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Source: *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, JAN. - MAR., 2010, Vol. 71, No. 1 (JAN. - MAR., 2010), pp. 59-68

Published by: Indian Political Science Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/42748368>

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## KAUTILYA : SAPTANGA THEORY OF STATE

*Kiranjit Kaur*

*The article attempts to analyse the Saptanga Theory of Kautilya. It describes seven elements of state and these resemble the modern theory of state. The paper also looks into modern concepts of statecraft.*

Political thought is primarily concerned with the state and its functions. There are no historical records to tell us how and when man originally came to live under state conditions or a political system. In the absence of historical evidence, political thinkers have, however, made various suggestions to explain how state originated.<sup>1</sup>

There are differences of opinion among various political thinkers regarding the meaning, origin, nature, functions, objectives and elements of the state. The word 'state' and its cognates in other European languages – stato in Italian; etat in French; staat in German and Estado in Spanish and Portuguese. The word 'state' derives from the Latin Statvs, literally "standing" but meaning "condition" or "status".

The idea of the state as an organized society goes back to the Greek city-states. Aristotle described it as the natural growth of family and village. The theory is prior in nature, family being older in time. The Romans borrowed the idea of state from the Greeks but applied it to a bigger geographic unit. The Roman term Status Rei Publicae means the state of public concern. In its modern sense, the term was first used by Machiavelli during the 16th century as general term for a body politic. C.L. Weyper divides the theories of the state into three broad categories viz.,

- The state as organism
- The state as machine
- The state as class

It was for the first time, in ancient India, that the Arthasastra of Kautilya provided a definition of the state. According to him 'no territory deserves the name of kingdom (state) unless it is full of people and controlled by an agglomeration of power with absolute authority over the territory".

Kautilya's Arthasastra is not a theoretical treatise on political science. It does not directly concern itself with the question of the origin of the state. The entire teaching of the Arthashastra is addressed to the king, the single ruler of a state.

### **The Saptanga Theory : Elements of State**

Kautilya used the word 'Rajya' which according to Spellman, corresponds to the English word 'State'. The state is defined for the first time in the Arthasastra of Kautilya as consisting of

seven elements, a definition which becomes an axiom in the later sources. The state as seven-limbed is contemplated by the ancient Hindu thinkers. In Manusmriti, Manu deals with seven prakritis of the state like king, the ministers, the capital, the realm, the treasures, the army and the ally. But Kautilya in his Arthasashtra put the same in a different order like the Swami, the Amatyas, the Janapada, the Durgas, the Kosha, the Danda, the Mitra and the Satru. He changed the previous order of priority and added a new element viz. the enemy. Kautilya also reduced the elements at the state when he writes 'the king and his kingdom are the primary elements of the state' because all other elements evolves round these two elements.<sup>2</sup> Kautilya restated the relative importance of the different elements of state and then ultimately reduced their number in the following words 'Swami-Amatya-Janapada-Durga-Kasha-Danda-Mitrani-Prakritayan to seven.'<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Swami

Kingship or monarchy was the widely accepted and prevalent form of government in ancient India. King was synonymous with the state. For Kautilya too the king was the supreme authority in the state. Kautilya has gone to the extent of saying that, the king and the state epitomize the prakritis (the seven limbs). The king, according to him was the symbol of the state. The rise and fall of the prakritis very much depended on the king. Because, he happened to be the principal among the seven prakritis of the state. All the prakritis were guided and moulded by him. That is why Kautilya, mentions the king of the first element of the state.<sup>4</sup>

The success of the government and prosperity of the people depended largely on the king.

Kautilya being realist knew it very well that a ruler born with all these qualities must indeed be rare. Therefore, he prescribed vinaya-training of the ruler as essential. He insisted that the king should study Anviksiki (philosophical disciplines), Trayi (vedic lore), Vartta (economics), and Dandaniti (political science). He should also learn from the people, the theory of various trades and professions. However, Kautilya attached the highest importance to the study of Anviksiki, represented by the three philosophical systems of samkhya, yoga and lokuyata, besides, Kautilya says king must strenuously exert himself to conquer his indriyajaya (senses). He should shun all vices which flow from lust, anger, avarice and pride. Presuming that no ruler possesses by birth the qualities of a good ruler, training of the crown prince was tough indispensable by Kautilya.<sup>5</sup>

According to Kautilya the king must be un-remitting in the performance of his duty. He must perform his duties. Therefore, he laid down a very disciplined life for the king. He also prescribed a daily time-table for the king from 1.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.

An ideal king is one who has the highest qualities of leadership, intellect, energy and personal attributes. The qualities of leadership are: birth in a noble family, good fortune, intellect

and prowess, being righteous, truthful, resolute, enthusiastic and disciplined, not breaking his promises, showing gratitude, having lofty aims, not being dilatory, being stronger than neighbourer kings and having ministers of high quality.

The qualities of Intellect are: desire to learn, listening to others, retaining, understanding thoroughly and reflecting on knowledge, rejecting false views and adhering to the true one. An energetic king is one who is valorous, determined, quick.<sup>6</sup> The king of the sovereign head of the state has different types of duties like the appointment of ministers, protection of the people, ability to give justice and inflict punishment on the wicked. Happiness of the king lies in happiness of the people. Thus Kautilya's head of the state resembles modern head of the state who is all powerful provided he does his duty.<sup>7</sup> According to Kautilya, the king is the most important as he is preserver of dharma. He insists that the king must possess wisdom and foresight and should have his senses under control.<sup>8</sup> The assertion of Kautilya that the king is the state should not be misunderstood so as to deny any effective place to the people. In the Kautilyan state the kingship and the law did conceive of the king's authority as that of a father. Kautilya suggests the king not to make himself inaccessible to his people causing thereby public dissatisfaction. The king should take note to public reaction to his administrative measures. The threat of the people dissatisfaction was one of the deterrents against the tyranny of heavy taxation, according to Kautilya. He holds the view that the influence of dharma, the identity of interests and the highly refined character of the king are mainly responsible in restraining the Kautilyan prince from abusing absolute sovereignty with which he is supposed to be invested. Finally it is pointed out that the king is rightly called the highest and most important organ of the state because he is the prime source of its unity. Unity is an indispensable feature of the state and has to be preserved at all costs. The monarch at the top who is responsible for the efficient and smooth functioning of the machinery of government and stands as a father and mother to the people is its most natural symbol. He is the pivot round which the entire state machinery revolves. A good and wise king ruling benevolently becomes a blessing to the people who prosper under him.

## 2. Amatyas

Amatya constitute the second element of the state. But Kautilya refers to amatya in a different sense. It generally means Council of Ministers. In the Arthashastra, amatya constitute a regular cadre of service. The importance of ministers as counsellors or advisors, helpers, colleagues, guides etc. to the king has been widely acknowledged by the political thinkers of ancient India. Kautilya was no exception to it. He says that the state affairs cannot be conducted by the king without the assistance of competent councillors in the same manner as the carriage with one wheel cannot move. Thus, the king should employ amatyas or ministers and hear their advice.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the state functionary next in importance to the king is the amatya or the mantrin. The term appears to stand for all high officers, whether councillors or executive

heads of departments. Kautilya asserts that the king should appoint three or four counsellors, neither more nor less. It is argued that a single mantrin would be difficult to control, two might quarrel and ruin the state or conspire against the king. At the same time, a larger number would affect the secrecy of counsel, on which naturally great stress is laid. The king is supreme in the matter of arriving at decisions.<sup>10</sup>

Kautilya has divided the Amatyas into two categories according to their qualities. Those who were of indigenous origin, noble family, firm determination and retentive memory, and artists economists, wise, cleaver, orator, powerful, debater, charming, tolerant, enthusiastic, impressive, gentle, capable, loyal to the king, healthy, steadfast etc. were considered worthy of being the prime minister. Those, who possessed either one fourth or half of these qualities were taken as minister of middle or lower grade. Amatyas had to undergo different kinds of tests before their appointment. Only those amatyas who passed all these tests were appointed as ministers. And those who failed in all the tests were made incharge of different mines, forests and elephant force etc. In the opinion of Kautilya the number of ministers should be determined according to the discretion of the king, the prevailing situation in the state and the necessity arising out of it, etc.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Janapada

The Janapada falls in order as third important organ of the state after the king and the ministers. The territory and population being the pre-requisite conditions for the creation of a state were always kept in view by ancient Indian scholars. The nature of Janapada defined in the Arthashastra indicates that both territory and population are intended to be covered by this expression. The territory should consist of villages with minimum 100 and maximum 500 houses. The distance of one village from the other should not be more than either one or two krosa, so that they may help each other in necessity. The boundary of a well settled village should be fixed by planting trees or by rivers, mountains, forests etc. As far as population is concerned he says that it should be inhabited by industrious sudhras peasants who are capable of bearing the burden of taxes and punishments. Finally, it should contain intelligent masters and be predominantly populated by members of the lower classes, and its people should be loyal and devoted. Kautilya advises the king to induce people from other countries to migrate and settle in new villages on old sites or on new sites. Kautilya had divided four administrative units. The smallest unit of a Janapada was Grama. A block consisting of ten villages was known as 'Samgrahana', two hundred villages as "Kharvatika", four hundred villages as "Dronamukha" and eight hundred villages as "Sthaniya".<sup>12</sup>

A definite territory was a necessary element of the state. The term Janapada also signifies population.<sup>13</sup> All economic activities (relating to the fortified cities, the treasury, the army, waterworks and trade) have their source in the countryside. The kingdom shall be protected by fortified the capital and towns at the frontiers. The land should not only be capable of sustaining

the (native) population but also outsiders (when they came into kingdom) in times of calamities. It should be easy to defend from (attacks by) enemies and strong enough to control neighbouring kingdoms. It should have productive land (free from swamps, saline kind, uneven terrain and deserts as well as wild (unruly) groups of people). It should be beautiful, being endowed with arable land, mines, timber forests, elephant forests. It should not depend (only on) rain for water. It should have good roads and waterways. It should have a productive economy, with a wide variety of commodities and the capacity to sustain high level of taxation as well as a army. The people shall be predominantly agriculturists devoted to work, honest, loyal and with intelligent masters and servants.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. Durga**

The defence of Janapada was a matter of principal concern for the ancient Indian scholars. Therefore, the Durga or fort constituted the fourth element of the state. Here Durga means the fortress and resembles pura, the third element of Manu's state. As a synonym of pura, it should be understood in the sense of fortified capital. According to Kautilya, forts should be erected at the frontiers of Janapadas under the guidance of Antapala for providing security. Besides, some of the forest tribes like the Sabaras, Pulindas and Candalas were assigned the duties of guarding the frontiers of Janapadas. Kautilya has referred to four types of Durgas :

- Audaka-durga (surrounded by water on all four sides looking like a delta)
- Paravat-durga (made on the mountains or made of rocks)
- Dhanvana-durga (on the plain surrounded by desert) there forts are built in deserts, where there is no water, grass or approach
- Vana-durga (near thick forest).

The first two durgas were useful for protecting Janapada in case of emergency and the following two shelters to the king and others in the event of any emergency.<sup>15</sup>

According to Saleore, "Kautilya's theory of forts may be summarized thus: as between forts and the people, the latter were more important; while as between the fort and the treasury, it was the former that was more important. He would, therefore, in the last resort place reliance upon the people, and the fort, and as between these, he would prefer the people".

#### **5. Kosha**

The Kosha and the army were the twin pillars of all ancient Indian states. Kautilya has rightly said that "yatra raja tatra kosah kosadhiana his rajata". Thus, "where there is a king, there is kosha". Besides, it helps in the pursuit of Dharma and Kama. According to him both kosha and danda equally important, but comparatively the former is more important than the latter. Kautilya, while admitting its importance, has also emphasized the fact that in absence of

kosha the army cannot do anything rather they can go against their own king and joint he hostile forces. Further, the army protects only kosha, but the latter protects both army and durgas. Kautilya makes mentions of Sannidhata, whose duty was to set up 'Koshagriha' or treasury-house. In order to increase the resources, the king was supposed to augment the wealth of the whole rastra, to encourage all kinds of production, to promote trade and commerce, to collect taxes in time, etc. The Koshadhyaka was not supposed to violate the rules regarding the collection of state taxes. He was not supposed to make any mistake regarding the handling of state taxes.<sup>16</sup>

According to Kautilya the treasure accumulated by righteous and legitimate means should be retained by the king or should be amassed by him in the same manner. Filled with gold, silver, precious jewels and gems, the treasury should be able to stand the strain of expenditure during times of adversity, such as famines, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Kautilya rightly remarks that all under the kings depend upon kosha, i.e., finance. He expresses the view that treasury is more important than the army. The latter can be raised and maintained only with the help of a well filled treasury. Sound finances are essential for any state. Agriculture yields the most important part of revenue. The state is entitled to the produce of the crown land and one sixth of the produce of other land. Shulka or custom duty is levied not only on export or import, but it also on indigenous products. The rates of excise vary from one sixth to one twentieth except on foreign goods which are charged at the rate of one fifth of their value. When the goods were brought along the waterways they had to pay duties and other charges at the port. The state also maintains a fleet on its own that is to be out on hire to traders and fishermen.<sup>18</sup> The taxes should be neither heavy nor excessive, they should be moderate. The king was advised to follow the example of the bees or the calf. Just as the bees collect honey from flowers but without damaging them in any way, the calf drinks milk without in any way bruising the udders of the mother cow, in the same way, the king should tax the people without in any way injuring or harming them. He further advised the king to never to forget that nothing would expose him to greater danger than oppressive taxation. The taxation should be equitable which means, both the state on its side and the agriculturist and the trader on their side feel that they got a fair and reasonable deal.

When for some reason, such as a costly military adventure, the treasury gets depleted, efforts become necessary for its reenlistment. Kautilya recommends the following measures to fill the treasury :

- A levy in agriculturists ranging from one-fourth to one-third of the stocks with them, according to the productivity of the soil.
- If this is found insufficient, farmers are to be induced to grow crops as directed by the state and give part of the produce to the state.

- A levy on traders ranging from 50 panas on dealers in gold, silver etc., to 5 panas on dealers in vegetables, cooked food etc. Even actors, singers and prostitutes are to pay half their income.
- A levy on animal-breeders, ranging from half the sock of poultry and pigs to one-tenth of cattle, horses etc. keepers of brothels are to augment the treasury through the earnings of beautiful and young maids supplied by the palace.
- If these measures, too, do not suffice, contributions should be requested for specific undertakings and people should be pressed to contribute to their utmost capacity.
- Rich men should be asked to pay according to their means, conferring on them titles, decorations and other honours in return.<sup>19</sup>

These measures are intended to be used only in an emergency.<sup>20</sup>

## 6. Danda

The sixth limb of the state as mentioned by Kautilya is Bala or army. It has been considered as one of the chief organs of the state. It is hardly necessary to labour the point that a strong and powerful army is absolutely essential for the existence and security of a state. Armies are necessary not only for defence against aggression by other states, they are equally needed for carrying the fight into the enemy's camp which was often unavoidable as a defence strategy in ancient times when the country was divided into a large number of small and medium sized states. Kautilya while referring to the qualities of soldiers has observed that they should be valiant warriors, well versed in the art of war and loyal to the king. He has also mentioned that there should be maximum number of Ksatriyas in the army.<sup>21</sup> The army shall consist mostly of men of tested loyalty, Kshatriyas, having come down from the king's father and grandfather. They should be recruited in the permanent basis. The soldiers should be strong, obedient, not averse to a long expeditions, power of endurance, skill in handling all various forms of weapons and should share the weal and woe of the king. He advised the king to keep their wives and families also contented with the maintenance received from the state. They should have no interest other than that of the king and should share his prosperity and adversity.<sup>22</sup> Kshatriyas constitute the main part of the army. Kautilya allows even the lower castes to join the army provided they have some brave fighters among them, but does not favour a contingent of Brahmins because they are more prone to be influenced by the supplications and prayers of the enemy. But the best army should be strong, obedient and happy. It should be invincible, rained in fighting various kinds of battle.<sup>23</sup> Bala or army is considered to be an important element of the state in view of the fact that the king was control both his own subjects and the enemies through it.<sup>24</sup> According to Kautilya, the army may belonged to the following seven categories:

- Maula (recruited on hereditary ground; permanent wing, maintained by state and whose duty was to defend the capital).
- Bhrtaka or Bharta (paid).
- Shreni (a well organised group of soldiers well trained in the art of war).
- Mitra (soldiers of friendly kings).
- Amitra (soldiers of hostile kings or of conquered countries and recruited like slaves).
- Atavi or Atavika (tribal soldiers consisting of Nisadas, Mlecchas and other mountain tribes).
- Autsahika (living in different countries, without any leader and invaders. They used to attack other countries with or without the consent of king).

Out of the above seven categories of soldiers the first three have been considered dependable.

It is in the Arthashastra of Kautilya that there he distinguishes between several kinds of armies and regards the regular or standing army of the best of all. Hired or mercenary troops, the troops organised by corporations or srenis, troops belonging to friendly states, troops consisting of deserters from the enemy and those recruited from wild tribes constitute the other kinds or types of army. They become less and less dependable as we descend from the hereditary or standing army at the top downwards. Kautilya divides the whole army into divisions, sub-divisions, each with its own flag, trumpets, drums etc. He also provides physicians and surgeons for those wounded on the battlefield.

## 7. Mitra

The paramount necessity of an ally for a king has been felt in all ages. The ancient thinkers were guided by practical considerations in including Mitra as one of the elements of the state. They felt that on most occasion a true friend is a far more important asset than gold or property in the case of an individual and more valuable than land or gold in the case of a state. According to Manu's king does not prosper by the acquisition of gold and land so much as by securing a dependable friend who would be powerful in future.

Kautilya also felt that it was indispensable for a king to make friends, so as to achieve the goal, that was the prosperity of his state. The king without friends could easily fall prey to enemies' attack. Kautilya has described three types of friends in connection with the Saptanga theory :

- Sahaja-mitra: obtained through near relatives.
- Krtrima: acquired by virtue of obliging other king or being obliged by the latter.

- Prakrta: living adjacent to the frontiers of neighbouring king.

He added further the eight elements and that is Satru and divided them into three categories :

- Sahaja Satru: found among own relatives.
- Krtrima Satru: always hostile to others.
- Prakrta Satru: neighbouring kings.<sup>25</sup>

Kautilya's concept of Mitra is base more on ethical considerations. The real ally should be one with whom there is no possibility of rupture and one who is ready to come to help when occasion demands it. But on the other hand, one is to be treated as an enemy who is greedy, possessed with disloyal subjects, loose character, addicted to mean pleasure, powerless and impotent etc.<sup>26</sup> Ideal ally is one who has the following qualities: constant, amenable to control, powerful in his area, sharing a common interest, able to mobilise (his forces) and not a man who double crosses (his friends).<sup>27</sup>

The Saptanga theory of state as expounded by Kautilya bears partial resemblance to the modern definition of state. infact, it adds some more basic elements of state. To conclude with some of the elements of state of Bala, Kosha and Mitra described by Kautilya do not find a place in the modern duly accepted definition of the state. Organic theory of state was supported by Kautilya but there seems to be one basic difference between his concept and the modern organic view of the state which was expounded in the nineteenth century by Herbert Spencer. His object seems to have been to underline the unity of the industrial state, for he compares the industrial organisation to the elementary organ, commercial organisation to the circulatory organ, political organisation to the nervo-motor organs, and the legislature to the cerebrum in man.

On the other hand, the organic conception of the state in ancient India Kautilya was intended to stress the importance of the different elements in relation to the need of the state. it seems that the emphasis on the importance of the other elements was due to the growing independence of the hereditary amatyas and dandanayakas.<sup>28</sup>

Sharma argues that most of the basic features of modern day concept of good governance, responsiveness of the government, efficiency of administration well-being and prosperity of the people, overall development of political community, good quality of life, ethical upwardness and economic affluence have got prominent place in the thought process and administrative structures postulated by Kautilya in his Arthashastra.<sup>29</sup>

Kautilya's concept can be compared with the modern concept of the state. He mentions one element Janapada which includes population and territory also. It shows that the modern two elements that is territory and population are covered in one element by Kautilya. The third element of the state in modern time is government. Kautilya discusses under the elements,

the king and the ministers. Then the elements like Durga, Kosha, Mitras and Danda also form a part of the government. The fourth modern element is sovereignty. Sovereignty element of state is said to be all inclusive. The state possesses coercive and tax collecting authority because of its sovereign character.

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