

SOME CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCES  
FROM THE ARTHAŚĀSTRA OF KAUṬILYA

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya can profitably be used to elucidate a variety of terms and sentences occurring in later sources of ancient Indian history which have so far been defying adequate comprehension. We shall be studying a few of them in the present paper.

The Aśokan Pillar Edict VII contains the following exhortation:

*Avihisāye bhūtānam  
anālabhāye pānanam*

Of the two words, *avihimsā* and *anārambha*, the latter admits of different interpretations. In the monastic terminology of the Buddhists, it means « suitability of a land for the construction of a *vihāra* or a *Kuṭī* »<sup>1</sup>. But since Aśoka is speaking of all living beings and not only of the monks, this meaning is completely ruled out.

Sometimes « *anārambha* » is taken to mean « lack of effort » which has been condemned by the *Mahābhārata*<sup>2</sup>. So, this meaning too is not applicable to the line in the Aśokan inscription.

D. R. Bhandarkar has translated the above quoted extract from R. E. VII as follows:

« non-injury to (all) creatures and non-slaughter of (all) life ».

But this translation should appear to be extremely incongruous for the simple reason that « non-injury » covers « non-slaughter » as well.

The real meaning of the word « *anārambha* » is brought out by the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. While describing the virtues of a *parivrājaka*, it mentions *Ahimsā* and *Anārambha* in one and the same breath. This identical description in the two near-contemporary sources may not be

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1. UPASAK, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, Varanasi, 1975, p. 12.

2. *Mbh.* 2.14.7:

*Anārambhaparo rājā  
Valmiki iva sidati*

incidental. It may even suggest the Aśokan scribe's borrowing from the Kauṭilyan terminology.

In the context of a *parivrājaka*, the meaning of the word *anārambha* as « non-slaughter » does not make sense, for the *parivrājakas*, by no stress of imagination, can ever be associated with any kind of slaughter of animals so as to be told to refrain from it. From the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya it would appear that the word « *anārambha* » meant « self-conduct »<sup>3</sup>.

Aśoka's scribe also had the same meaning in mind when he exhorted the people to ensure « non-injury » to (all) creatures and « self-less conduct » towards (all) living beings.

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya contains copious allusions to the manufacture and sale of a variety of wines suggesting thereby that drinking was prevalent in the society and that it constituted an attractive source of entertainment in *utsavas*, *samājas* and *yātrās*<sup>4</sup>. Lest unrestricted drinking on such occasions should result in unseemly behaviour of the people and pose serious security problems for the king when he participated in them<sup>5</sup>, Kauṭilya had striven to contain it and prescribed punishment in the form of fines for unauthorised drinking. Aśoka informs us in his R.E.I. that no *samāja* should be held, for he sees much evil in it. Among these evils associated with the *samājas*, drinking must have been the one over which Aśoka was greatly exercised and which he steadily wanted to prohibit. *Inter alia*, it was his pro-prohibition attitude that led him to take the extreme step of banning altogether the *samājas* which Kauṭilya had only sought to regulate. That excessive drinking on festive occasions very often led to tragedies, including murders, is illustrated, among other literary works, by the *Upamitibhavaprapaṅcā-kathā* (p. 392).

While dealing with the king's judicial functions, the Greek writers make the following observation:

« He (Chandragupta Maurya) remains there all day thus occupied, not suffering himself to be interrupted, even though the time arrives for attending to his person. This attention to his person consists of friction with pieces of wood, and he continues to listen to the cause, *while the friction is performed by four attendants who surround him* »<sup>6</sup>.

3. Kauṭ. 1.3.12-13:

*Parivrājakasya...*

*anārambho...*

*sarveśhāmahiṃsā*

4. *Ibid.* 2.25.36:

*Utsavasamājayātrāsu*

*Chaturahaṅ sauriko deyaḥ*

5. This explains why Kauṭilya (1.21.46) advised the king not to join in these festivities all alone:

*Yātrāsamājotsavapravahaṅāni daśavargikā-*

*dhishṭhitāni gachchhet*

6. H. and F., Strabo III, pp. 106-7.

That these attendants were invariably females working as « *snāpaka* » and « *samvāhaka* » is borne out by the *Arthaśāstra* <sup>7</sup>.

The mention of the cow is conspicuous by its absence in the list of the creatures whose slaughter was banned by Aśoka vide his Pillar Edict V. It is so because the cow was exempted from slaughter by the vast majority of the people since ancient times. Kauṭilya has made it abundantly clear that calves, bulls and cows were not to be killed <sup>8</sup>. In this connection D.C. Sircar's observation « that beef was taken by the Indians in the 3rd Century B.C. » <sup>9</sup> is belied by the internal evidence of the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, Megasthenes', account and the Aśokan inscriptions. When Aśoka includes *shandaka* (bull set free) in the list of creatures whose slaughter was prohibited, he simply takes care to emphasise the fact that like the *vatsas*, the *vrshas* and the *dhenus*, the *shandakas* too are not to be killed.

Ancient Indian warfare was heavily elephant-oriented. Kauṭilya has gone to the extent of saying that the king's victory dependend upon his elephants more than anything else <sup>10</sup>. And the finest elephants of his time were available in Kaliṅga <sup>11</sup>. Kaliṅga was also known for its cotton fabrics <sup>12</sup>. As would appear from the account of Pliny <sup>13</sup>, Kaliṅga, being « nearest the sea » had a flourishing trade with the outside world. Thus, it would appear that Aśoka was impelled to conquer Kaliṅga by his desire to obtain the priced elephants, the fine cotton fabrics and the busy sea-ports of it.

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya contains numerous references to *āṭavikas*. A kingdom is very often threatened by the hostile kingdoms as also by the foresters <sup>14</sup>. It refers to the *aṭavi-pāla*, *antapāla*, and chiefs of *pura* and *rāṣṭra* whose cooperation was absolutely necessary for the

7. Kauṭ. 1.21.28:

*Snāpakasaṁvāhakā-  
starakarajakamālākārakarma-  
dāsyah kuryuḥ*

8. Kauṭ. 2.26.13:

*Vatso vrsho  
dhenus'chaishāmavadhyāḥ*

9. *Select Inscriptions*, p. 60, fn. no. 1.

10. Kauṭ. 2.3.16:

*Hastipradhāno hi vijayo rājñām*

11. *Ibid.* 2.3.16:

*Kaliṅgāṅgagajāḥ śreshṭhāḥ*

12. *Ibid.* 2.12.120:

*Kāliṅgakam  
Kārpāsikam śreshṭhamiti*

13. *Indian Antiquary*, 1877, p. 338.

14. Kauṭ. 2.1.44:

*Parachakrāṭavigrastam  
Vyādhidurbhikshapīḍitam  
Deśam pariharet rājā  
Vyayakriḍāścha vārayet*

free flow of commercial goods<sup>15</sup>. Another passage in the same work alludes to the lifting of cattle by the hostiles and the foresters<sup>16</sup>. Very often the foresters have been spoken of along with the enemies<sup>17</sup>. Sometimes they have been coupled with the *sāmantas*. Care was taken by the state to see that the disgruntled elements of society did not join hands with the *sāmantas* and the *āṭavikas*<sup>18</sup>.

All these references, combined together, go to shed welcome light on the nature of the *āṭavika-rājyas*. Generally speaking, an ancient Indian kingdom had four territorial divisions in it:

- (1) *Pura* (Urban areas).
- (2) *Rāshṭra* (Rural areas).
- (3) *Sīmanta* (Border lands).
- (4) *Āṭavī* (Forested areas).

Though the forested areas were very often technically included in the kingdom and were taken care of by a high functionary of the state called the *Āṭavīpāla*, they were semi-independent territories mainly because of their difficult accessibility. Lying beyond the sphere of effective control of the central government, they had their own armies and could be of much service or disservice to their nominal over-lords. If hostile, they could easily create problems for them by operating as cattle-lifters, way-layers and bandits. They could even enter into conspiracies with the neighbouring kings and feudatories against their central government. R.E. XIII has it that these turbulent forest-dwellers created similar problems for Aśoka who was forced to administer a stern warning to them to the effect that, though he was compassionate, he was strong as well and that if they did not mend their ways, they would be killed<sup>19</sup>.

15. *Ibid.* 2.16.25:  
*Āṭavyantapālapurāshṭra-mukhyaiścha  
pratisaṃsargam gachchedanu-  
grahāratham*

16. *Ibid.* 2.29.7:  
*Parachakrāṭavibhayadanu-  
praviṣṭānām paśūnām  
pālanādharmaṇa  
daśabhāgam dadyuḥ*

17. *Ibid.* 1.13.40:  
*Amitramāṭavikam.*

18. *Ibid.* 1.13.16:  
*Parasparādvā  
bhedayedenān Sāmantāta-  
vikatatkulināvaruddhe-  
bhyaścha*

19. R.E. XIII:  
*Yo pi cha apakareyati kshamita viya  
mate va devanam priyasa yam śako kshamanaye  
ya pi cha aṭavi devanam priyasa vijite  
bhoti ta pi anuneti apunijapeti anutape  
pi cha prabhave...*

The *Harshacharita* informs us that Pushyamitra, the commander of the Mauryan army, killed his master Br̥hadratha, while he was inspecting his army<sup>20</sup>. It is anybody's guess as to what time Pushyamitra had chosen to effect his *coup de tat*. But a conjecture can be hazarded on the basis of the king's schedule of work prescribed by Kauṭilya. According to it, the king's day and night were divided into 8 parts each, each part, thus being of one and a half hours' duration. Under this scheme, the seventh part of the day was allotted to the king for the inspection of his army<sup>21</sup>, while the eighth part was meant for discussions with his Commander-in-Chief<sup>22</sup>. Assuming that the king's day started with sun-rise approximately at 6 a.m., the seventh and the eighth parts of the day would fall between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. It was during these three hours in the afternoon that the Commander-in-Chief had an access to the king. Pushyamitra seems to have assassinated his master some time during this period, while the latter was inspecting his army in the company of his Commander-in-Chief.

Public opinion was regarded as an important factor in ancient Indian polity. Kauṭilya has used the word *mata* for opinion and has differentiated it from *kir̥nvadantī* (rumour), *chāra* (news) and *apavāda* (slander). Like other political thinkers, he too was of the view that public discontent (*prakṛti-kopa*, *janapada-kopa*, *amarsha* or *aparāga*) could be a major cause of the undoing of the ruler. The popular discontent finds expression in a variety of ways including (1) *dharna*<sup>23</sup> (2) hunger strike<sup>24</sup> (*anaśana* or *prāyopaveśana*) (3) migration<sup>25</sup> and (4) regicide<sup>26</sup>.

But Kauṭilya, being a staunch advocate of the principle of legitimacy, has purposely refrained from describing these popular expressions

20. *Prajñādurbalam cha bala-darśana-  
vyapadeśadarśitāśeshasainyaḥ senānīranāryo  
Mauryo Br̥hadratham pīpsha Pushyamitraḥ  
svāminam.*

21. Kauṭ. 1.19.18:  
*Saptame hastyaśvarathā-  
yudhīyān paśyēt*

22. *Ibid.* 1.19.19:  
*Ashṭame Senāpatisakho  
Vikramam chintayēt*

23. *Mbh.* 1.1.120:  
*Rathasyaikāmagrāstishṭhamānām*

24. *Ibid.* 1.2.183:  
*Kṛtānaśanasāṅkalpā yatra  
bhartṛinupāviśāt*

Also, the Br̥hamaṇas of Kashmir had undertaken hunger strike to remove Tuṅga from Prime Ministership around 980 A.D.

25. *Mbh.* 1.75.4:  
*Sthātum tvadvishaye rājan  
na śakshyāmi tvayā saha*

26. *Ibid.* 1.130.7:  
*Katham Yudhishṭhirasyārthe  
na no hanyuḥ sabāndhavān*

of discontent. Allusions to *dharnas*, hunger strikes or other forms of civil disobedience are conspicuous by their absence in his *Arthasāstra*. While denying to the people the right to resist the ruler, Kauṭilya only refers to the harm that his unpopularity may bring to him. He makes the king conscious of the fact that excessive taxes and punishments are counter-productive<sup>27</sup>. An angered, greedy, frightened and slighted people are prone to cross over to the enemy's side<sup>28</sup>. If a king, he observes, is inaccessible to the people, he is sure to give birth to popular discontent and may even fall a prey to his enemies<sup>29</sup>. At the best, he cites the examples of such kings as had come to grief in the past for their indiscretion<sup>30</sup>. But quite unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Manusmṛti* or later works, the *Arthasāstra* of Kauṭilya does not propound the thesis of popular resistance to or revolt against a legitimate authority.

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27. Kauṭ. 1.13.4:

*paurajānapadān  
daṇḍakarābhyām piḍayati*

28. *Ibid.* 1.13.22:

*Kruddhalubdhabhītā  
vamānināstu pareshām kṛtyāḥ*

29. *Ibid.* 1.19.31-32:

*Durdarśo hi rājā  
... prakṛtikopamarivaśam vā  
gachchhet*

30. *Ibid.* 1.7.12-15.