

# **Welfare State in Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Analytical Study**

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## **Abstract**

Kautilya's Arthashastra was one of the great political books of ancient world. This book seeks to introduce readers to Kautilya's social, political and economic thought and tries to put Kautilya's political theory in to the cultural and historical context of his time. Kautilya's stated principles for the welfare of his citizens have inspired Indians for centuries. Kautilya in his book Arthashastra has given measures to establish good governance and public welfare state. This paper discusses how Kautilya's Arthashastra lessons on good governance and administration can be incorporated in Indian context to achieve the welfare state. This research paper attempts to explore the idea of welfare state in the Kautilya's Arthashastra of which is important treatises relating to polity of ancient India.

**Keywords:** Kautilya, Welfare State, Sustainable Development, Yogakshema, Good Governance, Arthashastra, Intricately.

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## Introduction

The concept of welfare state is thought to be of later origin and that earlier states were police states. In a welfare state duty of Government is not only limited to the maintenance of law and order in the society but to work for the overall development of people. Though in ancient India the types of government were monarchy, yet the concept of welfare state was present at that time. It is of general view that the concept of welfare state is of later origin. Earlier the states were police state where the chief function of the government was the maintenance of law and order in the society. It is a model in which the state assumes primary responsibilities for welfare of its subjects. From very ancient times, rajadharma is the subject of discussion on dharmasastras and Arthashastra. Though in ancient India the types of government was monarchy, yet it cannot be said that the concept of welfare state was absent at that time. The concept of welfare state is brought closer to political thinking by the dharmasastras and the Arthashastra. They introduce us to the programmed of universal protection and state relief of the poor destitute and kindness. The concept of state was well developed and the duties of King and leaders of the society were comprehensively depicted in these works. Here the rules of war, protection of state, duties of state and King etc. are expressed clearly.

Kautilya was the priest and prime minister the king Chandragupta Maurya. Arthashastra was written by Kautilya as a method of Governance. It details the principles of politics as well as their experiments. Kautilya envisions an ideal state whose king is philanthropist, whose ministers are worthy and honest to public welfare. The sole purpose of this ideal state was to provide welfare to the subjects.

According to Jha and Jha Kautilya was a great statesman as well as a great scholar. He played a important role in the establishment and construction 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."<sup>1</sup> "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."<sup>2</sup> Kautilya has given a description of such a system of governance in Arthashastra by which the ruler can rule happy while welfare of the citizens.<sup>3</sup> Kautilya made politics an independent discipline. He emphasized that out of four science-first Anviksiki, or philosophy including the materialistic lokayate system. Secondly, the Tray, or triple Vedas, Rik, 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.<sup>4</sup>

The Arthashastra is based only on available texts on polity but also on the experience that Kautilya acquired by his personal observation. He corrected his knowledge with the help of experiences of practices and forms of the institutions of all the governments of that time. Kautilya's Arthashastra carries significance because for the first time it liberated the science of politics from all sorts of limitations and developed a systematic tool of administration of the state. The state described in Kautilya 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.<sup>5</sup> According the Arthashastra, the state and royalty were based on popular goodwill in the public. Kautilya had viewed state as an organic unit it which had its constituent units such as monarch (swami), Amatya, Janapada, Drug, Koshna, Army 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.

Kautilya's Arthashastra creates a stable country with welfare hierarchy. The king was the head of the entire administrative system. Like Manu, Kautilya also decent realized the units of administration. The most important objective of the government was to guarantee security & public welfare to the citizens through an honest, loyal and effective administration.<sup>6</sup> Kautilya also arranged his official administration on the basis of the modern principles of administration like, hierarchy, Spin of Control, delegation of authority, unity of command and suggested his king to make his officers honest and sincere in their duties.<sup>7</sup> Kautilya's first principle of recruitment laid down that the state officials must be native of the country. The qualifications lay down by Kautilya. It is same in modern writers lay emphasis on these qualifications.<sup>8</sup> Kautilya advocated certain qualities for the Chief Executive, strong be an athlete, courageous and one who is guided by reason, not by emotion. He must control his lust, anger and greed. He must be guardian of his people. It is an accepted fact in the modern times. It was the moral duty of the Kautilya's king to provide national security, judicial fairness and prosperity.

### **Concept of Welfare State**

The term 'welfare' can be understood as a state or condition of well being, good fortune, happiness or prosperity of an individual in a community. Welfare in the life of the state indicates a guarantee of collective social care of its citizens. In the modern neo-liberal environment of recent years, the concept of welfare state is losing ground where the idea of state withdrawing from the service sector becomes more and more favorable. The concept of welfare state is associated with the use of the prerogative of the 'state' to meet the 'needs' of the members of the society. The term 'state' is sometimes used to refer to

the territorial-domain of a particular political region under its jurisdiction. However, the concept of the state, associated with welfare state pertains to the implementation of welfare or social policies by some instrumentality of certain authority to apply uniformly to all persons within the territorial domain of a Nation-State. The concept of welfare state denotes the assumption of responsibility by the state for the promotion of all-round well-being of its citizen. The welfare state believes that the satisfaction of socio-economic needs of man is the prime objective of all human activities. They, therefore, define the ends and functions of the state in accordance with this belief. In a layman's language, every state is or ought to be a welfare state. The term encompasses the many ways by which the State, through a host of different services (various needs of life), tries to raise the standard of living of its people and help them to meet the various problems through which most of us have to pass at one time or another in our lives.

It is a commonly held notion that the concept of welfare state originated in the west. According to Bo Sodersten, the welfare state came into existence after the first great burst of globalization in the period between 1820-1914. The credit for developing the modern concept of public welfare state goes to Western European states in the twentieth century. The majority of the people there also played an important role in developing the concept of this welfare state.<sup>9</sup> However, a close perusal of ancient Indian texts on polity and society reveals that the idea of state sponsored welfare, though of recent origin in the Occident, was not unknown in ancient India.

Quite unlike the modern welfare state, which developed as a response to the industrial development and post-first world war situation in the west and in the post colonial situation in India, the Kautilyan concept of 'Yogakshema'-welfare of citizens- did not evolve as a consequence of any revolution or war. On the contrary, the idea was predominantly guided by the practical concerns of good governance. The state as part of good governance, played an effective role over individual's social, political, economic, cultural, moral and even spiritual life which led to the development of the concept of life as an integrated whole, not an amalgam of self contained fragments.<sup>10</sup> The individual in today's state is self contained, self-centered and self-defining subject whose entity consists in the protection and promotion of his own interests. Justice in this state implies distribution of benefits in an equitable ways and is intended to be proportionate to unequal needs.

The Kautilyan state was in essence a welfare state not only in its ideal but also in its programmed of action. Kautilyan state intervened, regulated and participated in socio-economic activities and, at the same time, it controlled private enterprises in many ways checked unhealthy profit motive, standardized weights and measures and fixed prices. Private enterprises were strictly regulated for profit, general welfare and prevention of

fraud. Kautilya favored regulation of private industries by the government for harmonizing the relationship between the employer and the employees. The state owned natural resources, fishing, ferrying, mining and trading. Textile, agriculture and commerce were also regulated. Irrigation was the main concern of the state. Useful animals were under state protection. As for imports, the guiding principle was the good of the society. Kautilya's concept in its scope was a holistic one in which the social responsibility of welfare was not only for the individual or the society but for the whole of humanity, nature and cosmos. The social responsibility of welfare in the modern state does not go beyond ensuring the basic human needs to everyone in society, beyond which the individual is free to compete for higher rewards. Thus, the exercise of human potentialities and the realization of human capacities become dependent upon individual attempts. Consequently, this has given birth to consumerist, acquisitive and possessive individuals interested in neither development of neither self nor society.

Kautilya touched almost all the aspects of human life, civilization and culture within his concept of *Yogakshema* (Welfare State, in the modern sense). Unfortunately, Kautilya's ideas on welfare state did not receive the attention of foreign scholars and it is generally believed that the idea of welfare state is a modern one and it originated in the West. As a student of Ancient Indian History, I have been highly impressed by some ideas of Kautilya on welfare state, more especially his concept of *Yogakshema*. Kautilya vouched for a state where the prosperity & welfare of the citizens were given optimal priority. He was not only concerned about the material welfare of the citizens but also their moral welfare. According to Kautilya 'The King should be happy in the happiness of the citizens and the king should understand his welfare only in the welfare of the citizens.'<sup>11</sup> Kautilya maintained that a welfare state was the supreme concern of the ruler. He was not only interested in the material welfare of the people but also in their moral welfare.

Kautilya has given the welfare of the public the foremost place in his administrative policies. The most important objective of his administrative system was ensuring inclusive development of all while doing the work of public interest.<sup>12</sup> Kautilya State made several laws for the welfare of the society. A ban was imposed on the sale and purchase of children as slaves. This shows his immense concern for child labor. Similarly, an employer could not force a female slave to become naked or hurt or abuse her chastity. This indicates remarkable human values which Kautilya cherished against slavery and thus guaranteeing civil rights to shudras. His views related to children slavery and women liberty are significant in modern period. Today every state makes many laws against the child labor and for protection of women liberty. Kautilyan state was not merely concerned with the material and physical welfare of the citizens; it was concerned with the moral welfare of the people as well.

To do the work of public interest, the state has to carry out developmental activities like constructions of dams, settlement of virgin lands, opening trade center, maintenance of widows, the orphans and the helpless. The state's main duty of protect the social order in accordance with the system of varnas (caste) and their Dharma (duties). The state has to promote education, learning and art. Kautilya's economic system can be included under 'Mixed Economy System' Kautilya's views on state activities and its economic system resembles modern Indian welfare state system. It is thus clear that Kautilyan State partakes practically in full the nature of a welfare State of today and even goes beyond the modern concept of the welfare State by associating it with the idea of human happiness. Kautilyan state was a welfare state, which aimed at a fully regulated life of citizens.

### **Good Governness**

Good governance is an adjective word and consists of speaking something in itself, whereas governance is a process that points towards a valued system. Good Governance is the most important requirement for the establishment of a welfare state and Kautilya understood the importance of good governance.

In modern times, governance can be understood in three meanings. First, it is a governance or political system in which the general public is ruled. Second, it is a process by which the economic and social resources of the country are exercised properly by using authority. Thirdly, it is a mechanism in which public policies can be formulated and the activities of the wider public interest can be maintained. Good governance is an important concept in ancient Indian culture and its political philosophy that enhances and protects the general interest, keeps public officials alert to duty and conduct. The king's most important duty was to keep the subjects happy, research the truth and work responsibly. Dharma is the foundation of Hinduism and culture, which is also the foundation of good governance. In Hindu culture, Dharma means a code of conduct and art of living life. Its literal meaning is that which is capable of holding, that is, the one who is capable of holding it is the Dharma.

In Kautilya Arthashastra, the rules regarding the conduct of a king are described in relation to the conduct of his officers and judges. According to this, the king himself, while editing personal works and royal works, orders that all officers should work only for the good of the citizens. The king is expected to have the best conduct. According to him, the interest of the king is in the good of the citizens and whatever is good or pleases the king, he should not only be considered good, but whatever the people feel good should be considered good.

Kautilya's Arthashastra has presented the details of such administrative system which is in

keeping with the concept of good governance prevailing in the present time. The concept of good governance can be seen in Kautilya's administrative system.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is a study in detail of the art and the science of Good Governance. The goal of the good governance can be achieved only through its administration. Kautilya conceives of two goals of the State administration: (1) to make the state financially sound, and (2) to help people realize the goal of life, i.e. Trivarga- Dharma, Artha, Kama. Later Moksha was added as the highest aim of life. Of them Kautilya attached greater importance to Artha or wealth, for on this depended the welfare of the people.<sup>13</sup>

In Kautilya's administrative set up, the king was the sovereign authority. He made all higher administrative appointments. His authority ran through the whole structure of administration. The whole administration, ministers and senior civil servants, were accountable to him. Though Kautilya prescribes that the king must consult his inner and wider councils, yet he did not bind the king by the advice given by the Council. He was free to use his own discretion. Kautilya's administrative system was, therefore, centered round the king.

Though not bound by the advice of the Council, yet Kautilya's king was not beyond law. Kautilya advised the king not to take decisions arbitrarily. For good governance, the king must deliberate with his ministers. Deliberations with wise men help the king reach sound decisions. In case, the members of his inner Council or cabinet and also the ministers of his Council, with whom he deliberated on important state affairs, were not unanimous, the king was advised to follow the majority decision. Kautilya, thus, favored the ideas of the king functioning in co-operation with other members of the Council which besides the king consisted of his trusted advisers and heads of various departments.

Then, there was another check on the king's authority. He had to ordinarily work within the limits of Dharma and morality. His administration was to be guided by the principles of Dharma, ethics and morality. An administration based on Dharma alone could guarantee welfare of the people. The popular conception of the ancient Hindus was that the king was not a law-maker; he was to act according to the established law and Dharma was the supreme law like an unwritten constitution. Though in Kautilya's scheme of things, there was no legislature to keep control over the king, the Dharma and the customs of

The land acted as restraining forces, Kautilya was of the view that a king who observed Dharma attains happiness here and hereafter. For Kautilya, Dharma was the ultimate sovereign to which the king was also subjected to. Besides, at the time of coronation, the king took the oath that he would not act in an arbitrary manner and would consider himself as the servant of the people.

Kautilya believed that kingship is possible through assistance, a single wheel does not move. V.R.R. Dikshitar, therefore, remarks: "it is thus evident that the Council enjoyed executive powers, and that the king did not generally go against its wishes. Thus, neither the minister nor the king alone could act, but the king with the body of ministers did act."

Kautilya has outlined an administrative organization based on the hierarchy of agents and different grades and jurisdiction extending right down to the village. The kingdom was divided into provinces, provinces into districts, districts into villages. Each village consisted of 100-150 families. The village was administered by a Gramika. Kautilya mentions 'Gopas' and 'Sthanikas' as the country officials.

In the hierarchical administrative organization presented by the Arthashastra, the village represented the base and the king the apex. In between was a hierarchical chain of organization.

Kautilya's administration consisted of a large number of departments. The division of departments is made according to service required by the people and discharged by the government. The departments covered almost all aspects of the administrative activities.

Of the various departments mentioned in the Arthashastra, the finance department and the other departments dealing with business and economic activities formed a vital part of the Kautilyan administrative machinery. Kautilya attached highest importance to finance as it was the chief nerve of control and guided all the activities of the government. As for the taxation system described in Arthashastra, it is in accordance with the concept of welfare. Kautilya has laid down certain guiding principles of taxation in a welfare society; such as the king is not free to levy taxes as he likes, he has to issue a proclamation of his intention to levy certain taxes, and if people approved he could levy taxes. Besides, Kautilya provides that the king should levy taxes only on such enterprises as are well established and not new enterprises or industries. His theory of taxation satisfies the canons or the principles of welfare. The tax was certain and not arbitrary.

The civil servant is the backbone of administration. The efficacy of the administration depends on the honesty and competence of the civil servant. Kautilya laid stress on the quality of bureaucrats to ensure the efficiency of administration. He particularly emphasized that the qualifications of the persons in the higher echelons of administration should match their position. According to the Arthashastra, higher the responsibilities, the greater the qualities. The welfare of the people depends on the efficiency and efficacy of the administration which, in turn, depends on the character, ability and competence of the ministers and civil servants. The king's assisting personnel should be well-versed in the science of public administration. Kautilya has not dealt with in detail about the rules and procedure of

recruitment, promotion and transfer of civil servants, particularly of the lower personnel, yet the picture of the administrative Machinery, as outlined in the Arthashastra is both elaborate and complex. More than the competence, Kautilya stressed the loyalty of the civil servant to the king. The king himself made the higher administrative appointments in consultation with the Prime Minister and the high priest. These appointments were made on the basis of mental, moral and physical qualifications. The king was very selective and carefully examined the socioeconomic background of the Amatyas and other higher level bureaucrats.<sup>14</sup>

In Kautilya's system of good governance, espionage was an important institution. Kautilya was of the view that an effective system of espionage was necessary for keeping the king informed about the affairs of the state. It was also necessary for the purpose of maintaining security, stability and integrity of the kingdom against the dangers of internal dissensions and external aggression. It was also necessary for controlling and curbing corruption in the administration. The king could keep a strict vigil through his spies over the conduct of those whom he assigned the task of running the administration. Inefficient officers were asked to explain their lapses and the corrupt officers were severely punished.

The system and set up of administration, outlined in the Arthashastra, is comprehensive and complex. It is based on the principles of Yogakshema. Thus Kautilya's state was comprehensive in scope and welfares in spirit. It was not a police or night watchman but one to take health care and improvement of citizens. Kautilya's state fully left maximum freedom to the regulated life of the citizens but acted in a limited way to secure the happiness of the people. The state not only regulated economic activities but allowed private enterprises for maximum production. But, it checked private enterprises in many ways to prevent exploitation and monopoly, in the interest of workmen or the consumers. Any violation of the regulation was severely punished. The state likewise regulated craft, labor, agriculture and guilds.

Kautilya has elaborately discussed the system of administration of justice. The king, being the sovereign, was the highest judge in his realm. The Judges were appointed, controlled and removed by the Executive, but were independent in their imparting of justice. Impartial Judicial administration was one of the ideals of Kautilya. The judge, like any other citizen, was punished if he misconduct and did not administer proper justice.<sup>15</sup>

Hence we can say that according to Kautilya's Arthashastra Good governance refers to a political system in which the king exercises his power in utilizing the economic and social resources for the welfare of his subjects. Good governance is a framework for sustainable human development.

### **An economic idea of Kautilya's in Arthashastra**

Arthashastra provides valuable thoughts for economic system. The views stated in it and policy about economic and sustainability development. For the promotion of economic sphere Kautilya laid down many responsible for the king and state. Kautilya's allows private property and private ownership. Kautilya's economic system can be included under 'Mixed Economy System'. But the state retains the right to interfere in case of loss of production, or overproduction or workers problems. The state also regulates the trade to ensure good of the consumers. Kautilya views about economic system is significant because in modern time every government and private industry provide economic policy for workers, which related to loss of production, workers problem.<sup>16</sup> Kautilya state assumed the nature of a welfare state. It not only regulated the economic activities but also actively participated and at the same time controlled private enterprises in many ways. The state owned all the natural resources and treasure troves belonged to the state. Kautilyan state was interested in the promotion of trade and commerce and protected traders and merchants from the molestation of workers, robbers, boundary, guards, civil servants and others.

As a practical statesman, Kautilya looked at things from a realistic point of view and there is nothing unnatural when we find his state extending its jurisdictions over almost all the spheres of life. With all the limitations of the time, the state activity was not only unbounded but also distinctly socialistic and highly beneficial to the people. The entire economy of the country was directed 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.<sup>17</sup> Kautilya's emphasis on economics often makes good sense. Perhaps no ancient thinker put such emphasis on the economic prosperity of the country and no thinker gave such a role to state ownership, intervention and incentives. We don't even have a phrase to describe this economy appropriately, although "socialized monarchy" comes close and there has been no economy in the world like the Mauryan regime.<sup>18</sup>

The entire study about the economy in the Kautilyan state brings out the fact that Kautilya's concept of *Yogalshema* (welfare of the people) was based on what is now described as the concept of welfare state, though, in a rudimentary form. He realized that the privileged section of the society could exploit the under-privileged sections and it was, therefore, necessary for the state to intervene on behalf of the under-privileged. The whole concept of regulation of wages by the state is based on this premise.

Kautilya, therefore, did accept maximization of profits as one of the goals of the society, the other being provision for the needs of the lowest in the society. He believed in reasonable profit by the producer so that the sharing of gains of production could be equitably distributed among the various sections of the society. In this sense, it can be reasonably concluded

that the Kautilyan state did have the rudiments of social justice in its structure, social structure being the prime objective of a modern welfare state.<sup>19</sup> In a welfare state to maintain peace and harmony in the society, friendly relation among the members of the society, between the government and citizens, among various foreign countries of the world are of very importance. Such idea is exemplified by Kautilya while stating that since the acquisition of friend is superior to acquiring of gold and land, therefore, the King should Endeavour to secure compact and persistently observe it.

### **Conclusion**

Kautilya's Arthashastra represent a remarkable scholarly achievement which is a handbook on efficient statecraft for kings and high level ministers and officials for whom good governance was to provide the basis for sustainable development, welfare and splendor. In the conclusion it may be mentioned that in Kautilyan state the kingship and the law did conceive of the king's authority as that of a father, probably less to emphasize the despotic aspect of the father's role than to symbolize his duty to sacrifice for the well-being of those dependent on his protection. The Swami could know happiness only as his subject prospered and realized themselves in the Dharmik order. King's character should provide an example for his people. Of course, the king's chief duty was to protect his subjects. But this involved more than law enforcement. There had been a notable increase in the welfare functions of the king in Kautilyan state as compared to earlier ancient Indian states. The king was obligated to promote education, religion, arts, agricultural, commercial development and charitable services. If the sacred tradition was upheld, the country would prosper. According to Kautilya, this idea had the effect of making the king accountable for the general prosperity of the people as well as their security. If the king used his authority for his own ends, it was considered as theft of the citizen's wealth and also as a great offence for not providing security to them.

In Kautilyan Yogakshema, the state was a civil polity rather than a military one. Social institutions contributed to the well-being of the subjects in this world as well as in the next. It was the duty of the king to rule in accordance with the sacred law and tradition and he was obligated to respect and encourage the various customs and rules of family, Varna and associations, if they were consistent with the Dharmik code and for the preservation of the same order. The stated goal of the Arthashastra is the protection and welfare of the citizens. Their happiness must come before that of the king, indeed their prosperity and goodwill would bring happiness to the king. The interests of the king were the same as those of his subjects. Kautilya demanded subordination of self-interest of individual members of the society, from the king to the humblest citizens.

Thus Kautilya's Arthashastra a can be re-examined from the angle of global human concerns

for a better society- harmonious, stable and prosperous blended with moral and spiritual awareness. The basic foundation of the state should be grounded on the canons of liberty and all forms of regimentation, indoctrination, thought-control, authoritarianism or totalitarianism should be done away with. The state should become more sensitive to popular aspirations and more democratic in the discharge of its functions. A welfare state, operating under social control, will be more suitable in today's world and in this sense lays the relevance of the concept of welfare in Kautilya's state. It contains several points of relevance to modern welfare states. From the above discussion, it may be concluded that glimpses of these two works show that something like the idea of welfare state was prevalent at that time also. Though monarchy was the chief form of government there were checks and limitations and observance of dharma was the great social and political ideal.

Some of the guidelines of Kautilya, regarding governance and moral are equally relevant and can be helpful in solution of so many problems that the today's contemporary world is facing. Therefore, we can say that the impression of Kautilya's Arthashastra still exists.

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