



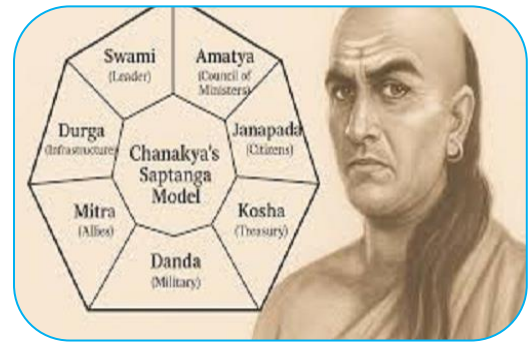
A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON KAUTILYA'S SAPTANGA THEORY OF STATE

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ABSTRACT:

Kautilya, popularly known as Chanakya, born in 375 BCE, had a unique, ambiguous, multifaceted, and egocentric personality. His lifelong work, 'Arthashastra', is one of the most systematic and pragmatic treatises on statecraft in ancient political thought. At the heart of his political philosophy lies the 'Saptanga theory' of the state. According to this theory, a state is composed of seven interdependent elements: Swami (the ruler), Amatya (the ministers), Janapada (the territory and its people), Durga (the fortresses), Kosha (the treasury), Danda (the army and coercive power), and Mitra (the allies). We will discuss in detail the seven organs of the state. This article provides a critical analysis of the 'Saptanga theory' and examines its relevance in the context of the structure and governance of the contemporary Indian state. This article argues that although Kautilya's monarchical ideas were fundamentally different from modern democratic norms, the theoretical foundation of the 'Saptanga theory' highlights enduring principles of institutional balance, administrative efficiency, financial capacity, diplomacy, and national security. The study concludes that, when properly contextualised from a democratic perspective, the 'Saptanga theory' offers a valuable indigenous framework for understanding the capabilities and governance challenges of the state in modern India.



KEY WORDS: Arthashastra, Governance, Kautilya, Political Thought, Saptanga Theory, State.

INTRODUCTION:

There are differences of opinion among various political thinkers regarding the meaning, origin, nature, functions, purpose, 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 Dutch; and 'Estado' in Spanish and Portuguese. The word State derives from the Latin word 'Status', meaning 'condition, circumstances'.

The concept of the state as an organized society goes back to the Greek city-states. Aristotle described it as the natural growth of families and villages. The Romans borrowed the idea of the State from the Greeks but applied it to a bigger geographic unit. In its modern sense, Machiavelli first used the term during the 16th century as a general term for a body politic. C.L. Wayper divides the theories of the state into three broad categories:

- The state as an organism,
- The state as a machine,
- The state as a class.

It was for the first time, in ancient India, that the Arthashastra of Chanakya defined the state. Traditionally, he is known as Visnugupta or Kautilya. According to him, 'no territory deserves the name of the kingdom (state) unless it is full of people and controlled by an agglomeration of power with absolute authority over the territory.'

Kautilya's Arthashastra, written in 300 BCE, almost 1800 years before Machiavelli's 'The Prince', is an extraordinarily detailed manuscript on statecraft. Henry Kissinger, in his book 'World Order,' refers to the Arthashastra as a work that highlights the imperatives of power, which is the dominant reality in politics. For Kissinger, the Arthashastra long preceded 'The Prince' with a realist view of politics, which Kissinger felt was a combination of Machiavelli and Clausewitz. Max Weber, the German sociologist, called it 'Truly Radical Machiavellianism' (Halpern).

The Arthashastra is perceived as a masterpiece of statecraft, diplomacy, and strategy and an example of non-Western literature that reflects realism and is relevant to foreign policy in contemporary international politics. Kautilya wrote the Arthashastra for the Indian king, Chandragupta Maurya, whose empire was confronting an environment resembling a Westphalian Europe of many states that encompassed the countries of South Asia in the contemporary time. He wrote the Arthashastra as a solution to this anarchical situation and played a leading role in directing, assembling and administering the large empire of Ashoka.

According to Kautilya, God did not create the state; the origin of the state came through the covenant. According to him, the society was in a state of chaos, like a Hobbesian state. In addition, to get rid of this condition, the king (Vaivasvata Manu) was chosen as the ruler, and the king had to give 1/6 part of mustard, 1/10 of commodities, one part of gold, and 1/6 part of forest wealth. In return for this revenue, the king would protect the people.

The doctrine we find in the context of Kautilya's state is known as 'Saptanga'. During the peace period of the Mahabharata, there were seven organs within the state. In some texts, the eight limbs are mentioned, but we do not find any identification of the eighth limb. Although the nature of the state is discussed in various texts of ancient India, Kautilya's Saptanga theory is the most relevant, coherent, logical, and thematic discussion on the nature of the state (Mukharji, 2013). Therefore, Kautilya was a unique thinker who was quite pragmatic and utilitarian in his approach.

Research Methodology: In this paper qualitative methodology is applied.

SAPTANGA THEORY OF STATE :

In literal terms, the word 'Saptanga' means seven limbs. This theory of Kautilya also gets its essence from ancient Greek political philosophy. Kautilya states that they are like bodily organs, eyes, ears, nose, heart, hands, etc. He stated, "One wheel does not move a chariot" (Pillalamarri, 2015). In the Manusmriti, Manu deals with seven Prakritis of the state: the King, the Ministers, the Capital, the Realm, the Treasure, the Army, and the Ally. However, Kautilya in his Arthashastra put the same in a different order, like the Swami, the Amatyas, the Janapada, the Durgas, the Kosha, the Danda, the Mitra, and the Enemy. He changed the previous order in priority and added a new element, viz., the Enemy. Kautilya also reduces the elements of the state when he writes that the king and kingdom are the primary elements of the state, because all other elements revolve around these two elements (Mohanty, 2001, p. 40). He restated the relative importance of the different elements of the state and then ultimately reduced their number in the following words, 'Swami, Amatya, Janapada, Durga, Kosha, Danda, Mitrani Prakritayan to seven' (Choudhary, 1971, pp. 59-60).

All seven elements of the state are discussed below:

1.Swami (The King) : Among the seven elements of the state, the most important element is the Swami or King. Hereby, the term Swami refers to the monarch of the particular territory. He states it as the highest place in the body. The meaning of the word 'Swami' is 'Swayam', which refers to self-determining. Kingship or Monarchy was the widely recognised and prevalent form of government in ancient India. For Kautilya, the king was the supreme authority in the state. Kautilya has gone to the extent of saying that the king of the state epitomizes the prakritis (the seven limbs). The rise and fall of

the prakrtis depended largely on the king because he was the chief of the seven prakrtis of the state. All the prakrtis were guided and moulded by him. That is why Kautilya mentions the king as the first element of the state (Singh, 2005, pp. 29-30). The success of the government and the prosperity of the people depended largely on the king.

He said that the king would be an upper-caste dynasty and it would be hereditary, that is, he was a supporter of dynastic and high-caste monarchies. That is the kingdom and the king, in short, the nature of the kingdom (Bandyopadhyay, 2001, p. 337).

Given the contemporary state and socio-economic conditions, Kautilya favoured a strong dictatorial king or monarchy. Because there was no political unity in ancient India at that time, and at the same time, external enemies were again invading India. The king was at the top of the complete state system and the source of all authority. He emphasized the importance of education in making the king so powerful and mentioned some of his virtues.

2.Amatya (Ministers): Amatya constitutes the second element of the state. According to Kautilya, Amatya represented the eyes of the state. He refers to Amatya in a different sense. It generally means the Council of Ministers. In the Arthashastra, Amatya constitute a regular cadre of service. Due to the underdeveloped communication system in ancient India, the king could not rule the state alone. Therefore, the king needed a royal assistant to perform his duties. There were various categories of royal servants, like ministers and secretaries, to help the king in performing his royal duties. He explains the recruitment of Amatyas from higher order to lower (Kangle, 1965, p. 133). Thus, the king should employ Amatyas or ministers and hear their advice (Singh, 2005, pp. 63-64). The king is supreme in the matter of arriving at decisions.

The word 'Minister' meant royal advisor, the word 'Secretary' meant helper, the word 'Amatya' meant personal secretary, and the priest's job was to impart Yajna and religious knowledge. These public officials were called by different names at different times. In the age of the Mahabharata, Arthashastra, and Nitisar, there is a reference to the cabinet, but the number of state functionaries was different in different eras. It was generally considered to be based on the size of the state. Ten classes of ministers are mentioned in the Shukra-Niti. Although there is no mention of a minister in the Rig-Veda and Atharva-Veda in a small country, it was known that there were three royal servants, namely Senani, Gramani, and Purohit. There are 19 references to Kautilya's Arthshastra, of which ministers (chiefs) and priests were high-ranking; 17 ministers were relatively low-ranking, and three more were mentioned.

3.Janapada (Population and Territory) : The Janapada falls in order as the third most important organ of the state after the King and the Amatyas. The word 'Janapada' denotes where people reside. Janapada represents the legs of the state. The nature of janapada as defined in the Arthashastra indicates that both territory and population are intended to be covered by the expression. The territory should consist of villages with a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 500 houses. The distance from one village to another should not be more than one or two krosa so that they can help each other in necessity. The boundaries of a well-settled village should be defined by planting trees or by rivers, mountains, forests, etc. As far as population is concerned, he says that industrious Sudhras peasants who are capable of bearing the burden of taxes and punishments should inhabit it. Finally, it should have intelligent masters and be populated mainly 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. He had divided four administrative units. A block consisting of ten villages was known as 'Sangrahana', two hundred villages as 'Kharvatika', four hundred villages as 'Dronamukha', and eight hundred villages as 'Sthaniya'.

4.Durga (A Fortified Capital) : The Durga or fort constituted the fourth element of the state. As the capital represents the heart, he saw the fortification of the capital as an essential element, as it provided security. Here 'Durga' means the fortress and resembles pur, the third element of Manu's state. In the Manusanghita, the durga or fort means pur, meaning the king's abode. Here pur or Rajdhani was more important than the state or janapada. Manusanghita mentions six types of forts, namely Dhanvadurga,

Mahidurga, Jaladurga, Vrikshadurga, Baladurga or Nrudurga, and Giridurga. Mentioning the necessity of the fort, Manu said that one warrior is capable of defeating hundreds of warriors from behind the fort. Therefore, it is necessary to build a fort for the security of the king, especially the kingdom. Kautilya, in his State Security Management, said that forts should be built in the centre of the state and around the state. He speaks of four types of durgas:

Audaka Durga (surrounded by water on all four sides, looking like a delta)
 Parvata Durga (made of rocks)
 Dhanvana Durga (surrounded by desert), and
 Vana Durga (surrounded by forests).

5.Kosha (The Treasury): The Kosha and the Army were the two 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 a kosha. He considers money as the blood that makes the state-run. The treasury is the foundation of the state, so the most important element of the state is the kosha because all the functions of the state depend on money. The main source of the treasury is Rajkar. The treasury will be full of gold, silver, gems, and cash so that there is no difficulty in times of crisis in the state, i.e. all the dangers of the state can be overcome.

According to Kautilya, the king will collect all the wealth fairly and lawfully. He was very careful about protecting the treasury. He said that several warehouses and granaries would be set up to store the collected goods. A royal official who was called 'sannidhya' and a 'collector' who would ascend properly to collect the revenue would protect the goods. To increase the resources, the king was supposed to augment the wealth of the whole rastra, encourage all kinds of production, promote trade and commerce, collect taxes in time, etc. The koshaadhyaksh was not supposed to violate the rules regarding the collection of state taxes. He was not supposed to make any mistakes regarding the handling of state taxes .

6.Danda (Army or Force) : The sixth limb of the state mentioned by Kautilya is the Bala or Army. It is considered one of the main organs of the state. It is hardly necessary to labour the point that a strong army is essential for the existence and security of a state. Kautilya, while referring to the qualities of soldiers, has observed that they should be valiant warriors, tolerant, well-versed in the art of war, and loyal to the king. He has also mentioned that there should be a maximum number of Kshatriyas in the army (Singh, 2005, p. 110). They should be recruited permanently. The soldiers should be strong, obedient, and not averse to a long expedition, have the power of endurance, and 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 and 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.

7.Mitra (Ally or Friend): The last limb, Mitra or Ally of the seven limbs, is a very important element for the protection of the kingdom. In Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, we find mention of four types of allies, namely Samarth, Bhajman or Loyal, Relative, and Artificial. Out of these, loyal and relative allies are the best. However, in the Mahabharata's peacetime, Bhishma says that there are no permanent allies or non-allies in politics; everything is relative. It depends on the space-time-pot (Prabir Kumar De, 2021, p. 14). There are also four types of allies known in Kamanadakiya Nitisar, namely, putra-putradi, i.e. ally by birth, ally by marriage, ally by heredity, and ally who saves from various dangers. Signs of a friend in love with a friend.

According to Kautilya, there are four types of allies: hereditary allies, unconditional allies, non-discriminatory allies, and great allies. Inter-state relations depend on all these. To measure the power of a state, it is necessary to measure the power of the state as well as the power of the ally. In this context, Kautilya has come up with several concepts, such as Mandal Theory, Shadgunya Theory (six methods of foreign policy), Three Types of State, Four Ways, and Diplomatic Institutions. It is through these ideas that the real political reality of Kautilya is identified .

CURRENT RELEVANCE :

At present, we see that to establish good governance, it is necessary to bring welfare to the citizens of the country. At the heart of this good governance is the responsibility and duty of the state or the king and the administrative department to meet all the needs of the common people. The administration was always aware of various strategies to maintain transparency and dynamism, which were essential for good governance, and the king had to be held accountable for the work of the departments. From this, it is clear that Kautilya is very skilled in establishing good governance.

Kautilya created his politics completely secular. In ancient India, the secular character of this state bears the hallmark of modernity. Although Kautilya had a prominent role as a political priest and was merely a consultant, the king played the main role in the state. Even today, almost 75 years after India's independence, how secular politics is conducted is extremely endangered as an Indian nation, so one of the tools to get rid of it is to separate religion from secular politics. Kautilya has been able to do this work skillfully for a long time, which carries the identity of modernity.

Kautilya's concept can be compared with the modern concept of the state. In Kautilya's theory, the Swami is the supreme executive authority, responsible for coordination, policy-making, and the stability of the state. In contemporary India, sovereignty is constitutionally vested in the people, but executive power is exercised through elected leadership, primarily the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, who operate under parliamentary accountability. As the head of the executive branch, the Prime Minister performs many functions similar to those of the king. However, the modern executive is constrained by several important factors, such as the constitution, parliamentary oversight, judicial review, and the federal distribution of powers. This transformation reflects a shift from personal sovereignty to institutional sovereignty, yet the functional necessity of effective leadership remains unchanged. Kautilya's emphasis on the ruler prioritizing public welfare (*praja-sukha*) is consistent with the constitutional commitment to justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Thus, although the form of power has changed, the functional relevance of the Swami as the executive leadership remains intact.

The Amatya in Kautilya's framework most closely resembles the Indian bureaucratic system, which includes the civil services (IAS, IPS, IFS), regulatory bodies, and cabinet administration. Kautilya's detailed instructions regarding the appointment, training, supervision, and accountability of officials foreshadow many modern principles of public administration. The enduring relevance of the Amatya lies in the recognition that the state capacity depends on administrative integrity, which remains a central challenge for the Indian state.

Kautilya mentions one element of *janapada* that includes population and territory. It shows that Kautilya covers the modern two elements, territory and population, in one element. It corresponds to the geographical, demographic, and socio-economic foundations of the Indian state. The constitutional recognition of fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy reflects a moral institutionalisation of Kautilya's concern for the welfare of the subjects. While Kautilya grounded welfare within the framework of pragmatic state interests, modern India has placed it within a rights-based framework. Therefore, the *Janapada* remains a crucial conceptual perspective for understanding how the people and the land constitute the fundamental basis of the state's power.

Kautilya's concept of *Durga* (fortress) is consistent with modern statecraft, which emphasizes territorial integrity and infrastructural development. India's investments in highways, railways, digital infrastructure, and border security reflect this timeless principle. Moreover, internal security challenges such as insurgency, terrorism, and cyber threats underscore the continued relevance of *Durga*, not merely as a physical structure, but as a symbol of governance and resilience.

Kautilya's emphasis on a strong treasury (*Kosha*) as the foundation of governance remains highly relevant to contemporary concerns regarding economic growth and public expenditure. In modern India, economic governance is subject to democratic accountability and macroeconomic constraints. Nevertheless, Kautilya's fundamental insight remains valid. Economic strength is the bedrock of political sovereignty and administrative effectiveness.

Danda represents the coercive power necessary for maintaining law, order, and external defence. The fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, judicial oversight, civilian control

of the military, national security challenges, border disputes, and internal conflicts continuously underscore the importance of Danda in maintaining the balance of the state.

The concept of Mitra resonates strongly in India's contemporary foreign policy. Kautilya's emphasis on strategic, interest-based alliances rather than permanent friendships aligns closely with the modern realist approach to international relations. It reflects Kautilya's understanding of diplomacy as a core element of statecraft. The pursuit of strategic autonomy, combined with flexible alliances, reflects the adaptability and pragmatism emphasized in the Arthashastra. Thus, the concept of Mitra remains a powerful conceptual tool for understanding India's external relations in a multipolar world.

CONCLUSION :

This study has evaluated the relevance of Kautilya's 'Saptanga theory' of the state in the context of the contemporary Indian state. Instead of being merely a relic of ancient monarchical rule, the 'Saptanga theory' emerges as a systematic and holistic theory of statecraft. It is based on institutional interdependence, administrative rationality, economic viability, and strategic realism. This study has demonstrated that the enduring value of the 'Saptanga theory' lies not in its historical form, but in its functional logic. It transcends temporal and institutional boundaries. In the context of Indian political discourse, this study re-establishes the importance of engaging with indigenous intellectual traditions.

In conclusion, it can be said that territory, military power, skilled bureaucrats, a well-planned economy, close powerful allies, etc., are prerequisites for the success of any state in the modern age. It is an elemental ground for the expansion of the social duties of the people. Kautilya's 'Saptanga theory' is of modern quality. Many instructive issues are still awaiting implementation from the state administration described by Kautilya. We can call his state system benevolent, dutiful, secular, and good governance. Kautilya's philosophy is still a role model even in present-day India, but the applicability differs in modern society. One cannot completely criticize or repulse the ideas of Chanakya, as it is one of the leading factors for the adoption of new policies and regulations for the contemporary state. Therefore, revisiting Kautilya's 'Saptanga theory' is not an outdated practice, but rather establishes a meaningful connection with one of the deepest traditions of contemporary Indian political thought.

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