



# WELFARE ROLE OF THE KING DURING MAURYAN ERA

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## Abstract :

Kautiliya explain a brief account of the role of king is protecting and promoting welfare during Kautilyan/Mauryan period. In Arthashastra Kautiliya described various measures for weaker sections especially women, children and slaves, different provisions for consumer protection and the welfare of prisoners has been examined in this paper : Besides human beings varied provisions for animal welfare are also evaluated in this article.

The paper also evaluate the difference between prescribed Ideal situation and the ground reality.

## Keywords :

Yogakshema, Rajadharma, Weaker sections, Consumer Protection, Harassment.

## The King as a protector -

Since the king is synonymous with the Kautilyan state, we first note the kind of attitude and behavior that Kautilya recommends for him. The verse used as the epigraph to this book, **‘In the happiness of his subjects lies his own happiness...’** summarizes it. A king should be well trained<sup>1</sup> and practice self-control.<sup>2</sup> An ideal king is one who has the highest qualities of leadership, intellect, energy and personal attributes and behaves like a sage monarch, a *rajarishi*. Among other things, a *rajarishi* is one **‘who is ever active in promoting the yogakshema of the people and who endears himself to his people by enriching them and doing good to them’**.<sup>3</sup> The word, *yogakshema*, is compound made up of *yoga*, the successful accomplishment of an objective and *kshema*, its peaceful enjoyment.

Thus, peaceful enjoyment of prosperity, i.e. the welfare of the people, is given as much importance as knowledge, self-control and observance of *dharma*.

A king should not only obey his own *rajadharma* but also ensure that his subjects obeyed their respective *dharma*. For, **‘when adharms overwhelms dharma, the king himself well be destroyed’**.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a wicked prince, who hates dharma and is full of evil, should not be installed on the throne, even if he is an only son.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Kautilya prefers and ignorant king who had not been taught dharma to a wicked king who, in spite of his learning, deviates from it.<sup>6</sup>

The king’s own *dharma* is to be just, impartial and lenient in protecting his people. The king’s attitude to his people should be like that of a father towards his children, particularly when any danger threatened the population.<sup>7</sup> He should treat leniently, like a father, those in new settlements whose tax exemptions had ceased to be effective.<sup>8</sup>

No doubt there was an element of self preservation in this. Discontented and impoverished people might be provoked to revolt; they may then kill their king or go over to the enemy.<sup>9</sup> The king should not tax the people unjustly because **‘that will make the people angry and spoil the very sources of revenue’**.<sup>10</sup> A weak king who needed to recoup his depleted strength should try to promote the welfare of his people so that he might have the support of countryside.<sup>11</sup> Nowhere is Kautilya’s emphasis on the welfare of the people seen more clearly than in the advice to the king on how to deal with a territory newly acquired by conquest.<sup>12</sup>

## **LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD**

Protection of life and livelihood constituted, in that order, the elements of securing the welfare of the people. Disagreeing with earlier teachers, Kautilya points out that life was more important than livelihood.<sup>13</sup> Even when a man’s property was attached by a decree in a civil suit, he was not to be deprived of the tool of his trade.<sup>14</sup>

Protection of livelihood extended to protecting the major areas of economic activity. Agriculture was protected from being oppressed by onerous taxes, fines and demands for labor, herds of cattle from the depredations of thieves, wild animals, poisons, crocodiles and diseases and trade routes from harassment by courtiers, state officials, thieves and frontier officers.<sup>15</sup>

The Chief Controller of Shipping was responsible for the welfare of sea-traders and seamen, elimination of piracy, ensuring the seaworthiness of vessels and rescuing vessels in distress, The official had to pay the compensation himself if any vessel was lost due to lack of seamen or equipment because it was unseaworthy.<sup>16</sup>

The principles of fair trading enunciated in the text were designed to promote the welfare of the people. The phrase **‘to be sold for the benefit of the public’** occurs in the following places: both locally produced and imported goods<sup>17</sup> any commodity causing a glut in the market, by centralized sale until the stock was exhausted and any surplus unaccounted stock in the hands of merchants.<sup>18</sup> When Crown commodities were sold, no artificial scarcity was to be created and even a large profit should be foregone, if it was likely to cause harm to the public.<sup>19</sup> Imported goods were to be sold in as many places as possible in order to make them readily available to people in the towns and the countryside. Profit margins were fixed at 5% for local goods and 10% for imported ones; making undue profit attracted a heavy fine.<sup>20</sup>

Special favours were shown to those who did things which benefited the people, such as building embankments and road bridges, beautifying villages or protecting them.<sup>21</sup>

## **THE WEAKER SECTIONS**

The list of the weaker sections of the society, who required special protection, occurs in a number of places: priority of audience before the king, maintenance at state expense, free travel on ferries and the special responsibility of judges on matters concerning them.<sup>22</sup> The list, with minor variations, always runs: Brahmins, ascetics, the minors, the aged, the sick, the handicapped, the helpless and women.

It may seem strange to speak of welfare when discussing torture to elicit a confession. Nevertheless, the list of persons who were not to be tortured is interesting: minors, the aged, the sick, the debilitated, those in a drunken state, the insane, those suffering from hunger, thirst or fatigue after a long journey, those who had eaten too much, those accused of trifling offences and those who had already confessed. The restrictions on torture of women, particularly pregnant women, have been cited earlier.<sup>23</sup>

Some aspects of the welfare of women, referred to earlier, are: spinning work to be given to handicapped women and taken to those who did not normally leave their houses,<sup>24</sup> protection of women slaves from exploitation, punishment for rape and protection of prostitutes against exploitation and physical injury.<sup>25</sup>

Protection of children is emphasized, especially in the context of slavery and bonded labour.<sup>26</sup> When an Arya man had bound himself and his family, the minors were the ones to be redeemed first.<sup>27</sup> A slave less than eight years old was not to be compelled, against his wishes, to do menial jobs or work in a foreign country. The property of minors was to be held in trust and looked after by the village elders.<sup>28</sup>

**Social security** was both a private and a state matter. The primary responsibility for maintaining the family-wife, children, parents, minor brother and unmarried or widowed sisters-lay with the head of the family; no one could become an ascetic without first providing for his wife and children.<sup>29</sup> Dependents were not to be abandoned, particularly when travelling together. However, the state had the obligation to provide a safety net and maintain children, the aged, childless women and the helpless. But, when the state had to maintain the young with no family of their own, these could be recruited into the secret service.<sup>30</sup>

The extent of Kautilya's concern for the weaker sections is shown by these further examples ranging from chivalry in battle to gleaning on Crown lands. When the enemy fort or camp was attacked, the following were not to be harmed: the non-combatants, the frightened and those who surrender, fall down or turn their backs.<sup>31</sup> Mendicants and village servants were allowed to glean the grain on Crown lands after the harvest. Even in time of distress, handfuls of grain could be taken for worship of gods and ancestors, for charity or for cows.<sup>32</sup>

## **HARASSMENT OF THE PEOPLE -**

Using the technique of comparing two different calamities afflicting the people, Kautilya pinpoints the harassment that could be visited on the people by those in positions of power and authority. A decadent king could oppress the people by seizing what he wanted and taking the wealth of the country for himself and his cronies: quarrels within the royal family could result in harassment: the king's favourite queen or concubine might by her waywardness cause harm to the people: the most powerful officials, like the **Treasurer** or the chancellor, might, for their own enrichment, harass the people: the king's own army might exact heavy contributions or go on the rampage.<sup>33</sup> Overzealous tax collectors might collect more than the right amounts and thus impoverish the countryside. There is a systematic classification of **forty** ways by which corrupt officials might cheat the government of revenue, cheat the public or both. Since there was no one in a position of

power who could be trusted not to misuse his authority, Kautilya gives clear instructions on how to detect and punish the culprits. For example, people who had suffered at the hands of corrupt officials were compensated after issuing a proclamation asking such victims to come forward.<sup>34</sup>

Other possibilities of harassment of the people were: the nobility seizing common land profiteering by traders; marauders and robber bands and, destruction caused by rogue elephants.<sup>35</sup>

**Chapter 4.4** is wholly devoted to detecting the activities of thirteen types of persons who amassed black money by illicit means: village officials, heads of departments, judges, magistrates, perjurers, instigators of perjury, extortioners, practitioners of the occult, black magic or sorcery, poisoners, dealers in narcotics, counterfeiters and adulterators of precious metals.

Kautilya also deals with the welfare of the population when afflicted by natural calamities; the relevant verses have been brought together in this translation under 'Acts of God' in **II.iv**. Keeping grains and other products as reserve stocks and building forts as places of refuge were part of the system of protecting the people.<sup>36</sup>

## **MAINTENANCE OF ORDER**

The responsibility of maintaining social order was partly individual, to the extent that each person had to follow the *dharma* of his own *varna* and *ashrama* and partly that of the state. The laws relating to maintenance of order, in the sense of punishing unsocial behaviour, have been grouped together in this translation under criminal investigation (**VIII.xii**), robbery and theft (**VIII.xv**), verbal and physical injury (**VIII.xiii**) and sexual offences (**VIII.xv**). Punishments for a variety of offences will also be found throughout the text under the appropriate subjects. **Danda**, the coercive power of the state, was exercised through this extensive set of fines and punishments including amputation and the death sentence.

Order was maintained by controlling movement and activities like drinking and gambling. A curfew was normally imposed in the cities at night. Care was, however, taken to ensure that the city guards did not use it to misbehave with women.<sup>37</sup> By restricting drinking to authorized drinking hall, not permitting large quantities of alcohol to be bought taken away or stocked, by not selling on credit and by punishing anyone moving about in a

drunken state, the effects of drunkenness on society was contained. Both masters of gambling halls and the gamblers themselves were punished for dishonest behavior.<sup>38</sup>

Lodging-house keepers had to report the arrival of undesirable person. Doctors had to report treating a wounded person or anyone suffering from food or drink poisoning. prostitutes, and owners of drinking halls and restaurants had to report anyone who spent lavishly.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note that the state was held responsible for any failure to protect the public. If a thief was not apprehended and not restored he was paid its value. Judges could modify the rate of interest if the king was responsible for increasing the risk of loss by not providing adequate protection.<sup>40</sup>

## **CIVIC LIFE -**

Katutilya was aware of the dangers inherent in the confined and densely packed cities, particularly with regard to fire, hygiene and privacy. The welfare of the people could be guaranteed only by having clear regulation fixing the responsibility of the citizen and by providing appropriate penalties for violations. The verses dealing with prevention, house building and hygiene have been collected under **‘Civic Responsibility and Municipal Regulations’** (see VII.xi). The rules were not applied indiscriminately. For example, passing urine or faeces in a public place was not punished if it was due to illness, medication or fear.<sup>41</sup> The rules on sanitation inside houses were relaxed for childbirth and the ten-day lying-in period. House building regulations could be modified by mutual agreement among neighbours so long as the undesirable was avoided.<sup>42</sup>

## **CONSUMER PROTECTION -**

The rules regarding protection of the welfare of the consumer by control over merchants and weights and measures have been referred to earlier. Other rules take into account the propensity of artisans and craftsmen to cheat the public; these not only refer to goldsmiths and silversmiths palming off precious metals but note that washermen wore their customers’ clothes! All verses on consumer protection have been collated in the book.

## **WELFARE OF GOVERNMENT SERVANTS -**

While government servants were always under suspicion of wanting to skim off government revenue into their own pockets.<sup>43</sup> They were also rewarded for good work, **‘Those officials who do not eat up the king’s wealth but increase it in a just manner and are loyally devoted to the king shall be made permanent in service’**.<sup>44</sup> **‘An official**

who accomplishes a task as ordered or better shall be honored with a promotion and rewards.’.<sup>45</sup> The family of a government servant who died on duty was looked after by the state. An official, whose property was liable to confiscation because he caused loss of revenue, was spared the confiscation if he had many dependents.<sup>46</sup>

## WELFARE OF PRISONERS -

The welfare of prisoners was safeguarded by the following: having separate prisons for men and women, providing halls, water wells, latrines and bathrooms, keeping the prisons free of fire hazards and poisonous insects, protecting the rights of prisoners to their daily activities like eating, sleeping and exercise, putting restrictions on warders from harassing or torturing prisoners, prescribing severe punishments for rape of women prisoners and releasing prisoner periodically as well as by general and special amnesties.

## ANIMAL WELFARE -

There is extensive evidence in the **Arthashastra** on Kautilya’s concern for the welfare of animals. Regulations for the protection of wildlife, a long list of punishment for cruelty to animals, rations for animals, regulations on grazing and the responsibility of veterinary doctors are some of the major topics.

As part of the creation of the infrastructure of a settled and prosperous kingdom, an animal sanctuary, ‘**where all animals were welcomed as guests**’, was established. Live birds and deer received as tax were let loose in them. A list of protected animals and fish is given. Killing or injuring protected species and animals in reserved parks and sanctuaries was prohibited. Even animals which had turned dangerous were not to be killed within the sanctuary but had to be caught, taken outside and then killed.<sup>47</sup>

**Village headmen** were responsible for preventing cruelty to animals. If protected animals or those from reserved forests strayed and were found grazing where they should not, they were to be driven away without hurting them; anyone who let such animals stray were to be warned to prevent a recurrence. Stray cattle were to be driven off with a rope or a whip without harming them. Any means could be used to restrain a person found to be treating an animal cruelly.<sup>48</sup>

Some animals, like deer, were given special treatment. Temple bulls, stud bulls and cows for up to ten days after calving were exempt from payment of grazing charges. Riding or driving a temple animal, a stud bull or a pregnant cow was prohibited. Animals fights between horned or tusked animals was also prohibited.

Special regulations applied to animals in Crown herds, horses and elephants, since the latter two were important for war. The possibility of herdsmen starving calves of their mother's milk is foreseen; milking cows twice in seasons when they should be milked only once was punished by cutting off the thumb of the culprit; killing or inducing someone to kill animals in crown herd was punishable by death. Special provisions were made for looking after nonproductive cattle. Rations are laid down for horses and elephants, including special rations for tired horses. Attendants who ill-treated elephants or kept them in dirty stalls were punished. Horses unfit for use in war were used to breed animals for the benefit of the people.

Veterinary doctors were fined if the condition of a sick animal became worse; they had to repay the cost of the animal if it died.<sup>49</sup>

In newly conquered territory, animal slaughter was prohibited for four days around full moon day and during on fortnight in each of the four months of devotion (*chaturmasya*). Slaughter of female and young animals and castration of males was prohibited.<sup>50</sup>

## **REALITY AND THE IDEAL -**

The picture of the ideal Kautilyan state that emerges from the above is one of a well-run state, prosperous and bustling with activity. There were shops with textiles, gold and jewelry and eating houses serving vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. Musicians, dancers, story-tellers and reciters, clowns, acrobats and jugglers entertained the people. Men went to gambling places and drinking halls or visited brothels. Monks and nuns wandered freely.

Some people were given special privileges. The king himself was obliged to grant audiences to deal with matters concerning the weaker sections. Local customs of different regions were preserved. A good conqueror adopted the dress, language and behavior of his newly-conquered subjects.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, there were some people automatically suspect, like ascetics and practitioners of the occult. There are two long lists of people who were to be arrested on suspicion: in the city and on ferry crossings. The outcasts lived both physically on the fringes of the inhabited areas and socially on the fringes of the **Arya** society. Everyone was suspected of having designs on the king and the kingdom. Secret agents were everywhere.

But this picture is the ideal. The reality could have been very different. There were kings who impoverished their subjects, whose life could only have been one of unremitting



drudgery. Kings imposed extra burdens on the people during calamities or for waging war. Dishonest officials cheated and robbed the people. Robbers and marauding jungle tribes harassed them. And unjust conqueror oppressed his newly conquered subjects.

## Conclusion-

Thus Kautiliya believed that good Public Administration could help accelerating welfare of the people provided it was run in the interest of the people Kautiliya said that the king as a head of the state played a key role to protect his people and it was his “**Rajadharma**” to implement all policies for the welfare and happiness of his subjects. The contents of a good administration for protection and welfare of people in Arthashastra were described in the following points.

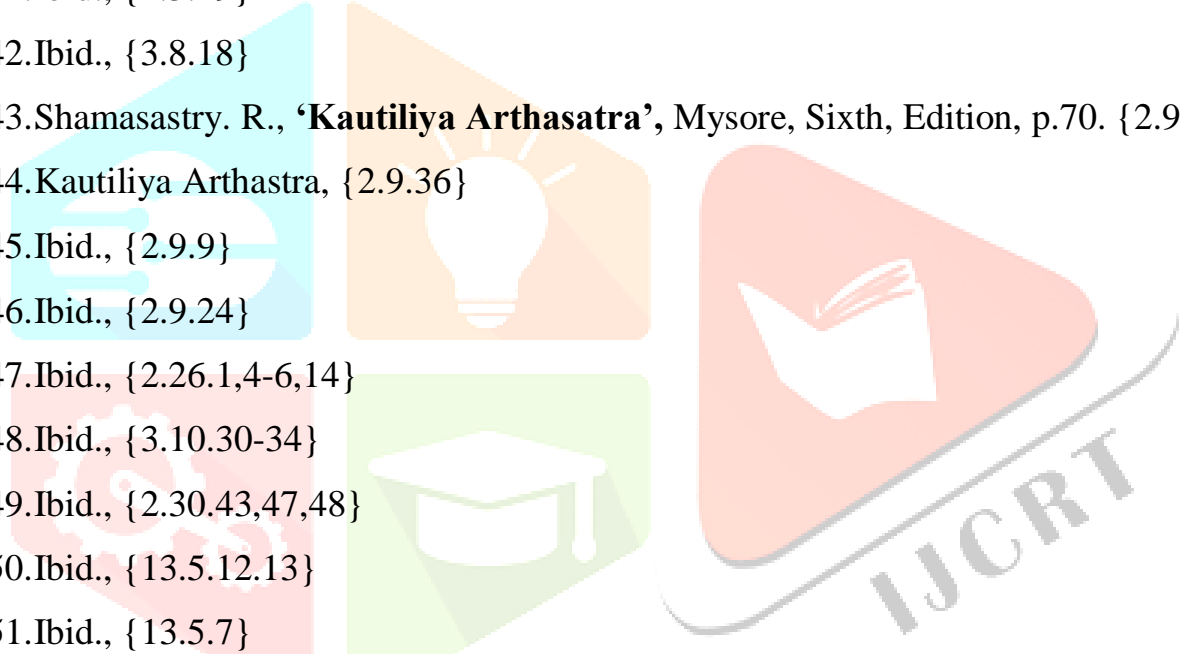
- (i) Openness in the sense of having wide contact with the people administered;
- (ii) A sense of justice, fair play and impartiality in dealing with men and matters;
- (iii) Sensitivity and responsiveness to the urges, feelings and aspirations of the common people;
- (iv) Securing the honour and dignity of the human being however humble he or she might be;
- (v) Humility and simplicity in the persons manning the administrative machinery and their easy accessibility.
- (vi) Creating and sustaining an atmosphere conducive to development, growth and social change; and
- (vii) Honesty and integrity in thought and action.

Kautiliya thought that all the points were essential for protection and welfare of the people of a state.

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5. Ibid., {1.17.51}
6. Ibid., {8.2.12}
7. Ibid., {4.3.43}
8. Ibid., {2.1.18}
9. Ibid., {7.5.24; 1.19.28}
10. Ibid., {5.2.70}
11. Ibid., {7.14.18}
12. Ibid., {13.5.4,6,11,21}
13. Ibid., {8.3.28,35}
14. Ibid., {3.1.31}
15. Ibid., {2.1.37,38}
16. Ibid., {2.28.8, 12,26}
17. Ibid., {2.16.2}
18. Ibid., {4.2.26,27}
19. Ibid., {2.16,6,7}
20. Ibid., {4.2.28,29}
21. Ibid., {3.10.46}
22. Ibid., {3.20.22}
23. Ibid., {4.8.17,18}
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26. Ibid., {3.13.1,2,4}
27. Ibid., {3.13.5}
28. Ibid., {2.1.27}
29. Ibid., {2.1.28,29}
30. Ibid., {1.12.1}



- 31.Ibid., {13.4.52}
  - 32.Ibid., {5.2.10}
  - 33.Ibid., {8.4.20,23,26,31-33}
  - 34.Ibid., {2.8.24,25}
  - 35.Ibid., {8.4.45}
  - 36.Ibid., {2.15.22.23}
  - 37.Ibid., {2.36.41}
  - 38.Ibid., {3.20.9,4.10.9}
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  - 40.Ibid., {3.11.3}
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  - 46.Ibid., {2.9.24}
  - 47.Ibid., {2.26.1,4-6,14}
  - 48.Ibid., {3.10.30-34}
  - 49.Ibid., {2.30.43,47,48}
  - 50.Ibid., {13.5.12.13}
  - 51.Ibid., {13.5.7}
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**Note :**

- ❖ Arabic numerals indicate the number of the verse for, example {1.1.1} Book 1, Chapter 1, Verse number 1.
- ❖ Double braces { } enclose verse numbers.
- ❖ Sanskrit words are in *Italics*.