

PUBLIC ENTERPRISES IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA

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Public sector in India has expanded rapidly after independence, but the knowledge of public Enterprise in India is as old as the knowledge about political democracy. Even in Vedic times, the Institution of state existed and it function as a properly organised institution. The king, when crowned, was administered an oath, “I will see to the growth of the country as God myself”.¹ The great Epic of Mahabharata provides the severe sanctions against a king who fails to guard the Welfare of his people. The idea of welfare state was practiced with such thoroughness and perfection as to make Prof. K T Shah observe that “welfare state” of today has a very little to teach to its ancient prototype: and perhaps a great deal to learn. Defence and provision for infrastructure where Prime obligation of the state in ancient times. About half of the total revenue of the state was used to be spent on defence. Items of Expenditure other than defence were the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, temples schools, hospitals, irrigation works the maintenance of police, Judiciary, forests, mints, granaries and Gowshalas.

In ancient India a variety of public Enterprises existed and the state played a direct, active and even Pioneering role in the economic life. The modest aim of the public Policy was the Welfare of the subjects, together with the advancement of the state. All unoccupied land was supposed to belong to the king. Such lands were developed as a state farm. Irrigation, since time immemorial has been looked up as the state activity. Well tanks, reservoirs, and large irrigation work we enjoined as a public duty, from which no king, no ruler. could obtain ex in the emption. In the same way building and maintenance of roads and keeping them open for traffic what the obligation of state. Forests and forest-based industries with the concerned of the state.² The Monopoly of the state existed in the field of mines and metallurgical industries were fully developed in ancient India as is evidenced by the superior quality of the products. Iron Pillar of Delhi bears and unbelievable testimony to the skill of the craftsmen of Gupta period. The manufacture of arms, ammunitions and other equipments were a state monopoly. Chariot, the important war carriage in those days, was manufactured, in the state factories by “Rathadhyak-sha”, the superintendent of the Chariots.³ The state was large scale in manufacturer of the textiles, weights and measures. The state was responsible

¹ In terms of steel upto 1970-71.

² In terms of finished steel upto 1970-71.

³ Excludes output in Railway Workshops.

for import and export. In the medieval period mining also came in the ambit of state activity.

A large number of Karkhanas, Royal workshops with attached to imperial household.⁴ The profits of the public enterprises from the considerable proportion of the total income of the state. During the Mauryan Age, India gave to the world the first taste of 'State socialism' and Chandragupta Maurya was the first to establish a state of modern type and organise the administration on rational basis with assistance of his able Minister, Kautilya.⁵ In Mughal India, the state was the largest manufacturer of several commodities. The Mughal Sultans took a great interest in maintaining state Karkhanas at different places such as Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur, Ahmedabad and Kashmir.⁶ At a time when the birthplace of modern industrial system, West of Europe, was inhabited by uncivilized tribes, India was famous for the wealth of rulers and for the high articles skill of her craftsmen and even at a much later period, when Merchant adventurers from West made their first appearance in India, industrial advancement of this country was, at any rate, not inferior to those of the most advanced European Nations.⁷



⁴Includes land rovers, jeep, utilities, station wagons and vans.

⁵ Includes buses, trucks, tempos and three and four wheelers.

⁶ Includes Blended/mixed and cent percent non-cotton yarn from 1970-71.

⁷ Includes Blended/mixed cotton cloth from 1970 onwards.