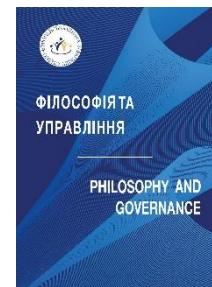




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Kautilya's Arthashastra: Modern Actualization of Non-European Political Thought

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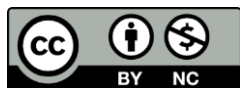
ABSTRACT

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Kautilya's Arthashastra is one of the oldest and most systematic treatises on political philosophy that was formed within the framework of the Indian tradition and offers an alternative to Western political thinking. The results of the study show that Arthashastra's ideas remain relevant for modern theories of public administration, corporate management and international relations. They offer alternative approaches to strategic planning, governance ethics, and economic policy that can be useful in the context of globalization. In addition, the analysis highlights the importance of the text for decolonizing political thought and finding non-Western development models. The treatise covers several topical units: internal governance, economic control, intelligence, law, foreign policy (the well-known Mandala principle) and governance ethics. Arthashastra combines pragmatism with moral principles, offering a unique model of effective but controlled power. In modern conditions, these ideas take on a new meaning. As an interest in non-European traditions of state thinking is growing, especially in the context of global decolonization of knowledge. The reinterpretation of Kautilya's teachings is relevant both for analyzing modern Indian politics and for a broader understanding of the principles of realism, governance and security in the world outside the Western paradigm. The main task is to study the political philosophy of Kautilya's Arthashastra, outline its main topical units, and determine how these ideas are reinterpreted in the context of modern politics. The study is based on a set of methods, including historical and philosophical analysis, political methodology (in particular, the theory of political realism and neo-institutional analysis), content analysis of texts, comparative method and interdisciplinary approach. The results of the study show that Arthashastra is not only a historical document, but also a valuable source of practical ideas for modern society. Its study contributes to expansion of scientific discourse, integrating classical Indian thought into global political and economic theories.

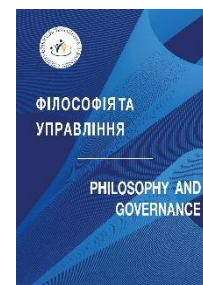
KEYWORDS

Arthashastra, Kautilya, political philosophy, philosophical and political teachings of India, pragmatism in governance.



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Артгашафра Каутільї: сучасна актуалізація неєвропейської політичної думки

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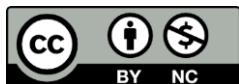
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Артгашафра Каутільї — один із найдавніших і найсистемніших трактатів з політичної філософії, що сформувався в межах індійської традиції й несе альтернативу західному політичному мисленню. Результати дослідження демонструють, що ідеї Артгашафри залишаються актуальними для сучасних теорій державного управління, корпоративного менеджменту та міжнародних відносин. Вони пропонують альтернативні підходи до стратегічного планування, етики влади та економічної політики, які можуть бути корисними в умовах глобалізації. Крім того, аналіз підкреслює значення тексту для деколонізації політичної думки та пошуку незахідних моделей розвитку. Трактат охоплює низку тематичних блоків: внутрішнє управління, контроль над економікою, розвідка, право, зовнішня політика (відомий принцип мандали) та етика правління. Артгашафра поєднує прагматизм із моральними засадами, пропонуючи унікальну модель ефективної, але контрольованої влади. У сучасних умовах ці ідеї набувають нового звучання. Оскільки зростає інтерес до неєвропейських традицій державного мислення, особливо в контексті глобальної деколонізації знань. Переосмислення вчення Каутільї актуальне як для аналізу сучасної політики Індії, так і для ширшого розуміння принципів реалізму, управління та безпеки у світі поза західною парадигмою. Головне завдання — дослідити політичну філософію Артгашафри Каутільї, окреслити її основні тематичні блоки, а також визначити, як ці ідеї переосмислюються в умовах сучасної політики. Дослідження ґрунтується на комплексі методів, включаючи історико-філософський аналіз, політологічну методологію (зокрема теорію політичного реалізму та неінституційний аналіз), контент-аналіз текстів, компаративний метод та міждисциплінарний підхід. Висновки дослідження свідчать, що «Артгашафра» є не лише історичним документом, але й цінним джерелом практичних ідей для сучасного суспільства. Її вивчення сприяє розширенню наукового дискурсу, інтегруючи класичну індійську думку в глобальні політичні та економічні теорії.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

Артгашафра, Каутілья, політична філософія, філософсько-політичні вчення Індії, прагматизм в управлінні.

1. Introduction

Classical texts can profoundly influence the consciousness of many generations, while maintaining their relevance far beyond the time and context in which they were created. Despite their origin from a specific historical and cultural environment, the problems they raise are often universal in nature. Arthashastra is an example of such a text that focuses on the concept of “political” in non-Western discourse. Its analysis provides access to alternative ways of understanding politics and introduces unique epistemological practices formed in specific geo-cultural contexts.

Resorting to non-Western classics plays an important role in the process of intellectual emancipation, contributing to recognition and legitimization of various learning styles. The study of such works as Arthashastra becomes a tool for decolonizing knowledge and expanding the analytical horizons of modern science.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is an ancient Indian treatise that serves as a comprehensive guide on politics, economics, and military strategy. It is a valuable source that exposes functioning of political and social institutions in ancient India, demonstrating the high level of complexity of public administration and economic thought of the time. It has gained recognition for its in-depth analysis of public administration mechanisms, building political institutions, and conducting international politics. Even though the treatise was created more than two millennia ago, its provisions remain significant today, while maintaining practical value in the fields of leadership, administration, diplomacy and conflict resolution.

2. Literature Review

The study is based on analysis of the text of Arthashastra in the translation by Shamasastri and contemporary scientific papers covering various aspects of Kautilya's teachings – from political realism [2; 15] to economics [12; 13] and corporate governance [14]. Important emphasis is placed on sources that explore the relevance of Arthashastra's ideas in modern contexts, in particular in governance [3], ethics [4], and political philosophy [10]. The analysis is complemented by materials from Indian mass media [7] and international research platforms [11], which implies an interdisciplinary approach to the topic.

3. Problem Statement

Purpose of the article is to explore the political philosophy of Kautilya's Arthashastra, outline its main topical units, and determine how these ideas are reinterpreted in the context of modern politics.

4. Methods and Materials

This study is based on a set of methods aimed at a comprehensive analysis of Arthashastra's ideas and their relevance in modern political, economic and social discourse. The main approaches are as follows: historical and philosophical analysis (allowed tracing the evolution of Kautilya's political thought, identify its connection with the traditions of ancient Indian philosophy and compare it with other classical concepts (for example, “Bhagavad Gita” and “Laws of Manu”). The applied political science methodology allowed identifying parallels with modern theories of political realism. Content analysis and comparative method are used to consider the political and philosophical ideas of the treatise and the possibility of keeping them current in present-day politics. Combined economic [3; 12], philosophical [4] and managerial [14] analyses through an interdisciplinary approach are used to comprehensively understand the impact of Arthashastra on various areas of society's life. The chosen methods are relevant because they allow not only to reconstruct the historical context, but also to reveal the practical application of classical ideas in modern conditions of globalization, decolonization of knowledge and search for alternative models of development. In particular, comparative and interdisciplinary approaches help integrate Indian political thought into the global scientific discourse, offering new perspectives for addressing current challenges.

5. Results and Discussion

Consideration of the main themes and ideas of Arthashastra is necessary not only to understand this text in its historical context, but also to help find an analytical tool for identifying its significance and impact on the modern political culture of India. First, it allows identifying epistemological practices that arise within specific geo-cultural contexts and provides the possibility to more fully assess the significance of non-Western intellectual traditions that form alternative paradigms of understanding the world. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the philosophical foundations and unique conceptual categories laid down in the text itself. Secondly, even though Arthashastra was formed in the pre-modern period, the modern attempt to interpret it involves transferring some of its ideas to the context of post-Westphalian statehood. Given the millennial distance, as well as transformations that have taken place in Indian political and philosophical thought from the classical era to the present, there is a need for a critical rethinking of these ideas. Such an analysis becomes especially relevant in the era of populism, where the line between philosophical knowledge and political ideology can be extremely blurred. In this context, it is important to consider Arthashastra not only as a historical document, but also as a source that can shed light on the nature of modern Indian public thought. Can the strategic wisdom of this text contribute to understanding the intellectual foundations of modern India? The answer to this question requires preliminary consideration of the thematic content of the treatise.

5.1. Structure, History and Authorship of the Treatise

The treatise was concluded during the period of Mauryan Empire (321-185 BC) by an outstanding adviser to the emperor Chandragupta Maurya – Chanakya, also known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta. At the beginning of the text of Arthashastra, the author notes that his work is the result of generalization and harmonization of ideas that were already present in the socio-philosophical discourse of that time: “This Arthasāstra is made as a compendium of almost all the Arthasāstras, which, in view of acquisition and maintenance of the earth, have been composed by ancient teachers” [6].

Current research also points to a complex compilation process. Linguistic, stylistic and semantic analysis shows that the current text of Arthashastra is the result of editorial treatment that could have been completed much later – in the period between the II century BC and the III–IV centuries AD [8; 9; 15]. It is most likely that the text was the result of a gradual accumulation of knowledge and experience in various areas of public administration, supplemented and systematized over several centuries.

Arthashastra covers all aspects of the functioning of a centralized state relying on a pragmatic approach to power. It creates a model of the ideal ruler, capable of running a stable empire through espionage, strategy, strength, and wisdom. It consists of 15 books (*adhikaraṇas*), which together include more than 150 sections and about 6 thousand slokas (couplets) and has the following topical units.

Moral and ethical guidelines for the ruler are related to the importance of fulfilling the dharma of ruler. In general, the category of dharma is fundamental for both everyday life of every Indian and the political one. What exactly is the dharma of each individual person is determined by the Varna from birth, the stage of life (*āśrama*), gender or certain circumstances. For example, the moral choice of Prince Arjuna, which became the subject of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, is precisely related to the fulfillment of his dharma [1].

In Kautilya, dharma has a political connotation because it is the principle that ensures the functioning of society and its leadership – dharma tattvam samhitah. There are four types of dharma: Raja Dharma, Praja Dharma, Ashrama Dharma, and Varna Dharma [4, p. 113]. Accordingly, these are the duties of the king, the lieges, duties related to the stages of life (study, marriage, teaching, etc.) and duties related to social status or profession. The responsibility for fulfilling the entire set of obligations lies with the ruler. It is he who, in addition to economic or military issues, should be engaged in maintaining morality and guaranteeing justice. Thus, the sphere of public administration, starting with the ruler himself, includes the duty to observe moral norms and principles that can be defined, for example, by religious texts – the Vedas.

However, the approach to politics and public administration in Arthashastra is an example of pragmatism and rationality. The interpretation of dharma not just as an abstract moral law, but as a tool of power to stabilize the state, distinguishes this text from other texts on governance at that time. For example, Manusmriti considers the dharma as an unchangeable divine law [8].

Kautilya builds a clear hierarchy of responsibilities: from individual ethics to public policy. The highest priority is given to maintaining order, even if it requires tough or ambiguous decisions on the

part of the ruler. Today, this approach can be observed in crisis management, where the balance between ideals (e.g., human rights) and reasonable practicality (state security) requires similar flexibility. However, modern democracies, unlike Kautilya, limit such pragmatism to legal and international norms.

The fulfilment of dharma requires laying down the fundamental principles of public administration, defining the duties of the ruler, the structure of the court, managing finances, etc.

From the peculiarities of understanding dharma in the treatise also follows understanding of the ruler not as the viceroy of the gods, but as a governing manager. He must ensure order in the country and can apply harsh methods. Insufficiently cool-headed and strict ruler will be destroyed or overthrown by his enemies [2]. Therefore, he has the power to use force and coercion, aims toward benefits, including economic ones for the country, and must be careful and informed. The latter is presented in the treatise in chapters on the network of spies, their importance and functionality. In particular, these are sections from the first book, where he mentions the role of intelligence in leadership, the tenth book – about war and collecting information about the enemy, the twelfth book – the use of spies to protect against external threats, and the thirteenth book – espionage under siege [6].

Economic benefits can be obtained from rational financial management of agriculture, taxes, trade, and mines. The second book describes in detail recommendations for managing the state budget, trade, organizing agriculture, and creating state monopolies [6]. However, further we see how economic relations are regulated in legal proceedings (for example, punishment for fraud) or in establishing international relations (the idea of what is now called economic sanctions). If we summarize this topical unit of Arthashastra, regulation of the economy has the following features. The role of the king is to control and coordinate the work of the official apparatus. In other words, the state authorities have great powers and interfere in economic management at various levels. But such “individual dependence” on the state is compensated by obligations to protect and support the population. This can be assistance during lean years, as well as taking care of ports, roads, forests – ensuring infrastructure and protecting the environment. Finally, Arthashastra emphasizes the importance of fair and moderate taxation which should not exhaust business entities. Ideally, tax increases should be slow and nonviolent.

The treatise contains instructions and recommendations for managers who nowadays belong to various branches of legal science: criminal and civil law, judicial procedures, evidence, punishment. In particular, the fourth book has a chapter on combating corruption. If a person is suspected of illegally receiving funds, this should be checked with the help of a spy. And the testimony of a spy in court can be grounds for punishment for extortion of money or other acts of corruption: “If any person is found to be of foul life (gúdhajívi), a spy who is acquainted with similar avocation shall be let loose upon him” [6, p. 299].

Another important topical unit is presented by military affairs: army structure, tactics, espionage, diplomacy, war and peace. The ruler is the guardian. Therefore, he must stop the attackers and protect his subjects. However, diplomacy is defined as a higher priority method. That is, if the situation is favorable, preference is given to negotiations. Therefore, the seventh book “Concerning a Powerful Enemy” defines six ways of conducting foreign policy: conclusion of treaties, demonstration of power (mobilization or strategic deployment of troops), open conflict or enmity, passive aggression and waiting, double play (concealment of one’s own intentions), conclusion of military alliances.

5.2. Political System of Kautilya

Analysis of the main topics of Arthashastra allows concluding that the political system described therein is based on the following principles. Some of them remain relevant today, but some are relevant only for their time and are either rejected or adapted in modern politics.

Realism and pragmatism. A pragmatic approach to public administration involves focusing on achieving real results, minimizing bureaucratic pressure, ensuring accountability, efficient use of resources, and fighting corruption. This approach is based on a combination of rational analysis of policies, flexibility of management tools and adaptability to the challenges of modernity. Kautilya emphasizes expediency, but not morality – the state must act effectively, even harshly, if the situation requires it. “Today’s leaders can learn valuable lessons from Kautilya’s Arthashastra. His emphasis on pragmatism, adaptability, and ethical governance provides a timeless guide for effective leadership. By balancing power with justice and economic strength with ethical considerations, modern leaders can navigate the complexities of governance and international relations with wisdom and foresight” [11].

Emphasizing efficiency, anti-corruption and reasonable control by the state is relevant for modern governance as well as a pragmatic approach that has been further widely developed. Because it is not

ideological, but functional, one that focuses on what works. This is an approach that recognizes the need for adaptability, institutional responsibility, and practical implementation of policies. The pragmatic model of governance has become particularly relevant in the XXI century against the backdrop of global challenges – economic crises, pandemics, wars and climate change.

Moral and efficiency in management. The ruler must ensure stability, prosperity and security of the state. The debate on whether moral governance is always effective remains open – it is one of the main challenges for modern politics. Along with rigid pragmatism, it does contain an ethical framework, which Kautilya considered necessary for stable government.

Although, at first glance, the combination of pragmatism and morality in governance sounds controversial, this contradiction is removed by the concept of dharma. The moral limitations of power are fulfillment of the dharma of Kshatriya ruler. Even a pragmatic ruler must adhere to the basic norms of justice, otherwise he will lose his legitimacy. At the same time, not only some personal qualities of the ruler and his virtues are mentioned. The fulfilment of dharma involves making socially useful decisions. Therefore, the powers of state authorities extend to various spheres of life: from international relations and foreign policy to organization of economic activities within the country or even control over natural resources. “Dharma is the moral and ethical standard that directs people, organizations, and communities towards good life. In the scripture few aspects of sustainability can be found. Kautilya emphasizes the importance of efficient resource management, including land, water, and forests. He suggests that these resources should be used judiciously and not depleted to the extent that they become unsustainable. The text discusses the idea of “Kshetra” (territory) and “Koshtha” (treasury), which implies that the state should manage its resources effectively” [3, p. 28].

Thus, the ruler is assigned social responsibility. Both morality and ethics are tools of control. It is better when the ruler is loved and respected than feared. The pragmatic justification is that popular support is cheaper than the army and maintenance of special services. Therefore, Arthashastra has instructions on the proportionality of punishment for a crime [6, III], control over local officials [6, II. 5, 9], even parts concerning protection of the environment (for example, rivers or meadows) [6, II. 1, 15, III. 9].

At the same time, a ruler who cares about the population has a positive image. And in order not to tarnish his reputation, data control and collection takes place through intermediaries, often spies. In other words, Kautilya integrates morality into a system of pragmatic government. At the same time, the ruler simultaneously looks like a virtuous and rational person. And citizens get protected against both external enemies and social ones.

If we actualize the combination of efficiency and morality of management activities presented in Arthashastra, then both rationality and balance, as well as honesty, are important for a present-day politician. Politicians who ignore social justice (even if it is cost-effective) run the risk of triggering protests. The example of “yellow vests” (gilets jaunes movement in France, 2018–2019) perfectly illustrates the main principle of Arthashastra: even economically effective decisions will fail if one ignores the moral and psychological aspect of management. The essence of the reform was to raise fuel taxes. The reason was the need to replenish the budget and the environmental initiative. However, this was not explained. The government did not point out the correlation between taxes and social benefits from the state. As a result, reforms were reduced due to protests, and the government and the president Macron undermined confidence in them [16].

Social networks expose lies, so at least limited transparency (for example, about real challenges) is more effective than complete secrecy. Therefore, “false decency” can be quickly exposed. And this will lead to the loss of political authority, and as a result – to the loss of power.

Thus, although Arthashastra emphasizes the efficiency, pragmatism and rationality of managerial activities, morality is not rejected but becomes a regulator of the ruler’s responsibility to the people. “Another key principle of Chanakya’s teachings is the importance of ethics and morality in leadership and governance. He believed that a ruler must possess moral and ethical values in order to maintain the support of the people. In the modern era, this principle can be applied to leadership in both government and corporate settings, as ethical and responsible leadership is essential for building trust and credibility with stakeholders” [7].

Centralization of power. The state described in Arthashastra is a strong centralized state with effective administration, a network of spies, and a system of punishments. Centralization of power is a necessary condition for stability, security and prosperity of the country. Such a management system has certain components. First, the ruler serves as a center of political and administrative regulation. Although his power is absolute, it is not arbitrary. After all, he follows the dharma and must support the

material well-being of citizens and is responsible for spiritual development. This means honoring religious traditions and rituals, as well as their main performers – Brahmins. The ruler is the head of all other branches of government. He controls ministries, finances, and foreign policy. The next component is the hierarchy of power structures and bureaucracy. The treatise describes the roles and functions of officials and the entire official apparatus. It also describes the reporting conditions and the system of inspections. In particular, chapter 9 “Examination of the Conduct of Government Servants” has a list of 18 government officials, their responsibilities and the need for daily reporting on their work: “THOSE who are possessed of ministerial qualifications shall, in accordance with their individual capacity, be appointed as superintendents of government departments. While engaged in work, they shall be daily examined; for men are naturally fickle-minded and like horses at work exhibit constant change in their temper. Hence the agency and tools which they make use of, the place and time of the work they are engaged in, as well as the precise form of the work, the outlay, and the results shall always be ascertained” [6, p. 90].

Control was combined with the requirements of selection for positions. Today, the system of competitive selection to fill vacant positions is a common practice. For example, the European Personnel Selection Office is transparent, standardized and based on the principles of meritocracy, equal opportunities and impartiality [5]. Certainly, given the historical, cultural, and social conditions, the selection in EPSO and India during the Mauryan rule are very different. Arthashastra imposes restrictions on the ability to hold certain positions due to Varna’s affiliation, social status, personal affection of the ruler or recommendations of people close to him. However, a common feature will be the presence of criteria for the candidate and the need to pass exams. For the EU, this is a standardized testing, and for ancient India, it was a knowledge of the Vedas and the Vedic canon.

Social control was provided not only by reporting, but also by a network of spies. Above we have already mentioned the importance of this method of supervision over both officials and ordinary people.

Economic governance. The treatise describes how the state should organize the management of the economy to achieve stability, prosperity and social order. This is one of the oldest examples of a systematic approach to public administration of the economy. Kautilya stands for active participation of the state in economic life. It is the state that owns key resources – land, mines, forests, crafts. It also controls pricing to prevent speculation. While there is a public sector of economy, at the same time the private sector (especially small businesses) is supported. The tax system was flexible to support and develop various industries – trade, agriculture, crafts. Taxes were set depending on the crop, income, employment, etc. [12, p. 93].

Kautilya formulated the following basic principles of effective administration: rationality of decision-making, i.e., decisions should be based on analysis and benefit; planning and long-term perspective – the state should have strategies in case of drought, wars, and poverty.

The ideas of financial management, taxation, trade and economic control correlate with modern state approaches to market regulation. “Chanakya’s work can also be used to illustrate several aspects of economics emphasized in modern economics such as the principal-and-agent problem, information asymmetry, Urban-bias, principles of taxation, the importance of national income accounting and census data, the importance of property rights for economic activity and so on” [13].

5.3. Relevance for Modern Sociopolitical Discourse

Arthashastra contains deep ideas about management, ethics, executive responsibilities, and control mechanisms that are still relevant today. Kautilya saw management as a service to society, not just as a way to get rich. The treatise sets out the principles of effective management. First, these are strategic planning and risk assessment, accountability and control, corruption prevention, and a system of remuneration and punishments for employees. At present, these principles are relevant both for management in companies and for public administration. Balbir Sihag believes that many concepts of Arthashastra can be useful for shaping a modern corporate governance system, especially in setting of developing countries [14].

Arthashastra remains a valuable source of wisdom for modern management, politics, and economics. Here is a list of classic ideas that can be adapted to modern challenges: a pragmatic approach to management (for example, reasonable state control); political realism (expressed in a qualitative analysis of the balance of power, search for allies, etc.); the value of competent intelligence work for the purposes of state security; economic governance (management of finances, taxation, trade and limited control over the market and pricing); a combination of morality and efficiency in making managerial

decisions. Regarding the latter, we would like to note that this is still a very relevant and controversial issue, which is one of the main challenges of modern politics.

6. Conclusions

Arthashastra is an example of the representation of ideas of political realism and pragmatism by non-Western political thought. Kautilya's ideas and their present-day reinterpretation in Indian socio-political discourse play an important role in decolonization of political thought, search for alternatives to Western models. "Thus, Arthasashtra is one of the most exhaustive treaties on the part of Govt" [10, p. 124]. The treatise is one of the most thorough works on the role of the state, management and strategic thinking, which remains relevant against the background of modern global challenges.

The text, written many centuries ago, not only embodies the classical tradition of political realism and practical philosophy of power, but also serves as an important intellectual resource for modern societies seeking to overcome the colonial heritage in political thought. The presented ideas – from the art of governance to economic strategy – demonstrate that non-Western traditions can offer their own solid models of public administration, alternative to the dominant Eurocentric paradigms. Nowadays, in the context of globalization and the search for "multiple modernities", Arthashastra takes on a new meaning. It becomes part of the intellectual movement for decolonization of knowledge, proving that effective governance, governance ethics, and strategic planning are not exclusive advantages of the Western tradition. On the contrary, Indian political thought, in particular through Kautilya's work, offers universal tools for analyzing power that can be creatively reinterpreted in modern conditions.

To conclude, the study of Arthashastra nowadays is not just an academic interest in the past, but participation in an actual dialogue about the future of politics, economics and social development.

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