

## **Module 15**

**Paper: History of India (From Earliest times upto 8th Century C.E)**

**Topic: Nature of Mauryan State: Administration, Mauryan Art**

**Quadrant: II**

### **Summary**

#### **Mauryan Empire (322 BC-185 BC)**

##### **Introduction**

The Mauryan Empire was founded in 322 BCE by Chandragupta Maurya, who had overthrown the Nanda Dynasty and rapidly expanded his power westward across central and western India in order to take advantage of the disruptions of local powers in the wake of the withdrawal by Alexander the Great 's armies. According to legend, the teacher Chanakya convinced his disciple, Chandragupta Maurya, to conquer the kingdom of Magadha (the Nanda Empire ) when he was insulted by its king Dhana Nanda. Chandragupta Maurya expanded the Maurya Empire north and west as he conquered the Macedonian Satrapies and won the Seleucid-Mauryan war. In its time, the Mauryan Empire was one of the largest empires of the world.

##### **Mauryan Administration**

**The Mauryan Empire was divided into four provinces with the imperial capital at Pataliputra. From Ashokan Edicts, the name of the four provincial capitals were Tosali (in the east), Ujjain in the west, Suvarnagiri (in the south), and Taxila (in the north). At the centre of the structure was the king who had the power to enact laws. The Mauryan King was taken to be the representative of the God. Kings were described as Devanampriya, Beloved of the Gods. He was the source and centre of all authority, head of the administration, law and justice and also the supreme judge. He himself selected his ministers, appointed high officials and controlled their activities. There was a well-planned system of supervision and inspection. The king was assisted by a council of ministers called the Mantriparishad; the ministers themselves were known as mantris. The Mantriparishad consisted of Purohit (high priest), Senapati (Commander-in-chief), Yuvaraj (heir-apparent) and a few other ministers. Kautilya has mentioned functions of various officers of the Central Government. Some of the important officials and their functions are described as under. Sannidhata was the head of the royal treasury, and of the State income both in cash and kind. Samartha was like chancellor of the Exchequer and was responsible for the collection of revenue from various parts of the country. Sitadhyaksha was the Director of Agriculture and in charge of the cultivation of Crown lands or of Government agricultural farms. Pautavadhyaksha was the Superintendent of Weights and Measures.**

### **Intelligence and Espionage :**

**A remarkable feature of the Mauryan administration was the uninhibited manner in which the organization of a secret service was recommended and the use of Secret Agents for a variety of purposes. To keep a complete vigil over the entire administration, including the conduct of officers, a well-knit espionage system was evolved. A large number of detectives, secret agents, double agents, news agents, spies, counter spies etc were posted all over the kingdom. The king was always kept informed of the working of the bureaucratic machinery. The spies were “the ears and eyes of the king”.**

### **Military Organisation :**

**The Mauryan rulers had a large, disciplined and well organized army. The King was the Supreme Commander and he personally supervised the Army both in peace and war. The soldiers were provided with uniforms, arms and armour by the state and they received their regular pay. Elaborate rules were prescribed for the training and drilling of the soldiers, their pay, duties and responsibilities.**

### **Public works :**

**The king was to treat his subjects like his own sons and daughters and was therefore to undertake various public welfare schemes. The department of roads constructed, repaired and maintained national highways and other important roads. Trees were planted and wells**

were dug by the sides of the road. Resting places like dharamshalas and inns were constructed at important sites where food for men and fodder for the animals were provided at reasonable cost.

**Irrigation** : There was a full-fledged department which looked after irrigation activities throughout the State. Construction and maintenance of wells, canals, reservoirs, lakes and other sources of water was the duty of the State. The most famous 'Sudarsha Lake' at Girnar in Gujarat was constructed by Pushyagupta, the provincial Governor of Chandragupta Maurya. This lake was provided with supplementary channels by Tushaspa, the Governor in the days of Asoka.

### **Census** :

There was a regular department of Census, each birth and death was properly recorded in the register. The Census officer was called Nagaraka.

### **Public health**

Hospitals for men and animals were set up at all important places. The treatment was universally free. Postmortem was done in doubtful cases to determine the cause of death. Some oils were applied to prevent the dead body from decomposition for some time.

### **Revenue**

The most important duty of the Monarch was to keep his treasury full at all times for all works. The chief source of revenue was the land tax. The second major source of income was toll tax which was imposed on all articles. Tributes were received on the birth of a prince or on other important occasions.

### **Crime and maintenance of law and order**

The suppression of crimes and the maintenance of law and order were the foremost duty of the king. The pradesika were the principal police officers whose duty was to investigate the crimes committed in the region within their jurisdiction.

### **Justice**

The king was the head of justice- the fountainhead of law and all matters of grave consequences were decided by him. There were two types of courts: dharmastheya dealing with civil matters and kantakasodhana deciding cases of a criminal nature. Petty cases in the villages were settled by the village elders in their panchayats. The evidence of respectable persons were relied upon.

### **Provincial Administration**

The Empire was divided into a number of provinces, probably five. each being administered by a provincial governor. Most important provinces were administered by the viceroys who were appointed from amongst the

numbers of the royal family. The northern province called Uttarapatha had Taxila as its capital, western province known as Avantipatha had its capital in Ujjaini, Eastern province called Prachyapatha with its capital Toshali, and southernmost province known as Dakshinapatha with its capital Suvarnagiri. The central province Magadha with its entire capital at Pataliputra was also the headquarters of the entire kingdom. The most important provinces were directly under the command of Kumaras (princes).

### **District Administration**

Provinces were sub-divided into districts for purpose of administration, and a group of officials worked in each district. The group consisted of three major officials, the Pradesika, the Rajuka and the Yukta.

### **Village Administration**

Village (grama) was the smallest unit of administration and enjoyed autonomy to a great extent. The head of the village was called gramika who was assisted by gramviddhas or village elders. Most of the disputes of the village were settled by the gramika in open panchayat.

### **Municipal Administration**

A number of cities are mentioned in the edicts of Asoka. An important characteristic feature of the Mauryan administrative set-up was its municipal administration. Indeed, the municipal administration of

the cities evoked the admiration even of the foreigners. The Municipal administration was conducted by a board consisting of thirty members. These members were divided into six committees or groups of five each and each committee had separate functions.

### Mauryan Literature

Literature during Mauryan Empire witnessed less literary contributions. Very little is known regarding the Literature of that time. The literature of the Maurya period was composed either in Sanskrit or Prakrit or Pali languages. Only few works can be assigned to this period due to lack of evidence. Chanakya was a well known author of this age who was also the minister of Chandragupta Maurya. He was well versed in Buddhist, Jain as well as Hindu works. He received his education at Taxila. He was a great man of his age. Arthashastra was the famous work of Chanakya. The work is considered as a genuine composition of the Maurya age. The Arthashastra is a book on political economy and the art of government. It is a prose work divided into fifteen adhikaranas each subdivided into numerous chapters. It deals with the duties of kings, administration of public affairs, law and judiciary, relation with foreign powers, methods of warfare, and secret means to injure an enemy. Bhadrabahu was the greatest Prakrit author of the age. He was the disciple of Yasobhadra who lived and wrote during the reign of Chandragupta. He has composed many Jain Prakrit works. Kalpasutra is a prominent composition of Bhadrabahu. Visakha Datta's 'Mudra\_Rakshasa : Though it

was written during Gupta Period, it describes how Chandragupta Maurya get Chanakya's assistance to overthrow the Nandas. Besides this, it gives an excellent account of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. The only Pali work of the Mauryan period was the Buddhist Kathavatthu that has been ascribed to Maudgaliputra Tishya. It was composed in the reign of Ashoka. The reign of Chandragupta was not devoid of literary achievements. During the reign of Ashoka across the empire Buddhist literature was published. Apart from these three important works, the Puranas and the Buddhist literature such as Jatakas provide information on the Mauryas. The Ceylonese Chronicles Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa throw light on the role Asoka in spreading Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

### **Mauryan Art**

- Mauryans were the earliest empire builders who ruled over a vast geographical area. Strong political base, centralised administrative system and favourable economic as well as other environmental conditions provided surplus production which led not only to urbanization

but also paved the way for renaissance in the field of art and culture.

- Mauryan art basically flourished under the royal patronage, but side by side folk art was also developed during Mauryan period. It would be better to study the Mauryan Art by dividing it into two parts :



## **i) Court Art   ii) Popular Art**

### **Court Art**

- **There was a great influence of strong Central government (of Mauryan Empire) on the different forms of Court Art.**
- **Court Art is subdivided into 4 subcategories i.e. (I). Palace (II). Viharas (Caves) (III). Pillars and (IV). Stupas.**

### **i) Palace**

- **One of the important examples of palaces of Mauryan Period was the Palace of Chandragupta Maurya near Kumhrar (Patna). This palace had 80 pillars, these pillars were made up of single piece of rock. The floor and ceiling of the palace was made up of wood. The length and breadth of the whole palace was 140 ft. and 120 ft. respectively.**
- **Chinese traveller Fa-hian(or, Faxian) declared the Palace as the god's creation. The ambassador of the Seleucus Nicator, Megasthenes in the court of Chandragupta Maurya also described the grandeur of the palace in his famous book Indica.**

## **II. Viharas (Caves)**

- **Viharas were basically the residences of Buddhist Monks. These were made by cutting mountains in either rectangular or circular form. The walls of these caves were shiny polished and decorated with wall paintings and sculptures.**

- Important examples of Viharas in Bihar are Barabar and Nagarjuni Caves in Gaya. These were made by mainly Ashoka and his grandson Dashratha.

### **III) Pillars**

- The tradition of constructing pillars was started during the Mauryan period. Similar to pillars of palaces, these pillars were also made up of single piece of rock/stone. These contained an inverted lotus over Mekhla on which a pedestal was placed. Above pedestal a sculpture of animals were placed.
- These pillars were made out from Red sandstone which was brought from Chunar and Mathura regions. The Sarnath Pillar of Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh) is the best example of the Mauryan Pillars in India.
- These pillars had engraved messages of Dhamma.

### **IV. Stupas**

- The tradition of Constructing stupas was older but it got development and current form during Mauryan period.
- Ashoka Constructed many stupas across the country. these stupas are important religious place for Buddhists. These contain relics of Buddha/Bodhisatavas lying inside the foundation of the stupas. Stupas are similar to inverted smioval shape (called as Anda) with Toran gate, Pradakshina Path, Medhi, Yashti, Chhatra.

**According to the scriptures of Buddhism, Ashoka had made 84000 stupas across the country.**

## **2) Popular Art Forms**

**Popular art forms during Mauryan Period had no influence of the Central Government, instead these art forms were mixture of local and other Indian Art forms. Popular Art forms of Mauryan Period are classified into 3 types (I). Potteries, (II). Sculptures and (III). Beads.**

### **I) Potteries**

- This was one of the most important popular Art form during Mauryan Period. These potteries were being made by people for their daily needs as well as for decorative purposes one of the most characteristic features. One of the most characteristic features of these potteries was its shiny black polished outer surface that's why this art form is known as Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). Many such potteries were obtained from different parts of the state as well other parts of the country.**

### **II. Sculptures**

- Besides animal sculptures found on Mauryan Pillars, many other sculptures are found. These sculptures were made up of stone. On these sculptures shiny polish was used to be done, which adds to their beauty and sculptures became more realistic the most significant example of independent sculptural art of Mauryan Period is the statue of Yakshini, found from Didarganj,**

**Patna. Besides these many other sculptures are found from different parts of Bihar and the country.**

- **Yakshini statue was later considered as the statue of a goddess.**

### **Critical Analysis**

- **Many historians such as John Marshall and Persi Brown considered that the Mauryan Art was influenced with (inspired from) Iranian Art Forms.**
- **Some of them said that the Mauryan Palace was a carbon copy of the palaces of Armenian Empire of Iran.**
- **Pillars of Mauryan Period was also considered as the inspiration of Iranian pillars with slight variations in their architecture.**
- **Mauryan Art (especially court Art){ was highly religious in nature, which restricted the appearance of cultural ethos and other aspects of the society of that period.**