

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN ARTHAŚĀSTRA

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Abstract: The Arthaśāstra, an ancient Sanskrit treatise, comprehensively addresses various domains of knowledge. Regarded as a guidebook, it encompasses a wide range of subjects. The statecraft policies outlined in the Arthaśāstra remain relevant throughout history. This treatise places significant emphasis on environmental awareness and conservation. The maintenance of ecological balance holds utmost importance for society. Within the Arthaśāstra, the interconnectedness of the environment and economy is vividly portrayed. On this context environmental governance emerges pivotal role within the state. It emphasizes the importance of sustainable resource management and the need for effective policies to ensure the well-being of both society and the environment.

Keywords: Arthaśāstra, environment, forests wealth, sarvāthithivana, economy

Arthaśāstra is an ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on state craft. This treatise is directly or indirectly related to polity. It deals with both internal and foreign policies. This ancient treatise is considered as a guide book particularly for a ruler and to become a good administrator in all terms. The entire work is the economic wellbeing of the state. It covers almost all fields of knowledge. The subject matter also includes different dimensions of subjects such as agriculture, trade or commerce and various other topics. Each chapter deals with the discussion of important topics that a ruler should follow in order to maintain a stable kingdom.

Environmental awareness and the ecological conservation are major concepts in Arthaśāstra. Kautilya, who is the author of Arthaśāstra clearly states the importance of environment and he suggests various laws and even strict rules for the proper conservation of environment.

The main elements of environment in which he includes land, water resources, forests and sarvāthithivana concept.

Fertile lands

Kautilya maintains that the land should be fertile enough not only for the native population, but also considers who migrate to the country at the time of the calamities. There should be always productive land. The land should be both beautiful and always stimulate economic activities. Kautilya always views everything for the welfare of the state and he always use strategical measures to maintain a stable and strong kingdom. In the case of governance in the environment area also he keeps that ideology. All the measures he suggested are only for the sake of a stable state. He considered those fertile lands which are not maintained well was really a major crime and he discouraged those activities and he suggested to charge adequate fine from those people.

For fertile lands he gives top priority to water resource management which is essential for agriculture. For that he instructed to build storage reservoirs. He suggested to involve all people and those who refuse to participate were to be forced to do their lot. He has a clear-cut idea about each sector of the ecological atmosphere. The productive lands not only increase the agriculture but also it increases the production and which helps to maintain a proper revenue. The economic matters are dependent on the environment matters also. Kautilya connected everything for the economic purpose also.

Forest wealth

He has a great view about forest wealth. He states that three types of forest. He classified on the basis of how they are used for in which –

Recreational purposes Forests. Those forest areas are used for hunting and they are well protected area.

Economically useful Forests. Those areas produce useful materials like bamboo and also some medicinal plants are planted in there.

Elephant forests. Elephants are important especially in the war time. So, the protection and preservation of elephants are really important. Those particular areas are completely allowed for the sanctuary of elephants. Capital punishment is prescribed for a person for killing an elephant.

Sarvāthithivana Concept:

He encouraged the concept of Sarvāthithivana. The type of forest in which hosting all types of animals. Kautilya has given the definition that forests include enclosure for beasts, deer park, forests for produce and elephant forests. Protected species and animals were not to be killed or injured but in the case of dangerous animals were not to be killed with the sanctuary, but taken outside and killed. In this concept Kautilya focuses that a forest is a place in which every species can survive and each of them are dependent on each other. The forest itself is a place where it constitutes birds, animals, plants of variety of species and all the ecological elements.

In case of domesticated animals, Kautilya prescribes severe punishments to offenders starving them. Slaughter of female and young animals was prohibited at that time. Provision to give free ration for horses and elephants. Horses unfit for war were used for breeding to be punished. The cutting of trees is completely prohibited. Kautilya promotes the practice of afforestation. For harming the trees by cutting any part, adequate fines were charged, depending on the types of injury to the trees. Special forests with considerable areas were created for the settlement of ascetics and respected people devoted to the study of vedas. They are respectively called tapovana and brahma somāranya. Kautilya has often advised the kings to use poisons against their enemies, for that various plants for the purpose of collecting poison were need to grow in separate session.

There were separate officers for different departments. There were superintendents exclusively for the welfare of the cows, horses and elephants to ensure their well-being. Special positions were occupied by Director of Forests, supervisor of animal slaughter, separate superintendents of cattle, horses, elephants and pastures. The destruction of forests was not tolerated by the administration. In Arthaśāstra around three chapters there is a detailed discussion about the care, training, treatment of horses and elephants, milking of cow etc.

The concept of protected reserve forest has existed at that time also. Kautilya states that forest is a place where every forest being can live without fear and it is considered as a shelter to them. The concept of Abhayāranya was particularly mentioned in the Arthaśāstra. When a person kills species in those protected area particularly from the Abhayāranya, he shall be heavenly fined.

Severe punishments

Kautilya is very much concerned about the ecological system. He is sympathetic towards the animals also. If a person killed deer or any other domestic animals and birds kept in the protected areas and parks the crime was of greater magnitude and the punishment became heavier. In such cases he prescribes, in addition to a fine of two hundred paṇas, an amount equal to the price of the animal killed.¹ In case of killing cats, dogs or pigs of less than twenty-five paṇas are charged. If the offender is unable to pay the fine, severe punishment was charged like his nose tip was to be chopped off. During that period of time there were no moral teachings and practices Kautilya always suggested severe punishments. If the offender is a forest-dweller, the punishment was to be reduced to halved.² If anyone harm animals like elephants and horses it would become more severe. Those animals belonged to king's side and the offence was considered to be very serious and severe punishment is recommended. The offender was also liable to meet the expenses of the treatment and cure of the animal injured.³

Kautilya strongly opposed deforestation and he recommended severe punishments and fine for those who cut trees and plants. He prescribes higher punishments in cases of trees growing in sanctuaries or in royal parks and in such cases, the offender was to be pay double the punishment by paying higher amount of fine. Similarly, if anyone obstructed the cultivation of crops in the field of others by causing damage to their plough, he was to pay the amount in equal to the damage done.

Conclusion

Kautilya's Arthaśāstra is relevant in all period. The topics covered in this treatise is always relevant. It covers the subjects mainly on administration, economics, public finance, law and justice, ecology. Kautilya strongly focus the idea of welfare state. The description of nature and its awareness is seriously discussed in Arthaśāstra. There is a detailed discussion about the environmental governance and the preservation of environment in order to maintain ecological balance. There should be a balance between the human and nature. The degradation of environment completely destroys the balance of the land and also the balance of the entire life cycle. Even today the environmental awareness is a major topic and centuries ago Kautilya systematically stated the rules and regulations for preserving the environment. The conservation of forests and the caring of animals, the maintenance of wildlife sanctuaries, proper treatment of medicinal plants all these are effectively done in that period. Even today the administration system is imposing fines and other punishments for the encroaching of lands. The negligence towards nature from ourselves cause serious calamities and now there is an increase in the number of natural calamities due to the improper treatment of the nature by humans. These problems were noticed by Kautilya at that time itself and recommended adequate measures to maintain an ecological balance.

Kautilya strongly advocates the revenue of the state. For maintaining a good economy, nature has prominent role. He clearly stated the importance of environment in the economic field also. It helps the ruler to maintain a stable economy.

It enriches the royal treasury and thereby promotes to maintain a stable government. Environmental governance is a major concept within the state.

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2. Ibid. 4.10.2
3. Ibid. 3.19.27

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