

Environmental conservation in Kautilya Arthashastra

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Abstract

Since the beginning of civilization, mankind has lived in a competitive relationship with nature. His relentless pursuit of progress, comfort and security has resulted in tremendous stress on environment. Unlike the present day piecemeal and adhoc approach to solve the issue of environmental problems, ancient Indian environment consciousness was holistic in its approach. Among the ancient Indian texts, Kautilya Arthashastra is very pragmatic as Kautilya considered conservation of environment and ecology as integral part of human living and enforced strict legal provisions for the defaulters. In this papers we will make efforts to highlight the provisions made in Kautilya Arthashastra and their relevance in present context.

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Introduction

In consequence of rapid industrialization, advancement of science and technology increased population, urbanization, deforestation, indiscriminate utilization of natural resources etc. and abandoning of traditional practices to preserve and conserve natural resources by the people in modern times have resulted in environmental degradation. India has an ancient traditional philosophy of protecting and promoting environment. The Vedic seers inculcated spirit of duty and reverence for the presence of holiness and harmony in nature. Many customary or community practices were evolved by the ancestors to protect the environment. The flora and fauna, hills, mountains, rivers were worshiped as symbols of veneration. The cutting of trees, polluting air, water, and land were regarded as sins and they were to be respected as associated with gods and goddesses. Long before ecological concerns became a global phenomenon, India had developed a noble practice of the sensible use and judicious conservation of all environmental resources useful to human beings. The Indians were first amongst other countries to show their reverence to natural

elements with religious beliefs. Such endless devotion to the nature continued unabated for the past so many generations. The priceless and valuable natural resources were protected and conserved.

In Manusmriti there were provisions of self-punishment for damaging the system of biodiversity [1]. The Mouryan period is considered as the most glorious chapter of Indian History from environment protection point of view. It was in this period we find detailed preventive measures inscribed in Kautilya Arthashastra [2]. The Arthashastra also prescribed punishments for causing pollution and uncivic sanitation [3].

In medieval period, there were some instances of establishment of magnificent gardens and fruit orchards and green park by the Moghal rulers around their places and along banks of rivers but they did not have any definite policy to protect the forest or wild life. Basically they considered forest as a good source of revenue [4]. During the time of the British, the formulated laws were inadequate. It is often criticized that the British government also adopted legislative measures towards earning revenue only, however it may be regarded as a primary step towards environmental protection and conservation of natural resources in British India [5, 6].

The Kautilya Arthashastra Context

In this paper we intend to describe some important facts given in Kautilya Arthashastra for conservation of environment and ecology in the present context. Kautilya Arthashastra an Indian ancient treatise provides a lot of knowledge about environment and its conservation. It describes in details the maintenance of public sanitation and

preservation of the environment, forest and wildlife and the laws enforced at that time. Kautilya was very much concerned about all the related problems. Kautilya laid down that it should be the DHARM (moral duty) of each individual in the society to protect nature. We will quote few examples from Arthashastra to show the concerns of Kautilya about various scheme of welfare of human and protection of nature in this paper:

(i) Protection of Plant Parts and Plants:

Kautilya stated that if any one collects flower and fruits from flower garden or fruit orchard one is to pay 54 panas* as fine. Similarly, when one gathers leafy vegetables, root crops) and corms from crop field, a fine of 51 panas should be levied on him/her. For collecting crop from paddy field one is to pay a fine of 53 panas. For plucking flowers, fruits, and cutting young twig of shady trees in the parks in and around city, the offender shall give to pay a fine of 6 panas. For lopping young branch of a tree a fine of 12 panas should be imposed, and if a thick branch is cut, the amount of fine will be 24 panas. One is to be punished with the first amercement for cutting off the trunk of a tree and for felling a tree the punishment will be the middle penalty. If the shrubs and climbers, which "bear flowers, fruits and provide shade, are cut, the penalties will be half of the above fines. If the trees of places of pilgrimage, forests of hermits and cremation grounds are cut, the same penalties will be inflicted on the offenders. If the trees, situated on boundaries, a pile of stones forming a landmark or a sacrificial shed or a place of religious worship or in a royal forest are assaulted, the amount of fine will be double of the above. Further, he enjoins that, if any one

sets fire to a forest of timber yielding trees, pasture, crop field, yards prepare for threshing out grains or forest of elephants, one should be above. If one steals cattle, grazing animals, birds, or wild animals captured in traps or fences or pits covered with grasses, the offender has to return the respective animals and must also pay a fine equal to the value of the stolen animal. If one steals a mahapasu, either the legs of the offender will be cut or that person has to pay a fine of 600 panas.

(ii) Sanitation:

Kautilya was very particular about sanitation. The owner of every house has to ensure that drains must be clean to allow free flow of wastewater, drain water should not be allowed to flow through the neighbour's property, nor water should stagnate near the wall of neighbor's house. Particularly during rainy season, the drains must be free from obstacles. If any Impediments are caused for the movement of wastewater, it invites greater punishments. Kautilya's regulations of cleanliness extended to stables. Water shall not be allowed to stagnate. The surroundings of holy places water sources, temples and government offices must be kept clean; they should not be contaminated by urination etc. Violation of these rules was punishable.

(iii) Pollution

In ancient India, there were no exhaust fumes, no chimney smoke to pollute the air, nor industrial wastes and no underground drainage to spoil water courses. Lacking modern aids to disinfection, etc. as the ancients were, they could see that they had to pay attention to the maintenance of purity of water and air. Kautilya in his Arthashastra, refers to sundry trades among which figure mining, smelting,

making of metal work coins, and ornaments, and brewing of alcoholic drinks. All these would involve contamination of the air by smoke and fumes; but perhaps the scale was small that it could be neglected. If pollution of air was not much of a problem for people in Kautilya's day, pollution of water surely was. Provisions were made to keep streams and other sources of water absolutely clean and uncontaminated and for Waste disposal. Kautilya introduced new methods of pollution control and formed laws to punish people who did against it. His belief in pollution control was appropriate to his concept of 'Welfare Nation'.

(iv) Hygiene

In the Arthashastra of Kautilya, we can find very strict rules for hygiene, some of which we do not find even in modern society. People had to pay fines of throwing dirt on the road and for blocking it with dirty water. People had to pay fines for passing urine at public places. Proper arrangements were made for the disposal of dead bodies. About market regulations, just to point out that it was an offence to sell foul-smelling meat, for which the seller had to pay a fine. All these rules reflect the strict case of public health and hygiene by the state.

(v) Natural Calamity

Kautilya was aware of various types of natural calamities like, fire, flood, disease, famine, rats, wild animals, serpents and evil spirits. and well. Kautilya' perception for disaster management is worth noting. Prevention of fire is explained in 'Rules for the City Superintendent' and in Rules for the Royal Residences and prescribed in Slokas [II/36/(15-220)], for Prevention of Flood Hazards in Slokas [IV/3/(6-9)], for Famine

Hazards in sloka [IV/3/17] *etc.* Kautilya also advised the worship of fire, rivers lord of Suci (in case of draught) Ganga and Mountains [7,8].

Conclusion

It is clear from above facts and writings of Kautilya that King Ashoka's rule was the foremost ecologically responsible statehood in ancient history of India. We should also understand that in Kautilya's time moral teaching was not enough to prevent people from damaging the eco-system of the nature but punitive measures were enforced against the defaulters. Today the environmental problems are growing rapidly due to fast industrialization, advancement of science and technology, increased population, urbanization, deforestation, indiscriminate utilization of natural resources etc. In due course of development of humanity through ages, the human has detached themselves from nature. He has become accustomed of comfortable life style, wants to be more powerful and have become greedy too. The modern society is becoming rational and it believes in science and logic leaving no place

for spirituality and love for nature. In present circumstances, there is no doubt that ancient texts may not help us today in solving specific environmental and ecological problems, but inspire us to find out ways and means to maintain harmonious relation with nature.

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