

RNI Title Code: TELENG/2017/74418

ISSN 2581-6322

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# SPWI JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

(A Multi Disciplinary Peer-Review Bi-Quarterly Research Journal)

Volume 2 Issue 1, January-March 2019

*Editor*  
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**An ISO 9001-2015 Certified Journal**

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# POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION: A THEORETICAL PERCEPTION



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**Abstract:** *Political Decentralization implies the setting or establishment or formation of new levels of government like the autonomous states in Indian Union example formation of Telangana state in 2014 or provinces in Canada or creation of autonomous local governments in the Federal States like the United States of America, or the Unitary States like Britain or Japan. The establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions or Municipal corporations in India, city governments in the United States of America, Country Governments in Britain and Prefectural Governments in Japan are a good example for political Decentralization.*

*Key Words: Decentralization, Development*

## Introduction

Administration decentralization may be territorial and vertical, or horizontal and functional. The former implies the superior authority setting up area administrations and vesting them with some sort of independent powers and functions. Creation of Districts, Divisions, Talukas, Mandals, and Circle are a good example. These are vested with decision making powers within specified limits and function in an independent manner. Territorial decentralization thus involves the problem relationship between the headquarters and numerous field agencies. Functional decentralization signifies the central authority ceding certain areas of decision making to technical or professional bodies or experts. Universities, Bar association, All Indian Medical Council and University Grants Commission are a good example for such decentralization.

### Approaches to Decentralization

James W. Fester classified the different approaches to the concept of decentralization into four categories. They are 1. Doctoral Approach. 2. Political Approach. 3. Administrative Approach. 4. Dual-Role Approach.

1. **Doctoral Approach:** The Doctoral Approach conceives decentralization as an end in itself and not as a means to the realization of the goal. It views decentralization in terms of idealization that is, a theory which holds that things exist only as ideas in the mind. The concept of Decentralization: A Theoretical Perception.
2. **Political Approach:** The Political Approach says that the creation of decentralized units with a set of operational autonomy is governed by a political factor. For example, the creation of Panchayati Raj as a rural local self-governing body in our country is politically determined.
3. **Administrative Approach:** The Administrative Approach says that the establishment of autonomous decentralized units in the fields is determined by the factor of administrative efficiency, that is, better decision making faster problem-solving. For example, the creation of regions, divisions, districts, sub-divisions, talukas, mandals, and villages.
4. **Dual-Role Approach:** The dual role approach conceives decentralization as a method of resolving conflicts in field administration between tradition and change. The usage of status –quo oriented colonial field administration in our country.

### Advantages of Decentralization

Decentralization has many advantages. They are:

1. It removes the danger of “apoplexy at the top and anemia at the extremities.” The dispersal of authority, functions, and responsibility, on the one hand, brings relief to the overburdened central authority and strengthens field agencies and grass root units.
2. The people immediately affected get an opportunity for adaptation and adjustment in the administrative programs and operations which are brought closer to them.
3. Dispersal of authority encourages faster action, reduces delays and shortens the red tape. The overall efficiency of administration thus, increases.
4. It gives an opportunity to develop resourcefulness and self respect among subordinate administrators, who thus have to fend for themselves, to take their own decisions, and should their own responsibilities.
5. Decentralization facilitates experiments by various units by not committing the entire organization to a particular course of action. It also permits healthy competition among units.

6. In the words of Charles worth, “Decentralization has a more important justification than more administrative efficiency. It bears directly upon the development of a sense of personal adequacy in the individual citizen; it has spiritual connotations.”

### **Disadvantages of Decentralization**

Decentralization, on the other hand, is not free from following dangers.

1. Decentralization complicates coordination and integration o the activities of various units due to a decrease in the degree of central control over the total organization.
2. Decentralization makes communication among various levels difficult and thereby reduces its effectiveness and authenticity.
3. Decentralization makes communication administration expensive due to duplication of work and lack of centralized housekeeping services.
4. Decentralization is not suitable for dealing with emergencies and unanticipated matters.
5. Decentralization weakens the national perspective in administration by breeding localism and parochialism.
6. Decentralization increases administrative abuses like corruption, maladministration, nepotism, and so on.

Decentralization, therefore, can be brought about only within limits. There have to be certain safeguards provided for in the administrative system. “Before divesting himself of functions, the center-head must be sure of several things:

1. Local officers must report to no more than one central agency.
2. Jurisdictional lines must be meticulously drawn.
3. Procedures in the several field establishments must come up to a common standard, although they need not be uniform.
4. The local agency must have a sufficiently flexible physical and psychological structure to permit it to adjust to emergent local conditions.
5. The field units must not make decisions affecting overall policy, although it should be encouraged to make their own decisions to a point approaching that situation.
6. A system of ready appeals must be present.
7. Suggestions from the field to the center must be freely channeled.
8. Adequate reporting and inspection methods must provide the center-head with full and current knowledge of peripheral operations” has satisfied himself

that these eight safeguards have been installed, he is free to tell his field supervisors that within those limits they are urged to run their organization their own way.

### **Decentralization for Development**

The centralization versus decentralization debate has been more insistent in the development strategy of Third World counties. Since the early fifties, the general trend was towards centralized planning and development efforts to achieve socio-economic goals. However, by the end of the 1960's there been widespread disillusionment with centralized models of growth in developing countries. During the seventies, many governments began experimenting not only with new approaches to economic and social development but also with new political and administrative arrangements for implementing developmental programs and projects. Finally, it evolved from the growing realization among policy analyses during the early 1980s that as societies become more complex and government activities expand, it would be increasingly difficult to plan and administer all development activities effectively and efficiently from the center. Due to liberalized policies, many changes have been taken place in the administrative system in and after the nineties.

To sum it up centralization and decentralization are not axiomatic principles of administration which can be universally applied to all types of administration; they have contextual relevance. According to James W. Fesler, there are four factors which are relevant in opting for a centralized system. These are responsibility, administration, functions and external factors.

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