

## **Social Welfare Administration in India: Historical Understanding of Tribal Development Prospects in North-East India**

**Jayanta Krishna Sarmah\***

### **Abstract**

*The main concern of Social Welfare Administration is to diagnose the social problems, identify social inequalities and social injustice and to resolve and redress them. It makes use of the findings of any of the social sciences which are relevant to its sphere, which includes the solving of social problems, the implementation of social policy and the promotion of social welfare. Social scientists opine that Social Welfare Administration constitutes a branch, a sub-division or a specified sub-system of Public Administration. Its scope extends from diagnosis of the emergence of social problems in all times, initiating measures to eradicate them through social legislation and creation of public awareness about provisions of social welfare services for the deprived sections of the society.*

**Keywords:** Social welfare, administration, management, tribal, constitution

Administration is of crucial importance as a method of social welfare since all the policies and programmes formulated for the welfare of people and the financial allocations made for their implementation would be of little avail unless adequate administrative mechanism and processes manned by properly trained and motivated staff are given due importance and recognition. Social welfare administration can be defined as the process of transforming social policy into social services. It is a process of implementation and of translating policies into action programmes. It signifies the attempts made by governments and voluntary organisations to help families and

individuals by maintaining incomes at an acceptable level, by providing medical care and public health services, by furthering adequate housing and community development, by providing services to facilitate social adjustment and by furnishing facilities for recreation. Thus, it involves participation in administration of the welfare services to provide health, housing, drinking water, education and economic well-being to the people in general. The norms of conduct of social welfare administration emphasise human elements and human services.

The main concern of Social Welfare Administration is to diagnose the social

\* Prof. Jayanta Krishna Sarmah is Professor, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam. Email: jayanta1947@gmail.com

problems, identify social inequalities and social injustice and to resolve and redress them. It makes use of the findings of any of the social sciences which are relevant to its sphere, which includes the solving of social problems, the implementation of social policy and the promotion of social welfare. But its distinctive character is that it combines and benefits from any of the conclusions of social sciences which assist it and uses them as tools in the performance of functions which are its particular concern (Slack, 1960).

Social scientists opine that Social Welfare Administration constitutes a branch, a sub-division or a specified sub-system of Public Administration. Its scope extends from diagnosis of the emergence of social problems in all times, initiating measures to eradicate them through social legislation and creation of public awareness about provisions of social welfare services for the deprived sections of the society. Richard M. Titmus defines it in his essay on the *welfare state* as the study of social services whose object is the improvement of conditions of life of the individuals in the setting up of family and group relations. It is concerned with the development of these services, both statutory and voluntary, the moral values implicit in social action, the roles and functions of the services, their economic aspects and the part they play in meeting certain needs in the social processes – all these are important and need to be explored in social service administration (Titmus, 1958).

Kidneigh defines social welfare administration as the process of

transforming social policy into social services – a two way process: (Kidneigh, 1959) transforming policy into concrete social services, and the use of experience in recommending modification of policy.

V.M. Kulkarni describes Social Welfare Administration as the administration of social welfare programmes and states that the administration of social services and social welfare programmes should fall in the sub area of social administration (Kulkarni, 1972). A comprehensive definition of Social Welfare Administration, however, is given in the curriculum study of the American Council of Social Work Education in the following words:

Administration is the process of transforming community resources into a programme of community service, in accordance with goals, policies and standards which have been agreed by those involved in the enterprise. It is creative in that it structures roles and relationships in such a way as to alter and enhance the total product. It involves the problem-solving process of study, diagnosis and treatment (solution or action) and evaluation of results (Spencer, 1959).

Social Welfare Administration has come to acquire a systematic body of knowledge, specialised skills and unique methods and techniques to deserve entitlement to a distinct discipline and profession. It as a matter of fact, is the art and science of those governmental and non-governmental activities which are directed towards the diagnosis of the

emergence of social problems in all times, initiating measures to eradicate them through social legislation and the creation of public awareness, the care of dependent and neglected children, the treatment of criminals and delinquents and the care and treatment of the mentally ill. Administration might also be thought as the life processes of the social welfare structure. It is the application of knowledge and skill of case work, law, medicine, management, public relations, and statistics — to the solution or mitigation of social problems of individuals and groups. Once legislation is adopted providing social welfare services and directing the appropriate authorities to set-up an organisation, administration has its beginning. In other words, administration comes in after the services have been organised. It may be good administration or poor administration; that depends upon the knowledge, the ability and the sincerity of purpose of those responsible for taking the first steps towards organisation of social welfare agency. Matters of major importance in administration are : (i) Personnel-selection, classification and management; (ii) Management of funds; (iii) Communication; (iv) Records; (v) Public Relations; (vi) Professional services and (vii) Planning (Sachdeva, 1993).

The scope of Social Welfare Administration is very wide and the areas constituting the subject matter of its study are increasing day by day. This is due to the emergence of new social problems in the dynamic society. In Social Welfare Administration, administrative activities

range from the determination of functions and policies and executive leadership to routine operations such as keeping records and accounts and carrying on maintenance services (Dunhan, 1958). The administrative process seeks to mobilise the total resources of the agency to the end that its purposes are translated into efficient and effective service (Kruse, 1960). At the same time, it also works with boards and committees and evaluates accurately the results achieved in relation to established purposes. It always looks ahead, so that services are kept consistent with dynamic trend in needs and resources.

In modern times, the concept of welfare administration has made the governments all over the world conscious of their obligation to provide maximum social welfare services to their people with a view to provide remedies to social problems and to secure social justice. Social welfare departments and voluntary organisations now require properly qualified and trained social welfare personnel to perform social welfare functions of various types in different fields from the grass-root level to the highest echelon of administration.

All states irrespective of their political ideologies and form of government provide for social welfare services for their people on a scale to be determined by the financial resources at their disposal. The success of the various welfare programmes would however, depend on how effectively and efficiently these are

implemented, executed by the personnel who are entrusted with the task of administering them. Well thought out and well considered policies, plans and programmes fail to succeed, the best organizations based on sound principles break down if the available human material is not competent to manage the public affairs (Bhamri, 1988). A.E. Gorwale observes that the mere laying down of right policies and programmes is not enough, the test is performance and implementation. It is by this test of performance that the work of individual officials of all grades could be judged and praised or criticism given (Gorwale, 1953). The enormous growth in social services and delivery system makes incumbent upon on the part of the government to devise special measures for ensuring adequate and appropriate personnel system to meet the increasing demand in social welfare administration (Verma, 1980).

The quality of the welfare service is related directly to the number and competence of the employed personnel. The agency's basic personnel relationship are defined in its personnel policies concerning such matters as employment, salaries, tenure, vacations, grievance procedure, retirement and so forth. It is a sound practice for an agency to formulate comprehensive personnel policies. According to Pfiffner and Presthus, personnel policy of an organization and its major activities in the area of 'Personnel Administration' should include: (Pfiffner & Presthus, 1960)

1. Job analysis and position classification – the description of the work to be performed in a given job which becomes the basis for effective recruitment.
2. Recruitment and placement – the process of individual skills and aptitudes with job or class specifications.
3. Evaluation, promotion and transfer – the procedures used to recognise accomplishment and to use individual abilities to greatest advantage.
4. Compensation scales – plan for assuring equal pay for equal work, with salary gradation based on individual skills required by the job.
5. Training, counselling and improvement of working conditions – the most important of a variety of services designed to motivate employees.
6. Relations with employees' organizations and unions – handling relationships with these groups.
7. Disciplinary action – supervision of individual suspension and dismissal cases.
8. Personnel records: maintaining such employee's records as rosters, time records, sick and vacation leave records eligible lists, pay roles.

These methods and their underlying assumptions are however, likely to change from country to country in the context of

changing circumstances and conditions and the new insights into organizational behavior afforded by research and experience.

India has a long tradition of Social Welfare, which aims at the well-being and improvement of the life of the individuals in general, and alleviating the sufferings and ameliorating the lot of the destitute, deprived, disadvantaged and underprivileged sections of society in particular. Right through the centuries commencing with the reign of King Ashoka or going back even to the days of Buddha, there have been many rulers and many among the common people of India who trod the path of service to their fellow beings and adopted it as a life mission. The Kings and the Chiefs also provided free kitchens during the famine and shelter to the homeless. In Assam, the Ahom king Suchengpha or Pratap Sinha (1603-1641 AD) had started the welfare administration in Ahom Dynasty in true sense of the term. Suchengpha's experience from his wars with Mughals made him to undertake elaborate administrative reforms. His reign is notable for the development of backward areas, construction of innumerable roads, health centres and forts. The Ahom Kings in Assam took personal care and interest in the silk (Eri/Muga/Pat) industry. A lot of people engaged themselves in this industry and royal patronage contributed to its rapid development. The fabrics prepared out of *Muga*, *Eri* and *Pat* (Mulberry Silk) became the national dress of the Assamese and formed a common costume of the

women of the Assam valley. Similarly, while education was confined mainly to the Brahmins in the medieval period, who were engaged as priests by monarchs and nobles, the *satras* played a great role to spread education towards the common people of Assam. The contributions of Satras are not less important than that of the education system of modern welfare state observing the socio-cultural condition of Assam in the medieval period. *Satras* developed themselves as centres of learning with the spread of neo-vaishnavism in Assam. Nevertheless, the state activities in the field of social welfare were more or less stagnant during the pre-independence period.

After achieving independence, the Indian Republic is wedded to the ideals of democracy, social justice and welfare state. The welfare state ideal is enshrined in the Indian constitution with a view to ensure social justice to the most deprived and underprivileged sections of our society, especially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Here it is important to note that tribal development and tribal welfare are also some essential parts of the entire process of development and it cannot be understood in isolation. In this regard, India has both the legacy and heritage from our great national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the form of the 'Concept of Trusteeship' and 'Panchsheel for Tribal Development'.

The strength for tribal development as expressed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

was the avoidance of two extreme courses — one was to treat them as anthropological specimens and the other to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity (Rao & Ramana, 1998). The goals of Tribal Development in India were best summarised in Nehru's foreword to Verrier Elwin's book on NEFA as follows: (Basu, 1985)

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and the government should avoid imposing anything on them. It should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture;
2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected;
3. The government should try to train tribals to do administration and development work. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory should be avoided;
4. The government should not overadminister these areas or overwhelm the people with a multiplicity of schemes. It should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions; and
5. The results should be judged not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but the quality of human character evolved.

This five point formula enunciated by Nehru is the corner stone of the government policy. This was further elaborated by Elwin, who emphasized the need for the tribal people to come to terms with their own past, avoiding danger of pauperism and without creating a sense of inferiority. Elwin stressed on recognising the contribution of the tribal people in helping the Indian society as a whole, so that they may feel as part and parcel of India as any other citizen (Mathur, 1975).

In this context it is more relevant to mention some of the views of Verrier Elwin on tribal development. Verrier Elwin (Mathur, 1975) depicts that the five most important needs, in the context of multi-focal tribal development in agriculture, communications, medicinal facilities, education and so on which are common to the whole nation are:

1. The tribal lands should be guaranteed to them and that any further alienation of it to outsiders should be stopped;
2. Their rights in forest should be respected and an entirely new attitude should be taken towards them by the forest authorities throughout India;
3. The problem of indebtedness should be solved without delay, partly by legislation and partly by a great intensification of the cooperative movement and the availability of easy credit from official sources;

4. The problem of industrialization of the tribal areas must be regarded much more seriously and that where the tribal people are dispossessed off their lands and settled elsewhere, intelligent and generous measures should be taken to compensate them; and
5. The long isolation of the tribes should come to an end, and they should be welcomed everywhere with warm affection and on equal terms, and they should be given every opportunity of public service.

At the same time, multipurpose tribal development projects were jointly undertaken by the Ministries of Community Development and Home Affairs intended to tackle tribal problems in agriculture, animal husbandry, public health, education, co-operation, irrigation and communication, so that their all round development is ensured. These projects in addition to general schemes of community development, have special programmes like settling shifting cultivators, encouraging tribal arts and crafts, opening up of the tribal areas through the introduction of communication facilities, organising special institutions like Ashram Schools for educating tribal children, operating mobile units to take medical and health facilities to the door step, fighting endemic diseases and encouraging co-operative movements.

To assess the performance of these multipurpose projects, the Government of

India appointed a committee under the Chair Person of Varrier Elwin in 1959. The Committee in its report submitted on March 30, 1960 felt that it is difficult to assess a fluid situation as the picture is changing rapidly and observed that the communications in multipurpose tribal blocks were improved, unsuccessful officers were replaced, field staff were strengthened by appointing village level workers and funds were redistributed more suitably and realistically. It also observed that the proportion of non-tribals to tribals is far too high in many blocks and the large areas with tribal concentration were left out. The programme has primarily benefited the non-tribals instead of tribals. Some of the blocks were too big to cover the interior tribals while some of the headquarters were located far away from tribal areas.

Right on the heels of Elwin Committee, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission (Dhebar Commission) was appointed under the chairmanship of U.N. Dhebar in April, 1960. The Dhebar Commission Report covered the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes under Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. It has brought out some of the anomalies in the then existing Scheduled Tribe lists. The recommendations were mainly concerned with protective measures and giving Panchayati Raj a tribal bias besides comprehensive and integrated view of tribal development. The recommendations on planning and development were more

specific for solving the problems of land alienation, indebtedness, promotion of education, protecting tribal interest in forests and sectoral development. The Dhebar Commission also recommended establishment of Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institutes in States having one million and above tribal population for conducting training for official and non-official development functionaries and undertaking tribal research studies so that their results can be ploughed back to planners and administrators. In 1969, a study team headed by P. Shilo Ao as its chairman, was appointed to evaluate the tribal programmes. This committee, while agreeing with the general conclusions and approach of the Dhebar Commission, on the point of suitability of the tribal development block came to the conclusion that this scheme of the blocks was inadequate for dealing with the complex problems of tribal development.

Under these backdrops, the Constitution of India also provides various safeguards for promotion and protection of interests of the Scheduled Tribes. The Constitutional safeguards are general as well as specific protective provisions. Under *Directive Principles of the State Policy*, the Constitution of India put a moral responsibility on the State that: "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of

exploitation" (The Constitution of India, 2000).

There are many other provisions in the Constitution of India which ensure equality to tribals and protect them from exploitation. These safeguards also include some Fundamental Rights of Indian citizens. For example, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste and place of birth. Under this provision, no citizen only on the grounds mentioned above shall be treated unfavourably by the State when compared with persons of any other religion or caste merely on the ground that he belongs to the particular religion or caste. The significance of the word 'only' is that if there is any other ground or consideration for the differential treatment besides those prohibited by this Article, the discrimination will not be unconstitutional (*Yusuf Abdul Aziz vs. State of Bombay*, 1954). Article 16 ensures equal opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. The true import of equality of opportunity is not simply a matter of legal equality. Its existence depends not merely on the absence of disabilities but on the presence of abilities and opportunity of excellence in each cadre/grade as equality of opportunity means equality as between the members of the same class of employees and not between that of separate independent classes (*Havildar/Clerk*, 1999). Article 17 abolishes the practice of untouchability in any form. In this regard



Parliament has also enacted the Untouchability (offences) Act, 1955, which has been amended and renamed (in 1976) as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. Article 19 (d) and (e) protects the tribals by restricting the movement and residence and settlement of non-tribals in some tribal areas. Article 23 deals with the prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour and ensures equality between citizens. Article 25 deals with freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion; Article 29 entails freedom to people to conserve their language, script or culture and ensures the equality to all citizens of India to get admission in educational institutions maintained by the state or receive aids out of state funds; and Article 35 provides Constitutional Remedies, to give effect to the provisions of Part III of the Constitution.

Further, Article 164 deals with the appointment of Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Welfare in some States; Article 244 pertains to the administration of Scheduled and Tribal Areas; Article 275 under Finance, deals with grants from the Union to certain States as it may be necessary, to enable the State to meet the cost of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the State with the approval of Government of India for the purpose of promoting the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the State or raising the level of administration of Scheduled Areas; and Article 320 deals with functions of Public Service Commissions

for ensuring equal treatment to all citizens of India.

Moreover, Article 330 makes *special provisions* for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People. Article 332 makes reservation of seats in the Legislative Assemblies; Article 334 specifies the tenure of reservation of seats and special representation; and Article 335 deals with their claims to services and posts and indicate that their claims shall be taken into consideration, consistently, in the making of appointment to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.

By virtue of the Constitution (sixty fifth Amendment) Act, 1990, the Special Officer's Post under Article 338 of the Constitution has been substituted by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and five other members to be appointed by the President. Article 339 outlines the control of the Union over the administration of Scheduled Areas and the welfare of Scheduled Tribes, whereas Article 342 lays down the mechanism of scheduling the tribes.

In addition to the above special provisions for the Scheduled Tribes, efforts were also made through certain *Acts and Orders* which are protective, ameliorative and concessional in nature. The State Governments have also taken steps by legislative and executive

enactment regulations and measures in the field of : land tenure; distribution of waste land; local self-government institutions; forest rights; money lending business; reservation of jobs and admission in educational institutions; loan facilities to raise the economic level on different rate of interest from financial institutions; subsidies in loan for the development of agricultural yield; public distribution of consumption goods; marketing of agricultural and forest produce; development of small scale and cottage industries; allotment of housing sites, several schemes of providing educational scholarship; hostel facilities and other related measures for their socio-economic development. The government made serious efforts in the past to contemplate transformation of the tribal economy with a view of bringing tribals at par with other rural areas in the country. The underprivileged groups such as Scheduled

Tribes, Scheduled Castes, denotified tribals and nomadic tribes, lacked adequate opportunities for group and individual self-development specially in increasing their income, employment, facilities for health, housing and education.

The development under five year plans aimed to replace the traditional system of agriculture to remove subsistence economy which is attributed to: the lack of irrigation sources; small land holding; land alienation and improper utilization of land. The lack of industrialization, nonprofitability and little scope of rural industrialisation and absence of competitive life were some of the other significant factors which inhibited the socio-economic growth of the tribals. Thus the development of the tribals has been made an integral part of planning and policy making both at the Centre and State level.

## Reference

- Basu, Ashok Ranjan. (1985). *The Tribal Development Programmes and Administration in India*. New Delhi: National Book Organisation. [For Details: Verrier Elwin. (1959) *A Philosophy for NEFA*,. Forward by the Prime Minister of India, Shillong; North East Frontier Agency]
- Bhamri, C.P. (1988). *Public Administration : Theory and Practice*. Meerut City: Jai Prakash Nath and Co.
- Dunhan, Arthur. (1958). *Community Welfare Organisation, Principles and Practices*. Thomas Y. Crowell Company.
- Gorwale, A.E. (1953). *Report on Public Administration*. New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India.

Social Welfare Administration in India: Historical Understanding of Tribal Development Prospects  
in North-East India

- Kidneigh, John C. (1959). Social Work Administration, An Area of Social Work Practice. *Social Work Journal*, April 31, 58.
- Kruse, Arthur. (1960). Administration of Social Welfare Agencies. *Social Work Year Book*, New York: National Association of Social Work.
- Kulkarni, V.M. (1972). *Essays in Social Administration*. Delhi: Delhi Research Publications in Social Sciences.
- Mathur, J.S. (1975). *Tribal Development Administration: Respective on Tribal Development and Administration*. Hyderabad.
- Pfiffner, John M., & Presthus, Robert V. (1960). *Public Administration*. New York: The Ronal Press Company.
- Rao, D.V.V. Ramana. (1998). *Tribal Development : New Approaches*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
- Sachdeva, D. (1993). *Social Welfare Administration in India*. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal.
- Slack, K. (1960). *Social Administration and Citizen*. London.
- Spencer. (1959). *The Administrative Method in Social Work Education Curriculum Study*. New York; Council on Social Education Work.
- The Constitution of India. (2000). *Article 46*. Allahabad: Central Law Publication.
- Titmus, Richard M. (1958). *Essays on the Welfare State*. London.
- Union of India and others vs. No. 664950 IM Havilder/Clerk, April 15, 3 S.C.C. 1999.
- Verma, S.P. (1980). Personnel System for Social Administration. In T. Chaturvedi, & S. Chandra, *Social Administration : Development and Change*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration.
- Yusuf Abdul Aziz vs. State of Bombay. (1954). *AIR (vol. 41, C.N. 77) 10th March, 1954, S.C., p.321*.