

Approaching *Kautaliya Arthashastra* from the Communication Perspective

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Political thoughts on good governance from the Hindu perspective are set by Dandaniti, which is guided by Dharma and Artha in a continuum. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* has been one of the most influential sources of political thoughts in Hinduism since over two millennia. The treatise deals with wide-ranging subject matters including politics, economics, governance, administration, philosophy, and so on. Though the emphasis on Artha is self-evident in *Arthashastra*, the common guiding principle for all affairs of statecraft as envisioned by Kautilya is the concept of Dharma. For instance, raja-dharma, the duty of the King or the ruler, is discussed at length in the classic text. As evident in *Arthashastra*, Hinduism envisions close interconnection between peace, politics and religion, in which politics guided by Dharma is instrumental for ensuring peace in society. This classical treatise can be approached from the communication perspective, employing certain indicators.

Key words: Arthashastra, communication, Dandaniti, Dharma, Hinduism, Hindu polity, political communication

Background

By virtue of its rich discursive tradition, the Sanskrit knowledge system has a far broader scope of study corpus than explored as of now (Adhikary, 2013). In fact, studying Hindu perspectives on communication at the onset needs a broader outlook because diverse

and enormous sources are available. *Kautaliya Arthashastra*, that is Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, is an addition in this regard. A checklist for exploring classical Sanskrit texts from the communication perspective has been presented and discussed (Adhikary, 2014, 2015). The checklist consists of following indicators:

1. Intrinsic qualification
2. New insights
3. Indigenous theorization
4. Cultural identity consciousness
5. De-Westernization
6. The philosophical and cultural foundation of society
7. Multi-disciplinary nature of communication discipline
8. Multiculturalism
9. Promotion of comparative study of communication

In order to explore *Arthashastra* from the communication perspective, the classical text can be examined against the above-mentioned indicators. Such an endeavor has been fruitful in the case of *Natyashastra* (Adhikary, 2014) that has resulted in the theoretical construction of the Sadharanikaran model of communication and Sancharyoga theory. The present article approaches *Arthashastra* to explore its intrinsic qualification to the communication discipline.

Hinduism and Political Thoughts

The term “Hindu” is used for a wide range of meanings, including the nomenclature of the civilization, culture and religion as well as the philosophy rooted in the Vedas (Adhikary, 2012, 2016). “Hinduism should be viewed as the consummation of different Vedic and post-Vedic schools of thoughts - from extreme spiritualism to extreme materialism and as custom, rituals and traditions that have acted and reacted upon each other, giving rise to a sense of oneness” (Adhikary, 2012, p. 68). Hinduism is extensive and pluralistic with a sense of oneness that facilitates a common Hindu identity.

In fact, “Hinduism is characterized by the vast number and diverse approaches of Hindu religious-philosophical texts, the discourses of different schools of philosophy, the existence of different sects and cults, and the multiplicity of practices among Hindus” (Adhikary 2016, p. 831). However, such vastness, diversity and multiplicity has not hindered Hindus from living as common inheritors of the ancient civilization. And, the basic principles are same irrespective of the differences in caste, sect, cult and so on. For instance, the notion of a set of four goals of human life (Purusharthachatushtaya) - namely, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha - is common to all practicing Hindus.

The Purushartha-chatushtaya is considered all-encompassing umbrella concept that includes all purposes and goals of human life envisioned in Hinduism. Each of these Sanskrit words has multiple meanings. For instance, Dharma refers to eternal rule, inherent nature, cosmic rule, duty, righteousness, virtue, law, and so on. Artha refers to all worldly things and Kama is based on pleasure due to Artha. In other words, Kama is sensual pleasure. Moksha is the highest attainment beyond the time and space that may be Moksha-in-life or Moksha-after-life (Adhikary, 2014).

The political thoughts on good governance from the Hindu perspective are set by Dandaniti - “the science of polity or government” (Ghoshal & Basak, 1993, p. 452), that is guided by Dharma and Artha in a continuum. This is why, the issues pertaining to polity, political system, governance, rule of law etc. in Hinduism have been dealt as the subject matters pertaining to Dharma and Artha. Hence, ancient Sanskrit texts called Dharmashastras (treatises on Dharma) and Arthashastras (treatises on Artha) consist of contents in this regard along with other areas of concern. Of them, Arthashastra has a more detailed discussion “as the branch of knowledge which deals with the acquisition and preservation of dominion” (Ghoshal & Basak 1993, p. 451) or

“the science which treats of the means of acquiring and ruling the earth” (p. 461).

According to Hinduism, Dharma guides each and every individual and all the institutions including the State. In particular, there is concept of raja-dharma, which literally means duty of the king, and connotes the duty of the State. The concept of raja-dharma envisions “the administration of the State to such a degree of perfection as to enable the king and everyone of his subjects to pursue undisturbed the paths of dharma, artha and kama” (Aiyar 1993, p. 502). The State, according to Hinduism, is believed to have been evolved primarily for ending anarchy (Matsya-nyaya) (Sircar 1993, pp. 509-510), and to ensure the rule of Dharma through Dandaniti. The foundation of political thoughts in Hinduism revolves around Dandaniti, and its ultimate objective is to uphold the law of Dharma; not in the sense of religion, but in the sense of duty/righteousness.

Political Communication in Hinduism

In ancient Sanskrit literature, Dandaniti, Rajaniti, Rajadharmashastra, Arthashastra, etc. are the terminologies that were used to refer to the science of politics (Vidyalankar 2001, p. 19). Whereas the independent treatise on political science were written later on, the political thoughts in Hinduism are rooted in Vedic texts. Thoughts on polity can be found in Vedas themselves, and Brahmana texts such as Aitareya Brahmana have rich insights in this regard (see: Gajendragadkar 1993, pp. 420-421). Keith (1993) and many other scholars have already presented an account of Sanskrit literature to appraise the existence of the science of politics in ancient time.

The scriptures known as Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras also consist of norms regarding polity and statecraft, especially under the theme of raja-dharma. For instance, Manusmriti has chapters on raja-dharma that “might easily have formed an independent treatise on polity (Mitra 1991, p. 340). Other Smriti texts also have relevant

insights. The two great epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata - consist of “sound political and economic theories for good governance” (Mitra 1991, p. 341). Particularly, the Shantiparva section of Mahabharata provides enormous resource with regard to political thoughts of ancient times. Purana texts too incorporate stories and teachings through which they present ideals of governance and socio-economic justice under the theme of raja-dharma.

This is to note that many scholars, including P.V. Kane, seem to “take the view that Arthashastra is really a branch of Dharmashastra, since the former deals with the responsibilities of kings, for whom rules are laid down in many treatises on dharma” (Gajendragadkar, 1993, p. 430). However, in latter day Hinduism, Arthashastra and Dharmashastra have been two closely related, but remain independent disciplines, as “the Arthashastra was dealing with secular law and approached the consideration of relevant questions from a purely secular point of view, whereas Dharmashastra considered the same problems from an ethical, religious or moral point of view, and gave effect to the notions on which the Hindu social structure was based” (Gajendragadkar, 1993, p. 430). And, Arthashastra is considered the text that specifically deals with Dandaniti.

It is a widely held fact that there were a number of treatises on Artha (that is, Arthashastras) before Kautilya’s Arthashastra (Keith 1993, pp. 451-452; Vidyalankar 2001, pp. 21-24). Kautilya mentions a number of scholars and schools of thought developed even before Arthashastra, but it is only Kautilya’s treatise that still survives. It is considered the last classical work in the field of political thoughts in Hindu milieu. It “is unquestionably one of the most interesting works in Sanskrit” (Keith, 1993, p. 452).

For about 24 centuries, it has been the most influential source book for political thought in Hindu society and hence provides foundation for political communication. As Pillai (2017,

p. 4) observes, “Imagine a book being on a bestseller list for 2,400 years and still going strong!” He further writes, “There were many Arthashastras written before Chanakya. And there were many more composed after him. But Kautilya’s Arthashastra still stands strong. It has survived the test of time, and has become a classic” (p. 11).

An Outline of Kautilya’s Arthashastra

In Arthashastra, it is clearly mentioned in the last verse that the treatise was authored by Vishnugupta (Luitel 2011, p. 485). According to the classical Sanskrit text *Abhidhana Chintamani*, the following were the names of the same individual: Vishnugupta, Kautilya, Chanakya, Vatsyayana, Mallinaga, Dramila, Pakshilaswami, and Angula (Vidyalankar 2001, p. 26). Of these names, Chanakya and Kautilya are the most known. Traditionally the treatise is widely referred to as “Kautilya’s Arthashastra”, rather than just mentioning the title of the treatise.¹

This text is considered a product of the fourth century B.C. and has been one of the most influential treatise in the East, although it had once gone into oblivion. “This work was long lost and was known only from quotations and from reference to it by later authors. However, ... the full text of the manuscript was recovered and published in 1909” (Mitra 1991, p. 336; also see: Gajendragadkar, 1993, p. 428). Since then, it has attracted many scholars of the East as well as West.

Arthashastra consists of 15 *adhikaranas* (Books) that are divided into 180 *prakaranas* (sections dealing with a specified subject matter) fitted into 150 *adhyayas* (chapters). Some chapters contain more than one *prakarana*. All together, there are 6 thousand *sutras*. These *sutras* are mostly verses, and these are sometimes interspersed by prose.

1 The authorship of other famous texts *Chanakya Niti Darpana* and *Vatsyayana Kamasutra* (or *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana) are also popularly ascribed to the same person.

The focus of the fifteen books can be presented as following:

1. Book One mainly deals with various aspects of the preparedness (including discipline and education) of a king and his team. The very first adhikarana presents a chapter outlining the contents.
2. Book Two mainly concerns with the running of a bureaucratic and security system of government at the time.
3. Book Three deals with the branch of civil law.
4. Book Four deals with various topic regarding penal code in order to removal of thorns and anti-social elements.
5. Book Five deals with various secret measures.
6. The seven constituent elements of the State are described in Book Six followed by the twelve constituents of the circle of states.
7. Proper utilization of the six political expedients in the field of diplomacy is discussed in Book Seven.
8. A discussion on the several kinds of dangers or calamities befalling a king and his kingdom both from within and outside is the main subject of Book Eight.
9. Book Nine deals with leading an expedition.
10. Book Ten is focused on various aspects of war.
11. Book Eleven is concerned with various guilds and corporations.
12. Book Twelve describes various contrivances to use in warfare.
13. Book Thirteen is focused on various strategies of warfare.
14. In Book Fourteen, various activities and techniques for the destruction and harm of the enemy are discussed.
15. Book Fifteen presents explanation of thirty-two technical terms used in *Arthashastra*.

It is observed that “there are nearly 180 topics that Chanakya has written in this book” (Pillai, 2017, p. 7). It is to note that “*Arthashastra* is also considered as the science of politics, economics, warfare, and a text that relates to governance, leadership

and strategy. It is also a book on law, foreign policy, international relations and how to rule a territory” (ibid.). Pillai (2017, p. 144) presents the outline of Arthashastra as following:

The fifteen books can be classified thus: book one is on the fundamentals of management; book two deals with economics; books three, four and five are on law; books six, seven and eight describe foreign policies, books nine to fourteen concern subjects of war; and the fifteenth book deals with the methodology and devices used in writing the Arthashastra. ...

Also, various specialized sciences are described in the Arthashastra, including gemmology, Ayurveda and architecture.

According to Mitra (1991, p. 338), Kautilya’s presentation of the topics of *Arthashastra* seems in congruence with “the twofold aspect of the ancient concept of the functions of the State, namely, (i) the protection and welfare of the people and (ii) the security and consolidation of the realm.” Traditionally, the first function is termed tantra and the second is known as avapa. Notably, the term tantra has a number of meanings in Sanskrit, and here it should not be confused with the Tantrik texts and practices. Rather, it refers to a system pertaining to the protection and welfare of the people in the State.

According to this scheme, the first five books of Arthashastra, consisting of 95 prakaranas, are devoted to this tantra aspect, whereas the rest ten books, consisting of 84 prakaranas, largely deal with avapa aspect (Mitra, 1991, pp. 338-339). The concluding book serves as “a glossary of thirty-two technical political terms and verbal contractions used in the text” (p. 339). Slightly different observation has been made by Ghoshal & Basak (1993, p. 452), in this regard as following: It “consists of two great divisions, the tantra portion comprising the first five Books (adhikaranas), which

are divided into ninety-four sub-sections (prakaranas), and the avapa portion consisting of the next nine Books, which are divided into eighty-four sub-sections. The fifteenth Book consisting of a single prakarana may be regarded as somewhat outside the two divisions of tantra and avapa.”

In brief, this magnum opus by Vishnugupta (aka Kautilya) has been a much appraised treatise on Dandaniti since more than two millennia. Though it is not the only source of political thought in Hindu society and beyond it has been one of the most influential sources in this regard. Through this treatise, Artha was brought forward to such an extent that there could be a claim of equal or even more importance to it as compared to Dharma. However, as will be discussed hereafter, Arthashastra’s ultimate objective is to uphold the Dharma.

Artha as a means of Dharma

To the ancient Hindu thinker,

polity and political economy, as sciences, were not independent disciplines. Society was viewed as an organic whole which was governed by the immutable law of dharma (or its Vedic antecedent rita). The term dharma was fairly wide in its connotation. It included codes of socio-economic relationships, and also the relation between the State and the individual, the king and his subjects. (Mitra, 1991, p. 335)

The all-encompassing notion of Dharma has a contextual meaning here. “For the purpose of political theory,” as Sircar (1993, p. 515) mentions, “the import of dhrama as law, justice, and duty” is relevant. “In matsya-nyaya there is no law, no justice, no duty. The State is the originator of law, justice, and duty” (ibid.). And, “it is the fear of danda that brings about an order among men, each man minding his own duty (svadharma)” (p. 518). The State is not only

the caretaker of Artha, but it is also “a dharma-promoting samuha (public association)” (p. 519) too.

According to Gajendragadkar (1993, p. 428), the “Dharmasthaniyam” book of Arthashastra

can legitimately claim to be one of the earliest secular codes of law in the world, and the high level at which legal and juridical principles are discussed, the precision with which statements are made, and the absolutely secular atmosphere which it breathes throughout, give it a place of pride in the history of legal literature.

According to economic historian B.C. Sen, (quoted in Mitra, 1991, p. 339), Arthashastra presents “the art and technique of government with its economic basis treated as an integral part of statecraft and social relations. The manner of its specialization in political economy gives it a stamp of individuality, of belonging to a distinct branch of thought and learning.” Though Kautilya’s views “are based on practical considerations according to the needs of circumstances” (Mitra, 1991, p. 341) he upholds the supremacy of Dharma. While doing so, he considers the due importance of Artha.

Mitra (1991) pertinently observes that “the sheet-anchor of life was dharma which embraced all aspects of life and society and included what we now refer to as politics and economics” (p. 335). With such background, it is obvious that Dandaniti also was to abide by the law of Dharma. Since Dandaniti owes both to Dharma and Artha in a continuum, good governance is a cumulative outcome of both Dharma and Artha.

To Kautilya, “Artha (wealth and its acquisition and distribution, or the financial viability of the State) is of the utmost importance in so far as it enables a king to discharge his duties to the people and achieve the political objectives of the consolidation and expansion of the territory of the State.” (Mitra, 1991, p. 339).

As such, Artha is a means for a greater goal. It provides strong foundation for the ruler and the subjects to perform their duties. To perform one's duty is the Dharma. Good governance in such context is a fine balance between Artha and Dharma.

The notion of raja-dharma is crucial to the ruler. Kautilya's vision of raja-dharma prepares the basis for the ruler's treatment of his subjects. Arthashastra "states that a king who is severe in repression becomes a terror to his people, and one who is mild in the award of punishment is treated by them with contempt, while he who awards punishment as deserved is respected" (Ghoshal & Basak, 1993, p. 452). The rule further goes like this: the rule of carrot and stick or "danda should be awarded after full and just consideration, and it must not be awarded wrongly, nor allowed to remain in abeyance; for, in this case, it will produce the condition of matsya-nyaya or anarchy" (Ghoshal & Basak, 1993, p. 452).

Another aspect of Dharma is related to one's preparedness for doing his or her duty. The preparedness of the ruler is of utmost importance, according to Arthashastra. In Book One, Chapter six, there are twelve sutras elaborating the importance of control over the senses: how to give up kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), mana (pride), mada (arrogance) and harsha (foolhardiness). The purpose is to prepare ruler as the sage king.

The king wields control by weeding out the six enemies of the senses; he cultivates his intellect by association with elders; keeps a watchful eyes by means of spies; brings about security and well-being by (energetic) activity; maintains the observance of special duties by the subjects by carrying out his own duties; acquires discipline by receiving instruction in the sciences; attains popularity by knowing what is of material advantage; and maintains proper behaviour by doing what is beneficial. (Pillai, 2017, p. 146)

Arthashastra puts much emphasis on the preparedness of the king (or any ruler) as “proper discipline and education of the king under experts and specialists depends his power of awarding danda” (Ghoshal & Basak, 1993, p. 452). This emphasis is pertinent. As Pillai (2017, p, 196) observes, “any form of governance depends on the king/leader who is the head of the kingdom or the state. So clearly, Kautilya indicated that creating a good leader, who in turn has an able team of able ministers running the government machinery, provides good governance for its people.” In other words, “A rajarishi, along with the dharmic praja following their respective duties, creates an ideal spiritual society - the ultimate aim of any model of ‘good governance’” (p. 198).

In Hindu society, “the king’s main duty was just to uphold the existing social order, which considered of an infinite number of autonomous groups each with its own constitution, laws, and practices formed for various purposes like local administration, industry, trade, or religion” (Sastri, 1993, p. 487). As it has been observed, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* “means something quite definite by the state, namely an order of society which the state does not create, but which it exists to secure” (Keith, 1993, p. 455).

The most basic foundation of *Artha*, the dominion or the earth broadly, is not the creation of the ruler. Likewise, the eternal rules, aspects of *Dharma*, also are not created by the ruler. What the ideal ruler is expected to do is to ensure good governance by proper acquisition and management of *Artha* and by upholding the principles of *Dharma*. This is why the ruler’s role in social affairs was rarely expected in traditional Hindu society:

It is only in the rare instances of disputes arising among them proving incapable of adjustment that the king’s aid was invoked; it was only then, and even then only to the extent needed to procure a just settlement of the matter in dispute, that the king did interfere in the affairs of these groups. (Sastri, 1993, p. 487)

As such, Hinduism envisions close interconnection between politics and religion. It is evident from the Hindu perspective that the fine balance between politics and religion ensures peace.

Against this background, it can be fairly said that politics and governance in Hindu milieu abides by Dharma, while keeping Artha in a continuum with that. And, the politics guided by the law of Dharma is instrumental in ensuring peace in the society. As Ghoshal & Basak (1993, p. 452) observe, “The whole of Kautilya’s theory of polity is based on the proper and peaceful performance of the assigned duties of the four varnas” (namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) and the four stages of human life (called Ashramas) according to orthodox Hinduism. Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Keith (1993, p. 453) observes, “accepts wholesale the Brahmanical theory of the castes and their duties, - economics, agriculture, pastoral pursuits, trade and industry, and polity, Dandaniti.”

However, the Dharma of the Varnas and Ashramas (that is, the Varnashrama Dharma) discussed here is not in the narrower sense that the opponents of Hinduism subscribe. Here, it is just another terminology for Svadharma, that is, one’s own duty. And, the State, and the king as the chief of the State, have the duty to ensure that all the people abide by their own duties - the Svadharma. “To say that the State has been born, and yet the various orders or classes of the people do not follow dharma would indeed be a contradiction in terms, a logical absurdity” (Sircar, 1993, p. 520). As such, it is pertinent to conclude that any political thought in congruence with Hinduism abides by the law of Dharma, and so does the Arthashastra.

Dharma as an All-embracing Principle

Dharma, as the foremost element in Purushartha-chatushtaya, is an all-embracing principle in Hinduism (Adhikary, 2012). It is “the doctrine of dharma in its entirety (that) imparts to the State the character of an institution” (Sircar, 1993, p. 519) capable of

implementing the Dandaniti. As “the sheet-anchor of life was dharma which embraced all aspects of life and society and included what we now refer to as politics and economics” (Mitra, 1991, p.335), it is unlikely to assume that Arthashastra was not in congruence with such established principle.

Drawing on Mahabharata, it can be said that the ruler, to be in accordance with Hinduism, is always considered to be under the law of Dharma: “One becomes a king for advancing the cause of dharma and not for acting capriciously. All creatures depend on dharma, and dharma depends on the king. He, therefore, is the true king who maintains dharma” (Aiyar, 1993, p. 503). Kautilya’s vision of the raja-dharma certainly is in congruence with this standard view of Hinduism. Moreover, to be a good ruler is to understand and abide by the raja-dharma. Thus, it can be concluded that, in line with the orthodox Hindu view, to be an ideal king or any leader is to understand and abide by raja-dharma as envisioned by Arthashastra too.

Of Dharma, Artha and Kama, Kautilya’s primary concern while writing Arthashastra must have been Artha. Otherwise, the treatise would not have been “Arthashastra”. Kautilya was writing Arthashastra, and hence looking at all the subject matters from the perspective of Artha was natural. Nonetheless, his Artha is not detached with Dharma. For instance, in the opening chapter of the first book, he clearly says, of various disciplines of knowledge those which consist of knowledge on Dharma and Artha are important. The simultaneous mentioning of dharma and artha are worth noticeable.

Kautilya considers Artha a must for Dharma and Kama, and believes that the proper material foundation (Artha) facilitates one to have Dharma and Kama pertinently and finally to attain the Moksha. Establishing and maintaining the triad of virtue, wealth and pleasure (more precisely, Dharma, Artha and Kama) is emphasized by Kautilya himself in the concluding verses of Arthashastra. As such, the proper understanding and implementation of Dandaniti as

the science of politics is to embrace both Dharma (e.g., raja-dharma), the duty, and Artha, in order to ensure material, mental and spiritual well-being of the people.

For the author of the Arthashastra, the interconnection between peace, politics and religion as understood today is primarily through the Dandaniti, which envisions governance in accordance with Dharma. Thus, the role of Dharma in good governance is instrumental. And, the primacy of Artha as emphasized by Kautilya finally serves the purpose of ensuring good governance and peace in the society.

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