

The Administrative Aspects of Kautilya's Arthashastra

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Abstract

Kautilya's Arthashastra is an important treatise on Public Administration in Ancient India. The article is not an attempt to question the veracity of Kautilya's Arthashastra. It focuses on certain salient elements of the template of public administration inscribed in Arthashastra (KA: 15.1). Arthashastra deals with the perennial problem of "acquiring and maintaining the earth". "Thus this Shastra," writes Kautilya, "is composed as a guide to acquire and secure this world" (KA: 5.1.). In the words of Kautilya, "In the happiness of the subjects lies the happiness of the king and in what is beneficial to the subjects his own benefit. What is dear to the king is not beneficial to him, but what is dear to the subjects is beneficial to him", (Bandopadya, 1980). Kautilya's Arthashastra is one of the most comprehensive treatises ever produced on state power, its acquisition, exercise and disruption (Rangarajan, 1992). Several characters of the Arthashastra render it particularly relevant to the present context. The purpose of the paper is to explore the very idea on the different indicators and contexts of good governance espoused by Kautilya during the fourth century BCE.

Keywords: Arthashastra, Public administration, Good governance, Justice

Introduction

Amitav Acharya notes that we are yet to see such grand theorising from Sumerian, Egyptian, Chinese or Indian pasts, stuck as we are with the idea of Kautilya being an Indian Machiavelli, rather than Machiavelli being a Euro-Mediterranean Kautilya (Acharya, 2011). Kautilya held out the view that establishment of good institutions is indispensable for the attainment of

prosperity since they created conditions favourable to the full exploitation of opportunities but good governance was necessary for creating opportunities. He emphasised the interdependence of good governance, accumulation of knowledge, Kautilya's concept of Good Governance, practice of ethical conduct and prosperity. In recent years, a considerable amount of intellectual effort has been devoted to study the nature of relationship between institutions, good governance and economic growth (Sihag, 2007). In an age of monarch and legitimised accretive inequality, Kautilya alone called the king a servant of the State who would harbour "no personal likes"; it would be rather the likes of the servants that would be followed by him" (Gaur, 1998).

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to understand the various parameters of Kautilya's Arthashastra by way of analysing the principles of good governance espoused by Kautilya. It also provides us the scope to follow and practise the qualities of good governance in the present-day administrative system.

Methodology

The article deals with the various principles and practices of good governance and administrative parameters of Kautilya's Arthashastra. It also discusses the ways of making it applicable in the present context. The study follows the templates of rigorous analysis and interpretation of data collected from various secondary sources. These sources have been extensively and empirically examined to design and structure the present article.

Kautilya' concept of State

Kautilya sought to define the state as a set of functions. These functions referred not only to a definition of the government but also a much fuller explanation of what made up the state. This is clearly reflected in the Kautilya Arthashastra(Thapar, 2000).The seven constituent elements or prakrits are: svamin(King or ruler), amatya(body of ministers and structure of administration), janapada/ rastra(territory being agriculturally fertile with mines, forest and pastures, water resources and communication system for trade), durga/ pura(fort),kosa(treasury),danda/bala(army) and mitra(ally)(Gautam,2013).Being a chief advisor to Chandragupta Maurya Kautilya explained his ideas in Arthashastra and made it clear that ‘ For , the King, trained in the science[Arthashastra], intent on the discipline of the subjects, enjoys the earth alone without sharing it with any other ruler, being devoted to the welfare of all beings’(KA.1.5.17,11). If a King is energetic, his subjects will be equally energetic. If he is reckless, they will not only be reckless likewise, but also eat into his works. Besides, a reckless King will easily fall into the hands of his enemies. Hence the King shall ever be wakeful (Shamasastri,1956). The King was revered almost as a god in ancient India because of the belief in Karma, which stipulated that anyone with such a high birth must have had extraordinary previous lives (Spellman, 1964; Flood, 1996).Thus, Kautilya’s Arthashastra is a treatise of political realism describing how the political world function and not very often interpreting how it ought to work, frequently disclosing to a king what calculating and sometimes brutal measures he must accomplishing to protect the state and the common good. R.S. Sharma rightly argues, “Kautilya furnishes us as full and complete definition of the State as was possible in ancient. The Geek thinkers hardly discuss the constituent elements of the state” (Sharma,1991).

Parameters of Effective Administration of Kautilya

The Arthashastra of Kautilya dwell on three major parts, which prioritize the issues encompassing economic development, administration of justice, foreign relations. Book three consisting of thirteen chapters deals with administrative of justice and the duties of Judges and law. The Judicial System of Kautilya is

based on “Dandaniti,” “the science of law enforcement” is the main template of Arthashastra. He created laws covering all aspects of human society, economy, culture and offences. He incorporated a distinct and all-encompassing system of justice which is still pertinent in the modern system of justice.

1. Importance of the Rule of Law

For providing efficient administration the leader requires to maintain law and order within the state and it could materialise only when effective mechanisms are made obligatory for ensuring justice and safeguarding the welfare of the people. Kautilya opined that the prevalent law and order is an indispensable for the maintenance of law and order and growth of economy. A ruler’s duties in the internal administration of the country are three-fold: *raksha* or protection of the State from external aggression, *palana* or maintenance of law and order within the State, and *yogakshema* or safeguarding the welfare of the people (Rangarajan,1992).The advancement of the world is based on the maintenance of rule of law and proper functioning of government. With the conspicuous absence of law that ensures every King’s right to exist, irrespective of size, the *vijigshu* is truly living in a system of *matsya-nyaya*, “the law of the fish” where “the big ones eat the little ones,” a system in which it is every man for himself. Because sizes enhance security, the objective is to consolidate one’s strength at the expense of other powers (Zimmer, 1967). Plato, in his book, Laws explains, “Where the law is subject to some other authority and has none of its own, the collapse of the state, in my view, is not far off; but if law is the master of the government and the government is its slave, then the situation is full of promise and men enjoy all the blessings that the gods shower on a state”(Saunders, 1970).

2. The Equitableness of Law

The leader should maintain just and impartial administration. Arthashastra says, “A king meting out unjust punishment is hated by the people he terrorizes while one who is too lenient is held in contempt” (KA: 1.4.7-10). kautilya says, “Loyalty of people could be ensured only by a leader who is just in his actions. People follow the just leader till their death when a leader who is weak condition is attacked. Contrary to that, people switch over to enemy side and even overthrow the leader when unjust and strong leader is attacked (KA: 7.5.9,10). To maintain law and order the Indian King must use ‘rod’ (*danda*) or punishment. The King, with the Rod is honoured (Doniger & Smith, 1991). But the King should use his power judiciously without resorting to any form of biasness. This idea of using the rod implies that a successful ruler must use ‘the two handle’ of punishment and reward, or ‘chastisement and commendation,’ chastisement means ‘to inflict death or torture upon culprits’, commendation means ‘to bestow encouragement or reward on men of merit’ (Tzu, 1939). According to Cicero, the status of the laws differed depending on their consistency with natural law. Natural law was the rule of reason, and according to the rule of reason, law should be for the good of the community, it should be just, and it should preserve the happiness and safety of the citizens. This idea of natural law stood above positive and human law; it was a law that was consistent with justice and hence reigned supreme (Tamanaha, 2004).

3. Administration of Justice

(a) Chastity of the Law Enactors

Kautilya prescribes the check of background of the candidates for the officials posted in various wings of administration. With the aid of his Prime Minister, priests and spies, the King involves himself in examination of the ministers.

According to Kautilya, “those whose character has been tested under religious allurements shall be employed in civil and criminal courts; those whose purity has been tested under monetary allurements shall be employed in the work of revenue collectors; those who have been tried under love allurements shall be appointed to superintend the pleasure grounds... those whose character has been tested under all kinds of allurements shall be appointed as prime ministers, and those who are proved under one or all of these allurements shall be appointed in mines, timber and elephant forests and manufactories”(Shamasatry,1960). Leaders should stick to their moral duties. When adharma (unethical acts) takes over the dharma (moral acts) the King himself will be destroyed (KA: 3.16.42). Kautilya laid great emphasis on honesty, integrity and sense of devotion of civil servants both to the state and the citizens. “The qualitative aspect of the personnel is treated in the minutest details” (Prasad, 1989). Kautilya put stress on the notion that the law enforcers themselves including the king must be honest and law-abiding (Polinsky & Shavell, 2000). With the role of ministers being important for the state, Kautilya set down the qualities that a minister should have and leaders should keep that in mind while appointing them. According to Arthashastra(KA:1.9.1) the qualities that a minister should possess are: ability to influence, intelligence, dexterity, boldness, ability to handle adversities, logical ability for foresightedness, amicability, well trained in different arts, free from fickle-mindedness and procrastination, loyalty and being controlled by the leader. Therefore, Plato considered that “where the good king rules, law is an obstacle standing in the way of justice” (Jones, 1956).

(b) Impartiality of the Ruler

It is important that punishment should be meted out in a most fairly way that no one- be it a poor man or a rich man, could realise that justice does not follow its own course. The established tradition generally attests to the notion that the higher castes comparatively got lighter punishments. Perhaps Kautilya himself could not have deviated from the tradition. Nevertheless, he sincerely endeavoured to reduce the gaping swathe of inequalities. A judge or magistrate should be impartial in assigning a punishment, “remaining neutral between the King and the subjects” (KA:4.10. 283. 17-18). It is only through the impartial adherence to effective laws where a guilty is punished in proportion to the seriousness of the sinful act that a leader is able to maintain this world (KA:

3.1.42). Judges should be “impartial to all beings, worthy of trust and beloved of the people” (KA.3.20.24,253). The scheme of social security in Kautilya’s Arthashastra is of optimal importance and it rests upon the ruler to ensure a just and fair law. Hence, corruption was deemed as a menace to social security. “And in the case of false statement by these, the fine shall be the same as for the officer (concerned). And he should issue a proclamation in the sphere of his activity. Those wronged by such and such as officer should communicate. To such as communicate he should cause payment to be made in accordance with the injury suffered” (KA:1.5.17). Protecting the people by being impartial and just is the moral duty of the king and he should have full obedience to it (KA: 8.12.12.).

(4) Importance of Social Justice

According to Arthashastra, “In the happiness of his subjects lies the King’s happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects” (KA: 1.19.34). A leader should work for the welfare of the society. Kautilya argues that the leader should take care of his self-interest. His attention should be on the happiness of his subjects. Kautily advocated that social justice is always the prerogative of the King’s self-interest. If a King favours the wicked and ignores the good, acts in an impious manner, steals from and oppresses ordinary people, harms ‘principal men and [dishonours] those worthy of honour,’ then he will create only greed and disaffecting among the people. ‘Subjects, when impoverished, become greedy; when greedy they become disaffected; when disaffected they either go over to the enemy or themselves kill the master’(KA.7.5.19–27, 335).Kautilya explains in Arthashastra that the King avoids even a big profit that would be injurious to the subjects(KA: 2.16.6).Jawaharlal Nehru in his Discovery of India (1945) calls Kautilya ‘great scholar’ of the ‘science of polity’ who deals with almost all aspects of the theory and practice of the state. He then mentions the comparison between Kautily and Machiavelli, and comes to following verdict: Chanakya has been called the Indian Machiavelli, and to some extent this comparison is justified. But he was a much bigger person in every way, greater in intellect and action

(Nehru,1981). As Adda B. Bozeman puts it: “Successful statecraft is always and everywhere dependent on good intelligence.” Because the world is divided, conflicted and anarchical, “security-conscious governments in all ages and places appear to have accepted these persistent complexities as standing challenges in their conduct of foreign affairs by collecting, processing, and institutionalizing their own political intelligence” (Bozeman,1993). Kautilya conceptualized the seven constituent elements of the state. They are (1) *swamin*: the ruler; (2) *amatya*: the Minister (government and administration); (3) *janapada*: the people(in the countryside); (4) *durga*: the fortress (capital); (5) *kosa*: the treasury (economy); (6) *danda*: armed might; and (7) *mitra*: the ally (in foreign policy).The aggregate of the seven state factors allows for a reliable estimate of a state’s power: ‘The king and his rule [the state], this is the sum total of the [seven] constituents (of the state)’ (Shoham & Liebig, 2016). Kautilya’s Arthashastra is the world’s oldest comprehensive treatise on the science of statecraft. It is a pragmatic and empirical manual to man the affairs of the State and guarantee the security and welfare of its citizenry. It provides viable direction on the policy of rajdharma upholding the program for state preservation and expansion of its functions and also the administration of justice. It also dwells on the exercise of wisdom by way of ensuring public order and prosperity for the well-being of the people of the state.

(5) A Robust Bureaucratic Structure

Kautilya built up a huge and intricate network of bureaucracy to handle the Mauryan Empire. The bureaucracy was involved in the provision of three such goods- the quality control machinery’, the system of currency, and the system of ‘weights and measures’. Bureaucrats received a fixed pay and were also eligible for state subsidizing housing (Rao, 1958). Kautilya tried to organize an efficient band of ministers and officials with the objective of helping to administer the increasingly centralized states of India. He advocated that without assistance kingship does not work properly. V.R.R. Dikshitar, therefore remarks: “It is thus evident that the Council enjoyed executive powers and that the King did not generally go against its wishes. Thus, neither the minister nor the King alone could act, but the King with the body of ministers did act”

(Dikshitar,1932). The potency of the administration calls for the honesty and competence of the Civil servants. Kautilya emphasised that the quality of bureaucrats helped in maintaining the efficiency of administration. Therefore, the King's ministers should act in accordance with the science of public administration. Kautilya tackled his bureaucracy through the procedures of intelligence organization and decentralization of authority. The intelligence organization kept a tab on the corrupt practices of the officials and made them aware of their dealings with the citizens. Secondly the decentralized- structure of bureaucracy accelerated the process of empowering of the local guilds. Kautilya did not want to construct the bureaucracy under any kind of disciplined ideology. Rather he preferred to set up the bureaucracy in line with the socially sanctified beliefs and practices.

(6) Guidelines on Judicial Conduct

Law is not a set of prohibitions, nor is it tied to the corrective justice of the law Courts. Its range is much wider encompassing institutions, law, morality, traditions and customs. Aristotle says that the worst fault of untampered democracy was its lawlessness, the reign of arbitrary will and thus entailing a condition of negation of freedom, the dethronement of reason and the predominance of clashing impulses (Mulgan,1987). Kautilya advocates the infliction of very severe penalties on government officers and others who were guilty of misappropriation or of damage to state property, like granaries, treasure, mines and manufactories. Issue or use of unauthorised orders by officers was punished in proportion to the gravity of the crime; even the judges were punished for intimidation, unnecessary inquiries and delay in the discharge of duty, evasion and imposition of unjust corporal punishment (Krishna, 1953).Kangle (Part III, p. 215) notes that, "The judges are called dharmasthas, a name which apparently refers to the dharma or law, by which they are to be guided in their work." Kautilya provided a comprehensive web of guidelines to affirm the judicial process would be equitable and impartial. A judge or magistrate should be impartial in assigning a punishment, "remaining neutral between the king and the subjects" (KA. 4.10.17-18,283).

(7) Espionage system

The scheme of espionage is an integral part in Kautily's platter of governance. The State administration has various types of spies for proper functioning of the government machinery. Arthashastra suggests organising a formidable system of espionage to ensure security against internal enemies, and against attempts to frustrate the welfare policy of the King (Krishna, 1958). The connotation of spy, Kautilya devised, was intricate and extensive, and he prescribed that espionage system should be implemented in every walk of life. Kautilya stated, "The administrator should station in the country secret agents appearing as holy ascetics, wandering monks, cart-drivers, wandering minstrels, jugglers, tramps, fortune-tellers, soothsayers, astrologers, physicians, lunatics, dumb persons, deaf persons, vintners, and dealers in bread, dealers in cooked meat, and dealers in cooked rice" (KA.4.4.3, 265). Kautilya argued that the king should jeopardize intrigues from internal and external sources. Internal sources refer to the inner cabinet, the autonomous guilds, religious orders and the personality of the king himself. External sources denote hostile foreign powers. The intelligent department included every institution and profession. Spies could be under the following guises- *kapatika Chhatra*(fraudulent discipline), *udasthita*(recluse), *grihapalka*(householder), *vaidehaka*(merchant), *tapas*(an ascetic practising austerities), *satri*(a classmate), *tikshna*(a firebrand), *rasada*(a poisoner) and a *bhikshuki*(a mendicant woman) (KA:1.11).

(8) Finance

The aim of pursuing successful economic policies is to increase the revenues of the State and appropriate the surpluses for the State treasury. 'A King with a depleted treasury eats into the very vitality of the citizens and the country' says Kautilya (KA:2.1.16). Finance was another significant element of Kautilya's Arthashastra since it was the driving force of all the activities of the government. "The finance department and the other departments dealing with business and economic activities formed a vital part of the Kautilyan administrative machinery" (Ravindra,1932). In Kautilya's Arthashastra we find three basic types of economic activities- agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. By

the way of generating resources in the form of grains, cattle, gold, forest produce, trade and labour the State accumulated wealth. There were separate units for accounts, revenue, mines, arsenals, taxation, agriculture, trade, and navigation. The State had its machinery that would supervise the dealings in the market (Edwardes,1961). With the maintenance of existence productivity in forests, factories, mines and cattle herds the King was also responsible for promoting trade and commerce by setting up market towns, ports, and trade routes, building storage reservoirs (Rangarajan, 1987). Kautilya came to know the critical role of the tax system for cinching the economic well-being of the society and the maintenance of social order. Kautilya envisaged a unique type of taxation that is based on certainty of taxation, proportional income tax, convenience of payment and economy in the collection of taxes. He never allowed any kind of tax evasion and any deviation from payment of tax should be dealt with stringent laws. Spengler observes, “Kautilya’s project of taxation and expenditure, apparently in keeping with traditional doctrine, gave expression to three Indian principles: taxation power is limited; taxation should not be felt to be heavy or excessive; tax increases should be graduated. One of his main concern seems to have been the collection and expenditure of revenue in such ways as to build up the permanent revenue-yielding capacity of the economy. While he manifested little knowledge of tax shifting and incidence, he emphasized the long run, cautioned against too heavy taxation in the short run, and noted that a ruler could not tax at his pleasure, particularly in frontier regions when disgruntled taxpayers could flee to neighbouring countries” (Spengler,1971). Thus, his tax system covered not only the principles of taxation and a piecewise linear income tax but also served receptacles to comply with.

Conclusion

Rooted in the empirical reality of ancient India, Kautilya's administrative state is not an ideal type of bureaucracy. It represents maturing of an analytical and prescriptive intellectual tradition in regard to the theory of organization in India. Giving primacy to public values, Kautilya lays out a value-based hierarchical

but decentralized organizational system. There are many references in Arthashastra to modern concepts of ecological, employee, and consumer welfare. He does not advocate immoral and corrupt corporate culture in which individual citizens can not realize their true personalities as ethical beings. The growing concerns about ethics in organizational literature endorse Arthashastra's guidelines on establishing a framework for moral and ethical administration. His support for secular means such as espionage, trickery etc. to protect the state from complete destruction is conditional. The aim of Kautilya's statecraft was limited, for it consisted in ensuring the security and stability of the King's rule inside the kingdom. The fact that Kautilya articulates the goals of public organization in terms of social welfare is consistent with democratic norms of modern organization. Moreover, Kautilya's notion of public organization highlights a good mix of traditional, charismatic, and rational authority. However, Kautilya remains only as an ideal person in academic discourse, unless his treatise is structured as an administrative device for the strategic policy-making of the present administrative system.

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