

A Brief Account of Indian Administration During Ancient Period

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ABSTRACT

Administration is the governing mechanism of state affairs. The original state of nature is imagined to be one of the total anarchy, which signified 'might was right'. The concept of a formal state was absent because of nomadic life at that time. People agreed to pay taxes and be ruled by one person in order to enjoy well-being and security. 'Manu' i.e. the law book of the Hinduism gave reference to about the formation of state. By the time of Mauryan period, the Indian Administrative system was well developed so their treatise provides a first detailed account about the formal administrative system followed in ancient time. It was famous for conversion of decentralized informal administrative structure into the centralized formal system of state. A set of administrative structure given by Kautilya's administration have been analyzed the researcher in details. Researcher emphasized upon the world-famous Chanakya's Niti which provides a fame and glory for the country at international relations and concludes with the legacy of administration in many aspects. Great efforts have been made to analyze the secondary data sources on administrative system of ancient period in this article.

Keywords: Administration, Monarchy, Centralized, Formal, Informal, State, Institutions.

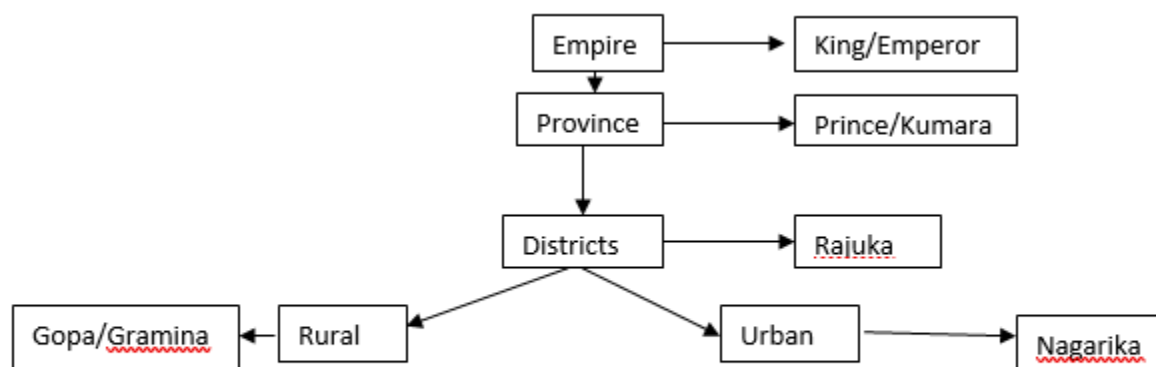
INTRODUCTION

Indian administration traces its earliest known reference from tribal system which later emerged as a monarchical form of governing system. We get to know about ancient Indian administration from ancient religious and political treaties. In the Early Vedic Period (EVP) there were many tribes, who elected their own chiefs and handed over the responsibilities and administration. Sabha (assembly of elders/brahmanas) and Samiti (assembly of peoples / commoners) were important tribal assemblies. War-booty was decided in these assemblies known as vidhata.¹

Reference of the 'state' are found first time in Manu which is a law book of the Hinduism. At this time, people were fed up with anarchy because of absence of any arbitrator who could have ample authority to solve issues of the society, so they appointed Manu as a king and paid service fees in a way of taxes for looking after them and ensuring justice and mutual benefits to everyone in the society. King was attributed to divine power and regarded as descended from god. This system of Administration later on compiled in the form of Manu Smriti. Several religious text / epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. gave reference of the same.²

There were no formal institutions; customs and religious ethos were proceeding as the law. King was helped by several officers like Purohita (Priest), Senani (Army Officers), Treasurers, Charioteers, Spies & Messengers etc. Punishment of the crime were decided on the basis of caste. Anybody who made a crime against brahmanas entitled to be for capital punishment. However, capital punishment was not practiced formally, but trails took place where justice was delivered by the king after consulting the priest and elders. Thus, by the time Kautilya wrote the Arthashastra, the Indian Administrative system was well developed, but this treatise of Kautilya gives a very first detailed account about the formal administrative system in India.³

The Mauryan period was well famous for the development of Indian Administration. Herewith, decentralized informal administrative structure converted into the formal centralized institutional mechanism. It was highly centralized system of administration, even it was first time of Indian history reflected full-fledged centralizing tendency of state administration. Since, village units were played important role in pre-mauryan period, for suitable form of centralized administration, empires were divided into a numbers of provinces which is further divided into numbers of district and that's also divided into rural and urban institutions to keep in touch of peoples at lower rung.⁴



Important functionaries of this time were called “tirthas” and these were paid in cash or kinds. Some of the highest functionaries were minister (mantrin), high priest (prohita), commander-in-chief (senapati), crown prince (yuvraja) etc. Apart from this Arthashastra reveals that state appointed twenty-seven Adhyakshas which is also known as superintendence, mostly to regulate the economic activities of the states.⁵

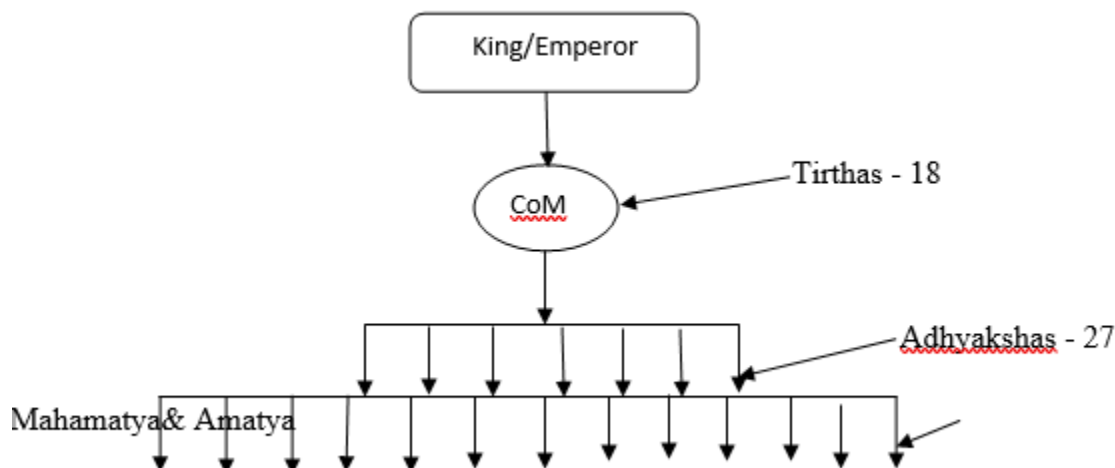
Kautilya’s Arthashastra is a work on Varta (science of economics) and Dandaniti (statecraft or management of state-craft) of the mauryan period which was written sometime around 321 BC to 300 BC. It was retrieved in 1904 AD and published in 1909 AD by R. Shamasastry. It described the functions of Chief Executive, Hierarchy, Bureaucracy, Corruption, Local Administration, Supervisory Management, Motivation, Morale and Job descriptions etc. which have been highly influential aspects in the subjects of public administration. The most important aspect of the Arthashastra is that it emphasized on Public Welfare even in an autocratic agrarian state of that time.⁶

Kautilya recommended not only the qualities of officials but he also emphasized upon the qualities of the ruler also. Ruler should be the native of the territory, must follow the teaching of shastra, physically strong with blue birth. In other words king should be the citizen of the state, educationally equipped with noble birth. He also emphasized on king’s training in philosophy, economy, science and dandaniti i.e. political science. King should take active part in the time of war and the administration of justice.⁷

Closer examination of mauryan period reveals that ‘state’ is neither a police state nor merely a tax gathering state. However, the elements of ‘military state’ were also present in Mauryan Administration. Elaborated army officials were there. The word ‘danda’ reflects about the coercive power in the present sense. It was only the symbol of ruler’s authority which seems to be necessary to prevent anarchy as like the same in present time of police force which is necessary to maintain law and order and for smooth transaction of governmental affairs. Ultimately, it was ‘welfare state’. As far as state affairs was concerned, Kautilya have mentioned seven essential ‘Prakritis’ in his ‘Saptang Theory’ and states that presence of these prakritis or vital organs are very important for smooth transaction of state affairs. State was concerned with the following seven essential elements:⁸

1. The Swamin (Ruler) 2. The Amatya (Minister) 3. The Janapada (Territory)
4. The Durga (Fortified Capital) 5. The Kosha (Treasury) 6. The Danda (Army)
7. The Mitra (Allay of Friends)

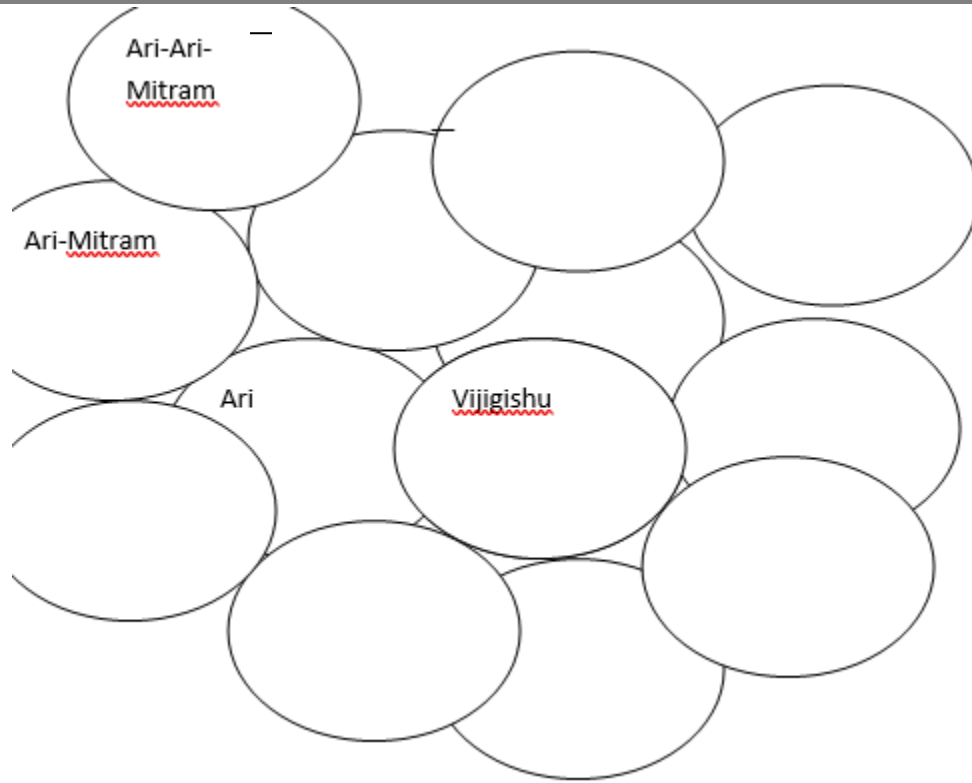
The elements of bureaucratic state were also present in the character of Mauryan administration and this bureaucratic system was very much powerful and effective. The officials were divided into various categories. The ‘Tirthas’ were the highest and they were 18 in numbers. ‘Tirthas’ played a role of council of ministers. Adhyaksha formed second categories and they were 27 in numbers. Adhyaksha had played a role of Head of Department. Mahamatya and Amatya formed the next categories of officials.⁹ The system of elaborated bureaucratic mechanism clarified by the flow chart given below:



Kautilya’s Arthashastra categorized officials of the state into 18 ‘Tirthas’ which had played important role in the administration. Kautilya advised the king to test his ministers and officials by putting them various short of temptations. He also advised the king to keep in touch with spies appointed for close watch of the affairs of the state. Spies are allowed to directly meet the king as per the need.¹⁰ These officials are as follows:

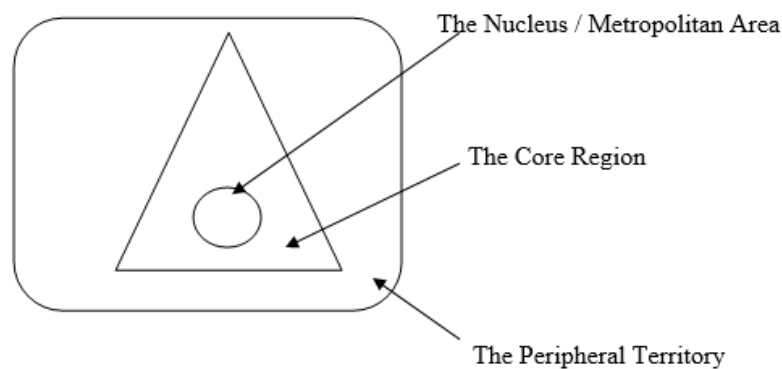
1. Mantrin – Minister 2. Purohita – Priest 3. Senapati – Commander of the Army 4. Yuvaraja – Prince
5. Prasastr – Magistrate 6. Samahartr – Collector-General 7. Sannidhartr – Chief Treasurer 8. Pradestr – Commissioner
9. Mantrin-Parishad Adhyaksha – Chief of Council of Ministers 10. Nayak – Town Guard
11. Karmanta – Superintendent of Mines 12. Dandapala – Officer of the Army 13. Durgapala – Guardian of the Forts
14. Antapala – Officer in Charge of Boundaries 15. Ativahika – Officer in charge of Forest 16. Dauvarika – Palace Attendants
17. Antarvamsika – King’s Guards 18. Paur – Chief of the Town¹¹

Kautilya in his work has provided an elaborate arrangement of thought in regard to foreign policy that how the king shall achieve stability and prosperity for his state. His foreign policy best elaborated in the form of ‘mandal theory’. Since then, India have been known by world famous ‘Chanakya Niti’ which gave the way to acquire the foreign territory. Famous Chanakya Niti states that Vijigishu i.e. king should make cordial relation with Ari-Ari-Mitram and lure them to attack on Ari-Mitram. By the help of Ari-Ari Mitram, Ari-Kshetra could ask help from Vijigishu. The help provided by Vijigishu further made Ari kshetra in debt. It made the acquisition of Ari-kshetra very simple. Later on, Vijigishu could be scornfully denied for promises made to the Ari-Ari-Mitram. According to Kautilya, this process shall be repeated till the time Vijigishu state become sufficiently eatable and the natural frontier have been reaching for the state.¹²



Mauryan Administration was highly centralized in character; there was an elaborated central administrative machinery. The ‘Empire’ was divided into a number of provinces. The head of the provinces known as ‘kumara’ or ‘Aryaputra’ were directly appointed by the king. The provinces were divided into districts, the district officials were ‘Pradesika’, ‘Rajuka’, ‘Yukta’ etc. also appointed by the king. All the officials were responsible and accountable to the king directly and they could be removed by him at his will.¹³

Though, the Mauryan Administration was centralized in character but at the same time the elements of Decentralization were also present. Researcher have been focused upon that Mauryan Empire was divided into three types of administrative area.



Direct control of the king was limited to the nucleus region where the administration was carried out by the help of central officials. This was the area in and around the capital. Administrations of core region were carried out by the help of provincial and sub-provincial officials. Because of difficult communication system at the time, it was hard to maintain effective control. By the help of Ashokan inscriptions and other contemporary sources it was comprehended that the provincial and district officials used to enjoy the wide powers which were a time misused to exploit the masses. Another evidence of decentralization could be traced by the fact that administration of the ‘Patliputra’ city was carried out by the help of a council of 30 members. The ‘Guilds’ used to look after the

management of secondary economic activities i.e. trade, with high degree of autonomy. These evidences indicate that the over centralization was absent in Mauryan administration.¹⁴

Revenue Administration Of Mauryan Period

Agriculture, Cattle-tending and Trade were the important sources of livelihood at the time. Taxes were collected and strictly controlled by the Samahartr and his assistance. The Go-adhyaksha was the superintendent of cattle who kept the record of all the animals. All trade was to be under the control of Panyadhyaksha. The Lavanadhyaksha was responsible for manufacturing of salt supply and fixing price. The Akaradhyaksha was highest officer in charge of mining. It shows an elaborated control of the economic like by the state administration.¹⁵

Personnel Administration

It was centralized monarchical set up in which king placed at the top most of the personnel hierarchy. Monarchy was divine in character; king was considered to be a representative of God on the earth. The title like 'Devampiya' adopted by Ashoka and his grandson Dasharatha, 'Piyadasi' adopted by Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka indicates the divine attributes of the king. This monarchy was despotic in character also because the king was all powerful and his word was the law of the land. In theory, there was a council of minister, the king was supposed to be consider their advice but the final decision was made by the king always. The king was also prescribed to take a decision to keep in mind of prevailing customs & tradition, but in case of emergency this tradition was violated by the king.

All the important appointment were made by the king himself and only persons having 'prajna' (intelligence) and 'vakyashakti' (power of expression) were to be considered suitable for the state services. He also prescribed tests such as 'Dharmapadha', 'Arthapada', 'Bhayopadha', and 'Kamopadha' those who passed appointed as Judges, Revenue Officer, Bodyguard, and Entertainer respectively. These officials were also prescribed by the test of 'Shashtra'. Kautilya also lays down the salaries to the state employees. Normally, one-fourth of the state revenue spent on the payments of the employee of the state. Salary was given on a fairly liberal scale.¹⁶

Role Of State In Economy

Important role of state in economy was another essential element of administration of Mauryan political system. A number of officials were appointed by the king to look after various economic activities. For instance, 'Lavanadhyaksha', 'Akaradhyaksha', etc. directly interfere in economic activity of the state. The state built the road networks to promote the trade and commerce. Complete state protections were guaranteed to the artisans and craftsman. Agriculture, Trade & Commerce and Arts & Crafts were the main occupations. Taxes on the goods produced as well as its imports and exports were the source of revenue and the expenditure focused on public administration, national defense, army, salaries of officials etc. all these plays an important role even today in our country.¹⁷

Public Secrecy The Mauryan polity was also characterized by an all pervasive (penetrating) kind of control of human life. The Mauryan rulers appointed different types of spies to keep a close watch on the behaviour of the people. Even the prostitutes & beggars were used as a spy by the Mauryan rulers. Thus there was hardly any scope of privacy.

Universal State

The elements of universal state were also prevalent in the character of mauryan administration. A universal state refers to a state system in which a large population having different cultures and language reside peacefully at the same time they enjoyed a natural frontier. Hindukush mountain in the north-west, the Himalaya in the north and the sea in peninsular India protect the empire as a form of natural frontiers.

Welfare State

The Mauryan Administration was secular in character, because the state did not discriminate among the citizens on the basis of their religious ideas and practices. Kautilya stated that the king was like the father and all the people or subjects of the country/empire were his children. This was conceptualized version of welfare state of modern times.

Corruption was not tolerated at all and dealt with severely like the same as modern time. Kautilya has his own criteria for selection of officers. There were two courts i.e. Dharmasthya (civil court) and Kantakashodhana (criminal court). King was head and his functions were all the important branches of state like military, judicial, legislative, executive, similar to the modern functions of presidents and he was to be well equipped in all areas of study especially economics, philosophy, statecrafts and the Vedas.¹⁸

Weakness of the Kautilya's Administration

Though, Mauryan administration was highly appreciable, it was first evolved centralized form of administration in Indian subcontinent. The Guptas carried forward the Mauryan legacy of administration in many aspects. Their legacies are still followed in Indian administrative system. A unique form of decentralized administration has also elaborated for the sake of people welfare at grass root level, but closer examination of Mauryan administration reveals that it was not free from weakness. The weaknesses of Mauryan administration was one of the reasons for the decline of the empire such as¹⁹:

Over Supervision-

Supervision refers to the meaning of overseeing the work of subordinates.²⁰ Mauryan administration was elaborated and structured form of administration with efficient institutions. Too much checks and balance downgrade the ethos of administrative officials.

Individualism-

A form of individualism was present in Mauryan administration. Officials were directly responsible to the kings because of this, scope of corruption and lack of motivation among subordinates could be traceable. Prominence of individual instead of institution made several institutions dysfunctional in the absence of prompt important officer.

Mistrust Among Official-

Fundamental mistrust of officials was also one of the drawbacks of Mauryan administration.

Administration of Post Mauryan Period

After decline of Mauryan empire, decentralized administrative system have been traced this is less significant in the term of administrative development. To large extent, Gupta empire tried to centralized the system of administration. Herewith, the legacy of Mauryan Administration is continued. Later after the advent of Ashoka, when he tried to liberalize the domain and describe the public duties of state officials, there came slight changes.²¹

Other waves of administrative development traced with the objective of the Mughal Empire was to set up a centralized administrative system to exercise control over the different parts of the empire so that disruptive elements challenging the Mughal sovereignty could be checked. In fact, they imposed structure of administration and ideas of governance, which are still practiced beyond their rule. They left behind a political legacy that the rulers of the subcontinent who succeeded them could not ignore.

CONCLUSION

Mauryan administration followed the monarchy system of ruling. It was a highly centralized administration, where a council of ministers was set up as the advisor to the king. The treaties presented by Kautilya expressed a vast and efficient administrative system. It was known for its efficiency and effectiveness in administrative set up. Kautilya's administration highlighted the function of CEO (King), Hierarchy, Bureaucracy, Corruption, Local Administration, Motivation, Moral, Job Descriptions, Supervisory Management System etc. which has been highly influential in the subject of public administration. India's administrative system and governing structure has been designed and reformed from time to time to meet the overall welfare goals and objectives. The role of government at the time of independence was mostly confined to revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Having attained a certain level of development in several spheres, now the government is initiating several steps to make citizens partner in the developmental process and giving a shape of collaborative governance.

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