

The existence of cities and their local self-governance by municipalities in ancient India.

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The city “has everything that is tardy and everything sublime. It holds both hope and despair. It encompasses millions of people, and it can be the loveliest place on earth...It is a vital Centre of every civilized society...It is both a place and a state of mind.”

By Robert Bierstedt

Abstract:

The constitution of India guarantees the democratic form of government at root levels by providing provisions for establishment of panchayati raj institutions at village level as well as provisions for establishment of municipalities at city and town level. The article provides a deep analysis of existence of municipalities in ancient India. In ancient India from Harappan civilization to Harsha period, there are ample evidences of municipal corporations. In a democratic country, the existence of self-government is mandatory for the enjoyment of rights of citizens of the country as well as for the better development of the country. When the trade increased by development of communication, the new towns and cities emerged which were governed by various guilds and merchants, all this shows that there should be administration and control in the cities as the development of the nation depends upon the development of villages, cities and states. Therefore, by 73rd and 74th amendment Act, the constitution provides for the establishment of panchayats and municipalities for better educational, sanitation, electricity, water supply municipalities play an important role to implement the policies at ground level. The existence of municipalities cannot be denied in any era of history because they play a major role in the economic, social and cultural development of the country.

I. Introduction

A body politic created by the incorporation of the people of a prescribed locality invested with the subordinate powers of legislation to assist in the civil government of the state and to regulate and administer local and internal affairs of the community. The word municipality thus has a wider meaning. Chapter IX A deals with municipality.

Article 243 – P defines municipality as “an institution of self-government constituted under Art. 243 Q of the constitution.

Article 243 Q states about constitution of municipalities at three levels :

1. Nagar panchayat
2. Municipal council
3. Municipal corporation

This definition indicates that a corporation or a municipal council or nagar panchayat is constituted on strength of population and area or place where it is constituted i.e. Urban or rural. But all three are deemed municipality. A municipal corporation with a larger area is as much a municipal council with smaller area.

The word municipality has been defined under Webster's new dictionary as "a town, city or borough, which has a local self-government".

In Black's law dictionary "municipality is extended to legally incorporated or duly authorized association of inhabitants of limited area for local governmental purpose or other public purposes".¹

II. Origin of municipalities:

The word "municipality" has been derived from the roman word "municipium". The word municipium denotes, a free town possessing the right of roman citizenship, but governed by its own laws. Royal and baronial charters protected these free town communities prevailed among Anglo Saxons, such free towns that were based on self-governing model and they elevated rapidly in medieval England. These independent communities led to the decline of feudal barons. Historian Robertson says these communities assisted in regulating the government, police and arts, even today, they are the basis of modern civilization.²

III. Decentralization :

in a democratic country like India which is the second largest populous country in the world and where exist unity in diversity regarding religion , race , culture , linguistic grounds and also the geographical condition are very much unique in the Indian subcontinent , the pillar of democracy stands on the principle of decentralization and building of a self-governing institutions of interconnected nature at all levels in governing the system. Although the urgency for economic development the forefathers of the sagacious document were compelled to concentrate the powers in a strong Centre that's why K.C. Wheare called our sagacious document as quasi federal because we have strong Centre with autonomous units. They were quite right in doing their job as the period in which they framed the sagacious document, the country was lacking in resources and the social and economic development was the need of an hour. But as far as the present is concerned, the social and economic necessities themselves demand decentralization for the bright future and development of the country. Therefore, it can be very well said that the pillars for developments are the self-governing institutions. The development of the country depends on the well-established integrated local self-institutions at both village level and urban level. Therefore, it becomes important to define the constitution, functions and powers of these institutions.³

¹Cantonment Board, secunderabad v. G. Veketram reddy, AIR 1995 SC 1210.

² Durga Das Basu, commentary on the constitution of India, vol.8 8592(LexisNexis, Nagpur, 8th edn., 2011).

³ Mv pylee, constitution of India ,323 (Vikas Publishing House pvt. Ltd. New Delhi , 3rd edn.,2000)

IV. Development of cities:

As the population of the country is rising day by day, because of development, and for facilities and convenience people are shifting from rural to urban areas. The urbanization has become a major problem of today as it, leads to many problems like housing shortage, unemployment and poverty, pollution at various levels, communication, traffic problems and many other problems. The cities are meant for development of the nation at the same time. They play pivotal role in civilization and culture. They are the foundation of industries, schools, better medical facilities. these cities at the same time also need sanitation , clean environment , better lightening system , better communication facilities and many other things . If the development of our country depends upon the development of rural areas, similarly it also depends on the development of metropolitan areas. At village level, the constitution has established panchayats, after establishing panchayats the need of establishing a local self-institution was realized at urban level also.

Urban area basically refers to cities and towns. Demographically the term “urban area” emphasizes on the size of population and density of population whereas sociologically the term urban area focuses on heterogeneity, impersonality, interdependence and quality of life. The German sociologist, **Tonnies (1957)** differentiated between rural and urban communities. The rural gemeinschaft community means the community where social bonds are based on close personal ties, kinship and friendship, and the focus is on tradition, consensus and informality, while the urban gesellschaft society is one which is impersonal and based upon secondary relationships and the interaction with people is formal, contractual and dependent on the special function or service they perform.⁴

Towns also comes under urban areas. town included collection of houses , every municipality/ corporation notified area , the place should have a few characteristics and civic amenities like transport and communication , banks , schools , markets , recreation centres , hospitals , electricity and newspapers etc.⁵

Therefore both rural and urban areas need separate self-governing institutions as both deals with different aspects of lives of people.

V. Growth of urban areas and need for local self-institution:

It is evident after going through the historical background of municipalities that cities have existed since ancient times, the rapid growth of cities and movement of people from rural to urban areas has become common from last ten decades. People are leaving villages for their own economic development, which ultimately helps in the development of the country, the main cause of urbanization is the industrialization, which demand labors from urban areas. The growth of cities depends on many factors such as political, religious, historical and economic factors. According to various sociologists, the growth rate of urban areas is going to increase during the next two decades whereas the growth rate for rural areas will decrease.

⁴ Ram Ahuja, social problems in India, 306, 307 (rawat publications, Jaipur,3rd edn., 2014).

⁵ Ibid.

As per U.N. projection, urban areas in India will be marked by an average annual rate of change of the fastest growing urban agglomerations of 3.3 per cent during 2018 - 2030. Also as per UN projections, 45.2 per cent people will live in urban areas in India by 2025 AD.⁶

There exists serious problems of housing and slums, crowding, water supply and drainage, transportation and traffic, power shortage, sanitation, pollution etc. these problems need to be tackled. This can be done only through local self-institutions. Taxes are needed to be collected for proper maintenance of roads, sewage system, water supply facilities and power supply. a city must bear the cost of its own development . Financial support from central and state governments is not pragmatically possible. All these tasks can only be done by a local self-governing body, therefore the municipalities are of great help.

Since the const. has been adopted, the efforts have been made for democratic decentralization of power as provided under Art. 40 of Const. of India, which states that the state shall take steps to re -organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and functions as, may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

It is a debatable question of consideration that the local self- government institutions at grass roots have attained the objectives of democratic decentralization or not. It was felt that the leadership was in few hands. The poorer and weaker sections of society were prevented from getting effective leadership. It was seen that the dominant sections of society in both panchayati raj institutions as well as nagarpalikas and municipalities have monopolized the power and used it for their own benefits and purposes. All this led to the loss of belief in the grass root democratic institutions. **(Bihari Lal rada v. Anil Jain (Tinu))**

Therefore 74th constitution Amendment Act, 1994 which specifically provides for reservation of seats in these local institutions to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their numbers. It was seen that local bodies were losing power and were becoming weak and not of much importance on account of many reasons, conditions like failure to hold regular elections, the powers not being devolved properly. It was realized that urban local bodies as well as panchayati raj institutions have not been able to acquire status and dignity of viable and responsive bodies.⁷

Our sagacious document provide for decentralization not only through directive principles of state policy but more specifically through constitutional 73rd and 74th amendment Act. These amendments seek to create an institutional framework for ushering in grass roots democracy through the medium of local governing local bodies in both rural and urban areas of the country.

The municipalities add new part in constitution in respect to urban local bodies to provide for reservation of seats in every municipality in favor of weaker section such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Part ix A inserted by 74th Amendment Act, 1992 with effect from 01.06.1993. It specifically provides for devolution by state legislature of powers and responsibilities upon municipalities with respect to preparation of plans for economic

⁶ World urbanization prospects 2018 , available at : <http://www.population .un.org> (visited on January 28, 2020)

⁷ (2009)2 SCC 1.

development and social justice and for the implementation of development schemes as may be required to enable them to function as institution of self-government. It was felt that economic development and implementation of schemes securing social justice may not be possible without providing for adequate representation to weaker sections of society. The paramount objective was to empower vulnerable sections of the society who were precluded from participating in local self -government institutions for various historical reasons due to which the constitutional objective of securing social justice remains unfulfilled.⁸

VI. Historical background of municipalities:

A. In ancient India: towns and cities have been in existence since ancient times. The Indus or Harappa culture originated in the north – western part of the Indian subcontinent. The civilization culture expanded to areas of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western parts of Uttar Pradesh. Many Harappa *sites* have been discovered in these areas, some sites are related to the developing phase of the civilization while other belongs to the developed phase and out of them, some belong to cities. Harappa on the bank of Ravi (Punjab) was first to be excavated. In Indus, valley civilization there existed proper towns and cities, out of such towns and cities the most famous were cities of Harappa and mohen-jo – daro. The mohen-jo-daro was situated on the river Indus. The third Harappa site is channhudaro, fourth site was Lothal in Gujarat, and fifth site was kalibangan in the dry bed of the river ghaggar in northern Rajasthan and banwali in Haryana. All these sites indicates the developed cities existed during the civilization. Some coastal cities like surkotada in Gujarat, sutkagendor near the makran coast, Rangpur and rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat were important cities during later phase of Harappan civilization. The Harappa and mohen –jo-daro each had its own citadel or acropolis fortified by crenellated walls. The citadel was parallelogram structure. Ruling class used this citadel for religious and governmental these fortresses were occupied by ruling class. Below the citadel there was a well-developed, proper town, the streets of the town were about 9 meter wide, these were straight and intersected each other at 90-degree angle, therefore they divided city in to big rectangular blocks. .the city of mohen Jo daro was full of structures and monuments, which indicated the capability of the ruling class to collect taxes, the concrete constructions made up of bricks also indicate the well-established link between ruling class and the common people. The quality of drainage system found in mohen Jo daro is very influential .all this arrangement indicates well planning of towns. The drain facilities in the streets, the drainage system was made of burnt bricks .there were rubbish bins, proper bathrooms in the houses. Drains with sewers in the main streets connected the bathrooms. There was a proper covering for the drains made of bricks or stone slab. All this indicates that there was proper administration regarding sanitation and water supply facilities. Such high standards of town planning and architecture is not possible without the ruling authority. Therefore it strongly supports the existence of **municipal organization** .the existence of

⁸ *Ibid.*

houses consisted of rooms and houses were two or more storeyed, represent the type of houses exist even today.⁹

- B. Later Vedic phase:** peasants did not contribute much to the development of towns. The term “nagara” is found to be in use in later Vedic period. Kaushambi and hastinapur were major towns .the formation of bigger kingdoms made the king more powerful, at the local level the villages were governed by “village assemblies”. These village assemblies were subordinate to the chiefs of dominant clans.¹⁰
- C. Buddhism and Jainism period :** cities like nalanda , taxila , kaushambi (Allahabad) , Mithila , vaishali , kusinagar (Uttar Pradesh) , Banaras ,chirand , rajgir , shravasthi, ahichchatra,hastinapur , were major cities. Archeologists have discovered the remains of houses, buildings and towns Artisans and traders introduced coins. The advancement of trade and commerce was assisted by the use of these coins. The conservatives vehemently criticized the concept of private properties because it had created inequalities, which led to poverty. They criticized new places of residents, dressing styles, the advancement in transport, which were facilitating comfort. The conservatives returned to their original primitive life. It is evident from this that all this happened because there was no proper administration at local level. Also around 8000 gramikas existed for the administration of villages at local level this shows the local administration was also the priority although for collection of taxes **during 6th century B.C. The NBPW** (northern black polished ware) it was a form of pottery. Rich people used this pottery. The N.B.P.W. phase introduced the second urbanization in India after the Harappan towns. After Harappa period for many years towns disappeared. Many towns like kaushambi, shravasti, ayodhya, kapilavastu, Varanasi, vaishali, rajgir, and patliputra appeared. Advanced knowledge of cultivation and use of influential instruments and implements assisted in the development and advancement of towns .there existed different kinds of urban centres. Aristobulus who was sent on commission by alexander , mentioned that he saw the remains of more than thousand towns .approximately 60 towns were found during 6th century B.C. shravasti was one of the twenty big cities .there existed nearly ten urban centres in the middle ganga basin . Government administered many towns; the towns with the advancement became a place for artisans and merchants. Markets evolved. There were 500 shops of potters at saddalaputta. These artisans and merchants associated in the form of guilds under their headmen. Around 18 guilds existed at that time. The name of four guilds have been discovered these are wood workers, smiths, leather workers and painters. The artisans and merchants and each guild had their residents in towns .this led to the localization of crafts and industries and hereditary transmission from father to son .every guild was administered and headed by jetthaka. Setthis (financer or banker) were also responsible for the administration of guilds. .trade started through sea routes and mainly the arrival of alexander’s army to India was responsible for opening various trade routes. Trade resulted in urbanization this urbanization was not possible without strong rural base. All the princes, priests, artisans, traders, administrators, military personnel and

⁹ Ram Sharan Sharma, Ancient India (National Council Of Educational Research And Training, new Delhi, 1st edn.,1999).

¹⁰ *Id.* at p.83.

various other administrators had their residents in towns. Their living and maintenance was only through collection of taxes. They had to keep links with the countryside. Therefore, it can be concluded that existed numerous towns.¹¹ The towns were therefore administered by artisans and setthis who existed as social groups. Towns were surrounded by cluster of villages. The Pali text mentions about three types of villages. 1. Typical villages, which were place of residents of several castes and communities. The village headmen of typical villages was called **bhojaka** . 2. Suburban villages, these were also known as crafts villages, these villages established interconnection between towns and countryside. 3. Border villages were at countryside, which combined with forests and jungles. Usually hunters and fowlers resided in such villages. Village headmen was pivotal in the administration of villages. Sometimes the village headmen was called gramini. Village headmen were also known as gramabhajaka, gramini or gramika. These village headmen had direct links with the king and their main function was to assess and collect taxes and maintain law and order.¹²

D. Magadha empire during bimbisara, ajatashatru and mahapadma nanda : ayodhya , kashi, indraprastha , patliputra ,Magadha these were prominent cities during Magadha empire.it was found that people started living around 500 B.C. Varanasi was the capital of kashi which was a city surrounded by mud embankments.there were two capitals of Magadha empire the first was at Rajgir and the second at Patliputra . Patliputra was a strong town and was not easy to conquer. The capital of Magadha, rajgriha which was capital till the time of ajatashatru, was circumscribed by an easily defended circumference of hills fortified with cyclopean walls of 40 K.m in length. The city had an influential system of water supply from hot and cold streams and could defend the attacks of enemies very easily. At the beginning, Magadha was not situated at the trade route but by the shift of capita to patliputra gave it the control of river traffic. All this led to the expansion of the Magadha Empire. This rapid growth and expansion of kingdom led to the imposition of land taxes, which became a stable source of income for the exchequer. Bali was a kind of tax, which became mandatory. New types of taxes like bhaga and Kara were introduced and after sometime these two became permanent source of income. The fertility of the soil in the gangetic valley and the rise of new class of rich peasant proprietors who could afford payment of taxes assisted in the growth of revenues. A new class of traders and artisan besides peasants also started paying taxes. The artisans were liable to work one day a month for the king. Traders were liable to pay taxes on sales to a toll officer who was known by the name of shaulkika or shulkadhyaksha. Two types of officers tundiya and akasiya, the jataka stories have described these officers as responsible for collecting taxes from the people. . This growth of taxation system led to the advancement of states. In the countryside local the village headman, who came out as head from the tribal militia, carried on administration of villages gramini was the head of village of tribe. The most characteristic feature was the standing army, senanayak (head of the army) occupied an eminent position .in the territorial states the chief of tribes revolted and claim the revenue for themselves. The leading members of the tribe also wanted the right to collect taxes from the peasants, and the right to maintain their own arms and army. This criticism led to

¹¹ D.N. jha, ancient India, 65, 66, 67(ajay kumar Jain for Manohar publishers and distributors, New Delhi, 1998).

¹² *Supra* note 9 at p.90

the establishment of true democratic and republic state .**when the Magadha was conquered by mahapadma nanda** the most characteristic feature of the empire was the republican government. The representatives of the tribes and heads of the families formed the part of public assembly (santhagara) of the capital. The head of the tribal assemblies was called raja or senapati. The office of the chief executive of the tribal state was not hereditary, and he was more a chief than a king. all the important matters were produced before the assembly and the decision was taken unanimously .according to jataka story , the shakyas were not allowed to marry a girl even with a king of low status , also the people of unequal birth were not permitted to dine together . In the gana (city) of vaishali there were several rules relating to marriage of girl in different wards of the city, .it can be concluded that there existed laws for the control private and family life of individuals in the city. Therefore, the cities were administered at local level.¹³

it can be concluded that in the post Vedic period there was democracy at the root level also . Common terms like mahaamatya and amatya were used to describe officers in both republics and kingdoms.

E. Mauryan period: there existed a very influential system of administration. Megasthenese the Greek ambassador in his book *indica* and kautilya (chanakya or vishnugupta) in his *arthashastra* gives a detailed description of the administration of city of patliputra. The whole mauryan empire was divided into small provinces, each province was administered by a prince, the prince was descendent of the royal dynasty. These provinces were still segmented into smaller parts, and rules of administration were laid down for both rural and urban areas. The study has found that there existed ample number of towns during mauryan dynasty. Patliputra, kaushambi, Ujjain, and taxila were prominent cities. The cumbersome process of economic and social activities of the state combined with the needs of urban settlements necessitated the creation of a machinery for The Administration of the towns; it was an innovation of the mauryas. Megasthenese gives a detailed account of *the municipal administration* of patliputra. Six committees administered the city of patliputra that was the capital of mauryas; there were five members in each committee. The committees were empowered to exercise different functions related to different subjects like sanitation, care of foreigners, the maintenance of account of death and birth, standardization and regulation of weights and measures and many other functions of the like nature. According to V.A. smith, “these boards were official development of the non official panchayat”. The specific powers and functions exercised by every board are described by megasthenese.

1. The first committee exercised functions related to industrial arts.
2. Second committee looks after the entertainment of foreigners. They provide them places to live, they accompany them when they used to go from the country, in the case of their death, and the property of foreigners were given to their relatives. They look after them in case of any sickness and in case of their death they respectfully interment their bodies with funeral rites.
3. The third committee maintained detailed accounts of births and deaths, when and how it occurred.

¹³ *Supra* note 11 at p.90

4. The fourth body was responsible for trade and commerce. Members look after the weights and measures. Traders were not allowed to deal with more than one kind of goods and commodities, only in case they pay double taxes only then they were allowed to deal with more than one commodity. (Superintendent of commerce was known as panyadhyaksha, he was responsible for prices of commodities, and superintendent of weights and measures was known as pautavadhyaksha, who was responsible for enforcement of standard weights and measures).
5. The fifth committee dealt with those who collect the tenths of prices of articles of food.

All these committees exercised their powers and functions integratedly and were responsible for many other works of cities administration like public works, harbours, and temples.

The facilities of fire services in cities, city police patrolling the streets at night were also available.

Kautilya (Chanakya) also mentions about municipal corporations in towns and cities. The Arthashastra mentions that the most prominent personality in the administration of cities was the *nagaraka*, who was the governor of the city. He exercised several powers and functions like collection of revenue, the maintenance of law and order, the maintenance of cleaning and sanitation facilities. Chanakya describes that the *nagarika* was responsible for inspecting the reservoirs of water, of roads, of hidden passages of going out of the cities, of forts, fort walls and other defensive works. The *nagaraka* was also responsible to keep in his safe custody, the things he found as lost, forgotten or left by others. The police, secret agents, assisted him and militia, which were having their duties in the chief towns. The *nagaraka*, was responsible to maintain safety against outbreak of fire. The *gopa* and *sthanika* used to assist the *nagaraka*. The *gopa* was responsible for collection of revenue, and the superintendence and supervision of forty households. They used to maintain records of births, deaths, incomes, expenditures of the households. The accounts maintained and all the relevant information collected by *gopa* was transmitted to the town office for permanent recording.

The *sthanika* exercised functions of attending to the accounts of four quarters of the town. *Samaharta* assisted by *pradesta* were supreme authorities for assessment of revenue.

Arthashastra also mentions about the superintendence and control of superintendents over the trade and industry. These superintendents were having different designations. The superintendent of markets was known as *samsthadyaksha* who was responsible for safeguarding the fraudulent trade practices. All state boats were under the superintendent of ships known as *navadyaksha*, who was responsible for regulating river traffic and collecting ferry charges. The superintendent of toll was known as *shulkadyaksha*, responsible for collecting taxes from traders customs dues from 1/5 to 1/25 of the value. Superintendent of mines was known as *akaradyaksha*. Superintendents were also responsible for weaving industry, breweries and the state liquor shops and salt mines.

Guilds of artisans living in the capital city were made to pay taxes; those who lived in the countryside were exempted. There existed copper and gold mines, use of various categories of iron proves that there was use of the metal. The enhanced use of iron provided infrastructure for

large scale manufacture of punch – marked coins and deluxe pottery northern black polished ware , the introduction of ring wells and most importantly , for the efflorescence of the pre mauryan towns as well as for the rise of new ones.

Gradually when the agricultural life was settled the Varna system was introduced, the vaishyas were dvijas (inferior to Brahmans and Kshatriyas). The participation of vaishyas in trade and commerce helped them to acquire wealth. Through their trade guilds, they were responsible for the administration of urban institutions.¹⁴

The very essential characteristic of mauryan administration was maintenance of strong and huge army. There was also maintenance of navy. The armed forces were under the control of board of thirty officers, which were segmented into six committees, there were five members in each committee. There was a system of separate committees for the army, the navy, the cavalry, the elephants, the chariots, and the transport. The economic activities were under the direct control of state. Taxes were collected from the peasants, tolls were levied on goods, which entered different towns, all this money raised through revenues and tolls were utilized by the royal exchequer. However, at the end the people of towns complained about oppressive rule and corruption by wicked dushtamatyas. Such complaints were from many cities, which was one of the major cause of decline of the empire. Therefore, it is evident that towns and cities must be properly administered for the development and bright future of the country.

After the last mauryan ruler, brihadratha the immediate successor was pushyamitra shunga. The major cities during this period were patliputra, ayodhya, vidisha, Jallundur , sakala (Sialkot).

F. Satavahanas: During this period, the king was known as upholder of dharma. There were units of administration in satvahana kingdom. The district was called ahara, the administrative officers were known as amatyas and matamatas. Senapati was called the provincial governor. Gaulmika was the head of rural administration. The Buddhist and monks were given tax-free villages. The cultivated fields and villages were free from the control of policemen and soldiers, and all officers. Therefore, these villages were autonomous. There were three kinds of feudatories the highest rank official was known as king, the second rank official was called as mahabhoja, and the third rank official was called as senapati. These officials exercised authority in the local units. Tagar, paithan, dhanyakataka, Amaravati, nagarjunakonda, broach, sopara, arikamedu, kaveripattanam all these were prominent towns during satvahana period. The demand for the commodities gave rise to market centres like dharanikota on the Krishna in Guntur district (Andhra Pradesh) and karad in satara district (Maharashtra). The satvahana ruler gautamiputra shatakarni instructed his royal officials not to interfere with the administration of donated villages or field. In such conditions, the beneficiaries were free to manage the administrative affairs in the donated areas. These gifted villages thus

¹⁴ H.V. Sreenivasa Murthy, History Of India part 1 59(eastern book company, Lucknow, 1st edn., 1993).

tended to become independent and autonomous administrative divisions, which weakened the royal control over the countryside. Therefore, there existed a kind of municipal control as exist today.

G. Gupta period: During the reign of gupta period, which is known as golden period in history, there existed a provincial and local administration. The whole empire was divided into various divisions, which were known as “bhuktis”, each bhukti was administered by “uparika”. These bhuktis were further divided into “districts” or “vishayas” which were administered by “vishyapati”, kumaramatyas and ayuktas. In eastern India, vishyas were divided into “vithis”, which again were subdivided into “villages”. It is a characteristic of the policy of decentralization followed by the gupta emperors that the district officer is habitually said to be nominated by the provincial governor.

The essential business in connection with the sale of government lands was sometimes carried out by kumaramatya or the ayukta or the vishyapati or the prince viceroy in cooperation with the **municipal board (adhishtanadhikarana)**, and sometimes by the kumaramatya with the district office (vishyadhikarana) and at other times by ashtkuladhikarna with the village headman (gramika), the house holders (kutumbins) and so on. **The municipal board comprised of four members namely the guild president (nagarasreshthi), the chief merchant (sarthavaha), the chief artisan (prathamakulika) and the chief scribe (prathamakayastha).**

The ashtkuladhikarna is said to be administered and headed by village elders (mahattaras), which may mean the rural board. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a system of popular representation in the districts as well as towns and village administration. Specifically, the members of the municipal board other than the chief scribe were representatives (probably president) of the guilds of sreshthis, sathavahas, and kulikas are known to have flourished during the gupta period in north Bihar. In this association of the popular element with the local government, it can be concluded that it was one of the boldest administrative experiments of the imperial guptas. Other evidences of tirakumaramatyadhikarna and vaishalyadhishthanadhikarana in the legends of seals recovered from the site of vaishali indicate that the district and municipal boards were also functioning in north Bihar. It can also be concluded that in north Bihari the municipal board comprised of the guilds of sreshthis, sarthavahas and kulikas.¹⁵

The village headmen was an important personality during gupta’s reign, he was responsible for the administration of village affairs with the help of elders. With the administration of a village or a small town, leading local elements were associated. No land transactions could be effected without their consent.

In the **urban administration**, there was an important place for organized professional bodies. The sealings from vaishali show that artisans, merchants and head of the guild served on the same corporate body, and in this capacity, they obviously conducted the affairs of town. Body of officers administered the cities. each officer was in charge of department and

¹⁵ R.C. Mujumdar, the classical age 350,353 (bhartiya vidhya bhawan , Mumbai)

al, of them constituted visyadhikarana .these officers included saulika , or the superintendent of tolls and customs utkhetapita , the collector of taxes , bhandagaradhikrita , officer incharge if city treasury . The cities like patliputra, ayodhya, Ujjain, dasapura, girinagara etc. these cities have their autonomous advisory councils or parishads. The advisory council was composed of representatives of several interests of the society .interests like nagarstrestin (chief of nigams of bankers), sarthavaha (chief of caravan traders), prarthamakulika (representatives of the guilds of artisans), prathamakayastha (chief of superintending and clerical staff) were represented in the council. The main function of the council was the advancement of civic amenities. It was responsible for maintenance of law and order. They were under the direct control of central government though its representative purapala uparika.

The administrative board of the district of koti varsha in north Bengal (Bangladesh) included the chief merchant, the chief trader and chief artisan. Their consent related to land transactions was mandatory.¹⁶

Artisans and bankers were organized into their own separate guilds. The main role of the guilds cannot be ignored in the administration of cities and towns .the Kula, shreni, gana, represented various grades of guild organizations. The titles like dasa, datyta, nandin, pala, sena, simha are evidence of members of different casted were included in the guilds. The guild was known by the name of the headman. Many numbers of guilds of artisans, traders etc. at bhita and vaishali were seen. At mandsore in malwa and at Indore, silk weavers had their own guilds and were administered by them only. The merchants or the craft guild had a legal status. it was independent in making its own laws and regulations . The honest person can be appointed by the guild as its executive officer to punish the violators of dharmashastras.¹⁷

In the district of bulandshar in wetern U.P, the guilds were organized by oil pressures. These guilds of merchants, enjoyed immunities. They also looked into the administration of their own members and punishments were prescribed for those who violated the laws and customs of the guild. Such administration system was also applied to north Bengal, Bihar, U.P., M.P. which were governed directly by the officers appointed by gupta kings.¹⁸ During gupta period patliputra, kanauj, Benares, Mathura, Ujjain, prayag, Nasik and other cities were main cities for political, religious, educational and other purposes.

The class of officers known as kumaramatyas and ayuktas furnishes a link between the central and provincial administration of the imperial guptas. The amatyas were referred as general body of officials as described by the arthashastra and the jatakas. The guptas administration created a new class (rank) called kumaramatya in this class high imperial officers as well as officers on the personal staff of the emperor, the crown prince, officers incharge of districts were included. The ayuktas of the Gupta Empire were given the job of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ H.V. sreenivasa murthy, history of India part 1 , 74 75 (eastern book company , lucknow,2013)

¹⁸ Ibid.

restoring the wealth of kings conquered by the emperor and sometimes they were given the responsibility of districts and metropolitan towns.

H. Harsha period:

Harsha's administration was based on feudal and decentralisation. The territories conquered by king Harsha were administered by feudatories. The king was pivotal in the administration, assisted by crown prince. Other princes were appointed as viceroys of provinces. Various ministers and advisors assisted in the administration by the king. Decentralization of authority was caused by increasing grants of land and villages with fiscal and administrative immunities to priests and temples. The priests were given the magisterial and police powers, which led to the weakening of central authority. The local administration was autonomous and independent of the Centre, the kingdom was divided into bhuktis (provinces) which was further sub divided into vishayas (districts). The districts were administered by "ayukta" and the provinces were administered by "kumaramatya", various other officers of local administration included bhogapati, ayuktaka, pratipalapurushas has been mentioned in Harshacharita. Therefore all this makes it clear that there was well administered village system. Other officers have also been mentioned in the Harshacharita is gramakashapatalika whose title indicates that he was responsible for maintaining and arranging the village accounts. Various other officers like ajnasatam prapayita (an officer responsible for carrying king's orders into effect), a simapradata (the officer for fixing the boundaries of the donated lands) a nyayakaranika (a judicial officer), a kayastha (scribe), a sasayita (officer responsible for execution of the charter), a bandagaradhikrita (superintendent of stores) and an utkhetayita (officer in charge for the collection of taxes), the description of donated lands as lying within the limits of Chandrapuri Vishya (district) and the name of the officer (nayaka) point to the usual administrative division of the kingdom into districts. The Vishyapati and the Adhikarana as receiving communication of the king's grants suggests the association of district officer with the **municipal board as existed during the Gupta period**. These officers established link between local administration and the Centre. Villages were under direct administration of rural bodies of headman and village elders.¹⁹

I. Peninsular India (southern India): during 300 – 750 A.D the Chalukyas of Badami and Pallavas of Kanchi were two prominent rulers in peninsular India, Vikramaditya got over on Pallavas and established supremacy. However, the Chalukyas could not become independent and supreme for a long time they had to come under the control of Rashtrakutas. The rural administration during this period was controlled in an influential manner, as the taxes were demanded from the peasantry to fulfil the needs of the king. There was formation of newly states, each state was further divided into feudatory chiefdoms, these feudatory chiefdoms were a part of bigger states. Each such state was independent and autonomous whether big or small. These states had their own army, own taxation system, own administrative machinery, there was priestly supports and the supporters of like nature. Every state got the resources from rural areas. The development of villages for the development of every state was of prime importance. The grants made

¹⁹ *Supra note 11* at pg 356, 357.

to Brahmans by pallavas assisted in expansion of rural areas. There existed three types of villages during this period in peninsular India. These are as follows:

1. Ur Sabha, it was a village where peasants, these peasants many times had their land over which everyone has a right. There was no concept of private land. These villages were under the control of village headman. The headman was responsible for the collection of taxes .these villages existed in Tamil nadu.
2. The second type of villages existed in peninsular India were Sabha villages. These villages were composed of brahamadeya villages and agrahara villages .the brahamadeya villages were villages, which were given to Brahmans. The Brahmans were having autonomous rights in these land but they used to exercise their authorities collectively.
3. The third type of villages existed were the nagram villages. These villages were like cities, which were inhabited by traders and artisans and merchants. In the kingdom of chalukyias village elders who were called mahajana administered villages.

The administration of the imperial chalukyias of vatapi was of special character. The kings were given titles like paramesvara (or rajadhiraja paramesvara), maharaja or the ambitious title like maharajadhiraj pamesvara paramabhataraka. Other officers included vishyapati (district officer), the gramakuta (village headman) and the mahattaradhikarins who represented the executive body of the assembly of mahattaras (leading householders of the village). The inscriptions mentions the grant of the constitution in favour of the mahajanas and the nagaras as well as eighteen prakritis of a certain town by the crown prince vikramaditya. The local taxes and other charges (in cash as well as in kind) were also collected by the guild of oilmen from every household.²⁰

Therefore, it can be concluded from the study of peninsular India in ancient times that there existed independent and autonomous villages and cities and the system of administration was very well described. The idea of collecting taxes was also good for the development of the empire. Therefore, the villages and cities occupied an important place in whole ancient India. This idea is alive even today for the better advancement and development of the country.

The central government was developed on the substructure of independent and autonomous local institutions, in every aspect it was a self-governing local institutions. The integrated system of the administration of villages and cities was very helpful as it was not possible for a central authority to effectively administer the cities and towns. These local institutions were proved efficient auxiliaries to the central government. These were formed for the development of cities and interests of the people individually. All these local institutions ensures that there was proper administration.

VII. Conclusion:

The existence of towns and cities and the administration of these towns and cities in ancient India is evident from the study of various civilizations and dynasties existed in ancient India. Beginning from the Harappan civilization to chalukyias and other dynasties in the south and peninsular India it can be seen that there was a proper administration of the whole empire

²⁰ *Id.* at p. 359.

divided into various autonomous towns and cities, which helped in proper administration and kept the country of ancient India intact. The shaka – kushans in the north and the north – west and the satvahanas in the Deccan ruled over large areas. Their administration system was based on decentralization. The kushans divided the empire into satrapies. There existed many lesser kings than the prominent ruler. The growth of trade was flourished by the construction of royal highway from patliputra to taxila by the mauryas. Land routes were developed to south India after mauryas. The emergence of the Roman Empire as the dominant power in the western world expanded India's trade the main exports were pepper, ivory, precious stones, tortoise shells. commodities like topaz , thin cloth , linen , glassware , copper , tin , lead , wine , realgar , wheat were exported from Rome. The list of commodities exchanged between India and Mediterranean world is fabulous. **This trade and exchange of coins is linked with the process of urbanization.** Many coastal towns emerged. It is evident that there existed large number of towns throughout the country. Taxila was the most important urban Centre. This increase in demand of trade required an efficient organization and administration of these towns and trading centres. Individual artisans congregated together and formed guilds, merchants organized themselves into corporations and used to administer the cities. Guilds started gaining sovereign powers in the cities and used to issue coins. Taxila was administered by merchant corporations, which also issued coins. The guilds were controlled by guild court. The large-scale production of terracotta during shaka – kushana is linked with the rise of urban centres. During gupta period, the decentralization of authority was caused by grant of lands and villages to priests and temples. The fourth century rustles iron pillar at mehrauli (Delhi) bears testimony to the technological skill of craftsmen, and inscriptions indicate that guilds of artisans and merchants played an important role in the municipal administration of towns in the gupta period.