

Central Secretariat of the Union Government

Introduction:

The Central Secretariat stands for the complex of departments or ministries whose administrative heads are designated as Secretaries and whose political heads are ministers. In this Unit, we shall briefly trace the evolution of the Secretariat, and describe its structure and functions. The tenure system and the staffing of the Secretariat will also be discussed. Under the Secretariat, there is a network of agencies that are responsible for the execution of government policies.

EVOLUTION OF CENTRAL SECRETARIAT:

' To begin with, the Secretariat in India referred to the office of Governor General in British India. However, the size of the Central Secretariat and the scope of its activities have undergone considerable change over the last two hundred years of its evolution in keeping with the changes in the aims, objectives, and nature of the central government in India. At the end of the eighteenth century, the central government consisted of a Governor-General and three Councillors, and the Secretariat of four departments.

Each of them was under a Secretary, and a Chief Secretary was heading them all. A hundred years later, on the eve of the Montfort Reforms in 1919, the Government of India consisted of a Governor-General and seven members and there were nine secretarial departments. This number remained the same until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Before 1919, the Central Government, while administering certain subjects directly like the army, posts and telegraphs and railways, had, by and large, left the task of implementation of other subjects to the local provincial governments. A major change came in the above position with the inauguration of the reforms of 1919 which for the first time, made a division of functions between the Central and provincial governments. Both the Central and provincial governments became responsible for both policy and administration. As a result, the role of the secretariat began to change from a merely policy-formulating, supervising and coordinating agency to that of an executive agency as well. The inauguration of provincial autonomy in 1937 and the outbreak of the Second World War accelerated the above process. In consequence, there was a four-fold increase of the Central Secretariat and its total strength rose to about two hundred. The Government of India was still struggling with the post-war problems of demobilization and reconstruction, when Independence came, accompanied by the partition of the country. At its very inception, therefore, the new government found itself faced with tremendous problems like rehabilitation of refugees from Pakistan, external aggression in Jammu and Kashmir, integration of princely states into the Indian Union, internal security, shortage of essential articles, at a time when there occurred serious shortage of personnel due to the British Officers returning home and many Muslim officers opting for Pakistan. Soon after, the adoption of the goal of a welfare state made unprecedented demands on the already overburdened administrative machinery. At the same time, the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 started the process of a vast expansion of the public sector. The inevitable consequence of such a vast expansion, in the functions and responsibilities of the government, was a marked increase in the number of departments, and personnel. Thus, the number of departments in the secretariat, which stood at four in 1858, (9 in 1919, 10 in 1939, and 18 in 1947) had risen to 74 by 1994. Correspondingly has also multiplied.

Meaning:

The Central Secretariat occupies a key position in Indian administration. The Secretariat refers to the conglomeration of various ministries/departments of the central government. The Secretariat works as a single unit with collective responsibility as in the case of the Council of Ministers. Under existing rules, each secretariat department is required to consult any other department that may be interested or concerned before disposing of a case. Secretaries, thus, are secretaries to the Government as a whole and not to any particular minister.

Role:

The Secretariat assists the ministers in the formulation of governmental policies. Ministers finalize policies based on adequate data, precedents and other relevant information. The Secretariat makes these available to the minister, thus, enabling him to formulate policies. Secondly, the Secretariat assists the ministers in their legislative work too. The Secretariat prepares legislative drafts to be introduced in the legislature. It engages in the collection of relevant information for answering parliamentary questions. And, also, for various parliamentary committees. Fourthly, it carries out detailed scrutiny of a problem bringing an overall comprehensive viewpoint on it., getting approval, if required, of other lateral agencies like the Ministry of Lab and the Ministry of Finance; and also, consulting. Other organizations concerned with a particular matter.

Functions as the main channel of communication between the government and other concerned agencies like the Planning Commission, Finance Commission, etc. And lastly, the Secretariat also ensures that field offices execute, with efficiency and economy, the policies and decisions of the Government.

FUNCTIONS OF CENTRAL SECRETARIAT:

The Central Secretariat system in India is based on two principles:

- 1) The task of policy formulation needs to be separated from policy implementation.
- 2) Maintaining Cadre of Officers operating on the tenure system is a prerequisite to the working of the Secretariat system. The Central Secretariat is a policy-making body of the government and is not, to undertake work of execution unless necessitated by the lack of official agencies to perform certain tasks. The Central Secretariat normally performs the following functions: 1) Assisting the minister in the discharge of his policymaking and parliamentary functions. 2) Framing legislation, rules, and principles of procedure.
- 3) Sectoral planning and program formulation.
- 4) a) Budgeting and control of expenditure in respect of activities of the ministry department.
b) Securing administrative and financial approval for the operational program and their subsequent modifications.
c) Supervision and control over the execution of policies and programs by the executive departments or semi-autonomous field once.
d) Calculating steps to develop greater personnel and organizational competence with in the ministry/department and it's executive agencies.
e) Assisting in increasing coordination at the Central level.