

# Appointment Procedures for Ministers and Administrative Officials by the Ancient Indian Scholars

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**Abstract :** The paper explores the pivotal role of ministers in ancient Indian governance, emphasizing their necessity for effective administration alongside the king. It examines philosophical perspectives, such as those of Kautilya, Kamandak and Shukra. The article outlines the selection criteria and qualifications for ministers, from the Vedic times to the Gupta age highlighting their multifaceted responsibilities. By analysing historical practices and terminology, the article illustrates how ministers were integral to maintaining social order and governance, significantly influencing India's political and cultural evolution.

**Keywords-**Upadha, Amatya, RajnahRajkritah, Rajsuya, Ratnin, Panya, Lakshandhyaksha, Sita, Durmantra or Kalyanmantra.

**Introduction** - In ancient India, the need for the state to maintain social order and security was understood from the very beginning. In the absence of system/order, chaos will ensue and anarchy (*Matsya Nyaya*) will ensue. Thus, ancient Indian philosophers considered the existence of the king inevitable for good governance. But the king alone cannot maintain law and order and carry out all the duties and responsibilities expected from him, and for this, he needed his council of ministers.

The concept of a cabinet or council of ministers played an important role in ancient Indian politics. The importance of ministers can be understood by the fact that different scholars have associated different terms with the council. For example, Shukra has compared the kingdom with a human body, where the king is the head, Amatyas are his eyes, and ministers are his ears. Even Kautilya has included and explained the importance of the council of ministers by including them in his "*Saptaang*" theory of state and considered them as the second wheel of the chariot (state). Somadeva Suri has considered ministers as the heart of the king; just as a heart is important for a man to survive, in the same way, it is essential to have ministers for smoother governance.

In the Vedic era, there were certain people called '*RajnahRajkritah*' who used to give *Parnmani* to the king as a form of royal approval. *Parnmani* was made from a soma plant and used for *Bala* (Strength), *Ayu* (long life), and *Dhana* (Wealth). In the post-Vedic era, these Rajkritahs were replaced with Ratnis. To acquire his Ratnis, the king would perform the Ratnahovimshi ceremony, which was a part of the Rajsuyagya. The Ratnis, apart from guiding,

would also legitimize the King and his rule. Most of the rats were 12 in number. And in order of their importance, they were: 1 *Purohit* or Brahman, 2 *Rajan*, 3 *Senani* (Head of the Army), 4 *Mahishi* or the Chief Queen, 5 *Suta*, 6 *Gramni*, 7 *Kshta*, 8 *Sangrahita*, 9 *Bhagadugha*, 10 *Akshvapa*, 11 *Govikruta*, and 12 *Palagal*. The king would visit the houses of these Ratnis and offer them *Havi* (offering given to the havan). *Havi* to the *Senani* was gold. To the priest in the form of a cow, the *Mahishi* is also offered a cow. *Suta* is offered food made from barley, bull to the *Kshta*, and black cow to *Bhagadugha*. *Palagal* was given a bow and arrow and a red turban. The rest (*Akshvapa*, *Sangrihita*, and *Govikruta*) were also offered cows.

Some Ratnis were related to the king through kinship, whereas others were functionaries who had no familial relations with the king. Most of the time, the Ratnis were men. Apart from *Mahishi*, in the Vedic era we do find instances where two or more Ratnis were women too. The Ratnis even included people from the non-Aryan tribe. It can be said that through the Ratnis, all members of different varnas and classes were represented. In most cases, posts were filled based on merit, meaning the Varnas might have been fixed, but the posts didn't assume a hereditary character.

Ancient Indian texts have used different words for council of ministers like *Amatya*, *Sachiv*, *Mantri*, and in later periods, *Tirth*. In the works of Kautilya, Manu, Kamandaka, and *Agni Purana*, the words *Amatya* and *Sachiv* have been used as synonyms. In the words of John W. Spellman, "Although there are distinctions between *Amatya*, *Sachiv* and *Mantri*, they are not often observed, and authors

sometimes use these words interchangeably and as synonyms."

The first Indian Empire in its true and complete sense was established in the Mauryan Age. Kautilya was the one who envisioned such an empire under Chandragupta Maurya. Kautilya, in his Arthshastra, has mentioned the Saptaang theory of state. That is, the state is made of seven components. *Amatya* (Ministers) *Janapada* (the territory) *Swami* (the king) *Durga* (a fortified capital) *Kosha* (the Treasury) *Danda* (justice or force) *Mitra* (ally). The functions of a state are so multifaceted and complex that a king alone cannot fulfil them and therefore needs assistance. A king without his councillors and ministers wouldn't be able to rule for a long period. According to Kautilya, the duties and functions related to operating a state are many and have to be performed efficiently at different times and places for smooth administration. To ensure the smooth running of the administrative machinery and avoid any mistakes, Kautilya suggests the appointment of Ministers and *Amatyas*. Kautilya has drawn a distinction between *Amatyas* and *Mantris*. According to him, anyone with good qualities can be appointed as *Amatya* (superintendent)," but *Mantris* he has not mentioned any specifications. Also, the *Amatyas* could be appointed as many depending on the size of the empire and the responsibilities of the state. Whereas he suggests that ministers should be only three or four.

To become a member of the Council of Ministers, the person needed to have some special qualities and qualifications. In ancient India, ministers had very high positions in the government. Their importance was next to the king; this is the reason much emphasis has been put on their qualifications. According to *Arthshastra*, certain pre-requisite qualities that were sought after for all administrative posts were that the person should be a native, a high-born influential well-trained in the arts, possessed of foresight, wise, of strong memory, bold, eloquent, skilled, intelligent, possessed of enthusiasm, dignity, and endurance, pure in character, affable, firm in loyal devotion, endowed with excellent conduct, strength, health, and bravery, free from procrastination, fickle-mindedness, affectionate, and free from such qualities as excite, hatred, and enmity.

Persons endowed with all the above were to be appointed as ministerial officers (*amātyasampat*), who were the high-ranking officers. Persons who possessed one-half or one-quarter of the above qualifications came under the middle and low ranks.

The ministers also underwent a character test conducted by the king. The ministers were tested under the criteria of life, religion, wealth, love, and fear.

Kautilya suggests that the king shall dismiss a priest who, when ordered, refuses to teach the Vedas to an outcaste person or to officiate in a sacrificial performance, undertaken by an outcaste person (*ayājya*). This dismissed priest, with the help of spies, will then instigate each minister to replace the present king with a new one. If any or all

ministers refuse to do so, they will be considered pure under the religious parameter. Next, the ministers will be allured by a dismissed commander of the army. Under the pretext of gaining immense wealth, the commander will allure the ministers to murder the king. If they refuse to agree, they will be considered pure to monetary temptations. Next, the ministers will be judged on the grounds of love and fear. A woman spy under the guise of an ascetic highly esteemed in the harem may allure each minister of the king on the pretext of love and wealth. If they discard the proposal, they are considered to have passed the love allurements test and are considered pure. With the intention of sailing a commercial vessel, a minister will induce all fellow ministers to follow him. Also, a spy under the guise of a fraudulent disciple, pretending he was imprisoned, will suggest they kill the king and take all the wealth. On the grounds of apprehension that the king would kill them and refuse the proposal, then they are regarded as pure. Those ministers who successfully passed the religious allurements trials were to be employed in civil and criminal courts. Those who were successfully tested under monetary allurements were to be employed as revenue collectors or chamberlains. Those who were tested under love allurements were to be appointed to superintend the pleasure grounds. Those tested under fear allurements were to be appointed to immediate service. Those who passed all four types of allurements—religion, wealth, love, and fear—and showed exceptional integrity of character and conduct were to be appointed as prime ministers. Those who failed and proved themselves impure in one or all of the allurements were to be appointed in departments like mines, timber, elephants, forests, manufactures, etc.

In the Mauryan administration, next to the *Amatyas*, *Adhyakshas* were also appointed. These *Adhyakshas* were also selected for various departments based on their character. These *Adhyakshas* served in economic and military roles. 26 *Adhyakshas*, or secretaries, have been mentioned in *Arthshastra*. Some of them were: i) *Lakshanadhyaksha*, President of Currency & Mint; ii) *PanyaAdhyaksh*, Head of Commerce; iii) *Kupya Adhyaksh*, Head of Forest; iv) *Pautav Adhyaksh*, Head of Weights & Measures; v) *Shulk Adhyaksh*, Collection of Customs & Toll; (vi) *Sutra Adhyaksh*, Head of Textile Production Activities; (vii) *Aayudhagara Adhyaksh*, Head of Maintenance of Weapons; (viii) *Sita Adhyaksh*, Head of Agriculture. It is to be noted here that the department heads were also appointed from among the *Amatyas*. The first-class *Amatyas* became prime ministers. The second class became members of the council of ministers, and the third-class *Amatyas* were to be head of department.

The Satvahanas took after the Mauryan administration, and like that, we find *Amatyas* were appointed here as well. The first mention of *Amatya* is found in the Satvahana inscriptions.

The inscriptions mention the names of various *Amatyas*

who served under them. It is believed that these Amatyas were not appointed based on hereditary. Drawing parallels with the Mauryan Administration since Satvahanas were highly influenced by the Mauryan Administration, we can assume that the Amatyas of the Satvahanas were also chosen based on merit. The only difference was that the Amatyas in this period did not enjoy the same power and prestige once associated with them in the Mauryan period, yet they were equally important. According to R.S.Sharma, the Satvahanas appointed traders and businessmen to the post of Amatyas as many urban and semi-urban centres emerged during Satvahanas rule, and these traders seemed to have a close relation with the activities of the towns and cities and hence were regarded as better suited for the post of Amatyas to look after urban administration.

The next big empire that emerged in ancient India was of the Guptas in the 4th century AD and continued till the late 6th century. The structure of the Gupta administrative setup was not completely different from the Mauryans but was replaced with new terminology. Also, several different posts with new terms were introduced. Kamandak's *Nitisar* serves as a reliable source to learn about the politics and administration of this period. Kamandak, who was a disciple of Kautilya. Uses the term *Mantriparishadmandalam* instead of Kautilya's *Mantriparishad*. Like Kautilya, he too has espoused the Saptangatheory of state and considers ministers to be an important part of any empire.

According to Kamandak, a person who wanted the post of a minister should have certain qualities, like being from a good family, certainly high-born, with pure and heroic tendencies, learned tendencies, versed in the art of politics, and loyal. Also, he should be a native with excellent character and a friendly disposition; he should be enthusiastic, truthful, and a bearer of agility with a sound and attractive personality, a healthy personality, a healthy physique, and appreciable diplomatic skills. Military prowess was a necessary requisite for all the ministers. Thorough scrutiny was done before the selection of ministers because, based on a mantra or council, a council can be *Durmantra* or *Kalyanmantra*, that is, it could be bad or good, respectively.

Kamandak also directs that in any case, if a minister puts his selfish interests above the state's, he should be immediately sacked.

Kamandak's *Nitisar* classified ministers into 3 broad categories: *Mantri*-incharge of territorial units; Amatyas-in charge of revenue; and *Sachiv*-incharge of the military department. Important ministers and administrators under the Guptas are as follows: (i) *Vinaysthithisthapaka*, kind of *Purohit*. Related to religious matters of the state; (ii) *Mahabaladhikarna*, Military General; (iii) *Sarvaadhyaksha*, General Superintendent of the Central Administration; (iv) *Mahasenapati*, Head of the Military Department. Military Department; (v) *Mahadandnayak*, Head of Police Department, Department. Subordinate of *Mahasenapati*; (vi)

*Mahasandhivigrahak*, Foreign Minister. (vii) *Mahapratihara*, chief of palace guards; (viii) *Dandapashika*, superintendent of the police department; (ix) *Khadyakapakik*, in *Khadyakapakik*, in charge of the Royal Kitchen; (x) *Ayukta*, appointed to restore the vanquished property conquered by the emperor.

The highest administrative officers were the Kumara Amatyas. The Kumaramatyas served as a connecting line between the central and provincial administrations. According to K.C. Srivastava, the Kumaramatyas had their own separate office called '*Kumaramatya Adhikaran*', signalling that they wielded significant importance and influence in the administration.

Somewhere after the era of Chandragupta I, the office of Mantris or Amatyas started to become generally hereditary. This is supported by the various inscriptional evidence we find of this period. One of the examples comes from central India, where five generations of administrative officers come from the same family. Another example is found in the *Karmadandainscription*, which shows that Kumar *Amatya Shikharswami* was the minister of Chandragupta. His son Kumaramatya Prithvisena became minister of Kumargupta and later on, was also appointed Commander in Chief (*Mahabaladhikrita*). This shows that although the selection of ministers was based on merits and qualities, based on them they were appointed to a certain post, and in some cases, there were even changes of portfolios, but the truth was that heredity played an important part. Sons of ministers were seen as the obvious choice for filling in their shoes, given that they had all the required qualifications needed to be a minister. These posts became hereditary with time, but by no means the ministers could act on their own accord. The minister's office was safe for as long as the assembly trusted them. Non-compliance or non-performance of administrative duties would lead to serious repercussions.

Somadeva Suri, the writer of *Nitivakyamrit*, has described certain qualifications for the members of the council of ministers. He opines that a person to be appointed to the post of minister should be a native of the state. Only a person born in the same state will be loyal to the state and not betray his country. Another qualification that the person should possess is that he should be a person of fine character; otherwise, even if he possesses all qualities and qualifications but does not conduct himself properly, then he shouldn't be made a minister. Nobility and lack of any addictions are also required qualities for the post. He should always be ready to assist the king in times of need and should have adequate knowledge of subjects like agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce, trade, etc., as these are required for running a state. Another desired qualification is knowledge of weapons. The post of minister is filled with sufficient responsibilities and dangers. Therefore, the minister should have adequate knowledge of weapons. Somadev like Kautilya advocates the

*UpdhaParikshan*. That is, a person appointed to the post of minister should undergo an examination based on (i) religion (*Dharmopdha*), (ii) wealth (*Arthopdha*), (iii) lust (*Kamopdha*), and (iv) fear (*Bhayopdha*). The person who passes these four tests should be appointed as the Prime minister of the Council of Ministers.

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded from the above discussion that ministers were an indispensable part of the ancient administrative system and had wide-ranging and multifaceted roles from policymaking to implementation to military strategization and crisis management. From maintaining diplomatic relations to overseeing religious and cultural matters, all in all, they enabled the smooth functioning of the kingdoms. That's why various scholars have suggested and devised various qualifications and tests to appoint the right, most excellent, and selected people to

the post of minister. Their contribution is integral & crucial in the historical development of ancient India & has left a long-lasting impact on India's polity & cultural legacy.

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