

A Brief Survey Of Ancient Indian Administration

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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. The Mauryan government also took effective and energetic measures to relieve the distress of the people. Elaborate precautions and remedial measures were enforced during famines, floods, droughts, rat-menace, outbreak of fire, menace from serpents and wild animals and evil spirits. To prevent an outbreak of fire in summer, city and village people were required to cook outside, and never under the roof. Every householder had to keep ready ten fire-fighting implements. People who worked with fire were to live in one locality.

Keywords: Arthashastra, Public administration, Good governance.

Introduction

The Early Indian, administration was geared for public welfare activities. It was not a *laissez-faire* state designed for maintenance of law and order only. The administration, while fully alive to its police and judicial functions, was actively interested in promoting the welfare of the common people. It is true, as we have seen, that in the interest of security of the king or the state intensive espionage was practised and for augmenting the treasury varieties of taxes were imposed. But the mutually dependent interests of the king and the people made the administration active in the loyalty of the citizens; a population noted for its loyalty was one of the principal characteristics of the *janapada*, one of the seven essential elements of sovereignty. Loyal subjects were of strength to the king, a king of considerable power because of estranging his subjects by taking himself to evil ways becomes assailable.

The king is as it were the aggregate of the *Praktis*. So much depended on the king that Kautilya held "A wise king can make even the poor and miserable elements of sovereignty happy and prosperous; but a wicked king will surely destroy the most prosperous and loyal elements of his kingdom".

Kautilya prescribes comprehensive study of military science and history which comprises *Purana*, stories, *Dharmashastra* and *Arthashastra*. He had every day to revise old lessons and receive new ones. Company makes the man and so the prince was to keep constant company with aged and disciplined experts. As a student he

was to study sciences under the authority of specialized teachers, Varta under government superintendents and Dandaniti (Science of government) under academic teachers and active politicians. A well-educated and disciplined Prince was expected to devote himself "to good government of his subjects and bent on doing good to the people, the king will enjoy the earth unopposed"? Here also the assurance of a safe and long rule is dependent on contributing to the welfare of the people. It is therefore not surprising that Kautilya asks the king to be kind, to show favors to the people as a father and Asoka proclaims that "subjects are as his children" who is more interested in the welfare than a father in his children? The training, education and association with the aged and wisemen from childhood must have ordinarily contributed to such a conditioning of the mind of the prince as to make him play the role of a righteous king. On becoming a king he was to remember that control of senses was necessary and his reading of history informed him of kings ruining themselves and their kingdom by becoming a victim to even of the sixfold vices (Vyasanans), and of kings who ruled successfully by exercising restraint on their senses. If later traditions are to be believed, Chandragupta had received good education under expert teachers like Canakya.

Chandragupta had a busy time-table. Kautilya provides a daily routine for the king. Both day and night were divided into eight parts, and most of the time was engaged in looking after state business, though a part of it was reserved.

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It appears that royal princes were also given practical training and experience in administration. Asoka served as Viceroy in Taxila and Ujjain before he became emperor. It was necessary that in a dynastic monarchical system great stress be laid upon the training of the princes- the would be kings'. It is, therefore, why the king was the level of administration, as the success or the failure of the government depended on the character and ability of the king. While Kautilya recognised seven constituent elements of sovereignty, the king not only heads the list, but is responsible for the progress or downfall of the other elements. Therefore, in his own interest the king had to do good to the people as on this basis alone he could himself be happy and prosperous. Possessed of subjects who are indifferent to the king's interests, the king was easy to be overpowered by his enemy. Therefore, Kautilya advised the king to take prompt remedial measures to remove the causes of disaffection among his subjects.

In numerous ways the administration carried out many schemes of public welfare. Development of roads must have contributed in many ways to welfare. The success of any administration claiming to be interested in the welfare of people, is to be judged as to how it treated its weakest and helpless citizens. Kautilya accepted the traditional joint family system with wide responsibilities of the head of the family. The rule was enforced that any person with means who neglected to maintain his or her child, minor brothers or sisters, widowed girls and unmarried daughters was liable to fines. Similarly any person embracing asceticism without making provisions for his wife and sons was punished. But still there could be some helpless orphans and it was the responsibility of the administration to maintain the children, aged, infirm, the afflicted and the helpless. The state also provided sustenance to helpless women who had no children and to the children they gave birth to. We have already seen that from amongst the dependent and helpless men, secret agents are recruited. The fact that in Asoka's kitchen many lakhs of animals were killed daily for soup or meals, indirectly corroborates the Arthashastra that numerous helpless people are dependent on kings for food. But the state must have been aware of the fact that offers of free food or money alone is not desirable. It has been well said that idleness even on income corrupts, the feeling of not being wanted demoralizes. Therefore work such as spinning of yarn was to be given to widows, retired Devadasis, crippled, girls, mendicant women, mothers of prostitutes and old women servants of the king and even women of good family who had no means of maintenance having regard to their honors and status. medicinal plants, and duty on medicines was 1/20 established at regular distance on roadways, rest

houses and watering places for both animals and men. " Kautilya refers to rest-houses and sheds for drinking water in the villages.

The Mauryan government also took effective and energetic measures to relieve the distress of the people. Elaborate precautions and remedial measures were enforced during famines, floods, droughts, rat-menace, outbreak of fire, menace from serpents and wild animals and evil spirits. To prevent an outbreak of fire in summer, city and village people were required to cook outside, and never under the roof. Every householder had to keep ten fire-fighting implements ready. People who worked with fire were to live in one locality. To avoid danger from floods, villages on the bank of the rivers or lakes were to be placed away from the level of the floods and boats, bamboos, and wooden planks were to be provided for the villagers to escape or rescue flood victims. During the outbreak of diseases physicians with medicines were treating those affected, and holy ascetics or magicians worked with charms to ward off diseases. Even epidemic among cattle was to be combated by taking resort to magic and prayers to gods. Droughts and famines were not unknown. Megasthenes says that Amine has never visited India. But according to Jain tradition recorded in a later inscription, a severe famine broke out in India in the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Kautilya refers to famine relief measures. Indra, Ganga, mountains and Mahakaccha were to be worshiped for rains. During famines the government distributed seeds and foodstuffs to people. The Sohgaura and Mahasthana inscriptions refer to royal granaries from which grains and other things reserved for use only in emergencies were distributed among the people." The king gave the famine stricken people work on construction of forts and water works. These were the hare-manual schemes for those days. Intensive sowing of grains, vegetables, roots and fruits along the water works and hunting of animals, birds, or catching fish were some of the measures to fight the menace of famine. Rats as to-day constituted a real menace and the state encouraged killing of rats, and even taxes were instituted, i.e., taxpayers would pay in dead rats. Of course, large scale use of cats was made to kill rats. Magic rites and pacificatory rites by holy ascetics were also resorted to. Even rats were worshipped. 35 In those days when much of the country was still not cleared of forests, wild animals could have often been a menace to regions bordering on forests. So hunters were encouraged to hunt these animals, and carcasses of cattle mixed with poison were left there to tempt the wild animals to death. Even soldiers were employed to kill these animals; and a killer of such an animal was rewarded. Of course, mountains were worshiped to restrain the activity of wild animals. Serpents were also similarly dealt with by use of magic charms, Atharvana mantras and even by worship of serpents. The government not only constructed water-works for irrigation such as the Sudarsana lake but also gave concessions to villages to construct these, by themselves. And agriculturists in time of distress were granted remission of taxes, and grant of loans, grains and seeds"

Common people are often cheated, defrauded and instigated by traders and other professional communities whose services are essential for the people. The Mauryan government took measures to protect the people against the anti-social practices of these classes. Prices for sale of goods were fixed. Traders were not to charge enhanced price, and were fined for weighing more or less and using non-stamped weights and measures as their selfish interest demanded. Goods intended for marriage, for religious sacrifices, for confinement of women, and the like were exempt from toll. Seeds and medicines of immense good to the people were freely imported. The consumers were protected against the concerted hoarding or cornering of goods by merchants.

The labourers, wage-earners, and slaves or pledges were granted legal rights and employers or masters were not free to treat them with impunity. It appears that often proper relations according to law did not exist, and that is why Asoka had to emphasize the maintenance of proper relations between the employer and the employee as an article of the Dhamma, he propagated and held that proper treatment of the slaves and wage-earning servants was dhamamangala."

It would be proper here to refer to the running of industries, agriculture and trade by the government. While this was a good source of revenue, it also has to be admitted that indirectly it served the interests of the people. Private traders, miners, landowners, factory-owners had to work under limitations and to the extent their

exploitation of the people was checked. Moreover, the revenue thus augmented were partly spent over public utility and welfare project mentioned above. Among the items of expenditure of revenues may be mentioned charity, royal kitchen, payment for remedial measures against sudden calamities public works etc.

The Mauryan administration was almost and all-embracing one, affecting practically all aspects of national and individual life. With the king as the directing and controlling head, the administration was fairly centralized in spite of the fact that local laws and institutions were given some recognition. The government officer and the secret agents were active even in villages, and the civic administration was under complete government management. Agriculture, industry, trade and markets were regulated by state regulations and administered by government management. Agriculture, industry, trade and markets were regulated by state regulations and administered by government servants. In Asoka's time even religious and socio-economic life of the individual citizens was directly brought under governmental ambit. It is therefore not possible to agree with Mookerji that the Mauryan administration was largely decentralized. The centralization was primarily motivated by the desire to secure the safety and consideration of the king and the kingdom.

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