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# UNIT 1 ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM AT THE ADVENT OF BRITISH RULE

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit the overall objective is to examine the political and administrative environment in India at the advent of British rule. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the administrative system prior to the Moghuls;
- Explain the Moghul administration which was by and large inherited by the East India Company; and
- Trace the roots of some of the present day administrative practices and institutions.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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There are evidences that Indian history originated with the Indus Valley civilization. The sites at Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Lothal are described as pre-Vedic period and the coming of Aryans as Vedic period. During the Vedic period, Hinduism first arose (it was during this time when Vedas were written). Large parts of India were united during Ashoka's rule. It was at that time that Buddhism spread not only in India but in other parts of Asia also. In the Mauryan reign, Hinduism took the shape. Islam came to light in the eighth century and in the subsequent three centuries established as a political force. Lodhis, Tughalaks and a number of other dynasties were succeeded by the Moghuls. Indian administration in the contemporary period possesses characteristics of heterogeneity of goals, ideals, focus and roles. It has reflection

The main focus of this Unit is on Mauryan and Moghul administration as it was known in the days of the great emperors, Chandragupta, Ashoka, and Akbar, who are singled out as the most outstanding rulers of India known for their administrative abilities of a high order.

This Unit gives a detailed coverage to Mauryan and Moghul administration because these reflect the significant features of earlier administrative systems.

Before we examine the nature of the British rule, its distinguishing characteristics and style of functioning, we must examine the administrative environment in India at that time. In other words, we must examine Mauryan and Moghul administration at great length and take peep into post-Moghul developments to get a comprehensive picture of the administrative system at the advent of British rule.

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## 1.2 MAURYAN AND GUPTA ADMINISTRATION

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As mentioned earlier, Indian administration can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilisation which is about 5000 years old that forms the basis of our civilisation and culture.

In the ancient period we know of the Magadha, Mauryan and the Gupta Ages. Kautilya's Arthashastra, a political treatise on ancient Indian political institutions, written sometime from 321 to 296 B.C., examines statecraft, gives an account of State administration and reflects the rule of the Mauryan kings. Arthashastra, a treatise by Kautilya, a Brahmin Minister under Chandragupta Maurya, is written in Sanskrit. It discusses theories and principles for effective governance.

It comprises fifteen books dealing extensively with the powers and obligations of the king; major organs of the state including the King, the Ministers, the Janapada [territory with people settled on it], the Durga, the Treasury, and the Army; Revenue administration; and personnel administration. A thorough analysis of the Arthshastra brings to light the following principles of Public Administration: welfare orientation; unity of command; division of work; coordination; planning, budgeting and accounting; decentralisation; recruitment based on qualifications laid down for each post; paid civil service; hierarchy; and delegation of authority.

In the Mauryan administration, the State had to perform two types of functions. The constituent (component) functions related to maintenance of law and order, security of person and property and defence against aggression. The ministrant (welfare) functions had to do with provision of welfare services. All these functions were carried out by highly organised and elaborate governmental machinery. The empire was divided into a Home Province under the direct control of the central government and 4 to 5 outlying provinces, each under a Viceroy who was responsible to the Central Government. The provinces had considerable autonomy in this "feudal-federal type" of organisation. Provinces were divided into districts and districts into villages with a whole lot of officials in charge at various levels. There was city government too and two types of courts corresponding to the modern civil and criminal courts. All the administrative work was distributed among a number of departments, a very important department being the special tax department, managed by an efficient and highly organised bureaucracy who was supplemented by the army and the secret police.

The king was all-powerful and everything was done in his name. He was assisted by the 'parishad' and the 'sabha'. The administrative system was a close combination of military force and bureaucratic despotism. An outstanding feature of Mauryan administration was that the State, through a new class of officials, known as 'dharma mahamantras' carried out the policy of moral regeneration of the people. Ashoka, the great Mauryan King, set up a new department called the Ministry of Morals.

The Guptas continued the legacy of the Mauryans in many respects. The divine character of the king was upheld and the king controlled all the levels of the administrative machinery. The empire was divided, like the Mauryan, for administrative purposes into units styled as 'Bhukti', 'Desa', 'Rashtra' and 'Mandala'. Villages had their own headmen and assemblies and towns and cities had special officers called 'nagarapatis' and even town councils. The king had the help of various functionaries to share the burden of administration. Apart from the confidential adviser, there were civil and military officials, feudatories, district officers and many others.

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### 1.3 MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF MOGHUL ADMINISTRATION

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The Moghuls upheld the earlier traditions in political and administrative matters. The Moghul emperor was a perfect autocrat and the administration was 'a centralised autarchy'. The king symbolised the state and was the source and centre of all power agencies. The Moghuls did succeed in building up a 'monolithic administration'.

When compared to the Mauryas, the Moghuls moved in the direction of greater centralisation. They did not pay much attention to social services of health and welfare as also morals which were areas of special concern for the Mauryan kings. But the Moghuls had an efficient civil service. They recognised merit and accepted Hindu intelligentsia in the higher civil service. Its only drawback was that it was 'land-based'. It means it was mainly concerned with revenue functions and was a 'highly urbanised institutions'.

#### 1.3.1 Role of the King

Administration was personalised. It has aptly been described as paternalistic. The entire administrative machinery revolved around the king who was viewed as a 'father figure' or a 'despot' by his people. Most of the time the king was seen as a benevolent despot who worked for the welfare of his people. The theory upheld was that of absolute monarchy based on the divine right to rule. The king was everything to his people. He was the source of all authority and the fountain-head of justice. The administrative system was highly centralised and personalised. Everything, therefore, depended on the character and person of the king. Hence, when Aurangzeb showed himself as a religious bigot and indulged in religious persecution of the worst kind, while indulging in endless wars in the South, central authority weakened, efficiency suffered and administration collapsed. Rajputs, Marathas, Jats, Sikhs and other local elements sought their independence and thus set into motion, forces of disintegration.

#### 1.3.2 Bureaucracy

Organisation of the administrative machinery was unstable. It depended on the whims and fancies of the king. Recruitment was on the basis of caste, kin, heredity and personal loyalty to the king. Administration was based on fear of force. In the name of the king, the officials struck terror in the hearts of people. They wielded much awe and respect among the people.

Officials were primarily engaged to maintain law and order, safeguard the interests of the king from internal uprisings and revolts, defend and extend the boundaries of the empire and collect revenue and other taxes.

Every officer of the State held a mansab or official appointment of rank and profit and was expected to supply a certain number of troops for the military service of the State. Hence, bureaucracy was essentially military in character. Officials or mansabdars were classified into 33 grades, ranging from Commanders of 10 to those of 10,000 soldiers. Each grade carried a definite rate of pay, out of which its holder had to provide a quota of horses, elephants, etc. State service was not by hereditary succession, nor was it specialised.

Officers received their salaries either in cash or through jagirs for a temporary period. The officers did not have ownership of lands in their jagirs, but only the right to collect the revenue equivalent to his salary. The jagir system provided scope for exploitation of the masses and gave undue power and independence to the holders of jagirs. These evils were difficult to check when the Emperor was weak.

### 1.3.3 Army

The army must be understood largely in terms of the Mansabdari system. In addition, there were the supplementary troopers and a special category of "gentlemen troopers" who were horsemen owing exclusive allegiance to the king. The army had cavalry which was the most important unit, the infantry, made up of townsmen and peasants and artillery with guns and navy.

The Moghul army was a mixture of diverse elements. As it grew in numbers it became too heterogeneous to be manageable. The soldiers did not owe direct allegiance to the Emperor but were more attached to their immediate recruiters or bosses and as such were beset with their bitter rivalries and jealousies. Above all, the pomp and splendour of the army proved to be its undoing. The army on the move was like a huge moving city, with all its paraphernalia of elephants, camels, harem, bazars, workshops, etc. Soon indiscipline set in and the inevitable deterioration was fully manifest at the time of Jahangir. No longer capable of swift action, the Marathas, under Shivaji, could score over the Moghuls in battles.

### 1.3.4 Police

In the rural areas, policing was undertaken by the village headman and his subordinate watchmen. This system continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the cities and towns police duties were entrusted to Kotwals. Among their many duties Kotwals had to arrest burglars, undertake watch and ward duties, regulate prices and check weights and measures. They had to employ and supervise work of spies and make an inventory of property of deceased or missing persons. However, the Kotwal's main job was to preserve peace and public security in urban areas. In the districts, law and order functions were entrusted to Faujdars.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the Mansabdari System.

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2) Enumerate the special features of Moghul administration.

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## 1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE MOGHUL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

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### 1.4.1 Central Administration

Central administration, like administration in general, was personal and paternal. The system operated with a fair degree of efficiency as long as the king was able to exercise control from above. As soon as his grip loosened, the system fell to pieces, as seen in the reigns of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb.

The two highest officials were the 'Vakil' and the 'Wazir'. The Vakil, in fact, was higher of the two. He functioned as regent of State and was in over all charge of the State. The 'Wazir' or high diwan was the highest officer of the revenue department. He was actually known as 'Wazir' when he acted as Prime Minister.

The Chief Diwan supervised revenue collection and expenditure. He was head of the administrative wing of Government. He supervised the work of all the high officials. He controlled and guided provincial diwans who along with their subordinates were in touch with him. He signed all kinds of documents and put his seal authenticating government transactions.

The Moghuls had many diwans. Under the high diwan, that is, diwan-e-ala, there was the 'diwan-e-tan' in charge of salaries and 'diwan-e-khalsa' in charge of State (crown) lands. At times, the diwans were also successful military commanders. There was also the 'mustaufi' who audited income and expenditure and the 'waqia-navis' who kept a record of all important farmers.

Among other officials there was the 'Khan-e-sama' or the high steward in charge of royal expenditure, the 'diwan-e-buyutat' who was the understudy of the 'Khan-e-sama', the 'Mir-e-Bakshi', the paymaster-general of the empire and the 'Sadr-e-sudur', the head of the ecclesiastical department.

Apart from the major officials of the central government, there were several others of minor importance who kept the system going. The administrative pattern was based on regulations, traditions and practices.

### 1.4.2 Provincial Administration

Given the centralised and personalised character of Moghul administration, provincial authorities were only administrative agencies of the Centre.

The Empire was divided into 'subas' or provinces. At the head of the province was the 'Subedar' or Governor. He was appointed by imperial order and was given the insignia of office and instrument of instructions which defined his powers, functions and responsibilities. As executive head, he was in charge of the provincial administrative staff and ensured law and order in the province. He tackled local civil and intelligence staff with a firm hand and realised tributes from the local chiefs under him. He also controlled the local Zamindars and contained their political influence.

The provincial diwan was selected by the imperial diwan. Though next in importance to the governor, he functioned independently of him and was subordinate to the imperial diwan. He was in charge of the finances of the province and appointed 'kroris' and 'tehsildars' to induce ryots to pay government dues in time. The diwan also exercised functions of an auditor and exercised full control over public expenditure. His establishment included the office superintendent, the head accountant, the treasurer, and clerks.

The provincial 'bakshi' performed a role similar to that of the 'bakshi' at the Centre. He was responsible for the maintenance and control of troops and kept an account of the salaries and emoluments of all provincial officers in terms of their 'mansabs'.

The 'Sadr' and the 'Qazi' were the two officers at the provincial level which were sometimes united in the same person though there was a distinction in the jurisdiction of the two. 'Sadr' was exclusively a civil judge, but did not handle all civil cases. 'Qazi' was concerned with civil suits in general and also with criminal cases.

### 1.4.3 District and Local Administration

The 'Suba' or province was divided into 'Sarkars' which were of two types. There were those ruled by officers appointed by the emperor and those under the tributary rajas. At the head of each sarkar was the Faujdar who was the executive head. Although Faujdars were subordinate to the provincial governors, they could have direct communication with the imperial government. On his appointment, a 'Faujdar' received advice regarding policy and conduct. He was also in charge of a military force and saw to it that rebellions were put down and crimes investigated.

Apart from the 'Faujdar', the other head of the 'sarkar' was the 'amalguzar'. He was in charge of revenue. Each of them had their own set of subordinate officials. The 'kotwal' did policing of the town and its suburbs.

A 'sarkar' was divided into 'parganas'. Each 'pargana' had a 'shiqqdar', and 'amil' and a 'qazi'. The 'shiqqdar' was executive head and combined in himself the functions of the 'Faujdar' and 'kotwal' of the 'sarkar'. He took care of law and order, criminal justice and general administration. The 'amil's' duties were similar to those of the amalguzar and the 'qazi's' were judicial.

The 'parganas' were further divided into 'Chaklas', which were created to facilitate and improve the realisation and assessment of revenue and had their own set of local officials like the 'Chakladars'. Each of the officials was responsible and accountable to those above.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Make a list of important officials at the Central level.

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2) Make a list of important officials at the provisional and district levels.

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## 1.5 REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

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### 1.5.1 Land Revenue as the Primary Source of Income

The Revenue system needs to be closely studied because land revenue has been traditionally, the primary source of income of the State. The State and the

cultivator were two parties to the contract. The right of the State to a share of the produce was recognised as a principle of political economy from times immemorial. What was disputed and had to be determined periodically was the fixing of the share of each.

In ancient times, the State's share was defined by law-givers as one-twelfth, one-eighth or even one-fourth. However, about one-sixth was realised. While in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the State took half, Akbar kept it at one-third.

### 1.5.2 Types of Land Tenurial Systems

There were three types of land tenurial systems in India. The Zamindari system was prevalent in Bengal and was extended by the British to parts of Madras. Here the Zamindars as the intermediaries played a crucial role. In the Mahalwari system, as seen in the North West Provinces, the settlement of land revenue was with zamindars that held their Mahal (estate) in joint proprietorship and not on an individual basis. The Ryotwari system, seen in North India and the Deccan, did away with all kinds of intermediaries between the State and the ryots or peasants. Though the actual cultivators of the soil were responsible for the annual payment of the fixed revenue, they did not have proprietary rights. These continued to be vested in the State.

### 1.5.3 Administration of Land Revenue

Land tenures were pretty complex and varied from place to place. These could be understood through the following three groups.

- i) Non-proprietary tenures were held by peasant cultivators who worked as tenants and rent-payers. They held land on various conditions and got a share of the produce in cash or kind. Though in theory they could be evicted by the proprietor, yet custom recognised their right to continue as tenants as long as they paid rent.
- ii) The superior proprietary tenures were held by a mixed group. They were descendants or representatives of ancient chiefs and nobles, military chiefs or even middlemen called 'assignees'. They also included hereditary officers and local influential that acted as temporary or permanent owners of the government share of the produce or rent so long as they paid a certain tribute or revenue to the State. They usually took 10% of Government share and were responsible for law and order, land improvement and even administration of justice. These various types of assignees formed the feudal structure of society. They often farmed out their lands and this system of revenue farming was oppressive to the cultivators.
- iii) The subordinate proprietary tenures were in between the earlier two. Their existence came to light as a result of the painstaking researches of Holt Mackenzie and Sir Charles Metcalfe. In the North West Provinces, these formed a large part of the proprietary community and their counterparts were found in Punjab, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

Since the bulk of the State's income originated from land revenue, administration of revenue was much critical. The machinery for collection was elaborate and hierarchical. Apart from the official bureaucracy, there were a whole lot of intermediaries who had a role to play in revenue collection. The net result was that the peasants were exploited and victimised. They were the worst sufferers in the system because of undue extortion. The only gain for them was a certain amount of security as they could not be evicted from their holdings for default of payment.

### 1.5.4 Important Revenue Reforms

Important revenue reforms were introduced during the reign of Akbar when Todar Mal was appointed the Diwan-e-Ashraf. Todar Mal established a standard system of revenue collection, with major highlights as survey and measurement of land, classification of land and fixation of rates. Hence, the overall success or failure of



The office of 'mir'adl' was limited to big cities and towns where the mixed population and advanced commerce gave rise to cases not covered by Quranic law. Here too, there were opportunities for corruption and misuse of authority. Where the 'mir'adl' and 'qazi' were both present, the former exercised a general controlling authority over the 'qazi' who acted under him as a law officer.

### 1.6.2 Administration of Criminal Justice

The Quran was the guide for conduct of criminal justice for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. According to Muhammadan law, crimes were classified under three main heads: (i) Crimes against God; (ii) Crimes against the sovereign; (iii) Crimes against private individuals. Punishment of Crimes was on the following principles: (a) 'Huda' or punishment specified by Quranic law which included death, flogging, etc.; (b) 'Qisas', or retaliation due as a right of man; and (c) 'Tazir' or punishment inflicted at the discretion of the judge, but not defined by law. It included admonition, exposure to public insult and even exile and scourging.

By modern standards of justice, punishments were severe and barbarous. Whipping to death was common. Persons were flayed alive for treason and conspiracy against the State. In the reign of Aurangzeb, no Muslim could be convicted on evidence of a non-Muslim, but the latter could be readily punished on the testimony of a Muslim or any other person.

The operation of regular courts was seriously affected. With the disintegration of the Moghual authority and the collapse of the empire, the operation of regular courts was confined to chief towns where the provincial governors continued to wield a measure of autonomy.

At a later stage, one finds that attempts were made by the Britishers to improve administration of criminal justice.

British administration was especially concerned with criminal branch and sought to do away with the inequities and inadequacies of Islamic law and order to meet the needs of a more advanced society as well as to conform to principles of natural justice and equal citizenship.

Briefly, the principles the Public Administration during the Moghul period could be listed as: Centralisation; personalised administration; civil service; different levels of administration; division of work; bureaucracy having military character; revenue administration based on well laid down principles; administration based on fear of force; administration based on regulations, traditions, and practices; and inadequate unity of command (one could find gaps through illustrations like the position of provincial Diwan, who was directly under the Imperial Diwan and not under the Governor, and the position of Faujdars, who were though under the Governors, yet could have direct communication with the imperial government).

#### Check Your Progress 4

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Describe the types of tribunals for judicial administration.

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2) Explain the distinguishing features of the Moghul judiciary.

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### 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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At the advent of British rule, the administrative system was paternalistic, centralised and personalised. There was an elaborate network of officials at the centre constituting the central secretariat which was repeated at the provincial and local levels. The emperor had the total control of the state. Land revenue was the principal source of income and land tenures were complex, elaborate and a mix of rules, regulations, customs and traditions. The judicial system was under executive dominance and was poorly structured. Society was feudal, with the toiling masses often given a raw deal.

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### 1.8 KEY WORDS

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- Bureaucratic Despotism** : Absolute and domineering rule of bureaucrats in a society.
- Centralised Autarchy** : Government by an individual or a group with absolute and unrestricted authority.
- Intelligentsia** : The educated or intellectual people in a society.
- Monolithic Administration** : Undivided and unitary administration.
- Paraphernalia** : Miscellaneous.

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### 1.9 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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### 1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Functions of the officers holding 'mansabs'
  - Classification of mansabdars into grades
  - Exploitative nature of mansabdari system
- 2) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Army
  - Mansabdari System
  - Police

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) See Sub-Section 1.4.1.
- 2) See Sub-Section 1.4.2 and 1.4.3.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Differences relating to role of intermediaries
  - Differences relating to payment of revenue
  - Differences relating to places where they existed
- 2) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Composition of Assignees
  - Source of Income of Assignees
  - Responsibilities of Assignees
- 3) See Sub-Section 1.5.5.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Two types of tribunals
  - Role of the Chief 'Qazi' and subordinate 'Qazis'
  - Role of 'mir'adl'
- 2) Your answer must include the following points:
  - Justice in Moghul period was based on Quranic Law
  - Classification of crimes into three main heads
  - Nature of punishment
  - Discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims
  - Dominance of executive authority
  - Gradation of Courts