

Administration in the Mauryan Empire

Power distribution among the bureaucracy had many aspects, the first of which was centralisation. This was based on the assumption that empires are necessarily centralised. Arthashastra represents state control over people, produce and resources.

Gerald Fussman argues that huge extent of empire and primitive communication networks wouldn't have allowed centralisation; there existed varying degrees of autonomy. Ashoka's personal supervision applied only to *dhamma*, not to routine administration. However, Greek and Aramaic inscriptions in the NW are not literal translations of Ashokan edicts, hinting that local officials had some powers. Thapar argues for decentralisation in *Mauryas Revisited*, saying that chiefs existed as intermediaries between the clan and the empire. She also says that the breakdown of the empire and the rise of local states from core areas was important in shaping their relationship with erstwhile peripheral areas.

Romila Thapar's understanding of this is that the empire consisted of 2 elements: extensive conquest and territorial control, and domination of culturally alien and inferior people. The components of an empire are metropolitan state, core areas and peripheral areas. The metropolitan state historically evolves from a small kingdom, becomes the nucleus of the empire, and ultimately becomes a highly developed state, in early times developing into primary state formations, e.g. Magadha. Core regions could be existing states like Gandhara (incorporating Taxila), or incipient state formations like Saurashtra and Kalinga, or existing centres of exchange, e.g. Ujjain and Brigukaccha. In a sense, these were sub-metropolitan, and developed into metropolitan states when the empire disintegrated. Peripheral areas were further differentiated political and economic systems. They ranged from hunting-gathering to producing societies, but had no known state systems. They were located in interstices between rich agricultural belts. Metropolitan areas were only interested in the dominance and exploitation of other areas through revenue collection and resource appropriation. For all other purposes, peripheral and core areas were left untouched. If this was not possible, then economic restructuring of the area was undertaken.

The empire was built on the foundations laid by Nandas. The first king of the dynasty was Chandragupta Maurya followed by Bindusara and Ashoka. Buddhist texts refer to Mauryas belonging to a kshatriya clan called Moriyas. Texts like *Puranas*, *Milindapana*, *Mudra Rakshasa* etc refers to Chandragupta's conflicts with Nandas. Greek sources refer to Chandragupta's meetings with Alexander and Selucus Nikator. He made matrimonial alliances with the Greeks. The Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradhama attributes the beginning of the construction of reservoir known as Sudharshana lake to Chandragupta's reign. Jaina tradition speaks about his relation with Bhadrabahu, the jaina saint. The Junagadh rock inscription tells about his conquests. He was succeeded by Bindusara. According to Strabo, Antiochus, king of Syria sent Deimachus an ambassador to Bindusara's court, but his death followed by a 4 years of succession conflicts which in later saw the emergence of Ashoka the Great. Initially he was the governor of Ujjain. The empire declined rapidly after Asoka. The empire weakened and fragmented and suffered by an invasion by Bactrian kings. The last Mauryan ruler was Brihadratha. He was killed by Pushyamitra Shunga who started the Shunga dynasty.

The extent of the empire under the Mauryas was even more than under the Nandas, covering most of the subcontinent and beyond its NW frontiers. Sophisticated monumental stone sculpture and architecture, along with rock edicts reflect a novel imperial ideology and vision. There was incorporation and acknowledgement of foreign elements, and thus looking beyond the realm of empire, e.g. entertaining ambassadors from Hellenistic courts, Ashoka's dispatch of Buddhist and dhamma missions abroad, and Ashoka's claim of attaining *dhamma-vijaya* in domains of other kings.

Notions of kingship included the concept of *saptanga rajya*: that the state consisted of 7 elements: *svami* (lord/king), *amatya* (ministers), *janapada* (territory/people), *durga* (fortified capital), *kosha* (treasury), *danda* (justice/force), and *mitra* (ally). This was accepted with minor modifications in many Dharmashastra texts, Puranas and Mahabharata. Arthashastra deals in greater detail with practical matters of governance rather than with theories. The text exalts the *svami* (king), who is made out to be the central focus of the empire even in Ashokan inscriptions.

The security of the king was important, since his position was vulnerable, and therefore there was a need for constant vigilance and security, expounded on in Arthashastra. It states that the palace should be provided with multiple security exits; things going in and out of the palace complex should be thoroughly examined. The king's food and drink must be first tested. A personal guard of female archers, and other people he trusts, must surround him always. Ministers should have to give frequent tests of loyalty. Spies should fan out to the far reaches of the empire, and be on the lookout for seditionists.

The king's moral dharma, acc. to the Arthashastra, included protecting subjects and ensuring their welfare and prosperity, looking after them like a father, safeguarding them from deceitful artisans, thieves, murderers and natural calamities, acc. to the Kantashodhana (Removal of Thorns) section of Arthashastra, maintaining helpless children, old and distressed people, childless women, and defending social order, esp. with reference to *varnashrama* dharma. The unique features of Ashoka's model of kingship, included the fact that he planted trees, dug wells, provided medical care for men and animals, all by way of ensuring welfare of his subjects. He instructed people in dhamma. Rock edict 2 tells us about need for authority and sternness in dealing with unconquered people living on the borders; only forgivable offences would be forgiven.

It is not known whether the Buddhist concept of universal monarch ('*chakkavattin*') predated or post-dated Ashoka. The notion is of *chakkavattin* as a just ruler ruling in accordance with *dhamma*; if he fails to do so, wheel of dharma sinks into the ground and disappears. There was a hierarchy of *chakkavattins*: *chakkavala* (ruling over 4 quarters), *dipa-chakkavattin* (ruling over 1 quarter) and *padesa-chakkavattin* (ruling over part of a quarter).

Ministers holding important offices (*amatya*) included consultative bodies. The Arthashastra mentions *mantra-parishad*, which included executive heads of department. Patanjali's Mahabhashya refers to Chandragupta's *sabha*, possibly a larger council. Megasthenes' '*sumboloi*' could also mean this. *Parishad* was meant to direct officers (*yuktas*) in the discharge of their duties, acc. to rock edict 3. Megasthenes' '*sunedroi*' refers to a smaller consultative body, within which if a conflict should arise, Ashoka, in rock edict 6, states he should be informed immediately. Radhagupta, Bindusara's minister, played a successfully huge bid on Ashoka's succession, reflecting the political role of high-ranking officials. Megasthenes observes that the king was available for consultation and was easily accessible to his officials.

High-ranking officers needed to be of high birth (upper 2 varnas). They included the *Samaharti*—chief collector of revenue, also in charge of maintaining accounts; *Samnidhatri*—treasurer, in charge of royal stores; *Antaravamshika*—chief of the palace guard; *Adhyakshas*—departmental heads; *Akshapatala*—Records-cum-audit officer; *Karmikas*—clerks to aid these officials. There were also *mahamatas*—*dhamma mahamatas*, *ithijakka mahamatas* and *anta-mahamatas*. The *purohita* (royal priest) was the guide/chief advisor of the king. The Arthashastra says he should be of high character, reputed family, thoroughly trained in Vedas, Vedangas, politics, interpreting divine signals and use of Atharvan practices.

The empire was divided into four provinces—Dakshinapatha (capital: Suvarnagiri), Uttarapatha (capital: Taxila), Western Province (capital: Ujjain), and Kalinga (capital: Tosali). The governors were called kumara/aryaputra, suggesting a tradition of royal princes as provincial governors. Imp. officers at the district level were pradeshika, rajuka, and yukta. They went on tours every 5 years to instruct people in dhamma, et al. Rajukas correlate with agronomoi mentioned by Megasthenes. The term came from 'rajju', meaning rope; rajukas measured land, perhaps using ropes, for revenue assessment. In Ashoka's time, they could also have been made responsible for public welfare measures.

The lowest level was the village. Headquarters were set up to administer 800 villages (sthaniya), 400 villages (dronamukha), 200 villages (karvatika) and 100 villages (samgrahana). Thus, the sthanika administered groups of villages large enough to form districts. Under the sthanika were the gopas, each administering 5-10 villages. The Arthashastra refers to village headman (gramika) and village elders (grama-vriddhas), who had an important role to play. In the city, Megasthenes mentions 6 committees of 5 members each, in charge of

i) industrial artsii) entertainment and surveillance of foreignersiii) trade and commerce
iv) maintaining records of births and deathsv) supervising public sale of goodsvi) tax collection
Nagalaviyohalaka-mahamatas (city administrators) are also mentioned in Ashokan inscriptions. Arthashastra mentions the city officer (nagaraka), who had sthanikas and gopas under him.

Also significant were the pativedikas and pulisani, responsible for keeping the king informed of public opinion. Pativedikas were spies/reporters, and pulisani had higher rank and wider mandate. Pulisani correlate with Megasthenes' mention of episcopoi/ephoroi. The Indica mentions spies positioned in one place (sanstha) and those who roamed about (sanchara). It also gives advice on how to recruit spies and effective disguises they should don for better/more effective discharge of their duties.

For fortification/defence in the capital (durga), the Arthashastrarecommends a series of frontier posts placed under officials. For constructing main fort in capital city, it suggests mud ramparts with parapets of brick/stone, with troops stationed along all approaches to it. Fort walls had to be surrounded by 3 moats filled with lotuses and crocodiles. There was a need to maintain stocks of supplies for times of siege, as well as for secret escape routes. The standing army was recruited and maintained by state, along with periodic levies of troops—infantry, cavalry, navy, chariots and elephants. Senapatis and nayakas were important military officials. The army had to be recruited from all 4 varnas, and had to be trained well in the importance of weapons and using magical practices.

Megasthenes mentions 6 committees of 5 members each— a) Navy b) Supervision of equipment and transport c) Infantry d) Cavalry e) Chariots f) Elephants
Plutarch refers to army of 600,000, but this seems exaggerated, since this was double the entire infantry of the Roman Empire in pre-Diocletian times. Ashokan inscriptions indicate an important change in policy regarding the Mauryan army after the Kalinga war—dhamma vijaya was introduced, perhaps because little else in subcontinent left to conquer for Ashoka. Therefore, U Singh argues, "the wheels of the military machine must have gone rusty due to lack of use during his long reign".

Justice (danda) is described in the Arthashastra in great length. Judges were called dharmasthas; there are references to pradeshtris as officers responsible for suppression of criminals. Punishment was levied for crimes ranging from mutilation of limbs to death. The nature of punishment depended on the nature, gravity and circumstances of the crime, along with the varna of the offender and plaintiff; higher varnas were usually given lighter punishment than lower ones. These

practices may not have necessarily translated into reality, however, given the normative nature of the Arthashastra.

Separate rock edict 1 refers to the judicial function of the city mahamatas. It urges them to be impartial and sympathetic, punishing people only for a good, justifiable reason. It says Ashoka sent a gentle officer through the empire to see if justice was being rendered to one and all. Pillar edict 4 says that the rajuka had judicial duties; it stresses on samata (fairness) in death penalty. Pillar edict 5 says the king released his prisoners annually.

Allies (mitra) consisted of a circle of kings (raja-mandala):

- a) Vijigishu (would-be conqueror)
- b) Madhyama (the middle king)
- c) Udasina (indifferent/neutral king)
- d) Ari (enemy)

Arthashastra mentions the six policies (shad-gunya).

- a) If one is weaker than enemy, sandhi (peace treaty) should be made
- b) If one is stronger than enemy, vighraha (hostility) should be practiced
- c) If one is equal in power to enemy, policy of asana (keeping quiet) should be followed
- d) If one is much stronger than enemy, one should march on yana (military expedition)
- e) If one is much weaker than enemy, samshraya (shelter with another king/fort) should be sought
- f) If one can fight enemy with help of ally, follow double policy of dvaidhibhava (sandhi+vighraha)

The types of conquerors it mentions are: demonic, or the one who seizes land, riches, sons and wives of enemy, then kills him; those motivated by greed (lobha) for land and riches; and the righteous (dharma) conqueror, who conquers out of desire for glory, and is satisfied with mere submission.

Thus, administration was complex yet effective.