

Economic Strategy in the Kautīliya Arthaśāstra

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Abstract: The Kautīliya Arthaśāstra admits “Kosha” is the most important prakṛti. According to Kautīliya “All state activities depend first on the treasury. Therefore, a king should devote his best attention to it”. Kautīliya used the word treasury (kosha) in a broad as well as a narrow sense. Kautīliya says that ‘without wealth, there is no production or acquisition’ because all state activities depend on the treasury. According to Kautīliya, the power of the Government (daṇḍa) comes from the wealth (kosha). The undertakings of the fort, the treasury, the army, water-works and the occupations for livelihood have their source in the country. Pishuna says that of calamities befalling the fort and the treasury, the calamity of the treasury is more serious. Kautīliya described three puruśārthas (i.e. dharma, artha, kāma) as vital factors for the survival of the human race. The planning of these three basic forces was regarded as the core of good governance.

Key words: Kautīliya Arthaśāstra, Kosha, Daṇḍa, Prakṛti, Fort, Puruśārthas, Dharma, Artha, Kāma

I. Introduction: Economic Administration- Meaning

The *Arthaśāstra* is one of the world's largest treatise on the economic administration of a state. Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade are the main types of economic activities. According to Kautīliya agriculture is better than mines, because mines fill only the treasury while agricultural production fills both the treasury and the storehouse. The king should protect agriculture from fines, laborers and taxes (*KA*, 2.1.37). During the period the director of agriculture consulted experts for water divining and the science of rearing plants. He collected seeds of all kinds of grains, flowers, fruits, flax and cottons. It is the duty of the agriculture officer to decide the suitable land for sowing the seeds for the crops like wet crops, winter crops, or summer crops. It is recommended to sow *śāli*-rice, *vṛhi*-rice, *kodrava*, *sesamum*, *priyaṅgu*, *udāraka* and *varaka* at the beginning of the season. The middle sowing crops are *mudga*, *māṣa* and *śaimbya*. The sunflower, lentils, *kulaththa*, barley, wheat, *kalāya*, linseed and mustard crops to be sown later in the season. The director of agriculture was conversant with the practice of agriculture, water-divining and the science of rearing plants. (*Gourela*, 195)

The cultivation of sugar-cane needed much expenditure. The banks of river are considered suitable for creeper fruits. For long pepper, grapes and sugarcane the outskirts of over-flow area is suitable. For vegetables and roots the vicinity of the lakes, tanks and canal-beds are desirable. The same area is also suitable for medicinal herbs, *usiragrass*, *hrībera*, *pīṇḍālaka* and others (*Prasad*, 24-25). Kautīliya also described the preparation of the seeds. The seeds of grains should be soaked in dew by night and dried in the heat by day for seven days and nights. The seeds of pulses should be soaked for three or five days and nights. After that these are smeared with honey, ghee and pig's fat and are mixed with cow-dung in the case of stalks that serve as seeds. In the case of bulbous roots those should be smeared with honey and ghee. The stone-like seeds are to be smeared with cow-dung. This is also desirable for the trees growing in the pit. (*KA*, 2.4.24). It is also suggested that the crops should be harvested at the right time. All products of the harvest should be carefully collected together as a wise man leaves nothing in the fields. The harvested grains should be piled with high walls or roofs of the same material.

II. Protection of animals

The most important economic activity is cattle-rearing. The king protected the domesticated animals like sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, camels and pigs. Both domestic and wild animals were protected. The cattle rearing was the second most important economic activity. The superintendent of cows supervised herds maintained for wages, herds surrendered for a fixed amount of dairy product, useless and abandoned herds, the total number of herds, and the cattle that are irrecoverably lost. In the *Arthaśāstra* elephant and horses played a major role in defense practices. The superintendent of horses was appointed to take care of horses and registered the breed, age, color, marks and made a report to the king of such animals as were inauspicious, crippled or diseased (*KA*, 2.30.1). The superintendent of elephants was appointed to take proper steps to protect elephant-forests and supervise the operations with regard to the standing or lying in stables of elephants, male, female or young. He had to note the training of the elephants and to supervise the total produced of milk and ghee. The cowherd, the buffalo-herdmen, the milker, the churner and the hunter were fed by wages to look after the unit of hundreds of such animals.

III. Trade

The king had to promote trade and commerce after setting up trade routes by land, water and ports which were kept free from harassment by the courtiers, works-officers, robbers, and frontier guards, and from being damaged by herds of cattle (*KA*, 2.1.19-38). The Director of trade was to be conversant with the difference in the prices of commodities of high value and a low value and ascertained their suitable time for distribution, centralization and purchase. The marketing system and marketing policy are also described in the text.

IV. Remedial measures during calamities

The functions of the state is to protect the country from calamities. Kauṭīliya described eight calamities like: fire, floods, disease, famine, rats, wild-animals, serpents and evil spirits. Against calamitous situations the experts in the *Atharvaveda*-lore were consulted to perform rites for destroying the evil spirits.

V. Mining and Manufacturing

Mines are the sources of wealth, which feed the treasury. A strong treasury can only support the army through which the king can run a sovereign state. The Director of mines is usually conversant with mining operations and with the geology of metal-bearing ores. He consults the concerned experts for new mines and the quality of ore whether it is liquid or solid. The depth, colour, weight, smell and the taste of the materials were ascertained. The chief superintendent of mines established factories for recovery of gold, diamonds, gems, pearls, corals, quartz and mica. He supervised trade of the above products. The chief superintendent of metals and jewelry also had experts to test the qualities of different types of gold, silver and touchstones. (*KA*, 2.12.23)

In the Vedic period monarchy was the normal form of government in a state. At that time the king was designated as *rājā*(the king), *mahārāja* (a great king), *samrāt* (an emperor) and each position was different with regard to power and prestige. According to Altekar the ritual was observed for securing *rājya*, *svarājya*, *bhaujya*, *vairājya*, *mahārājya* and *sāmrajya* to one and the same individual in the description of the coronation. He also described that these terms were used for different types of states or monarchies. In the Mauryan period monarchy was the prevailing form of government. At that time the eldest son was elected as the ruler. He was trained properly in the art of government and administration. The king was the main source of all government activity. Hereditary monarchy was also the ruling government in the Gupta Period. In this time the king was the center of military, political, administrative and judicial powers. He ruled over the state with the assistance of ministers; however, his decision was final and binding. It is proved that monarchy was the normal form of government in the past. The republics, oligarchies, diarchies are seen in ancient days, however the monarchy was well accepted pattern of government

The Kautilyan society was highly organized as the king stood as the head administration with the support of ministers. At that time the process of administration was divided into a number of departments and the state was managed by different sections as seen in democracy. The king was the supreme head of the executive, judiciary and military branches of administration. This is not seen in the parliamentary systems of democracy where the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief Minister and other ministers rule over the country. In ancient India the ministers were appointed after being tested by secret agents. Their merit was proved through qualifications, conduct and character. The state was divided into several districts, villages for good administration. Now-a-days the state is divided into several districts and the districts are divided into several blocks and blocks into some villages and villages into several wards. This unit pattern was also followed in the Kautilyan administration. In the state the district officer or the *sthānika* supervised various works of the district, like Collectors and the district magistrates today. He also employed secret agents to know about the secret news of the country. Spies were employed to watch the movements of the high officials including the priests, ministers, and the commander-in-chief. The text notes the judicial administration. There were the central courts, the local courts for offering justice. The central court was established in the capital and presided over by the king or the chief justice. The central court was like the Supreme Court the apex court of justice. There were also other courts like High Courts as seen in our own states now. Ancient monarchy was an absolute despotism. In the ancient India there were *Mantri-parishad* roughly corresponding to the modern legislative council. The study of the *Arthasāstra* reveals the fact that the people were recognized as one of the most important factor of the state in ancient India. The administration of the Kautilyan state corresponds to modern democratic system in many respects.

Some writers and political thinkers classify the forms of government for good administration. Aristotle described monarchy to be a very noteworthy system of government where the monarch or the king would be the best. In a monarchical form of government there is rule by a single person but his government is run with established laws. Rousseau also divided government into monarchies, aristocracies and democracies. The monarchical system was the most beneficial for it was characterized by singleness of purpose with unity, vigor, and strength. In this form the king is the law-maker, the judge, the executive and the military commander. Kauṭīliya described three *puruṣārthas*(i.e. *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*) as vital factors for the survival of the human race. The planning of these three basic forces was regarded as the core of good governance. According to the *Arthasāstra* the king with his authority strived to keep the social order with regard to the Vedic values. The king acted under law to maintain harmony in the society for a balanced growth through *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*.

For the good governance the *Arthasāstra* prescribes that the king should see through his spies and should collect every news through them. It is said that -

*Prājāsukhe sukham rājñāḥ prajānām ca hite hitam I
nātmapiyam hitam rājñāḥ prajānām tu priyam hitam II (KA, I.19.34)*

The total aim of the *Arthasāstra* depends on the subjects' happiness i.e. the king finds his happiness in the happiness of his subjects, his welfare is their welfare. He finds his pleasure and well-being in the pleasure and well-being of his subjects.

VI. Conclusion

The *Arthasāstra* of Kauṭīliya is very important for every ruler of any time as it seeks the happiness of the king in the happiness of the subjects and welfare in their welfare. Good governance reflected in this text shows that king should remain wakeful to listen to each and every affairs of the state. He listened to the people and delivered his judgments with regard to their prayers as seen now-a-days in the democratic systems of government. Now-a-days grievance cells also help every citizen to redress his grievances against administration. At that time the king communicated with his subjects through his *amātyas* and was always

communicative and sensitive to the welfare of his subjects. He punished the wrong-doers for the sake of *śusāsana* (good governance) only. Through mutual cooperation and assistance between the king and his ministers a perfect administration could be actualized.

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