

Analysis of Village Administration in Northern India**(From 320 B.C. to 185 B.C)***Ikbal Hussasin Khan*

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Introduction: The Arthasastra of Kautilya, Indika of Megasthenes and the inscriptions of Ashoka are the main sources of information for the study of village Administration in Northern India during fourth century B. C. This paper is limited to village administration only. This paper is historical one.

Description of village administration: The villages were semi-autonomous, enjoying much freedom in ordering their activities. They regulated land and water rights, cultivation and payment of revenue through the gramani, an official of the central government. Cultivable land was parcelled out in estates belonging to individuals, while pasture and forest land were held in common.

The villages were to be separated by well-defined boundaries such as river, hill, forest, shrubs, valley, embankments, trees etc. They should be within two miles of each other and should not be far too apart.

The work of rural development included mining operation, plantations, and traffic facilities including water ways and land routes and market facilities. Provisions for rural water supply were to be made by constructing dams. It was the duty of the state to supply stipulated contributions towards co-operative undertakings in a village. All the activities were necessary for the growth of a healthy village life. The helpless, the young, the aged, the orphan and disabled persons and the like others were entitled to get aid from the state. The village elders (Gram abrdhas) were enjoined to protect the property of minors and to temples.

The revenue department comprised three grades of officials, viz., Samaharta, Sthanika and Gopa. Each department was subdivided into groups or unions five to ten villages. The functions were performed by the various officers. The village records were accurately maintained.

The village's administration was carried under the supervision of the village headman. He performed various functions. He was the officer in charge of the militia and watch and ward. Besides this, he had to collect government revenue; to maintain village record, to preside over the village council and to supervise the working of the various activities of the village life.

The two important officers associated with village administration were the sthanikas and the Gopas. The Gopa had various duties including the maintenance of all kinds of village records. The village officials were responsible to the Gopas. The village headman was elected from the elder's. Village discipline and defense were his primary concern. There was a chain of officers from the Samaharta to the Gopa. The relation between the centre and the rural administration was maintained through these officials. Each village formed a close corporation invested with large powers and wide responsibilities. The king was bound to respect the local usage. The smallest unit of administration was the village. The village headman was the head of the village administration.

However, spies were employed to detect headman harassing the villagers. For helping him in the administration there were village servants. Disputes arose in a village between house-owners regarding boundaries of house, drains placing of the fire place., cattle-shed, a grinding mill or the pounding mechanic or boundary wall or village road or lane. Rules were in operation regulating these activities, and transgression rules by any house-owner were punished with varying fines.

The underlying principles governing a affairs of a village was that neighbours of village-elders were the best persons to help in the governance of the village and in the settlement of disputes between neighbours. Any owner, who wanted to sell house, park, field, tank etc., had to proclaim his intention and the price wanted for it in the presence of 40 neighbouring families, and the purchaser was given title to the house if he paid the price and no objection was made there.

The co-operative efforts in a village were encouraged. On festive occasions each villager was expected to contribute his share in cash or provisions or manual labour in the arrangement of public celebrations.

The village headman had some police functions .On official business, concerning the village, the headman had often to go out of village and it was the duty of villagers to accompany him by turn and if one whose turn came but not do so he was fined.

Conclusion: It appears that villagers enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. Rapson rightly observes. "We find already in operation that system of village autonomy under the headman which has prevailed in India at all periods". It also appears that the village records enabled the government to have complete control over the country in all its details. Even today statistical department cannot think of such an accurate picture. Periodical survey was a regular feature and that was obviated by the census department being kept up as a standing institution. The village officer maintained these records and such records were prepared and maintained at all levels of the various departments of government. Thus it is concluded that the village administration of the fourth century was unique in

nature. Even the modern government may follow the principles of administration of northern India (from 320 B.C. to 185 B.C.)

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