

**RE-VIEWING THE CONCEPT OF ARTHA IN KAUTILAY'S ARTHASHASTRA**

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The philosophical conception of *Purushartha* with its four popular dimensions i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksa* and their particular sequence is much debated and discussed in different philosophical treatises. Kautilay's *Arthashastra* is one such philosophical exposition that is devoted to one of the four *Purusharthas* i.e. *Artha*. The term *artha* is a multidimensional concept conveying a handful of meaning to different people. It can be "meaning" etymologically as the meaning of a word. It may denote "substance", as in the material, the stuff out of which anything is made. It may denote "purpose" or "goal" that determines the means. Out of the four *Purusharthas* i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksa*, Kautilay was the first to assign a high place to *artha* as against *dharma* and *kama*. The text of *Arthashastra* provides a structural analysis of the philosophical construct i.e. *artha* in the most comprehensive manner covering all the possible meaning of the term. Therefore, the epistemology of *artha* can be a valid subject of inquiry for exploring its metaphysical sources. This paper is an attempt to explore the essential sources of *artha*.

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Purushartha, one of the most celebrated philosophical concepts in Indian intellectual tradition, is thought to be a conception of the purpose of human life on the Earth. M. Hiriyanna states that "The literal meaning of the classical expression *purushartha* is 'any object of human striving, human effort'. And, when used adverbially, *purushartham* conveys the nuance 'for the sake of man' 'on account of man' (22). It has been a part of the intellectual discourse across various disciplines like, *Darsana*, *Kavya*, *Purana*, *Vedas*, *Itihasa* etc. Scholars like Gavin Flood states that "A careful historical review of the development of the *puruṣārtha* doctrine, looking well beyond the *Bhagavad-Gītā*" (11). In general, the concept provides a philosophical structure of the goals of human life. Dharmottara writes, "Even etymologically 'Pumshartha' means that which is aimed at or desired. It could be anything that we desire to have (upadeya) or to avoid (heya)" (22). Its theoretical structure comprises of four possible dimensions i.e. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksa*. The intellectual tradition in India provides theoretical and philosophical treatises composed by ancient Sages and thinkers of India devoted to these four objectives/ends of *Purushartha*. Sages and thinkers composed full length texts giving philosophical exposition to these ends. The philosophical exposition of these four *Purusharthas* in their independent treatises which are solely devoted to these ends reveals their interconnectedness or their contingent nature. In spite of the fact that these four *Purusharthas* have been expounded in independent texts, their division seems arbitrary as all of these are the parts of a single philosophical unit. In other words, it can be said that they are not divorced from each other. As life is a composite whole, its division in different spheres is a result of the polemics so the division of four *Purusharthas* is equally arbitrary.

The philosophical conception of *Purushartha* with its four popular dimensions i.e. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksa* and their particular sequence is much debated and discussed in different philosophical treatises. And the discussion and debates on their particular sequence determine their importance. Therefore, keeping in view, the importance of each one of them, the thinkers and composers of theoretical and philosophical texts

composed their treatises devoted singly to one of the *Purusharthas* Manu's *Dharmasastra*, Vatsayana's *Kamasashtra* and Kautilay's *Arthasastra* etc.

Kautilay's *Arthasastra* is one such philosophical exposition that is devoted to one of the four *Purusharthas* i.e. *Artha*. The whole treatise comprises of 15 books, 150 chapters, 180 sections and 6000 *slokas*. Kautilay in the beginning of his treatise admits that before this there were other philosophical schools which focused on the exposition of *Artha*. He mentioned a few of them like School of Manu, School of Brihaspati, School of Usanas etc. in the beginning of his discourse. Kautilay considers the sciences i.e. *Anvikshaki*, *Trayi* (The triple Vedas), *Varta* (agriculture, cattle-breeding, trade) and *Danda-Niti* (science of government) as the base for the structural analysis of *Artha*. He says that:

Anvikshaki, the triple Védas (*Trayi*), *Várta* (agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade), and *Danda-Niti* (science of government) are what are called the four sciences. The school of Manu (*Manava*) hold that there are only three sciences: the triple Vedas, *Varta* and the science of government, inasmuch as the science of *Anvikshaki* is nothing but a special branch of the Vedas. The school of *Brihaspati* say that there are only two sciences:

Varta and the science of government, inasmuch as the Triple Vedas are merely an abridgment (*Samvarana*, pretext?) for a man experienced in affairs temporal (*Lokayatavidah*). The school of *Usanas* declare that there is only one science, and that the science of government; for, they say, it is in that science that all other sciences have their origin and end. But Kautilya holds that four and only four are the sciences; wherefore it is from these sciences that all that concerns righteousness and wealth is learnt, therefore they are so called. (*Arthasastra*, 8-9).

The term *artha* is a multidimensional concept conveying a handful of meaning to different people. What is *artha*? It can be "meaning" etymologically as the meaning of a word. It may denote "substance", as in the material, the stuff out of which anything is



made. It may denote “purpose” or “goal” that determines the means. Out of the four *Purusharthas* i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksa*, Kautilay was the first to assign a high place to *artha* as against *dharma* and *kama*. The text of *Arthashastra* provides a structural analysis of the philosophical construct i.e. *artha* in the most comprehensive manner covering all the possible meaning of the term. Therefore, the epistemology of *artha* can be a valid subject of inquiry for exploring its metaphysical sources. This paper is an attempt to explore the essential sources of *artha*.

Arthashastra is a philosophical inquiry which provides structural analysis of socio-cultural reality in terms of *artha*. It covers the whole range of human existence in terms of all kinds of civilizational institutions. The text provides not only the genesis of power but also the different socio-cultural institutions through which it functions. It seems that Kautilay did not leave any aspect of human existence untouched. He discusses of all kinds of political, social, economic and cultural institutions in terms of their creation, function and purpose. But unlike Plato, the Greek philosopher, and Karl Marx, the German philosopher, he locates the essence of *artha* in human consciousness. Plato in his *Republic* creates an ideal political structure for the meaningful existence of human being on this Earth. In his philosophical discourse human will or ability does not determine socio-political structures. *Arthashastra* in its theoretical structure also differs from *Republic* in its practical nature. It does not involve in abstract philosophical debates between real/ideal or unreal. Kautilay's approach also differs from Karl Marx where human consciousness does not determine the reality rather the socio-political conditions determine consciousness. Kautilay's approach was a practical one where he does not create the dichotomies like real/unreal or consciousness/reality or socio-political being or being/becoming. To him, *artha* is a dynamic metaphysical concept comprising of subjective and material elements of human existence. And this dynamism of the concept the *artha* including its multi-meaning etymology that differentiate Indian philosophy of materialism from its Western counterpart.

Kautilay's conception of *artha* and its philosophical exposition in the form of theoretical text i.e. *Arthashastra* gives him a unique place among the philosophers of the world. Through his text Kautilay provides a dynamic and a comprehensive structure of human existence which is determined, governed and regulated by the political, social, economic and all kinds of cultural institutions which are resultant of the conception of a multiple reality where different layers or stages are possible from physical to metaphysical.

The beginning of Kautilay's theoretical discourse on *artha* in Book I “Concerning Discipline” of *Arthashastra* gives an idea of the epistemological sources of the multi-dimensional philosophical concept of *artha*.

It seems that Kautilay considers “human character” as the most potential source of *artha* in all its possible forms. Though “human character” itself is a controversial or philosophically debatable term but Kautilay being a practical thinker does not go deep into its layers. Purposefully, he discusses all the stages from where *artha* generates and gradually how does it acquire more and more complex forms in terms of political, social economic and all kind of cultural institutions. In Book I “Concerning Discipline” of *Arthashastra*, Kautilay states:

The observance of one's own duty leads one to *Svarga* and infinite bliss (*Anantya*). When it is violated, the world will come to an end owing to confusion of castes and duties.

Hence the king shall never allow people to swerve from their duties; for whoever upholds his own duty, ever adhering to the customs of the *Aryas*, and following the rules of caste and divisions of religious life, will surely be happy both here and hereafter. For the world, when maintained in accordance with injunctions of the triple Vedas, will surely progress, but never perish. (10)

Further, he states that “This people (*loka*) consisting of four castes and four orders of religious life, when governed by the king with his sceptre, will keep to their respective paths, ever devotedly adhering to their respective duties and occupations” (13). Therefore, it seems that to Kautilay everything comes



down to individual's character which is not something autonomous or independent of society. He makes the king as the main source of power/*artha* and everything depends further on his character which reflects in his vision. In fact for the attainment of *artha* one should perform his/her duties so that a harmonious order in the state and society may be created in which each individual may live his/her life progressively.

In his scheme of things, Kautilya makes power/*danda* as the most important element without which other forms of knowledge do not work. He himself states:

That sceptre on which the well-being and progress of the sciences of *Anvikshaki*, the triple *Vedas*, and *Varta* depend is known as *Danda* (punishment). That which treats of *Danda* is the law of punishment or science of government (*dandaniti*). It is a means to make acquisitions, to keep them secure, to improve them, and to distribute among the deserved the profits of improvement. It is on this science of government that the course of the progress of the world depends. "Hence," says my teacher, "whoever is desirous of the progress of the world shall ever hold the sceptre raised (*udyatadanda*). Never can there be a better instrument than the sceptre to bring people under control." (12)

'Power' is the result of the dynamic relationship between individual and the outside world but its use for the larger benefit of the society depends upon the individual. Therefore, Kautilya maintains that *artha* at the last instance lies in human will and its character. He does not see human subjectivity and outside Reality as exclusive and separate from each other. Rather, he sees the roots of all types of socio-cultural institutions in human character which is a subjective form.

Kautilya mentions that human behavior is regulated and controlled by discipline. He does not believe in absolute freedom of human will. He states that:

Hence the (first) three sciences (out of the four) are dependent for their well-being on the science of government. *Danda*, punishment, which alone can procure safety

and security of life is, in its turn, dependent on discipline (*vinaya*). (13)

Discipline is of two kinds: artificial and natural; for instruction (*kriya*) can render only a docile being conformable to the rules of discipline, and not an undocile being (*adravyam*). The study of sciences can tame only those who are possessed of such mental faculties as obedience, hearing, grasping, retentive memory, discrimination, inference, and deliberation, but not others devoid of such faculties. (13-14)

Kautilya does not believe in absolute free human will. Rather, he considers a human character which is trained in *dharma* and regulated by *vinaya* appropriate for the possession and exercise of power. Further, he states:

Harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, freedom from spite, abstinence from cruelty, and forgiveness are duties common to all. The observance of one's own duty leads one to *Svarga* and infinite bliss (*Anantya*). When it is violated, the world will come to an end owing to confusion of castes and duties. (11)

He mentions the duties of all classes of people according to *dharma* so that their attainment of *artha* may be made relevant. Namrata Goswami states that "*Danda* (Punishment) must be a part of *Dharma* (Sanskrit) or *Dhamma* (In Pali) meaning (duty) guided by legitimacy" (N. Goswami 9).

In this way, the epistemology of *artha* as discussed in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is crucial to comprehend the nature of human existence in contemporary times. The concept of *artha* as discussed in *Arthashastra* provides a framework to look into the nature of contemporary socio-cultural reality. *Artha* in contemporary times in all its institutional forms seems to have lost relevance. Looking at the contemporary culture and its civilization, it appears that the 'institutions' function not to support life. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* creates such a structure of *artha* from its simple forms to most complex one which represents the underlying principle of life. He prescribed the structure of all types of socio-political institutions to serve human ends. But socio-political institutions of contemporary times seem to tyrannize life instead supporting it.



In this way Kautilya's conception of *artha* serves as a working model of socio-political reality and its resultant institutions. It seems that today's sense of *artha* is completely devoid of dharma which is its ultimate regulator. Therefore, life in contemporary times seems to be losing its gravity and force because of the lack of interdependence of the four common goals of human life. *Artha*, one of the four ends of human life needs to be redefined in terms of its genesis, function and purpose. And Kautilya's *Arthashastra* may go a long way to achieve this end for the present day generation. In this way, *Arthashastra* may be considered one of the most relevant knowledge texts for today's generation.

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