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# EVOLUTION OF TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA WITH A FOCUS ON PUNJAB

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## INTRODUCTION

The world is characterized by a variety of spatial organizations: political, economic, religious, juridical and administrative to list some. The administrative organization of space refers to the overall arrangement and internal divisions of political areas into a hierarchy of administrative units to manage public affairs. This has been a universal practice since the earliest times. Each unit is meant to perform specific function/s consistent with its administrative status.

It is estimated that there exist in the world over two hundred national level administrative territories, about three thousand regions analogous in position to the French departments or the English counties, about forty to fifty thousand units comparable to districts, and about three hundred thousand basal units in the nature of local communities (Blazek: 1976). All of them offer a great variation in their evolutionary process, organizational set-up, spatial attributes, obligations and functions.

A study of the evolutionary process of administrative organization of space provides an insight into the conditions that led to the division of space into administrative units of various hierarchical orders and into the consideration that prompted their subsequent change/reform. This involved two types of changes: firstly, those connected with the functional organization of the administrative machinery, and secondly those relating to the structural design of administrative areas. From a geographic perspective, the evolution and periodical modification of administrative structures, which are an explicit expression of the administrative organization of space, make a highly fascinating and academically most rewarding theme of research investigation. It is the geographic space where ideology is translated into organization and polity is forced to come to terms with the complexity of physical, exonomic and social systems (Whitney: 1970:3).

It is thus a long historic process spanning centuries rather than mere accident that has been responsible for giving birth to administrative areas. There are many variations, but each and every beam or column has a meaning of its own (Alderfer: 1964:17). At the world scale, the administrative units emerged following the formation of the early state. This happened more than five thousand years ago in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and somewhat later in the valleys of the Nile (Egypt), Indus (India) and Yangtze (China) rivers. The subsequent process of growth and diffusion of states set in motion a search for an effective mechanism to sustain societal integration in progressively large and culturally

heterogeneous societies (Soja: 1971 : 15). The solution was found in the division of a state into a number of units enjoying sociological homogeneity or functional unity. Some of these had existed as feudatory territories. This represented the origin of administrative areas. The new arrangement intended to: (i) maintain control over people and resources, (ii) impart due recognition to distinct identity of different communities, and (iii) facilitate collection of revenue. The hereditary lords of such administrative units assisted the state chief in military matters during outside attacks. This arrangment contimued roughly till the end of the eighteenth century. The events following the French Revolution in 1789 led to the replacement of the feudal lords by salaried agents of central authorities in France and other operatives of continental Europe after 1915 (Wickwar: 1958:148). The creation of regular armies, in addition, deprived the feudal lords of their military functions as well. Meanwhile a democratic form of local government was taking shape in Great Britain. The process culminated in the establishment of the elective local government in the country by the end of the nineteenth century (White and Hussey: 1965:116). This kind of local government, usually in its variant form and involving different degrees of central government representation at the elective bodies, became common in the developed and the socialist countries of the world. In contrast, the local government in the developing countries largely remained non-elective. Thus, in a three-stage sequence, the feudal administration gave way to non-elective bureaucratic administration, which in its turn is now being gradually reformed into elective local government.

Massam (1972:72) identifies six stages in the evolution of an administrative structure. Based on empirical evidences, these stages move from a phase of no administrative division ($t_1$) to one of partial division as the claim of sovereignty is strengthened ($t_2$), and gradually leading to complete administrative organization of all the settled areas ($t_3$). This will be followed by the next phase of carving out administrative areas in the newly colonized regions ($t_4$). The fifth stage ($t_5$) may see the amalgamation of small units to take advantage of the economies of scale. A tendency towards centralization and standardization of the administrative services is also observed at this stage. In the last stage ($t_6$), administrative areas may again be modified but now the considerations of quality in supply of services prevail over matters of the economies of scale. Massam's ideas of evolutionary stages are evidently based on the Anglo-American experience. He links his six stages with the phases of the history of settlement, changes in the distribution and density of population, improvement in transport and communication systems, and increase in demand and supply of services. But he overlooked the radical transformation of administrative structures and the systematic reform which were made at particular times in former Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, respectively.

Whebell (1968:99-100), while advocating a different approach to the study of evolution of the administrative areas believes that the boundaries of administrative areas get defined only after the emergence of their cores. Hence the right approach to the issue would be to identify the cores first of all. His model includes (i) establishment of a core, and ipso facto (ii) the existence of frontiers of separation between cores. Through expansion from the core of jurisdictional claims with or without land occupancy or organization, these frontiers become (iii) frontiers of contact and the rationalization of conflicting or overlapping jurisdictions require (iv) establishment of formal

boundaries. Continued change in conditions in the decision making cores (population pressure or land hunger, technological development, defense fears, aggrandizement tendencies) keep the boundariers ever changing and may result in (v) formalized conflict and or boundary adjustments. Whebell's ideas are certainly more analytical and convincing than those of Massam. He could successfully demonstrate their validity in his inquiry into the evolution of local authorities in Southern Ontario and Nova Scotia. He takes them as an illustration of the process in the New World, and does not rule out the possibility of some differences in the process in the case of Old World.

Having come into existence once, administrative areas may undergo some changes from time to time. Massam and Goodchild (1971:199-210) list five types of such changes: (i) an area is abolished by being incorporated into an adjoining area, (ii) an area engulfs the neighbour, (iii) headquarters of an administrative area is changed, (iv) boundaries of an area are changed without relocating its headquarters, and (v) previously unassigned areas are engulfed or defined in terms of their administrative status. Demonstrating their ideas through a case study of the Rural Operating Areas in Ontario, they observed that such changes were effected to make the size of each area more uniform, its shape morer compact, and its headquarters more central. The purpose was to enhance the spatial efficiency of the administrative areas. The boundary changes were found easier than relocation of the headquarters in all cases.

Peake (1930:532) highlighted the germinal role of the traditional parish in the administrative organization of space in England. He noted that the parish., which was originally an ecclesiastical area, began to take on civil functions gradually since the sixteenth century. Yonekure (1956), on the basis of his study of the fortysix kens of present Japan, concluded that the provincial-administrative system preceded it by having its roots in ancient times. The basis of the Indian administration has historically been the assessment and collection of the land revenue (Cambridge History of India: 1937:56). The administrative units like the sircars (districts) and parganas (tahsils) defined for the purpose in the sixteenth century have largely persisted till today.

The susceptibility of the administrative organization of space to change varies with area. The administrative area changes are a more common feature of the highly centralized governments (Prescot: 1968:129). This tendency is also associated with the manner in which an administrative structure evolved (Steiner: 1965:35). It is difficult to alter a structure, which is entrenched in history and has not been a product of accidental superimposition. By comparison, it is possible to have a flexible administrative arrangement in a pioneer area where economic development may ocur suddenly and unpredictably (Nicholson: 1953:83). A periodical reform of administrative areas is now considered imperative to meet the requirements of the newly emerging situations (Krishan: 1988).

In addition there are some other issues that need to be looked into. Firstly, the administrative space is more permanent than economic space in general (Barrios: 1977:38). Secondly, there is a two-stage process of administrative area formation. In the initial stage, the primary divisions are established. Their boundaries coincide largely with the natural barriers. In the second stage, the primary divisions are broken into smaller and more regular secondary units. Their boundaries meet the primary boundaries at right or high angled intersections (Haggett: 1975:435-436).

The primeval organization of space for administration in India had a sociological base related to the joint family, clan and tribe in that order. Basic to such a system were the notions of family property, clan solidarity and tribal affinity. Those controlling larger territories were more important administrative functionaries at different spatial scales. Continuation of such a sociological base of administrative organization of space at least at the local level has been noted in recent studies done by Singh (1968:203-220) on Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and by Murton (1978:167-182) on South India. Such ideas need to be taken note of while studying the administrative organization of space in any part of India.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Taking a cue from the above propositions, the present paper proposes to reflect on the evolving scene of the administrative organisation of space in India focusing on Punjab. The basic questions posed here are: at what stage in history and why did administrative areas emerge? How has the spatial arrangement of administrative areas in India, in general, and in Punjab, in particular, changed over time? What were the considerations underlying the successive spatial administrative designs? The reference frame is set by the basic tenets of tribal administration that had a sociological base, revolving around the joint family, clan and tribe. A comparative view will be taken of different periods in Indian history to draw appropriate inferences.

However, it is not out of place to make a mention of the difficulties that are faced in any study of the evolutionary process of administrative areas in India. Firstly, there is hardly any direct material available on the evolutionary process of administrative areas in India, the necessary inferences had to be drawn from the history of India. This meant a systematic perusal of Indian history through spatial glasses. Secondly, authentic material on administrative history was grossly lacking. This was particularly true of the period prior to the sixth century BC. Gaps in subsequent annals are also numerous and sometimes cover centuries. Such a situation is more marked in Punjab where political instability remained the order of the day for most part of history owing to its frontier location. Thirdly, it is extremely difficult to identify boundaries of administrative areas before the British period beginning in the nineteenth century. This is owing to a lack of tradition in cartography in India. Its use was rare and imprecise. Fourthly, the access of a researcher to any government document in India is very limited. A high premium is placed on the confidentiality of government files. A researcher is normally suspect in the eyes of officials who tend to be wary of any exposure. It is indeed extremely difficult to get at the root of any administrative decision for want of basic information.

Keeping such limitations in view, the ensuing discussion traces the administrative organization of space in Punjab within the broader framework of Indian history by dividing it into ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary periods.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first describes the evolution of administrative areas in Punjab during the Ancient period, the second deals with Medieval period, the third examines the Modern period and the fourth looks into the Contemporary period. An attempt would be made to identify critical phases in recasting or reform of the territory organization of the administration and the factors working behind such reforms.

## ANCIENT INDIA

Punjab, by virtue of its favourable ecological conditions, provided an ideal groundf for the origin and growth of the ancient Indus valley civilization. The region also witnessed emergence of one of the earliest states. Its frontier location made it vulnerable to frequent attacks from the northwest. It has been a zone of instability throughout history. The impact of successive events has been strong on its political and administrative institutions. The earliest traces of civlization in Sindh and Punjab date back to 3000 BC, represented by what is commonly knwon as the Indus valley or Harappa civilization. Who are the authors of this culization is difficult to say, but this civillization had a wide spread reaching as far as Saurashtra & Deccan in the South and Yamuna river on the east.

Very little, however, is known about their political and administrative institutions. This glorious civilization suffered a sudden decline around 1500 BC. The precise reasons for this are not known. This could have been the result of a natural catastrophe such as a severe flood. The Aryans developed their own political and administrative institutions after their settlement and gradual spread in India.

Not many details are available about the early political and administrative institutions evolved by the Aryans. Some ideas, however, can be gleaned form the Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva), the primal scriptures of the Aryans.

It is surmised that the Aryans remained mainly confined to Punjab during the Vedic period. The region was then known as 'Saptsindhu', the land of seven rivers. These rivers included Vitasta(Jhelum), Chandrabhaga (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Vipasá (Beas), Satadru (Satluj), Saraswati (now dried up) and Sindhu (Indus).

The region was inhabited by a number of clans. Five of them (panchjanas), namely Anus, Purus, Bharatas, Yadus and Turuvasas were the most powerful and territorially extensive. The Bharata tribe eventually became the most dominant. This tribe is the source of India's traditional nomenclature as ***Bharat***.

The joint family system, as prevalent among the Aryans, played a crucial role in giving shape to their territorial organization. The patriarch of a family wielded the power. A number of such families owing common descent and owing a particular piece of territory formed the janaman or grama, having a gramani (village chief) as its head. Villages were grouped and regrouped, in hierarchical order, right up to the state, which was known as *jana* and headed by a *janapati* (chief of the tribe). *Vis* (a canton), headed by a *Vispati*, was an intermediate tier between the *grama* and *jana*. Such a politico-territorial arrangement, based on clan segmentation and consolidation, gradually developed at all levels of the Aryan state regardless of its size and ruling dynasty (Mukerjee: 1923:238). Those controlling larger territories were more important administrative functionaries at different spatial scales (Kosambi: 1970 : 42-52).

A tribal chief (*rajan*) headed the *jana* or Tribal State. His was a hereditary office. His authority was binding. An assembly (*sabha* or *samiti*) advised him consisting of the tribe's elders (Jayaswal: 1924).

Defence being a major consideration, a tribal army headed by a chief (*senani*) was raised. The king appointed the chief of the army. A religious leader (*purohita*) was also among

the important functionaries of the state. He advised the king on tribal customs and codes. These tribal states had duly recognized core territories but their peripheries were loosely defined. Physical features such as rivers and mountains usually indicated the boundaries.

Following this, the Aryans settlements started dispersing from Punjab to the Ganges valley. The process was hastened by the discovery of iron ore on the southern margins of the valley. Agriculture also diffused. New areas were colonized. Each tribe or a part of tribe was keen to extend its territory as the powerful among them wanted to secure political control over the weaker. In a bid for supremacy, the Kurus established themselves in the land between the Satluj and the Yamuna (Kuru-desh) as also in the Yamuna-Ganga interfluve (Panchala). The whole areas emerged, around the Mahabharata era (800 BC to 600 BC), as a pivot of Aryan domain. It was known as Madhyadesa (middle country).

The political and geographical horizons were greatly enlarged by this time. The term Bharata or Bharatvarsha for the whole of India appeared for the first time in the Mahabharata. The country was deemed as composed of five broad cultural realms: *Udicya* (north India), *Pracya* (east India), *Praticya* (west India), *Madhya desh* (central India), and *Daksinapatha* (sounth India). Around 500 BC, these five broad realms gave way to a number of states (*janapadas*). Sixteen among these were distinctly large and known as (*mahajanapadas*). These included Gandhara, Kamboja, Anga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vijji, Malla, Cetiya, Vamsa, Kuru, Pancala, Maccha, Surasena, Assaka and Avanti. Only Gandhara and Kamboja were located in Punjab. All *mahajanapadas* were independent enltities, not being under the rule of any single emperor.

As stated above, during this period a great empire under the Mauryan rulers was emerging in the Ganges valley. By the time Asoka (273-232 BC) took over the empire, it encompassed much of India. With the exception of some areas beyond the river Pennar in the south and some frontier tracts in Punjab, almost the entire country was administered by a single imperial power.

## Territorial Administration of Mauryan Empire

By the time Asoka (273-232 BC) succeeded to power, the Mauryan empire had grown so vast and diverse that it was impractical to administer it as one unit. The empire was divided into a number of provinces of varying size. Four among these were conferred special status because of their large size and strategic importance. These included, (i) the northwestern province, headquartered at Taxila, (ii) the western province, headquartered at Ujjain, (iii) the eastern province or Kalinga (modern Orissa) at Tosali, and (iv) the southern province headquartered at Savarnagari. Punjab was a part of the northwest province). Not much is known about the other provinces.

The four provinces enjoyed considerable autonomy in administrative matters. Their executive head, known as Kumara (viceroy), generally hailed from the royal family. In addition to being the head of the whole empire the emperor himself looked after the province wherein the imperial capital of Pataliputra was located. The northwestern province covered the territories of Punjab, Kashmir, Gilgit, Swat and parts of Afghanistan. It was neither physiographically nor culturally homogeneous. It was essentially a political arrangement for administration at the regional level. Nonethless, Mauryan administration brought a kind of unity in the political and socio-economic diversity of this region. The

province was called Gandhara, earlier referred to in the Buddhist and Jain literature as one of the sixteen mahajanapadas of that time.

The provincial administration was a replica of the central government. For the bigger provices, the king appointed the viceroy (Kumara) from among the princes. In minor provinces, governors (mahamatra) from non-royal families could be appointed (Puri: 1968:53). The viceroy was assisted by a mantriparishad (council of ministers). His main responsibility was to maintain law and order, to collect taxes for the central government, to co-ordinate the work of different departments, and to keep a watch over the activities of feudal lords and frontier people. He also received instructions from the imperial capital for transmission to the lower levels of the administration (Joshi:1977:259).

Lower down in the hierarchy, provinces were divided into pradeshas (divisions) under the charge of a pradesika, as mentioned in the Arthasastra- the manual on political-economy by Chanakya, Prime Minister of Chandra Gupta Maurya (322 BC - 293 BC). The *pradesikas* were accountable to both viceroy and the king. The *pradeshas* (divisions) were further divided into *aharas* (districts) under the charge of *rajukas*. District officers were responsible for the collection of land revenue, maintenance of proper records, promotion of trade and industry, and construction of roads and planting of trees along them. They were the key men in the sphere of local administration (Joshi:1977:291).

It seems that the district administration emerged as a powerful wing of imperial rule during the time of the Mauryas. The district official in charge combined in himself the executive, revenue and judicial functions, a practice that continued during the Muslim and later the British periods of Indian history. At the spatial scale of the district where the administration had to be intensive and unitary in character.

The *grama* (village) was the lowest unit of rural administration. A gopa, known as *gramani* during the Vedic period and *gramadhipati* during the epics period, was in charge of village revenue and judicial matters. The change in nomenchature of the village head represented a change in the philosophy of administration. He was now seen as a benefactor and not a master of his village. The Maurya administration, particularly during Asoka's period, was greatly inclined toward the welfare of the people. The decimal system of organizing rural polity operating earlier continued during this period also. There was, however, a change in the nomenchlature of village officials. A village officer, who headed over one hundered villages, was now known as sangrahana; earlier he was called satgrami. Likewise, an officer looking after over 800 villages was known as sthanika. This being a period of political stability and economic progress, the urbanization process experienced a spurt. The urban government, which finds a mention for the first time in the Apastamba sutra (500-100 BC), was now fully developed. Pataliputra (Patna), the imperial capital, emerged as a great center of trade and culture in the entire oriental world. This is evident from the writings of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.

In addition to the general-purpose administration at differnet spatial scales, special purpose authorities related to justice, revenue and public works were the hallmark of the Mauryas. Administration of justice was made more systematic and territorially pervasive. Under the Mauryas the judicial administration expanded on a scale never before seen. Land revenue was the major source of income; its administration also was elaborate. In addition,

excise duties had become an important sosurce of state revenue owing to a spurt in trade and other economic activities during this period. Land revenue was assessed at one-sixth of the gross produce. This had been the traditional Hindu land tax policy. There were indeed local variations in assessment and collection of land revenue but details are not available.

The Mauryas were pioneers in Indian history in establishing an independent department of public works. Asoka was particularly keen on the construction of roads, planting of trees and providing inns along them. His interest in roads arose from the need for efficient administration and convenient trade. Roads linked the different parts of the empire. Pataliputra-Taxila was the most important trunk route. Another innovative feature of the Mauryan administration was the establishment of an authority, antamahamatra for frontier areas. This authority looked after the frontiers for the overall defense of the empire. Propagation of dharma (religion) was a part of its duty. The authotity served as liaison between the Center and the frontier people and prevent any rebellion (Puri:1968:61). It follows that in the annals of ancient India, the Mauryan administrative system represented a landmark in the organization of space for administration. It responded to the needs and requirements of a vast continental empire. The provincial, district, urban and frontier area administration were organized on systematic lines for the first time.

The spatial framework of feudal-federal administration under the mighty Mauryas reverted to the clan-feudal type after their decline. The successors of Asoka were weak and inefficient thus failed to maintain the integrity of the inherited empire. A large number of small kingdoms and confederations emerged on the political horizon with fluid boundaries owing to matual hostilities. Such a situation was more typical of peripheral and frontier regions such as Punjab.

Kaniska (AD 78-101), the most prominent Kushan emperor, consolidated the territory in northwest India including Punjab, Kuruspur (modern Peshewar and now in Pakistan) was his capital. His impact however was short lived.

It remained for the Guptas (AD 335-445) to infuse new life into the geo-administrative history of India. What they accomplished was a model to follow for centuries to come.

## Territorial Administration of Gupta Empire

The core of new dispensation was centered at Prayag (Allahabad), now in Uttar Pradesh. The Mauryan power was earlier centered at Pataliputra (Patna) in Bihar. It signifies that the historic distance between the imperial center of power and Punjab was somewhat reduced. Despite adhering to the tradiational administrative practices, the Guptas brought in far-reaching changes (Table 1). They streamlined the spatial organization of administration and changed the official designation at different levels aof bureaucracy (Majumdar: 1954:30). The first order units of the Gupta Empire were known as *bhuktis* (provices) which were in turn divided into *vishayas* (districts). The latter were subdivided into vithis (subdivision). The *grama* (village) formed the lowest unit of administration. In the spatial hierarchy of administrative areas *Bhuktis* (provinces) came first. They were also known as madalas (divisions) in some cases. The heads of provincial administration were known as uparikas (governors). The monarch appointed them. Some important provinces were put under the charge of princes with the title of

**Table 1**

**Spatial Organization of Administration during the Maurya, the Gupta, the Mughal, the British and the Contemporary Periods**

| Maurya Period (BC 322-185) | Gupta period (AD 285-550) | Mughal period (AD 1526-1761) | British period (AD 1761-1947) | Contemporary period (AD 1947- |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Empire | Empire | Empire | Empire | Nation |
| Desa/Rastra | Bhukti | Subah | Province | State |
| Pradesa | --- | --- | Division | Division |
| Ahara | Vishaya | Sarkar | District | District |
| --- | --- | --- | Subdivision | Subdivision |
| Group of Gramas | Vithi | Pargana | Tahsil | Tahsil |
| – | – | – | – | Development block |
| Grama | Grama | Mauza/Deh | Village/Goan | Goan |
| 6* | 5 | 5 | 7 | 8 |

** Indicates the number of tiers in administrative hierarchy*

maharajaputra devabhattaraka. The uparikas of the Gupta period may be equated with pradesikas of Asoka, and maharajaputra devabhattaraka with the kumaras (viceroys). In this way, the Guptas continued with the traditional structure of administrative bureaucracy though with changed nomenclature (Majumdar:1954:350).

A *bhukti* (provice) was divided into vishayas (districts). District heads were called variously as kumaramatya, ayukta and vishayapati. The provincial chief rather than the emperor appointed them. This was a radical departure from the past. It represented a decentralization of administrative powers. Earlier, the crown appointed the district chief itself. On what basis was a province constituted into vishayas (districts) and what was the normal size of the latter? This is not known. District headquarters were located in towns, representing a traditional link between the centers of power and urbanization. Lower to vishayas in hierarchy of spatial administration were the vithis. Grama (village) was the lowest unit of administration. It enjoyed considerable autonomy on administrative matters. Its officia-in-charge was known as gramika or gramyaka or gramadhyasha. Earlier the village chief was known as gramani in the Vedic period, gramadhipati in the epic period and gopa in the Mauryan period, showing that the Guptas preferred a terminology close to the one prevalent during the Vedic period.

Like the administrative units at different spatial scales, the puras (towns) also had a council for thier administration. This was in the nature of the municipal boards or corporation of the present day. The number as well as population size of urban centers had greatly increased. Present day, the number as well as population size of urban centres had greatly increased. This was the byproduct of

peace and prosperity during the Gupta rule, which is known as the golden period of Indian history.

There were some deviations from the pattern described. The newly conquered states were allowed to maintain their special status, and were expected to simply pay the customary tributes and to act as buffer states against any outside invasion. They enjoyed full autonomy in internal administration. In brief, the Gupta Empire was a feudal-federal system at the macro level. It was composed of a number of provinces and feudatories of varying size. Punjab in the northwest was a feudatory rather than a federal part of the empire.

## MEDIEVAL INDIA

The Gupta Empire fell in the 5th century AD. Following this, several local and regional powers took shape. India was divided into more than seventy kingdoms of varying sizes and strengths in the 7th century, as observed by a contemporary Chinesse visitor, Yaun Chwang(Prasad:1974:263). The boundaries of these principalities were imprecise and unstable. Most of the rulers of this period being Rajputs, the period is also known as the Rajput period (AD 647 to 1206) in Indian history. Harshavardhana (AD 606-647), a Rajput ruler had Thanesar (now in Haryana) his capital. He consolidated his empire on the lines of the Gupta but with his death things fell apart.

Muslim rule over India spanned centuries. The AD 1206 to AD 1526 phase is designated as the Sultanate period and AD 1526 to AD 1761 as the Mughal period of Indian history. The new political dispensation brought the administrative organization of space, among other things, under the impact of Islamic polity.

### Territorial Administration in the Sultanate Period

Early Muslim ruler tried to supplant the HIndu administration by the Islamic pattern. This met with little success as India had its own administrative institutions and traditions. The ouright rejection of what was in vogue, was not so easy.

The Sultanate system was acentrally controlled and bureaucratic. All administrative powers lay in the hands of the monarch. The position of a Muslim monarch being vulnerable in theory, clan brothers, nobles and religious leaders were to be kept in good humour. This was generally done by grants of land. So frequent were the land grants during the reign of some sultans that the empire was reduced to a kind of confederation of landlords presided over by the Lodhi kings (Tripathi:1956:83).

During the 13th century Sultanate was composed of military commands known as *iqtas* (land grants of provincial size). To begin with there was no administrative tier below the *iqtas*. Later on, with the consolidation of the Sultanate and for the effective suppression of the Hindu chieftains, these *iqtas* were divided into lower administrative units known *as shiqs*. This also was not a universal practice. A little later, pargana - a group of villages - was introduced as a lower administrative unit in hierarchy than the shiq. This was intended to strengthen the imperial control at the local level. Thus provincial administration in the Sultanate period was organized into three tiers of *iqta*, shiq and pargana. In spirit it coincided with the military organization of space.

Iqtas were of two types, (i) the bigger and more strategic ones headed by *walis*, and (ii) the small and less imprtant ones headed by muqtis. There were, in addition, some Hindu principalities that had accepted a subordinate

position. These were ruled in the Hindu tradition. Such an administrative organization of space was in conformity with Islamic thought. It also suited the contemporary political situation (Qureshi:1971:194). Islamic practice demanded that sensitive territories be put under the charge of a ruling clan member while the less strategic ones being assigned to suitable persons from other clans. This was what was done when nominating *walis* and *muqtis*. It is notable that while delineating the territorial limits of iqtas, the boundaries inherited from the predecessor Rajput states were not ignored. The new military organization of space for this purpose. By its very nature, the Muslim administration was mainly concerned with the maintenance of its authority and collection of revenue. The military department at the *iqta* level was placed under an ariz, directly responsible to the ariz-i-mumalik (minister of war) at the center. Each iqta had a separate revenue department. The chief of finance was known as sahib-i-diwan or khwaja, appointed by the Sultan.

Briefly, the administrative organization of space got a coating of a revised nomenclature during the Sultanate period. It essentially was a military organization of space with the primary aim to protect the authority of the new ruling order and to collect revenue. The provincial administration was organized into a three-tier hierarchy of *iqta*, *shiq* and *pargana*. The Muslims were mainly confined to urban areas as the ruling elite. Being alien to the rural polity they did not interfere much with administration at levels lower than the *pargana*.

## Territorial Administration in the Mughal Period

The Mughals, who stepped into the shoes of the Sultans in AD 1526, administered their empire on the patterns inherited from the Sultanate. With Akbar's (AD 1556-1605) accession to the throne the situation changed radically. He combined statesmanship with the ability to administer. He followed a polity of religious tolerance and gave a new direction to the administration with the assistance of highly competent council of ministers, both Hindu and Muslim.

All this brought about political harmony and stability, a necessary prerequisite for a systematic deal with administrative matters. On the political horizon, as a major departure from the Sultanate period, he firmly established the heredity principle of Muslim Kingship on Indian soil.

Within years of his rule, Akbar consolidated vast territories under his sway with remarkable diplomatic shrewdness and great military strength. His empire extended from Kandhar (now in Afghanistan) to the farther confines of Bengal, and from the Himalayas in the north to the Deccan in the south. It was too large a territory to administer through the territorial framework. Akbar carried out his reorganization plan in AD 1580. The empire was first divided into twelve primary divisions. The number later on rose to fifteen. Each primary division was termed *subah*. It was an equivalent of *iqta* during the Sultanate period. The *subahs* (provinces) widely differed in their area and income (Tripathi:1956:3). The frontier provinces were not precisely defined (Saran:1941:63-69). The vassal territories, ruled by the Hindu kings, enjoyed vrying degrees of autonomy. The centrally controlled bureaucratic system of administration, as under the sultanate, was retained. All executive powers were concentrated in the monarch. He was now styled as *Padshah* in place of *Sultan*. The policy of non-interference in rural polity continued. The essentials of revenue administration, by now a blend of Hindu

practice and Muslim theory of taxation, were further rationalized.

Punjab was called the subah of Lahore. It was known as the subah of Punjab as well. The term Punjab- denoting the land of five rivers - came into wider currency during the reign of Akbar. Thus, the physical and administrative boundaries of Punjab became coterminous. Punjab was bounded by the river Indus in the west and by the river Satluj in the east. Peshwar was not a part of this province as was the case during the time of the sultanate. Kashmir was located to its north and Rajputana (Rajasthan) to the south. It had its provincial headquarters at Lahore.

All the important officials at the provincial level were appoionted by the emperor in consultation with the concerned ministers (*vazirs*) at the centre. In essence, all the executive powers were centralized at the core (imperial capital). Owing to its highly bureaucratic nature, scholars have termed the Mughal rule as *kaghazi raj* (paper government). In its turn the provincial administration was greatly concentrated at its capital (Sarker:1952:11). Its primary aim was to realize revenue and support the king, bureaucracy and standing armies. Of the four provinces in the north-west, namely, Lahore(Punjab), Multan, Kashmir and Kabul, the first one was the most important. Its office in-charge was the most senior of all.

The practice of dividing unwieldy *iqtas* (provinces) into *shiqs* was common during the Sultanate period. Some small *iqtas* were treated as *shiqs*. The *shiq* came to be known as *sarkars* at the later stage. This tier corresponded to the *ahara* during the Mauryan period and vishaya during the Gupta period (Table1). Akbar followed the same practice and divided the *subahs* (provinces) into *sarkars* (districts). A sarkar was also known as *sawad* in Punjab (Tripathi:1956 : 209). It was administered by a *faujdar,* a military officer. The *pargana* was primarily a clan territory, further divided into secondary clan areas known as tappas and further into individual villages (gaon). It was held in common by one clan under a patriarch who was the chief administrator of the confederacy made up of *tappas*. The Sultans first recognized such a territorially structured system of ancient Hindu rural polity. The Mughals too adopted it. Akbar replaced the pargana by mahal. Hence we have Akbar's mahalwari system. The use of the term *pargana* was also common. The *pargana* was operationally treated as a revenue unit. Its chief was called *shiqdar*. There was no officail machinery below the pargana. A Hindu landlord at the village level acted as the agent of government for collection of land revenue and its deposition in the treasury at the pargana headquarters. There were, however, some local variations. In Bengal, *jawar* represented an intermediate tier between the sarkar and a pargana. In some parts of India, including the hill and remote areas of Punjab, *tappas* made a tier between the mahal and the *mauza* (village).

The greatest contribution of Akbar was in the field of revenue administration. His system, in spirit and structure, was based on the ancient Hindu tax policy. Akbar streamlined the whole process. He adopted the revenue terminology in Arabic. During his time, an *amin*/amil was the head of the revenue administration at pargana level, a *malguzar* at *sarkar* level and *diwan* at the *subah* level.

It follows that the Mughals rationalized some existing arrangements such as reorganisation of provincial, sarkar and pargana boundaries in accordance with the facts of geography, history and political realities. They revived some old practices such as the establishment

of frontier outposts; and also permitted the continuance of several traditional ones such as autonomous rural polity at levels below the pargana.

## MODERN INDIA

The death of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in AD 1707 signaled the decline of the Mughal Empire in India. The void created by the fall of Mughal authority at Delhi was filled in by regional powers. The Mararthas became powerful in western India, the Jats around Delhi and the Sikhs in Punjab. The Sikhs had grown from a religious body into a military force under Guru Govind Singh (AD 1675-1708) and looking for an appropriate opportunity to consolidate their position in Punjab. In the course of their fight against Muslim rule, the Sikhs got divided into a number of *misls* or theocratic confederates. The number of such confederates was twelve by the close of eighteenth century. In a bid for supremacy, Ranjit singh, one of the *misldars*, gained the upper hand. In AD 1799 new consolidated Punjab took shape under his rule. He rule lasted up to AD 1839. During his reign the boundaries of Punjab changed to include Kashmir, north-west frontier and parts of Multan province. He had annexed all such territories between AD 1813 and AD 1834.

Ranjit Singh tried to systematize the territorial organization of administration in his empire. He met with some success too, but being busy with military campaigns only a little time was left with him to devote energies to administrative reforms. His administration though in broad conformity with that of Akbar's had some well marked departures. He used the term *taluka* in preference to the Mughal pargana/mahal and it was headed by a *kardar* in place of the Mughal amin/amil. It seems that he was influenced by the system of administration adopted by the Marathas, having *talukas* for fiscal administration at a comparable level (Banga:1974:66). A *taluka* was further divided into *tappas*. Further down at the village level the *patwari* looked after a number of villages termed *chakla/toppe*. This was again a departure from the Mughal practice of putting a single village under the charge of a *patwari*.

In addition to territories directly administered from Lahore, a number of vassal territories paid tribute to Ranjit Singh. The vassals were Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and the tribute paid by them formed a substantial part of the kingdom's income (Banga:1974-42).

Hurriedly united but neither well consolidated nor provided with durable stability, the kingdom of Lahore collapsed soon after Ranjit Singh's death in AD 1839. Owing to a power struggle among the rival descendants, the kingdom was soon in political disarray. The British meanwhile had established their supremacy in India even when Ranjit Singh had been in power but kept their hands off Punjab in his life-time. The political happenings following his death tempted the British to get involved in Punjab affairs. On the strength of their military power and shrewd diplomacy they succeeded in annexing Punjab in AD 1849.

Soon after, in 1857, a revolt broke out against British rule. It was suppressed ruthlessly and the British became strongly entrenched in power. Radical changes in administrative policy followed. Through an Act of British parliament, the authority to rule India was transferred from the East India Company to the British Crown. A clear distinction was made between the loyalists and rebels during the uprising. In a major administrative reorganization bid, the former Mughal Province of Delhi, then forming a part of the Northwest Provinces, was transferred to Punjab. A number of princely states, such as Patiala,

Jind and Kapurthala, were not only allowed to maintain their former status but were also awarded land grants. Punjab had two segments; the British ruled territory and the princely states. In 1901, the northwestern part of Punjab was constituted as a separate North-West Frontier Province. In 1912, Delhi was detached to form a new province under a chief commissioner. Thereafter, no significant territorial change took place in the boundaries of Punjab till partition in 1947.

## Administrative Organization of Punjab in the XXth Century

The Punjab of 1901 was divided into 27 districts grouped into five divisions. In 1904, two new districts of Attock and Lyallpur were carved out. Besides there were 43 native states of varying size and importance, scattered over different parts of Punjab. The British Punjab accounted for 70 per cent of the total prea and the native states for 30 per cent (Table 2).

An average district of Punjab spread over an area of 3,352 $m^2$ (8632$km^2$). Districts were divided into tahsils/subcollectorates. There were 104 tahsils/subtahsils in Punjab.

A tahsil was primarily a revenue administrative unit. It was subdivided into *kanungo* circles.

**Table 2**

**Punjab : Area, Population, Settlements and Administrative Units in Punjab, 1901-1998**

| Year | Area (in Km2) | Population (in million) | Number of Rural & Urban Settlements | Administrative units |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1901 | 389,036 | 26.88 | 47,256 | 32 districts<br>43 Native states |
| 1911 | 353,095 | 24.19 | 44,574 | 29 districts<br>15 Punjab states<br>28 Simla hill states |
| 1921 | 354,688 | 24.95 | 45,409 | 29 districts<br>15 Punjab states<br>28 Simla hill states |
| 1931 | 354,400 | 29.13 | 51,224 | 29 districts<br>15 Punjab states<br>28 Simla hill states |
| 1941 | 359,179 | 35.23 | 52,644 | 29 districts<br>16 Punjab states<br>27 Simla hill states |
| 1951 | 96,809 | 12.64 | 15,277 | 13 districts |
| 1961 | 122,005 | 20.35 | 22,879 | 19 districts |
| 1971 | 50,362 | 13.55 | 12,450 | 11 districts |
| 1981 | 50,362 | 16.79 | 12,450 | 12 districts |
| 1991 | 50,362 | 20.19 | 12,915 | 12 districts |
| 1998 | 50,362 | 23.41* | 12,915 | 17 districts |

*Source:* Census of India, 1901 to 1991 *Estimated

These were comparable to the Mughal *parganas/Mahals*. Each kanugo circle had a police thana. The latter, comprising a group of villages, was the lowest unit of police administration. On the other hand a *patwari* circle functioned as an intermediate tier between a *kanungo* circle and the village for revenue administration.

The British borrowed a number of administrative practices, including terminology, from the Mughals. There were some notable departures as well: (i) new tiers of division and subdivision were introduced for stronger administrative control; (ii) revenue administration was brought down to more local levels of spatial hierarchy; (iii) police administration was also spatially deepened not only to have a firm grip on law and order but also to make revenue collection more effective (Kant, 1988).

## CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

After the British left India in 1947, the province of Punjab was partitioned between India and Pakistan on religious lines. Of its 138,679 sq. miles (359,179km$^2$), 5 divisions and 29 districts, only 58,938 m$^2$ (152,649 km$^2$), 2 divisions and 13 districts were left with Punjab (East), renamed Punjab (India) on 26 January 1950 (Fig. 1).

The Punjab native states presented a somewhat different picture. Eight of them, namely Patiala, Kapurthala, Jind, Nabha, Faridkot, Malerkotla, Nalagarh, and Kalsia were constituted into a union, named as PEPSU, in 1948. These covered as area of 10,099 m$^2$ (26,156 km$^2$) and were arranged into 8 districts and 25 tahsils. In another move, the former Punjab Hill states were constituted into Himachal Pradesh in the same year. The new unit was a centrally administered territory. It was divided into 4 districts and 23 tahsils. The Hill State of Bilaspur, which became a scene of Gobind Sagar associated with the Bhakra Nangal project, was made a part of Himachal Pradesh at a later stage in 1954 (Fig. 2).

Subsequently, Punjab underwent two major reorganizations. In 1956, PEPSU was merged with Punjab on the recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission. Later on in 1966, under the Punjab Reorganization Act, a Punjabi speaking state was carved out of the erstwhile Punjab. This reduced the state to two-fifths the size it had attained after the first reorganization in 1956. Now it covers an area of only 19,445 m$^2$ (50,362 km$^2$). This was just one-seventh of its size before Independence. Though much reduced, Punjab was now linguistically homogeneous and structurally compact. It was divided into 11 districts, including Ropar created as a byproduct of the reorganization (Fig. 2).

It follows that, in the initial phase following Independence, the main thrust was on recasting and reforming the administrative organization of space inherited from the British. A notable innovation also cannot be missed. This was the formation of the developement block as the basic unit for rural development. It represented a new philosophy in area administration. The message went home that the administration was now trying to shift its focus from the maintenance of law and order and collection of land revenue to matters of development. The process of formation of development blocks in Punjab started in 1952. By 1963, the entire state had been covered by 117 blocks.

### Territorial organization of Punjab

Punjab, at present is organized into 4 divisions. 17 districts, 70 subdivisions/tahsils, and 139 development blocks (Table 3). At the time of its formation in 1966, the state had 2 divisions, 11 districts, 37 subdivisions/tahsils, 13 subtahsils,

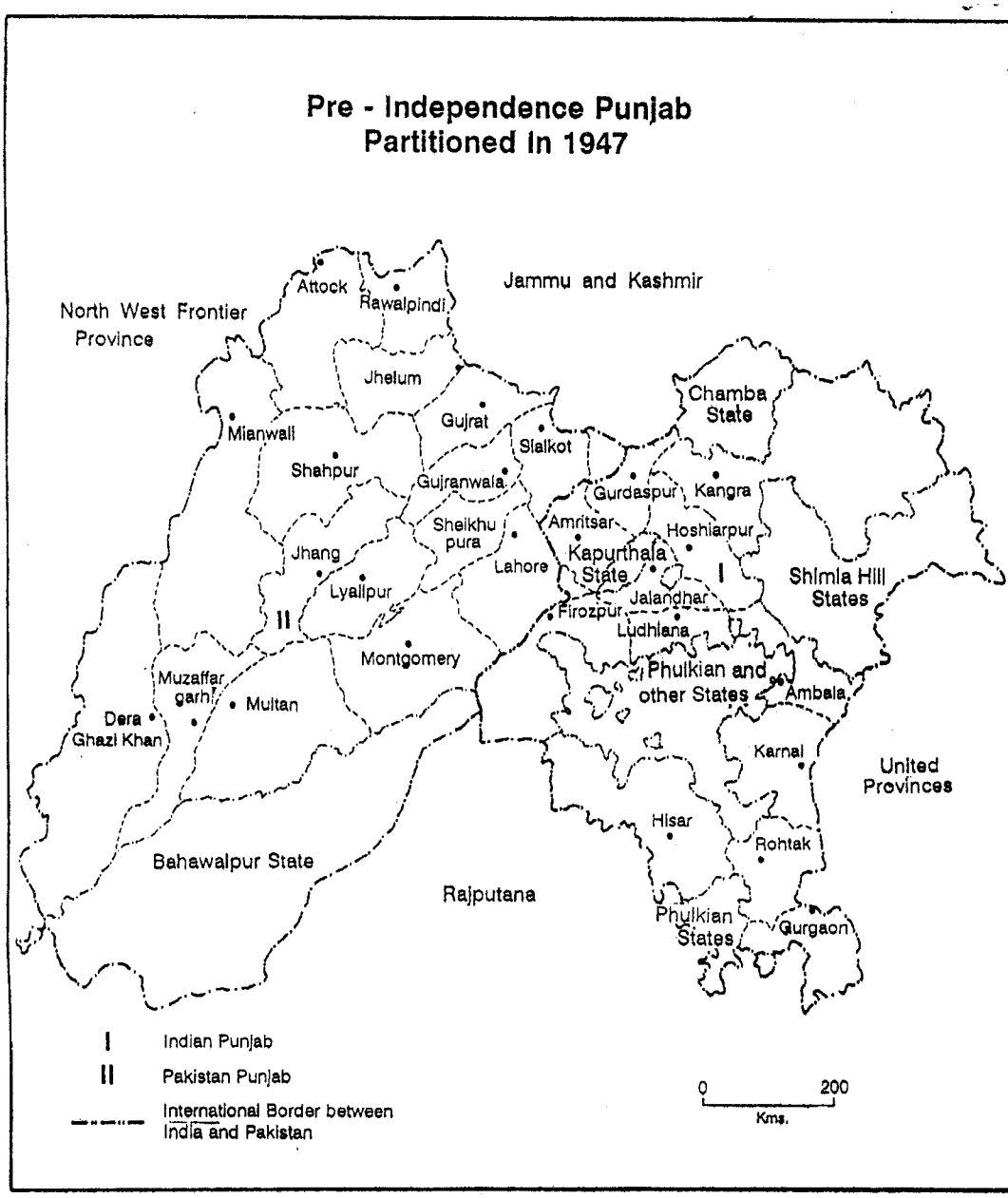


**Fig. 1 :** Pre-Independence Punjab Partitioned in 1947

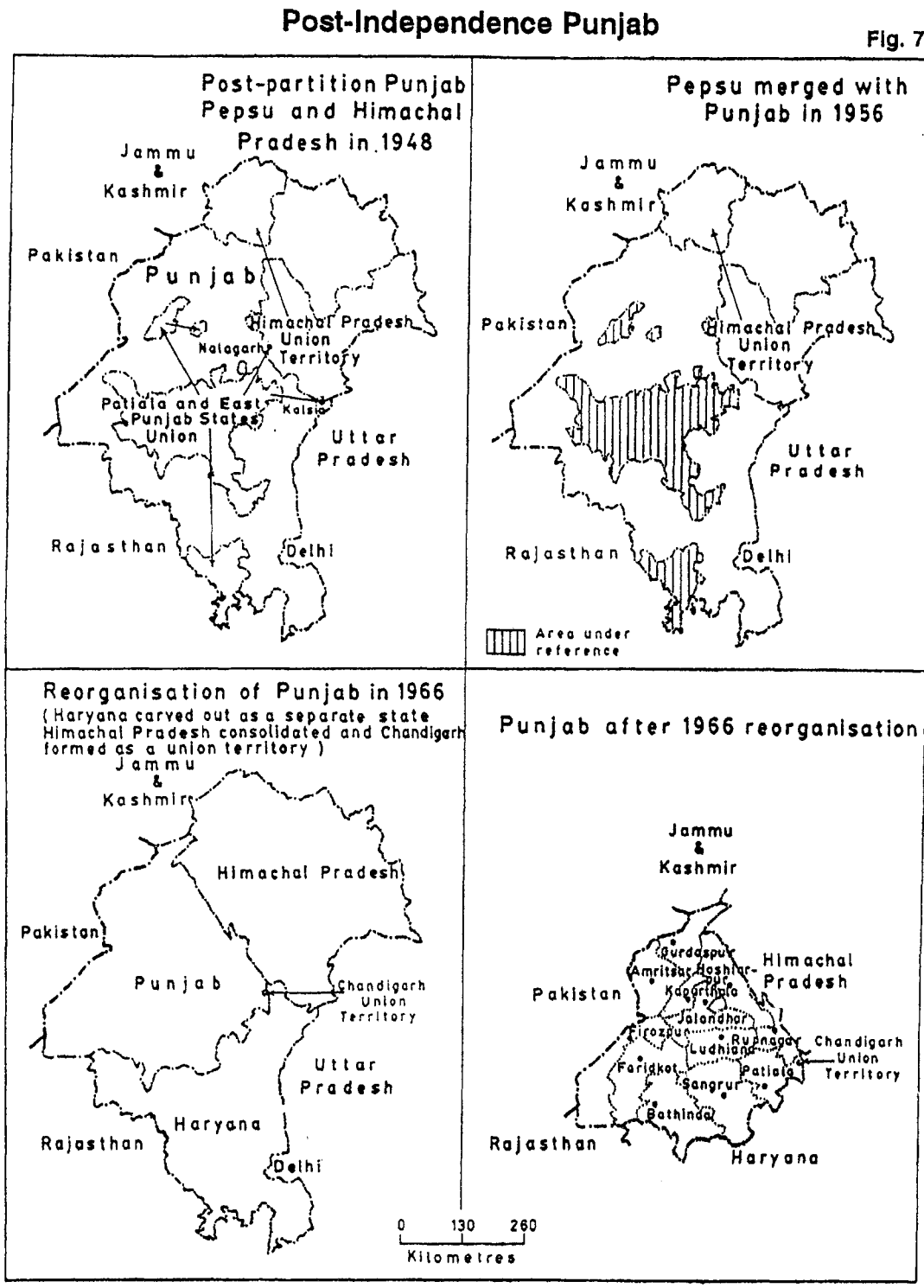


Fig. 2 : Post-Independence Punjab

**Table 3**

**Punjab : General Purpose Administrative Areas, 1966-99**

| Type | Number in the year | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1966 | 1985 | 1998 |
| Divisions | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Districts | 11 | 12 | 17 |
| Subdivisions/tahsils | 37 | 46 | 70 |
| Development blocks | 117 | 118 | 139 |

and 117 development blocks. A tendency towards creation of new administrative units at all levels is unmistakable. The process seems to have gained momentum since the mid-eighties. The same is true for other states in India. All the state governments, with few exceptions, are creating more and more districts for populistic reasoons. In 1998, there were about 544 districts in India against only 359 in 1971 (Table 4).

The number of districts and subdivisions in Punjab has gone by 1.5 times, that of divisions by two times and that of subtahsils by 4 times during the last 32 years. By comparison, the number of divisions as also of districts in the British Punjab remained constant for the period 1912-47.

In the chain of general administration, 'the division' represents the first order organization of the state. Its origin in India goes back to the British days when in 1829, for the first time, an intermediate authority between the district collector and the provincial government were created in the then Bengal province. In essence, the division emerged through an amalgmation process (grouping of already existing districts) rather than as a partitioning mechanism (of a province). The practice was subsequently followed in other provinces. Every province in India, barring Madras, was organized into divisions. The division was initially created as a revenue unit. The divisional commissioner not only heard appeals from subordinate revenue authorities but also acted as a supervisory and coordinating authority over collectors and their subordinate revenue officials (Government of India, 1978). Gradually, additional administrative functions and powers were delegated to him. A division eventually transformed into a general-purpose unit.

The advisability of creating an intervening authority between a province and districts was questioned even during the British period. The debate intensified after Independence. It was argued that the British adopted this system becauses it helped them centralize their authority. It could now be changed to a more democratic pattern (Sharma, 1971). This was seen as leading to a direct link between a district and the state. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat abolished the divisions in 1948, 1950, 1961 and 1964 respectively. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rejasthan, however, reverted back to the old system after some time. Punjab retained the traditional set up all through. It is divided into four divisions though one is not sure about the relevance of this practice for a small state like Punjab.

The British had favoured an administrative system that centralized powers and responsibilities in one hand at the district level. At the head of every district it appointed an officer who, in the eyes of most of its inhabitants, was 'the government' (Simon Commission Report quoted by Shukla 1976). Independent India too continued with the tradition of having the district as the pivot of local apparatus of public administration. The district administration in India is non-elective.

**Table 4**

**India: New Districts formed during, 1971-1998**

| State/Union | Number of districts | | | | Number of new districts territories formed during |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 1998 | 1971-1991 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 21 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 2 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 5 | 9 | 11 | 13 | 8 |
| Assam | 9 | 10 | 23 | 23 | 14 |
| Bihar | 17 | 31 | 42 | 55 | 38 |
| Delhi | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Goa | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Gujarat | 18 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 1 |
| Haryana | 7 | 12 | 16 | 19 | 12 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 10 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 2 |
| Jammu Kashmir | 10 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 4 |
| Karnataka | 19 | 19 | 20 | 2 | 8 |
| Kerala | 10 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 4 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 43 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 2 |
| Maharashtra | 26 | 26 | 30 | 31 | 5 |
| Manipur | 5 | 68 | 8 | 3 | |
| Meghalaya | 2 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 5 |
| Mizoram | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Nagaland | 3 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4 |
| Orissa | 13 | 13 | 13 | 30 | 17 |
| Panjab | 11 | 12 | 12 | 17 | 6 |
| Rajasthan | 26 | 26 | 27 | 31 | 5 |
| Sikkim | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | - |
| Tamil Nadu | 14 | 16 | 21 | 29 | 15 |
| Tripura | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | - |
| Uttar Predesh | 54 | 56 | 63 | 78 | 24 |
| West Bengal | 16 | 16 | 17 | 19 | 3 |
| **Union Territories** | | | | | |
| Andaman & Nicobar | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Chandigarh | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Dadra & Nagar Haveli | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Daman & Diu | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - |
| Lakhadweep | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Pondicherry | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | - |
| All India | 359 | 412 | 466 | 544 | 185 |

*Source:*

1. Economic Intelligence Service (1996): India's Social Sectors, Bombay: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, 5.
2. Manoram Year Book; 1998, Kottayam(Kerala): Malayala Manorama Press.

An officer from the Indian Administratiove Services is placed as its chief. The person is known as Deputy Commissioner in Punjab, District Magistrate in Uttar Pradesh, and Collector in Rajasthan. This reflects the difference in the perceived role of a district head as a custodian of law and order or as dispenser of justice or as collector of revenue.

There are 17 districts in Punjab. This gives an area of about 3000 $km^2$ per district. The comparable figure for India is around 6000 $km^2$. An average district in Punjab is just half the area of its counterpart in India.

Some parts of a district, depending upon their size or revenue or strategic location, were given the status of a subdivision while the remaining part was divided into tahsils. Some tahsils were further divided into subtahsils. The system continued after Independence under which subdivisions enjoyed higher status than tahsils. In 1985, all the tahsils in Punjab were elevated to the status of subdivisions to confer more powers at this level. Now almost all district-level departments have their field offices at the subdivisional headquarters.

Currently, Punjab is divided into 70 subdivisions. This number has grown from 37 in 1966. Of the 18 new additions, 9 came during 1966-85 and the remaining 9 during 1985-96. An average subdivision is now less than 1000 $km^2$ in area. This is smaller than the size initially earmarked for a block (1300 $km^2$).

The block as an administrative tier in district administration was an outcome of the Community Development Programme and the National Externsion Service Scheme initiated on 2 October, 1952 and 1953 respectively. These were intended as peoples' programmes with government participation and not as government programmes with peoples' participation for rural upliftment. Urban areas were kept out of the purview of development blocks. Punjab now has 139 development blocks. Of the 20 new development blocks created during 1966-96, 19 came into existence after 1985; one was added in 1997.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The underlying philosophy as also the methodology of organizing space for administration differed during successive periods of Indian history. In the Vedic period the primeval organization of space for administration had a sociological base related to clan solidarity. The top was represented by *jana* (clan state) and the bottom by a *grama* (village). The post-Vedic period was marked by continuity and change. The state persisted in its earlier form but the monarchy replaced the popular Vedic assembly. The office of the king became hereditary. Also the master quality of ancient Hindu administration, represented by a hierarchical decimal system of grouping villages into clusters of tens, hundreds and thousands took shape during this period. It was impractical to work this system to perfection, yet it left a lasting mark on the spirit and style of organizing space for administration for centuries to come. The spatial structure of administration became feudal-federal during the ancient Hindu period. The Mauryans (BC 322-185) provided a highly systematic administrative organization of spatial administration. During the period, the provincial, district, urban and frontier area administration was organized on systematic lines. A change in nomenclature of the village headman from *gramadhpati* to *gopa* represented the new role of administration as benefactor and not as master. The district administration was made comprehensive. The executive, revenue and judicial powers at this level were delegated to the district officer. This administrative practice continued throughout the successive periods

of Indian history, including the British period. Ancient Indian administrative practices attained to their maturity during the Gupta period (AD 285-550). Administrative units at different hierarchical levels were streamlined in a more systematic manner than ever before. The requisite bureaucracy was provided at every level. All this was accomplished with a religious fervour as ordained by the Hindu scriptures, customs and practices. The shape that the ancient Hindu administration took under the Guptas had a lasting impact.

The Muslim administration (AD 1206-1761) essentially was a military organization of space. The primary objective was to protect the authority of the new ruling order and to collect revenue for that purpose. Both the objectives were achieved through military force. The Muslims being largely confined to urban areas as a ruling elite, there was a well-noticed rural-urban dichotomy in administration during the period. The focus of administration remained all through the period on urban administration. Akbar (1526-1605), the great Mughal emperor, organized his empire into subahs (provinces), sarkars (districts) and parganas (subdivisions) in accordance with the facts of geography, history and polity. Boundaries of most of the provinces of his empire were well defined coinciding with natural features such as rivers and mountains.

The British (1761-1947) gave a new shape to the administrative system in India. They adapted the traditional organization of space to serve their colonial and economic interests. Administration at all spatial scales was intensified. Maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue were the two major priorities of the administration. That explains why the police and revenue administrations were given special attention. Two new tiers were added to the traditional three-tier system of provincial administration. The division was added between a district and the province and the 'subdivision' between taluka/tahsil and a district. A higher degree of centralization of power was achieved in the process. Above all, they replaced the military-revenue organization of space prevailing during the Muslim period by a bureaucratic-revenue organization. The traditional centres of power such as feudal lords were made to suffer a gradual decline. Their greatest contribution lay in the systematization, internsification and diversification of administrative process. Both rural and urban areas were fully covered and boundaries of administrative areas were clearly defined.

The spatial organization of administration in Punjab since Independence represents part persistence of the colonial pattern and part emergence of decolonisation. The basal structure of administrative areas and non-elective nature of the district administration remains practivally the same. The change is manifest in the creation of the development block as a new tier for rural development, and a rapid increase in the number of special purpose and regional authorities to promote multifarious development. On the whole, a shift in underlying philosophy of administration from land revenue collection and strict control during the British days to development promotion and populism during the post-Independence era is unmistakable.

In point of fact, one can discern three phases in the process : (i) the phase of administrative area reform during 1947-66, partly as a byproduct of successive reorganizations and partly by way of formation of development blocks; (ii) the phase of prolilferation of special purpose and regional authorities, during 1966-85, with a view to diversifying the development activities and taking care of problem areas;

and (iii) the phase of populism, since 1985, which was marked by the creation of several new districts, subdivisions, and development blocks in a piecemeal manner.

As a result, the administrative organization of space in Punjab as well as in other states of India has been assuming a more complex form over the years. Not only new layers of administrative arrangement were created but also the existing administrative units were subdivided or reorganized in diverse ways. All this was not free from certain infirmities. One requires a simple look at the administrative map of Punjab as it has taken shape after the formation of five new districts during the nineties. Firozpur district remains unwieldy and Kapurthala fragmented. Boundaries of three districts and seven subdivisions were tempered with to form Fatehgarh Sahib district. Its area is not much bigger than that of an average subdivision in Punjab, 1144 $km^2$ and 916$km^2$ respectively.

In fact, a number of issues need to be resolved before we arrive at right kind of decisions in respect of administrative area reforms. The first pertains to the determination of shape and size of the district. Three main guiding principles for this include: maximization of the access of people to administration; effective supervision by the district administration, and minimization of cost to the system. A rule of thumb suggests that a district should have a compact shape and its farthest settlement should not be more distant than an hour's bus journey from the headquarters. Such a distance could be reasonably placed at about 25 km. Accordingly, a district should cover an area of about 2000 $km^2$. Punjab may have 25 districts and India as a whole more than 1600 districts as per this computation.

The second issue relates to the methodology for delimitation of districts. What kind of an area should a district enclose? Should it be marked by a commonality of local historical heritage or identity of people defined in some manner or similarity of physical geography? Should it meet the requirements of delineating meaningful legislative and parliamentary constituencies? Above all, to what extent should the existing administrative boundaries be honoured?

Finally, a vital issue concerns the number of tiers in which the administrative units of different hierarchical order should be organized. A pertinent question is: Should Punjab continue with the existing system of divisions, districts, subdivisions, and development blocks or dispense with divisions and subdivisions and retain districts and development blocks only? What is the relevance of a division in a small state like Punjab? Do we need subdivisions when the average number of development blocks in a district is just eight. A case can be made for doing away with subdivision as a tier by transferring its law and order functions to the district level and revenue functions to the block level. The number of districts can be increased. Financial implications of their formation would be counterbalanced by the abolition of subdivisions (Krishan and Kant: 1998:11-12).

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