

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Mauryan Administration [Ancient Indian History for UPSC]

The Mauryan Empire had an efficient and centralised administrative system. The chief source of information regarding administration under the Mauryan Empire is Chanakya's work, Arthashastra. Megasthenes also gives some information in his book Indika.

Central Government

- Mauryan administration was highly centralized.
- The king was the supreme power and source of all authority.
- He was assisted by a Council of Ministers. It was called 'Mantriparishad'. The ministers were called 'Mantris.'
- The council was headed by 'mantriparishad-adhyakshya' akin to the Prime Minister of today.
- Tirthas: the highest category of officials in the administration. There were 18 Tirthas.
- Adhyakshya: Ranked next only to Tirthas. There were 20 Adhyakshyas. They had economic and military functions.
- Mahamattas: Higher ranking officials.
- Amatyas: High ranking officials almost like present-day secretaries. They had administrative and judicial roles.
- The Adhyakshyas were formed into a secretariat, which was divided into many departments.
- Arthashastra mentions many Adhyakshyas for commerce, storehouses, gold, ships, agriculture, cows, horses, city, chariots, mint, infantry, etc.
- Yuktas: Subordinate officers responsible for the king's revenue.
- Rajukas: Officers in charge of land measurement and boundary-fixing.
- Sansthadhyasksha: Superintendent of mint
- Samasthadhyasksha: Superintendent of markets
- Sulkaadhyaksha: Superintendent of tolls
- Sitaadhyaksha: Superintendent of agriculture
- Navadhyaksha: Superintendent of ships
- Lohadhyaksha: Superintendent of iron
- Pauthavadhyakhsa: Superintendent of weights and measures
- Akaradhyaksha: Superintendent of mines
- Vyavharika Mahamatta: Judiciary officers

- Pulisanji: Public relations officers
- Registration of births and deaths, foreigners, industries, trade, manufacture and sale of goods, sales tax collection were under the administration's control.

Local Administration

- The smallest unit of administration was the village.
- Head of a village: Gramika Villages had a lot of autonomy.
- Pradeshika was the provincial governors or district magistrates.
- Sthanika: Tax collectors working under Pradeshikas.
- Durgapala: Governors of forts.
- Antapala: Governors of frontiers.
- Akshapatala: Accountant General
- Lipikaras: Scribes

Military

- The commander-in-chief of the entire military was called Senapati and his position was next to the king's. He was appointed by the king.
- The military was divided into five sectors namely, infantry, cavalry, chariots, elephant forces, navy and transport & provisions.
- The army's salary was paid in cash.

Revenue

- The revenue department chief was called Samharta.
- Another important official was Sannidhata (treasurer).
- Revenue was collected on land, irrigation, shops, customs, forests, ferry, mines and pastures. License fees were collected from artisans and fines were charged in the law courts.
- Most of the land revenue was one-sixth of the produce.

Police

- All the main centres had police headquarters.
- Jail was called Bandhangara and lock-up was known as Charaka.

Espionage

- The espionage system of the Mauryas was well-developed.
- There were spies who informed the king about the bureaucracy and markets.
- There were two types of spies: Sansthana (stationary) and Sanchari (wanderer).
- Gudhapurushas were the detectives or secret agents.
- They were controlled by the Mahamatyapasarpa. These agents were picked from different segments of society.
- There were also agents called Vishakanyas (poisonous girls).

Transport

- The transport department fixed the width of the chariots, cattle tracks and pedestrians.