

## General Studies-2; Topic – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### Specialist and Polymath

#### 1) Specialization

- Specialization is the process of concentrating on and becoming expert in a particular subject or skill.
- Specialization of fields of education and profession is an ever-growing phenomena.
- With greater and deeper development of various fields of science, technology and even the social sciences, specialisation is inevitable and even necessary in the contemporary world.
- This has yielded many important, even life-saving results etc.
- But with a focus on expertise, polymaths are becoming rare in the 21st century.

#### 2) Perils of Specialization

- The “expertism” contributes to a host of problems that are being called the Anthropocene.
- The tragedy of specialisation is that it leads members of the knowledge industry to see little beyond their bulwarks.
- Or for an engineer to understand why decentralised solar power that allows greater democratisation among local communities is an opportunity to be grabbed instead of installing large solar parks by mega-corporations.
- It, therefore, becomes difficult or impossible for an economist to appreciate the importance and value of biodiversity or why its loss is a major casualty.
- It is about ownership, biodiversity, science and soils — cross-cutting domains that super-specialists will not be able to see.
- With increasing specialisation, what one gets are experts who do not understand the connections between knowledge systems and ways of knowing.
- While geoengineers say that we need to seed the upper atmosphere with exotic chemicals to cool the planet, there is rightly a hue and cry from many quarters
- When renewable energy experts call for more biomass plantations, others worry about the displacement of farmers, the reduction of food production and the loss of biodiversity.

#### 3) Polymaths

- Polymath means a person of wide knowledge or learning.
- Among scholars and knowledge makers in history, one can identify a large number of intellectuals whose interests lay in disparate spheres.
- A poet and philosopher could also be an astronomer, technical innovator and mathematician.
- Consider for instance Galileo, Ziryab, Leon Battista Alberti, or Leonardo da Vinci.
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a polymath: jurist, economist, politician, philosopher, anthropologist, sociologist, educationist, editor, journalist, historian and writer.
- Each person’s many spheres of knowledge create a syncretic world view that contribute to a broad perspective.
- Polymaths have the ability to see connectedness among multiple domains of knowledge of the natural world and human interaction.

#### 4) Current Challenges

- It is becoming difficult for any single person to excel in more than one sub-discipline.

- The academic system of rewarding greater specialisation has fed the knowledge industry and universities too prepare students in precisely this manner.
- Policy makers are listening to the experts seeking their guidance, thus promoting further fragmentation.
- The assault on nature from the ramparts of specialisation creates narrow viewpoints that are defended by specialists.
- Those at the short end are the most vulnerable creatures and humans on earth making up the vast connected webs of life.
- As Max Weber wrote “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved.”

### 5) Way Forward

- If we want to bring back a renaissance in innovation, we will need to break down the silos of our research and find ways to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- This will call for a fundamental re-design of the methodology we adopt for systematic research.
- We will have to resist the urge to curb curiosity regardless of where it leads us.
- We need to change the way we currently impart education and develop, in young learners, the ability to make connections outside of their prescribed syllabus.

### 6) Generalist vs specialist in Administration

- **Arguments for Generalist**
  - a. Best leadership is provided by generalists who have a breadth of understanding and experience.
  - b. Specialists, no matter how competent, tend to have a tunnel vision and are not equipped to take a broader view.
  - c. Domain knowledge can be accomplished by domain experts advising the generalist leader in decision-making.
- **Arguments for Specialist**
  - a. Only someone who has learnt the subject from the trenches, can provide competent leadership in a functional area.
- **Way Forward**
  - a. The complex and interconnected nature of policy-making demands that specialist expertise has to go with generalist experience.
  - b. The Constitution Review Commission 2002 suggested the “need to specialise some of the generalists and generalise some of the specialists”.