

PREFACE

District has been at the core of Indian administration in different phases of our country. A district of today has a continuous link all along and particularly British India. In recent years, district administration has been passing through heavy stresses and strains at critical and sensitive points under the combined impact on ecology and the forces of change. The role of administrative system changed in the context of three major factors, namely democracy, development and decentralisation.

Throughout the Third World decentralisation has long been regarded as a necessary condition of economic, social and political development. Third World States find much promise in decentralisation. The emphasis in decentralist programmes and reforms has generally been on democratic decentralisation, that is, development is seen as requiring a measure of political autonomy to be evolved to institution which local people may participate in and control. It is argued that if development is to mean the eradication of poverty, inequality and material deprivation it must engage the involvement and mobilization of the poor. Decentralisation is especially needed to enable the rural poor to participate in politics. Participation in local institutions should help overcome the indifference, pessimism and passivity of rural people.

Decentralisation is seen as a means of 'penetrating' rural areas. Support for development can be mobilized by decentralisation. It is seen that in Zambia, Tanzania and Papua New Guinea, among other new states, decentralisation, especially in rural development programmes, has been set the objectives of making decisions more relevant to local needs and conditions by having them taken by rural people. Thus decentralisation is designed to reflect unique local circumstances in development plans and their implementation.

In India, ever since the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team on Community Projects and National Extension Service made their recommendation for democratic decentralisation, it has become such a dominating concept in Community Development that both democratic decentralisation and Community Development have tended to be synonymous. Decentralisation through the involvement of local-level representative institutions in the formulation of plans

for development as well as their implementation is being advocated in the interest of efficient utilisation of resources and for ensuring more equitable sharing of benefit from development.

District administration has assumed greater significance in the light of the growing emphasis on development planning and the implementation of welfare and development programmes through a process of democratic decentralisation. It is a level at which the government becomes much more direct and impinging on the day to day life of the people.

The present study would identify the district as a planning unit. In future new district pattern may emerge in the light of the extent of planning process. It is said in order to bring to limelight the fact that as yet viable theory of territorial administration is lacking, a scientifically structured theory having practical orientation between the district and its people is of utmost importance in the territorial administration in India. Keeping the view in mind the study would try to throw light on the theory of district administration for the purpose of planning. It is now essential to study the functional change and the behavioural needs of district administration especially in the crucial context of the democratic polity and development proclivity of the nation.

In Chapter I attempt has been made to build a theoretical framework within which the district administration operates.

Chapter II seeks to emphasize the strong thread of continuity that has persisted since the British days. The District Collector was the principal functionary, the fulcrum and the pivot of the district administration. In the changed situation of the country following Independence in 1947, the Collector's powers, responsibilities and functions had also changed to a great extent. As a leader of the district development team, his greatest challenge is to coordinate of different development activities. The chapter also throws light on the relationship of the district officer with the police as directly concerned with the maintenance of law and order provides another theme for continuing debate.

Chapter III focuses attention on certain approaches and theories of development, the meaning of sustainable development and also the development administration. In the developing countries of Asia, the need for development

administration has been well recognized as a means of implementing policies and plans directed towards nation-building and socio-economic progress. This chapter also deals with the impact of development on district administration and its problems.

Chapter IV deals district administration as a planning unit. The entrustment of development functions to local institutions would remain incomplete unless these institutions are vested with the authority to take their own decisions and plan according to their own requirements. Planning would, therefore be an important function to be discharged by all the tiers of local government structure. The progress of Panchayati Raj Institutions following the recommendation of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee and Ashok Mehta Committee has also been discussed here. Keeping in view the past experiences it became imperative to provide constitutional status to local self-government to impart certainty, continuity and strength (73rd Amendment Act '93). The PRIs in India deserves to succeed at least the principal vehicles for rural development.

In Chapter V, effort has been made to sketch different state experiment on Panchayats. Selection of some state governments which stand out prominently - the Western states of Maharashtra and Gujrat which had adopted almost similar models of decentralisation during the early 1960s, the eastern state of West Bengal which has been governed by the Marxist-led coalition for almost two decades now, and the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka whose decentralization models are distinctively different from the earlier ones. Thus a comparative study of these models, by itself, can throw adequate light on the democratic decentralization. This chapter also throws light on some of the recommendations of Administrative Reform Commission on district administration.

Chapter VI deals with the empirical study of a backward rural district, i.e., Dakshin Dinajpur of West Bengal. It is mainly an agriculture - based district. It is the main intention to examine some specific schemes of rural development programmes in the district. Since the main thrust of study is towards the understanding of democratic decentralization of developmental programmes in district administration, a brief look at the district of Dakshin Dinajpur is not out of the track.

Chapter VII is the concluding part of the study.