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Human Values as envisaged in Kautilya's Arthaśāstra: A study

Dr. Biraj Krushna Mishra
Asst. Professor & Head, Dept. of Sanskrit
KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar

Abstract

Kautilya's Arthaśāstra, often viewed merely as a treatise on power politics, is fundamentally rooted in human values, ethical conduct, and the holistic well-being of the state (*Dharma*), where material gain (*Artha*) is used to serve human prosperity. While advocating for a strong, strategic state, it mandates that rulers uphold morality, protect citizens, and foster ethical leadership. Here are the core human values in the *Arthaśāstra*. Such as: Raja- Dharma: The Duty- Bound Leader, Ethical Framework for Individuals, Social and Economic Values, Leadership and Administrative Values, Environmental and Holistic Harmony.

Key Words: Human values, *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra*, *Dharma, Artha, Raj-Dharma.*

1.0 Introduction

The Indian way of life is essentially based on the four-fold value-system viz., the *Puruṣārtha catuṣṭaya*, named as *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, and *Mokṣa* are these four basic values. Among them *Artha* is presently considered for special study.

Artha Literally means an object, aim, desire, agency, instrument etc. It is also used as an equivalent for wealth. However, all these shades of meaning have the basic implication that *Artha* is a means to something else, viz. *Kāma*. *Kāma* is nothing but pleasure or enjoyment and *Artha* is only the potential means to achieve it. Therefore, *Artha* and *Kāma* go hand in hand. Greater the desire for *Kāma*, greater should be the potential of *Artha* in achieving that goal. Hence *Artha* and *Kāma* constantly accelerate their mutual existences and this is a perpetual cycle. However, this mundane race has to be regulated for the well-being of all and hence we have the unquestionable need for *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the governing force in accomplishing *Artha* and *kāma* for a healthy society and cultured human existence. Whenever we have Dharma coming into the picture, codification, rules, laws and a list of do's and don'ts become inevitable for this is the way of any *śāstric* treatment and is essentially based on the broad and catholic canons of human values. Thus, *Arthaśāstra* is nothing but the study and application of all the material-resources for the upliftment of mankind towards a better Living and a life under the shelter of righteousness.

Hence, as per the Human value is considered, it is derived from universal ideals, but being very personal, the definitions become subjective. Everyone creates their own set of human values which is based on their world view, or sense of Purpose. There is a greater consensus regarding the universal values and a wider diversity regarding the human and temporal values.

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Human values ensure the harmonious continuity of civilised life. They apply to the secular and practical day to day expressions of universal values, for example, co-operation, honesty, sincerity, humility, responsibility, simplicity, unity, love and affection. They encompass whatever is noble, dignified and worthy of respect in humanity. All the values of this society are inter-twined and interdependent. Human values are the inter-face between universal values and temporal values, establishing a balance that gives meaning. and purpose to the expression of spirit in the material world. Human values are what we cultivate and draw attention are the special focus of this context based on noble thoughts and values and which are relevant to the present-day society.

1.1 *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra*: A brief View

In Sanskrit we have many definitions of *Artha* and *Arthaśāstra*. Generally, *Artha* means *prayojana* and *Uddeśya*. *Kautilya*, in his *Arthaśāstra* explains that *Artha* is the means of living, essential agency to lead life, integrating factor among human beings, the very world and its resources. As it has mentioned that, मनुष्याणां वृत्तिरर्थः, मनुष्यवती भूमिरर्थः, तस्याः पृथिव्या लाभपालनोपायः शास्त्रमर्थशास्त्रमिति । (XV-1-1,2)[1] *Arthaśāstra* is the science of attaining a healthy formation of men, materials and methods to evolve a profitable and happy way of life along with a sustained mode of maintaining the same comfort throughout. *Somadeva* in his *Nīti Vākyāmṛta* opines that *Artha* is the instrument to attain all possible goals and that is: सर्वप्रयोजन- सिद्धिः सोऽर्थः । (II.1)[2] *Jayamaṇgalā*, a gloss on caṇakya's *Arthaśāstra* says that *Artha* is the entity by virtue of which the whole world is engineered. Such as:

अर्थो येन लोकोवर्त्तते। (IV.43)[3]

However, in all these definitions we can notice the undercurrent of righteous-ness, without which the very concept of *Artha* as a *Puruṣārtha* and *Śāstra* (any science moulded after fundamental values) will be defeated.

The heritage of *Arthaśāstra* or the science of the instrumental value for material comfort is quite rich in Sanskrit lore However, the codified material in volume and vastness is not comparable with those of the *Dharma* and *Mokṣa Śāstras*. The reason for this-is quite obvious as the realistic values viz. *Artha* and *Kāma*, more mundane and latent in human beings need no justification and establishment while the idealistic values viz. *Dharma* and *Mokṣa* more subtle and require greater attention and higher emphasis. But we can never ignore the fact that the *Arthaśāstra* has become an inseparable part in all most all the major texts of *Dharmaśāstra*.

Arthaśāstra should not be unduly limited to either Polity or Economies. It is a composite science dealing with the entire state craft and welfare of mankind in all the spheres of materialistic pursuits. However, it is not blind to the idealistic and value-based concerns either. In this way, *Arthaśāstra*, the best work on all the aspects of the second *Puruṣārtha* is much wider and holistic than any other systems of polity, economics and materialistic developments.

Arthaśāstra contains fifteen main chapters (*Adhikaraṇa*) and one hundred and fifty sub- chapters (*Adhyāya*) dealing with one hundred and eighty topics (*Prakaraṇa*). The summarising verses (*Kārikā*) are three. hundred and fifty in number.

Since then, *Arthaśāstra* has seen as many as six editions and many more translations in almost all the major

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languages of the world. Several thousand research papers some of the edited books have been written on this work and scores of doctoral theses are prepared. Still, it is but a fact that *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra* is fertile further studies and deeper understanding. A number of verses reflecting human values are selected from the *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra* and given with their meanings for the benefit of the common people. A representative value-based selection with special reference to the code of *Kautilya* has been made here and it will discuss some collected verses of noble thoughts and human values in this context and it surely gives an insight into the *Śāstric* teaching.

1.2 Human values in the *Arthaśāstra*

At the outset, as per the traditional way of classifying the vast bulk of all the aspects of Learning, *Kautilya* mentions Reasoning (आन्वीक्षिकी), Vedas (त्रयी), Economy (वार्ता) and Polity (दण्डनीतिः) as the four main branches. However, there are several other *Śāstrakāras* who differ from this. *Manu* ignores reasoning, *Vṛhaspati* dismisses both reasoning and Vedas while *Śukra* sticks only to polity) But *Kautilya* effectively justifies all the four and establishes the need for them to build an ideal state. According to him Logic and reasoning are very essential and they only cast light on the issues pertaining to the aspects of belief, devotion, past Learning, social order, business, finance and state er craft. As it is mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* that,

प्रदीपस्सर्वविद्यानां उपायस्सर्वकर्मणाम् ।
आश्रयस्सर्वधर्माणां शश्वदान्वीक्षिकी मता । (1-1-1-1)[4]

According to him Anveeksiki comprises of idealistic theoretical philosophy (सांख्यं), practical philosophy (योगः) and secular thoughts of rationalism (लोकायतं)- One can observe the broadmindedness of *Kautilya* in accepting both the idealistic and realistic. Philosophies for the betterment of the state craft. *Trayī*, according to *Kautilya* comprises of all the sacred Vedic texts, their limbs (*Vedāṇgas)*, *Itihāsa* (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*) etc. These sacred books deal with the aspects of Dharma and warn the people from following the path of *Adharma*. Dharmas are again subdivided into *Varṇāśrama Sāmānya* and Svadharmas. The fourfold life comprising of *Brahmacarya*, *Gārhasthya*, *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa* along with a liberal order of varna system makes a society mutually co-operative and complimentary. It is of very great. significance that *Kautilya*, in tune with the eternal heritage of Vedic society heralds the importance of *Sāmānya* or *Sādhāraṇa dharmas* viz, *Ahiṁsā, Satya, Śauca, Anasūyā*, *Anṛśaṁsyam* and *Kṣamā* (non-viole-nce, truth, purity, non-enviousness, kindness and forgiveness) and declares that everyone. should follow this as a rule at all times and at all places. He also advocates that concept of *Svadharma* (one's own capability at its best and meant for the total upliftment of the individual and the society with least friction) and advices the kings to set it correctly at all levels to ensure a healthy and prosperous state.

Under *Vārtā Kautilya* includes agriculture, animal husbandry, Trade, commerce and Industry. In one word, it is the quintessence of all that is discussed in economies. To this, he adds crafts, arts and other allied guilds.

Kautilya is ever an advocate of strong and efficient system of law and order. In *Daṇḍanīti* he includes internal and external security, law and order and able administration of the state. *Daṇḍa* (order) according to him is a must

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to shape a strong and peaceful state. But he is never hasty and unjust in proposing so. He is not a sceptic in codifying such ideas. His sole concern is to protect the humble, poor and helpless from the evil hands of miscreants of any sort. He also states that a king should neither be too soft not too harsh. He should be always balanced in executing his authority full capability as per the demands of the situation. In this regard, it is referred in *Arthaśāstra* that,

तीक्ष्णदण्डो हि भूतानामद्वेजनीयः, मृदुदण्डः परिभूयते, यथार्हदण्डः पूज्यः..... स्वधर्मकर्माभिरतो वर्तते स्वेषु वेश्मसु ॥ (1-1-3-4/5) [5]

Eternal vigilance and studiousness with undiminished industriousness must be imbibed by the king. If not, his state craft collapses within no time. King's commitment to the upliftment of his subjects itself is a sacred religious duty and his alert activities are holy sacrifices; his impartial and able polity, the holy and devoted administration itself is charity!! As it is said in the *Arthaśāstra* that:

राज्ञो हि वृत्तमुत्थानं यज्ञः कार्यानुशासनम् । दक्षिणा वृत्तिसाम्यं च दीक्षा तस्याभिषेचनम् ॥ (1-14-18-2)[6]

तस्मान्नित्योत्थितो राजा कुर्यादर्थानुशासनम् । अर्थस्य मूलमुत्थानं अनर्थस्य विपर्ययः ॥ (1-14-18-3)

He even declares that a king's happiness is only in his subject's welfare. There is nothing like personal satisfaction to a king apart from his people's satisfaction. Thus, it is narrated in the A's that:

प्रजासुखे सुखं राज्ञः प्रजानां च हिते हितम् ।
नात्मप्रियं प्रियं राज्ञः प्रजानां तु प्रियं हितम् ॥ (1-14-18-Verse-2)[7]

Selection for various posts in the state essentially depends upon the type of work. Hence, Kautilya says that any person's calibre has to be judged by his employment in the desired post and his capabilities in executing the assigned task. For instance, कार्यसामर्थ्यात् हि पुरुषसामर्थ्यं कल्प्यते। While discussing the various issues in the cabinet meeting a king should never ignore anyone's opinion however poor and insignificant it may be. And he should never discard any useful suggestion merely because the person proposing that is small and inexperienced. As it is said in the *Arthaśāstra* that:

न किञ्चिदवमन्येत सर्वस्य शृणुथान्मतम् ।
वालस्याप्यर्थवद्वाक्यं उपयुञ्जीत पण्डितः ॥)1-20-14-Verse-2)[8]

Are not these codifications sufficient to prove the farsightedness and Kind heart of *Kautilya* especially deeply rooted in the strong canons of human values? His caution regarding the unmindful import-policies from other countries is also very significant. Accordingly, he shuns the import of liquors, hazardous chemicals and other things which are meant for short-term gains. Instead, he advocates those useful herbs, medicines, food grains etc. should be imported and they must be exempted from taxes too. As it is also mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* that:

राष्ट्रपीडाकरं भाण्डमुच्छिन्द्यादफलं च यत्।
महोपकारमुच्छुल्क कुर्यादीजं तु दुर्लभम् ॥ (1-12-24)[9]

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1.3 Discussion

(i) **Raja Dharma: The Duty-Bound Leader**

- **Welfare over Power**: The central ethical principle is that the king's happiness lies in the happiness of his subjects: "*Prajā sukhe sukhaṁ rājñaḥ prajānāṁ ca hite hitaṃ"* (In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness).
- **Trust and Justice**: Leadership legitimacy is based on trust, justice, and the protection of the weak.
- **Responsibility**: Governance is seen as service, not merely the exercise of power.

(ii) Ethical Framework for Individuals

- **Control over Senses**: Kautilya emphasizes that a leader must control the "group of six enemies" (*Ariṣadvarga*): lust, anger, greed, pride, arrogance, and foolhardiness.
- **Core Values**: The text outlines virtues for individuals, including truthfulness, non-violence (ahimsa), compassionateness, forbearance, and freedom from malice.
- **Dignity of Life**: The *Arthaśāstra* advocates for the inherent worth, honour, and sanctity of human existence.

(iii) Social and Economic Values

- **Dharma and Artha Balance**: Although *Artha* (material well-being) is crucial, it is not pursued at the cost of *Dharma* (righteousness/morality).
- **Social Trust and Justice**: The state must ensure justice, safety, and security for all citizens.
- **Ethical Trade**: The text encourages honest trade and fair taxation practices, ensuring wealth is acquired and used in a way that is beneficial for all.

(iv) Leadership and Administrative Values

- **Accountability**: The text advocates for a, transparent, and efficient administration where officials are held accountable.
- **Meritocracy**: Recruitment and training of personnel are based on competence, integrity, and merit, reflecting strong human resource management values.

(v) Environmental and Holistic Harmony

- **Respect for Life**: The philosophy extends to honouring all life forms, including nature, reflecting a sustainable and conscious approach to resources.

In summary, the *Arthaśāstra* presents a, balanced, and ethical approach to statecraft, where human values are integrated into political and economic life to create a sustainable and prosperous society.

1.4 Conclusion

From above point of discussion, if at all the king has any authority it is only to see that the result of his sanctions will always be good to his Subjects. The King's authoritative po power is compared to the knife of a

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surgeon. Never can he become brutal. Any of his harsh steps are nothing but good treatments in the long run. Thus *Kautilya*, though unfortunately branded as a hardcore autocrat heralding the dictum 'end justifies the means' and a champion of cunning measures in state craft and polity is not so in reality, for his deep commitment to human values and idealism in its true sense is really praise worthy. Therefore, he is not only a man of very high wisdom and skill in state craft but also person of compassion, understanding and universal outlook in a large perspective His quest after perfection is practical and palpable. In this respect, from the modern point of view morality, ethics and human values are diminishing or deteriorating day by day in the society. This is the high time, we will learn and introspect how to identify, analyse, articulate and justify the most important human values, and that we espoused. The gap between espouse values and espouse practical application is also examined. So, practice is very much necessary through the Lessons and guidance of *Arthaśāstra* for the all-round development of the human being and its implementation has a vital role in the present day. Society. In this context , we must adopt and accept the noble thoughts of our ancient scriptures, like *Arthaśāstra*, which consists of so many thoughts, like as concerning discipline, the duty of government Superintendents, concerning law and administration, removal of thorns, the conduct of courtiers, the source of sovereign states, the end of the six-fold policy, concerning vices and calamities, the works of an invader, relating to war, the conduct of corporations, concerning a powerful enemy, strategic means to capture a fortress, Secret means and the plan of treatise. So, *Arthaśāstra* is based on social life, Political life, economic life, cultural life and so on. But as we see in a wholesome manner that the *Arthaśāstra* has immensely stressed on human values and that is the most precious thing for the need of global consciousness and also it teaches us humanity, honesty, sincerity, divinity, adjustment, patience, love and wisdom etc.

Hence, these noble thoughts and values make us introspective and correct our personality. when each and every individual will practise human values in their day-to-day life and correct their personality, then our society will automatically develop. So, everyday corrections and implication of human values are very necessary, helpful and also acceptable for the modern era and this is the global need of the hour.

End Note:

1-The *Kautilya Arthaśāstra*, A study, Part-I, Book-15, Chapter-1 Section-1, *Kārikā*-2, R.P Kangle

2- R.P. Kangle – Book-2 Chapter-I

3- Ibid, Kangle –Part-I, Book-4, Verse-43

4- Ibid, Kangle –Part-I, Book-I, Verse-I

5- Ibid, Part-I, Book-I, chapter-III, *Kārikā* 4-5

6-Ibid, Book-I, chapter-14, Section-18, verse- 2 & 3

7- Ibid, Book-I, chapter-14, Section-18, verse- 2

8-Ibid, Book-I, chapter-X, XIV, Verse-I

9- Ibid, Book-II, chapter-21, XIV, Verse-14

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