

District Administration : Dimensions and Functions : A Case Study of PurbaMedinipur District in West Bengal

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Abstract :District Administration is the key mechanism responsible for the proper functioning and development of a district.. It is a crucial aspect of public administration and governance, which works as a connecting corner between the government below the state and the state above. District Administration plays an pivotal role in implementing the policies and plans designed by the state and central government. This article is designed to develop the function of a district Administration, its administrative structure, and its relevance in West Bengal and in particularly PurbaMedinipur District.

Key Words : District Administration, District , Governance, Welfare, Development, Local Self Government.

Introduction :

‘District’ as a Unit of administration has been in existence in India through the ages. And the ‘District Administration, (DA) is that portion of public administration where ‘the total management of public affairs’ is to be carried out .¹ (Khera,1963, P.1) It has also being expected that DA should become an instrument of ‘Social change, economic development and political reconstruction’.² (Chahar. 2009,P.1) After all, efficiency of the public administration resembles to the efficiency of the district administration. Because of the fact that, it is the DA that comes into direct contact with the people. That is why prime minister LalBahadurShastri while addressing the National Development Council (NDC) in 1964 advised the chief Ministers of different states to restore the DA.³ (Chahar,2009 P.47) It is the most convenient field of administration which has been serving people through the ages, even in these days of all embracing and all-pervading nature of Public administration. The role and functions of the DA are many and varied. They may be grouped into a number of broad categories such as – i) Law and order, and Magisterial function, (ii) Land Revenue function, (iii) Welfare and

developmental function, (iv) functions regarding local staff government; (v) Electoral functions and (vi) Emergency functions.

The Objective of the Study

- *The objective of the present study is to analyse the
- *Various functions of district administration,
- * Different dimensions of district administration,
- * Functional framework of district administration,
- * And present day relevance of district administrative functions.

Methodology of the Study:

The study is conducted based on both theoretical and empirical analysis. The theoretical part has been analyzed with the help of desk research. The data and information have been collected from published literature both Primary and Secondary. The study of documents include published literature on the subject, books, Government Publications, Census reports, District abstracts, Planning Commission Reports, report of the various committees and commissions appointed from time to time, and articles published in leading Books and journals. The field study has been conducted by making visit to a district head quarters, through discussions on the basis of interview with the officials and on-officials employed and concerned in the acts and activities of the district level administration. After the collection of data and preparation of the Preliminary draft, the findings have been checked and errors checked where ever possible by personal interviews with bureaucrats, leaders and other associates of the district Administration. It is based on qualitative analysis of data.

1. Law and order and Magisterial Function :

Since the very first day of District Administration's journey, it has been designed with those noble objectives and goals, one of them is the maintenance of law and order. The issue of law and order is central to the district administration and it's functioning. The definition of law and order, as given by 'Oxford Dictionary' 'law' is defined as the body of indicated or customary rules recognized by a Community as binding. And orders is defined a 'law binding state, absence of riot, turbulence and violent crime".⁴ (Khera, 1963, p.69) Therefore, law and order signifies to a situation where people live in peace

The maintenance of law and order contains mainly two aspects :

- i) The detection and prevention of Crime in general and
- ii) Prevention and quelling of riots and serious disturbances.⁵ (Potter,1962, P-92)

Administration of criminal justice of the district administration is primarily- based on the provisions of the code of Criminal procedure and the Indian Penal Code (IPC)⁶. (Potter,1962, P.22) The session judge is usually responsible for the maintenance of criminal justice in a district. It also can punish to some body authorized by IPC. It also hears appeals against the decision of Magistrate. The trial of various petty crimes is entrusted to magistrates of three grades- firstly, a first class magistrate may pass a sentence of two years imprisonment and 2000 Rs. Five, Secondly, a second class magistrate one of six months imprisonment and Rs. 500 five and lastly, a third class magistrate one of one month imprisonment and Rs. 100 fine ⁷ (Potter,1962, P.23) Functions of the district administration under the code of Criminal procedure falls into two broad categories :

- i) Functions which are administrative in character, such as handling of unlawful assemblies, the issue of arm licenses etc.
- ii) Functions which are essentially financial in character, such as- the trial of criminal cases, involving the shifting of evidence, pronouncement of decisions, sending of individual for trial to another court.⁸ (Potter,1962, P.24)

The executive Magistracy acts in many ways as the agency of judiciary. The execution of writs of the civil and criminal courts including criminal writ form courts outside the district is normally done through the magistrate trial element of the district administration. ⁹(Bhatt,2007, P.21)

The another aspect of maintaining law and order is the police force. The Superintendent of Police (S.P.) is mainly responsible for the maintenance of law and order in a district. He primarily functions and concern with the maintenance of order, prevention and detection of crime, collection of political intelligence and anticorruption works¹⁰ (Potter,1962, P-25) They perform their duties in accordance with the section 23 of the Police Act 1861,¹¹ (Khera,1963, P-93) section 33 of this act set out that the control of Police in the district shall vest in the district Magistrate.¹² (Khera,1963, P-94).

Section 4 of the police act contains the administration of the Police through out the local administration of the magistrate of the district shall under the general control and

direction of such Magistrate be vested in a district superintendent of police (SP).¹³(Bhattacharya, 2007, P.22) In-fact, overall control of Police administration in a district goes under the charge of the DM. This became evident particularly when there is riot or wide spread of disorder.

Armed force is another aspect of maintaining law and order within a district. Article 33 and 34 of our constitution provides for the deployment of armed force¹⁴(Khera,1963,p.96). They may be called to the safety of the people when there are natural or other calamities such as earth quake, floods, fires and the like Section 130 and 131 of the code of criminal procedure¹⁵(Khera,1963,p.98) prescribe that, a Magistrate may call upon officers or commanding troops in dealing with an unlawful assemblies.

The citizen itself may be an aspect in the maintenance of law and order in a district. Security and peaceful living of the citizen can be ensured by the active involvement and participation of the citizen. The concept of citizens' cooperation is as old as human civilization. In ancient time, citizens had prevented crime and maintained peace and tranquility on the basis of 'cooperative Community efforts. For instance we may say 'watch and ward duty,'¹⁶(Khan,1997,p.134) of the medieval period. In present time, we can say of the concept of 'Gram RakshaBahini or peace Committee of the villages.

2. Land Revenue.

Land revenue and the collection of revenue is the most important functions of the district administration. So the head of the district who has been being come to designate against this role as collector. It was Akbar who introduced the modern system of land revenue and the assessment of land revenue as well as its payment in cash instead of in kind. With the coming of British in India, the matter of land revenue remained the same. But they too emphasized on land revenue and the collection of revenue. They knew it very well that land is the only major source of government's income in India. There after, they took much care regarding the matter of land and land revenue. They also understood that, as one could not take away the land and could not hid it, it was the easiest way to levied the taxes. They appointed collector to collect the taxes. The tax on land being one of the easiest of all to levy, they gave due attention to the question of ease and conveniences of assessment and of collection.

During the period of Mughal empire and the early British era, the main task of revenue administration was- i) land records (ii) Settling and assessing the revenue and (iii) the collection of revenue¹⁷ (Khera,1963, P.164).

The vitality and importance of proper land records were needed first up, so that the disputes between Zamindar and his cultivators or the disputes among the cultivators might be solved. The system of land records includes a) the measurement of lands and the classification of soil and b) the rights of land holders in the land.¹⁸ (Potter,1962,p-.126). There of, the maintenance of land records is the principal task of the district administration. These records are initially prepared at the time of settlement. Settlement is a process of agreeing with a particular person or body of persons that he is singly or they are jointly responsible for paying the land revenue assessed on a particular field¹⁹ (Potter,1962, P.26). Betterment may be Permanent or temporary. Permanent settlement is prevailed in North-East India and temporary in Northern Parts of India. Temporary settlement is of thirty to forty years. This may be extended by a state government up to eighty years. Settlement is made us in the cultivators when one may be owner of the land. It is called 'Ryotwari' system. And when the owner pays revenue after receiving rent from the cultivators, settlement is made with he land owner, not actual tiller of the land. This type of land tenure is called 'Zamindari'. It is to be remembered that land records and it's maintenance is a continuous concern of the district administration. When general settlement or re-settlement of land revenue of a district takes place, it is usually preceded by a complete general revision of the land records. The land revenue functions of district administration also includes the matter of land reforms, Land management and the acquisition of land. In the field of land reforms the district organization consists of the collector, the sub-divisional officer, the tashildar and the Patwari. There is also provision for the creation of special departments and staffs as the situation demands. The function of land reforms includes the consolidation of lands, the abolition of the Zamindari and the acquisition of land. Land management as a concern of the district administration includes the management of lands belonging to the government, and some times uncultivated common lands, forests, waterways and the like. The one more component parts of the land management is the court of wars. In the normal time the district officer is the manager of the court of wards. And he is responsible for supervising the management of all estates large or small, including those for which there may be a special manager.

Welfare and Development Function :

Welfare and development functions in the context of district administration in India are vital to the very existence of it's people. In a rural country like our's where more than 60% people still live in villages, the concept of rural development and mass welfare assumes a great importance. Not only that, with the advancement of science and technology, and the needs of the hours, the foci of district administration have

considerable shifted away from the collection of revenue and the maintenance of law and order, the economic development and upliftment of the people and society. India evokes rightly or wrongly, an image of traditional society, where lives of it's people are living with out having access to basic amenities and services., poverty and other forms of improvishment are conspicuously galling. Colossal scale of rural poverty remains a shameful slur on the face of India. As such, National development can not succeed with out attending to the enduring problems and in adequacies in rural India. Even after 63 years of planned economy development, huge villages lack households, food, shelter, education, health, safe drinking water and other civic amenities. And in this context the role of district administration, in the field of rural development and welfare is indispensable to be considered. The development and welfare activities of district administration includes- community development, agriculture, irrigation, industry, health, education, supplies and transport, cooperatives etc. each of these functions is looked after by separate department headed by a specialist officer in the district.

Community Development :

The concept of 'community Development' (CD) as defined by UNO's Economic and Social Council is 'a process designed to create conditions of economic and social Progress for the whole community, with the active participation and fullest possible reliance of communities initiative'²⁰ (Khan,1997, P.51). The concept of rural development in India is a result of a number of experiment after and before our Independence. Community development is a result of a such experiment. In 1952 India launched a pilot project of it on an experimental basis at Etawah, Gorakhpur and Nilokheri with the technical and financial cooperation and aid of united states of America. It started it's functioning with effect from 31st March 1952²¹ (Misra,1983,P. 290). The Project initially proposed was to be of the rural development type, including irrigation, fertilizer application, agricultural extension etc. The main thirst of the programme was to bring the benefits arising from it at the feet of the large scale section of the population. S. K. Dey was it's administrator. He was responsible for planning, directing and coordinating the programmethrough out India. A separate ministry was also to be created as the ministry of community development with effect from 20 September 1956²²(Mishra,1963,p.292).

In the 1953, National Extension Service Scheme' was lunched to provide administrative structure to CDP.

It consists of a number of schemes such as-Agriculture, Animal husbandry, irrigation and reclamation, health and rural sanitation, education, social education, communication, rural arts, crafts and industries, housing etc²³ (Potter,1962, P.30). At the district level the collector is to function as chief coordinator and give the lead through a

District Development Committee (DDC) consisting of the district officials representing the various notion building or development departments as well as non official members belonging to the state legislature and Parliament hailing from the district as well as prominent social workers. He is also the member Secretary of district planning board and chairman of DRDA and DDC. He is the principal authority of the programme at the ZillaParishad level.

Agriculture and Cooperatives :

The next group of development function of district administration is connected to the matter of agriculture and cooperative, 'Ab initio', the district administration is concerned with the agriculture, Economic and Social life of district derives from agriculture. $\frac{3}{4}$ th of our foreign exchange comes from agriculture. About 52.1 of it's population live directly on agriculture and allied activities²⁴(Census, 2001,GOI). Certainly, agriculture is a prime factor to our national development. Therefore, agriculture should be paid due attention in any discourse on our development. District administration to be the third strata of our administrative process shall not deny it's responsibility towards agriculture. In British Bharat, there was also some thinking and planning on agriculture development. In British era, the first administrative measures towards agricultural development was the creation of special department to investigate the conditions of agriculture in India. During the period of Lord Mayo, agricultural branch was established in 1875. Famine Commission of 1880, held that their should be in each district, a special officer of the rank of deputy collector, whose main duty would be take charge of all matters related to the economic condition and well being of the people ²⁵ (Mishra,1983, P.86). In pursuance of the famine commission's advice a central department of revenue and agriculture was created in 1881. In this year a new secretary to the government of India was also appointed²⁶ (Mishra,1983, P.88). At the district level 'voelker's concept of district analysis' put emphasizes on the matter of agricultural development ²⁷(Mishra,1983,p.100). On the field of irrigation, Lord Dalhousie established civil public works department in 1867- to look after the matter of irrigation and others. In 1906, a separate Inspector general of Irrigation was appointed for three years. In 1901, irrigation Commission was appointed under the chairman ship of Sir Colin Scott Moncrieff.

What does make district administration vitality, to bring agricultural aspect in to the light of the developmental discourse?

First, the importance of agriculture to the development of rural India, especially the uncountable poor rural masses, in their augmentation of their fate and fortune claiming the first priority of attention on the part of the district administration. Limited amount of

cultivated land, no amount of new land brought under the plough, expansion of industrial activities taking land out of cultivation, the reduction of fertile and wooded land etc. are evoking Various contemplation to district administration. Second, Land Reforms is another factor which has come to make district administration a more and more important institution in the whole process of India administration, consistent with the National Policy of land Reforms and the abolition of Zamindari, district administration has to ply vital role in agricultural sector, Land ceiling land mapping, allocation of 'Khas Jami' (vested land), determination of land revenue, collection of land revenue and various relation works which district administration has to should responsibilities. There are separate departments for each of the functions under the general supervision of both the departments – Zilla Agriculture. Irrigation and cooperative and the Zilla Land and Land Reforms departments.

Cooperatives :

When ever we talk about any agricultural development, the institution of cooperatives automatically followed by it. The system of cooperatives for agricultural credit has been in practice in the country since many decades before our independence. They have been providing major credit needs of our small and marginal farmers since enactment of the cooperative credit Societies Act, 1904. West Bengal being agrarian in character, One -third of it's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) comes through agriculture and more than two-fourth of the toal agricultural credit needs comes through cooperatives²⁸ (Tripathy,2012, P.38). A statistics shows that the total 40,782 villages of West Bengal are being served by 5,982 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies out of which 5229 are in working, that means, there is at least one Primary Agricultural credit societies (PACS) in every 6-7 villages²⁹ (Tripathy,2012, p.28). Infact, PACS are playing a significant role for agricultural development in Bengal by supplying various in puts like seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and reasonable price at the door step of farmers. 2nd Green Revolution in West Bengal is hardly possible if cooperatives have no significant role for agicultural development in so many ways. They are successfully implementing various project under RashtriyaKrishiBikashYojana (RKVY) NABARD sponsored self help group (SHG) in cooperative fold in West Bengal assumed the shape of a movement. Presently, under NREGS scheme cooperatives are making payment of ways to huge number of job Card holders through S/Bs. A/cs³⁰ (Tripathy,2012, P. 34). usually in each district there is a central cooperative bank, and frequently the collector of the district was 'ex-officio chairman of the District Central Cooperative Bank. Not only that, district administration has to look after the administrative and other aspects of cooperatives with in its territory.

Welfare Activities :

Social and economic welfare of the people is a major concern of district administration. The various special economic Programmes like the Food for work programme (FWP) of the late seventies, The National Rural Land Less employment Guarantee programme (RLEGP) etc. of the eighties, JawaharRozgarYojana (JRY), Indira AbasYojana (IAY), Integrated Rural development Programme (IR.D.P.) of early nineties, Jawahar Gram SamridhiYojana (JGSY), Swarnajanti Gram SwarozgarYojana (SGSY) of late nineties and early twenties or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), PradhanMantriJibanjyotiYojana (PJY) of the Present time are implemented by the district administration in the district. Besides economic welfare programmes, various social security measures like ole age Pension, Widow Pension, Maternity allowance, Atal Pension Yojana of the central government or Kannyashree or Sikshashree schemes of West Bengal State government were also being implemented by district administration.

Each of these above said functions is looked after by separate department headed by specialist officers in the district. In fact, attention to the welfare of the people living in a district is not merely a incidental to or outside of district administration. In British days as is supposed by some Indian observers, it is more extensively concerned to promote the welfare of the people of the district.

Health and Education :

Public health is another concern of district administration. Though there has been a greater improvement in public health in general over recent years, yet we are still facing some problems of public health especially in the remote and slum areas of a district. In those areas standard of sanitation and nutrition is still very poor. It is there very difficult to handle and control any epidemic diseases and maintaining the standards of child nutrition . The district administration is directly responsible for the maintenance of public health-threatened by outbreak of any epidemic diseases. District administration has to make adequate arrangements for the treatment of those who fall victim to the epidemic, and to take necessary step to prevent the epidemic from spreading. We do not have to search far for example of epidemics. Say fer-very recent two instances, in 2010 the outbreak of 'Bird Flue' and in 2014, the out break of 'Swine Flue'.

The district administration, Particularly the district health and medical staffs and other agencies of the administration in the district have responsibilities in combating the epidemic. In West Bengal, at the district level these are also sanitary inspectors,

veterinary officers nurses and vaccinators to be the district health and medical staffs. And legal provisions exist, under which DM and his staffs can exercise the necessary rules and regulations to control it. In accordance with the 'West Bengal Panchayat enactment Act, 2010, district administration has the responsibility in the field of health to make adequate arrangements, to establish and maintain dispensaries and hospitals for the sake of public health.

Education :

According to our constitution, education is a subject to both the union and state governments; Both in union and states, the administrative organization of education consists of the Ministry of Education headed by Minister of cabinet rank. At the central level, Ministry of Education formulates national policies in the field of education. It also co-ordinates, maintains and facilitates standardized in respect of University technical Education and any education field in various union territories. The state governments have to perform same activity in the field of education with in their own territories. The district as an agent of state administrative machinery, has to play vital role in the field of education. Districts have the responsibility to take initiatives in the field of education in implementing, organizing and regulating various scheme and Programmes sponsored by the union or state governments. For instances we may say, the programme of 'Total Literacy campaign'(TLC), the programme of 'BetiParaho-BetiBanchaho or the various schemes for backward sections of the society. In each district there is a District Inspector of schools to look after the over all matters of school education. There is also a social education officer in the district. District administration has to maintain and to give financial assistance to public libraries existed with init's territory. District administration has also to make programme or to take initiative in the field of various formal and non-formal education for the sake of well being of it's students.

Industries :

Industries is an another aspect of development function performed by the district administration. The principal responsibility of the district administration in respect of large scale industries is mainly to assist in the regulatory and overseeing functions, for which different departmental arrangements exist. On the other side, district administration is directly responsible for law and order excise and other revenue matter to which a particular industry may be assessed. Generally there is a district industries officer to look after the overall matters relating to industries. According to West Bengal Panchayat amendment Act 2010, district administration has the responsibility to sustain and develop various small and cottage industries like textile, handicrafts etc.

Local Self Government Matters :

Stalemate bureaucratic addition left behind by the British at the district level become irrelevant in the context of democracy, decentralization and development. Simultaneously, the proposal of NirmalMukherji on district administration revolutionizes the task of district administration in respect of local self government. Now the district administration has occupied prominent position in the system of local self governments in India. The major changes which take place in the district administration in the light of the 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) is the creation of ZillaParishads instead of former district boards, or Municipal Committees and Municipal boards in the cities, 74th CCA also provides for constituting the District Planning Committee (DPC) at the district level. It consists of officials and people's representatives from both rural and urban local bodies³¹(Chahar,2009,P.149). The idea behind the formation of DPC is unionize the rural and urban local planning in to one district Plan. In West Bengal, District Magistrate (DM) is the secretary of the DPC.

The tasks of district administration in respect of local self governments cover the functions which are concerned with the administration of local bodies. The district administration supervises and exercises control over Municipal bodies and Panchayats in urban and rural areas respectively. The implementation of various developmental and anti-poverty measures for the urban and rural poor is monitored by the DM. The most important of these programmes are the SwarnajayatiSahariRojgarYojana (SJSRY) or SwarnaJayanti Gram SwarozgarYojana (SGSY), Urban Ashraya (Housing), Indira AbasYojana, Integrated small and Medium Towns Development (IDSMT) Programmes, MGNREGS etc.

Supply and Transport :

Another most important function of district administration is 'Supply and Transport; The district administration is responsible for day to day supplying essential civil services like food, drinking water, medicines, Vaccines and other basic commodities. It has the responsibility to maintain and regulate the rationing system with in the territory of each respective district. It also maintains various roads, bridges and ferries etc. As to transport, there is usually a transport department in every district. The district police are concerned with the regulation of traffic, supervision over the proper registration of light or heavy motor vehicles. There are separate department to carryout each function in the district.

Electoral Functions :

One of the vital activities of district administration is electoral function, It is a continuous process. It is going on over the years either election is in progress or not. There is always certain amount of work related to election. It has the responsibility to hold election of Parliament, State Legislature or local Bodies. At the time of general election DM takes the responsibility of a returning officer in a district. He is also responsible for the proper observance of the process of election from the registration of voters to the declaration of results of election.

Crisis Management Function :

When a natural disasters occurred in a district or any portion of it, every officials and every agency in the district comes into play, to share the responsibility in dealing with the situation. In situations like floods, drought, fires or famines, earth quakes, cyclones and like other natural calamities the entire district administration is geared to meet the threat and the District Magistrate assumes charge to coordinate the activities of the various departments and takes proper steps to remove sufferings of the people.

Miscellaneous Functions :

There are a number of functions which are not clearly defined, or there is no separate office and officer to carryout the duties in the district. It is the DM by his own capacity and capability, as the prime representative of the government in the district,, has to deal with all these matters. This group of activities includes functions like collection under Small savings Schemes, contribution to Public loans, implementation of family Planning Programme, hearing complaints, visit to VIPs etc.

Conclusion :

At the end of the discussion, one thing is clear that the functions of the district Administration under the ideological obsession of the welfare state has greatly expended. District administration today has both preventive functions like maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue as well as welfare functions like providing education transport sanitation or environment protection etc. As a result there is increase in filtration of politics in administration. Administration to be the sub-system of the political system has to extend its constant cooperation to achieve national goals and objectives. And politics is the means through which society responds to the matters of administration and decides how to conduct the administration. Therefore policies-administration relationship is a major concern in the process of governance and development. From the perspective of developed nations it can easily be understood that

warm and cordial relation between politics and administration is only alternative to progressive and prosperous administration. Hence there has been intellectual inquiry of politics –administration relationship since the days of Woodrow Willson.

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