



THREE DIMENSIONS OF KAUTILYA'S FORESTS

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Abstract: India's heritage includes *Arthaśāstra*, written by *Kautilya*, more than 2,000 years ago. It speaks of varied topics associated with a country's governance. One of the themes that the ancient work discusses is forests. We can identify at least three dimensions, viz. education, economics, and security, in the forest-related statements of *Kautilya*, spread over different chapters. This paper attempts to delineate these dimensions.

Keywords: *Arthaśāstra*, *Kautilya*, forest, economics

INTRODUCTION

Arthaśāstra, as a Sanskrit word, means the science of wealth. It is in this sense that one comes across *Kumbhakarna* speaking his mind out to *Rāvaṇa*, his brother, in *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*. The work *Arthaśāstra*, by *Kautilya*, also known as *Cāṇakya* and *Vishṇuguptā*, dating back to the second century BC, is a treatise on political science, written for his king, *Chandragupta Maurya*.

Arthaśāstra runs to six thousand slokas, in hundred and eighty sections, grouped in one hundred and fifty chapters, which make the fifteen books. The slokas are in the nature of statements rather than verses. Domains covered by *Kautilya* range from secret service to property inheritance, from judiciary to agriculture, displaying the width and depth of the author's knowledge. His statements about forests are the focus of this paper.

FORESTS, EVER GREEN

Forests have always captured the imagination of writers, across the world. For instance, a fort is one that has everlasting water, plains, mountains and cool shady forests, says *Tiruvalluvar*. *Shakespeare* speaks of "skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat," in *As You Like It*. *Kālidāsa's Raghuvanṣa* describes forests as "robes of fresh green" on the earth. He opens *Abhijñānaśākuntala* with King *Dusyanta*, a great hero, hunting in the forest.

Rāmāyaṇa mentions many forests such as *Tāṭakā*, *Citrakūṭa*, *Daṇḍakāranya* and *Pañcavati*. *Pushkara* forest finds mention in *Padma Purāṇa*. *Naimiśāranya* forest finds mention in *Mahābhārata* and many other works. *Madhuvana* forest, on the banks of the river *Yamunā*, is mentioned in *Srimad Bhāgavatam* where *Dhruva* did intense penance. *Hitopadeśa* instructs that the medicinal plant which grows in the forest far off does so much of good to us.

DIMENSION ONE, EDUCATION

Education of yore happened in *gurukul-s*, where the teachers and the students lived in the forests. Students were exposed to forests at a young age and the *Rṣi-s* in the forests were respected by the kings. So much so, the elementary royal education was under the tutelage of *Rṣi-s*. *Arthaśāstra* insists on learning for the prince too, because the study of sciences is possible only by those who have obedience, listening, grasping, retentive memory, discrimination, inference and deliberation.

Vana or forest was integral in life cycle management. Indian philosophy traces individual life as a journey through four *Āśram-s*, viz., *brahmacharya* or the period of studentship, *grhaṣṭha* or the stage of the householder, *vānaprastha* or the stage of the forest-dweller or hermit, and *sanyāsa* or the life of renunciation or asceticism. To the student who began education in the forest *gurukul*, the *vana* again is important in *vānaprastha*, the third stage.

DIMENSION TWO, ECONOMICS

This dimension is discussed elaborately in *Arthaśāstra*.

- To *Kauṭilya*, forest was a main source of revenue. Hence, when describing the excellences of a country, he includes, “wild animals, deer and forest tribes, charming, endowed with agricultural land, mines, material forests and elephant forests.”
- In Book 2, the king is required to protect produce forests, elephant-forests, irrigation works and mines that were made already and should start new ones.
- Accordingly, the king should establish forests, separately for the products indicated as forest produce, as well as factories for goods made from forest produce, and settle foresters, attached to the produce-forests.

मूलम् - पशु-मृग-द्रव्य-हस्ति-वन-परिग्रहो वनम्॥ (2.6.6)

Transliteration - *Paśu-mṛga-dravya-hasti-vana-parigraho vanam* (2.6.6)

Meaning - ‘Forest’ constitutes enclosures for beasts, deer-parks, forests for produce and elephant forests (2.6.6):

मूलम् - तत्रारण्यो ग्राम्यः पार्वत औदको भौमः समो विषम इति विशेषाः॥ (9.1.19).

Transliteration - *tatrāraṇyo grāmyah pārvata audako bhaumah samo viṣama iti višeṣāḥ* (9.1.19).

Meaning - Land is classified as forests, villages, waterfalls, mountainous, dry level plains, and uneven grounds (9.1.19).

मूलम् - कृषि-पशुपाल्ये वणिज्या च वार्ताए धार्य-पशु-हिरण्य-कुप्य-विष्टिप्रदानात् औपकारिकी॥(1.4.1)

Transliteration - *krṣi-paśupālye vanijyā ca vārtā, dhārya-paśu-hiranya-kupya-viṣṭipradānāt aupakārikī* (1.4.1)

Meaning - Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade constitute economics; they are beneficial, as they yield grains, cattle, money, forest produce and labour (1.4.1).

मूलम् - समाहर्ता दुर्ग राष्ट्र खनि सेरु वनं व्रजं वणिक्पथं चावेक्षेत॥(2.6.1)

Transliteration - *samāhārtā durgān rāṣṭram khaniṁ setum vanam vrajam vanikpatham cāvekṣeta* (2.6.1)

Meaning - The Administrator has to attend to the fort, the country, mines, irrigation works, forests, herds and trade-routes (2.6.1).

मूलम् - द्रव्य-हस्ति-वनाजीवं वर्तनी चोर-रक्षणम्। सार्थतिवाहां गोरक्ष्यं व्यवहारं च कारयेत्॥(2.34.12)

Transliteration - *dravya-hasti-vanājīvam-vartanīm cora-rakṣaṇam* sārthātivāhyām gorakṣyām vyavahāram ca kārayet (2.34.12)

Meaning - Duties of the superintendent of pasture lands include the ensuring of the livelihood of those in produce forests and elephant forests (2.34.12).

मूलम् - संनिधाता कोशगृहं पण्यगृहं कोष्ठागारं कुप्यगृहमायुधागारं बन्धनागारं च कारयेत्॥ (2.5.1)

Transliteration - *saṁnidhātā kośagrhaṁ panyagrhaṁ koṣṭhāgaram kupyagrhaṁayudhāgaram bandhanāgaram ca kārayet* (2.5.1)

Meaning - The Director of Stores has to build a store for forest produce, apart from treasury, warehouse, godown, Slaughterhouse, armoury and prison-house (2.5.1).

• Interestingly, included in the 40 types of embezzlement are, “forest produce for which the price has not been paid is delivered, that for which the price has been paid is not delivered.”

• As a master of institutionalising checks and balances, *Kauṭilya* requires the Master of the Armoury to be aware of fraud (if practised), gain, loss and expenditure of (the various types of) forest produce.

• Weights and measures were standardised for products. For instance, fifty-four *angula-s* make a *hasta* for (measuring) forest produce.

मूलम् -

कुप्याध्यक्षो द्रव्य-वनपालैः कुप्यमानाययेत्॥

द्रव्य-वन-कर्मान्ताश्च प्रयोजयेत्॥

द्रव्यवनच्छिदां च देयमत्ययं च स्थापयेत् अन्यत्रापद्ध्यः॥(2.17.1-3).

Transliteration -

kupyādhyakṣo dravya-vanapālaiḥ kupyamānāyayet (2.17.1-3)

dravya-vana-karmāntāṁśca prayojayet

dravyavanacchidām ca deyamatyayam ca sthāpayet anyatrāpadbhyaḥ (2.17.1-3).

Meaning - The director of forest produce is responsible for bringing in forest produce by the guards, starting factories for forest produce, and fixing dues from those cutting produce forests (2.17.1-3).

मूलम् - कुप्यवर्गः शाकतिनिश-धन्वनार्जुन-मधूकतिलक-साल-शिंशापारिमेद-राजादन-शिरीष-खदिर-सरल-ताल-सर्जीश्वकर्ण-सोमवल्क-कुशाम्र-प्रियक-धवादि: सारदारुवर्गः॥(2.17.4)

kupyavarga:- śākatiniśa-dhanvanārjuna-madhūkatalaka-sāla-śiṁśapārimeda-rājādana-śirīṣa-khadira-sarala-tāla-sarjīśvakaṇa-somavalka-kuśāmra-priyaka-dhvavādih sāradāruvargaḥ (2.17.4)

Meaning - Forest produce is grouped under various heads, depending on the material, such as hard wood, reeds, creepers, fibre-plants, and metals. *Arthaśāstra* enumerates materials for ropes, useful leaves, flowers, medicinal plants, poisons, as well as the utility of skin, bones, bile, tendons, eyes, teeth, horns, hooves and tails of a host of animals (2.17.4).

• The strategic strength of material forests is explained thus:

मूलम् -

द्रव्य-वनयोरपि यो महसारवद् द्रव्याटवीकं विषयान्ते नदी-मातुकं द्रव्यवनं छेदयति सोऽतिसंधते॥

नदीमातृकं हि स्वाजीवमपाश्रयश्च आपदि भवति॥ (7.12.6-7)

Transliteration -

dravya-vanayorapi yo mahatsāravad dravyāṭavīkam viṣayānte nadīmātṛkam dravyavanam chedayati so'tisamdhatte (7.12.6-7)

nadīmātṛkam hi svājīvamapāśrayaśca āpadibhavati (7.12.6-7)

Meaning - Of timber forests, which is large and produces valuable articles, expands into wild tracts, and possesses a river on its border overreaches the other, for a forest containing a river is self-dependent and can afford easy means of livelihood and becomes a shelter in calamities. (7.12.6-7)

DIMENSION THREE, SECURITY

Elephant forests were of strategic importance to Kauṭilya.

मूलम् -

शक्यं द्रव्यवनम् अनेकम् अनेकस्यां भूमौ वापयितुम् न हस्तिवनम्॥
हस्तिप्रधानो हि परानीकवध इति॥ (7.11.15-16).

Transliteration -

śakyam dravyavanam anekam anekasyām bhūmau vāpayitum, na hastivanam
hastipradhāno hi parānīkavadha iti (7.11.15-16)

Meaning - It is possible to plant many material forests in many tracts of land, not so an elephant forest, because the destruction of an enemy's forces is principally dependent on elephants (7.11.15-16).

In designated forests, elephants were trained. While discussing the six measures of foreign policy, Book 7 has a debate on whether it is good to have dull or brave elephants. 'As between one with many but dull (elephants) and one with few but brave, the one with few but brave elephants is preferable; for, on the brave depends the fight; the few brave rout the many dull, (and) those routed become the destroyers of their own troops,' say the teachers, but *Kauṭilya* says, 'No.' The many dulls are preferable; because of their use in the army, they carry out many tasks, become the refuge of their own troops in battle and unassailable and frightful to the enemies; for, to the many dulls, bravery can be imparted by means of training, but numerosness cannot be created at all in the few brave, he argues.

Forests were also among the venues for intelligence-gathering. The king depended on the forest chieftain to be a spy in his own territory.

मूलम् -

वने वनचरा: कार्यः श्रमणाटविकादयः।
परप्रवृत्तिज्ञानार्थः शीघ्राश्वरपरंपराः॥ (1.12.23).

Transliteration -

vane vanacarāḥ kāryāḥ śramaṇāṭavikādayah
parapravṛtti-jñānārthāḥ śīghrāścāra-paramparāḥ॥ (1.12.23).

Meaning - In the forest should be placed forest-dwellers (such as) monks, foresters and others, – a series of spies, quick in their work, to find out news of (the activity of) the enemy, advises *Kauṭilya* (1.12.23).

Coups can be facilitated by forest chieftains, as remarked:

मूलम् -

तत्रस्थः कोशदण्डसंपन्नः प्रवीरपुरुषकन्यासंबन्धम् अटवीसंबन्धं कृत्यपक्षोपग्रहं च कुर्यात्॥1.18.7

Transliteration -

tatrasṭhah kośa-dandasaṃpannah pravīra-puruṣa-kanyā-saṃbandham atavīsaṃbandham krtyapakṣopagraham ca kuryāt॥1.18.7

Meaning - "Staying there and becoming enriched with treasure and troops, he should enter into marriage relations with heroic men, make contacts with forest chieftains and win over seducible parties (from his father's kingdom)." 1.18.7

CONCLUSION

Inch wide but mile deep is how one can describe *Kauṭilya*'s *Arthaśāstra*. While the attempt of the paper was to showcase the breadth of *Arthaśāstra*'s coverage about forests, as a sampler, it would be of value to posterity if we engage in deeper analysis of the many topics and sub-topics spoken of by *Kauṭilya*, and draw insights for managing contemporary challenges.

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