The Mantrins, Their Qualifications
And Methods of Appointment
It could not be possible for a king, however, efficient, energetic and disciplined to handle the affairs of the state single handed. Therefore, the ancient Indian constitutional writers formulated the institution of ministers and advised the king to seek their assistance.

The Rāmāyana states that if a sovereign surrounds himself with ten thousand ignorant persons he will recover no help from them but should a king be attended by a wise minister thoughtful, studious, versed in the moral ways and governmental policy he will reap a great adventure.\(^1\) The Mahābhārata also recognises the importance of ministers and lays down that it will not be possible for a king to run the administration of a state even for three days without the assistance of ministers.\(^2\) Manu opined that the king should appoint seven or eight carefully examined ministers.\(^3\) Kautilya\(^4\) though a firm believer of monarchy did not favour one man’s rule and states that the king should appoint ministers and listen their opinion. The Sukranitisāra states, 'Sovereignty in a kingdom is deprived of his beauty if there is the king but there are no ministers, well disciplined kinsmen and restraint off-springs.'\(^5\)

We do not possess any information regarding the appointment of Ratnins during the Vedic period.
'Samiti in the Vedic age was a popular body and it is not unlikely that the Ratnina were selected from its members'. It is probable that the institution of ministers came into existence with the disappearance of the Ratnin council of the Vedic Aryans.

A critical study of the ancient Indian sources reveal that the authorities had divergence of opinions regarding the mode of appointment of ministers. Some laid stress on the heredity, while others considered merit and worth of a person as a criterion for the appointment of the ministers.

Kaunapadanta was of the opinion that those persons should be appointed whose father and grandfather had been minister. The Ramayana the Mahabharata, the Manusmrti also refer to the hereditary ministers.

The epigraphical records bear the testimony that the ministers were appointed hereditarily. We have spooner's seal from Vaiśali in which we find that Amātya Hastabala was the son of the Amātya Bhandārika. In the Allahabad Pillar inscription we find that Harisena had one of his office (Mahādandanāyava) which was previously under his father Dhruvabhūti. In the reign of Chandragupta II Virasena alias Saba of Pataliputra calls
himself the hereditary minister as well as the minister of peace and war in the Udayagiri cave inscription. Another important case of the hereditary minister is found in the Karamadanda inscription of Gupta Era 117 - (446 - 447 A.D.) We find that Kumārāmātya Śikharāsvāmin a Brāhmaṇa was the minister of Chandragupta II and his son the Kumārāmātya Prthvīsena was at first the minister of emperor Kumaragupta I but later on he became the commander-in-chief. In the Parivarājaka administration Suryadatta was a minister in 482 A.D. and his son Vībhudatta 28 years later. We find that under the Chandellas five generations of one family, Prabhāsa his son Śivanāga, his son Gagadhara, worked as ministers or Prime ministers. Lahaṣa was minister under Madanavarman and his son Sallakshāna and his grandson Purusottama under Paramarddideva, the grand son of Madanavarman.

The Harsacharita refers to the presence of hereditary ministers at the death of Prabhākara Vardhana. The Raghuvamsa also speaks of hereditary and old ministers.

Though most of the authorities laid stress on the hereditary but other aspects were also given due consideration.
According to Bhāradvāja the king should appoint his classmates as his ministers. Viśālaka says that king should appoint those persons as ministers whose secrets are known to him. Parāśara opined that the king should appoint such a person as his minister who has shown his loyalty many times. According to Piśuna those persons should be appointed as ministers who have served the state for a long time and are of tested ability. Bāhudantiputra says that such persons should be appointed as ministers who have practical efficiency and are endowed with dōvILITY of birth, integrity, bravery and loyalty. Kauṭilya finds truth in the views of his professors and says that 'the fitness of a person should be considered in view of his work he is called upon to undertake'.

The ancient Indian works lay down certain qualifications which were expected of a person to be appointed as minister.

Though the Rāmāyaṇa does not discuss this question as a separate topic yet it has brought out the requisite qualifications of the ministers at several places. It lays down that the ministers should be virtuous, scorning to do wrong, benevolent, versed in the moral law, of wide experience, magnanimous,
acquainted with the spirit of the scriptures, forbearing, obedient to the king, true to words, cheerful, free from avarice and well acquainted with the affairs of their fellow subjects. They were expected to be efficient, firm in friendship and should be in a position to pass judgement on their sons if they broke law, expert in the science of economics and war, fare conversant with every branch of political life, brave and unambiguous.25

The Mahābhārata26 says that the minister should be well born, humble, learned, brave, loyal, truthful, intelligent, able to read sign, free from cruelty, conversant with the time and place factor, possessed of sweet temperament, capable, and free from passions. A minister according to the Mahābhārata was required to be at least fifty of age. Such persons should be appointed as ministers who have been firmly examined and serving the state from many generations.27 The ministers were expected to be very firm in resolve and efficient in knowing the movements of foes.28 The epic warns that the king should not appoint such a person as minister who is not loyal and has no faith in the king.

The person who was to be appointed as minister should discard hunting, dicing, indulgence in sexual enjoyment, drinking wine, cheating, abusing and
creating confusion without any reason. Experience was also given due consideration for the ministerial appointments. They were expected to cultivate practical wisdom, as might and wisdom when combined together cause the objectives of the state to be achieved.

Groupism in the ministry was not liked by the theorist of the Mahābhārata. Therefore, it is said that those persons should be appointed as ministers who do not organise groups and create hinderances. The great Epic instructs that the king should not appoint such persons as his ministers who are of mean character. It says that the wicked ministers cannot bring prosperity of the subjects. Only a competent person versed in state policy was to be appointed to the post of a minister. We find that the ministers of Aṅga king were well versed in the matters of policy.

Kauṭilya lays down the following qualifications for the guidance of the king which were expected of a person to be appointed as Aśātya.

He should be son of the soil, influential, well trained in arts, possessed of foresight, wise and of strong memory. He was required to be bold enough, eloquent, skilful, intelligent and possessed of enthusiasm. He was expected to be full of dignity and endurance, pure in character affable,
firm in loyalty devotion and endowed with excellent character. He was required to be physically strong and brave. He should be free from such qualities as enmity. Kauṭilya classifies Ājītvās in three categories. Those who possessed one half of the above mentioned qualifications were to be considered of the middling and those who possessed one fourth of the above were to be placed in the lower category.

The authorities have devised certain ways to ascertain these qualifications:

Native birth and influential position were to be ascertained from reliable persons. Educational qualifications were to be noticed from professors of equal learning. Theoretical and practical knowledge, foresight, retentive memory and affability should be tested from successful application of work. The power shown in narrating the stories were the means to ascertain eloquence, skilfulness and flashing intelligence. Endurance, enthusiasm, bravery, purity in life, friendly disposition and loyal devotion by frequent association. Conduct, strength, health, dignity, freedom from indolence and fickle mindedness were to be ascertained from their intimate friends. Their affectionate and philanthropic nature were to be ascertained by personal experience.
The Paññāchatantra says that the kingdom is supported by ministers of unshakable mental caliber not crooked or dishonest. Kātyāyana states that the king should appoint such a person as his minister who is Brāhmaṇa, who takes interest in the affairs of the state, who is devoted to the king and who is best of his family. Kāmandaka was of the opinion that the minister should be capable of taking the right decision and enforcing it with firmness. He should be in a position to preserve the secrecy of the council. The ministers were expected to avoid certain bad qualities such as anger, fear and untruthfulness.

The inscriptions of the Gupta rulers throw some light on the qualifications of the minister during that period. We learn that Amrakaraddava, a minister of Chandragupta II, was 'an embodiment of amiable behaviour and virtue and has acquired the banner of victory and fame in many battles'. Virasena alias Saba the minister for peace and war of the same emperor 'knew the meaning of words and logic, and the ways of mankind, and was a poet'. The Gangdhara stone inscription narrates the qualifications of a Sachiva Mayurakshaka as follows 'He springs from a family possessed of wisdom and prowess; whose heroism is renowned in every region; who holds himself under control; who is of noble behaviour, who is devoted to gods, Brāhmaṇas, spiritual preceptors, relations and holymen,'
and who by (nature) not free from morality, has applied (his) thought of courteous behaviour destitute of litigation which is applauded by the sacred writings'.

The Junagadh Rock inscription of Skandagupta has given in detail the qualifications of a responsible employee of the state and that too may be taken for 'the ministers; 'He who is endowed with intelligence, modest, possessed of disposition that is not destitute of wisdom and memory; endowed with truth, straightforwardness, mobility, and prudent behaviour; and possessed of sweetness and fame; loyal, affectionate, endowed with manly characteristics; and possessed of a mind that (has been tried and) is found to be pure by all the tests of honesty, possessed of an inner soul pervaded by (the inclination for) the acquittance of debts and obligations occupied with the welfare of all mankind'.

The Kādambarī describes the qualifications of Śukanāsa in the following words.

"That king had a minister, by name Śukanāsa, a Brāhmaṇa, whose intelligence was fixed on all the affairs of the kingdom, whose mind had plunged deeply into the arts and śāstras and whose strong affection for the king had grown up in him from childhood. He
was skilled in the precepts of political science, pilot of the world's government. Unshaken in resolve by the greatest difficulties he was the castle of constancy, the station of steadfastness, the bridge of bright truth the guide to all goodness, the conductor in conduct, the ordainer of all ordered life, like the serpent Śeṣa, enduring the weight of the world, like the ocean, full of life, like Jarāsandha shaping war and peace, like Śīve with Durgā at home, like Yudhiṣṭhira a day spring of Dharma, he knew all the Vedas and Vedangas, and was the essence of the kingdom's prosperity. He was like Brhaspati to Surāśīra, like Sukra to Yṛṣahparvan, like Dhaumya to Ajātaśatru, like Damanaka to Nala. He, by the force of his knowledge, thought that Lakṣmi was not hard to win, resting though she were en the breast of Narayana terrible with the scars of the weapons of the demons of hell, and a strong shoulder hardened by the pitiless pressure of Mount Mandara as it moved to and fro. Near him knowledge spread, wide, thick with many a tendril and showed the fruit gained from conquered realms like a creeper near a tree. To him though out of the four oceans and filled with the going to and fro of many thousand of spies, every whisper of the king was known as though uttered in his own palace.

The Matsya Purāṇa enjoins upon a king to appoint ministers and assistants from respectable family. The minister should be capable of bearing hardship, ambitious and handsome. A person who was to be appointed as a minister was required to have Satvagūṇa. Loyalty was
also one of the qualification for the minister according to the Matsya Purāṇa. He should be conversant with the knowledge to act at proper time and place and should be eager for a good name.

The Agni Purāṇa lays down two fairly long lists of the qualifications of the ministers. According to it a minister should be a man of noble parentage and impecunious honesty. He should be a man of eloquence and confidence, strong in physique, possessing a good retentive memory, with all his passions and appetites put under a healthy check. He should be well versed in the code of penalties and the different branches of arts. He was required to be courageous enough to risk public censure for the good of his country and full of resources and capable of remedying all evils of the state. He should keep a vigilant eye upon the affairs and doings of his neighbours and be a man who would fully understand the principles of war and treaty making. He should be able to read the secret counsels of the foreign courts, and capable of achieving opportunity at an appropriate time and place. He should never allow any consideration of private grudge or personal gain to mould his decisions in the council of the state. He should avoid pride, fickle mindedness and bragging. He was expected to be experienced. It
mentions that a minister should be a man born of noble parents in the province and having acknowledged influence in the state. He should be eloquent, energetic in action and capable of enduring hardship. He should be a man whose attachment to the persons and the good of his sovereign should be above all suspicions. He should be truthful, capable of giving just and prompt decisions. Moreover, a minister was required to preserve the secrecy of the secret counsel.

The Visnuśharmottara Purāṇa like the previous works maintains that the ministers should be of noble birth, honest, loyal to the king, and son of the soil. He should be conversant with the knowledge of the daṇḍanāti, arts, crafts and śāstras. He should be devoid of bad qualities such as anger, greed, fear and untruthfulness. The Śukranātisāra says that the king should for the development of the state, appoint assistants who are high by birth, attainment and character who are valourous devoted and sweet tongued who can advice well and bear pain, who have virtuous habits and who by the strength of their wisdom can deliver a king who has gone astray, who are pure and who have no enemy, passions, anger, cupidity and sloth.

The Salotgi inscription of Kṛṣṇa III tells us that the ministers were expected to be learned and well
versed in the science of politics. Some of them were poets also. Even during the Rāstrakūta rulers the ministers continued to be military leaders.

The Tilakamādhyāya informs us that the ministers were to be adept in the Dharmāstra. They were required to follow the examples of the elders and were to be men of benevolent motives. They were expected to be one who could feel the nerve of the people and he should be capable of administering in accordance with the wishes of the people without causing pain to anyone.

According to the Nityākhyārtha the ministers were required to possess the following qualifications. They should be native by birth and not foreigner; for natives have a tendency to love their country. Love of one's own country is the highest and most tenacious of all prejudices. It is said that the foreigners should not be entrusted with matters of finance and protection of life for after staying for a while they fled away or become adversaries. The ministers should be pure in character for lack of character vitilifies all personal merits and qualities. The ministers should be high born for the low born persons never feel shy after doing misdeeds. They should be devoid of passions. They were required to be endowed with all practical and theoretical knowledge. The ministers should be capable of understanding the military problems.
The ministers were appointed after a good deal of examination and close scrutiny in ancient India. To find out the suitability of a person, the king was required to test their merits by Upadha. Kautilya mentions four types of allurement viz Dharmopadha, Arthopadha, Kamopadha and Bhayopadha.

1. **Dharmopadha**

In this test the king dismissed a priest who refused to teach Vedas to an out-caste person or refused to officiate in a sacrificial performance carried on by an out-caste minister; he with the help of spies under the guise of a classmate taking an oath in the following words said 'this king is an unrighteous well, let us set up in his place another king who is righteous, or who is imprisoned or a neighbouring king and of self sufficiency or wild chief or an upstart; this attempt is to be taken by all of us. What dost thou think? To this effect if he refused to act in accordance with the high priest who has been dismissed he was considered to be pure.

2. **Arthopadha**

In this test a commander of the army was dismissed for receiving condemnable things. He with the help of spies was to contact each minister
inciting them about the murder of the king for getting huge wealth saying 'this attempt is to the liking of all of us; what dost thou think?' In this respect if the ministers did not agree with him he was considered to be pure.

3. **KAMOPADHĀ** :-

In this test a wandering nun who was highly esteemed in the palace was to suggest secretly to each minister saying 'the chief queen is in love with you and has made arrangement for a meeting; besides this there is also the certainty of large acquisitions of wealth'. If this was not accepted to the minister they were considered to be pure.

4. **BHAYOPADHĀ** :-

In this test on some festival a minister was to invite all other ministers. Seeming fright at this conspiracy, the king should put them in prison. A sharp pupil who has already been imprisoned there should suggest to each of those ministers, when they are deprived of prosperity and honour saying; 'the king has betaken himself an unwise path; well having murdered him; let us put another in his place. We like this; what dost thou think? If this was not agreeable to them then they were considered to be pure.
Kautilya has critically remarked that those who qualify all these tests and proved to be honest were to be appointed as Mantrins. The Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Manu Smṛti, the Śukranitiśāra also refer to the test of ministers but they do not elaborate the process of examination.

Caste also played a great role in the appointment of ministers. Generally speaking, the Brāhmaṇas were preferred for ministerial posts. But as Brāhmaṇas and kshatriyas were considered equally important, the kshatriyas and Vaiśyas could as well be appointed as ministers. According to most of the law givers Sudras were not appointed as ministers. However, Śukra is of the opinion that work, character and merit these three are to be respected neither caste nor family. He adds that the caste and the family are to be considered only at the marriages and dinner parties.
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