



# The Office of Deputy Commissioner in India: A Historical Perspective

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The notion and structure of the district administration in India is, apparently, perceived as an offshoot of British legacy. The system of district administration in India under British rule had evolved through a corps of select, trained and disciplined career officials. This system was primarily based on the western legal system, in which government had the powers to oversee the functioning of the officials in terms of their accountability towards people and the government. Fundamentally, this system was aimed to achieve two objectives: firstly, to generate revenue for the government and; secondly, to redress the grievances of the people. The very purpose of creating administrative system at the district level is to manage the public affairs within a specific territorial jurisdiction. The districts in India were created out of an earmarked unit with defined and demarcated territory on the basis of geographical convenience for the purpose of the management of public affairs.

The district administration evolved under the British rule had to perform various tasks like-maintenance of public order; management of public affairs; and revenue generation and collection. For this purpose, the institution of the Deputy Commissioner was created and that system not only played a significant role in the administration under British rule but it has also been continuing to play quite an important role in the district level administration of independent India. Although, the administration at the district level had evolved during the British period, yet, provincial administration system with its hierarchy and organization down below<sup>2</sup> had been in place even before the British Rule.

To understand the evolution and development of district administration in India, there is a need to look into various dimensions of the concept in the historical perspective. **The present study** is a small attempt in this regard. The paper is based on secondary sources of data collection and the discussion in the paper has been divided into three parts- one is **Pre British Era**, second is during **British Rule** and third is in **Independent India**.

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<sup>2</sup> A. K. Dubey, *District Administration in India*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995.



## I. PRE BRITISH ERA

The ancient texts including *Vedic* literature, the *Sutras*, the *Epics* and the *Jatakas* have numerous references with regard to revenue system prevalent at that point of time. For example, during the Aryan period, the tribes from a number of villages used to form political organizations under the rule of a 'Raja' or 'King' for the purpose of mutual protection. *Raja*, who could be elected or hereditary, was vested with supreme authority as per *Aryan* common law and tradition. This led to formulation of a *state*, which collected regular taxes called '*Bali*' from the tribesmen and tributes from the conquered enemies. It may be acknowledged that the practice of giving share to the King or *Raja* or the Chief from the produce cultivated on the land of a territory under his/her authority was one of the most commonly accepted tradition in the tribal societies of that period. With the passage of time this revenue came to be no longer taken in kind, but in form of a money payment (currency), made at certain seasons when harvest had been realized<sup>3</sup>.

There are evidences with regard to the *Rig-Vedic* period in the context of some feudal set up that existed with *Rajan* (King) at the apex of administration assisted by *Senani* (led the tribe in war) and *Purohita* (Priest) at the headquarters and *Gramani* (leader of *Gram*, Village or Horde, consisted of several families) at village level. Although, it was a formative stage of administrative set-up which existed during that period and was followed by a complex pattern of administration at a later stage. In the formative stage, administrative units were possibly quite small. Therefore, it was not required to have a cushion in the form of district administration, between the *Gramani* and *Rajan*. Perhaps *Gramani* was a liaison between the people and the king.

As a result of changes in the political set-up during the later Vedic period (roughly 1000-600B.C.), a more structured administrative system started evolving. This administrative system was aimed to mitigate the demands of emerging political set-up. In this system, the king was, no longer, considered an authority created by exigency for the purpose of mutual protection. This resulted into shift from narrow perspective of mutual protection, to wider and extensive areas associated with the authority of the king – the head of the State. "The principle of

<sup>3</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *Deputy Commissioner in Punjab*, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, 1971, p. 9.

law (*dharma*) was stressed with its supremacy, while kingship was taken as synonymous with **righteousness**. The status of the king, his election and consecration etc., figure in the later Vedic literature. The king was firm in his duties and was assisted by eight *Viras* or Heroes. These *Viras* were known by different names. *Gramani* was still considered a link between people and ruling monarch"<sup>4</sup>.

In *Arthashastra*, Chanakya, has also referred to a group of five to ten villagers as an administrative unit under the charge of *Gopa* (Head of a *Jana* or tribe), who used to look after accounts under the direction and supervision of collector generals (*Samarta*). The Collector general attended to the collection of revenue from forts (*durga*), country parts (*lashtra*), mines (*khani*), buildings and gardens (*setu*), forests (*vana*), herds of cattle (*vraja*) and roads of traffic (*vanikpatha*)<sup>5</sup>. The '*Arthashastra*' was the first Indian work to mention village officers known as "*gopa*" whose duties included preparation of various registers for village field, transfers, and due taxes etc.<sup>6</sup>

### a. Mauryan Period

During the Mauryan period, the administration system improved considerably. Therefore, administration system during that period is considered as pioneer of the present day district administration.<sup>7</sup>

In Mauryan days of slow and difficult communication, the collection of revenue and the enforcement of empirical writs would not have been possible without splitting up an unwieldy empire into administrative units of convenient size placed in the charge of agents of the imperial

<sup>4</sup> B.N. Puri, *History of Indian Administration*, Vol. 1, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1968, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Naresh Kumar, "Deputy Commissioner in Himachal Pradesh – A Study of Role Analysis in Development Administration", an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, 1997, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Vinay Thakur and others, "*Land Management System in India: Past, Present and Future*" available at <https://www.geospatialworld.net/article/land-management-system-in-india-past-present-and-future/> accessed on 16/04/2018 at 10.00 am

<sup>7</sup> M.I. Khan, *District Administration in India*, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1997, p. 3.



authority. The administration of *Janapada* or District was under a triumvirate viz., the *Pradesika*, the *Rajuka* and the *Yukta*. The *Pradesika*, equivalent to modern Deputy Commissioner, used to visit his marked geographical area after every five years with a view to ascertain that different functionaries were performing their assigned work within the stipulated jurisdiction in time. Apart from it, duties of military and judicial nature were also undertaken by him. He was assisted by a subordinate official known as *Rajuka* or modern *Lekhpal*, whose duties and responsibilities were to make survey and assess land for prompt realization of land revenue. On behest of *Pradesika*, he maintained roads in proper condition, promoted trade and industry and carried out public works like irrigation. The *Yukta* was basically a treasury officer. According to the Rock Edict III of Ashoka, he was restricted to the secretarial and accounting nature of work in the district<sup>8</sup>.

The empirical agent sufficiently important in hierarchy, corresponded to the District Collector/Deputy Commissioner (*Pradesika*), was the *Rajuka*, appointed over "Many, hundred thousand, men," having powers of "awarding rewards or punishment". Though essentially a revenue official, the *Rajuka* exercised judicial functions also. He collected land revenue, maintained roads in proper conditions, promoted trade and industry and carried out public works like irrigation, etc. The system of revenue administration described in *Arthsashtra* and apparently followed at least in broad outlines during the Mauryan period was in part perpetuated in the regions of northern and western India during the "Scythian period".<sup>9</sup>

#### b. Gupta Period

During the Gupta Period one finds more streamlined and effective district administration. There was three tier administrations in the state, first level of administrative unit was the province probably known as *Dedas*. The second level was *Bhukti* which was about the size of a present day division and the third level was *Vishaya*, roughly corresponding to present day district and was placed under the charge of official known as *Vishya Pati* and his headquarters was known as *Adhithana*. Each province was generally divided into two districts.

The inscriptions provide some knowledge about the appointment of the district head and his relation with the centre. He was appointed by the provincial head. In some cases he could be the choice of the emperor himself and could have direct link with the centre.<sup>10</sup>

The *Vishaya Pati* was responsible for maintenance of law and order and collection of taxes. He had a non-official advisory council representing different interests in the locality, such as trading and commercial interests. There were minor officials also who worked directly under the *Vishaya Pati*. They were known as *Saulkika* – the Superintendent of Tolls and Customs, *Agraharika* – in-charge of religious establishments, *Utkhstayika* – the collector of taxes, *Talavitaka* – the village accountant and others. Due importance was given to maintenance of records and the record room was known as *Akshapatala* and its head was known as *Mahakshapatalika* with many clerks known as *Diviras*. General Superintendents working in the district office were called *Sarva Dhyakshas*. In the matter of land grants and such other important matters full procedure was laid down to avoid any injustice and to fully safeguard the royal interests.<sup>11</sup>

Later on, it was found that the divisions of the empire came to be a permanent feature in the vortex of administration. Bigger divisions were known as *Desa* whereas *Vishaya* of older times, roughly corresponding to the modern districts, was replaced by *Mandala* in south and *Pattala* in the north. The *Pattala* usually included about 100 villages. There was a good deal of uniformity in provincial and district units under different regal families. Although *Vishaya* was not as popular as *Mandala*, yet the Chandella Administration had both *Vishaya* and *Mandala*. Sometimes one *Mandala* possessed as many as 1000 villages. There is also evidence that a *Mandala* had about 12 sub-divisions, also known as *Pathakas*, which contained about 65 villages each.

#### c. Afghan and Mughal Period

The process of Revenue Administration was started by Sher Shah Suri (1540-45). Elaborate methods were devised for determining the average produce of each class of land and for commuting grain rates into money rates. It was continued and improved upon under reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Todar Mal – greatest revenue expert who started his career under Sher Shah Suri

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> B.N. Puri, *The Gupta Administration*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1980, p.53.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.



joined in the service of Akbar, is remembered even to this day for evolving a system of revenue assessment and survey, a system which drew a balance between the demands of the State and needs of the subjects. The revenue administration during the regime of Mughals consisted of a heterogeneous class of persons, which included direct officials of the imperial administration, like the provincial governors, *amils* (officers who collected land revenue and other taxes) or *qanungos* (Maintained previous records of produce and assessment), *jagirdars* (revenue assignees) and their officials and agents, and representatives of the peasants like the village headmen (*muqaddams*) and the *chaudhis*.<sup>12</sup> During this period administration of *Sarkar* (District) was led by three officers namely the *Amalguzar*, the *Qazi* (a Judge) and the *Mir Adil* and the *Faujdar*. The nature of the work of each officer was different as the *Amalguzar* was responsible to collect land revenue, increase productivity, bring waste and barren land under cultivation, inflict punishment upon culprits and dacoits, settle down disputes arising out of the land and seek government help to meet natural calamities like floods, epidemics, destruction of standing crops by hail storms, etc. The *Faujdar* played a key role in administering executive functions in the *Sarkar* (District). He was the “direct representative of the emperor in the district and functioned directly under the guidance and supervision of the *Shiqdar/Subedar* (Governor). He maintained peace (law) and order, kept his army well equipped and in readiness for service, and assisted the *Amalguzar* in revenue collection”. Land was divided into *Jagirs*, *Jagirs* were allotted to *Jagirdars*, these *Jagirdars* split the land they got and allocated to sub-ordinate *Zamindars*. *Zamindars* made **peasants** cultivate the land, in-return collected part of their revenue as tax. *Zamindars* were placed under the control of *Faujdar* so that they would not cross the line of demarcation set out by the Emperor for their working<sup>13</sup>.

During the period of the collapse of the Mughal Empire, the political instability and disintegration of the administration separated the functions of law and order and the collection of revenue. Under the later Mughals, the *Faujdar*s were invested with revenue functions. The collection of revenue became the only concern of the government and those who paid the revenue also exercised judicial functions. Such a man, on

the spot, grabbed all the authority and facilitated the work of centralization to be carried on by centrally appointed professional covenanted civilians<sup>14</sup>.

## II. DURING BRITISH RULE

### a. Initial Experiments and Evolution of Land Revenue Administration under Company Rule:

To consolidate political sword, the English East India Company inherited the institutional form of agrarian system from the Mughal. They super-imposed a system over the existing land settlement pattern in tune with British customs and laws relating to land<sup>15</sup>. After the battle of Buxur (1765) the East India Company for the first time took over *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

But company did not appoint its own officials for the collection of land revenue due to lack of experience of the revenue administration. Moreover, the company was not in mood to take risk when spate of wars were on. Therefore, it handed over this task to the revenue officials of the *Nawab* through the medium of “ties of interest”, until experience should render their assistance less necessary. Henceforth, the company commenced the process of revamping district administration in general and revenue administration in particular.<sup>16</sup> So, Company followed traditional land assessment system in the starting but gradually modified the existing land settlement from time to time to collect maximum possible land revenue which was a need of colonial administration.

#### i) Appointment of Supervisors:

The Company’s first experiment in Bengal was the appointment of covenanted servants as Supervisors. In 1769-70 they were appointed to the several existing districts of the *diwani* provinces. In addition to the general history of the landholders and ancient rulers of the district under their charge, they were required under their instrument of instructions to report on “the state, produce and capacity of the lands”; on “the amount of revenues, the cesses, or arbitrary taxes, and of all demands

<sup>12</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> M. I. Khan, *op. cit.*, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Md Hamid Husain & Firoj High Sarwar, “A Comparative Study of Zamindari, Raiyatwari and Mahalwari Land Revenue Settlements: The Colonial Mechanism of Surplus Extraction in 19th Century British India”, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2, Issue 4, September-October, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> MI Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



whatsoever which are made on the *rayots* either by government, *zamindars* or collectors (*amilis*), with the manner of collecting them, and the gradual rise of every new impost". They were likewise asked to look into the state of justice and to summon *Qazis* and *Brahmans* to ascertain whether they possessed any *sanad* from Government authorizing them to administer it.<sup>17</sup> They were also to see that native judges maintained proper registers of cases tried and settled by them. Their instrument of instructions made it clear that within the limits of their charge they were not only to be concerned with the collections, but to have a general knowledge of all that affected the districts. The plan of supervision, however, failed. The Supervisors were for the most part untrained and inexperienced. And although some of them interposed their authority to ensure justice, their interposition remained ineffective because their powers were limited to reporting and their functions were in the main exploratory. Besides, their appointment excited the suspicion of the *zamindars*, farmers and native officers of revenue and justice who would not readily lend their co-operation except on their own terms.<sup>18</sup>

Prior to the beginning of Company rule in India, the land revenue administration system under the Mughals was at the verge of collapse. Lord Baden Powell (1857-1941, was a British general and founder of the modern Scouting movement) remarked that "some theory or practice of revising the assessment, some customary period for such revision might have been expected, but none was left us". In order to work out a satisfactory system of land revenue administration, Warren Hastings (the first and most famous of the British governors-general of India, who dominated Indian affairs from 1772 to 1785) resorted to the device of experimentation and tried to evolve a system by proverbial method of trial and error. On May the 14th, 1772, the Governor (Warren Hastings) and his Council came to a determination as to "the constitutional ground work of all their subsequent proceedings," and their decision may be summarized as follows:

1. The lands were to be let out to revenue farmers for a period of five years.

<sup>17</sup> B.B. Misra, "The Evolution of the Office of Collector (1770-1947)", in Rakesh Hooja and Sunil Dutt (ed.), *District Administration: Redefining the Development Role*, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2008, p.148.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

2. A Committee of Circuit, consisting of the Governor and four members of the Council, was to be appointed to visit the principal districts and form the five years' settlements.

3. The Servants of the Company employed in the districts under the designation of "Supervisors" or "Supervisors" were henceforth to be termed "Collectors".

4. In each of the several districts a native officer, under the title of *Diwan*, should be appointed to inform or check the Collector.

5. That no *banian* or employee of the several collectors should be permitted to farm any portion of the revenues.

6. Presents to the Collectors from *zamindars* and others, and from the *ryots* to the *zamindars* were forbidden.

7. The Collectors and their *banians* were forbidden to advance money to the *ryots*.<sup>19</sup>

On the basis of the above mentioned recommendations, Warren Hastings introduced a new system of revenue collection. The evaluation of this system has been summarized in following paras:

1. **Farming out land to the highest bidder:** The five-year settlement of land revenue by the crude method of farming out estates to the highest bidder led to a failure because, it was presumed that the *zamindars* were mere tax-gatherers with no proprietary rights. In the settlement of 1772, no preference was given to them and in fact in certain cases they were actually discouraged from bidding.

2. **Diwan System and Committee of Revenue:** In 1773 changes were made in the machinery of collection. The Collectors who had been found to be corrupt and indulged in private trade were replaced by Indian *Diwans* in the districts. Six Provincial Councils were set up to supervise the work of Indian *Diwans*. The overall charges rested with the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta. The trend of Hastings' mind was towards centralization and he desired to ultimately centralize all functions into the hands of the Committee at Calcutta.

3. **Failure of the Quinquennial settlement system:** The land revenue collection system introduced by Warren Hastings was a miserable failure and the peasants suffered greatly. Most of

<sup>19</sup> Available at <http://14.139.60.114:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/126/22/The%20early%20administration%20of%20warren%20hastings%20%28CCXI-CCXXXII%29.pdf> accessed on 9-11-2018 at 2pm.



the revenue-farmers were mere speculators, had no permanent interest in the land and therefore tried to extort the maximum sum from the cultivators by way of Land revenue. The officers of the East India Company themselves participated in the bidding through their servants or *banias*. Even Warren Hastings himself was not free from this greed; there is the case registered in the name of a ten-year old son of Kuntu Baboo, an Indian servant of Warren Hastings. Further, the land has been over-assessed and the state demand fixed very high. Added to it was the harshness in the method of collection. The result was that many revenue contractors fell in heavy arrears, many had to be arrested for default and the *ryot* deserted the land.

4. **Reversion to annual land revenue collection system:** After the expiry of the quinquennial settlement in 1776, Warren Hastings reverted to the system of annual settlement on the basis of open auction to the highest bidder. Preference was given to the *zamindars* in making the settlement. Some changes were made in the machinery of collection in 1781. The Provincial Councils were abolished. The Collectors were reappointed in the districts but were to have no power in the settlement of revenue. The *Qanungos* too were reappointed. The entire work of supervision was concentrated in the hands of the Committee of Revenue at Calcutta.

Warren Hastings failed to devise a satisfactory system of land revenue settlement. His bias towards centralization worked against an effective system of land revenue collection or acquisition of detailed knowledge regarding revenue matters. In 1782 Sir John Shore declared that "the real state of the districts is now less known and the revenue less understood than in 1774". Warren Hastings left behind him "a dark trail of misery insurrection and famines". How unsatisfactory the land revenue policy was may be clear from Cornwallis' remarks in 1789 that "one-third of the Company's territory in Hindustan is now jungle, inhabited only by wild beasts".

This was a period, when Company was in the process of transition to establish a system of land revenue to establish its control over the territory under its rule. A process of experimentation was initiated to settle the emergent issue related to land revenue. The major initiatives/developments have been discussed as follows:

1. When the scheme of Supervisors failed, the court of directors expressed its determination to the "Stand forth as *Diwan*" and to take over, through the agency of the company's covenanted servants, the entire executive management of the

public revenue. Accordingly, on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1772 Warren Hasting and his council at Fort William issued a general proclamation and three days later nominated the supervisors as collectors vested them with the executive powers of management and collection of revenue in addition to previous duties of inquiry and investigation. Thus, the office of the present day collector was for the first time created by the government of Warren Hastings on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1772.

2. *Zamindars* and big proprietors were not happy with powerful position of the collector as they were made subservient because of superimposition of the collector over their heads. Moreover, expenditure also increased with the appointment of highly paid collectors but there was no increase in the revenue collection. So this system did not function well and court of directors directed to recall the collectors from districts in January 1774 and a Board of Revenue was created at Calcutta<sup>20</sup>. From 1773 to 1781 there were really no district officers. But in 1781 they were restored, though these new Collectors had very limited powers<sup>21</sup>. The tale of experiment and confusion came to an end on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1782, when John Shore, governor-general of India (1793-1798), restored the power of the collector combining in him the duties and powers as were under the Mughals exercised by the *Amalguzar*, the *Faujdar* and the officers of justice taken together<sup>22</sup>. It was in 1786, after Pitt's India Bill of 1784, that the district officers really came into his own. The Collector became responsible for fixing the revenue in his district as well as for the collections<sup>23</sup>. In 1786-87 the administration of revenue, civil justice and magistracy were united in the office of the collector which brought simplicity and efficiency<sup>24</sup>. The directors of the company felt convinced that the difficulties found in administering criminal justice and regulation of police can only be removed if more powers are given to the collectors. Regulation IV of Bengal Code of 1821 empowered the government to give maximum powers to the collector. More serious breaches of the peace were generally connected with disputes regarding lands so the combination of magisterial and revenue

20 Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

21 Philip Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India*, Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 1985, p. 55.

22 Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

23 Philip Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

24 Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 33.



functions in the person of the collector became obligatory.

3. Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India (1786-93), being a wig, looked with disfavor this centralization of authority in one officer. Nevertheless, in practice the collector retained his independence. For safeguarding the interests of Indians from oppression, authoritarianism and tradition of oriental government, he divested the collector of his judicial and magisterial functions and handed them over to the newly created office of the district judge and magistrate. The collector was subjected only a fiscal agent without any political or magisterial authority<sup>25</sup>.

4. In contrast to Cornwallis system was the Thomas Munro (major-general, governor of Madras) system of district administration which was prevalent in the first decade of Nineteenth Century in provinces like Madras, Bombay etc. Under this system the district collector was the real head and exercised wide discretionary powers. He was responsible for public welfare and general administration of the district.

5. Lord William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck, Governor-General of India, attempted to restore the position of collector in Bengal system of district administration. He created the post of Commissioner with general authority over both revenue and judicial functions in groups of districts and combining executive and judicial powers of district collector<sup>26</sup>. The new scheme of Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit was given effect to by Regulation 1 of 1829. Section 2 of Regulation 1 of 1829 said, "To place the magistracy and police, the collectors and other executive revenue officers under the superintendence and control of Commissioners of Revenue and Circuit, each vested with the charge of such moderate tract of country as may enable them to be easy of access to the people and frequently to visit the different parts of their respective jurisdictions, to confide to the said commissioner the powers now vested in the Courts of Circuits together with those that belong to the Board of Revenue". It would have been a heavy charge for one officer to bear so the Governor-General in Council was empowered to invest by an order in Council, the judges of *zilas*/ districts or cities with full power to conduct the duties of the sessions<sup>27</sup>.

6. In 1837 authority/ task was given to Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India (1836 to 1842), to separate the office of collector and magistrate in Bengal whenever necessary and by 1845, the separation was complete in all districts of Bengal Presidency, except three districts of Orissa. The Police Committee Report (1838) by a majority vote also favored the split of the office of the magistrate and the collector<sup>28</sup>.

7. In 1849 Sikh rule in Punjab came to an end. The British reconstructed the administrative machinery of Punjab which had suffered laxity since the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Punjab was divided into divisions and districts and placed under a Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner respectively. Deputy Commissioner is the counterpart of collector in the regulation province. Deputy Commissioner was responsible for maintenance of law and order, assessment and collection of revenue, administration of justice, construction and maintenance of roads etc.

#### b. Developments under British Raj:

In the ongoing system under Company rule, the collector-magistrate was practically local governor in Bombay, Madras and North Western Provinces combining both the offices, but in Bengal and Bihar (regulation province) the collector had only supervisory authority. Lord Dalhousie, (Real name James Andrew Ramsay) served as Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856, realized that the separation of the two offices was an error; the remedy lay in reuniting both the offices. Lord Canning, Governor-General of India from 1856 to 1862, believed with Dalhousie that the division of authority was to be avoided rather than sought. The suddenness of the outbreak of disturbance in Bengal and Bihar proved that the Cornwallis scheme would not work well. As soon as clam was restored, the two offices of collector and magistrate were reunited in provinces where Cornwallis system prevailed. The collector-magistrate became the head of the district in 1859<sup>29</sup>.

During the period 1859-1919, Collector was the chief agent of the government at the district level, head of police, magistracy and the revenue administration and the sole repository in the district of the executive authority of the government. This conception remained basically unaltered until the country attained Independence<sup>30</sup>. In 1885, when the

<sup>25</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



Bengal Local Self-Government Act was passed the district collector became the chairman of the District Board. The Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization in India also favored the association of the collector with the local self-government institutions<sup>31</sup>. Even the reforms of 1909 (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms) did not affect his effectiveness to govern his district, though they increased his office work. He was still the supreme head of the district. The only setback to the position of the collector was that he became gradually tied up by laws, rules and regulations prepared by intellectuals<sup>32</sup>.

The Government of India Act 1919 introduced a new system of administration in some of the provinces, known as "Diarchy". This period (1921-37) was an ordeal for District Collector. In this period there was introduction of political element in the administration. The district collector had to work in a political climate and elected politicians came to carry more weight. The collector, whose rule had up till then been almost unchallenged, now saw that there were private individuals in his district who were in a position to criticize him, and if not satisfied, to make their voice heard in the highest quarters<sup>33</sup>. Under this new system, the advice of district collector was, however, taken on questions of policy and reliance yet final decisions were taken by the elected politicians, who were responsible to the public<sup>34</sup>.

The Government of India Act 1935, unlike the previous government, was based on the principles of collective responsibility and was accountable to legislature for all governmental affairs. By 1939, the sphere of activities of district collector had come to include rural development, cooperative movement and the village panchayats. The collector found himself faced with more complex and comprehensive problems and was expected to show more deference to popular opinion and to justify his actions when criticized by the members of the legislature.

The problem created by World War II (1939-45) added new dominations to the functions and duties of district collector and imposed several additional responsibilities on that "Omnibus" official, like he was made in charge of the emergency recruitment to the armed forces, provisioning of troops, taking care of the families of the soldiers and sailors on the battlefield. New

departments like Food and Civil Supply were set up and control, supply, procurement and rationing came under his control. The political element did not allow him to work freely and the tendency in the last days of freedom was to damage his power and prestige as the head and main coordinating agency of the district<sup>35</sup>.

### III. AFTER BRITISH RULE/ AFTER INDEPENDENCE

#### a. Office of Deputy Commissioner after Independence

After independence in 1947, government of India debated whether to retain Indian Civil Services (ICS) or to discontinue the service as that represented the oppressive and aggressive regime of the British and was therefore despised by the national leaders during freedom movement. The views of first Indian Home Minister Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel prevailed and service was retained as a steel frame of Indian governance system with new nomenclature of Indian Administrative Service (IAS). It was expected that the service would provide continuity in administration and be a bridge of balance between Centre and States in the federal set up. Such officers, who are selected through an all India level competitive examination conducted every year by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) with minimum qualification of a graduate degree in any discipline from any University or equivalent and are in a special age group, can become the member of this premier administrative service in the country. To retain the federal character of governance, these officers are allocated to their own home state and other states/Union Territories (UTs) on the basis of their merit and preference in the competitive examination. After initial institutional and field training as lower level functionaries in the district, an IAS officer is posted as the Deputy Commissioner after around six to eight years of service and remains in such positions or equivalent posts in State Secretariat or Central Government Secretariat till he completes about 16 years of service. Officers from State Civil Service are also promoted to IAS after putting in minimum 12 years of service on the basis of their merit against one-third quota reserved for such services<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Sudesh Kumar Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Naresh Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>36</sup> D.S. Mishra, "Administering A District in India: Reviewing Collector's Institution", Rakesh Hooja and Sunil Dutt (ed.) *District Administration: Redefining the*





The office of Deputy Commissioner is also known as District Officer or District Collector in some states of India. The role and responsibility of the Deputy Commissioner has undergone considerable change since Independence. With the adoption of Indian Constitution on January 26, 1950, the country became a welfare state and Deputy Commissioner assumed the role of social benefactor and nation – builder apart from regulator of peace and order and collector of revenue, as was the case during colonial rule.<sup>37</sup>

During British Empire land revenue was very important source of income for the government. So the post of the District Collector was very important and he maintained accurate and up-to-date land records, but after Independence, the importance of revenue administration became less important, because our country became a welfare state and the Deputy Commissioner assumed the role of social benefactor and nation-builder instead of regulator of peace and order and collector of revenue. Thus, the Deputy Commissioner/District Collector has become an important arm for implementing national and state policies on welfare, development etc. and his role as Collector has almost gone into background.

At present the role of Deputy Commissioner/District Collector can be categorized into three main groups:

1. As Collector of revenue
2. As District Magistrate
3. As Deputy Commissioner

#### IV. Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that the post of Deputy Commissioner has remained a significant feature of the field administration during the last 200 years' history of administration in India. The basic administrative structure of the Colonial Rule was adopted by India after Independence including the post of Deputy Commissioner. It is evident that the major functions of the Deputy Commissioner under Colonial Rule were general administration, maintenance of law and order and revenue collection. Although, these functions have been maintained during the transition from colonial rule to independent status but the structure and context

within which these functions are performed has changed after Independence. However, in the post-Independence era various efforts have been made by the Indian government to make it suitable for the new needs of the country.

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<sup>37</sup> *Development Role*, Indian Institute of Public Administration, 2008, pp. 68 & 69.  
D.S. Mishra, "Administering A District in India: Reviewing Collector's Institution", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. LI, No. 1, January-March 2006, p. 47.