

Managing the district

This source book, compiled with great care and thoroughness, should be made compulsory reading in all public administration institutions. The author has described at length the evolution of district administration, as we know it today, and the working of the principal components of this structure. The administration of the police force and the maintenance of law and order, which is perhaps the prime function of any government, is dealt with in detail.

This is one area in which there has been some falling of standards since independence, and considering the turmoil through which parts of the country, particularly, U.P. and some of the eastern States, are going through today. It should be profitable reading, even for senior administrators. All those involved in administration must ask themselves why things have gone wrong and law and order has deteriorated over the years. Many of the answers are given by Mr Khera in the long chapter on law and order.

It is true that in the British days the first requirement of a good district administrator was the maintenance of peace and tranquility. This remains a valid goal even today. However, rapid

economic development is an equally important objective in independent India. Perhaps law and order cannot be maintained for long if the economy breaks down under the pressures of population and inflation.

Though Mr Khera has, in part four of the book, dealt with the administration of development departments in the field, his

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA by S. S. Khera, National Publishing, New Delhi. Pp. 359. Rs 100.

treatment of this vital subject is cursory. Agriculture, co-operatives, health, education, industry and panchayati raj have all been covered in only 26 pages in a book of 350. Personally, I would have preferred some of the earlier chapters to be compressed, and a more elaborate and up-to-date treatment of the development aspect of district administration.

There should also have been a chapter on possible reforms of the system. It is true that the broad district framework has existed from the Mughals through the British down to our

days. It has served India reasonably well. But in today's economic, political and social pressures, the system is beginning to show cracks. In today's context, what should be the relative size of a district and its administrative structure is a question which needs to be gone into.

As in the case of States, so in that of district, there is a clear relationship between the size of the unit and its speed of progress. It appears to me that States like Punjab and Haryana, which are small, have demonstrated both at the State and district level that given our level of communications and technical aids, it is not possible to efficiently administer and develop large units. The progress made by these States, as compared with that of some large States in the east, is a clear pointer of criticism of the bigger units.

The balance that is to be struck between the management of affairs by the civil service, and pressing public aspirations, as articulated by political leaders, also needs to be examined at length. One wishes Mr Khera with his long experience of all levels of government, had undertaken these tasks also in his otherwise admirable book.

— Manohar Singh Gill