.
5. **Lack of co-ordination**: Decentralization may lead to lack absence of proper coordination and integration among the policies of different field stations. Decentralization can sometimes make coordination of national policies more complex and may allow functions to be captured by local elites. Therefore, excessive decentralization results in anarchy and chaos.
6. **All work cannot be decentralized:** There are certain specified works which cannot be decentralized at all. High amount of centralization is desirable in order to performance these duties. For instance, economic planning and audit and accounting, defence necessitates centralization.
7. **Chaos and anarchy:** Excessive decentralization results in anarchy and chaos. It encourages divisive forces in the organization and thus threatens the organizational integration. It increases administrative abuses like corruption, maladministration, nepotism, and so on. These things can be seen in the working of Panchayati Raj in our country.
8. **Weaken national interest:** It weakens the national perspective in administration by breeding localism and parochialism. It can result in the loss of economies of scale and control over scarce financial resources by the central government.
9. **Problem in distribution of resources:** Administrative responsibilities may be transferred to local levels without adequate financial resources and make equitable distribution or provision of services more difficult Also, distrust between public and private sectors may undermine cooperation at the local level.

We can, therefore conclude that decentralization itself is not always a blessings. It has its merits, as also demerits. But decentralization within limits is thought desirable.

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