CHAPTER V

MANTRIPARIŚAD
Ancient Indian political writers consider the Mantrapañād to be an essential organ of the body politic. The Mahābhārata states that the king is vitally dependent upon his ministers as animals are upon clouds, the Brāhmaṇas on the Vedas and women on their husbands. ¹

The epic depicts the same idea of the importance and necessity of the ministerial council at another place where it says that it would be difficult for a king to run the government even for three days without the ministers.²

The Manusmṛti also advises the king to have a council of advisers. It points out that even an easy task appears difficult if one is to do it single-handed; why then attempt to run the complex machinery of the administration without the assistance of ministers?³

Yājñavalkya also holds the same opinion and says that the king must have a ministerial council to assist him in looking after State affairs.⁴

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¹Mahābhārata Sānti Parvan V. 37, 38.
²Ibid., CVI. 11.
³Manu VII. 55.
⁴Yaj. I. 312.
Kautilya, though a staunch advocate of monarchy, was also against one-man rule. He significantly observes that the affairs of the State can be attended to only with assistance. A single wheel can never move. Hence he shall employ ministers and hear their opinions.¹

Later, Sukra also follows the tradition and asserts that without ministers, matters of State should never be considered by the king, be he an expert in all the sciences and fully versed in polity. A wise king must always follow the opinion of the members of the council, of Adhikārins or ministers entrusted with portfolios pertaining to various subjects. He must never follow his own opinion. When the sovereign becomes independent, he plans for ruin; in time he loses the State and also his subjects.²

In these injunctions we have the sound principle that governmental organisation is not to be left to the will of any single person — the so-called monarch — but should be carried on with the help of a body of advisers comprising accomplished ministers.

The terms indicating the existence of the council of ministers in ancient Indian body politic are abundant

¹Arth. I. 7. — सहायतः राज्यं कार्यं न करिस। कृपिः सत्वित्रम् तैथरा व अशुतान मतम ॥

²Sukra II. 2-4.
in early Sanskrit literature: the Samiti, the Samgati and the Pariṣad. It is described as Pariṣā in the Pāli canon and in Asokan inscriptions.

The council as an essential part of the Hindu administrative system has its origin in the earliest political set-up mentioned in history. As Dr. Jayaswal points out, "the Hindu council of ministers was a body and an organism which had differentiated and branched off from the old National Assembly of Vedic times."

Monarchy was the well-known and widely prevalent administrative system in Vedic India. There is no mention of the Mantri pariṣad or to Mantrins in the Rgveda or even in the later Vedic period. But the king's autocracy was curbed by popular assemblies i.e. the Sabha and the Samiti. A further check on the monarch was the Purohita; probably, he performed the functions of the Mantrin and the functions of the Mantri Pariṣad were performed by the Sabha and the Samiti.

Some officers are mentioned in the Samhitās of Yajurveda and Brāhmaṇa literature as Ratnins of the king. In the Atharvaveda mention is made of the Rājakṛtaḥs (king-makers) who invest the king with sovereignty. Modern writers on ancient Indian polity consider both the terms

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1Jayaswal - Hindu Polity. p. 275.
Ratnins and Rajakrtahas as identical. These Ratnins comprised the king's advisory body. They performed some important functions and held a position of great honour during the later Vedic period. Their importance and status can be gleaned from the details of the coronation ceremony described in the Brāhmaṇas.

The Ratnins, as referred to in the Brāhmaṇas, included members of the royal family, and high functionaries. Their number differs in different Brāhmaṇas.¹

In Indian tradition the existence of the Mantri-pariṣad is indicated in the governmental organisation of the earliest historical dynasty of Magadha. Ārya Varṣakāra is known to be the Chief Minister of A jātaśatru in literary records. Among the ministers of Prasenjit of Kośala, Mrgadhara and Śrīvṛddha were important.

Kautilya is the first to describe the Mantripariṣad as a well-established institution invested with definite constitutional powers in relation to the king and the business of the State.² He quotes the views of his predecessors, Manu, Viśālakṣa, Vātavyādhi, etc., on this point, making it clear that all these authorities were acquainted with this institution. Manusmṛti also

¹Ratnins are referred to in detail in chapter II on "Kingship".

²Arth. I. 11.
deals with the nature, scope and functions of the Mantri pariṣad.

Pāṇini recognises the Mantri pariṣad as an essential part of a monarchical State. He knows three kinds of Pariṣad (1) Social, (2) Literary and (3) Political. The political Pariṣad which is mentioned in Sūtra v. 2.112, prescribes the form 'Pariṣadvala' which the commentators apply to a king with this council of ministers (Pariṣadvalorāja).

Reference to the council of ministers in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata leave us in no doubt that the institution was quite well established during the period.

Yājñavalkyasūtra, Kātyāyana, Kāmāndka, and later Śukrāntisūtra speak highly of the Mantri pariṣad. The Purāṇas, especially the Agnipurāṇa, Matsya and Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, give a valuable description of the Mantri pariṣad. Kālidāsa mentions the Mantri pariṣad in his dramas, and the reference to it in the Mālavikāgnimitrām is of great importance. That the Mantri pariṣad was an indispensable organ of the State organisation during the Vardhana period is clear from the mention of the Kannauja ministry in Bāna's Harṣacarita.

1 Aśṭa. IV. 4, 44; IV. 3, 123; V. 2, 112.

2 Agrawal – India as known to Pāṇini. p. 401.
Buddhist and Jaina literature also contain many important references to the Mantri pariṣad.

Information regarding the existence of the Mantri pariṣad is supplied by some inscriptions also. The Aśokan inscriptions call the Pariṣad as Pariṣā. The Junāgadh inscription of Rudradāmanā I speaks of Matiśacivas and Karmasacivas. The Gupta inscriptions give us the name of many important ministers.

Terms used for Ministers

In ancient Indian literature the terms generally used for ministers are three viz., Amātya, Saciva and Mantrin. The exact technical meaning of these terms is not clear. These are generally translated by modern scholars as ministers, though they differ on their identity.

Amātya, being the oldest of the three, may be examined first. The expression first occurs in the Rgveda, where it is used as an adjective, thereby meaning 'our own and abiding in our house'. In the Rgveda itself the origin of the word meaning Amātya is found. 'O Agni! go like a king, riding an elephant accompanied by his ministers'. Yāsaka2 explains 'Amavān' as 'Aṃstvavān'.

1Rv. IV: 4, 1. 2Nirukta. VI. 12. - याहि राजा तव कमल्यान्त स्ववत्ता या ।
although he offers two more connotations of the word also.

In Baudhāyana Medhāttra the word Amātya is used to indicate 'near male relations in the house'. It is in the Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra, for the first time, that the term Amātya is used to mean a minister. "The king should not live better than his gurus (elders) and his ministers."

The Śacīvas occurs in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa where it is said that Indra considered the Māruts as his Śacīvas (helpers or comrades). The term occurs quite frequently in other writings of the period. Śacīvas as ministers are mentioned in the Junāgadh inscription of Mahākṛṣṇapura Rudradāman I. The inscription divides them into two categories: Matisacīvas and Karmasacīvas. As for Mantrin, it is the most familiar term employed for ministers in ancient Indian texts on polity.

Now the problem arises whether these terms were synonyms or whether they conveyed different meanings.

In the Rāmāyana, Amātya and Mantrin are used as synonyms. Sumantra is called Amātya and the best of the

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1 Baudh. Medhāttra, I. 4, 13; I. 12, 7.
2 Āp. Dh. S. II. 10, 25, 10.
the Mantrins, but in Ayodhya Kānda Amātya and Mantrin seem to be different functionaries.

Kautilya does not use the terms Amātya and Mantrin as denoting the same meaning. According to him, having demarcated the spheres of their powers and having taken into consideration the time, place and work which they have to do, all these persons should be appointed Amātyas and not Mantrins. He prescribes higher qualifications for Mantrins than those of Amātyas. He opines that Amātyas are to be employed if found honest after anyone of the tests by the Upadhās. But the Mantrins were to be appointed only if their integrity and loyalty were proved by all the tests combined. So it appears that Kautilya considers Mantrins to be of a higher rank than Amātyas.

The Nītivākyāṁṛta supports Kautilya's view by devoting two different sections to Amātyas and Mantrins and the treatment given to them indicates their inferior position as compared to Mantrins. Bhūja, the royal author, also strengthens this idea. He fixes same

1Rām. I. 7, 3.
2Ibid., II. 12-17.
3Arth. I. 8.
4Section 10 (Mantrins); Section 13 (Amātyas).
qualifications for Amātyas, but he adds some more for Mantrins. ¹

The chapters devoted to polity in the Agnipurāṇa show a dividing line between Amātyas and Mantrins. The text states that the king gives audience to Amātyas and Mantrins in the royal court. The simultaneous use of both terms at two different places ² proves that there was a difference between the position of Amātyas and Mantrins.

The view that Amātyas and Mantrins formed two different categories of State officials is also corroborated by the testimony of Greek writers who call Amātyas as councillors and assessors and add that all the high officials of the State were appointed from this class.

From the references in the Arthasastra, ³ Manu⁴ and Kāmāndaka,⁵ it appears that the terms Saciva and Amātya were synonyms, but the testimony in the Agni Purāṇa draws a line of demarcation between them. It observes that after the coronation, the Pratihāra (usherer)

¹ Yukt. p. 3.
² Agni. 106. 11.
³ Arth. I. 7 & 8.
⁴ Manu. VII. 54 & 60.
⁵ Kām. IV. 25, 27; XIII. 24-64.
comes with Amātyas and Sacivas to introduce them to the newly consecrated king. Even the qualifications and the weak points of Amātyas and Sacivas are separately dealt with in the Agni Purāṇa. The testimony of the Junāgadh inscription of Rudradāmanā I however indicates that in the post-Mauryan period Amātyas were more commonly known as Sacivas.

The relation between Mantrins and Sacivas also stands in obscurity. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Daśaratha's ministers are called both as Mantrins and Sacivas. But this is not so in all the texts.

The Agni Purāṇa uses the terms Amātyasaci vaciṃśca and Mantramātiadikah, but it never used the word Saciva with Manrin to differentiate their position. This may make them look like synonyms, but the confusion regarding their relative status persists.

The above discussion leads us to the point that all these terms were current in ancient Indian polity to mean the ministers. If one term is given importance in a specific period and kingdom, the others were in

1 Agni. 218. 31.
2 Ibid., 241. 16-18.
3 Ibid., 218. 31.
4 Ibid., 226. 11.
high esteem in the preceding or following periods. It seems that the terms kept on changing their meaning and application in different periods and kingdoms when used by different authorities. It is therefore difficult to describe the precise meaning of these terms. They can be taken to mean ministers in the modern sense.

**Mode of Appointment of Ministers**

Vedic literature does not provide us with information about the mode of appointment of the Ratnins. Altekar observes that the Samiti in the Vedic age was a powerful body and it is not unlikely that the Ratnins were selected from its members.¹ We cannot, however, be certain about this.

The institution of ministers evolved out of the gradually disappearing institution of Ratnins. By that time, monarchy had become hereditary. Along with it, membership of the ministerial council was also decided on a hereditary basis.

There are two schools of thought on the point. According to one, ministers should be appointed according to their merit; while the other laid emphasis on the hereditary character of the ministerial office.

Kauppadanta² laid stress on the family tradition.

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¹ Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 163.

² Arth. I. 8.
Those \"whose fathers and grandfathers had been ministers before such person by virtue of their knowledge of past events and of an established relationship with the king will, though offended, never desert him\". Manu, 1 Yājñavalkya 2 and Rāmāyaṇa 3 all lay stress on heredity. In the Mahābhārata, 4 Bhīṣma at one place remarks that the Maṇtrins should be Pitra-Paitāmaha (hereditary). The Agni Purāṇa 5 maintains that such hereditary ministers should not be allowed to dispose of the cases of their Dāyāds (agnates).

During the Gupta period the ministers were appointed both on the hereditary basis and on merit basis is clear from the sources of the period. In the Allahabad Praśasti Mahādaṇḍanāyaka Hariseṇa is mentioned as son of Mahādaṇḍanāyaka Dhruvabhūti. 6 Another instance of such a nature is found in the Udayagiri cave inscription of Candragupta II, where Virasena is described as \"Anvayaprāta Saciva\" (one, who hereditarily obtained the post of Saciva). 7

1 Manu. III. 54.
2 Yāj. I. 312.
3 Rām. II. 100, 25.
4 Mbh. Sabhā Parvan. 5-43.
5 Agni. 220. 16-17.
7 Fleet - Ibid., pp. 10, 15. 34.
Kalidāsa observes in the Raohuvaṃśa that the ministers were appointed from the same families but in the same work he says that a minister should be a master of polity. We can very well draw a conclusion that though the family factor was also considered but due importance was given to the qualifications of a person.

The other school is against hereditary appointments. Vātavyādhi opposes Kaṇapadanta when he finds that ministers appointed on a hereditary basis acquire complete control over the king. "Hence he shall employ as ministers such new persons as are proficient in the science of polity. It is such new persons who will regard him as a real scepter-bearer (Daṇḍadāra) and dare not offend him." Kautilya agrees with all his predecessors and expressly says: "This is satisfactory in all respects; for a man's ability is inferred from his capacity shown by his work." The Mahābhārata says that the ministers' appointments should be hereditary, but it also lays down that while the ministerial office is to be hereditary in character, at the same time the son may not be appointed a minister after his father if he is not competent.

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1Raohu. XII. 12; XIX. 57. — वैद्यकीय
2Ibid., VII. 17. — वैद्यकीयविश्वास
3Arth. I. 8.
4Ibid.
5Menu. VII. 54.
were to be hereditary and others accomplished in polity.

The Rājāṇiti-prakṣāsa, after quoting Matsya Purāṇa, insists that the hereditary mode of appointment should be given up if the sons and grandsons of the ministers do not possess the requisite qualifications but they should be appointed to posts suitable to their attainments.

From the authorities quoted above, it becomes clear that the appointments of ministers were not based on mere heredity but due consideration was shown to merit also. The appointments, rather the nominations were made by the king himself and considerations of heredity mostly prevailed.

The kings however proceeded to ratify the nomination of a new incumbent by choice, avoiding the automatic and exclusive succession to office from some select families. The kings were not to consider the hereditary virtue only. The ancient authorities have given a fairly long list of qualifications, which the king had to take into consideration while making ministerial appointments.

The Mahābhārata lays down: *Persons well born and possessed of good behaviour, who are brave and

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1 R.N.P. p. 176.

2 Mahābhārata, Śānti Parvan, LXXIII. 41. 46.
respectable, learned and full of resources, should be
appointed as subordinate ministers.* (Just before this
reference, the Epic lays down the qualifications for the
Chief Minister).

According to Manu,¹ "they should be men whose
ancestors were servants of the king, who were versed in
the Sāstras, who are personally brave, who are skilled
in the use of weapons and who are of noble lineage."

At another place he observes that the "should be natives,
possessed of enthusiasm, dignity, endurance and firm in
legal devotion". He should be diplomatic in his approach,
must be gifted with ability to reach the enemy and put
up with all kinds of hardship."

Kautilya was very particular about the selection
of ministers and he wanted the king to have the best
ministers. The recruitment of ministers was not left
to the hazards of succession but was to be done on the
basis of their qualifications. An idea of the required
qualifications of ministers can be had from the following
statement: "Native born of high family, influential,
well-trained in the arts, possessed of foresight, wise,
of strong memory, bold, eloquent, skilful, possessed of
enthusiasm, dignity and endowed with excellent conduct,
endurance, pure in character, affable, firm in loyal

¹Manu, VII. 54.
devotion, strength, wealth and bravery, free from procrastination and fickle-mindedness, affectionate and free from such qualities as excitement, hatred and enmity — these are the qualifications of a ministerial officer" (Anūtyasampat). ¹

Along with a list of qualifications, Kautilya lays down the principle of recruitment also. ² He prescribes four kinds of allurements (Upadhā) by which the mind of the minister was to be tested: religious allurement, monetary allurement, love allurement and allurement under fear.

Caste also played an important role in the appointment of ministers. Again, there are two schools of thought on this point. The Arthāśāstra school does not enjoin that only Brāhmaṇas should be appointed ministers; the other school lays emphasis on the appointment of Brāhmaṇas only. Mantrins should, according to most of the authorities, be selected from among Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, but not from among Śūdras, even if the latter are endowed with the requisite qualities. ³

From the Mahābhārata⁴ it appears that the council

¹Arth. I. 8.
²Ibid., I. 9.
³NVA. p. 108.
⁴Śanti Parvan. LXXXV. 7-9.
of four castes was preferred. It prescribes a council of 37 members out of which four were Brāhmaṇas, eight Kṣatriyas, 21 Vaiśyas, three Śūdras and one Sūta. Here we find the real democratic council in which the largest representation is given to the largest class of society i.e. Vaiśyas. Even the number of Brāhmaṇa ministers and that of the Śūdras is equal. Sukra is also of the opinion that the ministerial posts should not be given on the basis of high birth but to learned and capable people. Thus he does not rule out the possibility of Śūdras holding a ministerial post.¹ He further lays down that one should not enquire about the caste while making appointments to the ministry.²

From these references it appears that the Brāhmaṇas were given preference for membership of the ministerial council while the other two classes, i.e., the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas, were also given considerable representation in the council, and sometimes even the Śūdras were not considered to be unfit for the purpose. The criterion of caste representation in the council was applied differently in different periods.

Ancient Indian authorities on polity hold divergent views on the numerical strength of the ministers to be

¹Sukra. II. 39.
²Ibid., II. 545.
appointed in a council. The Mahabharata prescribes the number of ministers as eight.\footnote{Mbh. XII. 85. - कष्टानां मंकितां मडी मंत्र राजोपासार्थे।}

According to Manu, the ministerial council should be composed of seven or eight ministers.\footnote{Manu VII. 54. - संजीवान्यां वास्तो वा द्वार्त द्वयोगिस्तात्।}

The same is the view of Yajñavalkya.\footnote{Mit. on Yaj. I. 312.}

Kauṭilya does not fix the number of ministers but he opines that the ministers should be appointed according to the needs of the State concerned.\footnote{Arth. I. 15. - यथालाभ्यमिति कृतित्व:।}

The Cabinet

"There was a tendency to form a smaller body", observes Dr. Jayaswal,\footnote{Jayaswal - Hindu Polity, p. 206.}

pointing out the existence of the cabinet in ancient Indian political structure. We do not find any direct or indirect reference to this institution in Vedic literature.

There is a term in Pāṇini, "Āśa dashīṇa", meaning which is not seen by six eyes. The Kāśikā explains it to mean deliberations between two persons.\footnote{Agrawal - India as known to Pāṇini. p. 404.} It seems that

\begin{enumerate}
\item [1] Mbh. XII. 85. - कष्टानां मंकितां मडी मंत्र राजोपासार्थे।
\item [2] Manu VII. 54. - संजीवान्यां वास्तो वा द्वार्त द्वयोगिस्तात्।
\item [3] Mit. on Yaj. I. 312.
\item [4] Arth. I. 15. - यथालाभ्यमिति कृतित्व:।
\item [6] Agrawal - India as known to Pāṇini. p. 404.
\end{enumerate}
during the evolution of political ideas and institutions, with the emergence of the office of the Prime Minister, there was a tendency to form a smaller body inside the Parisad for more effective and responsible deliberations.

The Mahābhārata suggests that the king should have a council of 37 Amatyas but at another place it enjoins that the king should hold deliberations among eight ministers. From this it may be inferred that the eight ministers formed the king's cabinet while the 37 members formed his council. At still another place in the epic, Bhīṣma ordains that the king should deliberate with three or four ministers. The Rāmāyana suggests the existence of a cabinet. When Bharata came to meet Rāma during his exile, he was asked by the latter whether he had consulted three or four ministers.

The view that the cabinet had a separate existence also gets support from Kautilya. The Arthaśāstra prescribes higher salaries for Mantrins than for the ministers of the council. It is clear that the Mantrins possessed a higher status than members of the council.

1. Mahābhārata, Śanti Parvan, LXXXV. 7-8.
2. Ibid., I. 15.
3. Rāmāyana, Uttara Kāṇḍa, II. 100. 71.
4. Arthaśāstra, v. 3.
Besides, the Mantrins daily conferred with the king while the council of ministers was summoned to meet only in times of emergency.\textsuperscript{1} Kautilya records the opinion of Bhārdvāja\textsuperscript{2} who was in favour of a one-man cabinet.

The Agni Purāṇa advises the king at one place to appoint ministers according to the needs of the State, but at another place it warns him not to consult with too many ministers.\textsuperscript{3} Though the cabinet did not exist in ancient India in the modern sense of the term, it is clear from these references that there was a tendency to have a small cabinet of three or four members.

It is however difficult to say who formed the cabinet. Most probably the Chief Minister and purohita, along with some important ministers and the Yuvarāja, comprised the cabinet in the ancient Indian body politic.

\textbf{Working and Functions of Council of Ministers}

Unfortunately, the political treatises and epigraphic records of ancient India do not provide us with detailed knowledge about the actual working of the ministry. We may presume that under normal circumstances the king

\textsuperscript{1} Arth. I. 15.

\textsuperscript{2} Shamasastry - Kautilya's Arthashastra. p. 27.

\textsuperscript{3} Mishra - Polity in the Agni Purāṇa. p. 88.
presided over the meetings of the mantri parisad because he is advised not to lose his temper during the deliberations even if the councillors decide an issue against his wishes. Sometimes when the king was not able to attend a meeting, the Chief Minister perhaps presided and the decisions were later communicated to the king. We can form this opinion on the analogy of the Aśokan edicts which state that whenever there is a divergence of opinion in the cabinet, the king may at once be informed.2

It becomes clear from the evidence that written notes were required for a record of the proceedings of the cabinet. In his inscription Aśoka speaks of his oral orders which implies that the king's orders were generally written. The Arthasastra also bears testimony to it while stating that the ministers who were not present at the meeting wrote notes for the king.4

There is an account of the working of the council of ministers during the Śuṅga period in the Mālviṅkāgnimitram

\[ \text{1 Barḥs. Arth. II. 53} \]
\[ \text{2 Rock Edict VII (Sabazagarhi).} \]
\[ \text{3 Ibid. VI (Kalasi).} \]
\[ \text{4 Arth. I. 15.} \]
of Kālidāsa. The chamberlain informs the king:

"The minister begs to submit — we have resolved how matters in connection with Vidarbha are to be settled, we just wish to know Your Majesty's opinion."

It appears that the king was not supposed to attend meetings of the cabinet even on such an important matter as is discussed in the work referred to above. Secondly, the singular number of the minister referred to in the speech points to the Chief Minister as the president of the meeting. Thirdly, the resolutions were passed at the full meeting of the cabinet and, lastly, that only the opinion of the king was sought and not his command, when the courses of action have already been laid down.

It is indeed unfortunate that we do not find any references to the working of the ministry during the Gupta and later periods in Northern India. Altekar observes that it is not unnatural to suppose that usually the ministry worked in the normal course, as under the Mauryas and the Sungas. The inference is further strengthened by our knowledge of the Chola administration of the 11th century. The records of this dynasty show that the ministry functioned under the Cholas in Southern

\[1\] Māl. V. p. 103. Edited by M. R. Kale - कम्युनियो किशोर - यत्रि विशेषत्वो इतिहासिक किरितिवाणिहि।। देशस्य वाल्मिकिन्द्रा नामं अनुभविति

\[2\] Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India, p. 176.
India exactly in the same way as it had under Aśoka 1300 years earlier in Northern India. The oral orders of the king were subject to review by his council, as was the case with Aśoka's oral orders. It was only when they were scrutinized that they were entered in official registers.

Details of the procedure for passing a bill are given only in the Sukranītisāra.¹ When a matter is decided, the minister concerned wrote a minute, recording the decision, with a note that the decision had full approval and then he will set his seal. The matter was first endorsed by the Home Minister, the Chief Justice and the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the prescribed style — "This is not opposed to us". Then the Minister of Revenue and Agriculture will write: "The note is all right". The Finance Minister wrote: "Well considered". Then the Chief Minister, inscribed in his own, "Really proper", and next the Pratinidhi wrote: "Fit to be accepted". The Yuvarāja endorsed it thus: "Should be accepted"; the Ecclesiastical Minister wrote: "This is agreeable to me". All the ministers then fixed their seals. Finally, the king wrote "Accepted" and set his seal; sometimes this was done for him by the Yuvarāja.

¹Sukra. II. 362-69.
The first stage was then over, the minute was signed by all the ministers and sealed with the seal of the council. It was once more presented to the king who immediately wrote 'seen'. We may presume that the procedure for passing a resolution laid down in the Sukranitisāra was an advanced shape given to former customs.

The functions of the ministry covered the whole administration. According to Kauṭilya, the ministers should concern themselves with all the functions regarding the king and his enemy — commencement of work not begun, improvement of accomplished work and proper execution of the orders passed by the council.

The first and foremost task of the council of ministers was to give advice to the king in deciding state policies, as is evident from the epithet 'Mantrin' which means the 'counsellor'. Kauṭilya is of the opinion that all administrative undertakings must be preceded by consultations with the ministers.

The authorities hold different views regarding the number of ministers and advisers to be consulted at each sitting. Manu and Kauṭilya both enjoin that

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1 Arth. II. 7.
2 Manu. I. 57.
3 Arth. I. 15.
the king should first consult the ministers separately and then jointly. Bhārdvāja prefers self-deliberation for the king, because ministers have their own ministers and these in turn have some of their own. Such successive lines of ministers tend to disclosures of state matters. Śukra excludes the presence of the king at cabinet meetings. According to him, some ministers may not be able to express their opinions freely in his presence. All the authorities are unanimous on the point that the king should not consult many ministers at a time.

A unanimous decision of the council was considered to be of high value. Kauṭilya enjoins upon the king not to lose his temper in the course of deliberations with his ministers; and always to abide by the majority decisions of the council. He makes it quite clear that the ministers were free to express their opinions. The importance of freedom of speech in the council is also brought out in the Kāmandakiya according to which it is the king's duty to listen to his ministers.

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1 Shamasastry - Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. p. 27.
2 Sukra. I. 363-64.
3 Rām. VI. 12.
4 Arth. I. 6.
5 Kām. IV. 41-49.
The authorities lay great emphasis on secrecy of the deliberations. The places for deliberations should be so secluded that the talks going on inside should not be heard outside and that "even birds cannot reach it." The Mahābhārata suggests a secret place — on a hill top, an open ground, forest or a boat for holding deliberations.

Manu opines: "He should take secret counsel with his ministers ... that king whose secrets are hidden shall attain dominion over the whole earth, although he may possess no treasury."

Women were considered to be unfit to attend the meetings of the council due to their talkativeness. The authorities warn the king not to disclose the secrets of State policies even to his queen. The Harṣacarita bears evidence which tells us about the ruin of King Nāgasena of Padmāvatī, because his secrets were disclosed by a Maine; Śrutivarmen lost his kingdom when his secret was divulged by a parrot.

2Arth. I. 15.
3Mbh. V. 138. 17, 18; XII. 83, 57.
4Manu. VII. 147-50.
5Harṣacarita. VI.
Commenting on the legislative powers of the ministers, Basham states: "In theory, neither the king nor his council were legislative bodies in the modern sense of the term. The royal decrees (śāśana) which they promulgated were not generally new laws but orders referring to a special class; Dharma and established customs were gradually looked on as inviolable, and the king's commands were merely applications of the sacred law. Heterodox kings, however did from time to time issue orders which were in the nature of new laws, the most notable case being Asoka." We agree with the learned historian's observation because the Hindu customs based on Dharma were not easily changeable.

The departments of Judiciary, Finance, and Foreign Affairs were assigned to different ministers, whose designations and portfolios are discussed below.

**Designations and Portfolios of Ministers**

The official designations and portfolios of the ministers varied from time to time in the evolution of the ministerial council in ancient India. The Arthaśāstra gives the list as follows: Mantrin, Purohita, Senāpati and Yuvarāja. Though we find several references to various designations and portfolios of the Ministers

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1 Basham - The Wonder that was India, p. 101.
in the Epics, the Smṛtis and other political treatises, none except Śukra¹ has described them clearly. According to him, the ministers of the Pariṣad were the following: (1) Purohita; (2) Pratinidhi; (3) Pradhāna; (4) Sacciva; (5) Mantrin; (6) Prādvivāka, (7) Paṅgīt; (8) Sumantra; (9) Amātya, and (10) Dūta.

The division of the designations and portfolios is not clear from the references found in ancient texts. We shall now discuss some important ministers.

Chief Minister

The first reference to his office — a fact of great constitutional significance — is found in the Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini.² He is called 'Mantrin' in the Arthaśāstra and the text describes him as first among the ministers.³ In Manu he is styled as Amātya in whom the administration of Danda was vested.⁴

The counsellor, of Mālvikāgaṇīmitram who reported to the king the decision of the council on the Vidarbha issue must have been the first among equals, corresponding

¹Śukra. II. 70-72.
²Agrawal — India as known to Pāṇini. p. 403.
³Arth. V. 2.
⁴Manu. VII. 58-59; XII. 100.
to the office of Chief Minister.¹

The Agnipurāṇa uses the term Mahāmātya for the Chief Minister.² Other epithets in vogue during the period were Mahāmantri, Gupti-Pradhāna and Mantriparvar, but these are not found in the Agni Purāṇa. It describes the Chief Minister, the only privileged one who is provided with a residence in the capital.

In practice also, the alliance of a Kṣatriya king with a Brāhmaṇa Prime Minister was a recognised political arrangement since the reign of the Śaśunāga dynasty. In the Pāli canon, the Prime Minister of Ajātaśatru is called 'Agra Mahāmātra' (the foremost minister), but Divyāvadāna styles Rādhagupta, the Chief Minister of Aśoka, only as Amātya.³

Śukra calls him Pradhāna, Rājaśekhara in his Viddhāśālābhaṅjikā⁴ uses the terms Mahāmātya and Mahāmantri for one Bhāgurāyaṇa, probably identical with Bhākamīdra of the Kāritalei inscription who is called not only Pradhāna but Mantriprādhāna.⁵ He was the joint head

¹Mal. Act. V.
²Mishra - Polity in Agni Purāṇa. p. 84.
⁴Viddhāśālābhaṅjikā. p. 143.
⁵Fleet - C.I.I. vol. III. pp. 200-08.
of the Mantrins. Most of the authorities are of the view that the office of the Chief Minister was held by a Brāhmaṇa because it was believed that the king who is supported by a Brāhmaṇa and advised by ministers also conquers the territory not acquired earlier. Manu opines that on every issue the king should consult his Chief Minister who should be a Brāhmaṇa. He lays down an additional qualification for the Chief Minister — among them, most distinguished from all, "let the king deliberate the most important affairs which relate to the six measures of the royal policy."\(^1\)

He was considered to be the most trustworthy adviser of the king in normal times as well as in an emergency. He supervised the administration whenever the king was ill or absent. His influence appears to have been permanent. Several famous Chief Ministers enjoyed great influence over their patrons. Ārya Varṣakāra was the Chief Minister of Ajātaśatru of the earliest historical dynasty of Maṇḍāla. His contemporary kings Viṅgūḍabha and Udāyana had Vīrcha Chāryaṇa and Yaugendharāyaṇa respectively as Chief Ministers. Candragupta Maurya, the first Emperor of India, was raised to this high position by his Chief Minister Cāṇkya. Aśoka could acquire the throne with the help of his Prime

\(^1\) Manu - VII. 58.
Minister Rādhagupta. Jivanta is called Sarvasya Anuṣṭhāta in the 6th century record of the Kādamba dynasty. Bhandi, the Chief Minister of the Maukharis of Kannauja is described as the great Minister Poni, whose powers and reputation were attested by Hsüan-Tsang.

**Purohita**

He was thought to be half the soul of the king. The cooperation of the spiritual teacher and secular head (the king) was deemed absolutely necessary for the prosperity of the kingdom.\(^1\) A reference in the Ṛgveda\(^2\) shows how the spiritual power of Purohita Viśvāmitra protected the Bharata clan. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa\(^3\) refers to the Purohita as 'Ṛṣṭrapāpa' (saviour of the kingdom). The ancient authorities emphasize the point that the Purohita was not only the sacrificial priest but held a high and important position in the administration of the State. The king was to regard him and listen to him as a preceptor and to venerate him as a son to his father.

Viṣṇudhārma Sūtra\(^4\) and Viṣṇuvalkya Smṛti\(^5\) require

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2. Ṛv. III. 53, 12.
4. As̄mu. III. 70.
5. Yāj. I. 313.
the Purohita to be well-versed in the Vedas, Itihasa and politics. The same was the opinion of Kauṭilya. He observes; "Him whose family and character were highly spoken of, who is well educated in the Vedas and the six Āṅgas, is skilful in reading postents, providential or accidental, is well versed in the science of government and who is obedient, who can prevent calamities, providential or human by performing such expiatory rites as are prescribed in the Vedas, the king shall employ as his priest."

The Purohita was expected to protect the nation by counteracting the magical charms of the enemy and ensure the prosperity of the people by performing the requisite rituals, opines Kauṭilya. That he was the sole adviser of the king is evident from the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, which suggests to the king to discuss State affairs with the Purohita, after deliberations with the ministers. That the Purohitas sometimes controlled the administrative machinery also is evident from the testimony of the Rāmāyaṇa, which records that after the demise of

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1 Arth. I. 9. — अर्थि निषिद्धारणसंस्कृतितः ्

2 Ibid.


4 Cited from Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 168.
King Daśaratha, Purohita Vaśiṣṭha carried on the administration until Bharata was back in the capital.

There is a divergence of opinion among the scholars on the point whether the Purohita ranked among the ministers or not. According to the early sources, he was probably considered as one of the seven or eight ministers, but with the decline in popular faith in the Vedic sacrifices and the rise of Buddhist and Jaina faiths, the position of the Purohita gradually deteriorated to one of a sacrificial priest. In the Jātaka stories, he is described as occupying an important position, but later on his influence declined and he is distinguished from the ministers in post-Gupta epigraphs.¹

Śukra follows the old tradition as he places the Purohita at the head of the council of ministers. He records that the frown of an ideal Purohita was sufficient to keep the king on the path of virtue and rectitude.²

Senāpati

The next important member of the council of ministers is the Senāpati. He stands third in the list in the Gahdawala records - The Śilāhāra records also differentiate him from Mantrin and Amātya.

¹E.I. IX. p. 24. ²Śukra. II. 99.
given by Kautilya where he is given precedence over the Yuvarāja. He was the commander of the army and the Minister of War. He was known as the Senāpati under the Mauryas and as Mahābalidhikṛta under the Guptas.¹ Sukranīti styles him as Saciva.² According to Kautilya, he should have royal blood.³ Mitivākyāmṛta⁴ was against his inclusion in the ministry. But in normal practice he was a member of the council.

Yuvarāja

The Yuvarāja occupies the fourth position in Candragupta Maurya's cabinet. The Crown Prince was closely associated with the task of administration; like other minister he had his own seal. Divyāvadāna⁵ states that under Aśoka, Sampratī, his grandson, was the Yuvarāja, while his son Kupāla was Governor of the North presidency. He was generally, according to Sukra, 'uncle, brother, nephew, son, an adopted son or grandson' of the ruling monarch.⁶

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¹ E.I. X. p. 71.
² Sukra. II. 70-72.
³ Arth. V. 2.
⁴ NVA. X. 101-02.
⁵ Div. p. 430.
⁶ Sukra. II. 15.
The Minister of Foreign Affairs was known as 'Dūta' in the Mauryan era. The Rāmāyaṇa also knows him by the same title, and so also Manu. During the Gupta period his designation was changed to Mahāsandhivigrahika, as he is mentioned in the Gupta epigraphic records. With the passage of time, his designation became more grandiloquent. Avanti, the Foreign Minister of Harṣa, was designated as 'Mahāsandhivigrah-adhikṛta'. Probably, he was assisted by some Sandivigrahikas.

Altekar observes: "India was usually studded with a large number of States, some independent and some feudatories. Most of them used to entertain the secret hope to attain the imperial status one day. The work of the Foreign Minister was therefore both heavy and exacting. He received political presents, letters, etc."
and ambassadors from the other States. Corroboration of this kind of function of the Foreign Minister is found in the Malvikaśnimitram, where the chamberlain announces to the king the present of two dancing girls from the Vidarbha country. Some inscriptions record that he was also in charge of crafting copper-plate charters.

Minister of Law and Justice

He is known as Prādavīvāka in Hindu law books. He was expected to be well versed in the Śārti law and expert in evaluating evidence. He presided over the highest court of appeal in the absence of the king; otherwise he sat with the king in the court when the latter heard cases and prepared the reports. The Śukraṇītisāra warns the king that on no account should the latter dispense justice without assistance, but he should hear petitions and appeals of the people along with the minister. Whenever the king was absent, the Minister for Justice received the petitions and sent the records to the king. Evidence of this practice is found in Abhijñāna Śakuntalam, the famous work of Kālidāsa:

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1 Māl. p. 94.
2 Ibid., p. 198.
3 Śukra. I. 660.
4 Cited from Upadhyaya - India in Kālidāsa, p. 129.
"Speak to Minister Piṣuna with my words thus—owing to having kept awake for long, it was not possible for us to occupy the judgement seat today. Whatever business of the citizens may have been looked into by his honour should be handed over after being kept on record". The Prāḍavivāka figures rarely in the inscriptions.

**Minister of Revenue and Treasury**

They are called Samāhārtri and Sannidhātṛ respectively in the Arthasastra. Sukra styles the Revenue Minister as Amātya and the treasurer as Sumantra. The inscriptions have another epithet for the treasurer: Bhāṇḍāgārika (the officer in charge of the treasury and stores).¹

All the old authorities are unanimous on the importance of the treasury (Kośa); so the treasurer must have been a minister of great importance. Since the taxes were collected in kind, his duty seemed to be rather exacting. He had to sell the old corn before it became rotten and store the new one. He was also to calculate the total collections, disbursements and the balance of the year.² The duties of the Revenue Minister were also quite heavy. He was to keep a correct inventory of villages, towns, mines and forests, the expected income

¹I.A. IX. p. 33.

²Sukra. II. 10.
from these sources, the land under cultivation and the
land lying fallow. It is clear from Kālidāsa that he
received, counted and treasured all revenues\(^1\) and
reported all cases arising out of the Finance Department
to the king. This was done by means of a document.\(^2\)

Except the above-mentioned designations of ministers,
many others are referred to, here and there in different
texts, for instance, Dauvārika (keeper of the royal gate),
Antravaṇḍeśika (leader of the harem), and Praśastri who
was to administer punishment in the royal camp.

The evidence shows that competent and ambitious
ministers sometimes held more than one portfolio, though
not always in allied fields. Samudragupta’s Sandhivigrhaḥika
Hārīṇeṣa held two additional titles, Kumārāmātya and
Mahādaṇḍanāyaka. This is evident from the Allahabad
pillar inscription of the emperor. Kālidāsa refers to
minister Pisuna as holding two portfolios, revenue and
law and justice.\(^3\) Dhruvasena of Valabhi held five titles:
Mahāsāmanta, Mahāpratihiṣṭa, Mahā-dāṇḍa-nāyaka, Mahākarta-
kritika and Mahārāja.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Māl. p. 219. - "कर्मात्मक गणना विद्युतितः".

\(^2\) Sak. p. 198. - "प्रतिष्ठापति" ; p. 219. - "प्रविष्टि".

\(^3\) Sak. pp. 198 and 219.

\(^4\) I.A. IV. p. 105.
Ministers were regularly transferred from one portfolio to another; this is evident from the Asokan records of Dhauli and Junagadh, which indicate three and five-yearly transfers. This process is called 'Anusamyāna' i.e. 'regular departure' which may be compared with the expression 'Anugata' occurring in the Sukranītisāra.  

Sukra refers to transfers of ministers made every three, five, seven or ten years. This, however, is not sufficient proof that the ministers were really transferred.

**Salaries**

Kautilya is the only authority who prescribes the salaries of ministers and other State servants. He fixes one-fourth of the revenue as salaries of State servants. He observes that the sovereign should look to the physical comforts of Stately servants and provide them with lavish salaries so that they are not tempted to indulge in treachery against the king. According to him, the Mantrin (Chief Minister), the Purohita, the Senapati and the Yuvarāja are to be given the highest salaries of 48,000 Panas, while the others were to get 24,000 Panas.
There is a divergence of opinion among modern scholars regarding the metal used for Papas. Dr. Jayaswal and Basham opine that Papas were silver coins, while K.V. Rangaswami Aiyangar describes them as golden. According to another opinion, Papas were copper coins. There is also some confusion regarding the ministers' salaries — whether they were paid annually or monthly. Prof. Law, Prof. Rangaswami Aiyangar, Dikshitar and Basham hold that the salaries were paid monthly, but Dr. Shamasastry and Dr. Jayaswal state the salaries to be per annum.¹

It is quite probable that the salaries varied from State to State and from time to time. Whatever the material of the Papas and the periodicity of salaries, the data provided by the Arthasastra show the relative superiority of the ministers over the other officials.

Ministerial Responsibility

The Arthasastra prescribes the time-schedule for the Finance Minister regarding the submission of accounts of each department. If any one of them (or their subordinates) keeps himself aloof or utters a false word, he was to be punished with the highest fine levied in the state, i.e. ranging from 500 to 1000 Papas.²

¹Cited from Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions, p. 349.

²Arth. II. 7.
Interpreting this to denote the idea of ministerial responsibility, Saletore observes: "Kautilya seems to have advocated what may be considered as the joint responsibility of the ministers." But Kautilya does not appear to be very clear on the point because he does not provide this privilege to the ministers of other departments. So Saletore's conjectural attempt to formulate the idea of ministerial responsibility is unwarranted. There is no term even in later literature to indicate the existence of such responsibility.

Checks exercised by the Ministry over the king

Though the council did not have any constitutional position and the powers of the ministers varied from time to time, it acted as an important political check on the king. The valour of the king was to be checked by the wisdom of Mantrins, otherwise, it was said, he would go stray. The Mahābhārata records that the king is always under the control of others and he was never free. The Mīтивśkyāmrta maintains that the king was bound to follow the dictates of the council, otherwise he will cease to be a king in the eyes of constitutional

\[1\]Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions. p. 348.

\[2\]Mbh. Śānti parvan. 325, 139-40... परतन्त्र तथा राज्य... स्वतन्त्र शस्त्राधिकृति... स्वतन्त्रता... मन्त्रेन्यायः

पारस्तेऽकृतः स्वतन्त्रता राज्यम्.
law. The Kathāsaritasudhā observes that all ministers worth their name, must inspire the king with awe; they must devote themselves whole-heartedly to the proper performance of public duties and never think of pandering to the whims of the rulers.

Sukra opines: "The monarch is not controlled; therefore ministers have to be, for if the king could not be kept in control by ministers, is national prosperity possible by such ministers? In the latter case they would cease to be real ministers and would be no better than ornaments." No ancient Indian authority allows a kingdom to be run by the solitary will of the monarch; all suggests that his autocracy should be checked by the ministers.

According to traditions, the king was not free even to choose his heir-apparent without the consent of the ministry. We learn from the Rāmāyaṇa that Dāsaratha consulted his ministers on the proposed consecration of

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1. RV. X - न कल्याणे राजा ते मन्निष्ठेः पञ्चिन्नाम वति ।
2. K.S.S. XVIII. 46.
3. Sukra. II. 81-82.
Rama Candra as the crown-prince of Ayodhya. Maurya history reveals that Bindusāra wanted his eldest son Sumana to be his heir-apparent, but powerful ministers like Rādhagupta and Khallātaka, along with other ministers, opposed the emperor's proposal. In their opinion, Asoka was wiser, possessed more valour and was far more impressive. A similar case is described in the Padanājali Jātaka, which maintains that Padanājali's accession as crown-prince was opposed by the council of ministers, because in their opinion he lacked intelligence and common sense.¹ Later, the Rājatraṅgini² provides historical evidence that when on his death-bed, King Kalaśa wanted to appoint his son Harṣa as his heir-apparent, he was prevented from doing so by the ministers. There are two more similar cases in the text.³

The king was sometimes inspired by his ministers to enter into matrimonial alliances with some members of the families of a contemporary king for diplomatic reasons. History reveals that King Udayana of Vatsa was persuaded to marry Padmavatī, daughter of Daśarika, King of Magadha - an alliance designed to establish

¹Ib. 247.
²Rāj. IV. 707.
³Ibid., IV. 715; VII. 702.
friendly relations between the two states. Udayana's marriage with Vāsavadatta was a result of the intrigues of Yaugandharāyana. The selection of the chief queen was also prompted by the council of ministers.

Oral orders of the king were not to be obeyed. Of this we have firm and permanent evidence in the Asokan inscriptions. Åśoka issued orders regarding his proclamation and Saramaṅgas which were shelved by discussions in the council and sometimes were even rejected. Åśoka's order that he should be informed whenever the council opposed his orders makes this clear. Sukra observes: *A king or an officer who orders or does business without lekhya (official document in writing) are both thieves at all times.* He further states: *The document signed and sealed by the king is the king and not the king himself.*² A resolution passed by the ministry and signed by the king with his seal was the "real king".

That the king did not even have the right to criticise the resolutions passed by the ministry is clear from the evidence of Mālavikāgnimitram (quoted above) where the council decides the Ādarbha issue

1I.A. XIII. p. 282.

²Sukra. II. 291.

³Ibid. II. 292. "न्यायविचारितं तेलं न्यायविचारितं तृप्तः".
without consulting the king. The king's opinion is sought by the Chief Minister through the chamberlain but he (king) is not informed about the council's decision at that stage. If the king's opinion on the issue by chance coincides with that of the council, the chamberlain says: "Victory to Your Majesty! My Lord the Prime Minister says "Happy is Your Majesty's idea; such is the view of the ministers also."

After listening to Maudgalya (the chamberlain), the king says: "Tell the cabinet to send a despatch to General Virasena to this effect."¹ It is interesting that the king does not command but just tells the ministers to take a particular course of action. Kautilya² also suggests that the king should accept the majority decisions of the council, apparently pointing to the fact that the king did not have any veto power, as is evident from the well-known incidents quoted below where the kings were prevented from acting according to their wishes.

Divyavadana³ describes how Asoka was not allowed by the council of ministers to make further gifts to the

¹Māl. pp. 903-08.
²Arth. I. 6.
³Div. p. 430.
Buddhist Sāmgha for building the Kućārāma monastery. The scripture explains that the ministers approached Samprati, the heir-apparent, and told him that Emperor Asoka was constantly offering gifts to the Buddhist church which would empty the treasury in due course. Since in the treasury lies the strength of the king, he must be checked from making further gifts. The Yuvarāja instructed the treasurer not to give any more money to the Emperor for the Sāmgha. Asoka got irritated over this and called a meeting of the council along with the Pauras and asked them who the sovereign was. On this, Rādhagupta politely told him that he (Asoka) was the sovereign. Asoka, with tears in his eyes, told the minister that he should not tell a lie for the sake of courtesy. He knew that he was being deprived of sovereignty. On no account could the Buddhist tradition preserve false evidence which went against the prestige of the greatest patron of their faith.

The Junāgadh inscription of Rudradāmanā I of the western house of Śakas bears immortal evidence of this nature. The Mahākṣatrapa wanted to get the Sudraśanā lake repaired, but he was prevented from doing so because the project required a huge sum of money from the treasury. If the expenditure were allowed, the taxes

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1 E.I. VIII. p. 44.
on the subjects would have to be raised. Deprived of
the authority of spending from the royal treasury,
Rudradāmanē utilised his privy purse, for the purpose.
Thus the epigraph shows that the ministers could prevent
a king from spending public funds on a public project
of his choice.

The Chinese pilgrim Yuan-Chwang\(^1\) also gives an
account of an incident showing that extravagant charity
on the king's part was curbed by the ministers of King
Vikramadityā of Śrāvasti. The king wanted to give away
daily five lakhs in charity. But he was told by his
ministers that while he would get credit for his deed
his ministers would lose respect among the people.

The tradition that the king should not make gifts
without the sanction of the ministry is as old as
Āpastamba.\(^2\) Brhaspati laid down that every gift
document should get the endorsement 'Jñātāmya' ('noted
by me') by the Sandhigrahika.\(^3\) Since the receiver
of the grant might be a foreigner or any enemy's spy,
the foreign office was considered to be the principal
authority to sanction or reject the gift. Every such

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\(^1\) Watter's Vol. I. p. 211.

\(^2\) Āp. Dh. S. II. 10, 26, 1.

\(^3\) Brhas. quoted by Vīramitrodyā. p. 192.
gift document should bear the countersignature of some officer known as Dutaka. The copper-plate grants made by King Hastin in the year 510 A.D. were first sanctioned by Mahāsandhi-vigrahaka Viḍhūdatta and finally by the senior magistrate.

The relations between the king and the ministers were not constitutionally defined. Their relationship mainly depended upon the personality of the individuals; sometimes strong and high-headed kings did not listen to the advice of the council and the ministers were reduced just to figureheads filling their seats in the royal court, as was the case of Duryodhana. In spite of the earnest wish and advice of all the ministers to avoid war, he remained firm on his decision. Hindusāra dismissed some of his ministers for giving bad advice. The ministers of Raṇa were in danger for giving unwelcome advice. On the other hand, when both kings and ministers were ambitious, then also their mutual relations were on the rocks. Sometimes weak kings were

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2 Mahābh. Śānti Parvān.
3 Chūllavagga. V. 1.
4 Rām. III. 43. 9-10.
5 Pāñcatantra. p. 66.
displaced by strong ministers, just as the father of Satyavāhana lost his kingdom due to the treachery of his ministers. The last ruler of the Mauryan dynasty also met the same fate.

Exceptions might have been there, but they were few and far between. The king usually held his ministers in great esteem and the ministers were loyal to him. The king, though not constitutionally bound to do so, generally accepted the majority decisions arrived at by the council which always considered the public interest. The king is advised by all the authorities to respect his ministers because a debacle by the counsellors is more dangerous than the revolt of the feudatories.

Ancient Indian literature and epigraphs show that the ministers usually held great influence over the administration of the State. They were generally faithful to the king, but at the same time they were guardians and custodians of the public interest.