

Mauryan Administration

We derive a lot of information regarding the Mauryan administration from Chanakya's *Arthashastra*. Chanakya, the prime minister in the court, advised Chandragupta Maurya in matters of administration. Chandragupta's successor, Bindusara, followed the same system. But Ashoka made a few changes due to the change of heart after the Kalinga war.

Central government

1. **King:** The king was the **supreme head of the state and had military, judicial, legislative and executive powers**. He was the supreme commander of the army and planned military operations with his *senapati*, the commander-in-chief. According to Megasthenes, the king was very hardworking, who 'does not sleep in day-time, but remains in the court for the whole day' for the execution of public affairs. It was the **king's duty to pay attention to the people's welfare, social order and military action** if and when needed.
2. **Council of ministers:** The king was assisted by *mantriparishad*, a council of ministers headed by the prime minister. They were a few in numbers but were very influential. It consisted of *pujari* (the chief priest), *senapati* (commander-in-chief of the army), *sannidhata* (the head-treasurer) and *samaharta* (the taxation-expert). Other officers included the accountant general, superintendent of mines, superintendent of ports, superintendent of weights and measures. The **central administration was conducted by a highly skilled secretariat divided into several departments, each headed by an**

adhyaksha or a superintendent who performed judicial and administrative functions. The *amatyas* were administrative personnel or civil servants who made the highest administrative and judicial appointments. Their pay scales, service rules and method of payment were clearly laid down. Their roles and functions were very important for all governmental proceedings.

Provincial government

Next to the emperor in power ranked the governors who were in-charge of the provinces of the empire. The Mauryan Empire was divided into the following four provinces.

- Magadh with Pataliputra as its capital,
- Gandhara with Taxila as its capital,
- Avanti with Ujjain as its capital,
- the Southern province with its capital at Suvarnagiri and
- Kalinga with its capital at Tosali

The capital province of Magadh was looked after by the king himself. The head of the province was called kumar or aryaputra. Only princes were appointed to this position. The kumar was assisted by the mahamatras, the governors.

District administration

The provinces were further divided into districts. A group of officials worked in each district. The Ashokan inscriptions refer to three classes of officials—*rajukas*, *yuktas* and *pradeshikas*.

- The pradeshika was the head of district administration.
- The rajuka was responsible for surveying and assessing land, fixing its rent and keeping records in addition to judicial functions.
- The duties of yukta largely comprised secretarial work, collection and accounting of revenue.

There were intermediate levels of administration between a district and a village. A unit comprised five to ten or more villages.

Village administration

- ✓ The village was the smallest unit of administration.
- ✓ The head of the village was called gramika. He was assisted in village administration by the village elders.
- ✓ The villages enjoyed considerable autonomy. Most of the disputes of the village were settled by the gramika with the help of the village assembly.

Municipal administration

The head of the city was called *nagaradhyaksha*. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* mentions *nagaraka*, the city superintendent. He was assisted by two subordinate officials, the *gopa* and the *sthanika*.

According to Megasthenes, the administration of Pataliputra was looked after by a committee of thirty members. The officials were divided into six committees, each with a membership of five.

- The first committee was concerned with matters related to industrial arts.
- The second was for facilities to the foreigners.
- The third kept a register of births and deaths both for census and for the purposes of taxation.
- The fourth committee was regarding matters of trade and commerce.
- The fifth supervised the public sale of manufactured articles.
- Lastly, the sixth collected the tax on the articles sold, the tax being one-tenth of the purchased price.

Revenue system

Kautilya laid great stress on the treasury as the smooth and successful functioning of the government depended on finance. The sources of Mauryan revenue were taxation and rent. **Land revenue was the chief source of income. It was one-sixth to one-fourth of the produce.** The revenue for irrigated land was higher. Some other sources of revenue were mines and forests, manufactured goods of various kinds, tolls payable for using bridges and roads, finer and license fees. There were two kinds of taxes—*bhaga* and *bali*. ***Bhaga* was the tax on agricultural products and cattle and *bali* was a religious tax.** From the revenue collected the state provided facilities like roads, irrigation, hospitals and also took care of other expenses of the state.

Network of spies

There was an **extensive network of reporters and spies to keep the emperor well informed about his opponents and their activities.** Kautilya called them *gurudhapurushas*, the secret agents. The espionage department was manned by secret agents under the **control of mahamatyapasarpa** with both stationary and wandering spies. They reported to the king directly. There were spies against the spies and on important matters more than one agent collected information.

Review

1. Name the authorities who were the part of the central government of the Mauryan Empire.
2. What were the heads of a city and a village called?
3. Who were the *gurudhapurushas*?

Judicial administration

(It was the duty of the king to ensure justice to the people and redress their grievances.) The Mauryan Empire was vast and this debarred the king from personally disposing of all the cases. However, he was the final court of appeal. Laws concerning crimes were stringent and punishments were severe.

- ✓ Serious offences were dealt with death penalty.
- ✓ Lighter crimes were punished by cutting off the nose or shaving off the offenders' hair (a punishment that made one feel ashamed).

Military administration

Chandragupta Maurya maintained a huge army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots. The army of Chandragupta, according to the Roman writer Pliny, included 6,00,000 foot soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants and chariots.

The chief weapons used were bows and arrows, shields and swords. The soldiers were paid salary in cash. They also built forts at strategic places for the safety of the empire.

The war offices of the Mauryans were managed by a board of thirty members. They were divided into six committees and each of the committees had five members to look after the following departments.

- navy
- transport and supply
- infantry
- cavalry
- war chariots
- war elephants

Ashoka's Dhamma

Ashoka is known for the formulation of a code of conduct urging his subjects towards observing virtues such as respect for elders, following a path of non-violence and tolerance of each other's beliefs and ideas. This code of conduct was known as the *Dhamma*. It was broadly based to include people of all religious denominations. Ashoka preached his policy of *dhamma* to promote a harmonious relationship between the diverse elements of the empire. These are not just the teachings of Buddhism, but the noblest ideas of humanism which form the essence of all religions.

Dhamma is the Prakrit equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharma*, translated as religion in modern times. However, the term used in the Ashokan edict has a broader connotation. The main features of his *dhamma* are these.

- ✓ Dhamma was an ethical code aimed at building up an attitude of social responsibility among people.
 - It emphasised the quality of tolerance of people and of their religious beliefs.
 - It denounced all useless ceremonies and sacrifices held under the influence of superstition.
- ✓ It emphasised non-violence and prohibited animal slaughter.
- ✓ It also included measures of social welfare.

Points to Remember

- The administration was at various levels—central (included king and council of ministers), provincial, district, municipal and village.
- Land revenue was the chief source of income.
- An extensive network of reporters and spies kept the emperor well informed about his opponents and their activities.
- The capital province of Magadh was directly under the control of the king.
- Serious offences were dealt with death penalty under the Mauryan judicial system. Laws concerning crimes were extremely strict.
- The Mauryan war office was subdivided into six committees. The office was maintained by a board of thirty members.

In his concept of *dhamma*, Ashoka laid stress on *daya* (compassion), *dana* (charity), *suchita* (purity), *sadhuta* (saintliness), *samyama* (self-control) and *satyam* (truthfulness). Ashoka aspired for a harmonious environment where everyone could co-exist peacefully irrespective of his or her caste, creed and religion. Some of his ideals were to:

- shun war and spread peace,
- stop animal sacrifices,
- ensure obedience and respect for parents and elders,
- ensure masters were treating servants like humans and
- promote vegetarianism.

Propagation of Dhamma

Ashoka took these measures for the propagation of *dhamma*.

- For the purpose of permanently recording the doctrines of *dhamma*, Ashoka inscribed them on rocks and pillars.
- He appointed a special class of officers called *dhamma-mahamatras* for propagating *dhamma* and for promoting its practice throughout the kingdom.
- He sent envoys as well as his son, Mahendra and daughter, Sanghamitra, to propagate Buddhism in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and in Western countries.

Points to Remember

- *Dhamma* was a code of conduct made by Ashoka urging his subjects towards observing virtues such as respect for elders, following a path of non-violence and tolerance of people's beliefs and ideas.
- The policy of *dhamma* was broadly based to accommodate people of all religious denominations.
- He sent envoys as well as his son, Mahendra and daughter, Sanghamitra, to propagate Buddhism to Ceylon and other countries.

Emperor Ashoka ruled for about forty years. After his death, the Mauryan Dynasty lasted just for another fifty years. He was one of the most significant moral reformers in the history of civilization and one of the pioneers of humanitarian values.

Answer the following:

1. Regarding the Mauryan administration, discuss the following:
 - a) Central government.
 - b) Provincial government.
 - c) District administration.
2. Briefly discuss the Municipal administration under the Mauryans.
3. Discuss Ashoka's Dhamma with special reference to its meaning.
4. Mention the measures for the propagation of Asoka's Dhamma.