



## **Good Governance in Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*Arthashastra is the masterwork of India's greatest statesman-philosopher, Kautilya. Kautilya appropriates a philosophy of governance that fundamentally aims at Yogakshema of the people to be achieved through Sushashan (Good Governance), able and stable leadership. Good governance is a recent term, but it has been around since the time human society evolved. Arthashastra is the most clear, scientific and detailed treatise on Indian politics, through which the introduction of contemporary political ideas and institutions is obtained. The principles of governance and statesmanship developed and established by Arthashastra were followed by many rulers of ancient India. In order to clarify the public welfare form of the state, Kautilya has presented a comprehensive outline of the responsibilities of the government, and in all contexts moral, social and economic, the government has to be fully dedicated and active for the welfare of the subjects. The glory of Kautilya lies in the fact that he has made the principles included in his Arthashastra such that they are relevant and useful even today. Good governance means formulation of good policies and their efficient implementation. My research paper presents a snapshot of some of his views on good governance.*

**Keywords:** Prosperity, Kingship, Governance, Law, Intricately.

### **Introduction**

Kautilya was the key advisor and general secretary of Chandragupta Maurya (c.317-293B.C.E). He destroyed the Nand dynasty, stopped the advance of Seleucus Nicator, and first united the Indian subcontinent in empire. According to Jha & Jha "Chanakya was a great statesman as well as a great scholar. He played a dominating role in the formation and functioning of the Maurya Empire. Subsequently under his guidance, growth with stability was attained in the empire with the help of strong administration and efficient fiscal management. His attainment in the sphere of scholarship is undoubtedly laudable. The 'Arthashastra' consists of detailed analysis of different aspects of ancient Indian economy."

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(Jha & Jha, 1997, pp1-4) The book named *Arthashastra* composed by him is a great book of politics, economics, agriculture, social policy etc. Not only is Kautilya famous as a great scholar and a serious thinker, he has also got fame as a practical and shrewd politician. He has historical contribution in the destruction of *Nandavansh* and establishment and expansion of Magadha Empire. According to *Salator*, Kautilya has a paramount place in ancient Indian political thought. "This science has been composed by him, who in resentment quickly regenerated the science and the weapon and the earth that was under control of the *Nanda* kings." Kautilya's *Arthashastra* was very influential until the twelfth century when it disappeared, although it continued to be referred to afterwards. The text reappeared rather miraculously in 1904 and was given to *R. Swamasastry*, the Librarian at the Mysore Government Oriental Library, who subsequently published it in 1909 and published in English translation in 1915. (Boesche, 2017, pp8).

While the ancient inhabitants of India paid special attention to the development of religion, philosophical thought and spiritualism, they did not ignore the worldly progress as well. According to him, where the purpose of religion was the attainment of salvation, there was also worldly development. He had developed many disciplines for the individual and collective progress of man. *Dandniti* was the most important of all those disciplines. In the ancient literature of India, where the term *Dandniti* has been used for Political Science. Politics, *Rajdharmashastra*, *Arthashastra* etc. many other words have also been used for this scripture. Kautilya *Arthashastra*, instead of a treatise on property, renders only *Dand* or politics. Kautilya has explained the meaning of the word *Arthashastra* in this way - "The land inhabited by humans is called *Artha* and the scriptures that deal with its benefits and observances are called *Arthashastra*." Kautilya's interpretation of *Artha* Yes, it is of great importance. In fact, it only gives the sense of the institution of royalty. The three main elements of the state are land, human beings and the power of the organized government. Two of these elements were included in Kautilya's meaning. The third element itself is called *Dandniti* in ancient political texts. It is clear that the main objective of *Arthashastra* was to show the path of the king in the work of governance by rendering various genres to meet the government needs. *Arthashastra* is actually a practical science of governance which discusses both practical and philosophical aspects of politics. His political thought revolutionized the political perceptions and institution of the period. For centuries, western scholars had made an impression about India that people here are not serious about fundamental questions of political thought like civil society, good governance, humanism, judicial system, because spiritual life is most important for Indians. The many western thinkers believed that India had not school of philosophy in the western sense. They believe that ancient Indian thinkers have made no significant contribution.

But in 1905, *Shamashastris* proved wrong the notion of western thinkers that Indian Political Thinkers had no contribution to the political thought. This brought to light that the history of Ancient Indian Political thought is the story of great mind.

## Political Ideas of Kautilya's Arthashastra

Kautilya's place is highest among the statesmen of ancient India and he is considered the greatest exponent of governance, art and diplomacy. Kautilya's '*Arthashastra*' is an important work of political principles. Kautilya did not base the *Arthashastra* only on the texts of contemporary politics, but also based it on his personal experience and knowledge, which he had gained from studying the contemporary political situation and institutions. Kautilya, in an attempt to make governance work a separate and distinct science, has divided it into a new abstract form. Kautilya has accepted the principle of social agreement regarding the origin of the state. At one place, Kautilya says that *Matsya Nyaya* had influence in the society before the state. Just as the big fish swallows the small fish, similarly the strong men of the society were always active in the destruction of the weak men. Fed up with this system, people made Manu their king. These people started giving one-sixth of their food grains and one-tenth of the money received from trade to the state as tax. While appointing Manu as the king, these people had made it clear that they should pay taxes to the king only when he makes proper arrangement of their area. Thus the origin of the state was the result of a social contract. The organic form of state described by Kautilya is not a foreign import, but is purely Indian. He is the embodiment of the supreme executive of the state. After that the ministers come, who give necessary advice to the king and run the administration. Forts are the main means of defense of the state and the safety of the public is possible only through them. District or territory is the physical basis of the existence of the state. It is very important to have a fund for the happiness and prosperity of the state and the people. Without punishment, peace and order is not possible in the state. In the end, the existence of a friendly state is also necessary for the existence and security of the state.

Kautilya is the most celebrated name in Ancient Indian administrative history. The Kautilya *Arthashastra* represents a definite stage in the history of Indian Political thought. He was not a theorist but a hard realist. He placed his social and political ideas before him and tried to devise means to achieve his ideals. *Arthashastra* deals with the perennial problem of acquiring and maintaining the earth. Kautilya in his book, composed as a guide to acquire and secure this world. (Prasad & Prasad, 1989, p-22) Kautilya made politics an independent discipline. He emphasized that out of four science- first, *Ānvīkṣikī* (Science of thinking and strategizing), or "philosophy" including the materialistic *Lokayata* system (A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism). Secondly, the Trayī or triple *Vedas* (*Rig, Sama and Yajus*). Thirdly, *Varta* or Economics was concerned with agriculture, cattle and trade. Lastly *Dandniti* or Politics was the science of government of the enforcement of law and order. (Prasad, 1968, p-93-94) The state described in *Arthashastra* is even more elaborate and seeks to control every aspects of national activity. Social life, trade, finance, civic activities, cultivation, in fact almost every part of man's or gained life was considered by the Kautilya to be within the legitimate sphere of administration. (Panikkar, 1963, p-6).

According to Kautilya the state and kingship were based on popular goodwill. The king was their leader as well as head of the state and Government. Kautilya had viewed state as an organic unit in which had its constituent units such as *Swami, Amatya, Janapada, Durga, Kosha, Danda* and *Mitra*. These constituent elements of the State were more

comprehensive than the modern political thinkers think of i.e. land, population, government and sovereignty. Although Plato and Aristotle speculate on the origin of state, they never define it as sharply and clearly as like Kautilya. In this sense, Kautilya explain us as full and complete a definition of the state as was possible in ancient period. Like other Kautilya focus on the powerful, but limited and welfare nature of monarchy.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* creates a stable government with welfare hierarchy. The king was the head of the whole administration. The main objective of the government is to guarantee security and welfare of the people through honest, loyal and efficient administration. In modern time, the main objective of the administration and government is to protect the people. (Mohanty, 1997, p-44-45).

Kautilya has supported the monarchical system. They have given wide powers to the king but did not support the autocracy of the king. Kautilya has a clear belief that it is necessary for the king to remain disciplined for the benefit of both the state and the subjects. Kautilya has suggested various types of policy, institutional, procedural and practical measures to control and limit the use of power by the king. Kautilya has advised the king to appoint only ministers of pious conduct who are tested by *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Bhaya* in different functions according to their capabilities. Kautilya suggests the king to consult the ministers individually or collectively according to the importance of the subject. Kautilya is of the opinion that the king should judiciously interpret the statements made by the ministers and should neither prolong the consultation nor delay the decision unnecessarily. Kautilya is of the opinion that if there is no consensus on any question in the Council of Ministers, then the king should decide on the basis of majority. Thus, it is clear that Kautilya is in favor of making the decision-making process completely democratic. The qualifications lay down by Kautilya is same in modern writers lay emphasis on these qualifications. (Kumar, 1998, p-88) As researcher Kautilya is as provocative to one accustomed to European political ideas as any other political thinker. Readers understand that Kautilya necessarily wrote political thought constrained by ancient Hindu society including classes, castes and customs. No thinker in his time or place, not even one as bold and innovative as Kautilya, could imagine ridding India of the four classes or *Varnas*. Even here, however, Kautilya pushed the edges of this caste system by defending the rights of most *Shudras* to be exempt from slavery and by seeking a popular army that relied on *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. As much as anyone could have done in India at the time, Kautilya defended the status of citizenship for *Shudras*.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* describes a system of governance in which the king rules for the welfare of the subjects. The king cannot rule by being arbitrary. He has to rule the subjects only after getting the help of the Council of Ministers. The state-priest is like a check on the king who establishes control over the king when he deviates from the path of religion and can compel him to follow his duty. Council of Ministers constitute the real wheel of the government because the king's decision are based on the suggestions of the council of the ministers and once a decision or a policy is finalized, its implementation is also the responsibility of his ministers. For the security and welfare of the people, the king solely

depends upon the performance and excellence of the ministers. The success of the king depends on the successful working of the individual ministers.

### **Good Governance in Kautilya's Arthashastra**

Good governance means running a socio-political unit in such a way that it gives desired results. Many things come under good governance, including good budget, proper management, rule of law, morality etc. On the contrary, lack or complete lacks of transparency, jungle raj, low participation of people, dominance of corruption etc. are the symptoms of bad governance. In the year 1992, in the report titled '*Governance and Development*', the World Bank fixed the definition of good governance. It defined good governance as 'the manner in which power is exercised in managing the country's economic and social resources for development'. There are 8 main features of good governance. It follows the 'rule of law' along with being participative, consensus, accountable, transparent, accountable, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive. It is also responsible for the present and future needs of the society.

Following the ancient Indian political thought, Kautilya has also made the concept of monarchy the center of his thought. He considers the king's power paramount in worldly matters, but in matters of duties he himself is bound by religion. He is not a lecturer of religion, but a protector. Considering the state as an end in itself, Kautilya has given it the highest place in social life. The interest of the state is paramount, for which sometimes it keeps aside the principles of morality. According to Kautilya, the purpose of the state is not only to establish peace and order, but also to contribute to the highest development of the individual. The duty of the king is to establish social justice for the general public. Proper operation of social system is possible only when father-son, husband-wife, guru-disciple etc. fulfill their responsibilities. In the event of divorce, he emphasizes the equal rights of men and women. Female slaughter and Brahmin-murder have been considered serious crimes. The field of work of Kautilya's state is very wide. By entrusting the state with the responsibility of all-round development of human beings, it makes it a welfare state of the modern era. He has assigned many functions to the state. Like- construction of dams, ponds and other means of irrigation, development of mines, plowing of barren land, animal husbandry, forestry etc. Apart from these, public entertainment was under the control of the state. Helping the orphans, the poor, the crippled, protecting the honor of women, arranging for remarriage, etc. were also the responsibilities of the state. Thus Kautilya's state is a universal state. Establishment of public welfare and good administration is its goal, in which religion and morality are used as a means. Kautilya says, "The happiness of the king lies in the happiness of the subjects. Whatever is beneficial for the people, he has his own benefit in it. At another place he has written- "Force is power, it is right. Happiness is attainable through these means." In this regard *Salettore* says, "The only objective of the state which has power and authority is to increase the happiness of its subjects. Thus Kautilya has properly directed the functions of a welfare state.

According to Kautilya, "In the happiness of his subject's lies the king's happiness, in their welfare lays his welfare. He shall not consider as good as only that which pleases him

but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects". For citizen friendly good governance there should be uniformity in the administrative practices as well as competent ministers and officials possessing qualities of leadership, accountability, intellect, energy, good moral conduct, and physical fitness, capable of taking prompt decision. A King who administers justice on the basis of four principles: righteousness, evidence, history of the case, and the prevalent law, shall conquer the earth. Governance refers to "all of processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through the laws, norms, power or language".

According to Kaufmann and Kraay, "the concept of Governance is not new. Kautilya presented key pillars of the art of governance emphasizing justice, ethics and anti autocratic tendencies. He further detailed the duty of the king to protect the wealth of the state and its subjects, to enhance, maintain, and it does also safeguard such wealth as well as the interests of the subjects." The *Arthashastra* lays various emphases a good leader, honesty and responsibility.

Kautilya emphasized the moral and spiritual development of the people and this explains his importance given to *Dhaima, Artha and Kama*. Attainment of material prosperity was also considered by him as essential as purity in religious and moral conduct. For the progress of the society, Kautilya believed in imparting education to the people. He emphasized that it was the duty of the state to provide grants for education as an important constituent of state expenditure. The teachers and scholars were to receive funds from the state to impart education to the people. In this sense, he believed in an autonomous educational system which was to be funded by the state. Education was universal and free. Kautilya wanted citizen not to be petty-minded so that the nation- building process could take place. Kautilya's views on education are relevant today. At present, the main goal of the states is to provide education to its citizens. Indian Constitutional gives the education right to our citizens. Kautilya imposed a ban on the sale and purchase of children as slaves. This shows his immense concern for child labor. Health and sanitation was also one of the state's prime concerns. Medical superintendents were appointed by the state to look after the health of the citizens. Doctors can be punished because of their negligence of duty. Kautilya was also aware of the environmental problems. Therefore, he prescribed different roads for carrying dead bodies. (Kohli, 1995, p.130-131).

Consumers were protected in Kautilyan scheme of *Yogakshema* against any kind of mischief regarding rates or quality of the goods. The protection of the interest of the consumer was upper-most concern of the state. Kautilya never lost sight of the welfare aspect of the governance. He gave the exact details of public administration dealing with the highly complicated network of relationship within the administrative system. He gave a comprehensive list of Instructions regarding the duties, responsibilities and qualifications of ministers and officials. His administrative and judicial structure was hierarchical in nature. As for justice, he emphasized the principle of equity and immediacy.

John W. Spellman rightly notes that one cannot understand India's reverence and awe for the king if one does not grasp the Indian concept of *karma*. The doctrine of *karma* maintains that what happens to one in this life, both good and bad, is the result of actions taken either earlier in this life or more likely in one or more of many previous lives. (Sinari, 1984, p-14-19) Kautilya thought that a king was indispensable for an empire and that it was his job to advise a king about how to rule correctly. "For, the king, trained in the science, intent on the discipline of the subjects, enjoys the earth without sharing it with any ruler, being devoted to the welfare of all beings." (A.1.5.17,11).

Whereas the king was supposed to be all-knowing, he was also supposed to be the loving father who took care of his subjects as if they were children, an ideal that one author calls "royal paternalism". (Bandyopadhyaya, 1927, p-64) Kautilya advocated something like a welfare state with the king as the kindly and caring paternal figure who "should favor the stricken like a father". (A.4.3.43,265). According to Kautilya, while the king himself, by means of his administration, should "maintain children, aged person, and person in distress when they are helpless", (A.2.1.26,57) his judges throughout the kingdom should concern themselves with the affairs of "women, minors, old person, sick person, who are helpless when these do not approach the court." (A.3.20.22,253) Each judge was, in a sense, an extension of the king who was the final authority in judicial matters. (Sharma, 1948, p-125) Those who are poor and need help to support themselves should be given work. "And those women who do not stir out-those living separately, widows, crippled women, or maidens, who wish to earn their living, should be given work." (A.2.23.11,147) Even after conquering an enemy, the king should "render help to the distressed, the helpless and the diseased."(A.13.5.11,492).

Kautilya emphasized the effective role of the state in shaping man's moral, economic, social and physical life. For the progress of the society, Kautilya believed in imparting education to the people. It was the duty of the state to provide grants for education as an important constituent of state expenditure. The teachers and school are to receive funds from the state to import education to the people. (Kohli, 1995, p-60).

No administrative system can be complete without a well-organized judicial system. Naturally, Kautilya also could not overlook this aspect of administration. Judges were appointed at all important centers to ensure the protection of life and property, as well as the trial and punishment of wrong doers. (Kumar, 1998, p-112). Kautilya has given the judicial power a level above the general executive or legislative power of the state and has also given the judges the right of judicial review of the state law. Judges are expected to be free from bias, while the ruler is expected to appoint qualified judges. Kautilya believes that the main objective of judicial administration is to ensure the rule of law. Kautilya gives a detailed account of law. He makes a distinction between civil and criminal law. Different types of law are a model for the modern legislators to follow in lawmaking.

The state described by Kautilya was not only a police state, that is, the state does not consider its work only to maintain peace, order and security. The aim of the state is to fully

assist the individual in his full development. A good state is based on a healthy and strong economy. According to Kautilya, the scope of the functions of the state should be very wide. The whole economic policy was regulated and controlled by the state. The state offered doles to the needy. Kautilya believed that the stability and efficiency of state were essential for human welfare. (Choudhary, 1991, p-255).

## **Conclusion**

Kautilya has an important contribution in Indian political thought. It becomes clear from the discussion of Kautilya's views that Kautilya has seriously discussed the theoretical, institutional and practical questions related to the state. The importance and relevance of the strategies and concepts explained in Arthashastra continues even today in the contemporary world. While presenting the theory of the origin of the state, Kautilya has made it clear that the state is the means which exists for the protection of the subjects and their all-round welfare.

Explaining the public welfare nature of the state, it has been declared that it is the main responsibility of the state to ensure distributive justice. He completely rejected the idea of autocracy of the ruler. Kautilya has also established institutional and procedural controls through consultative institutions and processes of policy-making, in addition to the moral controls of policy and religion on the ruler. Kautilya has supported the king to be controlled by the public and public opinion as well. While clearly announcing the control of the public on the power of the ruler, he says that if there is a conflict between religion and the state order, then the subjects have the right to disobey the state order and it is better to have no king than to have an autocratic king. Such statements clearly express Kautilya's insistence on a limited, controlled by the people and a functioning government under the supremacy of law. Kautilya has considered all the state officials including the king as the servants of the people.

Kautilya's Arthashastra emphasizes the close relationship between administration and the art of good governance. He gave valuable opinion on all aspects of human life and all its branches in his book Arthashastra. He stresses on the establishment of a stable government with a welfare form of government. The main objective of government is to guarantee the safety and welfare of the people through honest, loyal and efficient administration. To clarify the public welfare form of the state, Kautilya not only explained the responsibilities of the state in principle, but by presenting a comprehensive outline of the responsibilities of the government, in all contexts moral, social and economic, the government is completely devoted to the welfare of the subjects. Kautilya has presented a systematic form of administrative system. Kautilya's views on organizational, procedural and personnel aspects of administrative system express an excellent administrative philosophy.

Kautilya's approach on punishment, justice and judiciary is very sensible. Kautilya has not considered judicial power as the personal power of the king but has considered it as an institutional power and has given importance to the independence and organized status of the judiciary. While laying down a clear policy regarding punishment, Kautilya has emphasized on the amount and nature of punishment to be determined in proportion to the



gravity of the crime. Keeping the state safe from external enemies and invaders, protecting the internal order, justice and protecting the subjects from divine (natural calamities)-flood, earthquake, famine, fire, epidemic, deadly animals are the functions of the king.

According to Kautilya the main objective of the government is to guarantee the safety and welfare of the people through honest, loyal and efficient administration. In modern times also, the main objective of administration is public safety and good governance. He said that good governance should be linked to the welfare of the people. Kautilya's Arthashastra is an important treatise covering various topics on administration, politics and economy, which is still relevant today. Good governance and stability are inextricably linked. If the rulers are responsible and accountable then there is stability, if they are not then there is instability in the country. It is most relevant even today in the present democratic system. According to Kautilya, the king should avoid heavy taxation. Because if the tax rates are high then the public will not be ready to pay tax and will find ways to evade tax, this will cause loss to the exchequer. He was fully aware that the terms of trade depend not only on economics but also on various parameters. There is no autonomous mechanism that ensures that a nation will benefit from trade in the absence of certain safeguards and policy measures. Kautilya's emphasis on human capital formation is relevant even in the present times because development of any country is not possible without human capital accumulation. Apart from these ideas, there are many such things in Kautilya's Arthashastra which are very relevant even in the present times like conservation of natural resources. Arthashastra provides a lot of knowledge about public welfare which is relevant even today. Social welfare is the focal point of Kautilya's economic thoughts. The state needed to be active in helping the poor and helpless and contributing to the welfare of its citizens. Kautilya's Arthashastra has provided a strong foundation for the establishment of good governance in the state. For the establishment of good governance in the state, it is necessary that all the state officials including the king should be considered as public servants. Therefore, we see that the purpose of Kautilya's economic policy was to provide public welfare, firmness to the state and capacity for general welfare, which is relevant even in today's time.

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