



KAUTILYA'S PHILOSOPHY ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELFARE

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ABSTRACT

Kautilya, the first great Indian economist, recognized the importance of economic and social welfare in economic development. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the Kautilya's philosophy on matters related to economic and social welfare. *Arthashastra* shows various measures that State used to adapt to protect its citizens in ancient India. These measures are highly relevant to modern times also. Kautilya's views were that welfare of people should be the supreme concern of State. He stressed the importance of fair trade practices. He also laid down fines for adulteration and supply of goods of an inferior quality. The understanding of economic and social welfare by Kautilya has been found throughout the *Arthashastra*.

Keywords: Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, Welfare

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic welfare is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people. A welfare State plays an important role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social welfare of its people. It is based on the principles of equal distribution of wealth, equality of opportunity, and State's responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the basic necessities for a good life. The main purpose of a welfare State is to improve the economic and social well-being of all individuals for achieving the highest possible level of human development. Economic and social welfare is the main concern of Welfare Economics. It is not a new concept for India. India has been a welfare State since ancient times which is clearly visible in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Kautilya

put forward his idea of a welfare State in the 4th century BCE. Like modern governments, Kautilya was aware of the welfare of its citizens. Kautilya was in favour of taking all the necessary steps that would make the world a better place to live for everyone. In the present paper, Kautilya's notions related to the social and economic welfare has been studied. Kautilya explored the issues of economic and social welfare in his *Arthashastra*. He attached great importance to wealth. Kautilya advocated that wealth was not an end but a means to an end, which was required to secure the welfare and happiness of the citizens. He was keenly aware of the welfare of citizens which is the main objective of all developing and developed economies these days. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* includes maintenance of social order, increasing economic activity, protection of livelihood, protection of the weaker sections of the society, prevention of harassment of the subjects, consumer protection and even welfare of the slaves and prisoners.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present paper are as follows:

- To examine the philosophy of Kautilya on economic and social welfare.
- To take lessons from his philosophy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on qualitative research methodology called Hermeneutics. The Hermeneutic analysis is a special type of content analysis where it is tried to interpret the subjective meaning of a given text within its socio-historic context.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELFARE IN KAUTILYA'S ARTHASHASTRA

Welfare (*Yogakshema*) of the people is the prime goal of government in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Kautilya recognized that King's own *dharma* should be just, impartial and lenient in protecting his subjects. The government should provide relief to widows, orphans, the sick and the infirm. The State was responsible for the economic prosperity of its citizens. It is clearly indicated in the following *sloka*:

प्रजासुखे सुखम् राज्ञः प्रजानाम् च हिते हितम् ।
नात्मप्रियम् हितम् राज्ञः प्रजानाम् तु हिते हितम् ॥
(*Prajasukhe Sukham rajan; Prajanam cha hite hitam,*
Natma priyamnitam rajah; Prajanam tu hite hitam.)

{1.19.34}

The *sloka* states that-

“In the happiness of the subjects lays the happiness of the King and in what is beneficial to the subjects his own benefit. What is dear to him is not beneficial to the King, but what is dear to the subjects is beneficial to him.”

In this way, the King had no interest of his own but had to merge his interests with those of its citizens. It was considered to be the religious duty of the King (State) to work for the welfare and happiness of subjects. His concern for the welfare of the citizens was to be as dear and dutiful as that of a father towards his children.

राजः स्वधर्मः स्वर्गाय प्रजा धर्मेण रक्षितुः ।
अरक्षितुर्वा क्षेसुर्वा मिथ्यादण्डम् अतोअन्यथा ॥
(*Ragyh swadharmah swargaay praja dharmen rakshituh.*
Arakshiturva kshepturva mithyadandam atoanyatha.)

{3.1.41}

The *sloka* states that-

“Carrying out his duty by the King, who protects the subjects according to law, leads to heaven; of one who does not protect or who inflicts an unjust punishment, the condition is the reverse of this.”

Kautilya emphasized that a welfare State had to assure its citizens a living or maintenance. Protection of livelihood extended to protect the major areas of economic activity. Agriculture was protected from being oppressed by heavy taxes, fines and demands for labour, herds of cattle from the depredations of thieves, wild animals, poisons, crocodiles, and deceases. Trade routes were protected from harassment by state officials, courtiers, frontier officers and thieves. The 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 principles of fair trading enunciated in the text were designed to promote the welfare of the people. Special favours were shown to those who did things which benefited the people, like building road, bridges and embankments, beautifying villages and protecting them. All goods were sold for the benefit of the subjects.

तानि दिवसवेतनेन विक्रीणीरत्नगृहेण प्रजानाम् ।
(*Tani divasvetnen vikreeneeratnnugrahen prajanam.*)

{4.2.35}

The *sloka* states that-

“The (agents) should sell those goods for a daily wage for the benefit of the subjects.”

Kautilya's State was aware of its responsibility towards the helpless citizens and the weakest sections of the society. Kautilya strongly accepted the joint family system as the best insurance for the helpless and the afflicted members of the society. He enforced the law according to which the head of the family was responsible to look after the dependents. Various aspects of the welfare of women and children are indicated in *Arthashastra* are as follows:

बालवृद्धव्यस्न्यअनाथांश्च राजा विभृयात्,
स्त्रियम् अप्रजाताम् प्रजातायश्च पुत्रान् ।
(*Baalvridhvyasnyanathanshch raja vibhriyat,*
striyam aprajatam prajatayashch putran.)

{2.1.26}

The *sloka* states that-

“And the king should maintain children, aged persons and persons in distress when these are helpless, as also the women who have born no child and the sons of one who has when these are helpless.”

There was a penalty for a person who with means does not maintain his family. Spinning work was to be given to handicapped women and taken to those who did not normally leave their houses. There was the protection of female slaves from exploitation, punishment for rape, protection of prostitutes against exploitation and physical injury etc. Kautilya also emphasized the protection of children from slavery and bonded labour {3.13.1, 2, 4}. The property of the minors was to be looked after by the elders of the village. To quote:

बालद्रव्यम् ग्रामवृद्धा वर्धयेयुरा व्यवहारप्रापणात्, देवद्रव्यम् च ।
(*Baldravyam gramvridha vardhyeyura vyavaharprapnat, devdravyam ch.*)

{2.1.27}

The *sloka* states that-

“The elders of the village should augment the property of a minor till he comes of age, also the property of a temple.”

Arthashastra reflects that social security was both a State and a private matter. It was the primary responsibility of the head of the family to maintain his family, i.e., wife, parents, children, unmarried or widowed sisters and minor brothers. No person could become an ascetic without doing the provision for the livelihood of his family. However, the State also had the obligation to provide a safety net and maintain children, the aged, and the helpless and childless women. Kautilya provided instructions on how to detect and punish the culprits who harassed the people. For example, people who had suffered at the hands of corrupt

officials were compensated after issuing a proclamation asking such victims to come forward {2.8.24, 25}.

Kautilya emphasized the maintaining of law and order to create a stable condition for economic prosperity and growth of the Nation. Kautilya stated that for maintaining the social order every person should follow the *dharma* of his own *varna* and *ashrama*. The laws relating to maintenance of order were in the form of punishing unsocial behavior, verbal and physical injury, robbery and theft, sexual offenses etc. Care was taken to ensure that the city guards did not use to misbehave with women {2.36.41}. The movements and activities of the drinkers and gamblers were controlled. Drinking was restricted to drinking halls only {2.25.3, 4, 5, and 7}. Masters of gambling halls and the gamblers themselves were punished for dishonest behavior {3.20.9; 4.10.9}. Kautilya was aware of the endangered 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 regulations, fixing the responsibility of the citizen and by sentencing appropriate penalties for violations. In *Arthashastra* there are various *slokas* related with prevention, house building and hygiene. But these rules were not applied indiscriminately. Sometimes there were exemptions from these rules. For example, the rules on sanitation inside houses were relaxed for childbirth and the ten-day lying-period {3.8.6}. Passing urine or feces in a public place was not punished if it was due to medication, illness or fear {2.3.29}. House building regulations could be modified by mutual agreement among neighbors so long as the undesirable was avoided {3.8.18}. Kautilya mentioned specific rules for the welfare of consumers which include control over merchants, standardize weights and measures, price fixation and control, a ceiling on profits, access to justice.

Every State, interested in the welfare of the people, cannot neglect the health of the citizens on which depend the prosperity, security and the stability of the State. Much care was therefore devoted to sanitation and hygiene of the city and the countryside. The cities and the villages were to be built according to plan. Every house was to have a dunghill and an outlet for refuse water {3.8.6}. Throwing of refuse or dirt on the roads was an offense.

पांसुन्यासे रथ्यायामष्टभागो दण्डः, पंकोदकसन्निरोधे पादः ।

राजमार्गे द्विगुणः ।

(*Pansunyase rathyayamastbhago dandah, pankodaksannirodhe padah.*

Rajamarge dwigunah.)

{2.36.26, 27}

The *slokas* state that-

“For throwing dirt on the road the fine should be one-eighth of a *pana*, for blocking it with muddy water, one quarter. On the royal highway, the fines should be double.”

Special routes were prescribed for carrying away a dead body. To safeguarded the health of the citizens it was provided that adulteration of grains, oils, salt, medicines, and scents was to be punished with a fine of 12 *panas* {4.2.22}. There were physicians in the city and countryside to control the spread of diseases and to treat patients. They were to report about any patient suffering from serious sores, and doctors were punished if because of their neglect patient suffered death or any loss of a limb due to defective surgical operation {2.36.10; 4.1.56}. Kautilya recognized not only the welfare of consumers but also the welfare of government servants. They were rewarded for good work. Kautilya stated that the officials who did not eat up the State’s wealth but increase it in a just manner and were loyally devoted to the king should be made permanent in service {2.9.9, 36}. The family of a government servant who died on duty was looked after by the State as indicated in the following *slokas*:

कर्मसु मृतानाम् पुत्रदारा भक्तवेतनम् लभेरन् ।
बालवृद्धव्याधिताश्च एषाम् अनुग्राह्याः ।
प्रेतव्याधिसूतिकाकृत्येषु च एषाम् अर्थमानकर्म कुर्यात् ।
(*Karmsu mritanam putrdara bhaktvetnm labheran.*
Balvridhvyaditash esam anugrahya.
Pretyadhisootikakrityesu cha esam arthmankarm kuryat.)

{5.3.28- 30}

The *slokas* state that-

“Of those dying while on duty, the sons and wives should receive the food and wages. And their minor children, old and sick persons should be helped. And he should grant them money and do honour on occasions of death, illness and birth ceremonials.”

The Kautilyan State also took effective and energetic measures to relieve the distress of the people during national calamities. During famines grains from royal stores were distributed, seeds and provisions were given, remission of taxes was made, public works like road construction, fort repair or other constructions were started for the unemployed, rich were to be heavily taxed, and help from foreign countries was also sought, if necessary {4.3.17; 5.2.35}. To fight fire menace adequate measures were taken in the countryside and cities. The master of the house had to keep ready tubs full of water, ladder, leather bags, winnowers, hooks etc. But besides individuals, the government saw that at places near cross-roads

thousands of pitchers filled with water were kept always ready to fight any outbreak of fire. Thus something like modern fire-brigades was available at short calls. The State also protected the people against pestilences, rats, snakes of demons. Both scientific and superstitious measures were recommended to fight these calamities.

Arthashastra prescribes that welfare of prisoners was safeguarded by 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 punishment for rape of women prisoners and releasing prisoners periodically as well as by general and special amnesties. Kautilya mentioned that the State interfered with the private manufacturers in the sense that the relations between the employers and employees were regulated by contract and it was enforced by the State. The rate and manner of the payment of wages were fixed. The non-payment of wages or part payment, for the full work done punished. In the government weaving factory the superintendent was responsible for proper payment of the wages for the work done by the workers. To encourage the workers the superintendent was to give psychological incentives to workers. Disputes regarding wages were to be decided on the testimony of witnesses and in their absence by a local inquiry by the judge. The guilds of workmen were also punished if they did not complete the work agreed upon.

Kautilya's emphasis on welfare and his human approach towards weaker sections of the society are highly relevant in today's context. During modern era also the welfare economists recommend adequate funds for the social sector and our constitution proclaims the welfare of masses as the ideal. For example in the Constitution, Article 41 of Directive Principles asks the State-

"The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want (Article 41)." Article 42 says the state shall make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity benefits. (The Constitution of India, Part IV)

Kautilya supposes State to be accountable for any kind of welfare and crises in a nation which is very clearly visible in modern democratic countries like, India, America.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively *Arthashastra* represents that welfare is not a matter of charity but a right of citizens living in a State. Promotion of the welfare of different sections of society is the duty of State. Kautilya had the clear idea of a self-reliant, mixed and welfare-oriented economy. Therefore, Kautilya's welfare State provides the guarantee against starvation, poverty and unemployment. Such type of welfare State where there is no poverty, no unemployment and no starvation is the requirement of every economy. The Kautilya's State laid down various regulations to control the free play of competition, which could be detrimental to the interests of the common people and the revenues and security of the State. During modern era also the establishment of a welfare State is the fundamental objective of modern democratic governments. In order to achieve this objective, the State attempts to satisfy the wants of each and every person of the society.

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