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Some Issues in Development Administration.
Edited by Padma Ramachandran and M. A. Oommen, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, pp. 223, Rs. 95/-

This is a useful collection of essays presented in a conference organised by the Institute of Management in Government, Trivandrum, one of the most energetic of such Administrative Training Institutions set up at the state level in the wake of the Administrative Reforms Commission. Divided into two parts, the book contains ten invited essays on some of the major issues pertaining to development administration covering both policy and implementation and a summary of the comments on them. The editors must be congratulated for this because the issues are crucial

and the debates on them are far from reoccluded. Since the participants in the conference were drawn from the ranks of social scientists, administrators, management experts and practitioners, the readers are benefited by the alternative points of view as they converge on the different issues raised.

As the editors point out in the Introduction, there is a general tendency to lay the blame for failure of the development programmes at the door of the administrators and the implementing agencies. But poor conceptualization and operational strategy must also take their share. Some of the problems in conceptualization lies, as P. C. Joshi observes, in the fact that development is often viewed as a problem of technology and equated with economic growth. The institutional dimensions of planning, particularly the constraints posed by social institutions and values are mostly ignored. Even granting the fact that many of the social sciences are not in a position to translate their insights into concrete proposals, he prescribes an institutional approach as a corrective to a predominantly technocratic view of development planning. The task of 'promoting a community-oriented outlook and of building community oriented institutions as the framework of development' is most crucial in the Indian context, he observes. This can be taken care of, to start with, if there is a shift from centralized to decentralized planning and administration. But do we have a clear perception of what decentralized administration is ?

In a paper marked for its clarity and perception, Nirmal Mukarji argues that the question of decentralization must be tackled at three levels. At present, because of the emergence of the non-Congress governments in the states and the dominance of the regional and local power elites, the centre-state issue has got a higher salience. But decentralization also means devolution from the state to the district level and down below. Unfortunately, except in West Bengal and Karnataka, the ruling elites in most of the Indian states are apathetic to such devolution. Mukarji asserts that democratic decentralization 'involves devolution of powers rather than delegation of administrative functions and authority'. The second which is the bureaucratic path has powerful support both from the political

leadership and senior bureaucrats. But unless political development is accommodated in developmental thinking, developmental goals of equality and social justice may not be achieved. Such an approach would entail a shift from the present emphasis on stability.

T. K. Oommen reminds us that the 'eternal stability' of the Indian village is made possible through coercive equilibrium. Cumulative dominance of class, caste and sex both perpetuates and accentuates cumulative inequality. This may be countered only through countervailing actions. But the planners and administrators look at the smallest degree of militancy, even in voluntary organizations, with an eye of suspicion. The Seventh Plan document lays down a policy by which they are either to function as 'extensions' of the state apparatus or not at all. T. K. Oommen prescribes that the districts 'formed on the basis of natural collectivities' and not as they exist now as convenient units of administration ought to be the units of planning and development administration and these district governments should be given constitutional backing, functional autonomy and financial authority. However, whether this by itself will promote participation, as one commentator observes, remains a debatable question.

Coming to the management problems of rural development programmes K. K. Singh shows how the multiplicity of schemes and agencies to administer similar types of programmes and excessive departmentalism makes horizontal coordination at the implementation level almost impossible. Thus what we have now is just a multiplicity of projects with inefficient and unintegrated agencies to manage them. Kamta Prasad's paper reviews the major anti-poverty programmes and argues that in view of wide variations in techno-and-socio-economic conditions, it is not judicious to offer and implement the same set of programmes everywhere. The government should announce its firm commitment to attainment of specific objectives and allocate enough physical and financial resources to district level administration to enable them to formulate and execute appropriate schemes.

Both V. Ramachandran and M. A. Oommen review the experience of Kerala. They move

through the whole scenario of development administration while the latter concentrates his attention on IRDP and its failure. A. R. Basu, in his paper on tribal development shows how the multiplicity of agencies helps to 'develop' administration rather than the target groups in whose name the administration is established. This goes against the curious statement of V. Ramachandran who suggests that the reason for the vast expansion of the administrative system in Kerala and probably also its poor performance are due to quick changes in government and recurrence of coalition ministries.

Katar Singh in his paper on dairy development summarizes the Amul experience and prescribes it for all India adaptation so far as Operation Flood is concerned. Commentators on the paper however rightly point out that not only in trying to recommend the Amul experiment for all India adoption one often forgets the socio-economic milieu of the Kaira district and the strong political patronage received from the local, state and central political leaders which made the scheme successful. In evaluating the Amul experience it is necessary to distinguish between the physical and social achievement, particularly because under the Anand pattern the terms of trade have not really moved favourably for the milk producers, and consumption of milk at the local level has been diminishing.

The issues relating to development administration are legion and the lessons from experience are often unique. But reflecting on them one cannot but confront the general issue whether we have been wrong in assuming that development can flourish in its own separate compartment administratively directed and controlled. 'Genuine development must change social and economic reality and in doing so shake the power structure'. Without that 'development administration is not only untenable but even pernicious. This observation comes not from a left wing radical but from Nirmal Mukarji, a veteran administrator now with the Centre for Policy Research. And how can one disagree with him ?

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