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The Impact of 'Arthashastra' on the Ancient Society

Avijit Mondal*

Abstract

Kautilya was the Prime Minister during the regime of the Mauryan Dynasty and one of the shrewdest ministers of the time. He wrote 'Arthashastra' during the 3rd-2nd century B.C. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' provides an insight into the ancient Indian anthology of political wisdom, theory and the art of statecraft. 'Arthashastra' also guides the wise king on the issue of security, wealth and prestige. The principles enshrined in 'Arthashastra' were followed not only in ancient India but are significant in the present scenario also. It is essentially a classic work on administrative theory and practice. To ensure the rightful exercise of power by the king, Kautilya gives elaborate instructions. Kautilya proclaimed that Politics was the supreme Science and supreme Art. Kautilya was a realist than a theorist. He provides a grand strategy for Politics.

Keywords: *Kautilya, Arthashastra, Function of the State, Saptanga theory, Mandala theory, foreign policy*

1. Introduction

Kautilya's Arthashastra is a very popular text in ancient Indian Sanskrit practice. The study of ancient Indian political thought is considered

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incomplete without the knowledge of 'Arthashastra'. Not only this, but Kautilya's Arthashastra has also discussed in detail the formation of the Council Ministers, Justice, Principles, Laws, etc. In a word, Arthashastra is a pure mirror of society building. Kautilya made politics a scientific study in ancient India and attempted to test the political ideas on scientific lines with empirical orientation. He adopts the most pragmatic and analytical methodology in 'Arthashastra'. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' is considered the most scientific work on the ancient Indian polity and an encyclopaedia of practical administration.

At the time when Kautilya was living, India consisted of a number of small states which were constantly at war with each other. There was very little peace within the states either. Intrigues and Murders were quite common. It was the time of Alexander's invasion of northwest India and in contrast to the authoritarian rule he established, there was much disunity. Undoubtedly, in the field of Literature, Art and Philosophy there was much sophistication but since the Political Centre in India was weak, there was very little Political Organization. Alexander's invasion might have provided some rethinking. It at least produced one great political thinker, Kautilya, who has not been superseded in the depth of thought and breadth of vision by any subsequent political thinker in India. Kautilya is credited with being the founder of the Arthasastra tradition as distinguished from the Nitisastra tradition. He was the first to make political economy an independent discipline; while playing lip service to the ideal of right, he propounded a theory of Politics which dealt with the immediate practical concerns of the polity. He was known for his exceptional, frank and candid ideas. Through this study, I want to discuss the social, political and economic impact on ancient society.

2. Kautilya : A brief profile

Kautilya, also recognized as Chanakya, is traditionally credited as the author of the text. 'Arthasastra' entails the Science (Sastra) of wealth/ earth/ polity (Artha). In simple ways, Arthasastra' can be explained as 'Science and Art of Politics and Diplomacy'. This treatise is divided into fifteen books dealing with virtually every topic concerned with the running of a State, Taxation,

Law, Diplomacy, Military Strategy, Economics, Bureaucracy etc. The book is a Masterwork which includes an array of topics like Statecraft, Politics, Strategy, Selection and training of employees, leadership skills, legal systems, fiscal politics, civil rules, internal and foreign trade etc.

In the field of politics, Kautilya wrote his famous Arthashastra as well as Chankyaniti (5). He was highly intellectual and well-read in the Hindu religious scriptures and works on polity and other allied subjects. Since the book not only discusses political theories but also gives elaborate details of the administrative system, Kautilya had that familiarity with the detailed work in various branches of administration that we would expect from one who held the high office of the prime minister of a great empire.

Kautilya perhaps felt that the main purpose of the king is to see that such an eventuality when people rise in revolt against the king should never arise because anarchy is worse than the highest tyranny. Kautilya even goes to the extent of saying that a diseased king is better than a new king. This position was almost a reversal of the position taken by Manu and Vyasa. Kautilya gives two reasons in support of this contention.

First, while the diseased king is well versed in tradition and is bound by it, whereas, the new king, since there are no traditions to follow, acts without restraints.

Secondly, Kautilya generally preferred kings of high birth because, according to him, people obey high birth more readily and tend to weave in their loyalty to a king who is low born. These arguments involved a strong defence of the dynastic principle.

He adds, "When people are impoverished, they become greedy, when they are greedy, they become disaffected, when disaffected, they voluntarily go to the side of the enemy and destroy their own master." He further added, "Hence, no king should give room to such causes as would bring about impoverishment, greed or disaffection among his people." Although Kautilya was in favour of a strong king, it may be doubted whether he was in favour of an absolute monarchy. Indeed, the bureaucratic apparatus described in Kautilya's Arthashastra very closely resembles the bureaucratic structure we have today. Definition of the State the State represents the efforts of its people

to organize their activities, and the expression of their attempts to organise is seen in the formulation and application of regulations or laws which are usually certified in some constitutional form.

In Kautilya's book, the idea of a welfare state is repeated with great force. The state does not consist of the territory but is a much more complex organisation in which the territory, the people and their inter-relationships are indissolubly welded to form the entity which possesses individuality, a character, which marks it off from all other states. According to Kautilya, the king must ensure that people of the four castes and four orders of life keep to their respective paths, respective duties and occupations.

Kautilya classifies the functions of the state (3) basically into four:

i. Protection: The first function of the state is guarding the country against internal as well as external threats. Internally people and their property have to be protected from thieves and dacoits etc and also externally from outside the state there may be threats from invasions that have to be dealt with.

ii. Maintaining the Law: The king and the state, it is expected by the people, will maintain the customs and laws of the land. The king according to Kautilya should settle legal disputes in conformity with the sacred principles and laws in consultation with learned brahmins.

iii. Preserving Social Order: Kautilya saw it as the duty of the king to protect the dharma of the land by which he meant the social order. It is the duty of the king to deliver justice and help keep people of different varnas preserve their professions or in other words help maintain varnadharmasharma.

iv. Promoting the welfare of the people: The king according to Kautilya should function on the goal that it is in the happiness of his subjects that his happiness lies. The state should control the whole of social life. It should promote religion and spirituality and in so doing regulate the age and conditions under which one might renounce the world. Kautilya advised the state should provide support to the poor, pregnant women, and their children, orphans, the aged, the afflicted and the helpless.

3. Elements of the State

The relationship of the state with other territories is based upon the sovereignty that it exercises directly or more normally through its leader over the territory. The sovereignty originates from the force of expansion of the body politic at the time of the foundation of the state. Kautilya holds the view that sovereignty is possible only with assistance. The city, the Minister, the country, the fort, the treasury, the army and the friends are the elements of sovereignty. Each of these elements must possess distinct qualities. Thus, seven elements of sovereignty constitute the different limbs (angas) of state. This is also known as "Sapta Prakriti (3) Theory of state". They were: 1. The King 2. Amatya 3. Janapada 4. Durga 5. Kosa 6. Danda and 7. Mitra

Kautilya on the King Kautilya's theory of government involved three aspects: the king, the officials and the mechanism of administration. The king, being the most important element in the hierarchy must possess the following qualities: That he must belong to a high family, he must possess valour and be virtuous, truthful and highly enthusiastic and should not be addicted to procrastination, which he must possess a taste of discipline, a sharp intellect and trained in all kinds of arts. He must possess dignity and should be capable of taking remedial measures against danger and also possess foresight and be ready to avail himself of opportunities. Kautilya gave the highest place to the king. The king has to be dynamic in order to ensure that his subjects are likewise dynamic. He clearly states that it is the duty of the kings to maintain the safety and security of their subjects and their property. This is called rakshana or palana. This protection has to be both from natural calamities as well as from anti-social elements. The king is also required to construct dams, rivers and roads, maintain forests and provide help and superintendence to places of pilgrimage. The king must protect agriculturists from molestation and other kinds of oppression, forced labour and oppressive tasks. To ensure the rightful exercise of power by the king, Kautilya gives elaborate instruction on the education and training of princes, which also reminds one of the education of the Guardian Class in Plato. Thus, the ideal set before the ruler is that of paternalistic rule and the welfare state.

The Amatya, or the Minister Kautilya gives great importance to the Mantri Parishad i.e., the council of Ministers. No ruler, however competent or powerful, can run the state alone. The Amatya refers both to the mantra and the

administrative officials. The king appoints ministers to share the burden of administration and render advice to him. In fact, the Arthasastra is more of a treatise on administration than on politics and statecraft. The administrative principles are discussed with such insight as to make us wonder whether there has been any real progress in the science of administration since then. The most important function of the Mantris was to render advice to the king. Kautilya insists that the king should appoint three to four counsellors. He says that a single Mantri would be difficult to control; two might quarrel and conspire against the king and a larger number would affect the secrecy of the council. These three to four mantrins constitute a consultative body. Kautilya prescribes the highest possible qualifications for a mantris in terms of personal characteristics. As regards the quality of the minister, who constitutes an important element of sovereignty, Kautilya says that he must be a native and born of a high family, influential and well trained in all kinds of acts. He must try to remove whatever defects he finds in the king. In case of the king's death, the Minister shall install the heir apparent and then he should set the army against the enemy and when attacked he will take such measures to ward off the dangers.

The third important organ was said to be Janapada, the territory with people settled on it. Their existence is to be understood by implication in the reference to the janapada. As regards the population, Kautilya says that it should be prosperous enough to be able to pay taxes, should be loyal and should habitually follow the orders of the king. Another distinctive feature of the administrative system in the Arthasastra is marked as leaning towards decentralization. There are indications that a janapada is to contain 800 gramas headed by 'The Samaharta'. Janapada is to be divided into four divisions for revenue and administrative purposes. It is on the fort that the security of the kingdom depends both in times of war and peace.

Kosa or treasury is portrayed as the most vital element of the state as all its activities necessitate finance. The treasury is accumulated righteously and legitimately. The treasury must be filled with gold, silver, precious stones, jewels and gems and should be capable of standing the strain of expenditure during the time of calamities. According to Kautilya without a treasury, it is extremely difficult to maintain the army and keep it loyal.

Danda The next important element of the state according to Kautilya was Danda or the army-Kautilya opines that the army consists of hereditary and hired

soldiers constituting the cavalry, infantry, and the chariot riders. He considers kshatriyas to the excellent material for the army as they are good warriors. The basic qualities of the army according to Kautilya are inheritance, loyalty and strength. They should be trained in the fighting of various kinds of battles and skilful in handling various forms of weapons

The last element of Prakriti is the Mitra or the friend. He is the friend of the king, who is always ready to help him in times of war, and natural calamity. In order to emphasize the contrast, Arthashastra defines an enemy as one who is not born of a royal family and who is greedy, helpless and impotent and such an enemy is easily uprooted.

Kautilya on Mandala Theory (7)- The Mandala theory of Kautilya occupies an important place in the light of the contemporary situation. Kautilya was not only the prime minister of the first historical emperor of India Chandragupta Maurya but was his friend, philosopher and guide.

Five kings exist in front of the Vijigishu. They are: (i) Ari, the enemy. (ii) Mitraprakriti, the friend of Vijigishu, (iii) Arimitra, friend of enemy. (iv) Mitramitra, friend of the friend of Vijigishu. (v) Arimitra-Mitra, a friend of the enemy friend. Behind the Vijigishu exists : (i) Parsanigraha (ii) Akrandas. (iii) Parsanigrahasara (iv) Akrandanasava Far around the 'Vijigishu' exists (i) Madhyama (Intermediate) (ii) Udasina (Neutral). In the above spectrum of 'Mandala', the Vijigishu functions as a sort of balance of power. It is assumed that the two adjacent States are generally natural enemies and consequently two States beyond their neighbours is highly natural ally being common enemies of natural enemies. The neighbouring States turn into enemies. Likewise, States with no common boundaries become friends. In such a situation, the neutral country occupies an important place. The intermediary occupies the second-best position between the neutral country and other power.⁶ One of the distinctive principles of Kautilya Mandala theory is that whenever an enemy king is in trouble, and his subjects are exploited, oppressed, impoverished and disunited he should be immediately attacked after one proclamation of war. ⁶ SR Myneni; Political Science There is another significant aspect of the Mandala theory of Kautilya that the victor should follow the policy of goodwill and cooperation towards the conquered enemy and win his confidence.

Kautilya has laid much emphasis on his Mandala theory that the "immediate king who is situated close to the territory of the conquerer is the enemy". There is the need for an alliance of enemy's enemies who could easily be won over to meet the common challenge. The aspect of inter-state relationships finds expression in the foreign policies of constituent states. These relations fall into a global pattern which is susceptible to change and reveals underlying conditions which are worthy of analysis. It is concluded that the unequal growth of nations is directly or indirectly the cause of the great wars of history and is in large measure the result of the uneven distribution of fertility and strategical opportunity upon the face of the globe. States have no permanent enemies but only permanent interests.

Six-Fold Policy (2) in a system of mandala, Kautilya advocated a six-fold policy to interact with the neighbours, which included co-existence, neutrality, alliance, double policy, March and war. To achieve this he advised the king to resort to five tactics: conciliation, gift and bribery, dissention, deceit and pretence, open attack or war.

Alliance and Double Policy Alliance is another instrument of the six-fold policy by which an inferior king or weak king maintains equilibrium in and around his territory. Kautilya says that one should make an alliance with a king who is situated between two powerful kings shall seek protection from the stronger of the two or he may make peace with both of them an equal term. A king may ally with the Madhyama king or the neutral king. Alliance in Kautilyan way seems to speak of a strategic grouping of strategic relations among kings.

4. Conclusion

The primary objective and goal of foreign policy have to be from equilibrium to progress. The success of a foreign policy would very much depend on a combination of the sound council and material resources which would include revenue, army and enterprise. He discusses in detail the policies to be adopted by the king in dealing with a strong, an equal and as weak kingdom. Kautilya is categorical that if the progress of a kingdom is equally attainable through peace or war, then peace is to be preferred thereby saving the state from unnecessary expenditure on men and materials. In any case, before an action is taken, there should be an assessment of the relative strength of one's position in relation to the enemy in terms of such factors as power, time, place, the time for mobilization of

troops and the prospective loss of men and material. In these ideas, Kautilya is very creative and original in suggesting that a wise policy is to be preferred if one is based on purely military or financial considerations. A policy based on wisdom can achieve the same, and perhaps even better results than a policy based purely on military or financial considerations. Kautilya's Mandala theory of foreign policies and interstate relationships though cannot be said to be completely applicable in the present context, though one cannot ignore its relevance. His concept stands as a barrier to the idea of integration, both at regional and global levels. But in the present day, Kautilya dominates in regional and international relations. His warfare technique even in the present day helps a lot. He has actually very accurately given his theories. Moreover, even to understand the ancient Indian political thought, it is very important to understand the inter-state relationships and hence Kautilya's contribution is immensely important when we look back at the Indian History and how under his guidance India was reunited by the Mauryan Umpire. Summary Kautilya's Arthashastra is an important source of knowledge on polity, economy and administration. However, this important document has been forgotten for centuries. Kautilya was a true statesman who bridged the gap between experience and vision. For Kautilya, good governance was paramount. He suggested built-in checks and balances in systems and procedures for the containment of malpractices.

Even in the present situation, if we can imagine a society based on Arthashastra and follow the path of Kautilya, then our way of life and society will change radically. In the end, Arthashastra is an impeccable example of Sanskrit literature and world literature.

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