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MOURYA PERIOD OF ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHANDRA GUPTA MAURYA

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ABSTRACT:

The extensive Maurya Empire was divided into some big provinces. The administration of the provinces was placed either in hands of governors or the princes of the royal house acting as viceroys, and called as Kumaras. The exact number of the provinces at the time of Chandragupta is not known. The Asokan Inscriptions refer to the headquarters of some provinces. They were Kausambi, Ujjayini, Takshasila, Suvarnagiri, and Tosali. Since Kalinga with its capital Tosali was the only territory conquered by Asoka, it is most probable that except Tosali the other four places were the provincial capitals of Chandragupta's empire. Some historians regard them as revenue officers with police functions. According to some others, they were in charge of the divisions of a province. Some even regard them as provincial governors. It is obvious that provinces were administered according to the directions from the centre. By the time of Asoka, the provincial administration became more elaborate for the welfare of the people. The Indian villages from time immemorial managed their internal affairs in a smooth and orderly manner. At the time of Chandragupta, the same traditional village system continued. He was assisted by the village elders in looking to the disputes among villagers and keeping peace in the village. They enjoyed the confidence of the people because of their impartiality and devotion to truthful deeds. The village headman was not an officer of the government, but was the chosen leader of the villagers. A number of villages also formed themselves into groups under a superior headman called Gopa. Many villages constituted a Janapada managed by state officers. Thus, that India under Chandragupta Maurya enjoyed a strong and sound administration based on valid principles, systematic organisation and the rule of Law. No doubt the king was the chief executive, the supreme law-maker and the fountain of justice, yet he was only the head of a governmental structure which stood on the foundations of ancient traditions and the needs of the time.

KEYWORDS: Mourya Period, Administration System, India, Chandra Gupta Maurya

INTRODUCTION

Indian administration, as we know, has its evolution that can be traced back to the 5000 years old Indus Valley Civilization wherein the King was all powerful and everything in the Kingdom was carried out in his name. He was assisted by a council of ministers, and also other functionaries and officers in administering the Kingdom. In other words, in the ancient times, powers of administering the Kingdom were centralized in the institution of King. This was followed by the Vedic period. Early Vedic Aryans were organised into tribes rather than kingdoms. The chief of a tribe was called 'Rajan.' The main responsibility of the Rajan was to protect the tribe. He was aided by several functionaries, including the purohita (chaplain), the senani (army chief), dutas (envoys), and spash (spies). However, a systematic model of administration came in with the coming of the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties. Both the dynasties had elaborated governmental machineries that carried out state functions in a highly organized manner.

The Mauryas not only built a vast empire, covering practically in the entire subcontinent and extending beyond it in the north-west, but also integrated it by adopting a suitable administrative system. The administrative set-up established by Chandragupta Maurya (c. 325 – 300 BC), the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, continued under his successors and no change was felt necessary except that Ashoka tried to liberalise it further and elaborated the public duties of the state officials. The basic principles of Mauryan administration remained the same till the weaker Mauryas lost their hold over the administration. Three major sources viz., Kautilya's Arthashastra, Megasthenes' Indica and Ashokan inscriptions provide necessary information on Mauryan administration. On the basis of the Arthashastra and the Indica many scholars put forwarded the idea of a highly centralised and uniform structure of Mauryan administration. This idea was prevailed for a long time but now scholars like Romila Thapar, Gerard Fussman have modified this view. In general, Mauryan state was a monarchy with a powerful king at the centre of the political system. The Mauryan kings were guided by the Council of Ministers and followed the advice of the Arthashastra. They regarded the welfare and interests of their subjects more important than their own interests (Yoga-khema). Ashoka declared in one of his inscriptions that all his subjects were like his children and he was most anxious to promote their spiritual and temporal well-being. It indicates that the idea of paternal kingship became popular during the reign of Ashoka. According to Arthashastra, next to the king, Amatya played a vital role in the Mauryan administration.

This umbrella term Amatya included all high-ranking officials, counsellors and executive heads of department. Arthashastra mentions two consultative bodies, one small body of Mantrins called the "Mantra-Parishad", the other large body of variable number called the "MantriParishad", which included executive heads of department. Apart from the king and his consultative bodies, there were a number of high officers in charge of important portfolios such as the "Samahartri" chief collector of revenue, who was in charge of maintain accounts; "Sannidhatri" treasurer, also in charge of the royal stores; "Dauvarika" chief of the palace attendants; "Antaravamshika" chief of the palace guard etc. Ashoka's inscriptions mention many kinds of Mahamatras or high officers such as the "Anta-mahamatras" in charge of frontier areas; "Itthijakka-mahamatras" in charge of women's welfare; "Dhamma-mahamatras" in charge of Law and Piety. The Mauryas had a large, efficient and well-equipped standing army which was maintained by the state. According to Arthashastra, the Mauryan army was divided into four division's infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots.

The king held the supreme command of the army and he was the highest militant officer. The army administration was closely connected with the espionage system. Ashoka's inscriptions refer to the "Prativedakas" and "Pulisani", who were responsible for keeping the king informed of public opinion. Arhashastra also refers to the spies called "Sanstha", who were positioned in one place, and "Sanchara", who roamed about. The Mauryas had to organise a well set-up finance administration to maintain a large army and numerous high ranked officials in the state. Kautilya visualized extensive state participation, regulation and control over the economy. Therefore, Bangard Levin argued that 'the Mauryas exercised strict control over the activities of all units of taxation system and implemented in practice many of the principles elaborated by Kautilya in his treaties on polity.' The most remarkable aspect of the Mauryan administration is its provincial administration. Ashoka's inscriptions suggest that the Maurya empire was divided into provinces under governors.

There seem to have been at least four provinces a southern one with its centre at Suvarnagiri, a northern one with its headquarter at Taxila, a western one with its headquarter at Ujjaini and an eastern one with its centre at Tosali. The Mauryas appointed royal princes or member of the royal family as a governor of these provinces. There could have been a fifth unit of regional level administration in Kathiawad where we find Pushyagupta and Iranian Tushaspha were acting as a governor during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka respectively (Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradaman I, 150 AD). Both governors were outsiders to the royal house. The large provinces were divided into fairly extensive districts and these administrative divisions are referred to as "Ahara" and "Janapada" in Ashokan inscriptions. Ashokan inscriptions suggest that the "Pradeshika", "Rajuka" and "Yukta" were important officers at the district level. Arhashastra suggests an elaborate administrative structure. In his discussion of the countryside, Kautilya recommends that the king should establish headquarters known as a "Sthaniya" to administer a unit consisting of 800 villages, a "Dronamukha" in a unit of 400 villages, a "Karvatika" in a unit of 200 villages and a "Sangrahana" in a unit of 10 villages. Sthanikas and Gopas were in charge of these administrative units.

The village was the smallest unit of local administration. Megasthenes gives an elaborate description of the municipal administration of the famous city Pataliputra. According to him, Pataliputra was controlled by a municipal commission of 30 members, called the "Astinomoi", who were divided into six boards of five members each. The "Nagalaviyohalaka-mahamatas" of Ashokan inscription were no doubt associated with city administration. Kautilya also gives an account of municipal organisation. The Mauryan state had a complex and elaborate administration system. The king was the fountain source of all governmental activity. And all major sources for the Mauryan period emphasise on the notion of high-level central control and uniform structure of the Mauryan administration. Although new analysis of the sources, specially of Ashokan inscriptions, changes the idea of Mauryan administration. A. Nag Romila Thapar initially presented the Mauryan empire as a new form of government marked by centralized control and planning. But later she, considering various facts, suggests that the Maurya empire was not a homogeneous whole, and it subsumed different sorts of economics, politics and life ways. She also suggests that the Maurya empire should be considered as consisting of metropolitan (Magadha), core (Koshala, Vatsa, Avanti, Gandhara etc.) and peripheral areas (north-western frontier, Deccan area).

The level of central control and authority of the Maurya administration on these three parts were not same or uniform. Therefore, it is not actually necessary to label the Mauryan empire as "centralised" or "decentralised". The empire must have had some element of centralised control, but given its extent, there must also have been a

significant amount of delegation of authority to functionaries at provincial, district and village levels. Gerard Fussman also argues that given the extent of the empire and communication networks of time, the Mauryan empire could not probably have been centralised. Mauryan rule was superimposed over a number of existing political units, which must have been allowed to continue to exercise varying degrees of autonomy. It would be difficult for the Mauryan state to impose central control equally on every part of the vast empire. Though we can't deny the centripetal tendency of the Mauryan administration. But it does not mean that the Mauryan administration was uniformed and it had no varieties of local elements.

AN ESTIMATE OF CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

Chandragupta Maurya was one of the greatest and most successful rulers of Indian history. As a hero, a soldier, a conqueror, an empire-builder, and an administrator he earned his distinction for greatness. His rise was timely when India needed a deliverer of her frontier territories from the yoke of foreign servitude. Rising from humble origin and while in his youth, he could defy and offend no less a man than Alexander the Great in his own camp. By extraordinary will and efforts he could organise an army to drive out the Greeks and to overthrow the Nanda monarchy. No mere adventurer, he was capable enough to build up the first great Indian empire, and one of the strongest empires of all history. He conquered far and wide to give to geographical India a political unity. Unlike Alexander, he conquered to consolidate. In that work of consolidation, he proved himself one of the ablest of administrators. He was indeed the first Chakravarti King of India from the Himalayas to the seas.

By giving India a strong dynasty, he opened a new era in the annals of his country. It was an era of greatness and glory, marked with the high tide of political and cultural resurgence. The legacies left by this first Indian emperor influenced the future in a substantial way. To unite India in the Maurya way became the political goal of succeeding empire-builders and their dynasties in times of disintegration and decay. More than two thousand years after Chandragupta Maurya, when the Western Orientalists in nineteenth century identified his name with the name Sandrocottus of the description of the Western classical historians and writers, the imagination of the educated Indian youth was stirred to a sense of pride at the heroic deeds of India's earliest great emperor. The history of his greatness inspired patriotism and nationalism in the mind of the modern Indians in an age of foreign domination when India was gaining national consciousness to shake off the alien yoke.

EVOLUTION OF ANCIENT INDIAN ADMINISTRATION

The Vedic period or Vedic age (c. 1500 – c. 500 BCE) gets its name from the Vedas¹. Early Vedic Aryans were organised into tribes rather than kingdoms. The chief of a tribe was called 'Rajan.' The main responsibility of the Rajan was to protect the tribe. He was aided by several functionaries, including the purohita (chaplain), the senani (army chief), dutas(envoys), and spash (spies). However, the autonomy of the Rajan was restricted by the tribal councils called 'sabha' and 'samiti.' Arthur Llewellyn Basham, a noted historian and Indologist, theorises that sabha was a meeting of great men in the tribe, whereas, samiti was a meeting of all free tribe's men. The two bodies were, in part, responsible for the governance of the tribe. The Rajan could not accede to the throne without their approval. In the later Vedic period, the tribes had consolidated into small kingdoms, which had a capital and rudimentary administrative system. The Rajan was seen as the custodian of social order and the protector of

'rashtra' (polity). Hereditary kingship started emerging. Rituals in this era exalted the status of the King over his people. He was occasionally referred to as 'samrat' (supreme ruler). The Rajan's increasing political power enabled him to gain greater control over the productive resources. The voluntary gift offering (bali) became a compulsory tribute. There was no organized system of taxation. Sabha and samiti were still there but with the increasing power of the Rajan, their influence declined. By the end of the later Vedic age, different kinds of political systems such as monarchical states (rajya), oligarchic states (gana or sangha), and tribal principalities had started emerging. Economy in the Vedic period was sustained by a combination of pastoralist and agricultural way of life. Economic exchanges were conducted by gift giving, particularly to chiefs and priests, and barter system was there, wherein cattle were used, as a unit of currency. The transition of Vedic society from seminomadic life to settled agriculture in the later Vedic age led to an increase in trade and competition for resources. Agriculture dominated the economic activity along the Ganges valley during this period. Agricultural operations grew in complexity and usage of iron implements increased. Apart from copper, bronze, and gold, later Vedic texts also mentions about the usage of tin, lead, and silver. Crops of wheat, rice, and barley were cultivated. New crafts and occupations such as carpentry, leather work, tanning, pottery, astrology, jewellery, dying, and wine making arose. Romila Thapar characterizes Vedic-era state formation, as being in a condition of "arrested development," because ...chiefs were relatively autonomous and owing to surplus wealth they controlled, which was used for the increasingly grandiose rituals that otherwise could have been directed towards state-building (Bellah 2011). The period of the Upanishads, the final phase of the Vedic era, (was approximately contemporaneous with a new wave of state formations) was linked to the beginning of urbanization in the Ganges Valley. The growth of population and trade networks led to the social and economic changes that started putting pressure on older ways of life suggesting the end of the Vedic period and setting the stage for urbanization. (Bellah 2011), (697-98: citing the terminology of Bruce Trigger, Understanding Early Civilizations). By the time the Mauryan dynasty came into power, the treatise of Kautilya, namely Arthashastra' became a work on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy. Kautilya, was a scholar at Takshashila University and was the teacher and guardian of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. Indian administration system was well developed and the treatise of Kautilya gives a very first detailed account of the same. The Mauryan Period was the era of major development in Indian administration. Decentralization was prevalent, as the village units played a very important role, as the base of grassroots administration. Empire was divided into provinces, provinces into districts, and districts into rural and urban centers for efficient administration.

MAURYAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

Indian history entered into a new era with the beginning of the Mauryan Empire, as for the first time India attained both at the political and administrative levels. The Mauryan Empire was divided into four provinces with Patliputra, as the capital. The names of the four provincial capitals were Tosali in the East, Ujjayain in the West, Suvarnagiri in the South, and Taxila in the North. Mauryans developed an organized and an elaborate system of administration. There was central administration directly under the King. Besides there was provincial administration, local administration, revenue administration, judicial administration, and military administration. We will now discuss the administrative systems. To begin with, is the central administration system under the Mauryas.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

The King was the supreme and sovereign authority of the Mauryan administration. He had the supreme executive, legislative, and judicial powers vested in him. He was responsible for the safety and security of his kingdom. He laid down the general lines of policy that was to be followed by all officials. He appointed ministers and other officers of the royal administration. In addition, the King was the supreme commander of the army and head of the entire military. The Mauryan Empire (before Ashoka) was essentially a Hindu State. According to the Hindu concept, the supreme sovereign of the State was 'Dharma' or law and the King was to be its guardian. The King could never dare to defy the laws. He was aided and advised by a 'Mantri Parishad' (Council of Ministers) and he was to be guided by it in conduct of day-to-day administration.

This became more of an obligation during times of emergencies (war or a natural disaster or health epidemics). The Brahmins had a great influence on the King and the latter was required not to disobey them. Instead, he always looked towards their support. Also, as the powers of the Mauryan government was of a decentralized nature, the provincial governor and provincial ministers had the right to be consulted by the King, especially, in all provincial matters. The number of ministers in the Council of Ministers varied and was not fixed. The ministers had to qualify by showing their ability, especially in terms of religion and money. In times of emergency, the King was always to be guided by the majority decision of the Council of Ministers. Besides, there was a well-organized hierarchy of bureaucrats, who looked after the executive, judicial, and revenue offices. The entire administration system was organized into departments, each of which was headed by a Superintendent, known as 'Adhyaksha.' The Adhyaksha was assisted by clerks, accountants, and spies. In addition, there were two posts of high officials, namely the 'Samaharta' and the 'Sannidhata.' The Samaharta was the collector general of revenue for the Mauryan Empire. He had control over the expenditure part also. The post of Sannidhata was the officer-in-charge of the treasury and store. Besides, there were other officers like Army Minister, Chief Priest, and Governor of Forts.

PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The extensive Maurya Empire was divided into some big provinces. The administration of the provinces was placed either in hands of the governors or the princes of the royal house acting as viceroys and called as Kumaras. The exact number of the provinces at the time of Chandragupta is not known. Asokeu Inscriptions refers to the headquarters of some provinces. They were Kausambi, Ujjayini, Takshasil, Suvarnagiri, and Tosali. The Maurya province was administrated by several classes of officials. Among them were the Pradsibeas. It is obvious that provinces were administrated according to the directions from the centre. The provinces were divided into districts or Janapadas, having their administrative officers.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

It was for the administrative convenience, that the province was divided into source Janapadas ordinaries each Janapadas into some Gangs or sthanas and each sthana into some villages. The Sthanikas and Gopas carried out the administration of the district. While the Sthanika was incharge one greater district or Janapada, the Gopa was in-charge of five to ten villages. The Sthanikas and Gopas were responsible to Sameharta, the Minister of Finance and interior. The village was the lowest unit of administration. The gramik was the village headmen who carried the administration of each village with the help of village elders. Villages enjoyed antonomy. The administration

of the Capital city of Patliputra by a municipal commission of thirty members. They were divided into six Boards with five members each. The boards were entrusted with following duties respectively. The first board was to look after everything relating to industrial art, the record board to take care of the foreigners, besides controlling the inns and taking care of the resident in the city the third board to record the births and death's; the fourth board to superintendent the trade and commerce; the fifth board to supervise the manufactured articles; the sixth board to collect the tax of ten percent charge and the sales. But apart from these functions, the commission in its collections responsibly looks after matters of general interest, such as the supervision of markets, harbours, temples, and keeping of trouble building in proper repair. Thus, the Maurya Empire enjoyed a very sound administration board on enlightened despotism.

ADMINISTRATION OF CHANDRAGUPTA II

We learn about the administration of Chandragupta II from the account of the Chinese Pilgrim Fahien who came to India during his reign. The administration under Chandragupta II was highly organised and was far more liberal than in the Mauryan times. The taxes were light, the people were law-abiding and the criminal law was very mild. Ordinarily, a fine was regarded a sufficient punishment. Capital punishment was not imposed on any criminal and the most serious crimes of rebellion and treason were punished with the amputation of the right hand of the criminal. The government did not interfere in the activities of the people. Even foreigners were free to travel throughout the country without permits and passports. Fahien says, 'the people have not to get themselves or their households registered with any magistrate. If they want to go they go; if they want to stay on, they stay'. The roads were safe and Fahien never felt unsafe during his travels throughout India for about nine years. The most interesting fact about the ideal administration of Chandragupta II is that there was no spy system.

For purposes of administration, the empire was divided into many provinces. The governors of the provinces were more independent than they had been in the Mauryan times. The provinces were divided into districts. The people were given due share in government. There were district councils to advise the government officers in administrative matters. These councils consisted of the government officials and of elected members of the people. The lowest administrative unit was the Grama or village. It was administered by a headman and the village assembly or Panchayat. Thus, there was a democratic set-up in the Gupta administration. Land revenue was the main source of income of the state and was normally one-sixth of the produce of the land.

Ever since the fall of the Mauryas, India had been disunited. The Gupta rulers established political unity in India. Samudragupta was the main architect of this unity. He defeated nine kings in the north and twelve kings in the south and established his sway over almost the whole country. His son and successor Chandragupta II put an end to the rule of the Saka Sataraps in western India and released the country from foreign domination. Besides giving political unity, the Gupta rulers gave the people a sound system of administration. From Fahien's account we find that the taxes were light, criminal law was very mild, roads were safe and the people were law abiding. The most striking feature of this administration is that there was no spy-system.

CONCLUSION

The Maurya period saw the establishment of the first empire in the history of Indian subcontinent. Such a large empire required new strategies of governance. The complex system of administration set up under the Mauryas became the foundational basis of succeeding polities. Ashoka is known equally, if not more, for renouncing all

military ambition and turning to his spiritual side. He decided to promote the cause of dhamma, inspired from his personal faith in the Buddha's teaching for the laity. The social and economic processes of agrarian expansion and urbanization of the preceding centuries continued under Maurya rule, and there was a further growth in cities, trade, and the money economy. However, after Ashoka, the empire saw a swift and rapid decline. Since the time of sixth century BCE, there had been a continuous expansion of agriculture along with the rise in urban centers. The Greek writer Arrian talks about the immense number of towns. Technologically the Mauryan economy and state were on a sound footing. The Arthashastra mentions use of different kinds of iron. Iron was a crucially important metal for agriculture. Similarly, the social dimensions of production also had a strong basis. Arthashastra mentions that new lands should be brought under the plough and for this purpose the shudras were to be settled on these areas. The needs of labour for labour intensive tasks such as paddy cultivation were to be met with prisoners of war. It is believed that the 1,50,000 people who were deported after the Kalinga war were used in this fashion. The shudra settlers were given fiscal concessions along with seed and cattle to settle new lands. Such lands formed part of the sita lands or crown lands. Thus, two factors control over iron and manpower laid the foundations of a strong economy during the Mauryan period.

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