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Arthashastra: The Kingship Theory

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ABSTRACT

The lack of moral and ethical values amongst a few elected representatives and the political leaders which leads to acts of dishonesties and questions the entire political structure of the nation is the central stage of debate in the contemporary Indian politics. Various political thinkers and philosophers deliberate today the importance of politicians being moral and ethical. The Indian knowledge system should be explored to understand the duties and characteristics of a leader. The first Indian political thinker who has extensively written and discussed about the ethicality of a ruler (the government) is the great Kautilya. Kautilya in his treatise Arthashastra has very well defined and explained who a ruler actually is and how he should be working for the welfare of his state and people without being biased. Kautilya has deliberated upon the duties and responsibilities of a king besides on the ways how a king should be trained. The author in the paper attempts to understand the Kautilyan philosophy of kingship and state, and how a ruler (leader) should perform his duties and hence achieve good governance. Further in the paper author talks about the justice delivery system suggested and explained by Kautilya in Arthashastra, since Kautilya believed that good governance in state can only be achieved by a just and effective justice delivery system. The paper further tries to analyze the basic difference between Kautilya and other western philosophers.

Keywords: Kingship, Good Governance, Dharama, Welfare State, Saptanga.

I. INTRODUCTION

येन शास्त्रम च शस्त्रम च नंदराजगताच भू

अमर्षेरागेधृदतान्याशु तेन शास्त्रमिदं कृतं ²

This Sanskrit shlok means that the book ARTHSHASHTRA is written by the one who is responsible for the welfare of the land ruled by the Nanda dynasty, he is also the one who enriched the shastra and shaastras.

Chanakya also known as Kautilya (which indicates him to be of kutila gotra) and Vishnugupta is considered to be the chief minister of The Great Mauryan Empire (the first pan India Empire covering most of the Indian subcontinent). The birthplace of Kautilya is still a debate among

¹ Author is a student at Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur, India.

² Pranath Vidyalankar(trans.), 'Kautilya Arthashastra', p.3.

Indologists, some argue, that his birthplace is in Takshashila, a few claim him to be of the Gola district in South India whereas others trace his roots from Patliputra in Magadh. Although there is dissension on the exact date of the authorship of Arthashastra, most historians believe it to be written around the third to fourth century B.C.

Arthashastra unlike the common notion, that it is a book predominantly written on economics and management of wealth and resources in a state, is a book which is concerned with the management of state, politics, jurisprudence, administration of state by king, foreign relations etc. besides the abovementioned notion. ARTHSHASTRA derives its name from the Sanskrit words *ARTHA* (which means goal) and *SHASTRA* (which means treatise). On translation in English the word Arthashastra means ***The Science of Politics***.³

Kautilya has divided Arthashastra into 15 books, the first five talking about the administration of the state, the other eight being written on foreign relations and the rest on miscellaneous issues.

Book 1- It deals with the kingship i.e. education, training, appointment, daily routine and duties of the king. Besides it also deals with the appointment of various ministers of the state.

Book 2- In this book Kautilya mentioned the duties of the officers (executive) and also describes the activities performed by people whether economic or non economic.

Book 3- This book describes the judicial structure of the then state.

Book 4- It deals with the crimes and its management.

Book 5- This book is concerned with the emoluments of various officials.

Book 6- In this book theoretical and ideological concept of constituent elements and international relations are mentioned.

Book 7- Methods of foreign policies used in complex geopolitical situations.

Book 8- It describes the calamities which may affect the state adversely.

Book 9- It deals with war preparation, mobilization of troops, and appropriate defense that should be taken.

Books 10- Various ways of fighting techniques are described.

Book 11- How to manage oligarchies in a conquered state.

Book 12- It defines behavior and actions of weak and strong king.

³ Joshua J Mark, 'ARTHSHASTRA', <https://www.worldhistory.org/Arthashastra/>, (visited on 06/09/2022).

Book 13- Conquest of enemy's forts.

Book 14- It deals with the secret services.

Book 15- It describes logical and methodological approach towards state's functioning.⁴

II. KAUTILYA'S VIEWS ON STATE

The social contract theory of the origin of the state is very similar to Kautilya's view on the origin of the state. According to him people got fed up with the *MATSYANYAYA* (a pre-political condition based on the principle of might is right, where the strong dominates the weak), and to avoid situations of wars and humanitarian crises they selected Manu as their ruler. Prior to Kautilya the state and its structure were primarily derived from the *DHARMA*, the predominant aim of an individual in life was to attain spiritual realization (*moksha*), laws were based on the customs and traditions, with negligible authority of state, but Kautilya in *Arthashastra* talks about the power and the authority of the state to make laws and to execute them stringently if necessary.

Kautilya has divided the structure of the state in **seven parts** known as *SAPTANGA* or *SEVEN PRAKRITS*, these seven elements are

1. SWAMI
2. AMATYA
3. JANAPADA
4. DURGA
5. KOSA
6. DANDA
7. MITRA

According to Kautilya the state can function effectively only when all these parts of the state work harmoniously and simultaneously.

(A) What is Kingship?

If we go by the dictionary meaning of Kingship it means the office, dignity and position held by a king,⁵ it also means the personality of a king or the traits which an ideal king should have. Not only in India but in the entire world kingship has been the dominant form of government,

⁴ L.N. Rangarajan(ed.) '*Kautilya, The Arthshastra*', pp. 23,24.

⁵ Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kingship>, (visited 09/09/2022).

for a very long and considerable period of time. Kingship according to various historians is not just a form of government and political structure but also refers to the exemplary attributes that the person should have, acquiring the highest position in the state.

III. THE KING AND QUALITIES

It is the most important and the top most position in kingship. There are various theories of how the state originated and the institution of king was established, the most famous and accepted one being the *divine theory of origin of the state*. But Chanakya did not believe in this theory, he was of the opinion that it is not the God who has appointed a King and given him certain rights and privileges, but it is a human institution. In Arthashastra Kautilya has often used the King synonymously with the state because the king is the one who embodies all the constituents of a state. Kautilya considered the king to be the symbol and the principal organ of the state; this helped him to conclude that if the king is not functioning ideally then all the other organs (the seven prakrits) of the state will decline. Since the prosperity and success of the state and citizens largely depended on the king, Kautilya suggested certain qualities, attributes and duties that a king should have and follow. Kautilya suggested, the king to be well versed in four disciplines ANVIKSIKI (Philosophical), TRAYI (Vedic), VRATTA (Economics), and DANDANITI (political science).⁶

IV. THE TRAINING OF THE PRINCE

Kautilya believed that for the king to have moral, ideological and physical qualities, it is very important to inculcate these manners, skills and behavior in him from an early age that will ultimately result in a king who is suitable for the state.

The prince should be taught alphabet and arithmetic once TONSURE ceremony (generally at the age of 3-4) is performed. Further the Prince should learn the three Vedas (the Rigveda, Samaveda and the Yajurveda), economic principles of the state, and theoretical and practical applications of the political science from the learned elders.

The Prince is supposed to observe and practice Celibacy till his sixteenth birth anniversary, and then after he should shave his head and

He should be having good contacts and respect for elders, observing them will help him to understand the complexity and realism of life.

⁶ Kiranjit Kaur, KAUTILYA: SAPTANGA THEORY OF STATE, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/42748368>, p. 60.

V. DAILY ROUTINE OF THE PRINCE

- First part of the day – The day of the Prince should start by physical trainings; it primarily includes training in uses and applications of weapons, horses, elephants, chariots etc.
- Second part of the day- In this part he is supposed to learn and understand the *itihas*; it includes *Puranas, Itivratna, Akhyayika, Udaharana, Dharmashastra and Artshastra*⁷
- Third and the last part of the day – In the last two parts of the day the Price should learn from the society, family, elders, etc. by observing.

VI. CONTROL OVER THE SENSES

Character is known to be the most important part of an individual's behavior. According to Kautilya the King should be self disciplined and he must be having skills to resist the ill feelings and temptations. Kautilya has described six enemies of a king which he should fight and resist from:

1. LUST
2. ANGER
3. GREED
4. CONCEIT
5. ARROGANCE
6. FOOLHARDINESS⁸

A King should resist these temptations if he desires to enjoy his kingship for a long time. Chanakya in his treatise has given a few examples of kings who fell prey to any one of these enemies and perished later in life. For instance *Dandakya*, (the Bhoja king), *Krala*(king of Videhas), *Talajangha* etc. lost their kingship in a an early age due to their inability to conquer these enemies. Whereas, kings like Jamadagnya and Ambarisha long enjoyed there reign on the earth as they were able to resist these enemies.⁹

(A) Sage-Like King (Rajarishi)

Kautilya has also listed the qualities of a *RAJARISHI* (Sage-like king), these are as follows:

- He should cast out the six enemies which Kautilya considered to be harmful for the King

⁷ R.P. Kangle, the Kautilya Arthshastra (Part II), 2nd ed. p.11, 2014.

⁸ L Nagarjana, The Kautilya Arthashastra , 1st ed. p. 145, 1992.

⁹ R.P. Kangle, the Kautilya Arthashastra (Part II), 2nd ed. p. 12, 2014.

(should control his senses).

- He should learn and acquire skills and art of living by observing and having close coordination with elders.
- With the help of espionage he should protect his state from foreign conspiracies.
- He should be active in maintain the law and order and ensure security of the citizens.
- By performing his duties he should set an example for the state.
- The King should maintain a balance between the material and spiritual world.
- The king should balance between the three goals of life (i.e. spiritualism, material life, and sensual pleasures).
- He should make the ministers and the executives to behave in an appropriate manner.

VII. DUTIES OF THE KING

It is very important for a king to fulfill his duties in rightful manner as this is essential for setting an example for the citizens. The king should be energetic while performing his daily routine because if he himself will be languorous the subjects will also be lazy and lethargic which will not only affect the productivity and efficiency of the state but can also endanger the king's security. As Kautilya suggested division of day for the Prince into four parts, he also suggested the king to divide the day into eight parts, in the first part he is supposed to take reports from the defense officers (about the recent measures taken for defense of the state) and accounts department(regarding the income and expenditure). During the second part of the day he is supposed to listen to the petitions and complaints of the countrymen. In the third part the King should complete his daily routine (like taking bath, having meals etc.); in the same part of the day he should study various disciplines. Fourth part of the day should be reserved for collecting revenues and decentralizing powers and appointing ministers and officers for various jobs. In the fifth part the day king should consult the council ministers and receive information brought by the spies. Sixth part of the day can be used by the king for his recreation and entertainment purposes. Second last part of the day should be used by the king to review the artillery and troops, elephants, chariots, horses etc. The last part of the day was concerned with the formation military and defense strategies along with the commander in chief.

Just like Kautilya divided the day, he also divided night into eight parts:

1. The first part of the night should be reserved for interviewing secret agents.
2. In the second part he should take bath and have meals and also engage himself in reading

texts and literature.

3. He should proceed towards the bed chamber, listen to pleasant music and have a sound sleep.
4. He should have a sound sleep.
5. He should have a sound sleep.
6. On waking up he should deliberate and discuss the political matters and formulate plans for future.
7. In this part of the day he should deliberate with the councilors and dispatch secret agents.
8. At last he should see his purohita, teacher, and family, perform his religious duties before proceeding towards the assembly halls.

The assembly hall should be accessible for each and everyone who wants to file a complaint in front of the king. He is supposed to hear an urgent matter immediately and not postpone it (as postponement will lead to difficulty in resolving the matter.)

The king's happiness depends upon the satisfaction and happiness of his subjects; therefore he should constantly work for the welfare and development of the state and his subjects.

VIII. JUSTICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Kautilya believed that for functioning of such a big state in an effective manner the establishment of law and order in the society was of utmost importance. According to him there existed no society or state if there was no justice. Kautilya believed the king to be the supreme authority to do justice in the society, he writes in the Arthashastra that “*the king is the guardian of right conduct of this world with four varnas and four ashrams he (alone) can enact and promulgate laws (to uphold them) when all traditional codes of conduct perish (through disuse or disobedience)*”.¹⁰ Kautilya believed that the ultimate source of law is DHARMA and hence the judges appointed in that period were known as **DHARMASTHAS** (upholder of Dharma). According to Kautilya as long as every Aryan followed his *swadharm* keeping his *varna* and *ashram* into consideration and the king followed his *rajadharma* the peace in the society will be maintained.¹¹ Not only one kind of justicing issue is discussed in the Kautilyan Arthashastra, he has intensively discussed both the criminal as well as the civil issues in his treatises.

¹⁰Akshay Ranade, ‘Arthashastra: An insight in Kautilyan views on law and justice’ <https://www.youthkiwaaz.com/2011/12/arthashastra-an-insight-in-kautilyan-views-on-law-and-justice/> ,visited on 09/09/2022).

¹¹ L Nagarjana, The Kautilya Arthashastra , 1st ed. p. 378, 1992.

There are four parameters according to Kautilya on which a case has to be heard:

1. *DHARMA*
2. *EVIDENCE*
3. *CUSTOMS*
4. *ROYAL ETHICS*

In case there is a dispute between these four sources *DHARMA* will always prevail.¹²

(A) Judges and Magistrates

There shall be three judges of the qualification of minister and well read in Dharma and Vedas appointed at three frontiers, (1) *janapadasamdhi*, a frontier post, (2) *samgrahana* headquarters of ten villages, and (3) *sthaniya* the chief city among 300 villages.¹³ The division of the judicial authority at ground level (*samgrahana*) clarifies that Kautilya wanted the justice to be delivered at the root level and to every remote person possible. In the division of the judicial officers there is no evidence of any hierarchy, as can be seen in today's judicial structure. Hence we cannot conclude very evidently that appeals were made from lower court in the bigger ones. However, all the appeals could have been made to the King as he was the ultimate authority to decide any case and his verdict would be final and binding on all courts. However there is a list of priorities which the king is supposed to follow while considering the cases. Issues of temples, hermitages, heretics, Brahmins etc. are to be taken first and then the cases of minors, old persons, sick persons etc.¹⁴ However in an urgent matter this rule of priorities can be avoided.

Judges were supposed to work impartially and with due care and diligence so that citizens could trust the judicial system.

- A judge should hear both the sides of the cases and not debar anyone from filing a complaint and presenting his/her version of case.
- Judges should put relevant and reasonable questions in front of the parties and witnesses.
- A judge should not threaten a person coming to his court.
- Judges should not misinterpret statements made by witnesses or any other stakeholder concerned with the case.
- A judge should not fail in calling and summoning relevant evidences and witnesses of

¹² Ibid; p.380.

¹³ R.P. Kangle, the Kautilya Arthashastra (Part III), 2nd ed. p.215, 2014.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the case.

- Always three witnesses should be called (two only if both the parties agree).

Magistrates were appointed to suppress anti social activities, they were also supposed to inspect executives and officers appointed to collect revenues and taxes. Magistrates along with acting in judicial capacity also acted as an inspector officer to maintain transparency and ensure efficiency in working of the state.

(B) Kautilya and Machiavelli

Eurocentrism and oriental approach in political science and international relations is the result for Kautilya being called as India's Machiavelli despite the fact that Kautilya's work in statecraft is much wider in scope than Machiavelli's and was written about 1800 years before. Both Kautilya and Machiavelli have written on kingship and the ways and manners in which a king should act and behave and how a king should enhance his powers and protect his sovereignty. Virtues and ethical obligation on the king is the basic difference between Kautilya's and Machiavelli's work. According to Machiavelli power and morality cannot go hand in hand, it is impractical for a king to be virtuous in this realistic world; however Kautilya believed that there can be no difference between politics and morality and the king should act ethically to promote welfare and happiness in his reign. Machiavelli wanted the king to hold two qualities (1) bravery like a lion, (2) cunningness like a fox. Kautilya in his other work *Rajnitishashtra* advised the king to learn twenty important qualities from twenty different animals which would help him to maintain his state and administration effectively. According to Kautilya justice should be delivered at the root level to each and every individual. Contradictory to the rigid *varna* system present at the time of Kautilya he advocated *Personal liberty* and was of the view that justice should be such that '*the weak can resist the powerful*'. He proposed rational and proportional punishment for the wrongdoings, as too lenient or too harsh punishments would erode the confidence of general public in the justice system. However according to Machiavelli *people should either be crushed or caressed because minor damages would do no good. If they have to be injured, it should be done in such a way that they could not take revenge.*¹⁵. Kautilya had a more people-centric approach whereas Machiavelli's approach was more king-centric, he believed that people's behavior in practical was very different from what other political thinkers and philosophers have assumed to be and hence the obligation on the king to act ethically and morally is worthless.

¹⁵ Balbir S. Sihag, "Kautilya and Machiavelli on Justice, Prosperity and National Security" <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=75066>, April 2017, (visited 29/10/2022).

IX. CONCLUSION

Arthashastra by Kautilya is a treatise on state management and a guide for better wealth procurement and preservation; however Kautilya's work does not merely limit to the economic perspective, but also deliberates the social and political aspects of state management. Kautilyan state of nature is similar to what Hobbes proposed, a violent, miserable and petty society which ultimately chose an authority to maintain law and order in the society. Breaking the societal and political norms present at and before the time of Kautilya, he advocated the qualities and abilities of the person to be the basis on which he should be a king and not on the Varna to which he belonged. Kautilya in Arthashastra has comprehensively and rationally discussed the kingship and statecraft, according to him the king should possess certain attributes and fulfill duties for the betterment of his subjects. In the seven elements of state discussed by Kautilya (Saptanga theory) king has the authoritative power and his regulations and orders encapsulate the other six elements. Although Kautilya supports absolute monarchy but he does not advocate unrestricted and arbitrary powers to the king. In regard to the judicial system Kautilya believed *Dharma* to be the supreme and appointed the judges at various levels to ensure justice. Seeking the current economic, political and social crisis in the society, Kautilya's work on kingship and statecraft becomes relevant enough to take insights and try to resolve the contemporary issues. The oriental approach in history and its study has done injustices with Arthashastra which has to be revived and a new and positive discourse on the subject should enter the arena.
