



Pinnacle of Ancient Indian Governance and Prosperity - ESG in the Golden Era

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ABSTRACT

Mauryan and Gupta empires were known for their governance structures throughout Indian history. This paper looks at the ESG considerations embedded into their policies during 322 BCE - 185 BCE and 320 CE to 550 CE (7), respectively. Along with this, the paper also places the objectives behind pursuing ESG back in time on seven positions along the continuum: Gray, Owen and Adams (8); further emphasising that ESG has always been relevant, and in fact has been changing with time.

Key words: ESG, Golden Era, Mauryan empire, Gupta empire, continuum.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mauryan empire is distinguished by the work of Kautilya, Arthashastra (3), a valuable source of information on state administration (1). This is the starting point of evaluating the rules listed to identify those of ESG that were included in administering the empire under Chandragupta. This discussion is followed by understanding the ancient and mediaeval empires, specifically the Asokan empire, from The Wonder that was India, to cover the Mauryan empire.

The Gupta empire followed the Mauryan empire. Although there is no proper documentation of the rules for this dynasty in its entirety, the book on Gupta Empire written by Radhakumud Mookerji gives an idea of the succession of kings and within that their ESG policies.

The Gupta empire had reached its zenith on the death of Chandra-gupta II (5), thus the Gupta Empire section of this paper, will focus on Samudra Gupta Maurya and Chandra Gupta II; we get to see that they can be credited with expanding and consolidating the empire to its greatest extent.

Together, the Mauryan and Gupta empire formed the pinnacle of Ancient Indian Governance; with not just economic well being of the dynasties considered by most of the kings, but also environmental, social and governance factors building up the administration policies. They are far more relevant to today's organisational accounting and Integrated reporting, than they ever were.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (1) To identify the ESG strategies that were prevalent in Ancient India- zeniths of Mauryan and Gupta empires.
- (2) To understand the objectives behind pursuing ESG strategies, and mark them on the Continuum: Gray, Owen and Adams
- (3) To conclude the changes in objectives across the 2 dynasties.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

FINDINGS IN ARTHASHASTRA (3) ¹

This book focuses on King Chandragupta and administration under Kautilya, a major part of The Mauryan Dynasty.

Despite the ESG policies listed below, it is to be understood that Kautilya was pragmatic in his approach to economics and statecrafts, focusing on maximising efficiency, stability and power at the end of the day; aligns with the principles of pristine capitalists, "Kautilya's treatise reflects his emphasis on practical and efficient methods of governance and statecraft, focusing on the optimal use of resources and strategic manipulation to achieve political and economic stability." (6)

¹ All the italics that follow in this section are from the book cited here.



Environment policies-

1. *He shall protect agriculture from the molestation of oppressive fines, free labour, and taxes, but also keep them from being destroyed by herds of cattle.*

2. *Thus the king shall not only keep in good repair timber and elephant forests, buildings, and mines created in the past, but also set up new ones.*

3. *He shall not only start productive works in forests, but also fix adequate fines and compensations to be levied from those who cause any damage to productive forests except in calamities.*

The Mauryan empire saw environmental policies that promoted the idea of current day's 'sustainability'. Control system based on punishments was prevalent to meet sustainability goals.

Social policies-

1. *Merchants who conspire either to prevent the sale of merchandise or to sell or purchase commodities at higher prices shall be fined 1,000 panas.*

Price-fixing as we call it today is a part of anti-competitive practices that violates consumer protection laws and free market principles.

Promoting fairness in the market, it has helped protect consumers from exploitation since the Mauryan period.

Governance policies-

1. *IF a king is energetic, his subjects will be equally energetic. If he is reckless, they will not only be reckless likewise, but also eat into his works. Besides, a reckless king will easily fall into the hands of his enemies. Hence the king shall ever be wakeful.*

In contemporary terms, 'Tone set at the top' cascades down to different levels of organisation, and fosters a motivating culture; a culture that motivates employees to be the best versions of themselves and to contribute to the organisation's performance.

2. *When they (the accountants of different districts) present themselves with sealed books, commodities and net revenue, they shall all be kept apart in one place so that they cannot carry on conversation with each other. Having heard from them the totals of receipts, expenditure, and net revenue, the net amount shall be received.*

Resembles best practices within corporate governance- independence. The accountants were also required to be independent. However, it can be argued that in verifying the amounts written in the books, auditing was taking place and it required the

accountants to stay independent as is expected of the audit committee in today's corporate governance structure.

3. *In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good. Hence the king shall ever be active and discharge his duties; the root of wealth is activity, and of evil its reverse. In the absence of activity acquisitions present and to come will perish; by activity he can achieve both his desired ends and abundance of wealth*

The king was required to act 'in the best interests' of his subjects. Any conflict of interest was to be avoided. This way the subjects along with the King could benefit, similar to shareholders benefiting from increased value and the directors from their salaries.

4. *Artisans, musicians, physicians, buffoons, cooks, and other workmen, serving of their own accord, shall obtain as much wages as similar persons employed elsewhere usually get or as much as experts (kusaláh) shall fix.*

This resembles the objective pay structure to be given to the senior directors and the board by the nomination committee and is also a part of the social objective to treat employees fairly by compensating them in accordance with the industry standards.

5. *Whoever thinks that in the course of time his loss will be less than his acquisition as contrasted with that of his enemy, may neglect his temporary deterioration. -*

6. *When a king has in view the necessity of helping a friend or of destroying an enemy, or the possibility of acquiring much wealth (in return for the present help) or when he intends to utilize in future the services of the one now obliged by him, he may reject the offer of large profit at the present in preference of a small gain in future.*

Long-term interests and profits over short-term gains are the core of sustainability and promoting business continuity as we see today.



FINDINGS IN THE WONDER THAT WAS INDIA (1):²

The Mauryan empire was also known for Asoka's remarkable strong-willed and imperious administration. Being known as "half monster and half idiot" for his self-righteous and pompous but humane and benevolent attitude (1), there definitely is a social and governance aspect of ESG to look out for in his administration.

Social policies-

1. Infact, it turned out to be true. *After changing to Buddhism, Asoka declared that all men were his children, strongly supporting the doctrine of ahimsa-nonviolence.*

2. *The most profound transformation was bringing in reforms of humanity if internal administration and abandonment of aggressive war.*

3. *Asoka also claims that the social policies mentioned were what helped him to achieve many victories. In addition to this, he also believed that by setting an example of enlightened government, he might convince his neighbours of the merits of his policy and ultimately gain the moral leadership of the whole civilised world.*

Asoka's policies were of an instrumental nature-expedient on the continuum; highlighted by societal wellbeing, they were also to expand his territories, which he claims to have worked.

Environmental policies-

1. *Reduction in the consumption of meat in India, completely forbidding the killing of certain species*

A deep ecologist view was expressed, with advocacy for ecological balance and sustainability. A deep concern for ecological and environmental well-being was seen.

The Mauryan empire arguably had the most positive effect on India. Post-Mauryan India was filled with struggle and unity of India was lost for nearly 2,000 years.

However, the inspiration of Mauryas was forgotten soon enough, and that questions how sustainable their ESG policies were for Indians to stay united during the Gupta empire.

² All the italics that follow in this section are from the book cited here. .

FINDINGS IN THE GUPTA EMPIRE (2):³

Samudra Gupta Maurya

Social policies:

He worked for an international system of brotherhood and peace replacing that of violence, war and aggression

Nothing about this was instrumental. The objective behind working for peace was liberation of the neighbourhoods.

In a way, he was a deep ecologist emphasising co-existence and valuing life as the end.

Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya

Environment Policies:

Emphasised on no dealings in cattle, no butcher's shops or distilleries in market places. Cowries were the medium of exchange and only Chandalas could go hunting and deal in fish.

This resonates with Asokan principles after he converted into Budhissm and in this way he could be a deep ecologist aswell, although the reasons behind his policies are not very clear.

Social policies:

Rooms with beds and mattresses, food and clothes were provided for travelling and resident monks without fail.

The establishment of Dharmashalas was seen to be open to all without distinction of caste or creed.

Pluralist stakeholder theory holds true where multiple stakeholders, including monks, were acknowledged to support welfare and spiritual, ethical values they embody.

Moreover, a social contract can be seen where fairness and inclusivity were emphasised without regard to caste or creed. It could be argued that these social agreements helped in promoting peace and keeping the society intact.

The moral progress and public spirit of the people are shown in their liberal endowments of religious and educational institutions. Endowments took the form of lands with full apparatus necessary for cultivation, raising enough income to meet their expenditure.

³ All the italics that follow in this section are from the book cited here. .



As a social ecologist, the importance of providing resources to improve the living conditions through increasing income was adhered to. This, in one way, could be a holistic approach to societal progress.

The elders and gentry of the countries have instituted in their capital free hospitals, and hither come all poor or helpless patients, orphans, widowers and cripples. They are well taken care of, a doctor attends them, food and medicine benign supplied according to their needs. They are all made quite comfortable, and when they are cured, they go away.

Imbalances in the society were addressed. Equity was promoted as a socialist.

IV. CONCLUSION

ESG policies were evident in both the dynasties that marked the zenith of Indian governance, as seen above; proving that Indian administration reached its peaks through a combination of economic and ESG principles. They are not foreign to the state. However, the objectives have varied widely, as depicted in the diagram below. None-the-less, they have accumulated to form the Golden Era that India witnessed and formed the basis for exemplary statecraft and state administration.



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