

Polity and Administration under the Mauryas

From the accession of Bimbisara to the throne of Magadha to the conquest of Kalinga, we see a process of consistent efforts on the part of monarch to bring new and new areas under his control. Ashoka had a vast empire which included virtually the whole subcontinent leaving only areas of deep south and some parts of north east. What was the rationale behind such incessant efforts on the part of the rulers of Magadha Empire to annex more and more territories? The rationale was perhaps to bring more and more resources under their control. These resources could be in the form of natural resources, mines, arable land, trade routes etc. An efficient control over these resources could increase the revenue of the state which was so very important, according to the Arthashastra, for the survival of a state. To have an efficient and rigid control over these resources which were situated in various parts of the empire, an efficient and well-organized administrative structure was required. Mauryans were conscious of this fact, and this is highlighted in the organization of their administration which is considered to be one of the most important features of this dynasty.

We will first take a look at the kind of government and administration that has been described in the Arthashastra and the Indica of Megasthenes. This we can vaguely take as the administration under Chandragupta Maurya. According to the Arthashastra the supreme government consisted of two parts :

1. The king (raja)
2. The Councillors (mahamatras) and the Assessors (amatyas or sachivas)

Now let us consider these two in some detail :

The King

King was the head of the state. Though mortal as all human beings but still revered as *Devanampiya* (Beloved of the gods). The king as such was all powerful and rich but still paid full respect to porana pakiti (ancient rule) and based his government and administration primarily on these rules. Recent studies though have mentioned that porana pakiti has been mentioned in Ashokan edicts and hence is not datable to Chandragupta Maurya. A good government was considered very important for the proper development of the society and enhancement of the various capacities of people.

1. Powers of the king were extensive. His powers extended to all areas of administration—*Military, Judicial, Legislative and Executive*. According to the *Arthashastra*, war was one of the important occasions when the king came out of the palace to take the supreme command of the army. He, along with the *senapati*, envisaged and devised the military strategies against the enemy. As far as judicial powers are concerned, he was the highest court of justice. He was supposed to be very careful while dispensing a verdict. The *Arthashastra* says that the king should always be available, howsoever occupied he may be, to listen to the petitioners and to administer justice. It further says that he must hear to the urgent calls at once. The legislative function of the king derives vital importance from the reference of the *Arthashastra* to him as dharmapravartaka. Also important to mention here is that the *Arthashastra* identifies rajyashasana as one of the sources of

the law. Rajyashasana means royal prescripts. The Ashokan edicts are an illuminating example of rajyashasanas. The king also had a number of executive functions. These included posting of watchman, attending to the accounts and expenditure, appointments of ministers, priests, and superintendents etc., correspondence with the mantriparishad, collection of secret information from the spies and reception of envoys etc. Apart from these he was an instrumental part of public welfare policy making. All the administrative works were carried out in the name of the king. The Arthashastra also gives the king, a position of prime importance among the seven components of the state as described in the saptanga theory. The Councillors and Assessors Kautilya in his Arthashastra mentioned explicitly, "Rajatva (Sovereignty) is possible only with assistance, single wheel cannot move." The sachivas and amatyas correspond to the 'seventh caste' of Megasthenes. According to the Arthashastra the important class amongst the amatyas and sachivas were mantrins or high ministers. The Mantrin of the Arthashastra corresponds to the mahamatras of Ashokan VI Rock Edict. The salary of a mantrin as mentioned in the Arthashastra is 48000 panas per annum. Various duties of mantrins were as follows:

1. They assisted the king in the examination of the characters of amatyas.
2. They gave advice to the king on administrative affairs.
3. In case of emergency, they were also summoned along with the mantriparishad.
4. They also accompanied the king to the battlefield and gave encouragement to the troops.

Kautilya was perhaps one of the mantrins.

2. The mantriparishad -The mantriparishad was an assembly of the councillors or council of ministers (amatyas). They are referred to in the III and VI Rock Edicts of Ashoka. The members of mantriparishad were different from mantrins. In fact the former were probably inferior in position to the latter. The salary of the members of the mantriparishad as mentioned in the Arthashastra in 12,000 panas per annum. They were generally not consulted on administrative matters but were summoned in case of atyayika karya i.e., emergency. The king in such cases was supposed to act on majority decision. The mantriparishad was also present at the time of reception of envoys. The Arthashastra mentions that the mantriparishad should consist of twelve amatyas. They were to be recruited from all kinds of amatyas. Kautilya preferred the king to have akshudraparishad (a large council) as against khshudraparishad (a small council) which were preferred by Manavas, Brihaspatyais and Aushanas. Administrative and Judicial Amatyas Apart from the class of the mantrins and mantriparishad, there was another class of officials called amatyas who filled the administrative and judicial posts. The Arthashastra mentions a number of tests which were prescribed to ensure right people at right places:

- Dharmopadhashuddha amatyas were those who passed 'religious' tests and were employed in civil and criminal courts.
- Arthapodhashuddha amatyas passed 'money' tests and were employed as samahartri (chancellor of exchequer and minister of interior) and sannidhatri (high treasurer and keeper of stores)

- Kamopadhashuddha amatyas passed ‘love’ tests and were employed in pleasure grounds.
- Bhayopadhashuddha amatyas were those who passed ‘fear’ tests and were appointed to do work requiring immediate action and attention (asanna karya).

Those who could not pass the tests were employed in mines, forests and manufactories. Apart from these amatyas, those persons endowed with the qualities of amatyas were appointed as nishrishtartah (ambassadors), lekhakas (minister of correspondence) and adhyakshas (superintendents).

3. Adhyakshas- Adhyakshas were more or less the most important class of officials under the Mauryas. They were supervisors or superintendents and were primarily responsible for the smooth functioning of their department. Let us give a list of important adhyakshas and their area of functions :

- Nagaradhyaksha: In charge of cities
- Baladhyaksha: In charge of military affairs
- Navadhyaksha: Chief naval superintendent
- Goadhyaksha: In charge of the cowherds.
- Ganikadhyaksha: Controllers of entertainers
- Koshadhyaksha: Superintendent of the treasury
- Lohadhyaksha: Superintendent of metals
- Dhyutadhyaksha: Controller of Gambling
- Akaradhyaksha: Controller of mining and metallurgy
- Ayudhagaradhyaksha: Controller of ordinance
- Pautavadhyaksha: Controller of weights and measures
- Sitadhyaksha: Supervisor of the crown land
- Sulkadhyaksha: Controller of customs and octroi
- Madradhyaksha: Passport officer
- Panyadhyaksha: Control of state territories.

4. Justice- Kautilya has referred to two types of courts. Civil and criminal courts were called dharmasthyas and kantakashodhana respectively. Kautilya also mentions four sources of law. These are dharma, vyavahara, charita and rajashasana. King was the head of the judiciary. He headed the royal court. Apart from the royal court, there were a number of tribunals of justice in various cities (nagaras) and country parts (janapadas). Head of judiciary in the cities were vyavaharika mahamatras and in the janapadas, rajukas. Greek writers have referred to judges hearing cases of foreigners. Small cases in the villages were administered by village headman and elders. There were two important changes that we see in Ashoka’s edicts regarding the judicial system. First was that he advised his mahamatras to check maladministration of justice in the outlying provinces, and second was that he gave considerable discretionary powers to rajukas to carry out justice.

5. Revenue and Expenditure Administration- We have already highlighted the importance that financial aspects had in the Maurya empire. The major source of revenue under the Mauryas was the set of taxes which were imposed with utmost strictness.

In cities taxes were imposed on the sale of liquors, sales tax (shulka), fines, income tax etc. 21 such taxes are mentioned in the Arthashastra which were imposed by the city administration. Rural arable land was divided into two parts—sita (crown lands) and the land owned by the cultivators. In crown lands agriculture was carried out by farmers, who were paid salary by the state, under the supervision of sitadhyaksha. However on other lands a tax bhaga was imposed on the peasants, which was 1/6th of the produce. Apart from this, when the army passed through a particular area, it imposed another tax called senabhaktam on the inhabitants of the area. Apart from this, taxes were also imposed on pastures, orchards and plantations and forest. Mines were under the rigid state control. The mineral wealth produced from those mines was a source of revenue for the state. Taxes were also imposed on the imported and exported goods (comparable with today's custom duty) and finally state charged merchants and traders some charges for the use of trade routes and the security that the state officials provided to them. Under such extensive tax system it was difficult to find a sphere of life which was not taxed.

The outflow of revenue went mainly to salaries of officials, maintenance of army, public works, king's expenses, religious donations etc. Public works was an important area of revenue outflow and it included, inter-alia, irrigation, infrastructure, hospitals and provision of medicines, old age homes and their care, orphanages, repair of roads and buildings wherever necessary, construction of inns and sarais etc.

The Greek term for collector of taxes was Agronomoi. He was supposed to measure the land and also superintended the irrigation network. The Arthashastra mentions two important amatyas associated with the department of revenue administration. They are samahartri and sannidhatri. The former was responsible for the collection of all kinds of revenue from the whole empire. He was assisted in this job by akshapataladhyaksha or accountant general. The latter was responsible for storing the revenue in the treasury, keeping track of the monetary position and arranging for the security of the treasury. The buildings in which treasury was kept were known as koshagriha or koshtagara.

6. Provincial Government Territorial and administrative decentralization of the Maurya empire is as follows. The whole empire was divided into provinces and each of them was in turn divided into a number of districts (vishayas or aharas). A number of villages were included in one district. The exact number of provinces under Chandragupta is not known but Ashoka had at least five provinces. These were :

Provinces	Capital
Uttarpatha	Taxila
Avantiratha	Ujjaini
Dakshinapatha	Suvarnagiri
Kalinga	Toshali
Prachya or Prachina	Pataliputra

Each province was under the control of a viceroy. Sometimes princes of royal blood was made a viceroy in which case he was called kumaramatya otherwise the viceroy was designated as mahamatra. Further, there were divisions under the charge of pradeshtris. They were responsible to samahartri. Apart from the provinces mentioned above there were certain areas like Kamboja and Saurashtra, which had certain degree of autonomy. During Chandragupta's reign a yavana, named Pushyagupta has been reported as the governor (rashtriya) of Saurashtra. The same province had Tushaspa, another yavana, as governor during the reign of Ashoka.

7. District and Rural Administration- According to the Arthashastra village administration and judicial business was carried out by gramika, gramabhojaka or ayukta with the help of elders. In the Arthashastra there is no mention of gramika instead it is mentioned that the village servant of the king was gramabhritika or gramabhojaka. In the hierarchy, next to gramika was gopa who took care of 5-10 villages. Next to the gopa was the sthanika who was in charge of one quarter of a vishaya or ahara or janapada (district). The work of all these officers was supervised by the samahartri with the help of pradeshtris. The rural administration under Mauryas was highly efficient.
8. The Administration Under Ashoka- The primary sources of the reconstruction of the administration under Ashoka are his inscriptions. Though the nature of administration was almost same as that of his predecessors but we find new terms being used which are not mentioned in the Arthashastra. This makes it mandatory for us to study the administration of Ashoka on the basis of his inscriptions.

Rock edict III and VI have make reference to parisha. The parisha of these edicts is perhaps equivalent to the mantriparishad of the Arthashastra. The system of provincial government was also retained by Ashoka who had put all the four provinces (except Magadha or prachya) under the princes of royal blood (kumara or ayaputa). These princes were helped by bodies (nikayas) of officials who are described as follows.

- The Mahamatras: They were an important constituent of the administrative machinery of each city and province under the empire. In Kalinga edicts they have specifically been named as nagalaka and nagalaviyohalaka (nagaraka and paura vyavaharika of the Arthashastra). They administered justice in the cities. Edict I mentions amtamahamatras who correspond to antapalas of the Arthashastra. IthihakaMahamatras of Edict XII are probably same as stridhyaksha of the Arthashastra (Guard of Ladies).
- The Rajukas: They were next to the kumaras in the province and had vast judicial powers. The king (Ashoka) had granted them considerable independence in the award of honours and penalties. In RE III and PE IV they are associated with the yutas and in the Eerragudi inscriptions, with rathikas.
- The Rathikas: They correspond to the rashtrikas of Junagarh inscription and meant 'officials of the districts'. The Pradeshikas: Though they are sometimes equated with the pradeshtris of the Arthashastra (informer of the king) but more probably they were 'subordinate governors'.
- The Yutas: They were secretary in the office of mahamatras. Their main function seems to be the codification of royal orders.
- The Pulisa: Pulisas were perhaps the agents of the king and are probably comparable to the purushas or raja-purushas or gudha-purushas of the

Arthashastra. They were perhaps graded into high, low and middle ranks. They had many people under them and also controlled the rajukas.

- The Prativedakas: They were the reporters and without any doubts are equivalent to the charas of the Arthashastra.
- The Lipikara: They were the royal scribes and one of them Chapada has been mentioned by name in MRE II.
- The Dutas: They were the envoys. They have been mentioned in RE XIII. On the testimony of the Arthashastra, it is believed that they were of three kinds:
 - (i) Nishrishtarthah duta: They were full-fledged Ambassadors.
 - (ii) Parimitarthah duta: They were negotiators who could not go beyond instructions given to them.
 - (iii) Shasanahara duta: They were only special messengers who carried the royal writs. They are comparable with the lekharakas of the Harshacharita.
- The Vachabhumikas: They were inspectors of cow pen.
- The Ayuktas: They are referred to in the Kalinga Edicts. They may have been some village officials. In the Gupta period, the ayuktas were in charge of a vishaya (district). There, the full designation is ayuktapurusha.
- The Karanakas: They are mentioned in the Eerragudi copy of MRE. They perhaps refer to scribes, teachers or judicial officers.

9. s Megasthenes gives a detailed description of the civil administrative structure of Pataliputra. The administration of Pataliputra was under a commission of thirty members divided in six boards of five members each. First board was associated with the supervision of all aspects pertaining to industrial arts. Fixing of wages, quality of materials used in the industries came under the purview of this board. Second board was responsible for the care of foreigners. Arranging for their lodging, keeping an eye on them, escorting them in the territory, attending to their medical needs in case of sickness and arranging for their funeral in case they died during their stay were some of the responsibilities assigned to this board. Third board was concerned with the systematic registration of births and deaths. Fourth board looked after trade and commerce. It were responsible for regulation of sales, weights and measures etc. It was also required to keep track of the licence tax to be collected from merchants. Fifth board was concerned with the supervision of manufactures and the sixth board controlled the collection of tithe on sales and any fraud in this matter was dealt with death penalty.