An Outline of the Ancient Indian Politics and Its Political Institutionalism: Reminiscence the Arthasastra tradition of Kautilya

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ABSTRACT

The search for just and ideal polity - one of the basic themes which constantly hunts many of our minds since the ancient times. In fact it is vividly reflected in the discourses and different treatises of ancient Hindu scriptures. Kautilya's Arthashastra was part of it. Both in the popular and intellectual discourses, the idea of 'dharma', the idea of powerful kingship and of its different organs as integral part of the state were posited and were partly incorporated in the administrative machinery, which again followed legal codification and customary inscriptive laws in the dispensation of justice and in governance. This paper is going to highlights the role of political institutionalism in the words of Arthasastra tradition of Kautilya.

Keywords: Hindu Political Thought, dharma, Kautilya's Arthashastra, kingship, danda.

1. Introduction:

Any serious effort to the study of ancient India's political past may be conceptualised in a framework of Hindu Tradition[1] and its essential components, like social, cultural and economic bases. However, all these components not to realize in their static relationship with each other, rather appreciate in terms of their holistic reflection. Indeed, the study of Hindu Political Tradition, best to be analyse in terms of its two basic ideals i.e., 'dharma' and 'danda'. The term 'dharma' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dhr', means 'to holds' or something which holds in society together. Since the Hindus thought a society was held together by each individual and group doing his or its specific duties, they used the term to mean duties with certain obligations. On the other hand, the term 'danda' generally means discipline, force, constraint or punishment, many times it also known as 'danda-dan' or justified punishment. In this respect, 'danda' may be used for establish 'dharma' in society.

Though, both the term 'dharma' and 'danda' represent the most basic quality of political life, different scholars chose to concentrate on or the other and explored political life in terms of it, thereby giving rise to two different schools of political opinions of ancient India, these are the 'Dharmasastra' and the 'Arthasastra' schools of tradition. The scholars of 'Dharmasastra' tradition mainly concentrated on exploring 'dharma' of individuals and communities. The scholars discussed the sources of 'dharma' and provided a detailed prescription of duties and obligations. Basically, they were the law-givers, and their outlook based on didactic and perspective manner. Since they did not concentrated on governmental machinery and attempted to provide a code of conduct in this respect, so they did not developed any systematic study on politics (Parekh, 1986, p. 18). Thus, in contrast to the first one, the scholars of 'Arthasastra' tradition were mainly interested in the organisation and maintenance of 'danda', i.e., the way the government, the agent of 'danda', could be most effectively organised. They gave attention on the nature and organisation of government, the nature and mechanics of power, the way power is acquired, weakened and lost, the sources of threat to government and the best way to deal with them, state administrative apparatus and so on. Since the scholars of 'Arthasastra' tradition extensively deals with governments, their works were therefore, more political then ethical in contrast to the 'Dharmasastra' tradition.

Paradoxically, Western scholars like Basham and Keith would like us to believe that India had no school of political philosophy or anything like a serious theory of politics. Yet, they forget that some 300 years before Christ, according to those well-versed in statecraft or science of government Kautilya 'churned the nectar of policy science from the ocean of 'Arthasastra' (Kashyap, 2004, p. 2). His Arthasastra is a 'treasure-trove filled with precious gems of wisdom'. The precepts and principles propounded by Kautilya have relevance to administrators of society irrespective of the forms of government. The administrative principles are discussed in 'Arthasastra' with such insight as to make us wonder whether there has been any real progress in the science of administration since them (Mehta, 1999 , p. 95).

It may be argued that Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' is the first comprehensive treatise on politics in ancient India, but 'Arthasastra' itself begins with an acknowledgement that it is a compendium of several earlier scholars of the science of polity such as Vishalaksha, Bahudantiputra, Brihaspati, Sukra, Manu, Bharadwaj, Kaunpadanta, VataVyadhi, Ghotamukha, Katayayana, Charayana, etc. (Altekar, 1949, Rreprint in 2005, pp. 10 - 11). Thus, 'artha' is defined to mean material well-being of the people living on earth, in this respect Arthasastra, therefore may be define as the 'shastra' (science) which shows how acquisition and protection of earth and of its inhabitants is to be carried out. Thus, 'Arthasastra' becomes a book dealing with matters of the state, a book of 'rajdharma' (Ghoshal, 1959). The basis of 'rajdharma' is knowledge and that why Arthasastra accordingly classified knowledge into four broad categories (Kautilya, [1915] 1967). These are:

(a) Anvikasi (philosophy) generally considered to be the "lamp of all
sciences".
(b) Trayi (the three Vedas – Rig, Sama and Yajur), basically these texts establish the
four classes or 'varnas' and the four orders or 'ashrams'.[2]
(c) Varta (economics) usually consisting with agriculture, cattle breeding,
trade etc., and
(d) Dandaniti mainly referred as science of government and politics.

Following the above mentioned knowledge structure Kautilya views on governmental parameters in terms three broad heads, viz., the ruler, the officials and the mechanism of administration and taking these three components in all together which may developed the foundation of the 'Rastra' or 'Rajya' (State).

2. The State Structure:

The institution of state is created to enable the individual to practice his 'dharma' and thus move towards the emancipation from the cycle of death and rebirth but for others they have always had refractory impulses; for yet others human history is cyclical in nature and characterized by a regular and inexorable alteration of four distinct epochs representing different degrees of human corruption. Thus, in any case, once men become corrupt and incapable of 'Svaraj' or self-rule, they begin to ignore their 'dharma'. This results in 'Varnasankara' or 'confusion of castes', 'Arajakta' or lawlessness, 'Matsyanyaya' or the law of the sea, according to which the big fish eat the small, and the eventual disintegration of the social order. In any case, it must at all cost be remedied or avoided, and hence the institution of government became necessary (Parekh, 1986, pp. 20 - 21). Hence, according to Kautilya, the state to have seven elements (Choudhary, 1971, pp. 59 - 60). These elements are:

(i) Swami (the monarch).
(ii) Amatya (the minister and the institution of council of ministers).
(iii) Janapada (the population and territory).
(iv) Durga (the fortified capital).
(v) Kosa (the treasury).
(vi) Danda or Bala (the army), and

(vii) Surhit or Mitra (the ally).

King derived his power according to Kautilya from three sources. First, 'prabhushakti', derived from the power of the 'danda' and the 'kosa'. Second, 'mantranashakti' came from the advice of wise men, specifically the 'amatya' and 'amtya-parisad' or 'council of ministers. And, third, 'utsahshakti', based on charisma. The 'mantranashakti' to Kautilya was evaluated as the most potent source followed by the 'prabhushakti' and 'utsahshakti'. Undoubtedly, Kautilya believed in the importance of institutions like, 'council of ministers' and not of an individual even likes the 'King'.

In Next to the King came the Minister which consisted 'amatya' and 'parishad'. King was enjoined to discuss each and every matter with the 'parishad' as it represented the distilled wisdom of the society. The 'parishad' had two levels - the 'inner cabinet' and the 'outer cabinet'. The first one had four members - the Chief Minister, the Chief Priest, the Military Commander and the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince was included to ensure smooth succession and to maintain continuity in case of emergencies. The membership of the second one was however not fixed in number. Invariably the heads of the prominent guilds were co-opted in this body. This gave a representative character of the 'parishad' (Rao, 1958, pp. 86 - 87). Thus, Kautilya glorified the State and viewed the office Kingship to be the embodiment of all legal and moral authority associated with the institution of the state (Rao, 1958, p.50). The King was an intrinsic part of the social order and by the nature of his office, a defender of that order. However King was to regard himself as an agent of the people and had to abide by his dharma as laid out in the 'Sastras'. Thus, the institution of the Kingship was sacred but not the person who happens to hold it (Sarkar, 1922, p. 174) [3].

Yet, to Kautilya, King was not the vicar of the God [4] in its actual character, rather, Monarchy, to him was a human institution and therefore manned by a human being. However the King was expected to be more than a mere human being since he was the protector of 'dharma' of the whole society. He had to observe an exemplary conduct himself. Yet, he had no private life and all his actions were subject to public scrutiny (Rao, 1958, p. 122).[5] The King had to follow his 'rajya dharma', it his first and foremost duty is to ensure the protection of his subjects. He is the sole authority to ensure 'rakshana' and 'palana' of his subjects, i.e., the protection of both the individual life and his property. Doing in this way, the ruler actually maintains order in the society. Nevertheless, maintaining 'order' is the sole object of the Kautilya's scheme of theorization and in this respect discipline laid the root of the success. That is to why, Kautilya advocated to the King strictly follow his 'rajya dharma'. This included a thorough knowledge of the four branches of knowledge (Ghoshal, 1959). The King was expected to display 'atma vrata' or self-control and for this he had to abandon the 'Sara Ripus' or six vices, like, 'kama' (lust), 'krodha' (anger), 'lobha' (greed), 'mana' (vanity), 'mada' (haughtiness), and 'harsha' (over-joy) (Kautilya, 1915) [1967], Book 1, Ch. 7).

Clearly Kautilya expected very high standards from the rulers. This is in contrast to the realistic model of the citizen on which he based so many of his laws. The King had a fairly regimented daily routine. His day and night was divided into eight 'nalikas' [6] each and accordingly, the King were assigned to specific tasks for the specific 'nalikas'. Thus, a good ruler is expected to attend to the problems himself of the women, the minors, the aged, the afflicted and the helpless persons. Moreover, the ruler is bound by his vow to be always in readiness for action in the discharge of his duties (Kashyap, 2004, p. 4). Therefore, Kautilya is for a state in welfareism and for this 'Yogakshema' or welfare and prosperity are the supreme concerns of the ruler.

3. The System of Governance: Taxation and Revenue:

It is remarkable indeed that Kautilya had very well realized that any stable and prosperous state essentially requires sound finances, sufficient reserve funds and abundant treasury. He in fact well understood that the proposition that any deterioration in this connection would be one of the most serious national calamities

(Altekar, 1949 (Rreprint in 2005) pp. 260 - 265). The sources of state finance were as many as should be devised by human ingenuity. The state also regulated trade, commerce, manufacture, labour etc. (Saraswati, 1998, p. 17). Yet, the overall development and the progress of the state, normally based on the public finance. For this Kautilya provides a detailed description of the ways and meaning of creating in abundant the 'kosa' or treasury which is the inseparable part of the seven elements of state machinery.

Thus, two of the most significant and valuable features of any system of governance and administration are the taxation and revenue collection. The basis of the function of any state depends on the primary structures of taxation which finally provides for revenue collection for the state instrument. And, Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' not was exception in this regard. It is very important to note that the structure of government which was described by Kautilya and the nature and scope of policies were by and large influenced by the financial activities. Even himself Kautilya acknowledged that the finance as the life breath of the state and it is accepted by the modern states also (Kumar, 1999, p. 264). Generally healthy treasury and enough reserve capital are seemed to be very essential factors of the state administration. Kautilya also considered that state can fail to work smoothly without the prosperous finances and for this state has to face serious problems. So, according to Kautilya the ruler is expected to protect his subjects who are affected by 'Vyasana' or calamities as a father protects his sons. In cases of meeting unforeseen calamities or financing public utility work involving hang investments or the planning to execute ambitious expansion schemes, the state was considered to be within its power limits to levy extra taxes on the populace apart from regular taxes leaved by the state for difference purposes (Sharma S. K., 2012, pp. 209 - 220).

Commenting in this very context, Altekar said that in ancient India, taxation was "to be reasonable and equitable. The king was never to forget that nothing exposed him to greater hatred than oppressive taxation. The criterion of equitable taxation was that the state on the side and the agriculturist or the trader on the other should both feel that they have got a fair and reasonable return for their labours; in the case of trade and industry, the taxation was to be on net profits and not on gross earnings' an article was to be taxed only and not twice; if increase in taxation becomes in citable it should be gradual and not sudden and steep; and extra taxation was to be imposed only in times of national calamity after taking comprehensive steps to explain the situation to the people with a view to ensure a willing response. The king was never to forget that it was only an exceptional remedy to be adopted when there was no other alternative" (Altekar, 1949 [Rreprint in 2005], pp. 265 - 266).

Therefore, the management of finance is crucial and inescapable for administration, and this was realized by the Kautilya significantly. As a matter of fact, financial operations affected the very structure of Kautilyan government and the nature and scope of its whole scheme. Nonetheless, the finance and its planning was the life breath of the state, was acknowledged by Kautilya much as it accepted by the modern state (Sharma, 1959, p. 211). Modern governmental measures are dealt by the public finance which creates a relationship between expenditure and national income. The main objective of the finance is to help to the state to fulfil its aims, harmony between the state revenues and expenditures. Thus, it can be seen the similarities between Kautily's description on public finance and the modern one in different areas, "It is because of the meticulous care which Kautilya deals with questions pertaining to finance that the 'Arthasastra' is also known as a treatise on applied finance. This embodies sound teaching and thought on public finance and is an authoritative text on the subject even by the modern standards. It has tremendous relevance to modern times and is perhaps the only work of its kind in classical antiquity - unique, brilliant objective and foreseeing. Kautilya realized the critical role of the tax system for ensuring the economic wellbeing of the society. The hallmark of his tax system was 'certainty' - of time, of rate and of the mode of payment (Rao, 1958, p. 213). Stability in the tax regime was an important factor in ensuring active trade and commerce in the period when in fact Kautilya write. Indeed, this in turn strengthened the revenue base of the state and enabled it to maintain a huge standing army and the welfare apparatus.

State was overzealous in collection of taxes and tapped virtually every source. Citizens paid a toll-tax. The farmers (household as the unit of assessment) had to pay one sixth of the produce as the land tax. There was a land census at periodic intervals and land records were scrupulously maintained. This data base enabled the assessment of the taxable capacity of the household. Traders had to pay one tenth the value of the merchandize as tax. There was an entry tax to enter the fort, tax on use of roads and waterways, and for getting a passport. Even the hermits living in the forest had to part with one sixth of the grain gleaned by them as they too needed the protection of the King (Ghoshal, 1959, pp. 133 - 134). Service industry was also taxed - actors, dancers, soothsayers, prostitutes, and auctioneers were subjected to taxation. Pilgrims had to pay a pilgrimage tax. On the other hand, the citizens had to pay a tax for the acts of benevolence (Rao, 1958., pp. 209 - 210).

Thus, the whole trajectory of taxation system and mechanism of revenue collection in Kautilya's description make it evident that in that period the financial parameters was considerate, humanitarian, strong, based on strict prescribed rules and largely depend upon the nature of requirements of the state of a particular period of time for the purpose of creating large scale facilities and opportunities for the people in general besides providing for the upkeep of the governmental apparatus and administrative machinery. Therefore, there appears to be a well planned strategy of attaining legitimacy to the state functioning besides creating and completing ambitious construction projects for wide public use (Sharma, 1959, p. 218).

4. The System of Governance: Legal administration:

In addition with these Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' lays down strict norms, regulations and control over the departmental officials and departmental organizations. As the text described, if an officer fails in the discharge of his responsibilities any day, he would be fined twice the amount of his pay. It shall be the duty of the head of the departmental institution to keep a watch over the performance of each person under his charge. The Arthasastra says in this context: "*Just as fish moving under water cannot possible be found out either as drinking or not drinking water, so government servants employed in the government work cannot be found out taking money for themselves. It is possible to mark the movements of birds flying high up in the sky but not to ascertain the clandestine movement of government servants*" (Kashyap, 2004, p. 5).

Hence, with a view to maintain probity in public service and to obviate chances of corruption among officials, Kautilya prescribes confiscation of their ill-gotten wealth, and transfer to another job 'so that they cannot either misappropriate government money or vomit what they have eaten up' (Kashyap, 2004, p. 5). Similarly, 'Arthasastra' outlines a system of civil, criminal, and mercantile law, for example the following were codified - a procedure for interrogation, torture, and trial, the rights of the accused, what constitutes permissible evidence, a procedure for autopsy in case of death in suspicious circumstances, what constitutes defamation and procedure for claiming damages, valid and invalid contracts (Kautilya, 1915) [1967], Book 4, Ch. 7 & 8).

Apart from giving guidelines on administration and its administrators with extensive description of system of rules and regulations, Kautilya also recognized the need of 'danda' or 'bala' for maintenance of state and god-governance. Though, 'danda' is the most important segment of his doctrine of 'saptanga', but Kautilya is not for indiscriminate use of this power. He in fact lays down principles and conditions under which and how this should be applied. He mentions that while the lawful application of 'danda' ensures the complete happiness of the individual, its unlawful or vicious application cause universal disaffection and its non – application products anarchy. Additionally, Kautilya says unjust use of 'danda' may lead to revolt of the people against the ruler and may overthrow him (Kashyap, 2004., p. 6).

However, Kautilya was a product of the age of intrigue. That is to why he advocated to the King, establish an extensive arrangement of espionage system. According to Kautilya, the King has to guard against

intrigues from internal and external sources. Internal sources include the inner cabinet, the autonomous associations or the guilds, religious orders and the personality of the king himself which he called as 'atma-dosa'. On the other hand, external sources refer to Kautilya for identifying hostile foreign powers. Thus, the espionage system was very elaborately suggested by Kautilya in his writing which in fact had infiltrated virtually every institution and profession, especially the institutions of mass participation like religion.

Spies thus, could be under the following appearance in Kautilya's 'Arthasatra', the 'kapatika chhatra' or fraudulent discipline, the 'udasthita' or recluse, the 'vaidehaka' or merchant, the 'tapas' or an ascetic practicing austerities, the 'satri' or a classmate', the 'tikshna' or a fire-band, the 'rasada' or a poisoner and the 'bhikshuki' denotes a mendicant woman (Kautilya, 1915) [1967], Book 1, Ch. 11). More than else, the Monks and the 'sanghas' were actively used for the purpose of gathering intelligence. Kautilya even suggested that to assassinate a rival King, weapons may be kept inside an idol and be used when the King comes for worship. Thus Kautilya did not hesitate to use the institution of religion for the purpose of statecraft. For him, the most important condition for the practice of 'dharma' was not the institution of religion but the institution of the state (Prakash, 1993, pp. 14 - 15).

5. The System of Governance: Foreign Policy:

In his 'Arthasatra', Kautilya also plays special attention to the matter of foreign policy. The foreign policy is based on the policy of 'Mandala' [7], which is related with his views on interstate relationship. Kautilya while discussing his theory, he classified states into the categories of 'Ari Rastra' (enemy states), 'Mitra Rastra' (friendly states), 'Udasin Rastra' (neutral states) and 'Madhiyam Rastra' (states that are neither enemy nor friendly). The theory asserts that every state has a circle surrounding it a circle of states and these states can be further be classified into the categories as quoted above. Each state, according to Kautilya has a different nature, goals and national interests. The centre points of the circle is the King which Kautilya termed as 'Vijaghishu', who takes the neighboring states to be hostile to him and seeks conquer them and annex them to his state (Sharma, 1959; Singh, 1993).

Apart from this, the theory of 'mandala' better to be understood in terms its relation upon two broad heads, first, military preparation and warfare and secondly, policy for alliance. According to Kautilya the theory of 'mandala' based on power relationship of perpetual war and mistrust. From his viewpoint, survival of a king and his kingdom is dependent upon his military power and strength of allies. A King must endeavor to dominate and conquer other kingdoms; otherwise Kings own kingdom will be conquered by other Kings. He has suggested a policy of balance of power backed by Kings military strength. At the same time Kautilya also suggested that King should enter into alliance with the enemy of the enemy King. Apart from military strength, Kautilya also emphasized strictly follow the policies of 'Sama', 'Dana' and 'Bheda'. Thus, in 'Arthasastra', Kautilya observe his foreign policy in relation to his 'mandala' theory into following broad diplomatic categories (Singh, 1993; Ghosal, 1959; Sharma, 1959.):

    (i) Sandhi (treaty or peace and alliance).
    (ii) Vigraha (declaration of war).
    (iii) Asana (neutrality).
    (iv) Yana (planning for preparation of attack, without declaration).
    (v) Samsharaya (seeking protection of another) And,
    (vi) Duadhibhava (making peace with one and making war with another).

6. Concluding observation:

As we see the brief and sketchy description of Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' in this paper that apart from its systematize narrativity on political ideas and institutional description, the prime concerns always vested

upon establish 'dharma' in society through the proper execution of 'danda' and addressed themselves to three basic themes, such as the nature and organization of 'danda', the nature and basis of 'dharma', and the relation between the two. Thus, his 'Arthasastra' take a rational approach to justify political life in terms of these two concepts; though, if we compare with 'Dharmasastra', then we see, 'Arthasastra' was more concerned with discussing how to achieve 'good governance' and how sustain it than the first one. The writers of 'Dharmasastra' on the other hand, mainly busy to lay down authoritative statements of the duties and obligations of the individuals and their society as a whole, but lack of interest in the matter of organizing government apparatus.

Indeed, the prime component of Kautilya in his formulation lays down stringent policies of statecraft; it invariably follows the cardinal principle of 'rakshana' and 'palana' of the people and kingdom. Nowhere does it allow the state to function in an arbitrary manner, by the will of the ruler or in such a manner as to create disaffection among the people. In the happiness of the people lies the legitimacy and the happiness of the ruler and to this end he is duty bound to perform all the duties of his 'Rajdharma' required to keep the people happy (Kashyap, 2004, p. 6). If a closer study of Kautilya's 'Arthasastra' is made from this viewpoint, it is believed, many of foundational norms behind the current perception of 'good – governance' can be distilled from each 'slokas' and every 'passages' of Kautilya's 'Arthasastra.

Notes:

1. The term 'Hindu' thus, is not found in the ancient Indian literature; what is mentioned is 'Aryan'. 'Hindu' came into use with the invasion of the Muslims in the eight century A.D., who described the people living on the East of the river 'Sindhu' (Indus) as 'Hindus' and in consequence several socio-political and economic changes are visualised in this areas and similarly, how the Hindu scholars responding in all these happing to their systematic intellectual outputting. It is in this sense, which we may legitimately talk about the developmentalist approach of 'Hindu Tradition'. At the same time, in this paper we shall use the term 'politics' and its derivatives rather widely to their affairs of a territorially organised community held together by managing to a common authority to systematize epistemology.

2. The Vedic society, as conceived by Manu, is divided horizontally into four Varnas – Brahmin (intellectual), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaishya (trader and agriculturist), and Shudra (artisan and the worker) and hence, Varna system constitutes a division of labor at the societal level. For in depth studies please see (Manu, 1886).

3. Kautilya (Book 1, 16) has described the following ideal for the King:

   "Prajasukhe sukham rajnah, Prajanam ca hite hitam
   Natmapriyam hitam rajanah, Prajanam tu priyam hitam"

   (The monarch should seek happiness in the happiness of his citizens, his welfare is in their welfare, and his good is not in what pleases him but in what pleases the citizens).

4. Since some Hindu traditional belief system encourages pantheism, it was not possible for the King to claim to be the vicar of the numerous Hindu Gods and Goddesses, many of which are in conflict with each other. Therefore, this also may imply that the King could not gain legitimacy by claiming to be the 'protector of the dharma', but also enable to the common subjects to follow his own 'dharma'.

5. It is generally advocated by the Hindu scholars that the character of the King determines the character of the citizens and his kingdom. As the ancient text saying:

   Yatha Raja Tatha Praja

   For in depth study, please see (Singh, 1993; Ghosal, 1959; Sharma, 1959).

6. 'Nalika' represent one and half hours, where during the day the schedule presented as : 1st Nalika - attend book of accounts, 2nd - attend to public grievances, 3rd - bathe & dine, 4th - oversee the bureaucracy, 5th - meet ministers, 6th - see the intelligence reports, 7th - inspect horses, elephants & chariots , 8th - military affairs. Similarly, schedule during the night : 1st - receive spies, 2nd - bathe and dine, 3rd - harem, 4th & 5th - sleep, 6th - plan his day, 7th - administrative matters, 8th - consult the priest, astrologer and the Chief Minister (Kautilya, 1915; [1967], Book 1, Ch. 19).

7. The 'Mandala' theory is firstly described in Mahabharata in so explicitly. It is actually envisages mutual relationship between different states. Although, following his predecessors Kautilya's attempt in this respect is recognized by the scholars is the best effort as such.

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