

SOS POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MA PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION 401

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

UNIT-V TOPIC NAME: ROLE OF THE COLLECTOR

Role of the Collector in District Administration

The post of District Collector has been the most important feature of field administration in India for the last two hundred years. Before Independence, when the economy was primarily agrarian, the Collector as head of the land revenue, administration also enjoying wide powers under criminal laws. He was considered as the ultimate guardian figure - responsible for the well-being of residents in his jurisdiction - the representative of the British Empire, capable of doing anything and everything. In the post-Independence era, when the economy diversified, and the pace of industrialization and growth of tertiary activities picked up, other functionaries too gained in importance. But, even now, in most parts of the country, excepting metropolitan/mega cities, the Collector is the most recognized face of the administration; he is considered to be the principal representative of the government at the district level, who could be approached to solve virtually all problems ranging from land disputes, to scarcity of essential commodities, to inadequacy of relief in times of crisis, to community disputes and even to issues of family discords.

Functions of Collector

Main functions of the Collector include:

The DC has three major functions namely revenue, magisterial and developmental. Apart from these major functions, a large number of miscellaneous functions are also entrusted to him by State and Central governments like conduct of elections, dealing with calamities, supervising local government institutions, etc. Collector was mainly entrusted with revenue administration, however, since Independence with the considerable change in the nature of the state from police rule to development and welfare, his role have shown a shift in the direction of development as he implements all the development programmes. Since he is a Generalist, he coordinates the activities of overall departments under Specialists like Engineers, doctors, etc. by holding meetings among them at periodic intervals. He is also acting as the Friend, Philosopher and Guide of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Need of Reforms in District Administration

As stated above, the widespread functions of the District Collector without well-defined roles result in lack of clarity and diffusion of the Collector's responsibilities. Also, after the establishment of PRIs / ULBs as the third tier of government, the Administrative Reform Commission (ARC) is of the view that there is need to redefine the role and responsibilities of the Collector in a clear manner because the office of the collector and its widespread and

vaguely defined functions are affecting the followings-

a) Union-State and Local relations: One must take note that the District Collector is a Union/Central officer and it has been systemized in such a manner so that the DC functions in a neutral and unbiased manner, without any fear, regarding his/her duties and responsibilities, and implementation of welfare/development activities of both the Centre and the state in the respective district he/she has been assigned to, but he has to eventually proceed from the states to the Centre in his career graph, he has to first prove his mettle at the state level, and at this level he works under the supervision of the state government and reports to them regarding discharge of his functions. Secondly, coordination between Centre-State is important for proper supervision of implementation of these schemes and programs to achieve the welfare policies. However, there are issues plaguing this system.

b) Imperatives of development management: The term development management is used in the sense of achievement and objectives with optimum use of limited resources in manpower, finance, material, time and also active contribution to the clarification and reformation of policies and objectives. India specifically needs to shift its focus from development administration to a more efficient development management perspective and practice in order to remain in the League of Nations competing for implementation of International development programs. For this many courses as well as programmes are being rolled out by the country's education system as well as sponsored by the international organizations. Also, there should be a lot more emphasis on re-training of administrators in service to develop these management skills and become more efficient to achieve these goals and objectives.

c) Law and order administration: Law and order (Judiciary, Police, etc.) administration is one of the most important function performed by the Government. In fact, the survival of administration depends upon maintenance of law and order in a country. Unfortunately, in view of the prevailing atmosphere of violence in the country, attention to law and order is called for, but the sad part is that this is being neglected in favour of development administration.

Therefore, it is imperative that law and order is given adequate attention and it is built up both on the infrastructural as well as intelligence and implementation level and its grievances and issues sorted out if we want a sound welfare state where development and law and order go hand in hand otherwise development will be stalled.

d) District administration and democratic decentralisation: Democratic decentralization here is used in reference to the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 that set up rural and urban local government bodies, viz. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Municipalities, respectively. The PRIs were set up to move decision making centers closer to the people by transferring the powers of decision making from higher authorities to them, all development schemes and its funds to be channelized through them, inculcating leadership qualities among the rural masses, encouraging people's participation in planning and policy making, etc. However the ground realities are:

i) Bureaucratic resistance to delegation of power to PRIs.

- ii) Vested interests of higher officials and middlemen take over in between.
- iii) Elitist behaviour and biasness among the bureaucrats and government officials.
- iv) No incentive to the DC in development activities.

However, there has been constant debate as to whether the District Collector who represents the Centre and states be a part of this or he should simply supervise as the minds of the rural people are constantly suspicious towards them. This causes a lot of problems in effective administration and implementation of programmes. Another aspect to this debate is that with so much of responsibility, the DC will be distracted from his other major functions like law and order, etc.

Recommendations

i) Role of District Collector:

- a) There is need to realign the functions of the Deputy Commissioners/ District Collector so that he concentrates on the core functions such as land and revenue Administration, maintenance of law and order, disaster management, public distribution and civil supplies, excise, elections, transport, census, protocol, general administration, treasury management and Coordination with various agencies/ departments.
- b) A well-defined set of exclusive activities both statutory as well as non-statutory as a functionary of the State Government should be added in his job profile.
- c) His job profile should also include the general work of coordination with various departments / agencies of the State and the Union Governments at the district level and

ii) Modernizing the Office of the District Collector:

- a) Grievance & Public Feedback Cell-Grievance redressal of citizens and implementation of citizen charters should be an integral part of the Collector's office.
- b) Management Information Systems / IT tools /E-Governance for effective monitoring and evaluation of programme/projects which are directly under the charge of the Collector, there needs to be computerized/MIS attached to his office.
- c) A Vigilance Cell should be there.
- d) Tours Inspection Notes and Institutional Memory.
- e) Civil Society & Media Cell should be there.

iii) Functional and Structural Reform:

- a) Formation of Institutions of Local Governance at the District Level.
- b) Each district should have a District Council comprising of representatives of both rural and urban bodies.
- c) The District Collector should have a dual role in this government structure. He should work as the Chief Officer of the District Council and should be fully accountable to the District Council on all local matters.
- d) The District Officer would also be fully accountable to the State Government on all regulatory/other matters not delegated to the District Government.

iv) Other Reforms:

- a) There is need to strengthen the compliance machinery at the district level to enforce provisions of the RTI Act and to reduce the element of delay and subjectivity in the functioning of the lower level formations of the government. This should be done by creating a special RTI Cell in the office of the Collector.
- b) Officers may be posted as District Magistrates early in their career, but in complex and problem-prone districts an IAS officer should be posted as DM only on completion of 10-12 years of service.
- c) Steps should be taken to ensure that the Collector plays an effective coordination role in activities and programmes of other departments at the district level.

Conclusion

Although there is a debate going on that whether we need office of district collector or not, it plays a vital role in the district administration as the bridge between union-state and local government. Therefore there is no question of removing the post of district collector. There are some flaws in the district administration system but reiterating the recommendations on the issues of personnel management, performance and outcome evaluation, effective citizen centric administration, use of information technology, process re-engineering etc. made above, it is believed that if these recommendations are expeditiously implemented where applicable to the district administration would make India developed with bottom up approach and better outcome.