

# Provincial and Village administration in Ancient India.

**Rabia Siddika**

Research Scholar  
Magadh University  
Bodh-Gaya

## **Abstract:**

**Indian administration, as we know, has its evolution that can be traced back to the 5000 years old Indus Valley Civilization wherein the King was all powerful and everything in the Kingdom was carried out in his name. He was assisted by a council of ministers, and also other functionaries and officers in administering the Kingdom. In other words, in the ancient times, powers of administering the Kingdom were centralized in the institution of King. India's administrative system has evolved over time, with various administration systems in place at various times. Excavations have led scholars to the conclusion that the Indian valley civilization of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa had a systematic government, which was obviously very important in an age when communication was slow and industrialization was unknown. This is the earliest reference to the Indian valley civilization. In the ancient Indian world, towns played a minor role where as province played major role administrator; When describing the prosperity of the kingdom Jatakas, they proudly include a large number of prosperous villages, but they are oblivious to the existence of town and cities that may have flourished there. The Vedic hymns frequently pray for the prosperity Of the villages, but they rarely pray for the prosperity of the towns and cities. As has been demonstrated, the Vedic era was character. However, a systematic model of administration came in with the coming of the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties. Both the dynasties had elaborate governmental machineries that carried out state functions in a highly organized manner. The Unit therefore tends to discuss the administrative systems that prevailed during these dynasties. The crucial role that the village headman played in the village's management is documented in both the Jatakas and the Arthasastra.**

**KEY WORDS:** province, Village, Gram, Administration, Council.

## **Provincial Administration**

Mauryan empire was divided into a number of provinces, each under a governor, and that provinces of the blood royal were employed as governors whenever possible, becomes clear from the Asoka inscriptions and Buddhist literature. The avadanas contains stories of oppression by wicked ministers in the outlying provinces like Gandhara, and of the revolt of subjects against such oppression. But few definite facts bearing on the details of provincial administration are forth-coming, and we do not know exactly the relations of the governors to the central government on the one hand and the autonomous tribes and kingships comprised within their sphere of control on the other. We may guess that the provincial courts were smaller replicas of the imperial court at Pataliputra, from which the emperor directly administered the home provinces. The distinction between rural and urban administration must have prevailed in the provinces also. There is a short and pithy reference in the Gimar inscription of Rudradaman to the construction of lake Sudarsana by the Rashtriya Vaisya Pushyagupta in the reign of Maurya Chandragupta, and its extension and improvement by the addition of pipes, sluices and so on by the Yavanaraja Tushaspa acting on behalf of Asoka; this is could testimony to the continuous attention given by Maruyan emperors to large work of public utility, to the efficiency of their bureaucracy, and to the preservation of the memory of both through several centuries. Two records, the Sohgaura copper-plate from the U.P. and the Mahasthan inscription from Bengal, both fragmentary, are engraved in characters of the Mauryan epoch, and may well belong to that age; but difficulties of interpretation detract much from their value to the historian. The Sohgaura plate seems to record

an order of the Mahamatras of Sravasti issued from their camp at a place called Manavasiti; the order mentions the koshthagaras of some places and the articles stored in them. Store-houses also find a place in the Mahasthana record the import of which is still less certain. Even these faint gleams should serve as warning against the facile characterisation of the vast administration of the Mauryan empire as 'No doubt more effective in theory than in practice'.

During the time of Kautilya, the empire had become too extensive to be ruled by one central Executive body. IT was not possible to have direct dealings with the distant provinces. For administrative efficiency, the empire was divided into a number of provinces and they were constituted as separate units under the princes of royal blood or governors. The unit of administration in the Kautilyan scheme was the Janapada or province which normally consisted of 800 villages with hundred to five hundred families. The provincial defences were well organised and the approaches to the province were protected by frontier guards-under the warden of the frontiers called Antapala, while the interior was protected and policed by a special staff recruited from deer trappers, Sabaras, Pulindas, Chandalas and foresters. In the four extremities of the province were constructed four forts, which utilised the natural fortifications afforded by water on mountain, desert or forest.

During the Mauryan period, there were four viceroalties at Taxila, Ujjain, Toshali and Suvarnagiri. The viceroys were recruited from the princes of royal blood. The heir apparent also sometimes acted as viceroy. Kautilya provides for emergency which may cause king's absence from the country, in which case an officer will take his place thus rendered vacant (sunya) and will apparently be called Sunyapada. Toshali was created during the time of Asoka. The traditional names of the five provinces of India are:

- (a) Udichya (Northern India or Uttarapatha),
- (b) Madhyadesa (Central India).
- (c) Prachya (Eastern India)
- (d) Aparanta (Western India)
- (e) Dakshinapatha (Deccan or South India).

The viceroys had his council of Ministers and he also appointed ministers or Mahamatras for purposes of inspection of Judicial Administration. Alongside the viceroalties, there were governorships and the governors were known as Pradeshika Mahamataras and also Rajjuka. The governor was also sometimes called a Rastriya, Rastrapala or Rastramukhya and Ishwara. During the time of Chandragupta Maurya, Vaisya Pusyagupta was the governor of the western provinces of Saurashtra.

Under the Mauryas, Bindusar, Asoka and Kunala served as viceroys. The 2015

viceroys enjoyed high and wide powers. They had to maintain law and order in their respective areas and protect the empire against external enemies. They had their own courts and ministers. The orders of the central government were communicated to them by the royal edicts or rescripts. The home province, that is, the Prachya and the Madhyadesa were ruled by the emperor himself with the assistance of the Mahamatras and high officials stationed at important places. The Viceroys had to supervise revenue collection and to take steps to augment the sources of their provinces by constructing and repairing the works of public utility like irrigation and dams and to strengthen the foundation of empire by ensuring good government and promoting public confidence. There were occasional recalls and transfers of provincial governors. They acted as links between the central and the local governments. They enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy in the respective areas. The governor was assisted by a body of officials, viz. Mahamatras, Rajjukas and Pradestarahs, appointed by the central government and they formed the executive council of the governor. The Mahamatras were of the status of king's ministers. The provincial council took into account the views of the Paura-Janapada assembly.

The Samaharta was usually the head of a province and he controlled a number of district collectors under his province. Each province was divided into four districts' each of which was placed under an officer called

Sthanika. The Samaharta was responsible for the realisation of the provincial revenue derived from various sources, each of which required a special administrative department for its utilisation and appointment.

The empire was divided for administrative purposes into a number of provinces, of which the more remote ones were placed under Viceroys. The Viceroyalties were generally reserved for the Princes called Kumaras or Aryaputras in the Edicts. The Edicts refer to four princely Viceroys, viz., those governing the provinces with headquarters at Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali and suvarnagiri (Kalinga Edict I; Kalinga Edict II; Dhauli version, Minor Rock Edict I, Brahmagiri version). Gandhara is mentioned by Fa-hien as another viceroyalty under Prince Dharmavivardhana. Since Dharmavivardhana, according to Divyavadana, was another name for Kunala, who was sent out by Asoka towards the end of his reign as his Viceroy to Taxila for subduing its hostility, we may take it that the province of Gandhara had its head-quarters at Taxila. Sometimes, instead of the Princes, we find local chief appointed as Viceroys. Thus Pusyagupta, the Vaisya, was Chandragupta's Viceroy (Rastriya) of the western provinces with Girnar as a headquarters, which, under Asoka, came under another viceroy named Raja Tusaspha.

While the Edicts do not name any Viceroy, the legends name some. When Bindusara was emperor, he appointed his two sons, Susima (or Sumana) and Asoka, as his viceroys at Taxila and Ujjayini respectively. When later, Taxila was in revolt which could not be suppressed by Susima, Asoka was transferred there as more competent for the purpose. Prince Kunala, as we have already seen is mentioned as Asoka's Viceroy at Taxila. The emperor on his consecration is also said to have appointed as his deputy or Viceregent (Uparaja) his younger brother, Tisya, who, on his retirement as a religious devotee, was succeeded by Prince Mahendra, though he remained in office only for a short time prior to his ordination." Probably the Viceregent (Uparaja) was something like Prime Minister and different from Yuvaraja, heir-apparent. Bindusara, Asoka's father, had, as his Prime Minister, Agramatya, Khallataka, who is said to have supported Asoka in his contest for the throne. Tradition gives to Asoka himself a trusted minister named Radhagupta, who also helped him in gaining the throne and in his administration, and was his agramatya.

That Viceroys were associated with Mahamatras or Ministers is also shown by the Minor Rock Edict I, Brahmagiri text, and the Kalinga Edict 1. Dhauli text. In the former the Prince (Aryaputra), acting with his Mahamatras, addressed the king's message to the Mahamatras of Isila, in the latter, the king addressed the Prince and the Mahamatras together. Again the Jaugada text of the Kalinga Rock Edict II mentions a class of Mahamatras who are described as Lajavachanikas, i.e., those who were entitled to receive the king's messages directly, and not through the royal Viceroys. Thus these Mahamatras might be regarded as Provincial Governors, as they are given independent charge of their province. Samapa (Jaugada) or Isila" was the seat of such a governorship, as Tosali was of a viceroyalty. In the same way, the Kausambi Edict is addressed by the king directly to the Mahamatras of Kausambi, which must have been, therefore, the headquarters of another province. Perhaps these Mahamatras were distinguished from the other classes of Mahamatras

Provincial administration was under the immediate control of a prince or a member of the royal family. The terms used in the edicts are kumara and aryaputra. The former may have been the title of the sons of the king, and the latter may have referred to other close relatives. They were generally viceroys or governors of the provinces of the empire. The empire during the reign of Asoka was divided into four major provinces, as four provincial capitals are mentioned in the edicts. Taxila was the capital of the northern province, Ujjain of the west, Tosali of the east, and Suvarnagiri of the south." These provinces were administrative divisions and were placed under viceroys. The appointment of princes as viceroys served the practical purpose of training them as administrators.

Governors administering smaller areas within the unit of the province were probably selected from among the local people. At Girnar, mention is made of Tusaspa, a local personality of foreign extraction who is referred to as the governor. In the case of tribal people local kings were probably confirmed as heads of administration. This would tend to cause less disruption in organization when an area came under Mauryan control, apart from the fact that a foreign administrator might be resented more than a local ruler. In such cases local autonomy may have been retained at a lower level of administration.

The four divisions or circles of a Janapada (province) were under sthanika. Each division was further subdivided into groups or unions of five to ten villages under the charge of a Gopa. In addition to the Sthanikas and the Gopas, the rural staff working in a village included the following like Adhyaksa, Sankhayaka (accountant), Anikastha (trainer of elephant), Chikitsaka (physician), Asvadamaka (trainer of horse), Janghika (?) and Durdesagatagajivi (carrier of message). The village records (Nibandhas) were accurately maintained.

The records of the following were maintained:

- (a) Pariharaka- revenue free lands.
- (b) Ayudhiyam-contributing military service in term of taxes.
- (c) Contributing regularly as tax assessed prescribed quantities of rice or grain crops; number of animals of different kinds, assessed quantities of precious metals, and labour.

The village registers recorded the accounts of each village, its Economic values and resources and the kind of contribution it made to the general welfare of the country. The villages were classified according to the kind of contribution they made to the general revenue of the state. Each village was studied with reference to the following particulars separately-

- i. the ascertainment of the exact area of a village.
- ii. measurement and description of plots as (a) cultivated, (b) uncultivated and waste, (c) high and dry. (d) paddy fields, (e) park: (f) orchards, (g) plantation of sugarcane and the like, (h) wood, (i) inhabited, (j) trees for worship. (k) temples, (l) irrigation works, (m) cremation ground, (n) alms houses, (o) water places, (p) places of pilgrimages, (q) grazing grounds and (r) roads.
- iii. registers recording the boundaries, woods for common use (aranya) approaches to plots (patha; plots acquired by gifts, plots acquired by sale amount of loan advanced to agriculturists and remission of revenue (anugraha and parihara).
- iv. census of households showing (a) number of each house in the register (b) taxed or taxfree; (c) composition of each household as to the number of the Brahmana-Kahatriya-Vaisya-Sudra living in it (d) number of cultivators herdsmen, traders, artisans, workmen, serfs; (e) number of men and life stock (f) amount contributed by each household to the state in forms of cash, labour tools and military service (hiranya-vishti-sulkadanda); (g) number of male and females withages in each household; (h) occupations according to varna caste; (i) customs of the village and the family concerned; (j) domestic budget of each family indicating its income and expenditure (ii.35.). Thus it appears that Kautilya was the real precursor or the idea of having a most scientific village directory of the purposes of administration.

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