

## SECTION 4

## Chandragupta Maurya's (or Mauryan) Administration

Chandragupta Maurya was not only a great warrior but also a great administrative genius. He laid the foundation of such an efficient administrative machinery that it continued working smoothly, with little changes here and there, throughout the Mauryan period.

## (A) Civil Administration

1. **Central Government** – The head of the Central Government was the king himself, who was assisted by his ministers and a large number of other high officials.

(1) *King* – The king was the highest authority of the state and was the master of unlimited powers. He was the supreme judge and his authority over all the judicial matters of the state was final. He himself led in war and decided all matters of offence and defence. He appointed all his ministers and other high officers. He led a very splendid life and was very particular about his dress. His palace was unique in its beauty and was provided with “*beautiful parks, artificial lakes and all sorts of comforts*”. (Megasthenes). But Chandragupta never forgot the welfare of his subjects and ruled like a benevolent despot. According to **Kautilya**, Chandragupta gave his special attention to countless works of “*public benefit and public utility*”.

(2) *Mantri Parishad* – The king was assisted in the discharge of his duties by a ‘*Mantri Parishad*’ or a council of ministers. Kautilya lays a great stress on the appointment of ministers by the ruler. “*A single wheel can never run and hence he should employ ministers,*” writes the famous ‘*Michiavellian Brahman*’ (i.e. Kautilya). These ministers were all wise, loyal and men of high character and their counsel was always beneficial both for the king and his subjects. Kautilya enjoins his king to always consult his ministers but not to be a puppet in their hands. In this way ‘*Mantri Parishad*’ acted more or less like an advisory body. Their meetings were held in complete secrecy, because, according to Kautilya, “*even walls have got ears*”. “*A state which cannot keep its secrets cannot last long.*” (Kautilya). Each minister was in charge of a department and was fully responsible for its smooth running. The most important ministers were the Prime Minister (*Mantrin*), Commander-in-Chief (*Senapati*), Chief Priest (*Purohita*) and Crown-prince (*Yuvaraja*).

(3) *Other High Officers* – The king and his ministers were assisted by a large number of other high officers who were ever busy in the efficient running of the Government. These officers were known by different names such as *Adhyakshas* (or Superintendents), *Amatyas* (Executive Officers), *Mahamatras* (Governors), *Pradesikas* (Incharge of Revenue Collection),



*Rajukas* (Judicial Officers), *Yuktas* (Treasury Officers), and they were in-charge of different departments of the central administration. Before their appointment their honesty, integrity and character were all thoroughly tested. Even after their appointment they were not left alone to do whatever they liked. Special spies were always busy noting their movements and during the reign of Ashoka a special class of officers, known as the *Dharma Mahamatras*, was created to check the movements of these state officials.

**2. Provincial Administration** – The Mauryan empire was very vast in its extent and, therefore, it was divided into four provinces which were the following :

(1) *The Province of Magadha* – It was the home-province and was under the direct control of the king himself.

(2) *The North-West Frontier Province* – With its capital at Taxila.

(3) *The Western Province* – With its capital at Ujjain.

(4) *The Southern Province* – With its capital at Swarnagin.

The conquest of Kalinga by Ashoka gave birth to the fifth province known as Eastern province with its capital at Tosali. These provinces were governed by the Governors who generally belonged to the royal family and were called '*Kumaras*'. The government of a province was based more or less on the model of the Central Government. To assist these governors in the administration of their provinces a large number of officers were appointed. These officers looked after the administration of districts, towns and villages. To watch closely the movements and actions of these governors special overseers and spies were appointed. They kept the king informed of everything that went on in these outlying provinces.

**3. Local Administration** – Under the Mauryas the local administration of the districts, towns and villages was also carried on on the most systematic lines. Every district was in the charge of a special officer known as '*Sthanika*'. Each district had many villages in it and the head of the village was called '*Gramika*'. Every '*Gramika*' or the village head was assisted in his work by the village elders and every effort was made to decide all the local questions and disputes in the village Panchayats. Over every four to ten villages there was another officer known as '*Gopa*'. The work of '*Gramika* or '*Gramini*' was checked by the '*Gopa*', that of Gopas by the Sthanika, of Sthanikas by the governor and that of Governors by the King himself.

**4. Municipal Administration** – Megasthenes has given us a detailed account of the municipal administration of Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital. From this account we can easily infer that the administration of other big towns must have been carried on similar lines. There was a committee or commission of thirty members to carry on the day-to-day administration of Pataliputra. This commission was further divided into six boards of five



members each. Each board had been assigned special duties in the following manner :

(1) The first board was concerned with the development of various industries and arts. It fixed the wages of artisans and helped them in time of need.

(2) The second board was incharge of the foreigners. It looked to their needs and provided them with every possible facility. In case of illness every possible medical aid was provided to them and if any foreigner died this board made all the required arrangements for his burial and handed over his property to the right claimants.

(3) The third board registered the births and deaths of the people, for taxation and other administrative purposes.

(4) The fourth board was responsible for regulating trade and commerce. It also checked the use of false weights and measures.

(5) The fifth board supervised the manufacturers and saw that they did not mix the old articles with the new ones.

(6) The sixth board was entrusted with the work of collecting sales tax on sold goods, which was 10% of the sale-price. Anybody who tried to evade its payment was given a severe punishment, which was sometimes nothing less than the capital punishment.

These boards also had to perform a variety of other functions in their joint capacity. They looked after public buildings, water supply, sanitation, upkeep of roads, gardens, hospitals, schools, temples and other works of public utility. Most probably other big towns of the empire like Taxila, Ujjain, etc., also had municipal boards on the lines of the capital.

Kautilya, however, does not mention these boards. According to him the municipal administration of Pataliputra was in the hands of 'Nagaraka' or Town Prefect who was assisted in his work by 'Sthanikas' and 'Gopas'.

**5. Revenue System** – Land revenue formed the chief source of income of the government. It varied from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the total produce and depended upon the fertility and situation of the land. In addition to the land-tax, dues from mines, forests and cattle, tolls and ferry duties, professional fees, fines and the gifts received, formed some of the other sources of the royal exchequer. The officer-in-charge of the finances and revenue-collection was known as 'Samaharta'. The money thus collected was spent on the king and his courtiers, as well as on the army, pay of the state officials, charities and works of public utility including hospitals, roads, irrigation projects, temples and other buildings, etc. The whole revenue system and expenditure was thus based on most scientific lines.

**6. Judicial System**– The Mauryan ruler took a great interest in the



administration of justice. According to Megasthenes, Chandragupta Maurya sometimes sat for the whole day in hearing different cases and giving the decision. Regular courts had been established throughout the length and breadth of the country. In the villages the cases were decided by the Panchayats while in the cities there were the city courts. The appeal from these courts could be made to the provincial courts and from provincial courts to the central court which was established at Pataliputra. The cases were not decided summarily but some sort of system of summoning the witnesses was also in vogue. The laws were very severe. From simple fines to shaving of the hair, cutting of the bodily limbs, public humiliation, whipping and even the capital punishment were all known. No leniency was shown to the offenders and the criminals. Kautilya prescribes death even for a petty theft by the government servant. Such a severity of the penal laws must have gone a long way in preventing the crime. According to Megasthenes the average daily theft in Pataliputra, with a population of about four lakhs did not exceed 8 pounds daily.

**7. Spy System** – The credit for the efficient running of the administrative machinery of the Mauryas goes to their spies, who were generally very able and loyal men. These spies kept the king informed of everything going on in his kingdom as well as in the neighbouring states. They also kept the king informed of the public opinion on various important matters. There were many women among these spies, because according to Kautilya, they can prove more useful as spies than even men. The spies of Chandragupta Maurya, according to Arrian, were highly dependable.

**8. Works of Public Utility** – The Mauryan monarchs were no doubt autocratic heads of the state but they never forgot the welfare of their subjects. By dividing their empire into small administrative units, laying the foundation of a sound judicial system, appointing spies for punishing corrupt officers, giving severe punishments to the criminals, appointing new officers 'Mahamatras' for improving the general standard of the people and by doing such other works of public utility, the Mauryan ruler had always kept the welfare of their subjects in his mind. He constructed canals and dams for irrigation of trade and the convenience of the public. Hospitals were built both for men, birds and beasts. According to Kautilya, "*He (Chandragupta Maurya) gave special attention to hospitals, sanitation, famine, poor relief and countless other works of public benefit and public utility.*"

### (B) Military Administration

**1. Army** – Chandragupta Maurya had maintained a huge army. It comprised 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 9,000 elephants and 8,000 chariots. On every elephant there were about four men while each chariot had three men in it. In this way the total strength of his army was about 7,00,000. Elaborate arrangements had been made for the training and drilling of the soldiers. Regular salary was paid to this huge army. Only those men were



chosen as soldiers who were physically strong, courageous and brave. The king himself led the army in times of war.

**2. Army Department** – Megasthenes tells us that the whole administration of such a formidable army was efficiently run by an Army Department or War Office, which consisted of thirty members. This department was divided into six boards of five members each. These boards were assigned some special functions and they were in charge of : (1) Admiralty, (2) Transport and Supplies, (3) Infantry, (4) Cavalry, (5) Chariots, and (6) War-elephants. Each board had its own superintendent (or *Adhyaksha*) who carried on the day-to-day work of his department.

**3. Equipment** – The Mauryan army was well equipped. The chief weapons of offence were bows, arrows, swords and lances and that of defence were armours, shields and bucklers, etc. From *Arrian* we come to know that the Indian archer's shot was such a powerful one that there was nothing which could resist it. The physicians and surgeons also accompanied the army so that medical aid could be given to the wounded soldiers in the battlefield or very near it. Horses, donkeys and bullocks were pressed into service for sending supplies and other military equipment to the soldiers fighting on the front.

Thus we find that the whole organization of the Mauryan army was systematised in such a way that a similar example was not to be easily found anywhere else at that time. **Dr. V.A. Smith** praises this military organization of Chandragupta in the following words: "*No similar organization (military) is recorded elsewhere, and the credit of devising such an efficient machinery must be divided between Chandragupta and his exceptionally able minister, i.e. 'Chanakya'.*"