

Concept of Nationality in Arthashastra of Kautilya

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Introduction

Nowadays study of the history in all the fields are proving fruitful. Its impact on Administration and Management regarding national aspects is an established factor in many ways. Modern administrators and managers are benefited from the valuable ancient works of Sanskrit.

Indian polity has its origin from early period only. In Mahabharata, it is told that there is a need for a king to administer the country.¹ Likewise nearly 2400 years ago, there lived a great scholar, Kautilya, who is alive till date with his magnum opus, 'Arthashastra', a full treatise on concept of nationality. It is clear by historical evidences that Kautilya was a kingmaker, who destroyed the Nandas and placed Chandragupta Maurya on the throne in 321 B.C. His intrigue on this process is remarkable and relevant even for this day.

The credit of publication of the incredible 'Arthashastra' goes to Vidwan R. Shamasastri, Oriental Research Institute, Mysore in 1909. It was in the form of palm leaf in 'Tanjore Grantha' script with an old commentary by Bhattaswami when Vidwan R. Shamasastri received it. He published the text in 1909. In 1915, he published it with English translation in detail in 2 volumes. Several books were written and now also being written worldwide on this masterpiece. It is the practical manual of statecraft and administration. It is translated into English, German, French, Russian, Bengali, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and various other languages of the world.

Chandragupta Maurya

Chandragupta Maurya was the first historical emperor of India. As a great warrior and military strategist, he conquered almost the whole of the Indian subcontinent, including

modern Afghanistan, and laid the foundation of the first powerful national government of India. He was a builder par excellence.

A nationalist to the core, he liberated the country from the foreigners. National unification of the country was his greatest achievement, for which he has made his name immortal in the history of India. He was a great administrator and organizer. He was a ruler who sincerely believed in the concept of public welfare state and established it by dint of his hard work. He lived as an energetic ruler of a vast empire for 24 years. He was in fact, the most representative character of the glorious ancient Indian society and culture.

Basic concepts of Arthashastra

Kautilya gives prominence to the individuals and individual responsibilities whether he may be a king or a common man. **RESPONSIBILITY** is the key word throughout the text. In the beginning of Arthashastra, Kautilya makes it clear about the reason for the composition as, 'It is the quintessence of all the Arthashastras composed by the former teachers in the whole world for the acquisition and protection of the earth.'² Thus he has dealt elaborately with all the possible best practices for the acquisition, protection and sustainable growth of the land. He mentions that before him, there were many scholars in Science of Politics whom he often quotes whenever necessary.

He states all the rules of the administration with clear, detached, and logical mind. It is clear that at the time of composing this work, Chandragupta was not in his mind, but an ideal king, and ideal nation was. This is the real strength of Indian saints. Kautilya was excellent among them. Kautilya knew the two-fold aspect of the ancient state concept viz. the protection and welfare of people, the security and consolidation of the realm. Technically these are known as *Tantra* and *Aavapa*.

In the last *Adhikarana*, he proclaims that 'The source of the livelihood of men is wealth, in other words, the earth inhabited by men. The science which is the means of attainment and protection of that earth is the Science of Politics.'³ 'Thus this science, expounded with these devices of a science has been composed for the acquisition and protection of this world and the next. This science brings into being and preserves the spiritual good, material well-being and pleasures and destroys spiritual evil, material loss and

hatred. This science has been composed by him who in resentment quickly regenerated the science and the weapon and the earth that was under the control of the Nanda Kings.’

The main fourteen areas covered in Arthashastra are as follows;⁴

1. The qualifications, training, and duties of the king, and the ministers
2. The responsibilities of various heads, and penalties
3. Law and administration of justice for citizens
4. Maintenance of law and order by suppressing the crimes by *Danda*
5. Salaries and related activities
6. Foreign policy
7. The method of implementation of above six
8. Natural calamities and preventive methods
9. Preparations for war
10. War and war-field
11. The working plans of a conqueror
12. The working plans of a weak king against a strong king
13. Conquering the forts of enemies
14. Occult practices

The King as an Administrator and First Citizen

The king was the First Citizen and also the servant of the state. So Kautilya first deals elaborately with the qualifications, responsibilities of the King because if the ruler is perfect in all respects, the impacts on the subordinates will be high. Though he favored hereditary monarchy, he never compromised in the quality aspect.

According to him, ‘a king must possess the knowledge of Four Sciences as Philosophy, Three Vedas, (*Rk*, *Yagus* and *Sama*) Economics and Science of Politics.’ He

knew that one who has to manage a country has to be highly erudite in his field. Therefore Kautilya makes it very clear that it is not the Era, but the king who is the prime cause for either the welfare or the destruction of the nation. One can observe the same opinion in *Mahabharata* and *Shukranitisaara*.⁵

The best practices of a perfect king are depicted as, ‘By casting out these Six Deadly Sins, he should acquire control over the senses, cultivate his intellect by the association with the elders, keep a watchful eye by the means of spies, bring about security and well-being by energetic activity, maintain the observance of the special duties by the subjects, by performing his own duties, gain popularity by association with material advantage and maintain proper behavior by doing beneficial.’ These qualities apply not only to ancient times, but also to the modern concept of nationality.

Kautilya assigns 24 hours’ work schedule for an ideal king and gives an option too as every ruler cannot work under such a hectic schedule. So the king should divide the day and night into different parts according to his capacity and should carry out his tasks. Then he lists the prominent works of a ruler which must be executed for the welfare of the nation;

1. He should allow unrestricted entrance to those willing to see him in connection with their affairs.
2. He should attend at once every urgent matter and not put it off.
3. He should look into the affairs of persons learned in Vedas and of ascetics etc.

In the happiness of the subjects, lies the happiness of the king and in the benefit of the subjects, lies his own benefit. What is dear to him need not be beneficial to the subjects, but what is dear to the subjects is certainly beneficial to him. Here one can remember the famous saying, ‘As the king so the subjects.’

Assistants in Administration

Welfare of the subjects was top priority. Each maxim, idea and injunction was directed towards the end. The basic constituting elements of the state were,

1. The King
2. The Officials
3. Territory
4. The Forts
5. The Army
6. The Treasury
7. Allies

The important functions of *Mantriparishat* were as follows,

1. Initiation of the works not begun
2. Completion of the works begun
3. Progression of the works completed
4. Right execution of the rules passed
5. General supervision on public administration of the state

Kautilya prescribes certain tests before assigning the critical responsibilities to the administrators as,

Building Competencies: Kautilya stresses on building competencies. The first chapter ‘Concerning the Topic of Training’ emphasizes the twin qualities of the *skill-in-action* and *quest for perfection*. It identifies basic characteristics of the trainable persons.

Information Collecting and Decision Making: Kautilya recommends collection of comprehensive information on various aspects of human affairs as well as the amounts of income and expenditures. He insists on group decision making. He advised against relying

only on a few advisors. In addition to the soundness of the decision, an advice is not to put off decisions as ‘a decision postponed becomes difficult to settle or impossible to settle.’

In Arthashastra, the king has to consult the ministers separately to know their personal opinion on the important matters. Then there will be Council discussion as,

1. Beginning of the project
2. Co-operation of efficient persons
3. Collection of requisite materials
4. Consideration of prevailing circumstances
5. Protection from mishaps and safety from harm to kindred spirits

The best credit of selection and training of a trainee goes to Kautilya himself. He selected Chandragupta who was obscurity at that time, perhaps like a rough stone standing still. He turned him into a fine sculpture, which is remembered and respected by all who have inspiration to grow and let others to grow. He trained Chandragupta as Best ruler of a great nation namely Mauryan dynasty. He fixed the salary of the ruler too as 48,000 Panas, thus proving that the king is also a worker and is on the throne only to serve people. Thus Kautilya is the role model for practices in management even today.

As Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy puts, ‘I also believe that good leaders integrate the 50,000 feet birds-eye view of the world with the ground level worm’s eye view. They can articulate a great vision, get into the most intricate details of implementation of the vision and implement the vision on time, within budget and with the requisite quality’.⁶

Importance of Training

According to Kautilya, ‘Absence of training in the learning of doctrines is the cause of man’s vices. An untrained person devoid of learning is not able to visualize faults in the vices.’⁷

Training till today is one of the most important functions as it has direct bearing on human resource development. Training has the potential for leading towards excellence in management. His approach is the most accomplished.

Kautilya gives an alternative meaning of *Indriyajaya*. Here it does not symbolize the ascetic life, but regulations on the pleasures of senses. He tampers orthodoxy with rationalism, combines moderate pleasures and economic gains with the pursuit of spiritualism and supports self-control and not self-repression in them.

Finance Department

Artha is the main resource for all the necessary activities of the ruler. Kautilya says that all the undertakings of the nation depend upon the finance. **Profit** was a **must** in Kautilya's scheme of running a country's administration. The root of wealth is economic activity and lack of it brings material distress. In the absence of fruitful economic activity, both current prosperity and future growth are in danger of destruction.⁸

Arthashastra enumerates the measures such as penalties and a system of vigilance to ensure the efficient discharge of the responsibilities of various tiers of governance. Penalties also were used for the enforcement of revenue targets and expenditure limits. Kautilya knew the importance of accountability and transparency the lack of which has been a prime reason for the proliferation of loss making public sector enterprises.

The Mauryan penal code was very severe and the punishments rather harsh. Small offences like theft, misappropriation of public property, cutting of sacred trees, evasion of the payment of taxes, giving false evidence, cruelty against domesticated animals, and the various anti-social offences readily attracted corporal punishment, including whipping and cutting of hands and feet. Torture was used to extort confession. Capital punishment was imposed for a number of serious offences, which included robbery, sex offences, treachery and betrayal of the national interests, slaughter of a cow etc. As a result, the criminals, mischief-mongers and anti-social elements dreaded the law enforcing agencies and there was perfect law and order in the nation of Chandragupta Maurya.

Kautilya finds no hesitation to assign punishment to employees of the Government, even judges and collectors because that would give an alarm to common people. An eye for an eye principle for punishment was in practice.

Kautilya stresses the prominence of Law of Punishment as, 'The king seeking the orderly maintenance of the worldly life should ever hold the scepter raised.'³ But he is very clear about the application of the scepter because "the scepter, used after full consideration, endues

the subjects with spiritual good, material wellbeing and pleasures. When used unjustly in passion, anger, or in contempt, it enrages even hermits and ascetics in forests, then what about householders? If not used at all, it gives rise to the law of the fishes because the strong swallows the weak in the absence of the Wielder on the scepter. Protected by him, the weak prevails. The people of the four *varnas* in the four orders of life are protected by the King with the scepter. They are deeply attached to their respective occupations and special duties; also keen in their respective paths.’

Kautilya was aware of human tendency about finance aspects as he declares that ‘Just as it is impossible not to taste honey or poison that one may find at the tip of one’s tongue, so it is impossible for one dealing with government funds not to taste, a little bit, of the king’s wealth.’ ‘Just as it is impossible to know when a fish moving in the water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when government servants in charge of undertakings misappropriate money.’

Kautilya listed the ways of public funds misappropriated;

1. Falsification of date with a motive of personal profit,
2. Misrepresentation of income received or expense incurred with a motive of personal profit
 - a) Revenue due on a given date is allowed to be collected at a later date
 - b) Revenue not due is collected earlier by force or deceit but credited on due date
 - c) Revenue paid by one is credited in the name of other for a consideration
 - d) Revenue for treasury realized in the capacity of a collector is misappropriated by an individual by force or deceit
3. Discrepancies arising out of willful fraud in personally supervised work, account heads, labor and overhead charges, work measurement.

A deeper study of Arthashastra shows that the law is scattered throughout the work. It gives a full code of law and an important classic source for study of nationality of India. Today there is a need for such rulers for the development of the nation according.

Kautilya has provided an exhaustive and illustrative description of the duties, responsibilities and role of the king, the prince, the minister and other state officials. As for

the nation's political administration, he provides a full-fledged commentary as to how this should be effectively undertaken. He believes in the team work as he proclaims that the Superintendent should do his duty assisted by the accountants, writers, examiners, receivers of balance and supervisors and the ruler should monitor all the activities regularly. The duties of the Superintendent, Heads of the various departments, officials are dealt with.

This is perhaps the first instance of an institutionalized concept of passports that regulate flow of people across borders. Kautilya tried to establish guidelines for professional service providers such as weavers and prostitutes. He knew the law of demand and supply and pernicious effects of gluts in the market. It is the prime known treatise to discuss such concepts.

The essence of *Rajadharma* consisted in self-government Swaraj depending upon self-control and self-conquest. Gandhiji, true to this tradition of politics, achieved emancipation. Kautilya envisaged a conception of the kingship removed from the taint of absolutism of any kind and asserted that 'only a ruler who rules himself' can successfully rule others. Whoever is the sovereign even one whose dominion extends to the ends of the earth, if of perverted disposition and ungoverned senses, he must quickly perish. He did not give the kingship a divine origin. His basic functions are protection of good and punishment of evil as in Hindu belief. Cash management has drawn the attention of modern national experts in the advanced stage of development of management science.

The memory of the great past and its reinterpretation strengthens the awakening of modern India and in that lies the national significance of the ancient Hindu period. Its real achievements however are in directions other than strictly political – in perfecting of a remarkable social order and in the development of traditions and values that have had a lasting effect on all subsequent period. Though the kingdom was a feudal monarchy, it had well-constructed democratic administrative machinery.

Good governance is basic to the Kautilya's idea of administration. If the rulers are responsive, accountable, removable, recallable, there will be stability and rulers will be more careful and committed. This is very much relevant in the present democratic set up. Kautilya's precepts may have been in the context of the monarchical set up. However, present national leaders should be endowed with similar qualities.

Kautilya was on Ahimsa. At the same time, he provided slaughter houses. Arthashastra was regarded as *Upaveda* of *Atharvaveda* and *Rkveda*. It reveals classic clearness of outline and precision of form. To *reason*, not *emotion*, he addresses the final appeal. The shadow over fatalism which rested over the epics is removed. He stresses the importance of individuality and individual responsibility and the value of human endeavor in securing the best of this life. He never contested the prerogative of *reason* to be the ultimate criterion of truth. To him, the more obedience to a tradition or to an authority could have no value by itself. He looked upon History as a storehouse of examples rather than as a field of general experience.

Another interesting aspect was that Kautilya's framework of governance included programs for advancement of weaker vulnerable sections of the society and provision of many concessions and facilities, more or less similar to those for our backward segments of society in recent times.

His thought on labor law, constitutional and administrative law, law of commercial transactions, family law, and law of writs were perhaps for first time. He aims at reviving interest in classical Hindu jurisprudence may be seen as manifesting what has been often termed as contemporaneity of non-contemporaneous. Rule of proportionate punishment is modified by caste and gender consideration.

Kautilya in his Arthashastra makes mention of the Royal Road that led to Pataliputra to Taxila and beyond to the borders of the Mauryan empire. It had shady trees planted on both the sides and was dotted with rest houses and water-wells at regular intervals.

The Mauryan penal code was very severe and the punishments rather harsh. Small offences like theft, misappropriation of public property, cutting of sacred trees, evasion of the payment of taxes, giving false evidence, cruelty against domesticated animals, and the various anti-social offences readily attracted corporal punishment, including whipping and cutting of hands and feet. Simple imprisonment of criminals, excluding hardened ones, was avoided to solve the problem of overcrowding in the jails. Torture was used to extort confession. Capital punishment was awarded for a number of serious offences, which included robbery, sex offences, treachery and betrayal of the national interests, slaughter of a cow or the murder of a Brahmin. As a result, the criminals, mischief-mongers and anti-social

elements dreaded the law enforcing agencies and there was perfect law and order during the domain of Chandragupta Maurya.

It goes to the credit of the Mauryan state that in spite of the vast distances between its various centers of power, widely different ethnic composition and different levels of socio-economic development of the people, it was successful in enforcing the uniform political institutions on the national level. The law-and-order enforcing agencies, organization of agriculture and Industry, trade and commerce, the nature and the procedure for the payment of taxes to the state, composition and functioning of the panchayat system, etc. assumed uniformly and took deep roots in the various parts of India with amazing identities.

Many political practices still today are institute of espionage (1.11.12), cold blooded murder of rulers, princes, ministers, other high officials (1.17,18,20;8.1-5), the passport system (2.34), taking of census of people and animals including wild animals, (2.35) the levy of the number of taxes, benevolences and special taxes to replenish empty treasuries (2.6,12,16,21,5.2) oppressive taxes on the trade (2.21;4.2), the exaction of religious taxes, robbing of temple money by imposing upon the credulity and superstition of people (5.2), the confiscation of property of rich under the plea of embezzlement (2.2;4.3) or of tiding over famine and other national calamities, slaughter of animals on a large scale for supply of flesh to people including Brahmins (2.26), state owned drinking saloons to supply liquor (2.25), torture of criminals to elicit confessions(4.8), deceitful treaties and treacherous battles(7.17;10.3), evils wrought by spies by creating trust(12,13), use of destructive gases, medicines, poison to murder people or to render them in firm either in war or in peace (14)The appointment of women as spies was also popular.

Conclusion

Nehru in his Discovery of India gives a fine image of Kautilya, 'Chanakya has been called Indian Machiavelli and to some extent the comparison is justified. But he was a much bigger person in every way, greater in intellect and action.---Bold and scheming, proud and resourceful, never forgetting a slight, never forgetting his purpose, availing himself of every device to delude and defeat the enemy, he sat with the reigns of empire in the hands and looked upon the emperor more as a loved pupil than as a master.---There was hardly anything Chanakya would have refrained from doing to achieve his purpose; he was unscrupulous

enough, yet he was also wise enough to know that the very purpose might be defeated by means unsuited to the end.’

Kautilya was far ahead of his time. He was a philosopher, guide, statesman and economist for all time. He is like father of many latest ideas in many fields. Kautilya is Kautilya, an incomparable, peerless personality. He set challenging tough targets and standards deliberately and paved a wide highway path for the future administrators. The history of a single man who had nothing with him except him, demolished a strong Nanda kingdom and established a strong and prosperous kingdom without any personal expectations is noteworthy. Now a need has arisen for all to study the past and present historical and political thoughts, theories to build a future strong and developed nation.

Time may change, people may change, places may change, but the innate instincts like attitudes and emotions remain the same. Thus, one can find similarities between the concept of nationalism found in Arthashastra of Kautilya and Modern concept of nationalism.

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2. Arthashastra I. 1. 1.
3. Arthashastra XV.1.71-73
4. Rule the World Pg. 209
5. Mahabharata Udyogaparva 111.16 and Shantiparva I.69,79, Shukranitisara I.60
6. A better India better World. Intro. Pg. XX
7. ArthashastraVIII.3.1,2
8. Arthashastra 1.19.35-36

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