Political Science Honours

Paper Name -Indian Political Thought

**KAUTILYA’S SAPTANGA THEORY OF STATE.**

According to the Saptanga theory of the state, the seven elements were described by Kautilya,who was a teacher in the famous ancient Indian university at Takshshila.The seven elements are mentioned in the book ‘Arthasastra’ .But before Kautilya,The Constituents of the State Manu mentioned of seven limbs of the state and these can be taken as the seven constituent parts of a kingdom viz., the King, Minister, capital, Army, realm, treasury and ally. Giving the relative importance of each one of the seven parts, he stated that among those seven constituent parts of the kingdom. In the following paragraphs, the nature and importance of the seven organs of state had been described: However the seven elements are described as below;

**(i) King or Swami**

An important position was assigned to the king or swami. He was placed at the top in the list because he constituted the most vital organ of the State. Kautilya went to the length of asserting that‘the briefest exposition of the elements of rajya is to say that the king was the state. It signified nothing more than that the king was most important and highest of all the seven organs. He occupied the highest position because he was the source of social progress and prosperity, and in the last resort everything depended upon him. He appointed the ministers who were responsible to him and hold office during his pleasure; he also appointed the commander-in-chief of the armed forces as well as the heads of the various administrative departments, the judges and the collectors of revenues. More significant is the fact that he wielded the rod of chastisement or Danda on which the sway of Dharma ultimately rested. When Danda and Dharma disappears, the world comes to an end. Nothing more was needed to prove the importance of the royal office. Both Manu and Kautilya looked upon the king as the grand safeguard of the people’s security and the stability of the social order or vices.

**(ii) Amatya or Minister**

The second of the seven limbs of the state was Amatya. It might be translated as Minister, or as the Council of Ministers. As in actual practice the kings had a plurality of ministers to help and advise them in conducting the affairs of the kingdom. Besides the term Amatya, two other terms, sachiva and mantrin, were also used. Of these the first, namely, amatya, is the oldest. Sometimes a distinction was drawn between the three and sometimes they were used as synonyms. Those who regarded them as standing for three different entities did not draw the line of distinction in the same way. From the following passage in Kautilya’s Arthsastra it appeared that the amatya constituted a regular cadre of service from which all high officers were recruited, excluding the mantrins. It read thus; ‘Havingdivided the spheres of their powers and having taken into consideration the time and place and the work they had to do, all these persons should be appointed as ministers (amatyas) but not as mantrins.71 From this it appeared that Kautilya regarded the mantrins as of a higher grade than amatyas in general. In other words, the term amatya was considered to stand for the higher officials who managed the various departments and assisted the king in conducting the affairs of the state. The Mantrins then would signify the ministers or the mantra parishad. Kautilya said that it was as impossible for a king alone to govern.

**(iii) Janapada or Rashtra**

The third limb, known as janapada or rashtra needs little comment; it corresponds to the two elements, land and population, mentioned by western thinkers. Like Plato and Rousseau neither small states were favoured nor a big and extensive empirs as an ideal were advocated during those days. Attention was, however, paid to the qualities of the soil. Kautilya advised the king to induce people from other countries to migrate and settle in new villages on old sites or on new sites, or cause people from thickly populated areas of his own kingdom to settle down in such villages with a view to securing that each villages should consist of not less than one hundred and not more than five hundred families and contain a sufficient number of Sudra cultivators.

**(iv) Durga or Fort**

The next limb in the list was durga or fort. There is nothing corresponding to it in the western scheme. The reason why this had been mentioned here was that due to the geographical situation in northern India and the nature of fighting in ancient times the fortified capital was considered to be of great importance for the security and safety of the kingdom. Kautilya, keeping in view the defence of the kingdom included Durga or forts among the elements of the state. Forts in general were absolutely necessary for the safety of the kingdom and the security of the people and the treasury. Manu said the following in defence of forts; ‘A single archer under the shelter of the fort wall can fight a hundred of the enemy, and a hundred can

fight ten thousands.’ Kautilya described in minutest details about the layout of the capital and the construction of forts .He mentioned that the forts should be surrounded by deep and wide trenches always filled with water or surrounded by hills and rocks, or be builtin desert lands where neither water nor grass was available and access to which was impossible, or be built in dense forests, access to which was not easy to find.

**v) Treasury or Kosa**

Manu and Kautilya held the same view on treasury and rightly called upon the king to guard his finances and keep the treasury full. The principal source of revenue of a state in the ancient period was taxation as it is to-day. Manu and Kautilya had evolved certain principles to guide the king in his taxation policy. He could levy only those taxes which had been sanctioned by the smriti writers, i.e., by sacred canon law, and at rates fixed by them. For example, Manu permitted the king to take a sixth part of the grain-crops or the produce of the soil. Kautilya and other writers however permitted him to take even one-third or one fourth in times of emergency or national distress. Whenever the king demanded taxes at a higher rate, he had to obtain the consent of the people by appealing to them. Another principle was that the taxes should be neither too heavy nor too less; they should be moderate. The king was advised to follow the example of the bees or the calf. Just as the bees collect honey from flowers but without damaging them in any way, and the calf drinks milk without in any way bruising the udders of the mother cow, in the same way the king was expected to tax the people without in any way harming or overloading them. The king was advised never to forget that nothing exposed him to greater danger than oppressive taxation. Kautilya was told that taxation was equitable if both the state on its side and the agriculturist and the trader on their side felt that they got a fair and reasonable deal.

**(vi)Army**

Danda or army forms a formidable part of any strong state. Kautailya has mentioned of different characteristic features to be possessed by this very element of a state. The army men bearing the quality of inheritance and those who carry forward the legacy of their forefathers show natural allegiance towards the king, thereby remaining dutiful and ever upright in their functions. An ideal army constituting the security part of the state should possess external and internal strength of mind, tolerance, must be well equipped about information on the tactics of warfare. According to Kautilya, those belonging to the Kshatriya clan by birth, possess these intrinsic qualities of courage and readiness to dedicate lives for the security of motherland, and thereby can act as a promising band of soldiers. A successful state for its own security is largely dependent on a strong army that in Kautilyan time got designated as

‘Danda’.

**(vii) Mitra or Ally**

The seventh and last limb of the State that remained to be studied is the mitra or ally. The inclusion of ‘mitra’ or ally as a constituent element of the State by the ancient Hindus again highlights the concrete nature of their approach to the subject. For them the State was a concrete entity standing in intimate relation to other entities of the same nature; it was one political entity in the midst of many. It could not be thoroughly studied and understood apart from its relationship to other states. This shows that their approach was external also not wholly internal; it was dynamic and not purely static. Nothing corresponding to this idea exists in the western doctrine of the elements of the state.

According to Manu ‘a king did not prosper by the acquisition of gold and land so much as by securing a dependable friend who would be powerful in future’. Kautilya had a different view point as compared to Manu. .The doctrine of Mandalas which was developed by Kautilya in the course of his treatment of friend or ally, constituted the basis of what had been termed as external sovereignty. The doctrine of Mandala, underlying as it did the Hindu idea of ‘balance of power’ pervaded the entire speculation on the entire subject of foreign relations.

The theory of Mandalas was constructed on certain assumptions which appeared to be valid at that time. It presupposed the existence of a large number of states in the country the relations between which were not always friendly and peaceful. On the contrary,

each one was apprehensive of its neighbour and would not mind expanding at its cost.

**References: 1. VERMA, V.P., ANCIENT INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT.**

**2. MEHTA, V.R., THE FOUNDATION OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**