
UNIT 1 STATE AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION: EVOLUTION*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the roots of state administration in different phases of Indian history;
- Examine the development of state executive; and
- Describe the evolution of district administration.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As we all know “India, that is, Bharat” is a “Union of States”. The territory of India comprises the territories of states and union territories. Though development of the states in Indian Union can be traced back to the British rule in India, the foundation of state administration has been laid in the ancient times and continued in the different periods of Indian History.

The “District” as a unit of state administration has been in existence in the past; and all the succeeding imperial power – the Guptas, the Mughals and the British invariably adopted the territorial pattern evolved by the Mauryas, and made the district indeed a sub-state.

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District Administration has been one of the important institutional legacies bequeathed by the British to India. As a unit of administrative system, it has been a pivotal point of contact between the citizens and administration. The institution of District Collector was created as the pivot of administration. It combined the revenue, managerial and general administrative duties, but it was deemed to be absolutely essential for maintaining the British power, influence and authority throughout the country.

As we have already discussed about evolution of Indian Administration in detail in Block 1 (BPAC-103), which is divided into four units, namely Unit 1 Ancient Administrative System, Unit 2 Medieval Administrative System, Unit 3 British System and Unit 4 Continuity and Change in Indian Administration - Post 1947, therefore in this unit we will briefly describe the evolution of state and district administration in India. The science of Politics and Government was much cultivated in ancient India. The first textbook dealing with the statecraft, Kautilya's Arthashastra, epic literature – the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana of Valmiki highlight the administrative machinery of the kingdoms. Numerous other treatises like Nitisara (Essence of Politics) of Kamandaka written during the Gupta period, and the Nitivakyamitram (Nectar of aphorisms on Politics) of Somadeva Suri, a Jaina writer of the tenth century provide interesting information on ancient Indian statecraft. In the subsequent section, we will discuss the Mauryan and Gupta Administration from the ancient period of Indian History, as they reflect the significant features of the contemporary administration.

1.2 MAURYAN AND GUPTA PERIOD

In this section, we shall discuss the Mauryan and Gupta Administration, from the ancient period of Indian History, as they reflect the following significant features of the administration.

1.2.1 Provincial Administration

The Kingdom was divided into provinces. The provincial Governor usually belonged to the royal family, and was appointed directly by the king. During Ashoka's rule, there were four Viceroyalties with headquarters at Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali and Suvarnagiri. The provincial Viceroyalties of the Mauryan Empire were generally assisted by the Council of Ministers, who were of the status of Mahamatras. The foreign rulers like the Indo-Greeks, Parthians, Sakas and the Kushanas borrowed the Achaemenian pattern of designating the provincial heads as Kshatrapas and Mahakshatrapas.

The Guptas changed the pattern of provincial setup. The Gupta emperors appointed the most competent person as Provincial Governor, known as the Uparika. Sometimes the provincial Governor seemed to be hereditary as the same family acted as Provincial Head under several rulers. Provinces had branches of almost all the departments working at the Centre. The category of provincial officials includes Kumaramatyaya (Chief Minister), Ranabhandadhikarana (office of the military exchequer), Danda-pasadhikarana (Chief of Police), Mahadandanayaka (Chief Justice), Bhatasvapati (Chief Censor) and Mahapratihara (Chief Chamberlain).

1.2.2 Local Administration

The provinces were divided into divisions (Visaya or bhoga in the North and Kottams or Valanadu in the South). The other units of administration in descending order were the districts (adhsthana in the North and Kurram in the South), and groups of villages (agrahara in the North and Kurram in the South).

In Mauryan Empire, the Pradesikas or Pradeshtis looked after the Divisions; and the Rajukas, the Districts. The Pradeshtis were charged with the executive, judicial and revenue functions, while the Rajukas were to collect the land-revenue, promote trade and industry and carry out public works like roads and channels for irrigation. According to Kautilya the Sthanika had 800 villages under him, Dronamukha 400, Kharvatika 200 and Sangrahana (Gopa) 10 villages.

Local Administration during the Gupta period was well organised. A number of districts formed a Bhukti, while the district was called Vishaya. The Bhuktis were in charge of officers known as Uparikas, who were appointed by the emperor himself. The Vishayas were governed by Vishayapatis who were appointed sometimes by the Uparikas and sometimes by the emperor. The office of the Vishayapati was well organised, and used to keep records and files. Pustapala was the custodian of records.

The subordinate staff of the district administration consisted of officers described as Yuktas, Niyuktas, Vyapritas and Adhikritas. The Head of the District had a non-official advisory council representing different interests in the locality – the Chief Banker representing commercial interests (Sreshthin), the leader of the trading convoy (Sarthavaha), the Chief alderman (Prathama-Kulika) and the Chief Scribe (Prathama – Kayastha).

1.3 MUGHAL PERIOD

In the medieval period, though different dynasties rose in power, Mughals took a commanding role in the Indian medieval history; and their administration assumes a significant place in the Indian History. The emperor was supreme authority in the state, that is, the head of government, the supreme commander of the forces, the lawmaker and law enforcer. For effective administration, the empire was divided in provinces.

1.3.1 Provincial Administration

During the time of Akbar, a strong base for the provincial administration was formed. The whole kingdom was divided into Subas (provinces). The territories of the provincial units were fixed, and a uniform administrative model was established subjected with minor changes to suit the local circumstances. The control over the provinces was more effective with a team of officials, representing the different branches of the state activity.

However, the number of provinces differed under different Mughal rulers. For example, under Akbar, there were 15 provinces while under Jahangir and Aurangzeb their number rose to 18 and 23 respectively. Each province was under a Governor, also known as Nazim, Naib, Subedar or Wali. The Governor was a sort of mini King within his own Province, who was mainly responsible for the maintenance of law and order, control of the local army, realisation of state dues and provision of justice.

Usually members of the royal blood or confident nobles were appointed to this office. The Governor received authority from the Sultan, and stayed in the office as long as he remained in the good books of the king. Another important office, which was only second but not subordinate to the Subedar was that of Diwan who was in charge of the revenue administration. The Diwan was also appointed by the Sultan.

1.3.2 District Administration

The Suba/Province was further divided into Sarkars. The nearest equivalent of the District was Sarkar, during the Mughal times. Each Sarkar was headed by Fauzdar

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who was executive head of the district administration. He worked under the control of subedar. In addition, the Amal-Guzar was the revenue official who worked under the control of provincial Diwan and he was assisted by number of subordinates. The District was further sub-divided into Parganas and such Pargana was headed by a Shigdar. He was responsible for the maintenance of law and order as well as criminal justice. The other revenue officials at the Pargana level were Amil and Qanungo, who dealt with the survey, assessment and collection of revenue. In certain Parganas, Qazis decided the disputes.

The Village was the lowest unit of administration, below the Pargana. It enjoyed a great amount of autonomy, and most of the cases were decided by the people without any government interference. Each village had the Council or Panchayat. The Panchayat was headed by Sarpanch, who acted as a link between the village and the government.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) “Gupta’s pattern of provincial administrative setup was more effective than Mauryan period”. Discuss.

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2) Describe the significance of provincial administration during the Mughal period.

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3) Explain the organisational structure of district administration during Mughal period.

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1.4 BRITISH PERIOD

During the first entry of the Britishers in India, India was divided into small and large independent states. The Britishers continued the process of conquest and annexation. As their territory expanded, they slowly and gradually created the provinces.

The creation of provinces by the Britishers was purely based on administrative convenience, economy, military strategy and security. With the development of national awakening and consciousness, the people of these provinces raised their voice for the reorganisation of provinces in view of their needs, wishes and affinities.

The provinces were divided into following three categories, under the British rule:

- Provinces under the Governor and his Executive Council;
- Provinces under the Lieutenant Governor; and
- Provinces under the Chief Commissioner.

Further, the Government of India Act, 1935 envisaged an all India federation, which was to consist of 11 Governor's provinces and 6 Chief Commissioner's provinces and Indian states. The chief prize awarded to the Indians by this Act was the provincial autonomy, which gave an independent and autonomous status to the British Indian provinces (Sapru, 2018, p.30).

However, with the adoption of new constitution; and creation of four categories of states, that is, Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D states, the problem of the reorganisation of states was not over. However, the demand for linguistic states continued.

The Parliament in December 1953, appointed a States Reorganisation Commission consisting of Fazal Ali (Chairman), H.N Kunzru and K.M Panikkar. On the basis of report submitted by the State Reorganisation Commission in the year 1955, the Parliament enacted the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. On the basis of this Act, states were organised into two categories, that is, States and Union Territories. Now, it is pertinent to study about the State Executive.

1.4.1 State Executive

It is under the Indian Constitution that under a federal structure an autonomous State Executive has been established. Although the Government of India Act, 1935 had a plan to introduce a federal system of governmental organisation in India consisting of two types of units, that is, the British Provinces and the India States, which was never implemented into actual practice.

The Provincial Executive under the British rule cannot be considered the old form of modern State Executive, as he was an Executive under a Unitary State having no legal or constitutional status. However, the Provincial Executive under the British rule (up to the Act of 1919) consisted of the Governor and his Council with the dominant position of the Governor.

The Dyarchy/Diarchy introduced by the Act of 1919 created two divisions in the provinces. The Governor with his Executive Council was made in charge of the Reserved Subjects, and the Governor and his Ministers were made in charge of the Transferred subjects.

It can be seen that although there was a gradual decentralisation of power from the centre to the provinces during the British rule, yet in main the provinces remained in the form of dependencies of the Centre. The same was true of the province's Executive. The machinery through which this dependency was perpetuated was the office of the Governor.

The status of the State Executive under the revised constitution was not to coordinate and co-equal with the status of the Union Executive, but it had a subordinate status although a federal scheme of polity had been envisaged in the revised Constitution.

The federal scheme as envisaged in the Act of 1935 could not be realised partly due to the non-participation of the Indian Princely States; and largely due to the outbreak of Second World War. The partition of country and the problems created by it, aggression in Kashmir and the victory of the communists in the Chinese Civil War influenced the framers of the constitution in favour of a strong Centre and weak Province.

Article 256, 257, 365 and others will show that the State Executive has to work under the guidance and direction of the Union Executive. Failure of the State Executive to comply with the directions of the Union Executive may result into the proclamation of emergency in the state under Article 356; and the President may assume all or any of the functions of the Government of State. The Executive of State has been working on the same lines as that of the Union. The State Executive consists of the Governor, the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers.

1.4.2 District Administration

As we all know that the District is the principal unit of territorial administration in India. The Mauryas who built up their imperial system in the country were the first to constitute the District as the most prominent territorial unit; and centralise its administration with all powers concentrated in a single officer called the Rajuka at its hierarchic apex.

The British consolidated their territories generally in terms of the existing districts; and they, in the early part of their rule believed that the larger the district, the greater the economy of its administration, and the higher the stature and the prestige of their District Officer.

The foundation of the present day District Administration was laid during the period of Warren Hastings. From the historical perspective, District Administration in India was designed to resist political activities and political pressures rather than to generate a climate to enable local social forces to resolve political conflicts in the larger interest of society. In facilitating the introduction of their system of administration based on the rule of law, the British modified the then existing pattern to the extent necessary to make it really effective for the purpose of realising land revenue and enforcing law and order.

The centralisation measures that they had taken in building up a prefectorial bureaucratic society, yielded quick dividends from the angle of their imperial objectives, but the consequences of such measures could be abated to some extent only with their programme of participation of Indians in the administration; and the introduction of Local Self-Government. However, important functions and powers of the district administration remained intact in the hands of government in the district; and the representative of the government in the district was also authorised to exercise supervisory and regulatory jurisdictions over all activities in his territory, and exercise residuary powers according to his discretion.

1.4.3 District Collector's Office

The District Officer in India is the linchpin of administration in the country. The office has evolved over two hundred years of the British rule. In 1765, the East India Company was granted the Diwani (Civil Administration) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In practice, however the company did not take over the whole civil administration. Its interest was limited to the collection of revenue. The dual system of government introduced by

Robert Clive was an utter failure. The divided responsibility of administration led to masterless confusion, and the province was thrown into complete chaos.

To remedy this state of affairs, Verelst the then Governor of Bengal created the post of a Supervisor for each district. He was in the real sense a precursor of the office of the collector. The Supervisor had to prepare a rent roll of the district in his charge and also to oversee the method in which they were collected and appropriated. He had to investigate all the titles to the land, distinguish between various kinds of land, regulate revenue and encourage commerce, and administer justice.

The experiment failed as the supervisors were untrained and inexperienced, and the landlords and others did not extend their cooperation. Their abilities were overtaxed on account of appalling famine. It was also believed that their duties were so numerous, varied and difficult that they called for almost superhuman labours. The supervisors continued to engage in private trade. They turned out to be trade monopolists, sovereigns and heavy rulers of the people. Though the scheme was a failure, it formed a nucleus for the first time of a British Administration, and we find in the Supervisors the predecessors of the present day District Officers.

It was in these circumstances that in a letter of August 28, 1771, the court of Directors expressed its determination to stand forth as Diwan and to take over through the agencies of the company's covenanted servants, the entire executive management of the public revenues.

Accordingly Warren Hastings issued in May, 1772 a general proclamation and three days later nominated the Supervisors as Collectors, vesting them with the executive powers of management and collection of revenue in addition to the previous duties of enquiry and investigation. The Office of the Collector of today was for the first time created by Warren Hastings on May 14, 1772.

The Collector actually presided over the Civil Courts established in the districts reconstituted in 1772. A Criminal Court was established in each district. The administration of criminal justice was also under the supervision and control of the Collector.

The Court of Directors of the East India Company was of the opinion that the Collector should be retained as a permanent feature of local administration; and the offices of Revenue Administration, Civil Judge and Magistrate should be combined.

However the duties, functions and responsibilities of the District Collector varied from time to time. As circumstances changed, the precise nature of the collector's functions has also changed. The work of Collector has in fact been a continuous expression of the growth in the range, and complexity of the functions of the Government.

Between the establishment of the Rule of the Crown in 1857 and Transfer of Power in 1945-47, the Collector was virtually the Government. The Collector was responsible for maintenance of law and order, even handed justice, construction, repair and control of irrigation works, land records, field surveys, collection and the settlement of fair land taxes, some attention to education, health, roads, posts and telegraphs.

The office of the District Collector survived the historic role of change from an alien regime to a national one. With the passage of time and the introduction of constitutional reforms, the Collector's many sided responsibilities increased in some directions and got reduced in others. The role of administrative system changed in the context of three major factors, namely democracy, development and decentralisation.

Check Your Progress 2

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) Why the Provincial Executive under the British rule cannot be considered as the old form of modern State Executive?

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2) Write a note on district administration during British period.

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3) Discuss the evolution of District Collector’s Office.

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1.5 CONCLUSION

In ancient India, big Empires were divided into Provinces and Districts for the sake of administrative convenience. The Provincial Administration, during the times of the Mauryas and Guptas, was organised on elaborate basis, and was modelled on the pattern of the Central Government. The Governors of the provinces were the chief channels of communication between the Government and its Administrative Unit. During the Mughal period as well, the whole kingdom was divided into provinces. However, the number of provinces differed under different Mughal rulers.

District as a unit of state administration has been in existence in the different phases of Indian History in some form or the other. The district is regarded as the most important administrative division in the country. The reason for the formulation of districts during the British rule in India was mainly the efficient collection of land revenue, and maintenance of law and order.

The District Administration as an agent of the State assumed the responsibility of acting as a catalyst and functioning as a custodian, insurer, protector and a watchdog of the

interests of the weaker sections; and welfare of the downtrodden with a development orientation. In this unit, we have described the evolution of State and District Administration in India.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Diwani	: Diwani Rights were the rights granted to British East India Company to collect revenues and decide the civil cases.
Sarkar	: The nearest equivalent of the district was the Sarkar, during the Mughal times.
Vishaya	: During Gupta period, the territorial unit equivalent to district was called as Vishaya.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) Your answer should include the following points:

- The Kingdom was divided into provinces.
- The provincial Governor usually belonged to the royal family and was appointed directly by the king.
- The provincial Viceroys of the Mauryan empire were generally assisted by the Council of Ministers.

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- The Guptas changed the pattern of provincial setup.
 - The Gupta emperors appointed the most competent person as Provincial Governor.
 - Local Administration was well organised during Gupta period.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
- The Suba/Province was further divided into Sarkars
 - Each Sarkar was headed by Fauzdar.
 - The District was further sub-divided into Parganas.
 - The Pargana was the revenue collection unit under the control of Mukkadam.
 - Mukkadam collected the revenue and deposited the same with the Treasury.
 - In certain Parganas, Qazis decided the disputes.
 - Village was the lowest unit of administration.
- 3) Your answer should include the following points:
- Refer Section 1.3 (1.3.2)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
- The Provincial Executive was an Executive under a unitary state.
 - No legal or constitutional states.
 - Provincial Executive consisted of the Governor and his Council with the dominant position of the Governor.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
- Refer Section 1.4 (1.4.2)
- 3) Your answer should include the following points:
- The post of a Supervisor for each district was created by the then Governor of Bengal, Verelst.
 - The Supervisor was in the real sense a precursor of the office of the Collector.
 - The experiment failed as the supervisors were untrained and inexperienced and the landlords and others did not extend their cooperation.
 - The present day office of the Collector was for the first time created by Warren Hastings on May 14, 1772.