PROLOGUE
The ancient civilization of India differs from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece in that its traditions have been preserved without a break down to the present day. The Indian culture is fully conscious of its own antiquity and has remained fundamentally unchanged for many thousands of years. Our overall impression when we attempt to study her ancient past is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and man and of man and State so fair and humane.

From the days of Plato and Aristotle, European thought has turned its attentions to such questions as the origin of the State and the ideal form of government; as the basis of politics has long been looked on as a branch of philosophy. India also thought about such questions but she had no schools of political philosophy in the Western sense. The problems which form the stock-in-trade of the European political philosophy are answered in Indian texts with very little discussion, and often the only argument in favour of a proposition is the citation of an old legend.

Man was never a political animal but in order to fulfill certain socio-economic obligations he submitted himself to organized forms of government. In ancient India, society, the age old divinely ordained way of life, transcends the State and was independent of it. The King's function was the protection of society, and the State was
merely an extension of the King for the furtherance of that end. Since the State depended on an efficiently organized system of services for the achievement of this goal, an investigation into this aspect of Indian polity seems not only highly desirable but also makes for a study which is valuable, important and interesting too.

Although enough attention has been bestowed on experiments in the political organization of the State in ancient India, ranging from monarchical to those based on democratic principles, the organization of services, their obligations and the manner in which these functions were discharged have been inadequately dealt with. Most of the blame for our imperfect understanding of the organization of administrative services rests at the door of evidential data and its paucity.

The author intends to delve into the ramifications of the bureaucratic system in its entirety, and aims at tracing the gradual development of a systematic pattern of services and their organization in ancient India up till the pre-Gupta period.

There is no pretension that this study is something entirely new because political and administrative organizations of each epoch of ancient India have been
probed into by erstwhile scholars already. The only difference between the present study and those done previously is that while the earlier scholars have confined themselves to merely a theoretical evaluation of the services and their organization, the present work aims at a study of a more practical nature by analyzing the actual machinery of the government.

Ancient India has bequeathed to us a vast treasury of texts which represent the intellectual and literary activities of more than two thousand years and cover a wide field. The earliest literary work, the Samhita of the Rigveda is at least three thousand years old and may even be considerably older. A continuous stream of literature flowing since that remote age, and embracing all fields of human endeavor, excepting political activity, throws a light on Indian civilization such as we do not meet-with in cases of other ancient cultures. But we find no historical texts of any kind, much less a detailed narrative as we possess in the case of Greece, Rome and China.

The principal object of all ancient Indian literature was the study of philosophy, religion, art, letters, the development of society and moral ideas, i.e., the general progress of those humanitarian ideals and institutions which form the distinct feature of the
spiritual life of India and her greatest contribution to the civilization of the world. The study of wars and conquests, the rise and fall of empires and nations, and the development of political ideas and institutions were relegated to a position of secondary importance.

Unfortunately religious and literary sources are neither fully historical nor chronological. The greatest handicap in the treatment of ancient India, both political and cultural, is the absence of a definite chronology.

It is difficult to give a rational explanation of this deficiency of historical source material, but the fact admits of no doubt. It has been suggested that the foreign invasion and alien rule during c.200 B.C. to 300 A.D. may have been responsible for the dearth of political literature in the post-Kautslya period, but this appears improbable.

Though India had no formal political philosophy, the science of statecraft was much cultivated and a number of important textbooks on this topic have survived. The earliest works on polity which are unfortunately lost were probably composed in the seventh century B.C. and the science of polity must have begun to develop somewhere around this time. Systematic literature on the science of polity cannot go back to a time earlier than c.500 B.C.
Abstruse thinking and daring speculation characteristic of Hindu thought in other departments like philosophy and poetics is strangely enough conspicuous by their absence in works of polity.

In the texts on statecraft and sacred laws the authors describe things not as they were in fact, but as they believed they ought to be. Many errors have been made by historians through their uncritical acceptance of these political texts as giving an exact picture of things as they were.

Our knowledge of the Indus Valley people, their political organization and organization of services is zero because of the paucity of evidential material. Till the dawn of the historical period a lack of information hinders investigation; it is only with the arrival of the Mauryas that we find our feet on firmer ground and the scope of our examination can be expanded. Despite the number of problems apparent, the sources at hand help us to paint a tolerably realistic and comprehensive picture of the administrative services in ancient India.

In ancient India political science was known by several terms like Rajadharma, Rajyasstra, Dandaniti, Nitisstra and Arthasastra.
Monarchy was the normal form of State and the science of politics and government was therefore, naturally called Rajadharma or Rajyasstra.

The term Dandaniti is also self explanatory. Like many thinkers of the modern time, some Indian writers like Manu held that the ultimate sanction behind the State is force. Some writers like Kautilya do not understand Danda in its narrow prohibitive aspect. They believe that it establishes law and order in society and thus indirectly brings about a natural tendency in the average individual to obey the law of the land which renders the frequent use of force unnecessary. It deals with the totality of social, political and economic relations and indicates how they are to be properly organized and integrated with one another. The functions and duties of the King and the welfare of the State were therefore, naturally called Dandaniti.

The term Nitisstra was used popularly to designate the science of government, as the greatest propriety, wisdom and circumspection have to be shown in shaping and guiding the internal and foreign policy of the State.

Arthasastra, says Kautilya, is the science which deals with the acquisition and protection or governance of territory.
In the early stages of the development of the science it was known as Rajadharma, Dandaniti became a more popular term a little later and Arthasastra was suggested as an alternative to it. In course of time, the word Rajanitisastra, abridged into Nitisastra became most popular and gradually supplanted the other term.

Though there is no systematic literature on the political scene in the age of the Vedas and the Brahmanas we do find scattered passages providing material ranging from the scanty to the copious. The importance of these passages is enhanced considerably because they refer to an early period when the literature on polity and administration had not yet come into existence. We get valuable glimpses into the position of the King, the prestige he enjoyed, the taxes he collected and the entourage that surrounded him. There are passages which discuss the religious position and privileges of the different castes, especially the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, which are valuable to one intending to study political institutions.

The Pali scriptures of Buddhism throw light on the nature and working of the republics in ancient India.

The earliest and most important textbook specifically devoted to statecraft is the Arthasastra
of Kautilya. The *Arthasastra* is more a manual for the administrator than a theoretical work on polity discussing the philosophy and fundamental principles of administration or of political problems of government and describes its machinery and functions with an exhaustiveness not seen in any later work. It gives very detailed instructions on the control of the State, the organization of the national economy and the conduct of war. The excellence of Kautilya's work was so great that very few among the later writers thought it possible to supersede the great master. That seems to be one of the reasons for the relative dearth of original works in the later history of the science.

We are indebted to the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthasastra* for an account of the works written and theories propounded by pioneer writers like Indra, Brihaspati, Sukra, Brahma, Siva, Manu etc., in this field. It is these books written by human scholars but ascribed to super human authorities which are referred to by the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthasastra*. Unfortunately none of these books have survived to our times. The twelfth book of the *Mahabharata* Santi Parva, is a collection of many disparate passages on statecraft inserted into the body of the epic in the early centuries of the Christian era. We find similar passages in the other great epic the *Ramayana*, too.
The large body of literature, generally called Smritis, is very important in this connection, especially significant is the seventh section of the law book ascribed to the primeval sage Manu, probably composed early in the Christian era. The entire Smriti literature was the work of the Brahmanas who wrote from their own point of view. The Arthasastra written from a secular angle differs from them in many respects. The Smritis have important texts dealing with the duties of the King and the working of administration but they deal with the administrative problems in a general way. Their treatment would have been found inadequate and new books would have come into the field if there had been any intense activity in the realm of political thought; but there was no such activity. New political theories were not adumbrated in later centuries and the semi-religious and semi-moral outlook of the writers was responsible for this. In many ancient kingdoms the advise of the Smritis was not followed but it acquired authority with time. The statements of the Smritis should be cross checked with the Arthasastra, other general literature, inscriptions and writings of foreign travellers.

Our sources in so far as they are foreign, are almost invariably tainted with a bias towards India's conquerors and the research is meagre and disconnected.
Foreign writers left valuable glimpses of India but they are the results of superficial observation, though their value in reconstructing the past is immense. The accounts of Greek historians are very valuable for getting a glimpse into City-states and republics. The Indica of Megasthenese is of very great value for the study of Mauryan administration.

Epigraphic records of ancient India, though valuable, leave many periods unrelated but still they constitute an extremely important source of information. Sometimes they give an idealistic picture but to a very great extent they represent the actual state of affairs in the government-machinery and enable us to ascertain facts and aspects sometimes neglected by literary sources. They are useful in acquiring a correct picture of the territorial divisions and official hierarchy of the different administrations. They give us a graphic idea of the inter-State relations as also of the relation between the suzerain and his feudatories.

The coin legends often prove or confirm the existence of a number of City-states having republican constitutions. The earliest legend about the origin of Kingship occurs in the Aitareya Brahmana, one of the later Vedic texts, perhaps of the 7th or 6th Century B.C. This
legend suggests that in the earliest times Kingship in India was thought to be based upon human need and military necessity, and that the King's first duty was to lead his subjects in war. A little later the Taittiriya Upanishad repeats the story but in a significantly altered form. At this stage the King was still thought of as primarily a leader in war but Kingship had already been given divine sanction and the King of the immortals who was the prototype of all earthly Kings, held his office by the appointment of the Most High.

Even at this time, before the days of the Buddha, the King was exalted far above ordinary mortals through the magical power of the great royal sacrifices. The Royal Consecration (Rajasuya) imbued the King with divine power. The King was evidently the fellow of the gods, if not a god himself.

The Buddhists had their own legend of the origin of Kingship, which involved no heavenly prototype but looked back to a primitive social contract. The Jainas who appeared at about the same time and in the same region, had a somewhat similar legend.

All these legends imply that the main purpose of government is to establish order, and that the King, as the
head of the government, is the first social servant and ultimately dependent on the suffrage of his subjects. Thus in ancient Indian thought, on the question of the origin of the monarchy two strands are evident, the mystical and the contractual, often rather incongruously combined.

The Mauryas left behind them the concept of the Universal Emperor (Chakravartin), which was incorporated in the Buddhist tradition and, blended with later Vedic imperialist ideas was taken over by orthodox Hinduism. The concept of the Universal Emperor was known to the Buddhists and the Jainas while in the Epics we see legendary Kings who were conquerors of all the four quarters (Digvijayins). The Universal Emperor was a divinely ordained figure with a special place in the cosmic scheme, and as such was exalted to semi-divine status.

The invasion of the Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas brought new influences from West and East. Their Kings, following the practice of the orientalized Seleucids and other rulers of the Middle East, took the semi-divine title Tratara. They were not satisfied with the simple title of Raja which had served Asoka, but were Great Kings (Maharaja) and Kings of Kings (Rajatiraja) on the Persian model. The Kushanas, perhaps from the influence of China, where the
emperor was the Son of Heaven, took the further title, Son of the Gods (Devaputra).

With these influences at work, the doctrine of royal divinity was explicitly proclaimed. It appears first in the Epics and the Law Book of Manu. The first King, according to these texts, was imposed on mankind by the gods, without any suggestion of a contract or of human intervention of any kind. These legends stress the divine status of the King, and his divine appointment to the kingly office.

Though the King was an autocrat, not limited by constitutional controls, there were many practical checks on his sovereignty. All text books on statecraft recommend the King to listen to the counsel of his ministers, who are advised to be fearless in debate. Another and very important check was public opinion. The Vedic Raja was limited by Popular or semi-Popular Assemblies (Sabha and Samiti) and though these disappeared in later times Kings were invariably advised to keep a finger on the pulse of public feelings, and never to offend it too blatantly.

The idea of a body-politic, of the State as an organism transcending its component parts, does not seem to have taken any great hold on ancient Indian thought.
classification popular with the theorists enumerates seven elements of sovereignty, which are called angas (limbs), of the human body. But all such analogies are weak and weightless. Society, the divinely ordained way of Indian life, transcends the State and was independent of it. The King's function was the protection of the society, and the State was merely an extension of the King for the furtherance of that end.

The King's function was not conceived in terms of legislation but of protection and this involved the protection not only of his subjects from invasion but also of the order of society; the right way of life for all classes and ages (Varnasrama dharma) as laid down in the ancient texts.

The ideal King was a paragon of energetic beneficence. The Arthasastra puts the kingly duty in simple and forceful language setting an ideal such as few ancient civilizations can boast of; "in the happiness of his subjects lies the King's happiness, in the welfare of his subjects, his welfare. The King's food is not that which pleases him, but that which pleases his subjects."

In all sources the King is told that he must be prompt in the administration of justice and always
accessible to his people. The public audience (durbar) formed a very important instrument of government.

Succession was normally by primogeniture but exceptions might often occur, for the Sacred Law did not allow a diseased, maimed or seriously infirm prince to ascend the throne. Moral perversity might also exclude a prince from succession. Kings sometimes nominated their successors, over-riding the claims of their oldest sons if these were given to evil courses. The absence of a strict rule of primogeniture was the cause of dynastic disputes, and hence undoubtedly led to the weakening of empires.

Ancient India had a system of overlordship which was quasi-feudal, though it was never as fully developed as in Europe and it rested on a different basis.

The typical large kingdom had a central core of directly administered territory, and a circle of vassal kingdoms subordinate in varying degrees to the emperor. These vassals had vassals of their own in petty local chieftains calling themselves Rajas. The Indian system differed from that in Europe in that vassals became so by conquest rather than by contract though the Arthasastra advises a weak King to render voluntary homage if necessary to a stronger neighbour.
The amount of control exercised by the overlord also varied greatly. Among the many threats to the security of a King the revolting vassal was one of the most dangerous. The suzerain's hand weighed very lightly on the more powerful and remoter tributaries, and many claims to homage and tribute amounted to very little. The lesser chiefs, on the other hand, had little more power than the lords of the manor in medieval Europe, though they claimed the proud title of Raja.

Though monarchy was usual in ancient India, tribal States also existed, which were governed by oligarchies. The term "republic" is often used for these bodies but here we must remember that the Ganas or tribes, were not governed like the Republic of India by an Assembly elected by universal suffrage. Nevertheless it is true that in some of these ancient Indian republican communities a large number of persons had some say in the government.

Vedic literature gives faint indications of such tribes at a very early date, and the Buddhist scriptures recognize the existence of many republics in Eastern India. These were mostly tributary to the greater kingdoms, but exercised internal autonomy.

Western India did not feel the force of imperialism
as strongly as the East, and here republican tribes survived for much longer. Several such peoples are mentioned in the classical accounts of Alexander's invasion, the *Arthasastra* and *Mahabharata*. Most of these Western tribes became tributary to the Guptas and finally vanished as a result of the Huna invasion.

"A single wheel cannot turn", says the *Arthasastra*, "and so government is possible only with assistance; therefore a King should appoint Councillors and listen to their advice." The size of the Privy Council (*Mantriparishad*) varied. The Council was not a Cabinet in the modern sense but an advisory body with few corporate functions. Its purpose was primarily to aid and advise the King and not to govern. The Councillors were urged to speak freely and openly and the King should give full consideration to their advice.

The Council exerted great powers and could transact business in the King's absence and make minor decisions without consulting him.

Though the *Arthasastra* advises the King to appoint ministers by merit alone it would seem that in later times most of the Privy Councillors and the whole civil service enjoyed their position by virtue of inheritance.
The functions of the Councillors were not always defined or delimited, and terminology varied considerably. There seems usually to have been a Chief/Great Counsellor (Mahamantrin). With orthodox Kings the court chaplain (Purohita) was very influential. The royal authority was curbed materially by the power and prestige of the Purohita.

The Treasurer and Chief Collector were important officials as was the minister of peace and war. This minister approximated to the foreign secretary of the modern State, had more definite military functions and often accompanied the King on campaigns.

The Chief Judge and legal advisor, the Senapati, or general, were always influential; while the Mahakshapatalika, or Chief record-keeper and secretary, attended the Council meetings. The Senapati exercised military authority in times of war and discharged civil functions in times of peace.

In theory neither the King nor his Council were legislative bodies. Dharma and established custom were inviolable and the King's commands were merely applications of the Sacred Law. Heterodox Kings like Asoka, did from time to time issue orders which were in the nature of new laws. To transmit the royal decrees a corps of secretaries
and clerks was maintained and remarkable precautions were
taken to prevent error. Records were kept with great care,
and nothing was left to chance; the royal scribes themselves
were often important personages.

Councillors and high officials are often referred
to as Mahamatras. There was no high degree of speciali-
zation, and Councillors, like modern Cabinet ministers,
often changed their posts. All of them, even the Brahmanas
and the aged ministers might perform military functions. In
some sources they are divided as deliberative officers
(Matisachivas) and executive officers (Karmasachivas). The
former were Councillors, while the latter correspond to
high-ranking civil servants of modern times.

Of the seven occupational classes into which
Megasthenes divided all the inhabitants of India "those who
deliberate on public affairs" represent the Councillors
while the "Overseers" were the Gudha-Purushas of the
Arthasastra.

The Arthasastra envisages the payment of the many
officials of the State in cash. It's lists of salaries are
obscure since bare figures are quoted without specifying the
type of coin or the period of payment. In any case the list
makes it clear that the crown servant of ancient India like
the Indian civil servant of modern times enjoyed a standard of life much above that of his less fortunate fellows. Later it became usual for Kings to reward their officials by grants of the revenue of a village or district and which helped in the development of the quasi-feudal system of medieval India.

The ancient Indian kingdom was divided into provinces and these into divisions and districts; all with very varied terminology. The Provincial Governor was appointed directly by the King, and was usually a member of the royal family.

District Governors were not usually appointed from the Centre, but by the Provincial Governors and they combined judicial and administrative functions. At this level too, the government was assisted by a Council. We find that the decisions of the District officer were made after consultation with a body of leading residents which included the Chief banker, the Chief caravan leader, the Chief craftsman, and the Chief scribe. These members of the Council were heads of guilds or castes and probably held office by hereditary right.

Cities too had their Councils and had considerable autonomy. In general the most important element in City
administration was the Governor (*Nagaraka*), whose chief responsibilities were revenue collection, and the preservation of law and order, with the help of the police, secret agents and troops. These troops were under a captain (*Dandanayaka*) who might be the Governor himself. The City governor had positive duties too. He was responsible for the cleanliness of the streets, precautions against fire and prevention or alleviation of natural disasters.

The system of government envisaged by the *Arthasastra* involved a check on the movements and actions of all inhabitants of the city through petty officials (*Gopas*) who were also responsible for the collection of revenue and the supervision of a fixed number of households.

At all times the Village was the basic unit of government and the administration organized was essentially rural in character. There was no clear dividing line between a village and a town. In pre-Mauryan times, Collectors were appointed over groups of villages. The Village-headman and the Village Council were the last link in the chain of governmental control. The headman exercised both civil and military functions.

The headman's position was normally a hereditary one and he was looked upon as the King's representative, and
to be replaced at his pleasure. He was remunerated with tax-free land, dues in kind, or both. In larger villages he was an important functionary, with a small staff of village officials (accountant, watchman, toll-collector). These officials too were often hereditary and remuneration was in the same way as that of the headman. The Village Council is rarely referred to, and in most kingdoms it was not recognized as part of the State-machinery.

All ancient Indian authorities on statecraft stress the importance of a full treasury for successful government. At all times the basic tax was that on land, usually called Bhaga (share). Numerous exemptions and remissions were granted.

As well as the basic land-tax several other taxes fell upon the cultivator. Road tolls were collected by the Antapala who was responsible for the upkeep and safety of the road. Tolls were levied at the city gates on incoming merchandise. All craftsmen paid a sort of income tax on average daily earnings. There was also liability to forced labour (Vishti).

So complex a system of tax could not be maintained without surveying and accountancy; the Jatakas refer to the surveyor as Rajjugahaka which may correspond to the Rajjuka of Asoka's inscriptions.
Taxation was theoretically justified as a return for the protection granted by the King; if he fails in his duty he has no moral right to receive tax. On the other hand more than one source speaks of the King as the owner of all the land and water in his kingdom and therefore tax was a sort of rent in return for tenancy.

As early as the period of the Rigveda the idea of a Divine Cosmic Order (Rita) existed; and it was the forerunner of the later concept of Dharma. In Asokan inscriptions and Buddhist sources it has the broad general meaning of “righteousness”. In legal literature it is the divinely ordained norm of good conduct varying according to class and caste. In this context we translate it as the “Sacred Law”.

The King’s duty was chiefly the protection of Dharma and as protector of Dharma he was Dharma Incarnate. The King’s responsibility for maintaining Dharma by means of Danda was not taken lightly. Crime was suppressed through the local officials and garrison commanders, who had large staffs of police and soldiers as well as secret agents. Watchmen kept guard through the night in city and village.

The early Dharmasutras say that the King might be the sole source of justice and his own executioner. But in
general the administration of justice was delegated, the King's court being reserved for appeals and serious crime against the State. The composition of the courts varied with time and place, but the evidence indicates that ancient India preferred a bench of magistrates to a single judge. Though judicial corruption was not unknown, the standards set for judges and magistrates are very high.

As well as the royal courts there were other tribunals which could arbitrate in disputes and deal with minor crimes. These were the councils of villages, castes and guilds whose validity as judicial bodies for their members was fully recognized in the legal literature. They played an important part in the life of the community as did the King's courts.

Perhaps the least pleasant feature of political life in ancient India was the espionage system though it was necessary for the suppression of crime. The Arthasastra envisages a thoroughly organized system. The spy's chief duty was protecting the King's power. He helped the King in keeping a finger on the pulse of public opinion. The secret service was also a means of maintaining the King's popularity.

There is no evidence of a system of permanent
ambassadors which prevented diplomatic relations from being thoroughly organized. Relations between one court and another were maintained by envoys (Duta), who resided at the court to which they were sent while transacting the business in hand.

The Indian army was usually a large one. The ancient Indian army contained more than one type of soldier (hereditary troops, mercenaries, sreni troops provided by corporations, and subordinate allies, enemy deserters, wild tribesmen). Of the four great classes the Kshatriya was the warrior par excellence and no doubt most of the hereditary troops considered themselves to belong to this class, but all classes took part in war.

The traditional divisions of the Indian army were four: elephants, cavalry, chariots, infantry. Some sources add navy, spies, pioneers and commissariat too. According to Megasthenese the Mauryan army was organized under a committee of thirty, divided into sub-committees. The Arthasastra describes the army as organized under a number of Superintendents, with a general (Senapati) at the head of all military affairs. The General was always a very important figure in the realm, and often a member of the royal family. He exercised military authority in times of
war and discharged civil functions in times of peace. Below the General were several captains (Nayakas, Dandanayakas).

Unfortunately we have little information on intricate and controversial issues. For example we have references of persons well advanced in age continuing to hold high offices and also of instances where retired officials were called back to serve once again. We have difficulty in suggesting the type of link existing between the Center and the Provinces and have no certain information regarding the presence of any officials liaisons between the two. Evidence on the transfer of officials from one region or Department to another is also meagre. Inscriptions speak of persons and their offices without any reference to the principle necessitating the existence of these offices. There is no explanation as to how and why one person is holding two or more offices simultaneously. There is no clear cut distinction between the civil, judicial, military and executive duties of several officials making our task more complex. The designations too are open to various interpretations and so it is difficult to ascertain the exact duties and responsibilities of certain officials.

Despite the number of problems apparent the sources at hand help us to paint a tolerably realistic and
comprehensive picture of the administrative services in ancient India.

The path of the author is beset with difficulties, doubts and uncertainties; she has often to advance laboriously through dubious tracks and not seldom loses them altogether. Her task frequently resolves itself into weighing one set of doubtful evidence against another in order to arrive at what appears to her to be the most reasonable conclusion. More often than not, such theories are all that she can offer. The author must clearly recognize the provisional nature of these hypothesis and be ready to see them modified or upset and replaced by others with the discovery of fresh data. They are slender, but necessary foundations, on which the history of India has been built up in the past and has to be built in future.