

## Administrative Geography Revisited<sup>1</sup>

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Honourable .....

When I set forth to prepare my presidential address for the present event, the first question that came forth was the choice of the topic to expound. Felt diffident on several counts. My sweep of the Indian geography was not adequate enough to affirm where we stand today and what is the road ahead. My own contributions to research were just humble and restrained me from pronouncement of any homily. My readings in contemporary geography were sparse and were thereby dissuaded from attempting any overview of the evolving scenario of our discipline.

Such an overall discomfort paradoxically pushed me into a comfort zone. I started reminiscing over what I wanted to pursue as my research interest but failed to do. This was Administrative Geography, a theme which I adopted with great stimulus during my stay at the University of Cambridge, introduced a course under this title at our department, and supervised on it some doctoral work but could not come out with anything worthwhile at the personal level. There was another reason also for recalling this theme. *Transactions of the Institute of*

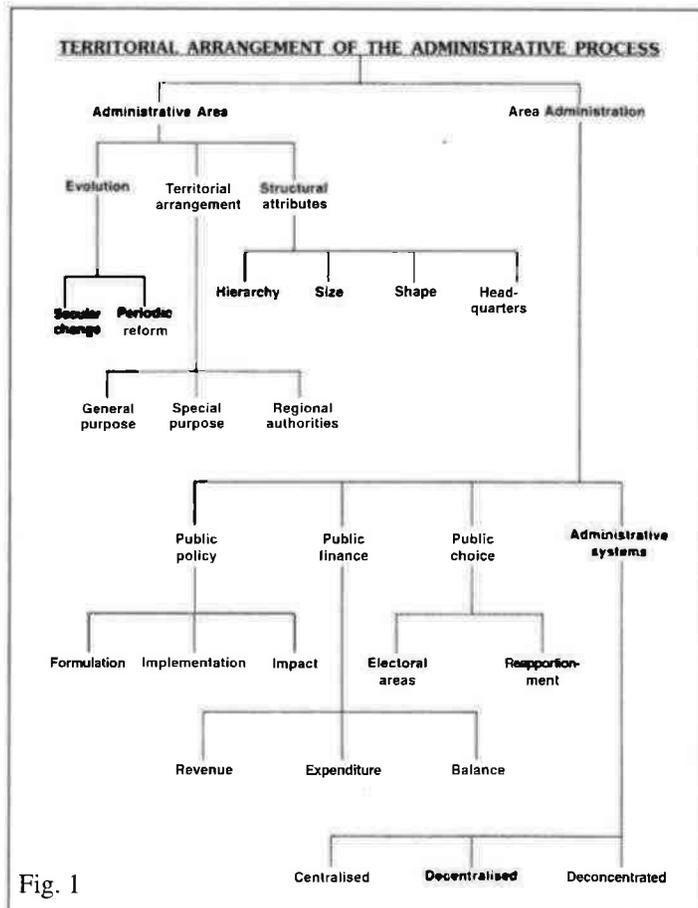
*Indian Geography* had published in 1983 my article under the title Administrative Geography. To celebrate its silver jubilee would have been trivial because my interest in this branch of our discipline was marked by hiccups. But when the IIG offered me a rare opportunity to share something on their own ground at Pune, I was tempted to revisit Administrative Geography. Things could not be more gracious and opportune and for that I am profoundly beholden to the organizers of this Meet.

To begin with, I started looking for articles published on the theme in *Progress in Human Geography* at the international level and in *Annals of the National Association of Geographers, India* and *Transactions of the Institute of Indian Geography* at the national level. The number of related papers published during the preceding decade did not cross the single digit in each of the three journals. A growing interest in the study of public policy and local governance was, of course, visible.

Presuming that the parent field of Political Geography may have started evincing a greater interest in issues relating to Administrative Geography, I scanned

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the latest books by authors like Agnew and others (2007), Blacksell (2005) and Flint and Taylor (2004). Sustaining the style consistent with that of earlier books, these generally did not go beyond a chapter on the study of local governments. A further exploration led me to *Dictionary of Human Geography* by Johnston and others (1994). It carried an entry under the title Geography of Public Administration in place of Administrative Geography, and offered separate brief notes on public policy, public finance and public services.

It was in 1988 that the first IGU Commission on Geography and Public Administration was constituted. This was an upgradation from its previous status of a Study Group in 1984. At the 2004 IGU, it got the nomenclature of Geography and Public Policy. Structures and processes of government at the local and regional levels, spatial and environmental aspects of public policy, local government finance and reorganization, and privatization of government services were defined as its main concerns (International Geographical

Union, 2004). Public policy emerged as the centrepiece of interest in Administrative Geography. By netting in the study of privatisation, the scope of this subfield got extended from its conventional coverage of 'administrative area and area administration' (Fig. 1). A step further was taken when 'building together our territories' was adopted as the focal theme of the 31<sup>st</sup> IGU Congress in 2008 at Tunis (IGU, 2008). This was a call for promoting, among other things, community based organisations for good governance. The scope of Administrative Geography got further widened.

To observe things in a wider perspective, a foray into recent developments in the discipline of Public Administration was deemed essential. Comparative public administration emerged as a sub-field of Public Administration following the World War II (Dwivedi and Henderson, 1990, p.9). The objective was to discern the differences in the administrative style and functioning of different countries.

This was followed by a new subfield of development administration in early 1960's in response to the need of the newly independent countries freed from the colonial yoke. The concern here was to understand the implications of the political transition for the development process in these countries and to discern challenges before administration for addressing them effectively. Subsequently since 1970's the wave of globalisation has been surging, and by now it has engulfed practically all countries of the world. The discourse shifted

in favour of reforming government to ensure good governance. This was underlined as basic to integration of any country with the global market (World Bank, 2009, p. 274).

Under the impress of market economy, the multinationals, corporate sector and private sector in general had strengthened their base, necessitating redefinition of administrative space. Management of privatisation, as specific to different regions and localities, emerged as a new issue. More recently a focus on governmentality, that is tools and techniques for upgradation of administration, especially for development and management of disasters, is universal. Under its purview, training is considered vital to the scheme of things.

Inspired by the book *The Age of Discontinuity* by Drucker (1968), Osborne and Gaebler (1991) were motivated to do the book *Reinventing Government*. Critical breaks associated with transformation of economic landscape and dynamics of social and cultural reality were seen as demanding a new kind of governance. A fresh approach in favour of entrepreneurial management of existing public institutions was considered imperative. These were expected to be catalytic, community owned, mission driven, result oriented and innovative in place of being practitioner of technicalities.

Parallel developments took place in India and if Administrative Geography is to be revisited here, it has to take cognizance of at least four major changes that have place of recent.

**Table 1: India, Decentralisation of Governance, Status of Functions Transferred to *Panchayats* and District Planning Councils under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment**

State	Number of district transferred out of 29	Status of Planning functions Committee
Andhra Pradesh	13	Not Constituted
Arunachal Pradesh	0	Not Constituted
Assam	0	Not Constituted
Bihar	0	Not Constituted
Chhattisgarh	23	Constituted
Goa	0	Not Constituted
Gujarat	0	Not Constituted
Haryana	16	Constituted only in 4 districts
Himachal Pradesh	15	Constituted
Jammu & Kashmir	N.A.	(Autonomous Council functions in Ladakh)
Jharkhand	0	Not Constituted
Karnataka	29	Constituted
Kerala	29	Constituted
Madhya Pradesh	23	Constituted
Maharashtra	18	Not Constituted
Manipur	22	Constituted
Meghalaya	N.A.	(Autonomous Council functions)
Mizoram	N.A.	(Autonomous Council functions)
Nagaland	N.A.	(Autonomous Council functions)
Orissa	25	Constituted
Punjab	7	Not Constituted
Rajasthan	29	Constituted
Sikkim	29	Constituted
Tamil Nadu	29	Constituted
Tripura	12	Constituted
Uttar Pradesh	13	Constituted
Uttarakhand	13	Constituted
West Bengal	29	Constituted

Source: Government of India, *The State of the Panchayats: Vol. II*, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 1002-3

These relate to adoption of new economic policy in favour of market in early 1990's, enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992, redelimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies in 2008, and gradual shift towards e-governance. The manner in which

these changes impacted on the nature of administrative areas and quality of area administration calls for an in-depth analysis. A simultaneous account is to be taken of the spatial organizations as carved out by the non-government organizations and institutions in carrying out their activities.

Indian States, though similar on many parameters of public administration, do differ in respect of quality of their performance. This difference is most manifest in the arena of development administration. Mohan (2005) observes that most of the development programmes in India did not deliver to the extent desired simply because their implementers were not familiar with the techniques of development administration. The specificity of different regions was just ignored and programmes and schemes designed at the national level were treated as applicable uniformly to all areas. Efforts at micro-level planning, likewise, did not succeed because sectoral approach, as common to national and state level planning, was adopted equally for local areas, for which spatial approach is indispensable. A serious distortion is observed also in fixing the boundaries of development blocks in several Indian States. These were determined in most cases by following the rule of thumb rather than by adopting a conceptual approach and a systematic procedure. A necessary intervention by Administrative Geography was missed here too.

Decentralisation is an integral ingredient of good governance. It essentially involves substitution of the macro-space by micro-space, of the government by the community, of bureaucracy by democracy. It calls for a precise delineation of functions and powers at the local, regional and national levels. Its preconditions include a political ethos which has a faith in devolution of power, a populace which is aware of their rights,

and an infrastructure which is adequate, dispersed and accessible.

In India, such an imperative found an expression through its Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment and Seventy-Fourth Amendment) Acts, 1992. These were constitutional mandates to the States for devolving functions, functionaries and funds to the *panchayati raj* institutions and urban local bodies. A third tier of governance below the Union and States was introduced to bring a revolutionary change at the grassroots level.

An exercise in Administrative Geography revealed that only six states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Sikkim and West Bengal have transferred all the 29 subjects to be panchayats, as mandated (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2006). Sikkim is the only State which has transferred funds and functionaries, alongwith functions. The performance of other States varies strikingly across the board (Table 1). Southern States are more progressive than others on this count. Those which did not go ahead with all the provisions of the Act include both the less developed States like Bihar and more developed ones like Punjab. A redeeming feature, of course, is that a majority of States has constituted District Planning Committees, as required. An exploration into these regional variations in decentralised governance is a call for any student of Administrative Geography to respond.

Governance in India is a highly expensive affair. Over one-third of the total expenditure

**Table 2: India, Expenditure on Wages, Salaries and Administrative Services by States, 2006-07**

State*	Percentage to total revenue	Rank
Nagaland	67.9	1
Assam	51.8	2
Maharashtra	51.5	3
Mizoram	51.3	4
Jammu & Kashmir	45.1	5
Tripura	45	6
Bihar	44.7	7
Uttarakhand	43.7	8
Himachal Pradesh	43.4	9
Meghalaya	43.1	10
Arunachal Pradesh	41	11
Manipur	39.9	12
West Bengal	38.6	13
Kerala	37.8	14
Jharkhand	37.7	15
Punjab	37.4	16
Madhya Pradesh	36.3	17
Chhattisgarh	35.4	18
Andhra Pradesh	35.3	19
Rajasthan	35.2	20
Orissa	35.2	21
Tamil Nadu	34.5	22
Goa	33.5	23
Haryana	31.2	24
Sikkim	28.8	25
Karnataka	25.4	26
Uttar Pradesh	25.4	27
Gujarat	14.5	28
<b>All States</b>	<b>35.2</b>	

Source: Reserve Bank of India, *State Finances: A Study of Budgets*, Mumbai, 2008

Note:\* States are listed in descending order of the specific expenditure as per cent of total revenue.

of State governments goes towards salaries, wages and administrative services (Table 2). A wide range from two-thirds in Nagaland

to just one-third in Gujarat obtains here. More than half of expenditure incurred by Maharashtra State accrues on running the administration.

Think of less developed States like Assam and Bihar which have to shell out one-half of their financial resources to employees and pensioners. The comparable proportion in the case of Goa, Tamil Nadu and Haryana is one-third but then for Uttar Pradesh it is one-fourth. Spatial contours are difficult to generalise. Administrative Geography may offer some clues to an understanding of all this.

This brings us to the question of what is left with States for development. The response may be couched in terms of per capita expenditure on development. For the year 2006-07, this worked out as Rs. 3527 for all the States put together. The comparable figures are two to more than four times for the Special Categories States in the North-East as also for Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir in the Northwest. Bihar is at the bottom with a figure just one-half of the national average. Other less developed States like Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan display a similar, if not a worse, situation.

Relatively developed States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Haryana are much better placed and for Goa the per capita development expenditure exceeds four times the national average. Such a spatial pattern of development expenditure is doomed to perpetuate regional disparity. Administrative

**Table 3: India, Per Capita Development Expenditure by States, 2006-07**

State*	Per capita development expenditure (Rs.)	Rank
Mizoram	17144	1
Goa	15943	2
Arunachal Pradesh	15858	3
Sikkim	15750	4
Manipur	10126	5
Nagaland	8786	6
Himachal Pradesh	8331	7
Jammu & Kashmir	8141	8
Meghalaya	6048	9
Uttarakhand	5930	10
Haryana	5873	11
Tripura	5656	12
Karnataka	5320	13
Gujarat	4562	14
Maharashtra	4501	15
Andhra Pradesh	4498	16
Tamil Nadu	4427	17
Punjab	4137	18
Jharkhand	4028	19
Chhattisgarh	3797	20
Rajasthan	3135	21
Kerala	3122	22
Assam	3015	23
Madhya Pradesh	2788	24
Orissa	2451	25
Uttar Pradesh	2339	26
West Bengal	2246	27
Bihar	1906	28
<b>All States</b>	<b>3527</b>	

Source : Reserve Bank of India, *State Finances: A Study of Budgets*, Mumbai, 2008

Note: \* States are listed in descending order of the per capita expenditure on development.

Geography may reflect over as to what can be done to correct such a distortion.

The plan outlays, as devolved from the Planning Commission of India, account for nearly one-half of development expenditure of all the States put together. Again the per capita outlay is two to more than five times of the national average in the case of Special Category States (Table 4).

By contrast, the comparable figures for the less developed States of Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are on the lower side of the national average. This is equally true of the relatively developed but densely populated States of Kerala and West Bengal.

By comparison, Goa is four times the national average and Punjab, Haryana and Karnataka are on higher side on this count. What accounts for such regional variations? Why are the densely populated States at the lower end of receiving the per capita plan outlays when population size is one major criterion for devolution of funds? Administrative Geography may look into on this malady.

What is the share of social sector, primarily education and health, in development expenditure as incurred by Indian States. The national average is one-third of the total, and of this education alone partakes two-fifths (Tables 5 and 6). This proportion is higher for the less developed States like Assam, Bihar and Rajasthan for the simple reason that education and health are to be catered for universally as a social welfare measure and this proportion will go high if the available development funds are limited. By comparison, the relatively

**Table 4: India, Per Capita Plan Outlay by States, 2006-07**

State*	Per capita outlay (in Rs.)	Rank
Sikkim	9000	1
Arunachal Pradesh	8109	2
Mizoram	7800	3
Goa	7133	4
Manipur	4548	5
Uttarakhand	3824	6
Nagaland	3465	7
Jammu & Kashmir	3372	8
Himachal Pradesh	3307	9
Meghalaya	3304	10
Karnataka	3252	11
Tripura	2788	12
Gujarat	2615	13
Chhattisgarh	2270	14
Andhra Pradesh	2256	15
Punjab	2204	16
Tamil Nadu	1947	17
Haryana	1817	18
Maharashtra	1493	19
Rajasthan	1440	20
Madhya Pradesh	1436	21
Kerala	1369	22
Jharkhand	1325	23
Uttar Pradesh	1110	24
Assam	1033	25
Bihar	943	26
Orissa	933	27
West Bengal	814	28
<b>All-States</b>	<b>1607</b>	

Source : Reserve Bank of India, *State Finances: A Study of Budgets*, Mumbai, 2008

Note : \* States are listed in descending order of the per capita plan outlays.

developed States like Punjab, Haryana and Kerala spend proportionately less on social welfare and are in a position to invest more in economic sector, particularly energy,

industry and agriculture. Punjab spares only 18 per cent of its development expenditure for social sector. One-half of this goes for education.

In the market driven context of today, the Indian States are competing with each other for attracting investment from both overseas and within the country. They, however, do not find a level ground because their capacity to compete differs widely. Using the criteria of economic strength, business efficiency, governance quality, human resource base and infrastructure and putting in service as many as 95 indicators, National Productivity Council (2004) worked out the relative competitiveness index for all the Indian States (Table 7).

Goa ranked on the top, followed by Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat, South Indian States of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu came next. In spite of its relatively high level of development, Haryana found an average position due primarily to its low score on human resource base, neglect of science and technology, and lack of high quality services. Practically all the North-Eastern and Eastern States are low on competitiveness indices. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan also fall in this category. Among the coastal States, Orissa and West Bengal rank low while all others are up in rank. In the case of hill States of North-West India, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand outrank Jammu & Kashmir. Size of the state is not a critical factor as both large and small States display wide variations on their competitiveness within their group.

**Table 5: India, Expenditure on Social Sector by States, 2006-07**

State*	Percentage to total expenditure	Rank
Chhattisgarh	47.6	1
Jharkhand	47.0	2
Bihar	41.0	3
Rajasthan	39.5	4
Assam	38.7	5
Uttarakhand	37.9	6
Meghalaya	37.6	7
Maharashtra	37.3	8
Tripura	36.5	9
Madhya Pradesh	35.3	10
Mizoram	34.8	11
Gujarat	33.4	12
Tamil Nadu	33.1	13
Himachal Pradesh	33.0	14
Andhra Pradesh	32.9	15
Karnataka	32.7	16
Uttar Pradesh	32.1	17
West Bengal	31.9	18
Goa	31.8	19
Orissa	31.7	20
Jammu & Kashmir	31.3	21
Kerala	31.0	22
Arunachal Pradesh	30.2	23
Nagaland	29.6	24
Manipur	28.7	25
Haryana	28.5	26
Sikkim	24.3	27
Punjab	17.9	28
<b>All States</b>	<b>33.9</b>	

Source: Reserve Bank of India, State Finances: A Study of Budgets, Mumbai, 2008

Note:\* States are listed in descending order of the percentage of expenditure on social sector.

This capacity is essentially a function of governance quality.

Debroy and others (2004, p. 591) worked out an economic freedom index for

**Table 6: India, Expenditure on Education by States, 2006-07**

State*	Percentage to total disbursements	Rank
Assam	20.4	1
Bihar	19.7	2
Uttarakhand	18.1	3
Kerala	17.1	4
Maharashtra	16.4	5
Tripura	15.9	6
Rajasthan	15.6	7
Jharkhand	15.2	8
West Bengal	15.2	9
Uttar Pradesh	14.7	10
Himachal Pradesh	14.1	11
Meghalaya	14.1	12
Mizoram	13.8	13
Goa	13.7	14
Karnataka	13.1	15
Chhattisgarh	12.9	16
Orissa	12.8	17
Gujarat	12.7	18
Madhya Pradesh	12.4	19
Nagaland	12.3	20
Tamil Nadu	12.2	21
Haryana	11.9	22
Manipur	11.9	23
Andhra Pradesh	10.8	24
Arunachal Pradesh	10.7	25
Sikkim	10.5	26
Jammu & Kashmir	10.0	27
Punjab	8.9	28
<b>All States</b>	<b>14.0</b>	

Source: Reserve Bank of India, State Finances: A Study of Budgets, Mumbai, 2008

Note:\* States are listed in descending order of the percentage of expenditure on education.

different States of India. Defining economic freedom as 'the unfettered ability to make economic choices' and using as many as 13 criteria, they found it difficult to identify any

**Table 7: India, Ranking of States on Competitiveness, 2004**

State*	Standard competitiveness score	Rank
Goa	0.776	1
Maharashtra	0.543	2
Punjab	0.524	3
Gujarat	0.511	4
Karnataka	0.478	5
Kerala	0.452	6
Tamil Nadu	0.440	7
Himachal Pradesh	0.291	8
Andhra Pradesh	0.233	9
Mizoram	0.172	10
Uttarakhand	0.144	11
Jharkhand	0.110	12
Haryana	0.090	13
Arunachal Pradesh	0.079	14
Sikkim	0.064	15
Chhattisgarh	- 0.011	16
West Bengal	- 0.023	17
Madhya Pradesh	- 0.066	18
Orissa	- 0.091	19
Rajasthan	- 0.091	20
Bihar	- 0.100	21
Uttar Pradesh	- 0.106	22
Jammu & Kashmir	- 0.109	23
Tripura	- 0.166	24
Manipur	- 0.211	25
Meghalaya	- 0.220	26
Assam	- 0.238	27
Nagaland	- 0.332	28

Source: National Productivity Council. *State Competitiveness Report 2004*. New Delhi, p.23.

Note: \* States are listed in descending order of competitiveness score.

geographic pattern in this regard. The only conclusion they arrived at was stated thus: States that are economically the most free tend to be those that have high per capita incomes. They added that 'which way the causality lies' is not clear.

It is equally intriguing to find as to how administration in India functions generally without the help of maps. Even plan documents dispense with maps. Vision statements do not give space to place. Administrative atlases do not go beyond mapping of the territorial boundaries of administrative units like States, districts and blocks. A student of Administrative Geography may question all this, reflect over what is required, and construct maps that are of direct value to governance at large, and for development administration in particular. Administrative efficiency depends upon an appreciation of ground realities for which the map is a potent tool. Equity demands a distortion free distribution of public goods and services. Maps lay bare any imbalance of the kind. Administrative effectiveness is represented by the measure of success in achieving an intended objective. Maps unfold areas of accomplishment as also of missed opportunities by location. Cartography, nay Geographic Information Systems, has to open a new administration-centric channel.

Any exercise in Administrative Geography calls for a direct interaction with government. It is a pity that the interface between government and research institutions, particularly universities, is weak in India. Factors underlying such a situation are rather multifaceted, for which both the researchers and government should share responsibility. Generally researchers pick up themes at random, responding to some available data or information, and rarely

start with a precisely defined question of social value. Most often the policy implications of their findings are not spelt out. The government is not far off the point in accusing social scientists of not attending directly to relevant issues of the society, or not providing their research based advice at the time it is needed, or offering solutions which are impractical or even being ignorant of what government had already done. On the other hand, academicians are also justified in accusing the government of denying access to information on the pretext of confidentiality, being hypersensitive to any criticism, and seeking simply firefighting solutions. The government is seen as highly arrogant in claiming all the possible practical wisdom. At the same time, it is also true that much of the social science research is fragmentary, imitative and vague. The outcome is obvious. The government policies tend to be not only inconsistent but also contradictory and even counterproductive. It is incumbent upon students of Administrative Geography, who are supposed to be in constant interface with the government, to contribute their best through quality research.

On the research frontier, one may trace the formation process of new States, such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, and that of new districts and development blocks within States. The impact of such new formations is to be assessed. Equally crucial is to identify distortions in division of a city into a variety of territorial arrangements, such as electoral wards, electricity zones, planning areas, police stations, and so

on. Most pertinent is to carve out optimal organization of space for administration in a given State (Kant, 1988, p. 248).

A plethora of additional research questions can also be listed. What is the share of women in government service at the State, district and block levels? How do various State governments differ in adoption of financial, legal and administrative reforms in response to the new economic policy? What is their comparative utilization status of grants received under different programmes and schemes of the Centre? How do the sources of revenue and avenues of expenditure differ among States? What is the relationship between the size of States or districts and their quality of governance? To what extent the e-governance has made administration free of locations and distances? The list is just illustrative, not exhaustive.

Today, the scope of Administrative Geography spans also to the non-government sector, including non-government organizations, voluntary bodies and private sector. Drucker (2004) in the preface to his book, *The Daily Drucker* informs that he has left blank spaces at the bottom of every page. This space is meant for the readers to contribute their decisions, actions and their outcome. For that reason, it is an action book. The action by non-government sector involves organization of space over which they operate – the nodes, destinations and routes for every activity to flow. Nowhere the book suggests the way this sector should organize its spatial framework of

activities. Here is a field of enquiry to lay bare the considerations which underline the location of headquarters, branch offices and territorial arrangements by non-government sector. Since this sector is guided primarily by considerations of competition to survive as the fittest, efficiency in respect of utilization of resources, and efficacy vis-à-vis the people and government, it may be worthwhile to explore as to how the parameters of their spatial organization for administration differ from those of government.

Extreme events in nature and human response' is the focal theme of this meet. De, Dube and Prakasa Rao (2005) provide a brief review of the extreme weather events and associated natural disasters that occurred in India during 1901-2004. They observe that natural hazards cause a global loss of US\$50-100 billion and a loss of a quarter million lives every year. Kapur (2008) highlights the dubious distinction which India holds in being among the top ranking countries in the world on both counts. Through her research on 4004 research entries on disasters in India, ascribed to natural phenomena, she calls for a fresh paradigm in any future research on the theme. The present tendency to blame nature for causing disasters is to be replaced by the one which is sensitive to vulnerability of people and places at large, rooted in insensitivity of those who are at the helm of affairs.

Equally worrisome is the emerging scenario of disasters linked to terrorism and frequent episodes of mob violence. The

former has its roots in a covert global domain while the latter is an open local affair. These are critical issues to be managed by administration and researched upon by social scientists. A special task for Administrative Geography gets defined. Regional and locational patterns of disasters from the macro to micro-level are to be identified, analysed and theorized. The spatial parameters of managing such situations are also to be spelt out.

This revisiting of Administrative Geography therefore brings me to a new realization. The domain of Administrative Geography looms larger than the way it is perceived. It is situated in every branch and subdiscipline of Geography. Be it development or disaster, population or services, transport or tourism, finances or corruption, decentralisation or privatisation, none can be understood or managed without an insight into Administrative Geography. Hence more than being revisited, Administrative Geography is to be resituated.

Coming to Pune, remeeting you all, and revisiting nay resituating Administrative Geography, has been a rewarding experience. I thank one and all for making this possible.

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