

**Ans. Main Features of the Mauryan Administration**

The Mauryan rulers were not only great conquerors but also administrators of high order. They organised an efficient and benevolent administrative system. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Ashokan Inscriptions and the accounts of Megasthenese suggest that the Mauryan administration was based on the principle of the well-being of the people.

**Nature of the State**

The Mauryan administration was centralised. Kingship was hereditary and the king was the pivot in the administration. King's powers and prerogatives were immense. He was vested with all the judicial, legislative and executive powers. We come to know from the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya that providing religious freedom to his people, protecting their lives and properties, protecting kingdom from internal and external threats, administering impartial justice, doing the works of public welfare etc. were the main functions or duties of the king. He enjoyed right of issuing ordinances or *Sasana*. The edicts of Ashoka are remarkable example of it. The ministers enjoyed much importance under Mauryan administration. The king would appoint some ministers to carry on the administration efficiently and smoothly. Prime Minister and high priest (*purohita*) were the most important ministers under Mauryan administration. The offices of the prime minister and the *purohita* had been amalgamated into one during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Kautilya functioned both as the Prime Minister and the Purohita of the empire.

## **Political Centres**

The Mauryan rulers had divided their vast empire into five provinces or political centres in order to run the administration smoothly. These were as under:

1. Prachi or eastern province was a central province with capital at Pataliputra. It included Magadha and the whole of northern India and was under direct control of the king himself.
2. Uttarapatha or north-western province included Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Punjab and Sindh. Taxila was its capital.
3. The western province included Malwa and its nearby regions. Its capital was Ujjain.
4. The southern province included the territories from Vindhyachala to Mysore. Suvarnagiri was its capital.
5. The fifth and the last province Kalinga was added to Mauryan empire by Ashoka. Its capital was located at Toshali.

The chief (Governor or viceroy) of the provincial administration was known as 'kumar' or 'Aryaputra'. The office being very important was generally given to a prince of the royal blood. Provinces were subdivided into districts known as 'Ahar' or 'Vishya'. Pradeshika was the head of district administration. Village was the smallest unit of the administration. It enjoyed a considerable autonomy. The head of the village was known as Grameek or Gramini.

## **City Administration**

Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjain, Toshali, Suvarnagiri, Samapa and Kaushambi etc. were several major cities of the Mauryan period. Special attention was paid to city administration. Megasthenese tells that Pataliputra was administered by a council. The historians suggest that similar administrative system would have been followed in other cities too.

The chief of the city administration was Nagarak or Nagar Adhyaksha. A council of thirty members was appointed to help him. This council was further divided into six boards. These boards were: Board of industries, Board of foreigners, Board of census, Board of trade and commerce, Board for supervising manufactures and Board of taxation. Each board consisted of five members. Each board was given some specific responsibilities in the city administration.

## **Efficient Spy System**

The Mauryan kings had organised an efficient spy system. The spies were of two types: Sanstha and Sanchar. Sanstha include those spies who while putting up at a place in an organisation would work in disguise. The Sanchar were those spies who gathered information by moving from place to place.

### **Good Means of Communication**

The means of communication were also properly taken care of in order to run the administration smoothly. Both land and water routes were the source of communication. There was a well-organised network of roads in the empire. Rest houses were built at several places for the convenience of the traders. It was the duty of the government to ensure the security of the traders and roads.

### **Efficient Military Organisation**

Chandragupta, the first Mauryan emperor, displayed special interest in military administration. A large army was organised in order to extend empire and to make it secure from the alien attacks. We come to know from the Greek sources that the Mauryan army consisted of 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 9,000 elephants and 8,000 chariots. A council of thirty members looked after the administration of this large army. It was divided into six boards of five members each. The five boards looked after the five organs of the army that is infantry, cavalry, elephants, chariots and navy. The sixth board was concerned with transport, commissariat and army service. Arranging for bullock carts to carry equipment, procuring food for soldiers and fodder for animals and recruiting servants and artisans to look after the soldiers, were its main functions.

### **Efficient Revenue System**

A huge amount of money was required to carry on the administration smoothly and to maintain a large army. Thus, almost all the Mauryan kings made efforts to promote their finance. Kautilya has mentioned different taxes realised from farmers, craftsmen and merchants. An elaborate structure of the assessment of taxes is seen for the first time during the Mauryan period.

Samaharta was the minister of finance department and he oversaw the collecting of all the taxes. Taxes were realised both in cash and kind and were collected by the local officials. Land revenue was the most significant source of state income. It was one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. Tax was levied on all the products brought in the market for sale. Tax was also levied on all manufactured goods.

In the event of inability to pay tax in cash or kind, it could be paid in the form of labour. According to Strabo, craftsmen, herdsman, traders, farmers, etc. all had to pay taxes. The state had sufficient income from mines, forests, pasture lands, trade, forts etc.

No tax was levied on Brahmans, children and the handicapped people. New trade routes, new irrigation schemes or the areas where new agricultural land was being developed were also exempted from tax.

## **The Gupta Empire**

During the early years of the 4th century A.D., a new empire emerged on the ruins of the Kushana kingdom in northern India which is known as Gupta empire. Undoubtedly, it was a great and glorious empire of ancient India. Under the auspices of this empire, the country experienced a political unification, registered an unprecedented economic and cultural growth and an all-round development thus dawning a golden period.



## Sources of the Gupta<sup>20</sup> History

Literature, coins, inscriptions and monuments etc. are significant sources of reconstructing the history of the Gupta dynasty. The Puranas (in particular Vayu, Matsya, Vishnu and Brahma Purana), the Dharmashastras (in particular Narad-Smriti, Vrihaspati Smriti etc.), the dramas like Kaumudi Mahotsva and Devi Chandragupta and the literary works like Raghuvansha, Manju-Shree Mulkalpa, Katha Saritsagar and Vrihat Katha Manjari furnish important information regarding the history of Gupta-period. The accounts of the Chinese travellers Fa-Hien and I-tsing also contribute significantly to reconstruct the history of the Gupta period. Inscriptions include both the public and the private ones. The public inscriptions consist of the prashastis or eulogies and the land grants. The prashastis

or eulogies and the land grants. The prashastis eulogize the attributes and achievements of kings and conquerors. The Prayaga Inscription of Samudragupta which is engraved on an Ashokan Pillar, is a remarkable specimen of prashastis. It provides us an elaborate description of the conquests and policies of Samudragupta. The Prayaga Prashasti<sup>21</sup>, more popularly known as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription was composed in Sanskrit by Harishena. Harishena was the court poet of Samudragupta<sup>22</sup>, perhaps, the most powerful of the Gupta rulers. The coins also throw important light on Gupta history. They tell us about the extent of empire, religious condition and cultural growth as well during the reign of the concerned rulers. Almost all the Gupta rulers issued gold coins in large numbers. It indicates that trade and commerce was in a flourishing state during Gupta period.

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The Gupta coins bearing the images of Vishnu and Garuda, suggest that the Gupta rulers were devotees of Vishnu. The lyricist type coins of Samudragupta suggest that he had a great taste for music. Similarly, his Ashvamedha-Prakrama coins tell us that he had performed an Ashvamedha yajna. The silver coins of Chandragupta Vikramaditya confirm his victory against the Shakas because the silver coins were in circulation only in western India at that time.

Of all the Gupta rulers, Samudragupta and Chandragupta Vikramaditya are in particular, worth mentioning. The reign of Samudragupta was great from all points of view such as extension, administration, prosperity, literary and cultural growth etc.

We come to know from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription that Samudragupta was a brave and ambitious ruler. He converted the small kingdom (inherited by him) into a vast empire by his policy of conquests. In line 13 of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, it is stated that Samudragupta defeated three kings of northern India in his first campaign against Aryavarta. In his second campaign he defeated and killed all the nine kings of Naga dynasty. Their kingdoms were annexed into Gupta empire. Samudragupta also defeated the 12 kings of Dakshinapatha or Southern India. He also conquered Atvika kingdoms. The frontier states also accepted his suzerainty.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription suggests that the Kushans, Sakas, Murundas as well as Sinhalas (Sri Lanka) and the rulers of other islands had sent their ambassadors to Samudragupta's court with valuable gifts and presents. We come to know from this Pillar Inscription that he was without an antagonist on earth. He, by his numerous good qualities and good actions had wiped off the fame of other kings with the soles of his feet. His heart was full of compassion and his mind had received ceremonial initiation for the uplift of the miserable, the poor and the suffering. He was resplendent and embodied kindness to mankind.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription also suggests that Samudragupta was a great scholar, a great musician and a talented poet. He was a great soul being the cause of the prosperity of the good and the destruction of the bad. His tender heart could be captured only by devotion and humility.



Similarly, Chandragupta Vikramaditya extended the Gupta empire by his conquests and made it move into a golden period by establishing peace and prosperity.