

Paper 2

District Administration since Independence:

Changing role of the Collector;
Union state- local relations;
Imperatives of development management and law and order administration;
District administration and democratic decentralization

1. With the advent of local self governments, the power and jurisdiction of District Collector has diminished. Do you agree? In this context has the district, as a basic unit of governance, become irrelevant? Examine critically.

15 marks (250 words)

Approach

The question has multiple demands, in the first part we need to provide both the sides of the arguments, i.e. how the powers and jurisdiction of District Collector has diminished and at the same time it is powerful enough in many other aspects. In the same way, in the second part, we need explain how the District seems to lose relevance but it is still crucial for administration.

From Paper 1

Bring in quotes and keywords related to bureaucracy, management, leadership etc.

Introduction

In the book District Administration: A survey for Re-organisation, Mohit Batacharya et.al opine that, the District collector was accepted as the pre-eminent officer in the district so long as revenue and law and order were the dominant considerations.

This, statement is a clear indication that the scope of administration in the district has changed from collection of revenue to bringing social and economic change in the district.

Body

Most of the credits for this change in the administrative perspective go to the local self governments. And this third tier of administration has not only given the development perspective to administration, but has also brought in several power centres to the district.

- The advent of Zilla Panchayath CEO (Chief Executive Offer) in the district has shifted most of the development related functions from the District Collector

to the CEO. CEO takes an active part in the District Planning Boards; he also looks after the implementation of the Central Sector and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes in the district.

- Further, along with the Local Self Governments, came the office of the minister of district in charge. Now District Collector, who earlier was the head and face of the government, is just a secretary of the office of the in charge minister.
- Further, the offices of Block Development officers and Tehsildars have increased, as the local governments at the block and the village level has been strengthened. In some of larger blocks, these block level officers even enjoy larger powers compared to District collectors. [Shuffling of the hierarchy]
- The, oncoming of the Urban Local Bodies has given a major setback for the office of District Collector, as many centres like the Mayor, Municipality Chairman, Municipality Councillor, etc, have propped up in the metropolis [Isher Judge Ahluwalia Committee states this has a cobweb of conflicting responsibilities].

Still the office of DC is very crucial as;

- DC as the collector and distributor of funds is essential even today. None of these new power centres are capable of managing the District treasury, as well as a district collector.
- DC still has the power to monitor and evaluate the implementation of schemes and programs at the district level. Information related to implementational realities is made available to the collector through the DisNICS, and some of the e-platforms like Priya-Soft, MGNREGA-Soft, etc, are directly connected to the office of collector.
- Further, the office of DC becomes crucial during the law and order crisis in the district. Even today the decisions to impose curfew and Section 144 are the prerogative of the Districts Collectors.
- Lastly, DC as a leader, manager, trouble shooter, grievance redresser, coordinator between different directorates in the district; is very relevant today. Ex: A case study shows that DC was the Chairman of a whopping 82 committees in the district.

Coming to the second part, the 2nd ARC had mentioned that, districts are the basic units of administration. However, several changes in the district level have prompted us to give this idea a second thought;

- Panchayaths and the Municipalities have made the Villages and Wards (also Mohollas) as the basic unit of administration. And these institutions have become the very interface of the public with the government machinery.
- Several studies have pointed that, there is a grave intra-district inequality that is prevalent in almost all the districts of the nation. I.e. some of the blocks are found to be at a higher level of growth and development when compared to others.
Hence, experts think it as the right time to make blocks and Taluqs as the basic units of administration. So that equitable growth can be brought in all the blocks.
- Some of the states have established zones as an intermediate level of administration between the state and the districts. Again, this has led to the diminishing of the importance of Districts. Ex: DCs and SPs now become answerable to the Zonal Commissioners and Zonal Superintendents. Best example is the Aspirational District Program, where a senior officer monitors the development of the district.

However any knee jerk reaction to abolish districts, as basic units of administration would be counter-productive;

- With the 70 plus years of administration and development, the districts have become the centres of Commerce, Education and Health care, etc. With the presence of Government Hospitals, Government Educational institutions, and the Public market places in very district headquarters. Shifting all these to the block levels, however, incurs huge expenditures.
- District collector acts as a lynch-pin, from whom the, state can monitor and control the state. His office is a nodal office for devolution of funds and dissemination of information to the districts. Without him, states will have to bear the burden of handling too many block level officers.
- DCs and SPs are the linking blocks between the All India Services and the State Civil Service officers who are mainly posted in the districts. Any alteration of these posts, and their jurisdictions, will not only disturb the hierarchy, but also accentuates the rift that is already present between centre and the state civil services.
- Lastly, office of DC acts as the centre for holding meetings and discussion, especially during the emergencies is very much essential. Further, his training, expertise and exposure make District Collector a resource person among the other officers at the block and the village level.

Conclusion

By the analysis of all the advantages and disadvantages, we can come to the conclusion that, the District and the Office of the District collector are indispensable for the nurture and growth of the both the district and local governments. Hence, rather than collision (between the LSGs and District administration) coordination and coordination can fetch more benefits.

Rajani Kothari observes: "The office of the Collector in India is in many ways unique, and its supposed stature and authority have engendered a sort of institutionalized charisma that is in some ways unparalleled in modern administrative development."

2. Along with the help of suitable examples explain how the district administration is a blend of generalists and specialists.

10 marks (150 words)

Approach

We can answer this in two parts; first we can explain the generalist and provide examples to it from the district administration. Second, explain the specialist and provide relevant examples from the same.

From Paper 1

Again, the quotes and keywords regarding bureaucracy, management and leadership become important here.

Introduction

The problem of generalist and the specialist is common in the arena of public administration. However, collaboration and cooperation between the generalists can only make a good administration.

Naturally, even the District administration has several offices of specialists and generalists.

Body

Generalist is one who has got minimum knowledge and expertise, but he has got the exposure to several domains. However he/she is not an expert in any of the domains. Such an individual is more suitable for the managerial and coordinating jobs. Because coordination and communication requires a minimum knowledge and frame of reference (as said by Herbert Simon) of all the domains between which he/she is a coordinator and communicator.

Examples of Generalists in the District Administration;

- District Collector is a generalist; he/she is a manager of all the domains of the district Viz, Revenue, Expenditure, Law and Order, Health, Education etc. However, he takes the help of the experts from the respective domains, while framing rules and regulation for those domains, inside the district.

- The CEOs of Zilla Panchayaths are also generalists as they perform the jobs of managing, holding Panchayath meetings, planning, advising the Panchayath president, monitoring the lower echelons of administration, etc.
- Chairman of the District Planning Boards are also generalists, they not only coordinate the meetings of the board, but also help the domain experts present in the board to fix the targets, estimate the resources, iron out the differences and frame the plans.
- Municipality Councillor is also a generalist, he performs the same function of the Zilla Panchayath CEOs, in the municipalities and municipal corporations. However, he has a different set of domains to be coordinated like the PwD, City Transport, Civil Engineering, Water Supply etc.

Examples of the specialists in the District Administration;

- The Superintendent of Police is a specialist in security, crime investigation and law and order, etc.
- The District Health Officer, who is also the director of the district hospitals, is a domain expert in health and medication. Any decision regarding Community Health is taken under his advice.
- The Director of Public Instruction or Education looks after the status of Primary, Secondary and Higher Education in the District.
- The chairman of District Jal board and the District Electricity Boards are experts in the civil and electrical engineering respectively. They are experts in their respective fields of water supply and electricity.
- Also, the office of Judicial Magistrate is specialised in the legal and judicial matters.
- Some of the states have IT experts in every district to facilitate e-governance. Ex: Andhra Pradesh.

Hence there are many specialist offices in the District, above given is a list of a few of them.

Conclusion

Finally, the generalist and specialist in the District coordinate through meetings, memorandums, circulars, notices and through formal and informal communications. Thus, District administration can be imagined as the hub and spoke model with the generalists as the hub and the specialists as the spokes.

In a case study, it was found that, most of the jobs in the district like, women safety, children welfare, tribal welfare etc, actually ran by the experts; and just the presence of DC as the head of respective committees was more than sufficient for the works to move on.

