

Chapter - V

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION & DECENTRALISED PLANNING ITS SYSTEM VARIATION

Section-A : Planning Models : States Experiences

The quality of both general and development administration in the districts can be effectively improved only on the basis of a complete integration of functions and activities among the different official agencies operating in the districts. Resources at the disposal of the State government for expenditure in the districts are necessarily extremely limited. There is a social obligation that these resources are, therefore, put to optimum use, a task which can be fulfilled only if the walls separating the different official agencies are taken down. Ashok Mitra committee recommends that the district wings of all the government departments be made directly responsible to the Standing committee for budget and Planning for the Preparation, co-ordination and execution of developmental as well as non-developmental work, the district magistrate, as the Principal officer of the committee, should be assigned the formal responsibility for the purpose. Neither the district plans nor the district budget can be formulated or executed in isolation; they have to be integrated with the state plan and the State Budget. At the district level, the staff of the Zilla parishad, and his services should be fully made use of by the Standing Committee for budget and planning. The Zilla Parishad's Pool of expertise should be further augmented with the induction of a district audit and accounts officer and the establishment of a Statistical cell.

It was felt that the lack of integration between rural development planning and anti-poverty programmes as well as among various anti-poverty programmes themselves is a serious problem as it has created good amount of confusion in our planning.

1. Three Kinds of alternative models were recommended for bringing about coordination at the district level: These models were as follows¹.

- (a) Zilla parishad should be apex body for the Overall planning at the district level. It should be assisted by a District planning Board(DPB) which should be an advisory expert body with a planning cell. The plan should be prepared by the DPB and sent to the Zilla Parishad for review and authentication. In this model,

all the rural development activities pertaining to the district should be covered under the purview of the district body.

- (b) For the States where Zilla Parishads are not in existence the alternative is to set up a District Planning Council at the district level. The Collector should be the chairman of the council and he should coordinate the development activities mentioned in the first alternatives. In order to reduce the burden of the collector, a Senior Deputy Commissioner or a junior deputy commissioner should be appointed to perform the routine tasks as well as protocol etc.
- (c) The third alternative model was to create a cooperative structure at the district level with the mayor as its statutory head. The Mayor's tenure should be one year and election should be held every year for the post. In this model standing Committee should do the planning and coordination work. The advantage of this model is that it does not create a vested interest of power at the district level.

2. According to the Report of CAARD, the problem of coordination is going to be a highly complex problem. It is therefore, necessary to scrap a large number of schemes and programmes to minimise the task of coordination. A suggestion was made that the planning function for district level should be done on the basis of a set of objective norms. It was also suggested that as the intervention of politicians prevails at the state as well as the district level, and as bureaucrats who are not objective in their Planning decisions, planning should be strictly done by well prepared formula which is prepared by experts and finalised only after the discussions in the State legislative assembly.

3. A view was also expressed by some that there is not much need for coordination among various agencies as there are limits to coordination and as there are limits to what bureaucracy can do. It was felt that sectoral freedom is needed to carry out sectoral planning efficiently. In this context two suggestions were made: one suggestion was to develop and anchor of powerful economic activity at the district or block level around which other activities can be developed. Considering the fact that the pressure on the administrative system is too much, there is a need to reduce the pressure by developing anchor activities outside the government. The activities could be relating to the farm-industry linkages. The township model as suggested by Gadgil, the amul diary model with a core activity at the centre, or the sugar cooperative model are the different

models developed in this context. It was felt that the anchor activity will improve the farm-industry linkages and reduce the problems of integration in the government to a considerable extent.

The experiences gained in the country during the last four decades of planning has amply demonstrated that benefits of developmental programmes have actually not percolated to the desired extent to the poorer sections and more so to the poorest of the poor and the people living below the poverty line have not been actively, involved in the development process. This prompted the planners, particularly from the Fourth Five Year Plan, to ponder over deeply on the root causes for this disturbing situation and since then they have been in search of appropriate and viable alternative strategies for development. Hence a new approach of development was adopted since the Fifth plan wherein poverty alleviation occupied the central theme in various rural development programmes and with the adoption of such programmes, administration of development assumed a crucial role². For making the administration of development to be effective and successful, the mechanisms of Planning and decision-making should descend to levels, where they can come to grips with the local people and their problems, and there they can organise an appropriate package of programmes activities with a measure of active community support. All these would be possible only if the planning and decision- making processes are decentralized to the local levels Viz, to the districts and the blocks³.

It has been noted that the states differ widely in their experience relating to decentralized district planning. For some states, the experience has been quite limited being confined at best only to one to two years. Consequently, the decentralization procedures and methodologies are still evolving in these States. Most of the States are just launching some moves towards decentralization of the planning process at the district level. In fact, it is only a few states in the country like Maharashtra, Gujrat, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Karanata, and lately West Bengal which have made some process in this direction. But even in these states, the working group had observed that “real planning functions have not percolated to the district level, nor the Panchayati Raj functions have been involved in the process.” In Maharastra, the planning functions were initially entrusted to Panchayati Raj Institutions. But later, new District planning bodies headed by the minister of state have been set up. Similar set-up have also emerged in Gujrat and Uttar Pradesh. In a number of other States, the District Planning Bodies

are headed by officials. There has also been an attempt at the disaggregation of funds at the State level for allocations amongst the districts. The methodologies for inter-district allocation of outlays have also been evolved in these States. Concomitantly suitable administrative decentralization measures have also been introduced.

There is a degree of difference in the patterns of decentralization in the States which have adopted it partially. The pattern of Karnataka where it is as complete a democratic decentralized planning as we could expect within the national parameters, and West Bengal will be discussed separately in the next section of the same chapter.

Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra Pradesh, the Zilla Parishad has been entrusted, among other things with preparation of plans in respect of the entire district, coordination and consolidation of the plans prepared in respect of Mandals, Securing of plans, projects, Scheme of other works relating to Mandals, performing other functions in relation to any development programme as may be entrusted by the government and advising government on all matters relating to the developmental activities and programmes under the developmental heads. Every Mandala Praja Parishad Shall endeavour to install among the people a spirit of Self help Gram Panchayat is the Grass- root level institution in the decentralized administrative Set-up. It continues with its existing powers and functions for carrying out the requirements of the developmental activities at micro level.

Jammu & Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir State has the distinction of being amongst the first few States in the country to introduce decentralized system of planning. To facilitate timely Sanction and effective implementation of development schemes, the Deputy Commissioner of the district was delegated administrative and financial powers of heads of the departments of non-engineering sectors. He was authorised to sanction schemes in respect of all development departments excluding major State level Project.

Consequent upon the success of this arrangement the State Government in 1976 took a decision to introduce decentralized planning in all the district of the State with the objective of making planning more reflective of the hopes and aspiration of the common man and ensuring speedy implementation of developmental programmes⁴.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, Zilla Parishad were initially entrusted with the function to promote planned development of the district so far as schemes and programmes under local sector were concerned by utilizing the local resources and preparing Annual Plans and long terms Plans. However, it was observed that for various reasons this functions could not be carried out by the Zilla Parishad as was intended by the Government. Accordingly, District Planning and Development Council was constituted in every district in 1974. The functions of the council are as follows:

- (a) to ensure coordinated action by various implementing agencies,
- (b) to give guidelines to various implementing agencies in regard to preparation and implementation of the perspective Five Year and Annual Plans.
- (c) Subject to the orders of the States Government, to approve these Plans,
- (d) to review from time to time the implementation of the Five Year and Annual Plans and
- (e) to consider and approve reappropriation of Savings/excesses within the approved district Annual Plan⁵.

Assam

In Assam, the decentralized planning has been introduced in April, 1986. The unit of decentralized planning in the State is the Sub-division which is the next lower level below district. The schemes which concern the levis of common people have been taken up under decentralized planning. In each sub-division, a sub-divisional planning and Development council has been constituted. It is an advisory body and

made responsible for formulation, review and monitoring of the Annual plan. At the district level, a core group has been constituted as a professional body under the chairmanship of the Deputy commissioner. The main function of the core group is to prepare draft Sub-divisional plan. It also scrutinises the operational plan prepared and submitted by the district heads of development department on the basis of the final allocation made for the Sub-division for planning it before the sub-divisional planning and Development Council for approval.

Gujrat

Gujrat is one of the States in the country which have made some Stride in the area of decentralized planning. In pursuance of the Gujrat Panchayats Act, 1969, the State government is enjoined to transfer necessary funds. Personnel and property in respect of various functions that are transferred to the Panchayats. In the case of transferred functions the Panchayats are competent to plan, Sanction and implement Schemes. They are involved in formulation of annual plans and Five Year plans in respect of schemes transferred to them.

As a further step in this direction, District Planing Board were set up in 1973. They were changed with the responsibility of formulating district level plans. The functions of the Boards are:

- (a) to prepare the perspective plans, Five Year Plan and annual plan of the district;
- (b) to formulate specific schemes in various fields to be funded from the outlays under decentralized planning,
- (c) to ensure maximum cooperation from the local bodies, public and voluntary agencies, and
- (d) to undertake a regular review and evaluation of district level schemes and Strive to remove bottlenecks in their implementation.

In Gujrat 80 percent of the allocation for district development is withheld at the State level and Schemes relating to it are formulated by sectoral departments without much consultation with the planning body. The District Planning body, intern, plans to scheme for the remaining 20 percent of the total allocation for district development in

the state budget in two parts, 15 percent discretionary for the district planning body to plan schemes which it considers appropriate, and the remaining 5 percent is used for schemes for which it is entitled to a certain contribution from the state.

Rajasthan

With the inception of the Fifth plan, a decision was taken by the Rajasthan Government to initiate the process of district planning in the state. To have the meaningful involvement of local people's representatives in the process, District Planning Committees were set up in each district under the chairmanship of District Collectors. Based on the guidelines for preparation of proposals within the funds allotted to the concerned district. The process worked satisfactorily in the first two years on the Fifth plan. Much headway could be made and the role of District Planning Committee largely confined to monitoring of programmes. After a Short experience of setting up of a District Planning Cell, the District Planning Committee has since been reconstituted with extended membership and enlarged scope. This committee is responsible for planning, coordinating the developmental activities and to oversee implementation of plan programmes.

Uttar Pradesh

As a step towards decentralized planning process in the state, a three tier Panchayati Raj set up was introduced as the aftermath of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report. However, these institutions themselves did not much headway. Subsequently, the Brahma Dutt Committee (1981) recommended the district as the unit of planning. The Committee felt that perspective and realistic plans for each district should be prepared according to its local conditions, resources and needs. The Dhar Commission (1983) examined the entire gamut of issues connected with district level administration and found that identification of realistic schemes, their preparation, execution and monitoring could not be effectively done without the active participation of local people and the concerned executing agencies.

Keeping in view the imperatives and advantages of decentralized planning, the system of Decentralized planning was introduced in the state in 1982-83. It had the following two objectives:

- (i) to remove intra and inter-district imbalances in development; and
- (ii) to give every district the opportunity to attain full development taking into consideration the potential, available man power and other resources of each.

As a first exercise towards achieving these twice objectives, all the plan schemes were classified into two categories, viz., District sector schemes and State Sector Schemes. Based on this classification, 30 percent of total plan outlay was earmarked for District Sector Scheme and the rest 70 percent was set for the State Sector Schemes⁶.

Although it is not possible to fully negate the impact of decentralised district level planning on the removal of inter disparities by the empirical exercises, yet there are certain inherent pitfalls that needed immediate attention.

As evident from the District Planning process in Uttar Pradesh, the district Planning Committee is dominated by politicians and also the committee is loaded with bureaucrats. The decentralised planning should be a planning from below, i.e., bottom up. It is only possible through the indepth research of local resources and local needs. Certain districts need to be bifurcated and certain districts need to be amalgamated in order to make the districts as efficient and viable planning units.

Decentralised Planning of mechanism as adopted in the recent years has not yielded satisfactory results as far as the question of inter-district disparity in various indicators of economic developments and socio-economic infrastructure is concerned. This has been so firstly because the overall resources placed at district level for plan formulation were too meagre to make any appreciable change in the situation, and secondly, the mechanism of devolution of plan funds among districts has certain inherent shortcomings and did not serve the interests of the backward districts to the extent required.

In order to make decentralized planning a more effective instrument of balanced regional developments, it will be necessary to rectify the above defects. This would require raising the share of district share in the divisible pool, and secondly, appropriate changes in the formula of devolution to give larger weight to backwardness.

Section - B : District Administration and Rural Development in West Bengal and Karnataka

It is necessary to think in terms of district development as a whole, embracing all development activities in a district plan or non-plan, rural or urban. Rural development and Poverty alleviation programmes would then become components, important ones no doubt, of a single District Development plan. It is for district development in this total sense that appropriate administrative arrangements have to be devised.

Following the recommendation of the Balwantrai Mehta committee there was a general agreement that the Panchayati Raj system with its three tiers offered the most appropriate pattern for the purpose of decentralization in political and administrative authority.

Quite a few State Government adopted the Panchayati Raj system with minor variations. But only two or three States achieved a degree of success in the process of decentralization both in planning and administration. The decline in the status and authority in the Panchayati Raj system was attributed to the reluctance of the political leadership at state level to share power with district leadership.

Of late, there appears to be revival of the idea of decentralization. This is probably consequence of the experience gained from a large number of rural development and poverty alleviation programme. But the return of decentralization has not meant revival of the system of Panchayati Raj. Somewhat weak representation of Panchayati Raj, have not reverted to a full-fledged acceptance of Panchayati Raj or the appropriate agency for rural development and poverty alleviation.

Only two states, Karnataka and West Bengal, appear to have put their full faith in devolution of planning authority on the Panchayati Raj system. A study of what has been put through West Bengal since 1978 and what is intended in the Karnataka Bill, reveals the following basic features⁷.

1. In both states, the first point of decentralization below the state is the district. This accords with the Ashok Mehta Committee's recommendation.
2. In both States, Zilla Parishads are based on direct elections, in Karnataka wholly so, in West Bengal dominantly so.

3. In both States, the chairmen of the Zilla Parishads are from amongst the directly elected members.
4. In Karnataka, it is intended that DRDAS will cease to exist and their functions merged with the Zilla Parishads. So will be the functions of district planning bodies. Also district heads of line departments will come squarely under the Zilla Parishad. Each Zilla Parishad will have a chief secretary, giving it the favour of a district Government. Horizontal coordination will be the responsibility of Zilla Parishads.
5. In West Bengal, the district magistrate is also the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad. The chairman of the Zilla Parishad is chairman of the district planning committee, as also of the DRDA. Horizontal coordination in the case is sought to be achieved by the key role allotted to the chairman, Zilla Parishad.
6. In Karnataka, there will eventually be only one tier below the district, namely the mandal Panchayat. In West Bengal, there are two-tiers: the Panchayat Samities at block level and the Gram Panchayats.

Efforts have been made in this section to show the nature and scope of district administration and rural development in West Bengal and Karnataka respectively especially the Zilla Parishad.

West Bengal

District administration in modern India has changed from time to time in terms of both its goal and structure, a change resulting from an interaction between the exigencies of regulatory and demands for “development” to satisfy emergent social and political urges.

In spite of periodical change, the general executive administration of the districts has remained the core, the central agency invested with an overall responsibility under the collector and District Magistrate functioning as the head of the executive administration. In the discharge of his functions he not only controls the machinery of law and order and the management of most branches of the revenue system, but also

handles the manifold relations between Government and the people within the limits of his jurisdiction. As District officer he is required in fact to remain concerned with the general circumstances of peace and fiscal administration, but also on other related matters affecting its economy and general well-being. There are, of course, variations in the pattern of district administration. The District officer none the less remains its main central pillar.

Rural development in the context of district administration in India mainly signifies the development of agriculture and such other elements as are of immediate relevance to the welfare of the rural population. Rural development in modern India was initially the work of European free-traders, a body of commercial entrepreneurs or colonizers, more especially from Britain who were emerging in the second half of the eighteenth century as the authorities of the monopoly rights of the East India Company.

The problems of rural development in Bengal were in no way different from those in other parts of India. They involved questions of policy and priority, of co-ordination and personnel management, of procedural techniques and planned integration, which called for no separate agency like that of the Agricultural Development Department.

In terms of rural development Bengal suffered from certain handicaps which did not generally exist elsewhere. Unlike the provinces where land was not permanently settled, for a century and a half Bengal could not establish direct contact with the masses in the absence of revenue staff. This lack in Bengal was sought to be remedied by the appointment of Circle officers on the recommendation of the Bengal Administrative Committee, 1913-14; but their jurisdiction was so large that they could not fully accomplish the object of their institution⁸.

As the main emphasis in Government policy was steadily moving from its regulatory to developmental functions, the committee advised a resort to planned priorities within the limits imposed by financial resources, and declared that the time had come "in Bengal and we do not doubt in other provinces as well, to co-ordinate all the District Development activities under a single administrative head." The Committee added: "when the objective in a geographical area like a district is the welfare of its people, separate activities are merely means to a single end and each cannot be considered in isolation from the rest⁹."

To ensure proper co-ordination the committee therefore recommended that the district officer must be the “undisputed Head” of all other Government agencies in his District except as regards the internal administration and technical methods of those agencies.

To reinforce the district officer’s development goal the Rowlands committee suggested that the number of circle officers be increased by reducing the area of their jurisdiction in each case and that the activities of Union Boards be strengthened and expanded.

It was recommended that there should be a circle officer appointed to each thana. His main function was to draw up a detailed plan of development for his circle and co-ordinate the activities of any technical officer operating within his jurisdiction. He was in fact to act as an alternative agency to local Self-Governing institutions. The combination of regulatory and developmental function was based on considerations of economy. But it tended in effect to be destructive of the principle of homogeneity. It was therefore emphasized that the circle officer should not be burdened with duties that might seriously interfere with his prime task of pursuing and co-ordinating development activities.

Under the village Self-Government Act of 1919 the union Boards had been invested with the discharge of several duties connected with the improvement of villages. It was, however, laid down that a union Board should, to the extent required by the district officer and within the limits of available funds, carry out such duties as the district officer might from time to time require them to perform.

With the gradual shift of emphasis on rural development under the direct administrative control of provincial governments, union Boards or the primary units of village Self-Government started gaining its importance, while District Boards began losing vitality, with the extension of development activities in the district, the committee doubtless visualized the expediency of having separate district development officers. But it never thought in terms of doing away altogether with a representative body of non-official advisors to district officials. An important consideration against District Boards, however, was that with their erstwhile statutory powers invested in them they in fact did not fit in with bureaucratic convenience.

While the status of District Boards was steadily diluted and their function taken over by the rural development agency operating directly under the Government in districts, the importance of union Boards or village Panchayats rose steadily as they gained freedom from the control of District Boards financially and administratively. The tendency was for union Boards to get organically linked with the regular official machinery of rural development emerging as part of the post war reconstruction plans of the British Government in India. In keeping with this trend provincial governments introduced on the transfer of power their separate legislative enactments for the establishment of village Panchayats. Article 40 of the Constitution of India itself laid down in a Directive Principle of State policy that the State should take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with the powers and authority to function as units of self-government¹⁰.

The Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee realized that the 'organizational Structures and methods which were suitable enough when the activities of Government were confined to the regulatory, policing and revenue fields, are quite inadequate to handle the advance on the economic and social fronts which have increasingly become the major concern of Governments in progressive countries'¹¹. It made a number of suggestions, including changes in the basic objectives of the government and regrouping portfolios. But the most important thing it did was to emphasize for purposes of development activities the immediate need for co-ordination at both policy and executive levels of the local self-governing institutions, the union Boards were considered by the committee to be "by far the most promising". It visualized these Boards "as becoming definitely a more active agent in the development work" in terms of both the activities they undertook and their influence on village life. It was, therefore, proposed to strengthen them as 'the basic unit of administration'¹² and to provide them a full-time government-paid clerk, a 'Jack of all Trades' and the last officer in the chain of development in rural areas. The Panchayat Raj Acts later actually provided for such an officer called a 'secretary', for each gram panchayat consisting of a number of villages.

Before the transfer of power in 1947 the Union Board formed the most practical unit for village administration. It was large enough for purposes of mobilizing financial resources and administrative requirements, and yet small enough to be identified with local feeling and community consciousness. The principle of the single village type of

Panchayat was gradually abandoned. That is why a multiple village Panchayat system came to be involved in course of time. The Union Board of Bengal was a natural corollary.

Since Bengal continued to be subject to a series of political and administrative changes that followed the transfer of power in 1947 and the reorganization of states in 1956, the West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed only in 1957, but its implementation was stretched over a number of years.

The State of West Bengal saw the emergence of a four-tier Panchayat system in 1963 when the zilla parishad Act 1963 was passed. This Act provided for zilla Parishads at the district level and anchalik Parishads at the block level. The act abolished district boards. Evidently, the West Bengal Panchayat experiment made a radical organizational departure by having four-tier instead of three-tier institutional arrangements. It was necessitated by the historical traditions of the State in which the district boards functioned successfully for more than three decades. But the wind was blowing in favour of the healthy growth of the institutions. The anchalik Panchayats and most of the Zilla Parishads were superseded soon after their formation because of their close proximity to the power base. The anchalik Parishads and gram panchayat were languishing because of the growing apathy on the part of the political leadership in the State and the State bureaucracy¹³.

Besides, political instability as a result of series of political developments in the State, further vitiated the atmosphere halting the growth of Panchayati raj institutions. The United Front Government, which was voted to power in 1967, put forward its own scheme of Panchayats, but the scheme could not be carried out before the dismissal of the government. The progressive Democratic Front which came back to power there after, rejected the proposal of the predecessor Government, and offered a modified scheme. But the ministry was soon replaced BY the presidential rule in 1968. The U.F. Government came back to power through the mid-term elections and introduced a comprehensive panchayat bill in the legislature in 1969. But the life of the ministry was again cut short the reimposition of president's rule. The Congress party was voted to power in 1972 and latter, the Congress Government introduced the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973¹⁴.

It may be noted here that the 1973 Act was a historical necessity keeping in view the objectives as laid down in the Third Plan document. Since the beginning of the Third plan, there had been a constant trend towards mobilization of more and more resources for rural development programmes necessitating active participation of the people. This highlighted the need for having an effective Panchayat System at the rural level.

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, was not, however, put into effect by the Congress Government. It was the Left Front Government, voted to power in 1977, which took up the task of organising village Panchayats in a concerned and serious manner. The elections to the three bodies of the Panchayat Raj were held 1978. Following the elections there came into being 15 Zilla Parishads, 324 Panchayat Samities and 3242 gram panchayat. It was a great democratic exercise, the voter's turn out being as high as 70 percent. About 25 million people exercise their right to elect 56,000 representatives to the three Panchayati Raj bodies¹⁵.

The Left Front Government decided to utilize the panchayati raj institutions as agencies for rural development and as a platform for fighting out rural vested interests¹⁶. Convinced that the benefits of development had in the past gone to well-to-do sections of the society the Left Front Government decided to vitalize the Panchayats for the benefit of the underprivileged. The government declared that it would like to associate the rural people in the progress of planning and implementation of development programmes.

Regarding the functions and duties of the Zilla Parishad it may be said that West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 entrusted the Zilla Parishad with the following functions and duties:

(a) (i) to undertake schemes or adopt measures, including the giving of financial assistance, relating to the development of agriculture, livestock, industries, co-operative movement, rural credit, water supply, irrigation, public health and sanitation including establishment of dispensaries and hospitals, communications, primary, secondary and adult education including welfare of students, social welfare and other objects of general public utility.

(ii) to undertake execution of any scheme, performance of any act, or management of any institution or organisation entrusted to it by the State Government or any other authority .

(iii) to manage or maintain any work or public utility or any institution vested in it or under its control and management.

(iv) to make grants-in -aid of any school, public library, public institution or public welfare organisation within the district.

(v) to contribute such schemes as may be agreed upon towards the cost of maintenance of any institutions situated outside the district, which are beneficial to, and habitually used by the inhabitants of the district.

(vi) to establish scholarships or award stipends within the state for the furtherance of technical or other special forms of education.

(vii) to acquire and maintain village huts and markets.

According to section (b) of the same article, a Zilla Parishad shall have the power to make grants to the Panchayat Samities or Gram Panchayats;

(c) contribute, with the approval of the State Government, such sum or sums as it may decide, towards the cost of water-supply or anti-epidemic measures Undertaken by the commissioners of a municipality within the district;

(d) to adopt, measures for the relief of distress;

(e) to coordinate and integrate the development plans and schemes prepared by Panchayat Samities in the distress; and

(f) to examine and sanction the budget estimates of Panchayat Samities.

Notwithstanding anything in sub-section (i), a Zilla Parishad shall not undertake of execute any scheme is beyond the competence of the Panchayat Samiti concerned financially or otherwise. In the later case, the Zilla Parishad may execute the scheme itself or contrast its execution to the Panchayat Samiti and give it such assistance as may be required.

A Zilla Parishad may undertake or execute any scheme if it extends to more than one block.

Article 157 says that a Zilla Parishad may take over the maintenance and control of any road, bridge, tank, ghat, well, channel or drain, belonging to or private owner or nay other authority ore such terms as may be agreed upon.

According to Article 163, a Zilla Parishad shall exercise general powers of supervision over Panchayat-Samities and Gram Panchayats in the district and it shall be the duty of these authorities to give effect to any directors of the Zilla Parishad on matters of Policy or planning for development.

The Left Front Government has brought about some changes in the organisation of panchayati Raj system. In the first place, the Department of community Development has been taken out from the Department of Agriculture, and has now been merged with the Department of Panchayats. It was considered necessary to speed up the process of rural development in a concerted manner. Secondly, the District Magistrate has been made the executive officer of the Zilla parishad with a view to integrating Panchayat administration with development administration of the district level. Keeping in view the busy schedule of the district magistrate, a provision has recently been made to place one whole-time executive officer of the rank of the additional district magistrate at the disposal of the Zilla Parishad. There is also a senior officer of the State Civil Service as the whole-time Secretary. With the added responsibilities and extended sphere of activities, the Zilla parishad has been given the services of all the officers and employees of the State Government at the district level. The Zilla parishad has also been provided with an engineering cell required to offer technical advice to the Panchayats¹⁷.

New Panchayats of West Bengal represent a break from the past political patterns in rural India, when Panchayats in most parts of India were seldom free from domination by landlords and peasants. The Panchayats, in fact facilitated the emergence of oligarchic forces yielding the benefits to the weaker sections. West Bengal has certainly made a departure by transferring institutional power from the hands of the dominant propertied Groups to a lower middle stratum.

Rural development policy of the West Bengal Government is guided by the philosophy of what may be called redistribution before growth to ensure growth with social justice. The Policy has two broad objectives. In the first place, it aims at involving the people not only in the process of implementation of development programmes but also in the process of preparation and monitoring of development plans. Secondly, it seeks to bring about a change in the correlation of class forces in favour of the poor and working class by involving them in an organised manner in the process of development. The policy has two legs-land reforms and panchayats. In his letter to the Prime Minister in 1986, the State Chief Minister observed : “We recognise on the basis of hard evidence the superior production potentiality in the poorer farmers and producers and therefore, that rural development process primarily through the rural poor will mean a progress towards the desired goals of both productivity and equity at the same time. In the rural development programmes of our state we have, therefore, given special emphasis on land reform and then on helping the beneficiaries”¹⁸.

The instrument of rural development policy has seen the Panchayats with pro-poor leadership¹⁹. The “red Panchayats” as Bhabani Sen Gupta calls them form the essential part of the overall political and development strategy of the Left Front Government. It is said that the reason for laying considerable importance on the institution of Panchayats is political. It is argued that C.P.I(M) “intends to accomplish its political goal by building its power-base primarily on the lower-middle and lower Classes²⁰. Be that as it may, it can hardly be denied that the bureaucracy has repeatedly proven ineffective in implementing rural development programmes. It, therefore, became necessary to ‘tame’ the local bureaucracy. This is why the bureaucrats at the three levels of the panchayat system have been turned into executive arms of the parallel elected governments. It is true that the bureaucrats resent this position. The Left Front Government’s special emphasis on changing rural land relation through the mechanism of Panchayat Via ‘operation barga’ deserves special appreciation. First thrust must be toward fundamental and genuine land reforms. In order to be effective these land reform measures need to be supplemented by assistance to the poor in terms of non-land inputs such as irrigation, implements, manures and fertilizations etc. These aspects are taken care of through the different programmes.

It should be pointed out that there is no machinery for monitoring programme implementation at the state level. There is thus a crying need for developing a mechanism

at the state level for the purpose of co-ordinating, overseeing and advising the panchayat bodies, on matters of rural development. This is necessary in view of the lack of technical and managerial skill of the new leadership²¹. The significance of the devolution of huge programmes on the hands of the panchayati raj bodies lies in the fact that through the implementation of these programmes a modest and sincere effort has been made by the Government of West Bengal towards bridging the gap between the people and Government by associating the former with the process of Planning and implementation of their development programmes. The passage of the constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1993 as well as the successful completion of panchayat elections in West Bengal has made it obligatory on all State Governments to amend their legislations suitably and whole early election as constitutional provisions now require.

Nirmal Mukherjee and D. Bandyopadhyay's Report on West Bengal's Panchayats has dwelt at some lengths with what needs to be done in West Bengal to endow panchayats with an adequate necessary of autonomy. Keeping aside details specific to that state, the issues they raise concern (a) the extent of 'Governmental' authority of Panchayats over the local domain; (b) control over staff functioning under them; (c) election, audit and accounts arrangements; (d) organic links between Panchayats tiers and with the State apparatus; (e) collegiate functioning at panchayat levels; and (f) financial devolution; panchayats can not be credible institutions of self-government if they do not enjoy a sufficient degree of financial independence, with undisputed authority for claiming a share of state taxes, levying local taxes and mobilising resources in other legitimate ways. The 73rd Amendment provides for the setting up of periodic Finance commission for this purpose.

Karnataka

The district government in Karnataka is patterned after the main recommendations of the committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the earlier scheme formulated by the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team in 1957, only an advisory role for the district tier was recommended. According to it, the basic unit of democratic decentralization should be located at the Block/Samiti level. The Ashok Mehta committee set up by the Janata government in 1977, gave a hard look at the experience of democratic decentralization and observed that "an account of growth of the span, spatial scatter and the complexities

of the development activities, as also significant changes in the strategies, the context of institution-building in rural India has undergone a change since the submission of the Report of Balwantrai Mehta Study Team in 1957²².

The committee suggested that in the context of district should be “the first point of decentralization under political supervision, below the state level.”²³.

It also be mentioned that the erstwhile native State of Mysore had a long history of district government, although its democratisation began in the later 1920s, Between 1926 and 1930 all district boards were allowed to elect non-officials as presidents. And, with this came the increasing awareness among the dominant castes, vokkaligas and Lingayats,” of supra-local polities impinged on the district level²⁴.

In 1927 the three boards endowed with this right, had elected a Muslim and two Brahmins as presidents. But soon the dominant communities wrested power from the minority communities. By 1930 seven of the eight boards had four lingayats and three vokkaliga presidents. This enabled the dominant community leaders to set up extended networks of patronage and influence in rural Karnataka.

Panchayati Raj was introduced in Karnataka on “November, 1959, when the Mysore village Panchayats and Local Boards Act, 1959 came into operation. Before the enactment of this legislation, no uniform Pattern of rural government was prevalent in the state, and it was composed of disparate units which previously formed part of the states of Andhra, Bombay, Hyderabad and Madras and the whole of the part “c” state of coorg. The five different areas which constituted the new Mysore State, now Karnataka, were governed by different rural government Acts²⁵. Naturally, therefore, the then Mysore government felt the need for a common legislation on local Self- Government in the country side. A three-tier structure of rural local self-government has been envisaged under the Karnataka village Panchayats and local Boards Act, 1950 Consulting with the Balwantrai Mehta study Team in framing the legislation. With the panchayats at the base, the Taluka Development Board in the middle and the District Development Council at the top. Although the district development council under section 189 of the Act, was empowered to approve the budgets of the Taluk boards and to review their work, it was not assigned any important role. The Mysore Resources and Economy committee, Set up by the state government in 1960, said; “we feel that the district level is not sufficiently emphasized in the scheme and that the district development council

should be made the prime democratic local body in the state.”²⁶. However, notwithstanding some efforts made in this direction in 1960s, nothing important emerged, and the Karnataka government seemed more concerned with strengthening the existing system rather than opting for new experiments in decentralization.

Karnataka initiated district planning with the commencement of Fifth plan, a District and Regional Planning Division was set up in the planning Department at the state level and district planning officers appointed in each district. At the organizational level there is a District Planning Committee in each district comprising of project Director, District Rural Development Society, General Manager, District Industries Centre, District Development Assistant, District Publicity officer, District Statistical officer and District Planning officer, headed by the Deputy Commissioner. This body is responsible for the initiation of the first draft on district plan which is then placed before the District Development council for approval. The council consists of all M.ps, MLAs, MLCs of the district, the TDB presidents and all officers of the district with the Deputy commissioner as the chairman.

With the view to integrate sectoral and spatial aspects of planning in view of local resources endowments and needs, District sector scheme were delineated in early 1978 based on whether a scheme benefits a district and its people, and whether it can be planned and implemented at the district and lower levels without any adverse implications for integration of district plan with the state plan. For the 1978-79 Annual plan, 75 percent of the District Sector outlay at the state level was allocated among district on an objective basis, keeping the other 25 percent as a caution to make up deficiencies in the distribution of plan benefits or to accelerate some priority programmes in selected districts. The lumpsum outlay thus conveyed was to be appropriated over the departments by the District Planning Committee in consultation with their heads. The draft plan evolved by them was to be first approved by the District Development council and then by the Government both with or without modifications. For implementation, the state Departmental heads released funds out of the approved outlay at the request of their district level counterparts. This process continued till 1981-82.

In 1982-83, the sectoral outlay at the district level was indicated from the State level in effect with drawing the freedom of the district in deciding the departmental

allocations, as the plans received from the districts tended to include state sector, central sector and non-plan schemes also.

A new dimension was introduced in April 1983 by asking the districts to provide scheme wise monthly break-up of physical and financial targets for the approved district plan and the districts were to adhere to it strictly. In case of any unspent amount in a quarter, it could be received only by convincing the Development commissioner of the state.

It was in 1983, when the Janata Government was formed in Karnataka, a new initiative in decentralisation was taken²⁷. From this emerged a new panchayat system with popularly elected Zilla Parishads constituting the main tier. Under the 1983 Act the parishad has extensive planning, administering and monitoring powers in development. Most important is its planning authority. As Abdul Nazir Sab said, "We will have two planning processes hereafter. One at the district and the other at the state level. The major schemes at the state level are medium irrigation and major irrigation works, electricity projects, etc. These schemes, in the nature of things, are centralised and will be formulated at the State level. But the district level schemes will be formulated by the Zilla Parishads²⁸. The link document to the State Government budget for 1987-88 actually indicated the list of schemes and the financial transfers to the Zilla parishads. These schemes are mostly the earlier district sector schemes and spread over twenty-eight sectors of development. The parishad is also invested with wide power of supervising the financial and personnel matters of the mandal panchayats, the next important tier of the new system. The annual budget estimate, after approval of the mandal panchayats, shall be forwarded to the Zilla Parishad for its approval. It is obligatory for the secretary of the mandal Panchayat to transmit to the parishad the yearly statement of accounts and annual administrative reports. Besides, section 126 of the 1983 Act gives the parishad sweeping powers in case of irregularities pointed out in the audit report. Besides, the parishad has appointing authority. The secretary of the mandal panchayat is appointed by the parishad.

Thus under the 1983 Act a powerful district Government has come into existence. Section 168 provides that "the Adhyaksha shall be the executive head of the Zilla parishad, and shall perform all the duties imposed and exercise all the powers conferred on the Adhyaksha under this Act and the rules made thereunder"²⁹. An adhyaksha has status and salary of a minister of state.

The Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act of 1993 which replaces the 1983 Act virtually restores the structures that existed prior to 1983 and has reduced the panchayats' 'autonomy' drastically. Under the new Act, Zilla and Taluk panchayats are not different from the old-style district and taluk development boards, which were essentially advisory bodies. The 2,500 odd Mandal panchayats have been replaced by over 5,000 from panchayats of a smaller size which makes them less viable on their own resources. Over and above all this, MLAs have been made active participants in the Zilla and Taluk Panchayat bodies, with a right to vote. And the Chief Executive officers (CEOs) of Zilla Parishads, who replace the chief Secretaries of the 1983 Act, are no longer under the control of the Z.P. Adhyaksha. Very significantly, the CEO has powers to decide whether any resolution of the Zilla Panchayat should be submitted to the State Government for approval before implementation. Between the MLAs and the bureaucrats, Panchayat institutions in Karnataka have become virtual non-entities, so far as Governance is concerned.

What it all boils down to is this: no matter how clever or comprehensive Panchayat legislations are, state Governments will not voluntarily accept effective devolution of 'Governmental' authority to Panchayats. They will do so only if there is strong and persistent pressure from below. There is unfortunately no evidence of this in any state. None of the political parties, neither the CPI(M) in West Bengal nor the erstwhile Janata Dal in Karnataka, has honestly sought to generate such pressure from the villages, taluks or districts. Even when the Bangarappa Government superseded the Karnataka Zilla Parishads in Karnataka in late 1991, none of the opposition parties organised any statewide protest. On the contrary, when the new panchayat Act was introduced in 1993 replacing the 1983 Act and greatly enhancing the power of MLAs and bureaucrats over Panchayat institutions, all these parties acquiesced, having arrived at an informal understanding with the chief Minister.

Devolution of authority and resources from the center to the states, or from State Governments to panchayats, inevitably leads to crises of havoc. Like all major changes in a country's polity, democratic decentralization cannot be 'granted' by politicians; it has to be achieved by a groundswell of public pressure. The economic and globalisation, together with the chaotic political scenario that looms ahead, will hopefully generate such a groundswell.

Section - C : Reforms in District Administration

Administrative reforms have always remained a major concern for all kinds of government at all levels. Since the emergence of the modern industrialised and bureaucratic states in the 19th century, the governments have increasingly paid attention to evolve better process and techniques for accomplishing their set purposes. Perhaps no other country in the developing world has been such spate of administrative reforms as India did. In an attempt to find ways of coping with more and more work of varying and complex types in the democratic context, the administrators in this country had to pay greater attention to the problems of maintaining the efficiency of the administrative system to the optimum level and to develop new capabilities to meet the challenges of the time, particularly those relating to developmental needs and aspirations of the people.

The experience of rural development administration shows that we have gone on from one approach to another, from one administrative mechanism to another, without conspicuous success or satisfactory results. Constant shifts in policies and programmes and slipshod execution has made for ineffective administration. We seem to be committing the kinds of mistakes over and over again. Some of these shortcomings could be listed³⁰. First, all India stereotype schemes are often introduced without sufficient operational flexibility, local adaptation and adequate delegation of power. Secondly, In spite of the loud sympathy today for decentralised planning from below, there has been lack of planning at local level. Thirdly, the top-down communication was often in the shape of imposition of targets without ensuring that the conditions are pre-requisites for reaching these targets were created. Fourthly, all development programmes, individually as well as collectively, require linking of numerous elements which alone can ensure the ultimate success of programmes. These linkages were found missing. Fifthly, the problem of motivation of the field workers are more or less ignored. The field workers lacked facilities as well as continuous guidance and supervision. There was 'top-down' communication but hardly any 'bottom up'. Sixthly and finally, there is the lack of peoples' participation. The goal of administrative Reform is to increase the area of success and diminish the area of failure. The ARC provided the most significant opportunity for having a total enquiry into the Indian system of public administration embracing within its sweep even the state administration³¹.

In the Schedule³² enclosed to the resolution, setting up the Administrative Reforms Commission, the items that were concerned under administration at the state level were:

- (a) Examination of the organisation and procedure of State Governments with special reference to problems similar to those enumerated above; and
- (b) The need to strengthen administration in the States at all levels.

The main aspect sought to be covered under the district administration consisted of³³ :

- (a) The role of the collector in respect of general administration and development administration, and as the agent of the State Government.
- (b) The role of the collector in the matter of the public grievances and complaints.
- (c) The relationship between the collector and Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- (d) The relationship between the collector and departmental heads at the district and supra-district level.
- (e) The size of the district.
- (f) Personal policies in relation to the post of collector.

The Administrative Reforms Commission said: the district administration should be divided into two sectors—one concerned with ‘regulatory’ functions and the other with ‘developmental’ functions. The district collector should be the head of the former and the Panchayati Raj administration should have the responsibility for the latter.

The District collector and the president, Zilla parishad, should meet at the periodic intervals to resolve matters calling for coordination between the regulatory and development administration. The procedure should be given official recognition in the legislation dealing with Panchayati Raj.

The Collector and the District Magistrate as the head of the regulatory administration in the district should exercise general supervisory control over the police organisation in the district. Except in an emergency, he should not interfere with the internal working of the police administration.

The Collector and his officer should spend a prescribed minimum number of days on tour with night halts in camp. The tour should be utilised, among things, for the redress of public grievances on the spot whenever possible.

There should be only two administrative units whose heads are invested with Powers of decision-making in the district administration - The one in the tehsil/taluka or a group of tehsils/talukas or a sub-division and other at the headquarters of the district the intermediary levels, where they exist, may be abolished.

Power should be delegated to the maximum extent to the officer in charge of the sub-district administrative unit³⁴.

The recommendations made in regard to district administration and administration at supra-district local have, no doubt, certain normative overtones but an ideal, even if distant for the present, needs to be kept before the eyes for realisation in time. It must be said to the ARC's credit that the structure of their suggestions has an underlining of its own logic, apparently invalid though they may appear to be³⁵.

According to ARC "We agree that the work relating to development should be transferred to the Panchayati Raj institutions.... it will be necessary to appoint a whole time senior officer as the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad. This officer must be suited to his work, having a view the particular developmental functions which devolve upon the Zilla Parishad. All the sources of supply of suitable manpower in the state should be tapped and the selection should neither be confined nor denied to any particular service. The officer may be designated as district development officer, as this designation will clearly bring out the nature of his duties. The district development officer will be the principal executive officer of the Zilla Parishad and will be responsible for all the developmental activities in the district. He should have supervisory control over the district level officers of the various developments, and also over the staff, technical as well as non-technical, working in the Zilla Parishad.... . The President of the Zilla Parishad, who is elected by the Parishad, is responsible to that body as well as to the people in the district. His leadership should be accepted and respected by all the officers working under him. The district development officer, in particular, must realise that he is subordinate to the President to whom are due his loyalty and co-operation." Departing from the scheme as envisaged by the Balwant Rai Committee, the commission suggested that the Zilla Parishad, not the Panchyat Samiti, be the

principal executive body of the Panchayati Raj administration in the district.” Only such a body, having jurisdiction over the entire district, would be in a position to take a broad over all view of the requirements of the entire district, make a proper appraisal of the total resources likely to be available including those to be raised locally, and formulate and execute a balanced plan for the entire district. Moreover, the proposed arrangements, under which the district level officers of developmental departments will become a part and parcel of the Zilla Parishad and will work as a team under the guidance and supervision of a senior officer acting as the district development officer of the Zilla Parishad, will ensure the effective coordination of development activities and execution by technically qualified staff. Some executive functions will, however, continue to be performed both at the block and village levels. State Governments may undertake a distribution of functions at the district, Samiti and village levels to suit their particular requirements, subject to the main seat of the executive power- the Panchayati Raj in the district being located at the district level.”

The state like Maharashtra and Gujrat have made sincere efforts to implement this idea to bifurcate the responsibilities of the collector into regulatory and developmental. Both have district level development officers who function almost independently of their respective District Collectors. However, through experience, the states have realised that it is not possible to run two parallel systems of administration in a district and the development programmes of a district could not really take off without the active participation of the local collector. Today the Collector of Maharashtra and Gujrat are again playing a major role in the formulation and implementation of developmental programmes³⁶.

Thus, the artificial dichotomy envisaged between a Collector’s developmental activities and his regulatory functions has proved to be an undesirable myth. A Collector can not be expected to maintain law and order effectively unless he understands the needs and aspirations of the people and can ensure timely formulation and implementation of development programmes meant for them³⁷.

The Collector’s burden can be made lighter by reconstructing the districts into smaller and more compact ones. The magnitude of problem in a district is directly related to the size of its population and indeed grows at a faster rate than that of the population. Similarly, it also depends, though to a lesser extent, on the geographical area of the district. Since independence, our population has more than doubled but

there has only been a marginal increase too, has not been uniform. While states like U.P., Bihar, and Kerala have created a few new districts, there has been hardly any increase in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, or Orissa. Tushar Kanti Das, a one time Collector in West Bengal writes: "I must confess that I found the task too much of a burden and had a nagging feeling that I did not have as much information, control or supervision over the affairs of the district that a Collector should really have."³⁸ The Collector is an overworked functionary. Consequently some of his work is apt to remain neglected and some only superficially attended, for omnipotence is apt to breed incompetence, at any rate, in human being³⁹. Paul Appleby had observed; "One sits in his office only to hear him receiving along with stream of either visitors, telephone calls from all the state Ministers who lay their most pressing problems at the door, he is responsible to everybody for everything, though with varying degree of clarity. No one can hold him responsible for anything in particular, and few facilities for checking his performance exist. He struggles valiantly in an outmoded structural situation."⁴⁰

The Ashok Mitra Committee on Administrative Reforms set up by the West Bengal Government has tackled the issue in a more positive manner and suggested, "The optimum size of a district should be determined in terms of a total population size of 15 to 20 lakhs." One must however, hasten to add that while population and area should be the main criteria for determining the size of a district, other factors like its geographical location, topography, climate and communication system should also be taken into account⁴¹.

Administrative Reforms must generate positive qualities in administration⁴². First, the administration has to be efficient, effective, dynamic, innovative and forward looking in character. Second, it has to be objective, fair and just. Third, it has to be clean and with highest standards of integrity and honesty. Finally, it has to be people-oriented and must be conducive to citizen satisfaction. It should take into account the needs and convenience of the people. It should reduce the distance between people and administration.

These attributes of administration are essential and desirable. But they can not be attained through limited administrative reforms alone. It functions in an environment, and the reform of the social, political and economic system as well as the constitutional machinery is a pre-condition to effective administration reforms.

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