

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IN 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

District Administration constantly changes with changes in the philosophy of state, objectives of government and values of people. It is a dynamic apparatus of State, not a static instrument. Values of society have undergone drastic change and a New Society and a New man with lofty ambitions and vaulting desires have emerged.

To be effective, public organisations will need to be increasingly more responsive. The key to responsiveness is organisational adaptability to change. The processes of social, economic and political change will continue to accelerate in the 21st Century making it vitally important that organisations adopt themselves to changed conditions. The district administrators must learn to anticipate social, economic and political changes and capitalise on these. The administration at present has become an all-pervasive affair through political direction, economic management, social engineering and increased bureaucratization. However, there is growing public resentment and hostility towards increase in bureaucratization as reflected in the increasing demand for decentralization, democratization and public participation in administration. "Unless the administrative system is geared to keep pace with cultural transformation, social discontent, alienation and violence may ultimately lead to the breakdown of the social fabric."¹ Besides, reflection on reinventing District Administration in the 21st Century is also necessitated by the changing socio-economic and political contexts and the new challenges facing the State and consequent ones of administrative responsibility to be borne by District Administration.

As society progresses, the processes of societal change throw up new themes and challenges that widen the scope of district administrative studies. 'Environment and ecology', for instance, is a major concern calling for action at both international and national levels. Pollution monitoring and anti-pollution measures, conservation programmes for our forests, river and water bodies, and bio-diversity generally are important items today for imaginative policy and administrative responses.

Another important theme is the 'gender' issue in administration. Female participation in work force has been increasing over the years, calling for administrative changes in compensation and welfare policies and other related issues (e.g. sexual harassment at workplace). In the context of the developing countries, 'engendering' development by involving more and more women in development activities, has now been accepted as a general policy by the donor agencies and the recipient countries' governments. Again, issues like prevention and abolition of child labour, untouchability, bonded labour, and other obnoxious social practices are increasingly claiming administrative action.

Contemporary Developments

The relationship between administration and society has never remained static. Emergence of new social situations has always impacted on administration. For instance, the care of the aged passed on to local government agencies or NGOs. Similarly, any new administrative attempt to influence or change social behaviour has often evoked varied responses from the society.

In recent times, two major administrative paradigms have opened up new relationship between administration and society. One-the Neo-liberal vision-poses what is familiarly known as the State vs. market debate. There has been a realisation of late in the developed West that formal government has over the years taken upon itself more administrative burden than it can actually shoulder. This has resulted in big bureaucracy, more taxation, and overall governmental inefficiency. To get out of this 'governmental overload', the advocacy has been for lean and more performance-oriented government through 'downsizing' and 'privatization' of many of the government functions. The market is capable of working more flexibly and cost-effectively; hence, government should reorient itself as an 'enabler' rather than a 'doer'. The New Public Management philosophy that has emerged in recent times favours more market-driven development than State or government driven development. This is expected to release more social energy and allow for autonomous societal action.

The other paradigm that has gained currency is 'governance'. The totality of a country's ability to grapple with and solve collective problems is subsumed in the concept of governance. It is an amalgam of the formal government, the private sector and the non-government agencies. In this way, the ambit of district administration is sought to be enlarged. All the traditions and institutions of authority exercised in a society are thus put together to connote the total governing resource that is available to cope with the complex problems of collective problem-solving. Also, the 'governance' concept, besides extending the boundaries of administration, brings in additional dimensions of, 'accountability', 'openness', 'transparency', 'participation', and the notion of ethical administration. What is significant in this characterisation of administration as 'governance' is the newly emerging administration-society relationship under which formal administration is called upon to forge networked functioning to optimise administrative effectiveness. Accountability to people, participative administration, right to information, and transparency and openness are the constituent elements of 'good governance'. The trend now is thus to democratize administration, and make it more and more society-centric and citizen-friendly.

Another new development in this context that deserves special mention is a major on-going effort to create conditions to bring about a more 'inclusive' district administration, as against an 'exclusive' one. What it means is that there is a fairly widespread concern now to make government more 'decentralized', 'participative', 'gender-sensitive' and 'sensitive to the needs of the socially marginalized'. In other words, the traditional insularity of State apparatus (e.g., bureaucracy) from the society is now under question and the trend seems toward closer State-

society nexus in the interest of more effective and real democracy deeply embedded in society and faithfully serving its just causes.

Norms Governing the Interaction between Citizens and District Administration

In the field of development administration, the client is differentiated on the basis of target groups. There are projects that are meant for tribals, children and women, scheduled castes and other socially backward classes. Clientele differentiation increases the complexities of interaction between District Administration and the public. In the developing countries, it is the poor and the underprivileged that constitute the majority of the population. National projects are implemented by the state concerned mainly through the district administration. These implementers/bureaucracies treat the target groups as 'beneficiaries'. Such a top-down delivery system has, in most cases, failed to ameliorate the living conditions of the target groups, mainly because of hijacking of benefits and resources by the village elite.

The centrally planned projects have often disregarded and misinterpreted the local needs and conditions. Interaction between people and government, especially in dealing with poverty, has generally been looked at from the government's point of view, making the poor more and more dependent on the government for help. Field researchers are now forcefully arguing that developing people's capacity to improve their lot is what is needed rather than repeated governmental efforts to design newer and newer projects. As Frances Korten has stated "The very ability of the poor to survive under the most unfavourable circumstances suggests that they are quite skilled in meeting their own basic needs even if only at standards intolerable to a socially conscious society. Too often the government programmes seek to improve their lot, not through interventions intended to strengthen their own capacity for 'self-help' action, but through doing for them, what they previously did for themselves – with the government making the decisions and providing the resources. As a consequence, the people's former self-sufficiency turns into dependence on the government leaving them even more vulnerable than before to the changes in the policies or lapses in the delivery systems".² Participatory and people-centred development activities are now being advocated and actively undertaken for the real benefits of the people. It would also create good image of district administration in the minds of the poor and the underprivileged sections of the society. The relationship between district administration and the citizens raises a number of important issues regarding the role of the government machinery and its interactions with the public.

As Katz and Danet explain in their volume on Bureaucracy and the Public, the structure of bureaucratic organisations that subsume a set of guiding norms governing the relationships between the organisation and the clientele.³ These norms are identified as: (a) Specificity, (b) Universalism, and (c) Affective Neutrality. Specificity refers to the strictly limited zone of interaction between administration and the clients as formally defined by the organisation. In a public transport the passenger pays the fare and the conductor assures him a travel up to a definite distance. Universalism stand for equal treatment of defined group as organizationally prescribed. For instance, every bus

and the municipal institutions. They have moved into a position of power, and this has surely enabled them to participate in local government decision-making, a sphere that effects their lives the most. It has given them political administrative visibility and the opportunity to learn politics and local governance. Inherently, it has made them aware, conscious and confident. In terms of absolute numbers, according to the Statistical Abstract (Government of India, 2003), as far as grass roots democratic institutions that is the Panchayati Raj and local bodies are concerned, these Amendments have helped to a great extent.

Recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) is being translated into action. Among other steps in the direction of empowerment, it includes: (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for the development of women to enable them to realise their full potential, (ii) Providing equal access to participation and decision-making in socio-political spheres, health care, education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, occupational health and safety, as well as social security; (iii) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women; and (iv) Building partnerships with civil society, especially women's organisations, corporate and private sectors.

Future Administrator : Role to Play

The future administrator needs to have not only efficiency and integrity but also a human approach to all problem. He must have a spirit of service to the community. He must also have the following;

1. He should possess a broad outlook on public affairs.
2. His only aim should be to help the public rather than getting bogged down with rigid and mechanical implementation of rules and regulations.
3. He should have the capacity to judge advice rendered to him and take decisions promptly.
4. When a decision is taken, the administrator should inspire and motivate his staff at all levels to execute it effectively. Every successful administrator should be result-oriented and prompt in meeting the demands of the public. What is needed is not a procedure – oriented bureaucracy but a performance-oriented one.

According to Richard L. Chapman and Frederic N. Cleveland;

1. The future administrator will be more of a moral leader, mediator and coordinator than mere issuer of order;
2. He will learn to be a tactician and politician as he will be subject to vastly increased political processes; and
3. He may also be called upon to act as an agent of change.⁸

The future administrator has to know as much of management, economics and sociology as history, law and politics. The increased complexity of social change and administrative arrangement will make the work of administration more demanding. They are adaptable and knowledgeable and perceptive and good readers of men and situations

Variable of success

Variable of successful administration and by extension administrator are⁹:

1. to recognise new solution rather than modify old ones ;

2. reformulate problems in new terms to elicit new responses and initiatives;
3. to turn crises to advantages, use deviation and conflict in problem solving to generate self-transformation with minimum alienation;
4. deal with uncertainty and fluidity and absorb change; instability, and interdependence;
5. tolerate deviation, conflict and confrontation without over-reading or losing sense of proportion in inter-disciplinary problem-solving;
6. encourage error-correction, initiative and creativity and learn from mistakes;
7. learn from experience and uncertainty; and
8. remain human and humane under stress.

Role of an administrator, according to M.A. Muttalib, has to be sorted out by reinterpreting public interest which is the corner-stone of administrative value system as the persons in authority often get intoxicated with power and money in the absence of adequate checks and forget the distinction between public interest, political interest and personal interest.¹⁰ Further, Muttalib holds that values of District Administration are at the threshold of revolution. The basic sources of administrative values, namely power, discipline and knowledge have been undergoing change with the changing social, political and professional values.

His Multiple Roles

District Administration today has broken away from its stereotype image of a rigid, conservative, inept and impersonal entity and the administrator has assumed the new image of a humane, innovative and responsive being. In this context, he has acquired a multiplicity of roles and responsibilities as follows:

1. crusading reformer intent on transforming some aspect of community life according to preconceived notions of the ideal society;
2. proactive policy formulator, ready with possible strategies to meet the unknown;
3. social change-agent ready to accept new ideals and to push others into accepting them also;
4. crisis manager, slow to burn out but quick to react and brilliant at immediate improvisation;
5. dynamic programme manager able to show new courses and adapts on-going arrangements;
6. humanitarian employer, treating staff with respect and meeting out even-handed justice;
7. political campaigner, responsive to public needs and champion of public causes;
8. competent administrator ensure effective performance with minimum political embarrassment;
9. interest broker, choosing among competing interests and reconciling all parties to the outcome;
10. public relations expert, adept at building up support, showing his area to advantage;
11. speedy decision-maker, oriented to assume responsibility and clear instructions;
12. constructive thinker, not easily lead astray by others who would want to make up his mind for him and.
13. optimistic leader, not easily discouraged in adversely but able to command attention and emulate subordinates¹¹. The future would call for a resetting of the goals of Public Administration in the wake of the changing demands of the future civilization as follows:

1. Human rights;

2. Human development;
3. Empowerment of people;
4. Gender equity; and
5. Care for non-humans and concern for future generations.

Summing Up

Any discussion on State, Society and Public Administration is indeed a thought-provoking. A futuristic study of this nature suffers from the drawback of speculative predictions and extrapolations based on the past and the current. However, we could reasonably conclude that the study for the next century calls for rethinking, reorienting and refocusing on priorities, goals and strategies. District Administration has endured by conceding and adapting to the changing time. It has evolved and readjusted with the changing nature of the State. It has risen to the challenges of modern times, such as overpopulation, poverty, resource crunch, illiteracy, economic imbalances, etc., by undergoing necessary structural and attitudinal changes. District Administration, however, has suffered from afflictions and drawbacks which have been highlighted by thinkers from time to time as public maladministration.

District Administration of the 21st Century should gear itself to human development, economy, performance-orientation, empowerment of the people, advocacy, technocracy, cultural-specificity and women-oriented structures and should have the lofty objectives of human rights, empowerment, gender-equity, care for non-humans and concern for future generations.

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