

6th – Ashoka, The Emperor Who Gave Up II



The Mauryan Administration

- The Mauryan Administration was a totalitarian one i.e., the monarch had absolute power, though a benevolent one. Adhyakshas (superintendents), Yuktas (subordinate officers), Pradeshikas (Provincial officers) and Rajjukas (district officers) were responsible for variety of duties, including the collection of taxes and revenues.

- The monarch was advised on policy matters by a privy, or mahamantriparshad.

Provinces

- The empire was divided into four provinces-Magadha, Ujjain, Tarila and Swarnagiri.

Districts

- The provinces were further divided into administrative districts called Janapadas. They were managed by officials called sthanikas.

Villages

- Each district consisted of group of five to ten villages. Gopas or ganardhans maintained records of all the resources of the villages under them. Each village was headed by an official called the gramini. His job was to regulate lands and water right and to collect taxes and fines.

The city of Pataliputra

- The most complex and well-organised system of urban Government was the administration of the imperial city of Pataliputra. According to Megasthenes, a committee of 30 people was appointed to look after the administration of the city. They were divided into six groups:

- Group I- Industrial activities
- Group II- Entertainment of foreigners, assigning them lodgings, taking care of them
- Group III- Registration of births and deaths
- Group IV- Trade and commerce, checking weights and measures
- Group V- Supervision of manufactured articles
- Group VI- collection of taxes

- Kautilya writes that the city governor, or the Nagarika, responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the city.

Society

- The Varna system was followed strictly. Kautilya prescribes different laws for different castes. Women enjoyed greater rights than they did for centuries afterwards. A large number of people were farmers.

- They grew rice, wheat, barley, pulses, cotton and vegetables. To have increased agricultural production was the main goal of the Mauryan state. Kautilya warns against 'damaging plants and trees in city parks, sanctuaries, holy places and cremation grounds, particularly those that bear flowers, fruits or provide shade'. Kautilya warns doctors, 'Physicians shall inform authorities before undertaking any treatment which may involve danger to the life of the patient. If, as a result of the treatment, the patient dies or is physically deformed, the doctor shall be punished.'

Trade and industry

6th – Ashoka, The Emperor Who Gave Up II



- Next to agriculture, the main occupation of the people was trade and industry. The Mauryans gave importance to road; security on the road was also improved to make trade routes safe.
- The Mauryans maintained commercial ties with the Greek kingdoms of Central Asia and the Middle East. The Mauryans built a royal highway from Takshashila (Taxila) to Pataliputra. This road was rebuilt over a period of time, and today serves as the Grand Trunk Road.
- **Trade Guilds**
- Yet another development was the emergence of shrenis or guilds. A shreni was like an association for each trade and had rules and regulations. Some of the guilds even acted as bankers to its members.

Coins

- Punch-marked coins became widespread in the Mauryan Kingdom. They were mainly made of silver, and stamped with different symbols.

Military Power

- The Mauryan army was massive, and was commanded by the senapati. Chandragupta had an army of 600,000. The soldiers were well trained and well equipped. The army had six branches—cavalry, chariots, transport and navy. There were also secret agents who informed the monarch of happenings in the state.

Contact with Foreign Lands

- Ashoka sent missions to several lands, mainly to the Greek states to the north-west of the Indian subcontinent. It is believed that Ashoka's son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitra took Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

The End of the Empire

- Ashoka ruled for about 37 years, and the empire continued for another 50 years. After that, the empire began to break up. Many reasons are suggested for this. The administration might have become less efficient; or it might have become financially difficult to run such a vast empire. Or perhaps the army had become weak due to the policy of peace followed by Ashoka. The final blow was given by the Sungas, who took over the throne of Magadha from the Mauryas.

