

MODULE-3  
MAURYAS AD MUVENTAR  
TOPIC -DEBATE ON THE NATURE OF MAURYAN STATE

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- Vast empire by military conquests
- Arthashastra inform us about 27 superintendents or Adhyakshas- to regulate economic activities
- Studied on nature of Mauryan state used as source from the Arthashastra, Indica, Edicts of Asoka
- Presented an image of a vast realm neatly organised into 4 provincial units – Takshasila in north, Ujjayni in the west, Tosali in east, Suvarnagiri in south
- Inscriptional evidences shows that in the Mauryan empire existed large administrative units more than the 4 entrusted to provincial authorities

- Recent studies have brought in significant changes in the historiography of the Mauryan state
- Debate about what sort of empire was it
- Thapar – centralised empire in her work “*Asoka & Decline of the Mauryas*”- 1961
- Later she revised her view & a new model of state based on world systems theory with more decentralised & less uniform administrative patterns

# 1. CENTRALIZED – BUREAUCRATIC STATE

- R.S.Sharma- Mauryan polity as Centralised-Bureaucratic state
- Most punch-marked coins can be attributed to Mauryan period
- Presence of large number of coins helped in the devpt of trade & enabled the govt to pay its employees in cash
- Distinguishing feature of Mauryan economy- state control of agriculture, industry & trade & the levy of all varieties of taxes on people

- Led to the creation of an elaborate administrative establishment with enormous power
- Arthashastra mentions about a large & complex bureaucratic organisation
- Pay scales had a large gap b/w the top & bottom level officials
- R.S.Sharma- Mauryan administration had pyramidal bureaucratic structure
- R.S.Sharma- suggests the following facts to justify the centralised nature of the Mauryan state
- Mauryas possessed a huge military setup & a strategic location of the capital Pataliputra

- Mauryan capital was connected with Kalinga by a route through eastern MP & Kalinga was linked with Andhra & Karnataka
- All this facilitated transport leading to enhanced central control
- Asokan pillars were manufactured in the sandstone quarry of Chunar near Varanasi & transported from there to different parts of empire

## 2. DECENTRALISED STATE

- **Gerard Fussman-** questions the unitary & centralised nature of Mauryan state
- Does not accept Arthashastra as a source but rely to Indica & Asokan edicts
- Argues that due to the large extent of the empire & distance b/w capital city & other parts of Mauryan empire could not possibly have been centralised
- Argues that there must have been a system of governmental communication, which could use a system of couriers on a relay basis

- Courier leaving Pataliputra , the capital would have taken approximately 11 days to reach Bengal, 30 days to reach Kandahar & even more to south India due to topographical factors & monsoon
- One must assume the existence of local representatives of the king, who had at their disposal a large amount of power
- Fussman- emphasised the material impossibility of having the orders of emperor carried out everywhere in the empire due to its vastness
- Asoka did not try to systematically standardise his administration



- Says that during Mauryan period issuance of currency was not the monopoly of the emperor as the Mauryan currency consisted of both the govt coins & coins issued by the provinces, towns or even private banks
- Says that there were tribal populations which accepted the main rules of the empire but they were autonomous in their internal governance
- Tribes existed before the constitution of the Mauryan empire, they exist even after its dissolution
- To Fussman- the freedom allowed to high officials of the provincial administration, continued existence of powers previous to Mauryan conquest, difficulties of communication acted as centrifugal factors in Mauryan state

### 3. DIFFUSED TRIBAL STATE

- J.C.Heesterman- not directly explaining the nature of Mauryan state but analyse the state in Arthashastra
- Describes the Mauryan state as a transition state which was trying to make a balance b/w tribal autonomy & central control
- Neither the king was all-powerful, nor the empire was centralised
- Says that it was not a centralised bureaucratic state but a diffused tribal state trying unsuccessfully to acquire a universalistic nature

- King was not an absolute ruler but only like a tribal head
- To him, the king played a dominant role in the rituals & festivals of community
- Says that the system of espionage was a means of maintaining checks & balances
- Points out to a factional system in which the king represent one faction
- King plays the factions against each other & keeps them in check
- kautilya recommends that the administrative depts should be headed by many officers instead of one
- Concludes that Kautilya wants to achieve a universalistic bureaucratic state, but he forced to work within the context of a particularistic tribal system

## 4. DIFFERENT ADMINISTRATIVE PATTERNS

- Thapar- *The Mauryas Revisited*- argues that a uniform pattern of administration cannot be traced throughout the Mauryan state
- Suggested 3 administrative zones
- 1. Metropolitan state
- 2. The Core Areas
- 3. The Peripheral Areas

- 1. METROPOLITAN STATE
- Had its nucleus in Magadha & included the imperial capital Pataliputra but extended across the entire Ganges plains
- Spread its hegemony over other areas through conquest
- Area is demarcated by the location of specially erected pillars on which a later set of edicts was inscribed in 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> years of Asoka's reign
- Pataliputra- capital monopolised monumental architecture
- Directly & centrally administered
- Asoka designates himself as Magadhan ruler or Raja Maagadhe in Bairat edict

- Means that Asoka consciously projected Magadha as the most important unit of the empire
- This area was administered to collect maximum revenue to the imperial treasury
- Payment of salaries to the upper levels of the bureaucracy & cost of maintaining the army are a major drain on the economy
- Upper ranks were well paid & in the case of lower, there is substantial drop in the salary
- Higher officials came from metropolitan or core areas

- 2. THE CORE AREAS

- Nuclei of provincial administration
- Included the existing states, areas of incipient state formation & centres of trade
- Lay beyond the Ganges plain & were located in the north-west, western India, south & east India
- Gandhara, Kalinga, Saurashtra, Ujjain, Amaravati, Bhrigukachcha
- Thapar- argues that the erstwhile Mahajanapadas like Kosala, Vatsa, Avanti, Gandhara incorporated in the Mauryan empire became core areas

- They are generally indicated by clusters of Asokan edicts engraved on rock surfaces
- Each core area was the nucleus of a larger unit, frequently governed by members of the royal family
- Core areas were economically active & their economic potential was exploited to support the empire
- Some of the produce & revenue from the core areas was sent to the capital, whereas some used locally
- Proportion for each is not known from the available evidence
- Due to the large distance from the capital control was flexible & most of the decisions were taken locally
- Core areas were earlier independent states, & emerged as independent kingdoms on the decline of the empire



### ● 3. THE PERIPHERAL AREAS

- Included many pre-state societies
- Includes the wasteland, the pastoral tracts & the forests
- Peripheral in terms of their economic potential, but geographically they were scattered
- Even lay in the interstices of core areas & not only at the frontiers of the empire
- Much of the peninsula & Vindhyan region are forested
- Many places of Sind, Punjab & western Rajasthan was not closely settled
- In these areas, edicts were not found, but some of their inhabitants are mentioned in the edicts

- It was difficult to conquer such regions & bring them under direct control
- Mauryan officials collected from the local chiefs, revenue in the form of animals & forest produce, such as elephants, timber, semi-precious stones
- Only group of people Asoka threatens is the atavikas or forest dwellers
- Forest dwellers were primarily hunter- gatherers, they may have found Asoka's ethic of non-violence unacceptable
- Thapar-Mauryan state intervened differently in each of these 3 categories

- State intervention was maximum in the metropolitan state
- More lands were brought under cultivation & revenue was raised in the form of agricultural taxes such as bali & bhaga
- Commercial activities were controlled & collected tolls & taxes
- Mauryan empire required revenue, labour & resources from other areas was exploitative
- Mauryan economy extended the use of money
- Core areas were more uniformly developed & well administered, generating revenue from agriculture & trade

- These were the areas of resistance when the empire weakened & they emerged as independent kingdoms in the post-Mauryan period
  - Metropolitan state did not introduce new forms of administration in the peripheral areas
  - R.S.Sharma- centralisation theory
  - J.C.Heesterman- diffused tribal society
- Not accepted by scholars because it was based on literary source
- Mauryan empire was host to a variety of distinctive cultures

- A broad based social ethic like Asokan Dhamma welded together the various groups
- power was expressed in a variety of ways , economic restructuring, cultural hegemony & persuasion towards ethical norms
- Upinder Singh- it is not necessary to label the Mauryan empire as ‘centralised’ or ‘decentralised’
- She says that the empire must have had some element of centralised control but due to its vastness there must also have been a significant amount of delegation of authority to fuctionaries at provincial, district & village levels