

Revisiting Philosophy of Governance in Kautilya's Arthashastra

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Abstract: The primary functions and consequently goal of all governments since time immemorial has been to govern in the most effective and efficient manner. However, the author believes that it is a pre-condition for human welfare and today has been hailed as ultimate teleos of the decision makers. Kautilya too appropriates a philosophy of governance that fundamentally aims at Yogkshem of the people to be achieved through Sushashan (Good Governance), able and stable leadership. This paper purports to revisit the ideological and philosophical contributions of Arthashastra and tries to contextualise them with modern challenges, changes and choices in the way we govern or may be do not govern (?) ourselves.

Key words: Governance, Kautilya, Arthashastra

Introduction:

Etymologically *governance* has its origin in the Greek language and it refers to steering which means acts of leading, guiding, making things happen. Simply put, governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). It was Harland Cleveland (1972) who first used the word 'governance' as an alternative to public administration. Since then the term governance has been evolving continuously. In Cleveland's opinion what people want is 'less government and more governance'. The new-right philosophy and neo-liberal framework which is increasingly becoming a force to reckon with which informs this understanding of governance and believe that "the organisations that get things done will no longer be hierarchical pyramids with most of the real control at the top. They will be systems, interlaced webs of tension in which control is loose, power diffused and centres of decision plural. There are among others like Rhodes (1997), who state that, 'governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed'. Bevir calls it 'government in progress' (Bevir, 2010).

According to Gerry stocker (1998) the governance approach has five most important attributes. They are:

- 1) It includes a set of institutions and actors that includes government and beyond government elements.
- 2) The boundaries and responsibilities for tackling socio-economic issues are increasingly getting blurred.
- 3) While governance approach is rooted in collective action, it also underlines the presence of power dependence involved in the inter relationship between different institutions.
- 4) It also is about autonomy and self-governing networks of actors.
- 5) Governance is finally about the ability of government to steer or guide different actors in the process of governance.

This entire discussion on governance revolves around one most important aspect and that is the state, changing notion of governance has had an impact on the role of the state. State at no point in time has become a redundant entity and was always at the centre of discussion on governance. One also has to understand that the ultimate goal of the state is human welfare since time immemorial. Shukla Yajurveda includes a prayer wherein a ruler prays thus: "let my subjects be satisfied, my herds be satisfied, my people be satisfied, let not my people be needy."¹ Sarve Sukin Santoo i.e. all become happy is the defining philosophy of ancient Indian political thought. In other words, 'Yogakshema' or the welfare of the people was the ultimate goal of any ruler or government. The idea of welfare though, discussed in various Indian classics was much broader than the idea that informs the contemporary discourse on governance. Yogkshem is

¹ Sridhar Nitin, Yogakshema: The Ancient Indian concept of Good Governance, <https://www.newsgram.com/yogakshema-the-ancient-indian-concept-of-good-governance>

made up of two words- Yog and kshem. Yog means Apraptsya Prapnam nam yog and Kshem means- Praptsya parirakshan nam kshem. Ironically this is a tagline of a famous insurance company and it achieves neither of the goal mentioned here. The Yogakshema model perceives governance in a more integral manner catering to not only physical but also meta-physical aspects of human life and society. The Yogakshema model not only enables the society to raise its overall quality of life at the mundane level but also assists to raise the level of consciousness at universal level. Most popular ancient treatise like Shatiparva, Nitisara or Arthashastra fundamentally highlight that, governance is an important medium to achieve overall welfare or Yogkshem of the people. In the light of this dominant goal of welfare, the next section of the paper aims to relook at the philosophy of governance in Kautilya's Arthashastra.

Revisiting Kautilian philosophy of Governance:

This paper aims to revisit the work of Vishnugupta Chanakya or Kautilya as he is popularly known to the world and purports to reconstruct a governance model by looking at it through contemporary lenses of governance. He wrote a masterpiece on governance called Arthashastra. It is principally an art and science of politics and economics. Written during the period of Indian renaissance (Drekmeier, 1962), Arthashastra stands out as a single treatise on ideas as well as ideals of governance. The book is very much relevant in addressing the issues and challenges of governance and explains how to be better at the task of governing.

Kautilya offered a comprehensive definition of governance which resonate the ideals and principles advocated by modern scholars as well and that have been already discussed in the first part of this paper. According to Sihag (2004), "Kautilya had a grand vision for building an empire, one that was prosperous, secure, stable, and based on fairness". The three important internal issues for the ruler to attend to are: Raksha—or protection of life and liberty within the state; Palana or law and justice; and, Yogakshema or welfare of the people. These three pivotal functions are also recognised by modern constitutions and it protects them by safeguarding Life, Liberty, Justice, Equality and at times even Property rights. Kautilya also particularly emphasized protection of private property rights, and the creation of necessary organizations for the purpose. In a way he too was a libertarian who espoused the cause of politics of rights.

There are few other important ideas that need to be highlighted when we discuss Kautilya.

According to Kautilya, good governance consisted of three basic elements:

- (1) Provision of national security and public infrastructure, such as roads to facilitate and promote commerce,
- (2) Formulation of efficient (farsighted and well thought-out) policies and their effective implementation, removal of all obstructions to economic growth and tax incentives to encourage capital formation, and
- (3) Ensuring a fair, caring and clean administration

Kautilya shows a passion for economic growth and development in his classic work, although sans neo-liberal, capitalist ideological framework which is a defining feature of the contemporary governance model. He pays enough attentions to roles and functions of a plethora of institutions that need to play a critical role in the matters of governance. The powers of the state are to be exercised by a plurality of actors and institutions whose roles and functions have been clearly delineated in Arthashastra. These activities eventually are aimed at achieving economic progress which in his view is a key to political stability and power. Kautilya provided three justifications for economic growth:

- (1) It was a king's moral duty;
- (2) It was essential for political stability; and
- (3) It enhanced national security

In order to achieve these goals he not only recommended removal of obstructions to economic growth but also suggested tax incentives to promote economic growth through encouraging capital formation. Interestingly, capital formation is the heart of modern governance discourse championed by the international funding agencies like International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Both modern and Kautilian paradigm of governance consider that economic growth is to be realised by ensuring creation of robust public infrastructure. Provision of basic infrastructure finds a special place in Kautilya's work too. Kautilya recommended to the king to promote capital formation, remove all impediments to economic activities and pursue productive activities. Kautilya suggested, "Not only shall the King keep in good repair productive forests, elephant forests, reservoirs and mines created in the past, but also set up new mines, factories, forests [for timber and other produce], elephant forests and cattle herds [shall promote trade and commerce by setting up] market towns, ports and trade routes, both by land and water. He talks about specific policies to encourage capital formation like Tax holidays, concessionary loans, duty free imports etc. Today, modern governments also have been experimenting with ideas like special economic zones, duty free industrial enclaves, urban development zones, micro-credit facilities etc.

In fact, modern governments are pre-occupied with this embryonic objective of ensuring provision of effective infrastructure mainly through public private partnerships. The gigantic projects like dedicated freight corridors, JNNURM, Smart city Mission, Make in India, interlinking of rivers, mining projects, hydroelectricity projects are just a few examples to substantiate this view.

Modern governance pays special attention to how decisions are actually made and implemented. Similarly Kautilya also focused on efficient formulation and effective implementation of policies. He suggested considering all aspects of a policy like its proper formulation and effective implementation. However in his model of governance the king or the leader plays an extremely important role, since he believes in monarchy as the best system of governance. Contemporary states are not monarchical in nature but the representative democratic state do revolve around the way the leader of the state performs and functions. Hence, Kautilian conception of the role of leader is important lens to be contextualised and is useful for modern day governance. The King or the Raja or the Leader is visualised as a Rajarshi, the one who has imbibed the qualities of a good king as well as an accomplished sage. He, at length, discusses the qualities and values that are essential to become a good leader. For instance, Kautilya expected the king to be very energetic and a source of inspiration to his public. He states that, 'If the king is energetic, his subjects will be equally energetic. If he is slack and lazy in performing his duties the subjects will also be lax and, thereby, eat into his wealth. Besides, a lazy king will easily fall into the hands of his enemies. Hence, the king should himself always be energetic'. Mahabharata, the epic that tells the story of a great war between Kauravas and Pandavas; written by Maharshi Ved Vyas, too highlights the role of a leader in similar fashion in following lines,

Kalo va Karnnam Ragno, Raja va Kal Karanam,
Iti te Sanshayo Mabhud, Raja Kalsya Karanam.

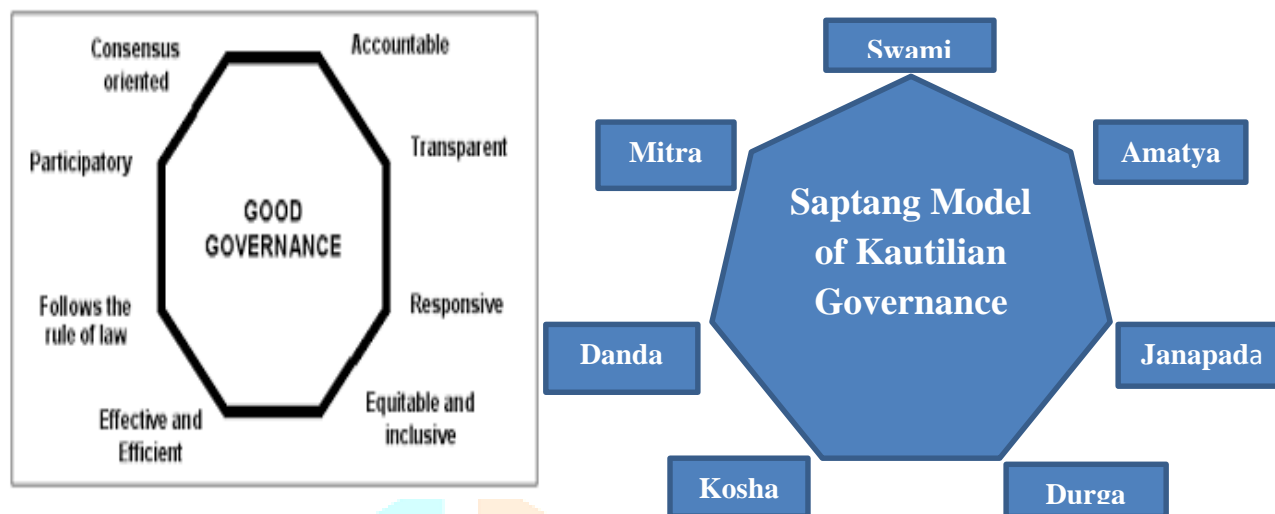
It is the leader who is the reason behind what happens and what takes shape during any period. Leadership is central to causing and sometimes even changing the circumstances. To explain this example of the famous Socialist revolution can be cited. It did not occur in industrialised and developed countries like UK or France as it was predicted by Karl Marx. It occurred in an under developed and a non-industrialised country like Russia, only because of the visionary and missionary leadership of Lenin. Hence, it is pertinent to note that importance of leadership is a valuable contribution of Kautilian model of governance. The modern conception of governance somewhere fails to highlight the role of the leadership, qualities required in a good leader and his impact on the circumstances that he can create or at times even change them. Kautilya's Arthashastra also further states that a ruler's happiness lies in the happiness of his subjects, in their welfare his welfare, whatever pleases him (personally) he shall not consider as good. Whatever makes his subjects happy, he shall consider as good. This idea of "Prajā Sukhe Sukham Ragnya", is the central theme of Kautilian model of governance. It centres all the governance activities, policies, programmes and actions of the government around the idea of happiness of the people. Kautilya also presents a list of some important qualities necessary to become the king like receptive mind, firmness of purpose, and training in all activities of the government. Kautilya wrote, 'In the interests of the prosperity of the country, a king should be diligent in foreseeing the possibility of calamities, try to avert them before they arise, overcome those which happen, remove all obstructions to economic activity and prevent loss of revenue to the state'. He goes on to state that a king should take care of his subjects like a father takes care of his children. He states that whenever danger threatens, the king shall protect all those afflicted like a father protects his children. This actually instils a sense of ownership and responsibility in the king or leader and compels him to function in the interest of the people. Kautilya model also suggested some brilliant measures to ensure social security for the marginalised and disempowered people in the state. The modern conception of governance with its focus on declining role of the state and emboldening the role of the private sector has many things to learn from the Kautilian model of governance., Kautilya states that, "King shall maintain, at state expense, children, the old, the destitute, those suffering from adversity, childless women and the children of the destitute women". This explains the pivotal role the state is expected to play in providing social safety nets to abandoned and marginalised sections of the society.

Principles that can guide the seven limbs of a State:

The United Nations Development Fund has identified eight major characteristics of the good governance model. This governance models states that it has to imbibe principles such as participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. In this paper an attempt is made to reconstruct a governance model which brings together the Saptang model of Kautilya and the modern principles of good governance. The Saptang model of governance proposed by Kautilya in Book 6, Chapter1, Verse 1 of Arthashastra, has seven constituents such as, "Swami, Amatya, Janapada, Durg, Kosha, Danda, Mitra i.e. The king, the minister, the country, the fortified city (robust infrastructure), the treasury, the army and the ally. This very model

acknowledges the plurality of actors and institutions that are involved in the process of governance which is also a core characteristic of modern conception of governance. The present paper aimed at undertaking an exercise where each of the eight principles can be attached to one of the actors of the Saptang model as a guiding principle of governance.

Figure 1: Placing Saptang Model with Modern principles of Good Governance:



For instance, The Swami or the modern day leader is the most important actor. The leader is expected to be accountable for all his actions and decisions directly as well as indirectly. The first indicator of good governance is that the ruler should surrender his individuality in the interest of his duties and has to be held accountable to his people. Kautilya's concept reverberates in Max Weber's concept of rational authority exemplified by a depersonalized bureaucracy. K. P. Jaiswal aptly uses the term 'constitutional slave' for Kautilya's king - a term popularized in England by Locke in the late seventeenth century.

The second important actor in the Saptang model is elected ministers or appointed bureaucrats i.e. the Amatyā. These officials who are actually responsible for carrying out the administrative responsibilities need to be highly efficient & effective, for that only delivers the promises of good governance. This also ensures the quality of administration. Kautilya too assigns them a number of functions and they stand for government machinery.

The third limb of the model is Janapada. The Arthashastra elaborates on how the Janapada should be organised. The contemporary paradigm of governance envisions a participatory Janapada and believes in greater localisation and decentralisation of powers so as to ensure people's participation in the process of governance, which begins at the grass roots level. In fact, the Chanakya Sutrani has a sutra namely, "Mantrasampada Rajyam Vardhate., which means Participation/ Interactions make the state stronger. This aspect of governance also draws our attention to another important and emerging actor of Japapda i.e. the civil society. It today plays an extremely crucial role and acts as a catalyst, as an actor in crystallising interests of the people and mobilises people's actions. The Janapada in Saptang model very well subsumes the modern ideal of people's participation through local actors like civil society organisations, voluntary or non-state actors.

As it has been discussed earlier, both Kautilya and modern conception of governance believes in creation of robust infrastructure which is the fourth significant actor in Kautilian Model. We know that no one today really debates about the critical importance of infrastructure and its development is a priority for all governments. But what is questionable is how it is distributed in the state. Hence, the Durga (Infrastructure) needs to be informed and guided by the principles of Equity & Inclusiveness. Both, modern and Kautilian model of governance highlight infrastructure but the modern governance models adds the dimension of being equitable and inclusive.

Finance is the number five important actor in the same model. All the developmental and state activities centre around and depend on the finance and this is generated from the taxes and money collected from the people. Hence the modern governance model believes that the Kosha i.e. the finance has to be the most transparent and open aspect of governance. If there is any form of opaqueness in matters of finance, they are unacceptable and disagreeable to modern financial governance. This is also crucial to survival of rest of the other elements.

The rule of the law or Danda is the sixth significant limb in the Saptang model. Kautilya Arthashastra echoes Danda & Dharma duality for promoting governance. On one hand the leader is expected to devote himself to the interests of the people, and on the other the Danda had to be exercised not arbitrarily but in accordance with laws codified to ensure fairness, and promote governance for the common good (Dharma). To ensure effective application of Danda in harmony with Dharma, the Arthashastra elaborates very careful principles and tests for the selection of ministers and officials, for taxation and public expenditure, and for the maintenance of law and order as the fundamental canons of good governance. The treatise also spells out in great detail how to control corruption, which can otherwise spread like a cancer through the seven key constituents of the state (Prakrits), and destroy the fundamentals of good governance. The idea of constitutional supremacy is quite close and analogous to the idea of supremacy of Dharma based Danda. The constitution today is considered as the supreme law of the land. No man is above it and all men are equal before it. Kautilya too imagines a similar model by positioning the entire process of good governance and welfare state on the firm foundation of 'Dharma based Duties.' This duty based narrative ensures that welfare state is not a privilege, not an entitlement that could be misused the way it is being misused in the modern rights-based narrative. Instead, the welfare state and good governance are made the prerogative of every citizen and the ruler's sole purpose is to serve his citizens, and he is bound by same obligations, same duties as his citizens. The only difference between a ruler and a citizen is that the magnitude and scope of those duties in case of the ruler is many times greater than in the case of citizens. This stress on personal duties in the Yogkshema model naturally translates into the emphasis on ethics and values in governance. The Chanakya Sutranī reiterates this by saying that Dandohi Vignane Praniyate which means, use Dand according to the Shastra. San analogy from the ancient times tells us accurately the significance of this dharma based Danda concept. When the Chakravatin Raja used to perform Ashamedh Yagna, towards the close of the Yagna the Raja would declare himself as "Adandyosmi", that I cannot be reprimanded. Then the Rishi who mediated the Yagna hits him with a Danda (symbolic of the Dharma based duty narrative) and says, "Dharma Dandyosi", which means you can be reprimanded by the Dharma (Danda). Even the Raja is not above the idea of Dharma. In modern times no leader, no state or no government is above the modern version of this Dharma called constitutions or law books. Hence the Danda of the Saptang model is directed and guided by the principle of rule of law, which finds a place in the modern conception of governance.

Finally the last important actor is the Mitra or the ally. The contemporary governments have to maintain relations with not only their neighbouring countries and other countries but also with the donor countries and international funding agencies. Hence while working with them the guiding principle should be to arrive at consensus and operate together in order to achieve peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion:

Thus these modern principles of good governance model can very be articulated as guiding principle of the seven important actors of the Saptang model and we can fructify the goal of recreating a governance model. The principles that guide the modern conception of governance can very well be juxtaposed with the seven element model of Kautilya and thus guide and inform each other to make it relevant to contemporary issues, challenges and changes that shape the modern day polity and economy.

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