

Development Administration: Contribution of F. W. Riggs

Introduction: Fred W. Riggs was a political scientist and pioneer in the field of ecological dimension of development administration. He is best known for his works in Comparative Public Administration, especially his Riggsian model of development administration. He has greatly contributed to the understanding of administrative performance in developing countries in his works *'The Ecology of Administration'*(1960) and *'Administration of Developing Countries; the Theory of Prismatic society'*(1964). While presenting the concept of ecological model, Riggs has taken the help of structural-functional approach. He considers structures as pattern of behaviour as standard feature of social system. Functions represent the interrelationships among various structures. Accordingly, Riggs suggested that behaviour and structures are an integral and interacting part of the entire society, which has been termed as 'ecology' of administration.

The Riggsian Models of Development Administration: Riggs has been primarily concerned in understanding the process of transition and social change in developing societies. He primarily focused on the two sets of theoretical models to explain the administrative system in the comparative context. His major work, 'Agraria and Industria towards a Typology of Comparative Administration (1957)', is worth to be mentioned here. Here we will focus on the traits of both the models separately:

(A) Riggs' First Models of Development:

1. Agraria-Transitia-Industria Model: In the first model Riggs differentiated two types of societies-(a) societies where agricultural institutions dominated and (b) societies where industrial institutions were predominant.

- i. **Agraria Model:** It refers to the society where agriculture dominates the society. Riggs takes China during the time of the imperial China. In agrarian societies primordial preferences like caste given priority. Occupational pattern is fixed and carries on for many generations. Administrative structure and their functions were not specified at all. Riggs has identified certain structural features of agrarian societies. They are:

- (a) dominance of ascriptive, particular and diffuse patterns;
- (b) Local groups are stable and there is very limited spatial mobility;
- (c) The occupational differences are very simple and stable.

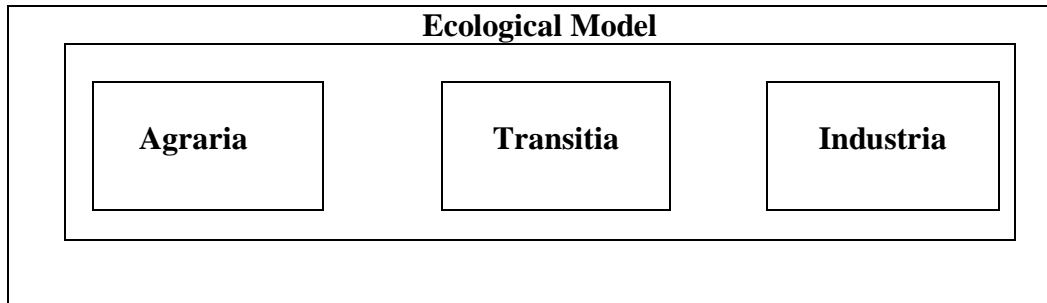
- ii. **Transitia Model:** The 'transitia' society represents a transitional stage of society between the agraria and industria. It bears the features resembling both agrarian and industria society. The transitia society is on the path to become developed society from a traditional agricultural society. For instance, Riggs stated the societies of India, Thailand etc.

- iii. **Industria Model:** This model refers to a developed or industry dominated society. Riggs stated USA as an example of this kind of society. Following are the important features of an industria society:

- (a) Dominance of universalistic and specific achievement norms.
- (b) Occupational system is well developed.
- (c) The degree of social mobility is higher.
- (d) Having an egalitarian class system based on generalized patterns of occupational achievements.

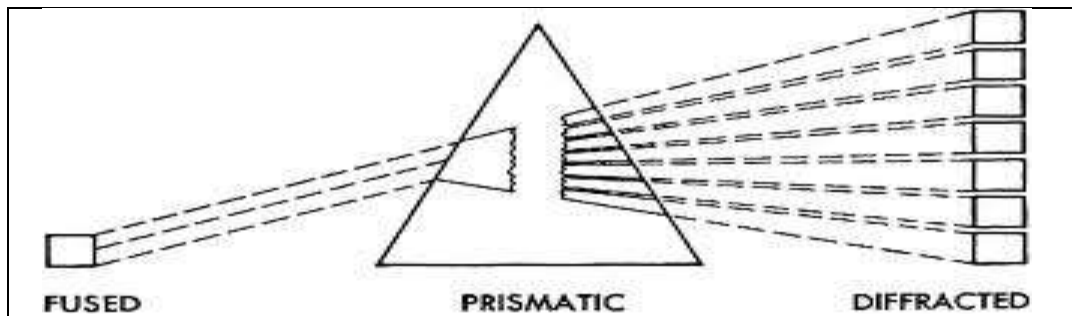
(e) Associations are functionally specific and non-ascriptive in nature.

The above mentioned model may be presented well through the following diagram:



Rigg's Agraria-Transitia-Industria Model

(B) Riggs' Second Models of Development: Riggs on the basis of empirical research came out later on with improvised and specified model of his previous model of development. The second model was developed by him during his stay in Thailand and Philippines in 1958-59. The model is most commonly known as Prismatic Model as he derived the word prismatic from the 'Prism' of Physics. The whole model was manifested in his master work, '*Administration in Developing Countries: The Theory of Prismatic Society*' in 1964.



Fused-Prismatic-Diffracted Model

2. Fused-Prismatic-Diffracted Model: Riggs further elaborated his model of development administration into the three ideal polar types- the fused, diffracted and prismatic. All these models were distinguished by Riggs on the basis of his structural-functional analysis.

(i) Fused-Model: A fused society can be compared to the agrarian model. It is a society with a single structure performs numerous functions. Riggs compared the fused model with the traditional system of Siamese (present Thailand). Following are the important features of a fused society:

- (a) Fused society is heavily dependent on agriculture.
- (b) The functional classification or specialization is absent.
- (c) Economic system is entirely based on the barter system.
- (d) King and officials nominated by the king carry out all administrative, economic and other activities.
- (e) Royal family and special sects dominate.
- (f) Ascriptive values dominate the society.
- (g) Having many administrative structures that are partly diffracted and partly fused.

(ii) Prismatic-Model: The societies which are neither fused nor diffracted are called by Riggs as Prismatic societies. Riggs conceptualized 'prismatic society' as a mid-point form of transitional society between the two ideal types, combining the features of both-fused and diffracted. Riggs articulated this prismatic model based on the metaphor of prism – as the fused white sunlight (which represents the fusion of several colours) passes through a prism, it becomes diffracted into several separate colours. Here the fused light signifies the fused structures of traditional society (single structure performing all necessary functions); the diffracted colours represent the specialized or differentiated structures of modern society (separate structures or institutions for major functions); and the situation within the prism (which is a transitional phase between the fused and diffracted stages) reflects the condition in developing nations, which Riggs began to define as prismatic societies. The model so called prismatic is characterized by the following:

- (a) **Heterogeneity:** Simultaneous existence of different kinds of system and viewpoints. For example, rural-urban, Indian Gurukuls-Western education, homoeopathic-allopathic etc. Political and administrative officers enjoy enormous influence. Privileges for select groups may create problem in administration.
- (b) **Formalism:** Excessive adherence to prescribed forms. The extent to which discrepancy exists between the prescriptive and the descriptive, between the formal and effective power and also between impressions and actual practices. Rules and regulations are prescribed but wide deviations are observed. Lack of pressure on govt. for programme objective. Weakness of social powers to influence bureaucratic performance. Constitutional principles which means that there is a gap between stated principles and actual implementation.
- (c) **Overlapping:** The extent to which what is described as administrative behaviour is actually determined by non-administrative criteria. This means that the differentiated structures coexist with undifferentiated structures of fused type. Modern social structures are created but traditional social structure continues to dominate. For example, parliamentary Govt. offices exist but behaviour is still largely governed by family, religion, caste etc.

Sub-System of the Prismatic Model: The Sala Model: The concepts like heterogeneity, formalism and overlapping are then applied to the sub-systems of the 'prismatic society' by Riggs. For each sub-system a useful set of concepts is presented, some of them being new inventions phrased as neologies, for example 'polycommunalism' and 'clects' (social), 'prices indeterminacy' and 'bazar-canteen' model (economic), and 'authority-control' differential (political). The administrative sub-system is extensively elaborated and explained as the 'sala' model, with its noble mission, its limited effectiveness, its low morale and endemic corruption.

According to Riggs the prismatic society has its appropriate administrative system and he has borrowed the Spanish word 'sala', which has variety of meaning like a government office, religious conference, a room etc, The word 'sala' is used in the East Asian countries more or less with the same meaning. Riggs combines both the pure (fused) chamber and the (refracted) office traits while using sala. In the sala model, both administrative rationality and non-administrative considerations are recognised. Riggs stated that the prismatic sala model enable us to cope with many problems of transitional societies that slips through the net of established social sciences.

(iii) Diffracted-Model: Diffracted societies are different from fused societies. In this model there are several differentiated structures which perform with a high level of coordination among differentiated structures. Following are the characteristics of diffracted societies-

- (a) It is the polar opposite of the fused society. There is structural differentiation and functional specialization.
- (b) Attainment of values in society.
- (c) Economic system is based on market mechanism and the society works as a market society. Riggs calls such diffracted societies as marketwise societies.
- (d) Responsive government.
- (e) General consensus among all the people on all basic aspects of social life.

Thus, it becomes obvious from the analysis of different models of Riggs that he strived hard to maintain that an administrative system operate in the context of its socio-cultural, economic and political environment. According to him the process of interaction administration and environment is a continuous one and both influence each other.

Subsequent modification by Riggs: Riggs has changed his original view regarding the prismatic society. In his later work entitled, '*Prismatic Society Revisited*' (1975), he reconsidered his earlier conceptualization as a mistake 'one-dimensional approach' and provided a new definition of prismatic society based on a 'two-dimensional approach'. The original dimension of societies were classified by Riggs into three types-fused, prismatic and diffracted.

Criticism: Riggs' model of development administration has been criticized by Robert Tillman, Richard Chapman and Michel Monroe. His concept of development administration has been criticised mainly on the following grounds:

1. Some critics found Riggs too gloomy. Others attacked the theoretical foundations of his theories, which were based on the tenets of structural-functionalism that was seriously attacked by critical social scientists during the 1970s and 1980s.
2. Riggs Fused-Prismatic-Diffracted Model is highly technical in description. Critics pointed out that mere usage of scientific words does not make administration a science. Prismatic and sala models are equilibrium model and do not lead to social change. Diffracted society is also not desirable because it is static and in equilibrium.
3. In the transitional prismatic societies, the bureaucracies are neither diffuse nor narrowly specific, but are intermediate as to the degree of functional specialization. They do not blend well with the other institutions within the political system and thus tend to fuel the forces of malintegration. Prismatic societies thus suffer from a serious lack of balance between the rates of political and bureaucratic growth.
4. The sala model (administration in prismatic societies) referred by Riggs as basically wasteful and prodigal exercise. It is associated with institutionalized corruption, nepotism in recruitment and inefficiency in the application of rules.
5. It has been alleged that Riggsian model of development administration suffers from over-generalization, as the so-called 'developing countries' are not a homogenous society.

Despite all these criticism, Riggs stated that there is no denying that he set the table and standard for Comparative Public Administration and got to the root of the failure of Americanized and Europeanized Public Administration practices failing in developing countries through his important paradigm called 'the ecological approach to Public Administration'. Fred W. Riggs' '*The Ecology of Public Administration*' (1961) and *Administration in Developing Countries* (1964), Riggs' position and reputation in the field of comparative public administration has been peerless. In fact, Riggs presented the concept of 'prismatic society' to explain the unique conditions and the dynamics of politics and administration in developing countries.
