The present research work *The Mauryan State: A Political Theory Perspective* deals with a topic which belongs to ancient India. Therefore, generally it forms the part of a historical research. Much research has already been done on ancient Indian history and particularly on Mauryan history. Then what was the need for a new research on the same topic? To put it in simpler words; why did I choose the Mauryan state as the topic of my research? This question can be answered properly only if we have an understanding of what is new or what is original. Originality does not only mean to say something which is completely new and which has not been told earlier. If this is taken as definition of originality then only a few and selective modern researches can be described as original researches. In the field of natural sciences where new inventions and discoveries take place such type of originality may be possible. But in the sphere of social sciences the above said originality is seldom possible.

Human civilisation has been experimenting with the ideals of liberty, equality, justice, fraternity etc. since thousands of year. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle the philosophical questions like how should I live politically and what should be the legitimising principle for organising the state have been raised and in every age there have been philosophical and intellectual responses to these questions by different philosophers in different ways. For example Plato defined justice as the right stage of human soul and an ideal of dutifulness which helps in maintaining harmony in the society and keeps the city-state intact. Aristotle being a realist philosopher looked at the applied aspect of justice and formulated the notions of retributive justice, distributive justice and cumulative justice. In modern days John Rawls relooked at the conception of distributive justice and explained justice as fairness. On the other hand Robert Nozick also talked of distributive justice but explained justice as entitlement. Now if originality means to deal with a concept which is completely new then all the above philosophers
lack originality because they dealt with the same old concept of justice. But we do recognise them as original thinkers which means there are alternative notions of originality. Any research can be described to be an original research in three ways:

1. The topic or subject of the research is new. This is a type of research in which we select a completely new topic for our analysis.
2. The topic may not be new but the sources which have been used are new in a way that they are different from the old sources.
3. The topic and sources both are traditional but new historical or analytical insights emerge.

If the present research work is to be judged on this criteria it is new in the sense that it explores the Mauryan state as a source to provide possible solutions to certain problems faced by the present Indian state. Can the past be used as a source to provide solutions to our present day problems? Though the research work deals with ancient India in general but it is particularly concerned with the Mauryan state.

The central hypothesis of my research is that the Mauryan state carries significant lessons for the present Indian state with respect to three problems:

1. The problem of national integration
2. The problem of federal autonomy and
3. The problem of personality- institution dichotomy.

There have been many researches on the Mauryan state but none of them have focused on these three specific issues. In this sense the present research work is new. To differentiate the present research work from earlier researches let us have a glimpse of the important earlier research works which have been done on the Mauryan state.
Review of Literature

The study of Mauryan historiography begins with the imperialist administrators like James Mill and V.A. Smith. They wrote the history of India to serve the interest of British imperialism. James Mill divided Indian history into three periods—the Hindu period, the Muslim period and the British period. Mill’s History of India was one of the prescribed texts at institutions like Haileybury College where English officers received their training before coming to India. Smith believed that India had a long tradition of oppressive despots—a tradition which ended only with the advent of the British. The clear implication of such an attitude was that the Indians were not fit to rule themselves. The British wrote on early Indian history with a view to providing historical justification for the Raj and its exploitation of Indian resources. This quite often led to gross distortion of historical evidence.

Evangelists like Shore and Grant backed by the missionaries attempted to justify British rule in India on the ground that it was divinely conceived. They provided an ideological base for “white man’s burden theory”.

In response to the Imperialist School, the Extremist School of Bankim, Tilak, Dayanand Saraswati, Savarkar and K.P. Jayasawal asserted the superiority of Hindus over Western culture. The Vedas were regarded as the repository of all knowledge and rational thought. Indian scholars now regarded the Indo-Aryans as the originators of human civilisation with India as its cradle. B.G. Tilak tried to prove that the Rig Veda was composed as early as 4000 B.C.E. K.P. Jayasawal thought that long before Europe built up democratic and self-governing institutions India had known and practised them. India’s struggle against Britain for self-rule was justified. Thus nationalist historians provided an ideological weapon to the national movement.

The other response from the Indian side was from the Rationalist School of Rajendralal Mitra, R.C. Dutt, R.G. Bhandarkar, H.C. Raychaudhury and those
who were not intoxicated by the nationalist sentiments, but viewed events more objectively in order to rectify the errors committed by Europeans in respect of Indian history. Mitra published a tract to show that in ancient times beef eating was not a taboo. Bhandarkar, being a social reformer, supported widow remarriage and castigated the evils of the caste system and child marriage on the basis of his study of the ancient Indian texts.

The Marxist school started with D.D. Kosambi. In Kosambi’s view the history of society, economy and culture was an integral part of the development of the forces and relations of production which can provide a rational basis for periodisation. Later on this tradition was enriched by historians like Romila Thapar, Ram Sharan Sharma and D.N. Jha.

The main historians who wrote about the Mauryas in particular in the pre-independence era include the names of V.A. Smith, D.R. Bhandarkar, R.K. Mukherjee and H.C. Raychaudhury. Among Vincent Smith’s major works on the Mauryan period are Asoka the Buddhist Emperor of India (Rulers of India series) and The Early History of India. In his Ashoka (1923) D.R. Bhandarkar argued that a change in foreign policy from Yuddhavijaya to Dhammavijaya made by Ashoka rendered easy the foreign invasions, Greek and Turanian. The impacts of this change in policy were politically disastrous. It sounded the death knell of the Indian aspiration of a centralised national state and world wide empire. R.K. Mookerjee wrote two books on Mauryan history, Chandra Gupta Maurya and his Times and Ashoka. In these books he gives an account of the origin and early life, conquest and chronology, administrative ideals, of these two kings. In his Political History of Ancient India, first published in 1923, H.C. Raychaudhury gave a dispassionate account of the origin, ancestry and conquests of Chandra Gupta Maurya. The achievements of Ashoka were examined by him critically.
In post-independence India the main writers on Mauryan history include the names of R.C. Majumdar, A.L. Basham, S. Chattopadhyaya, Buddha Prakash, D.D. Kosambi, Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma, D.N. Jha and G. M. Bongard-Levin.

*Ancient India* of R.C. Majumdar, first published in 1952, may be regarded as the response of a senior Indian historian to the work of Vincent Smith. On the other hand, in his *Wonder that was India* first published in 1955, A.L. Basham seems to make a conscious effort to prove his bonafides as an English historian who is academically impartial but is at the same time a great admirer of Indian culture. K.A. Nilkanta Sastri edited the book *The Age of Nandas and Maurya*. Sastri’s approach to the history of Ashoka was traditional in nature and his treatment of the Mauryan polity was based on the acceptance of the *Arthashāstra* as the authentic text of the Mauryan period. In his *Bimbisara to Ashoka* S. Chattopadhyaya has gleaned evidence from different sources, comparatively early and late, but in assessing their value he has not always exercised a critical judgement. Buddha Prakash in his *Studies in Indian History and Civilisation* wrote several illuminating chapters on the early Mauryas. D.D. Kosambi, the author of *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* and *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* accepted the Marxist formulations of Asiatic mode of production (with some reservations) to explain Mauryan history. According to Kosambi the Mauryan government flourished on a powerful cash economy and a vast salaried bureaucracy including a developed police system for coercion. But Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, much softened the coercive power of the Mauryan state by introducing serious changes in the administration.

Romila Thapar represents the newly emerging Marxist approach to ancient Indian historiography. Her famous study *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* published from Oxford in 1961, raised Mauryan historiography to a new level. She attempts to place Ashoka in historical perspective against the background of
the third century B.C.E. India and to distinguish, as far as possible, between Ashoka the man and Ashoka the monarch. The greatness of Ashoka according to her is to be understood in the context of his time. Romila Thapar is at her best while explaining the concept of Ashoka’s policy of Dhamma with the help of the edicts. She opines that Ashoka’s policy of Dhamma was an attempt to reform the narrow attitudes of religious teachings, to protect the weak against the strong and to promote throughout the empire a consciousness of social behaviour so broad in its scope that no cultural group could object to it. In her chapter “Ashoka’s India and the Gupta age” contributed to The Cultural History of India she draws attention to the role of economy, bureaucratic system, standing army, paternalistic ideal of kingship, development of means of production, use of shudras as free labour, development of towns and urban culture etc. Her books A History of India and The Maurya’s Revisited also throw light on Mauryan history.

R.S. Sharma deals with the administrative, social and economic problems of ancient India and particularly the Mauryan era in his Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Shudras in Ancient India, Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India and his numerous research papers. He conceptualised the rise of Magadh as a natural outcome of the expansion of material culture in the Gangetic plains. According to Sharma, a distinguishing feature of the Mauryan economy was the state control of agriculture, industry and trade, and the levy of all varieties of taxes on the people. D.N. Jha in his book Ancient India: an Introductory Outline assigns the Kautilya Arthashāstra to the Mauryan age and explains the administrative and socio-economic developments of this period on the same lines. G.M. Bongard-Levin’s Mauryan India is concerned entirely with Mauryan history while his A Complex Study of Ancient India: a Multidisciplinary Approach deals only with some problems of this period. In his works Bongard-Levin exhaustively deals with a range of topics including political history, economic and social developments, administrative system and religious and philosophical trends.
A Three Fold Focus

From the above analysis it is clear that immense work has been done on Mauryan history. But most of these works have been done by historians. They have generally adopted the descriptive methodology. Most of them have covered all aspects of the Mauryan history. This research work is different from the earlier works because the present research work focuses on three specific issues – the issue of national integration, federal autonomy and personality-institution dichotomy and explores the Mauryan state to provide some solutions to the present Indian state with respect to these three issues. The present research compares the problems faced by the Mauryan state and the present Indian state and critically examines whether we can revisit the Mauryan state to find out solutions for problems of the present Indian state.

We know that the Mauryas were the first dynasty to establish a pan-Indian empire. They were facing many problems some of which are still faced by the developing countries and particularly by the Indian state. There are a number of similarities between the past and the present. Looking at these similarities a question naturally comes before us of whether we can explore our past for providing solutions to our present day problems? The question becomes more complex due to the fact that there is a great difference between the socio-economic and cultural environment of the present and the past. Besides, it is said that the concepts like nationalism, federalism and multiculturalism are modern day phenomena and there was no adequate conceptualisation and theorisation in ancient India on these issues. Therefore, to critically examine the relevance of the past to the present has been the main concern of my research work. In my research work I have taken three such problems.

The first is the problem of national integration. Almost all developing countries including India are facing the problem of integration of people of different religions, races, castes, regions and ethnicities into the mainstream of
national life. They look at the West for a conceptual framework of nation building. The Western concept of nation state which is often called the child of the French Revolution is based on the ideal of “one nation one state”. The doctrine of national self-determination provides a theoretical base for it. But this concept of one nation one state is not applicable to the third world countries or post-colonial states like India because they consist of people speaking many languages, practising different religions and having different customs and cultures. In short, these states consist of multicultural nationalities and identities. Therefore, it is said that the basis of nation building in these states should be such as could recognise the composite culture of these nations.

Mauryan Diversity

In ancient India also we find such diversity and at the same time we see attempts to create unity out of this diversity. At a metaphysical level there have been long-ranging ontological discussions regarding the nature of Reality, and the consensus which was set out in the *Upanishadas* was that while there was a single Reality behind all the multiplicity, this Reality or Unity could manifest itself in multiple ways. This belief led to the concept of the trinity of *Brahmā, Vishnu*, and *Mahesh*, each of which represented specific aspects of truth, yet each was complete in itself. This concept of polytheistic monism had important cultural consequences: it was not necessary to obliterate the existing religious ideas and beliefs of different peoples who were conquered by the ruling elites, but to give almost equal respect to all religious sects and beliefs.

If we particularly look at the Mauryan state the expansionist Mauryan state was also facing this problem during the process of integration of different groups of people in the mainstream of imperial life. As far as religious diversity is concerned the Mauryan state consisted of orthodox and heterodox sects. In popular life these sects were represented as the Brahmins and the Sramanas. The brahmins were orthodox. They believed in the supremacy of Veda. They were
basically the followers of traditional Hinduism. Besides Brahmins there were heterodox sects (who did not accept the supremacy of Veda) like the Buddhists and Jainas. They were described as the Sramanas. We find reference to these religious sects frequently in the inscriptions of Ashoka. Besides these three dominant sects— the Brahmins, Buddhists and Jainas— there were other small sects like the Ajivikas and Charvakas. This situation may be compared with the religious diversity of modern India where we find the existence of various religious groups like the Hindus, Muslims and so on.

Similar to tribal diversity of modern India, we find the existence of forest folk in the Mauryan state. Various edicts of Ashoka mention semi-civilised groups like the hunters and fishermen in the bordering areas of the empire. They were still not a part of a system based on agrarian and urbanised economy. We see reference to these people in the 13th rock edict in which Ashoka warns the forest folks and asks them to obey the royal decrees otherwise the imperial army would destroy them. These people had their own lifestyle which was different from the lifestyle of Pataliputra and Magadh.

Another source of diversity in the Mauryan state was the presence of a foreign population. The Mauryan empire contained a noticeable number of foreigners like the Greeks. In the North-Western part of the kingdom, the centre of this cosmopolitan Indo-Greek life, was the city of Taxila. Bordering the Greek settlements of the trans-Indus region and farther West, situated on an important highway, it acted as the meeting-ground of the two streams of Indian and Western ideas. Since it also had the official prestige of being a provincial capital and was an important commercial centre, the result was a happy situation where foreign ideas, although they did not modify Indian orthodoxy, were at least allowed to coexist. A fair amount of mutual understanding and respect must undoubtedly have ensued.
In the Mauryan empire there was a significant degree of regional diversity also. The Mauryan empire consisted of various regions which were culturally and geographically different from one another. These regions were divided into various provinces for administrative convenience. In Ashokan edicts we find reference to four provinces:

- North-Western province (capital Taxila)
- Western province (capital Ujjayini)
- Eastern province of Kalinga (capital Toshali)
- Southern province (capital Suvarnagiri).

In linguistic terms also we see tremendous diversity in the Mauryan state. Sanskrit was the language of the elite class. During Ashoka’s time Prakrit also got prominence and it was the language of Ashoka’s court. The popular languages of the masses were Pali and other vernacular languages. The hill and forest tract of central India just to the South of the tract watered by the Ganges were Austric and Dravidian in speech; also Bengal and Assam, Orissa; and within the Aryandom of the upper Gangetic area and the Punjab, particularly within the former, there were still large areas, or small pockets, of non-Aryan speech which were fast becoming smaller and smaller. In tracts far away from Arya-land, where Dravidian and also probably Kol (Munda) languages were spoken, the edicts were published in this Eastern official speech for example, at Dhauli and Jaugada in the Kalinga country, which was both Dravidian (old Telugu and old Kannada) and Kol in speech, and at Siddhapur, Maski and Yerragudi where the language was equally Dravidian (old Kannada).

Thus the Mauryan empire possessed multifarious diversity and it was in search of a unifying principle which could create unity out of this diversity. The solution to this problem lay in a policy which was simple, based on common faith, and included the common elements of all the faiths and beliefs. Only this type of policy could act as a cementing force to join the different sections and groups.
present in the empire. The policy of Dhamma was a response to this problem. Ashoka, the greatest of all Mauryas, invented a cementing force in the form of the policy of Dhamma which could create unity in diversity and could protect diversity in unity in a multicultural society. Dhamma was a code of morality rather than a system of religion. In his policy of Dhamma Ashoka never discussed metaphysical doctrines nor referred to God or soul, but simply asked the people to have control over their passions, to cultivate purity of life and character in inmost thoughts, to be tolerant to the other’s religion, to abstain from killing or injuring animals and to have regard for them, to be charitable to all, to behave with decorum to parents, teachers, relatives, friends and ascetics, to treat slaves and servants kindly, and, above all, to tell the truth. It was a political ideology. Some thinkers believe that this all inclusive ideological device can still guide the plural nations in the process of nation building.

But when we look to our past, a question again comes that can the modern idea of national integration be applied to a political system which existed almost 2300 years ago and was in the form of an empire?

Federal Autonomy

The second problem which has been dealt in the present research work is the problem of federal autonomy. The nature of the present Indian state is that of a centralised federalism often described by critics as “quasi-federal”, “noticeably centripetal” or “vertical federation”. It contains both federal and unitary features. Though the founding fathers of the Constitution tried to make a thin balance between the unity and integrity of the nation on the one hand and autonomy of the regions on the other hand, the operational aspect of federalism has not been satisfactory. In many areas like in the North-Eastern regions of India separatist movements emerged. Similarly, Punjab remained disturbed for quite a long period and our Southern states like Tamil Nadu quite often complain of the cultural hegemony of the Hindi speaking Northern India over other parts of the country.
Some of these regions went to the extent of waging a war of secession from the Indian state.

In the era of globalisation and coalition politics we see a greater tendency towards political federalisation and economic liberalisation subsequently mutually reinforcing each other. Decline of Congress’s control over the economy is prefigured by the decline of the national party system. One-party majority governments, the norm until 1989, are replaced by federal coalition governments in which regional parties play an important role.

Economic liberalisation diluted the role of the Planning Commission. The permit-quota-license raj has been increasingly replaced by a market economy in which the private sector must by conscious design play a larger role than the public sector. Political federalisation is the result of collapse of the all India party system or the weakening of the Congress party and emergence and electoral success of regional parties in various states. The 1980s accelerated the process of the Indian political system’s adaption to the sub-national regional pressures for a more federal polity. This new trendsetting has made the state governments important economic actors instead of the Central government, and is becoming an unstoppable phenomenon.

Another important impact of globalisation on Indian federal arrangements can be seen in the form of growing regional disparity which is the result of uneven development of different regions. Some states like Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat etc. have been successful in trapping the opportunities of globalisation. Due to good infrastructural facilities and law and order situation they have acted as a hub for investment of global capital. On the other hand some other states (mainly the so called BIMARU states) have not equally benefitted from the forces of globalisation. This imbalance has increased regional disparity in India which is a potential threat to its unity and integrity. This regional unrest has been explained on various grounds. At the global level Dependency theorists like A.G. Frank
opine that the developed countries are the core or the metropolis and the developing countries are the periphery or the satellite. The appropriation of surplus takes place by the core from the periphery. Some theorists have applied this core-periphery model to the internal conditions of developing countries by formulating the notion of internal colonialism. According to this notion in a country itself there are core areas and peripheral areas and the core area or the heartland is enriched by the flow of surplus from the remote areas.

The Mexican sociologist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova argues that the same conditions of traditional colonialism are found internally in nations today. These conditions include monopoly and dependence, relations of production and social control, and culture and living standards. A derivation of the theory of internal colonialism is the theory of ‘poles of development’, first set forth by the French economist Francois Perroux and elaborated by the Brazilian geographer Manuel Correia de Andrade. This theory assumes that underdeveloped economies are characterised by a dual economy with advanced areas existing alongside subsistence ones. In capitalist states areas rich in natural resources and in socialist nations planned centres served as the basis of poles of development. In developing countries the main reasons for regional unrest lies in the economic exploitation of remote areas and the fear of these regions losing their socio-cultural personality in the overall national personality. Thus, today we see both the forces of integration and disintegration working together at the national level and global levels.

If we look at the history of ancient India, we see similar forces of integration and disintegration or unity and diversity co-existing together. Looking at the political aspect of the situation in ancient India we observe that the kingdom was generally the portion of the region on which a rājā ruled. These were small areas and there was one chakravartī rājā, who was paid annual tributes by the smaller rājās and in turn the chakravartī rājā provided protection from any aggression to the small rājās or vassals under him. To establish his suzerainty
over the vassals, the chakravarti rājā used to perform Aswamedha yajña in which the vassal rājās paid their tributes in recognition of his overall lordship over them. Otherwise these rājās were autonomous within their regions. The invasion of one rājā over the other was generally not for the purpose of annexing the rājya but to take presents and return the rājya to him to be ruled as a vassal state under the suzerainty of the conqueror. In this way although there were small kingdoms yet they were under the suzerainty of an overall chakravarti rājā. Thus, the polity presided over by a chakravarti ruler was, in essence, a loose federation.

If we look at the Mauryan state in particular, there also we find both the forces of integration and disintegration operating together. The Mauryan state was definitely centralised at the core, but the peripheral areas enjoyed a sufficient amount of autonomy. The empire was divided into provinces and the rulers of the provinces had enough autonomy though the broader policy framework was decided by the Central government. The provincial rulers accepted the sovereignty of the emperor ruling at the Centre. There were officers like Samāhartā (the chief revenue assessor and collector) who controlled the overall revenue collection of the empire. This suggests that the higher officers came from the metropolitan state or the core regions. But the actual collectors at the level of village and town might have been local appointees. Due to topographical factors communication was very difficult in ancient India. It was much slower during the monsoons. Therefore, the Central government was not in a position to always effectively force the provinces to act according to its own will. We also find the reference of revolt by the provincial governors against Central rule and sometimes it resulted in the decentralisation or even complete autonomy from the Centre. Due to a vast distance between Pataliputra, the capital city and the remote border areas and also underdeveloped means of communication, it was very difficult for the Central government to exercise full and effective control over the provinces. Thus, one must a priori assume the existence of local representatives of the king, who had at their disposal a large amount of power.
If the theory of internal colonialism is applied to the Mauryan state we can see that Magadh was the centre or nucleus and other areas like Taxila and Kalinga were the periphery. The Mauryan state like the present Indian state did control a large territory with culturally differentiated people and its nucleus; the state of Magadh was enriched by the flow of revenue and resources from other regions. The boundary areas like Kalinga, Taxila and Saurashtra had their separate cultural existence. All these factors created alienation among the inhabitants of these areas. As a result, a feeling of unrest which sometimes took the form of revolt became a common phenomenon. Historical sources tell us that revolt took place in Taxila twice.

Looking at these similarities some historians opine that a serious look at the Mauryan polity may help us in analysing the nature of current Indian federalism and in tackling the problem of federal autonomy. But again the question arises of whether we can use the modern concepts of federalism and regionalism in the context of a state which existed long before? The essence of federalism lies in devolution of power. But this devolution should be on a contractual basis and not on the basis of the arbitrary will of the Centre. This theoretical lacuna makes the problem more complex requiring a research based explanation.

**Personality-Institution Dichotomy**

The third research problem is related to the conflict between the personality and the institution or in other words between personalised politics and institutionalised politics. In most of the developing countries nationalism is the legacy of anti-colonial or anti-imperialist struggle. Sometimes third world nationalism is called elitist nationalism because it did not emerge from the bottom but started at the top. It is negative in the sense that its main goal was to overthrow alien rule and get national independence. In the post-independence era this phenomenon usually led to the emergence of a charismatic leader which
overshadowed all aspects of national political life. This leader in the post-independence era due to his overarching personality overshadowed all aspects of national life. This created order, stability and discipline and respect for authority in these newly independent states but at the same time whether knowingly or unknowingly it inhibited the development of institutions. This dichotomy between personality and institution was responsible for the rise and growth of personalised politics instead of institutionalised politics.

Generally the institutions like parliament, bureaucracy, judiciary and political parties are considered to be an indispensable part of modern democratic regimes and democracy cannot operate in the absence of these institutions. Public demands are effectively converted into policies, decisions and outcomes through these institutions. Therefore, institution-building is one of the primary concerns of democracy. The strength of democracy depends upon the strength of its institutions. In the absence of a systematic authority link between the state and civil society, tendencies towards centralisation and powerlessness are generated. Without parties or other political institutions, the link between the leaders and their supporters is very weak. Elections are won on general, non-programmatic issues and in such a case it becomes very difficult to translate such general mandates into policies. In such a condition though the formal authority of the state increases, its actual power declines.

If we look at the Indian scenario institutional politics begins with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Since its formation in 1885 the Indian National Congress remained an organisation of Anglicists with a very narrow social base till 1920 when Gandhi revised the Congress and tried to institutionalise it. In the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 two important decisions were taken:

1. use of regional languages (vernaculars) in the proceedings of Congress and
2. institutionalisation of Congress Party from village level to national level.
But though the Congress party was sufficiently institutionalised after 1920, Gandhi played a decisive role in the formulation of its policies no matter who was the President of the Party. Though Gandhi had tremendous influence over the policies of Congress, he never damaged its institutional base. In every village, bloc, district and province Congress committees worked autonomously. They were dominated by the local elites and workers and no efforts were taken to impose leadership from the top.

In post-independence India Nehru emerged as the most powerful leader of the Congress party. Though Nehru wielded a charismatic personality and during the General elections ‘strengthen the hands of Nehru’ used to be the popular slogan, the institutional base of the Congress party was not weakened. Nehru himself was a great democrat by temperament and though he had the opportunity to become a dictator by virtue of the popular support he had, he encouraged democratic norms and institutions to flourish. While Nehru was definitely ‘the first among equals’, the fact is that the Cabinet government during this early period was a reality, parliament functioned as an important deliberating and debating forum, the opposition was treated with respect, the Congress party had internal democracy and an identity independent of the government, chief ministers of states often possessed independent political bases, and such other state institutions as the Constitution, the civil service and the judiciary enjoyed a degree of non-partisan integrity. There were thus important institutional checks on the personal power of Nehru.

In Indian politics the rise of Indira Gandhi to power marks the real beginning of personalised politics. In this era of personalised politics personal loyalty, not party commitment, became the touchstone for preferment and promotion. The simultaneous rise of plebiscitary democracy and personal politics under Mrs. Gandhi’s guiding hand obviated the need for an organisation capable of articulating with society, serving and leading the political community, and
fighting elections. The rise of plebiscitary democracy and the demise of mediated politics resulted as much from unintended consequences of ad-hoc actions as from design or conspiracy. As Indira Gandhi became Congress’s most vital resource, the key to political power and personal advancement, the party and the person tended to become one until, in the rich prose of party president D. K. Barooah, the phrase “Indira is India, India is Indira” could be spoken to a grateful but anxious party following. As the myth of Indira Gandhi began to inspire and diminish India, the party that she led lost its institutional coherence and elan.

If we revisit the Mauryan polity we find a similar trend of development of personality politics particularly during the reign of Ashoka. By formulating the policy of *Dhamma* Ashoka tried to establish a patrimonial relationship with his subjects. He declared that ‘all men are my children’. He was available for his subjects even at his private residence. If we look at the inscriptions of Ashoka, it becomes quite obvious that the emperor most of the time tried to directly address the people through his edicts. All his declarations were the declarations of an emperor who wanted to make direct contact with his subjects. The widespread presence of his inscriptions suggests that they were spread throughout the empire from North to South. Thus even at those remote places where he could not interact with his subjects directly and frequently, he tried to do this through his inscriptions. At every important occasion and social gathering these inscriptions were read out to the public. In this way he sidelined the mediating links and institutions which came between him and his subjects. This system might have positive implications from the perspective of making the administration sensitive to the needs of the people but in the long run it resulted in the weakening of the institutions. Personality of the monarch became so dense and influential that it overshadowed institutions. In his edicts Ashoka used the title *devānāmpiya* meaning beloved of the Gods. This declaration of the monarch being the representative and grace holder of God also helped to intensify the importance of the personality of the ruler over that of the institutions.
This policy could work successfully during the reign of an able and influential emperor like Ashoka. But if the monarch was not able and influential, the same policy might lead to dangerous consequences. The strength of any state or system depends finally on the institutions which continuously carry out the responsibilities of administration and rule. But if the institutions are not well established and strong the system may collapse. Looking at the Mauryan empire one may clearly see that the empire worked successfully while Ashoka, the ablest of all the Mauryas, remained at the helm of affairs. But the successors of Ashoka did not possess that personal authority or charisma. Hence in the era of weak successors finally the empire collapsed because it lacked the necessary institutions strong enough to sustain it.

Textual Authenticity

Besides these three important issues, present research work also throws some light on the issue of authenticity of the *Arthashāstra* as a text of the Mauryan period. There are two groups of scholars having different viewpoints regarding this issue. According to first viewpoint supported by R. Shamasstry, N.N. Law, V.A. Smith, Fleet and K.P. Jayasawal the magnum opus, the *Arthashāstra*, was written by the famous prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Hence, it is a document of the Mauryan era. On the other hand Winternitz, Jolly, Keith and D.R. Bhandarkar claim that it is a later work, written in the early centuries of the Christian era. The present research work supports the first viewpoint and accepts the *Arthashāstra* as the main literary source for Mauryan historiography. The *Arthashāstra* is a text of Mauryan times because other sources, mainly the archaeological sources, for example, the edicts of Ashoka, complement the *Arthashāstra* and hence we find a co-relation between the Mauryan real politic and the verses of the *Arthashāstra*. Many institutions are common in the Ashokan inscriptions and the *Arthashāstra*. Similarities between the terms used in the *Arthashāstra* and in the Ashokan edicts suggest that the
Mauryan rulers were well acquainted with the book. It seems that originally it was a Mauryan document though the book was edited and rewritten during later centuries. The description of the Mauryan state in this research work is also chiefly based on the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya.

**Research Methodology**

As far as the methodology of the present research work is concerned, it is primarily library based. The main methods that have been used in the present research are:

a) Historical method  
b) Comparative method  
c) Analytical method

In the present research work though there is no addition of new data but under the historical method two important activities have been performed:

a) new interpretation of known data. The interpretation of data involves activities like elaboration, explanation, evaluation and critical examination of known facts.  
b) conceptualisation and theorisation on the basis of interpretation of data.

Comparative method is used in two ways:

a) Horizontal comparison  
b) Vertical comparison

Under horizontal comparison the Mauryan political institutions have been studied in comparison with the other contemporary political systems prevalent in ancient India like the republics present in the Western part of the sub-continent. Under vertical comparison Mauryan political institutions have been studied in comparison with the political institutions and system of modern India. But in the present research work I have mainly focused on comparing the Mauryan political
system with the modern Indian political system. Therefore, the present research work mainly uses the method of vertical comparison. Mauryan political institution and modern Indian political institutions have been compared with respect to three issues: the issue of national integration, federal autonomy and personality-institution dichotomy in politics.

Both archaeological and literary sources have been examined in the present study. Regarding Mauryan historiography the main literary sources are:

a) Various legends – Jaina, Buddhist and Brahminical concerning Chandragupta, Ashoka and other Mauryas in Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit and other languages. The main Buddhist texts are *Dīpvamsha, Mahāvamsha, Milindpanho, Divyāvadāna* and *Manjūsrīmūlakalpa*. Main Jaina texts are *Brihatkathā Kosa* of Harisen and *Aradhanākathā Kosa* of Neminath.

b) Brahminical works such as the *Arthashāstra* of Kautilya and the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patanjali.

c) Greek accounts having bearing upon the Mauryas, their foreign relations and administration as well as the geography and the general history of India.

d) Itineraries of such Chinese pilgrims as Fa-hsien, Yuan Chwang and I-tsing in respect of the facts recorded by them as eye-witnesses and the current legends that they were told by their informants.

The present research work uses many of these literary sources but the chief literary source has been the *Arthashāstra* of Kautilya.

Among the archaeological sources for the study of the Mauryan empire are included:

1) Inscriptions of Ashoka
2) Monuments found in excavations
3) Coins (mostly punchmarked coins)
4) Pottery, terracottas and other materials belonging to the Mauryan period.

Out of these archaeological sources, the present research work primarily uses the inscriptions of Ashoka as the main archaeological source.
Chapter-1

State and Society in Ancient India