

## MAGNA CARTA AND CHANAKYA'S ARTHSHAstra: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract:-**

*During her visit to Senate Hall of Melbourne, the author happened to come across the content of Magna Carta, in which controlling tools for the supreme authority-kings were laid down. The author was surprised to notice the similarity between the rules laid down by Chanakya and the rules laid down in Magna Carta for the rulers of its era. The paper attempts to prove that Chanakya almost 1600 years before Magna Carta had already established the role of kingship and his control on treasure of the king. There was a possibility that the fight between the Barons and the King John would not have taken place if they followed the rules of kingship, laid down by Chanakya in Arthshastra.*

**Keywords:-***Kautilya, Chanakya, Magna Carta, Arthashastra, Kingship, role of king, taxation, sanskrit manuscript.*

## Research Questions

1. Does the content of Magna Carta and Chanakya's Arthashastra talk about the role of the king as a state administrator?
2. What are the similarities and differences in both the documents?
3. Are the concepts explained in the two documents relevant today also?

## Methods and Material

For the present study, English translation of Chanakya's Arthashastra by R Shamasastri has been used and pdf version by Jon Roland of the Constitution Society has been used. Moreover, Arthashastra has been studied by many Indian scholars, while ample literature is available on Magna Carta by English scholars. Thus this secondary data acts as a platform to compare the two documents and discuss their significance in modern era.

### What is Magna Carta?

Magna Carta is a famous document in the world, which came into existence in 1215, as a practical solution to the political crisis faced by King John of England. IN the English history, it was mentioned for the first time in Magna Carta that everybody, including the king, was subject to the law. Magna Carta remains a cornerstone of the British constitution, even after many deletions and revisions. The document challenges the autocracy of the king.

### Kautilya's Arthashastra

Kautilya is another name of the economist 'Chanakya', Historians believe that his time period was somewhere around 2300-2350 years ago. He played a major role in establishing Mauryan dynasty in Magadha through a well-trained group of students, whose head Chandragupta became the king of the state and his rule continued for more than 135 years through his great successors like Bindusara and Ashoka. Chanakya was the main advisor of the king and his philosophy of management was successfully installed in Mauryan dynasty.

## Review of the Relevant Literature

### Comparative Analysis of Arthashastra and Magna Carta

"The Sanskrit manuscript, discovered in 1902      The Magna Carta at the State Library



Comparative Variable	Magna Carta	Chanakya's Writings
Origin/Discovery	Magna Carta is an 800 years old manuscript, written in 1215 by the Barons as a practical solution to a political crisis.	Written by Chanakya in somewhere around 2300 years ago and discovered in 1902 in Tanjore Library
Purpose of Existence	Magna Carta was an attempt by the Barons of Medieval England to stop King John from abusing his powers.	Chanakya laid down rules and regulations for a king, which acted as controlling tools on the state administration in general course
Relationship between King and Laws	Everybody, including the king, was subject to the law.	Ultimate objective of any economy is not to benefit the king but to benefit the subject
Role of the King in a State	Magna Carta established limitations of a king's control over the subject and the subject's resources.	Arthashastra also established similar limits on the king's control when it talks about a fixed percentage to be used from the treasure for the king's personal use.
Taxation	The army had been largely paid by the tax known as 'scutage' - a payment made to the crown in place of providing knights for military service, and this was the focus of much baronial discontent.	The king was supposed to take a fixed amount from this treasure as his expenditure on servants. This limit was not to exceed a quarter of his total revenue. Tax was to be collected just as a honey bee takes the juice from flowers.
Both were Contracts	Magna Carta was a political contract between the Barons and the King.	Chanakya's Arthashastra was a social contract between the subject and the King.

## **1. Origin:**

“The Sanskrit manuscript (168 palm leaves) of Chanakya’s Arthashastra was discovered in the Library of Tanjoreby Bhatta Swamy in 1902, where it was lying unattended for , no one knows how many years. Chanakya, an ex-professor of Taxila University, was a great historical figure, who established the empire of Mauryans with the help of his intelligent and shrewd strategies. It is believed to be written in 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Chanakya’s Arthashastra is almost 2300 years old, Magna Carta’s date of origin is on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of June of the year 1215, almost 800 years ago. The story of its origin is equally interesting as Chanakya’s Arthashastra. During the political unrest between Barons and King John of England, listened to the demands of barons (Article of the Barons). After further discussions, King John’s grantings were organized in the document called Magna Carta.

## **2. Purpose of Existence:**

Chandragupta Maurya, with the help of Chanakya, overthrew the Nandas and established the Mauryan dynasty. After this, Chanakya laid down rules and regulations for a king, which acted as controlling tools on the state administration, as Chandragupta did not belong to a royal family and Chanakya wanted to educate him and his coming generation’s ethics of state administration through his writings.

Magna Carta was an attempt to by the Barons of Medieval England to stop King John from abusing his powers. Purpose of existence of the document was entirely based on a negotiating meeting, where Barons demanded and King John agreed to some of their demands, which made the barons peace and calm for some time. The purpose of existence can be said to survive for a very short period only though.

## **3. Revisions in the original text :**

If any revision was made in the great book Arthashastra, we are not aware of it historically, as the only evidence of its existence is just one manuscript, while Magna Carta was revised by King Henry in III in 1216, 1217 and 1225. All the revised text was then added to the statute roll in 1297. Four original copies of theis document are available in the world today.

## **4. Administration of a country:**

Kautilya emphasizes again and again in his sutras that the ultimate objective of any economy is not to benefit the king but to benefit the subject or the common people. He takes into account economic, political, diplomatic, social, military and other factors that affect the economy of a nation. Several ideas expressed by Kautilya are followed by modern management thinkers as it is. His book ‘Arthashastra’ talks about administering a state in his era. The king used to appoint a cabinet of ministers that helped him in taking decisions in all state related matters. In the book, we also find details of appointments

of these ministers, as to what would be the minimum qualification etc. Chanakya laid emphasis on important issues like establishing a Government Hierarchy, levying taxes, laying down laws, deciding punishments for law breakers. Magna Carta talks about taxation and treasury but does not touch the issue of administering a state directly.

## **5. Qualities and Duties of the King:**

Chanakya’s focus in all his writings is welfare of the subject of the king. He emphasizes that the duty of the king is to protect the people, maintain peace and justice and be active in providing economic assistance to individuals and groups. These services then become the logical reasoning behind taxation. He discusses an undeclared social contract between the king and the subject. Magna Carta established limitations of a king’s control over the subject and the subject’s resources and Arthashastra also established similar limits on the king’s control when it talks about a fixed percentage to be used from the treasure for the king’s personal use. But Kautilya’s Arthashastra stands apart, because it also talks about the qualities of a king and teaches him to be a contended ruler who cares for his subject. Such lessons helped in producing efficient kings for coming generations also. We saw the effect of Chanakya’s teachings to Mauryan kings in all the three generations who ruled under his guidance – Chandragupta, Bindusaara and Ashoka. Somehow Magna Carta does not talk much about these inner qualities of a king. Stress on ethics and inner qualities has been an important part of Ancient Indian management techniques and Arthashastra is no exception. It is worth quoting a few verses from Arthashastra:

- a) “राज्यस्य मूलं इन्द्रिय जयः” Meaning, “The secret of good state administration is controlling sensory pleasures.” Chandragupta Varshneya, while commenting on this sutra, says, “In a democracy, The President, Prime Minister, cabinet minister etc. replace the king. But if they become out of control and start taking undue advantages of their powers then the state goes weak and the entire administrative system may crash.
- b) Chanakya also says “वरं न राज्यं न कुराज्य राज्यं” meaning it is better to be without a kingdom than to rule a weak and corrupt kingdom.
- c) In the sutra “अन्द्रनीति स्वन्द्वलाभा दस्वान्द्व लाभः श्रेयान्” Chanakya throws light on the behavioral qualities of a king, he advocates that a king should be polite and caring for others.
- d) “प्रकृन्दत् कोपः सववकोप्येभ्यो गरीयान्” sutra emphasizes that when the public of your state gets angry, it is very harmful for the ruler, the anger may pull him down from the throne and eradicate his rule from the country.

Magna Carta also for the first time in Britain, established the principle that everybody, including the king, was subject to the law. This way, the document challenges the authority of the king, which acted as welfare tool of the public.

### **The Taxation:**

Since Chanakya's ultimate motive was the welfare of common man, as he himself, as a common man was a victim of the king, hence most of the rules laid down by him view the treasury of a king rich enough to effectively and efficiently administer all the activities of state. Three key resources of treasury enrichment were: The abundance of harvest (sasya sampat), Opulence of Industrial production (prachara samriddhi), Prosperity of trade and commerce (Panyabahulya). Good fiscal management is paid supreme importance by Chanakya.

He emphasized that all avenues of economic activities should be used optimally to make the treasury rich and richer. But at the same time this treasure was not meant to be used in the luxuries of king and his family, but he was supposed to take a fixed amount from this treasure as his expenditure on servants. This limit was a quarter of his total revenue. Tax imposing was introduced in Magna Carta also but with the subject's consent, the way it is in Arthashastra. Magna Carta made it possible to get approval of the parliament before levying taxes on the people of the state: "No scutage not aid shall be imposed on our kingdom, unless by common counsel [alt. "general consent"] of our kingdom, except for ransoming our person, for making our eldest son a knight, and for once marrying our eldest daughter; and for these there shall not be levied more than a reasonable aid..."

The difference in the taxation policy is that Chanakya's Arthashastra advocates subject welfare, while Magna Carta advocates Subject's consent. This brings the huge difference between the motives of the two documents. In Chanakya's view, it is the responsibility of the king to think about subject welfare, while in Magna Carta, the king may take any decision, but the subject has to be intelligent enough to give its consent or not.

This innovation makes Magna Carta a revolution as it speeded the idea that the power of tax was limited by general consent. Though there were many loopholes in the policy, as pointed out by scholars later. On the other hand, Chanakya used a comprehensive system of taxation. Many scholars find his principles of taxation relevant in today's political economies also. Many sources of state revenue are listed by Kautilya. Areas of expenditure of these revenues were mainly protection of the citizens by social services, building of forts, roads, other transports, plantation of colonies, plantation of villages and building asylums, orphanage and educational institutes.

**Re-survival:** Both the documents were forgotten for quite some time. Magna Carta was all forgotten by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Shakespeare's King John does not mention it.

([http://www.verwoodu3a.org.uk/\\_wp\\_generated/MagnaCarta](http://www.verwoodu3a.org.uk/_wp_generated/MagnaCarta).) But later, it was taken up by politicians and scholars as an important political document.

Arthashastra was almost non-existent as all the scholars believed it to be a mythical piece of literature till its original handwritten manuscript was discovered. It was difficult for modern scholars to decode the Sanskrit manuscript's text, hence major attention to this document was not drawn until it was translated in English in 1915. Charles Waldaeu rightly calls the book Arthashastra – A neglected Precursor to Classical Economics. According to him, it stayed lost for approximately 1300 years.

**Failure/Success:** Although King John agreed the terms of Magna Carta and the barons renewed their oaths of allegiance, the settlement did not last long. The barons refused to surrender the city of London to the King until Magna Carta had been implemented. Pope Innocent III was alarmed by the charter's terms, and on 24 August 1215 he issued a document known as a papal bull, describing Magna Carta as 'illegal, unjust, harmful to royal rights and shameful to the English people', and declaring the charter 'null and void of all validity for ever'.

Magna Carta was effectively dead as there were frequent fights between the Barons and King John started taking place and continued till King John's death, whereas Chanakya's rules and regulations were practically used in the kingdom of Mauryan Dynasty for 135 years continuously. It would be appropriate to quote here, "As a 13th-century peace treaty, Magna Carta was a failure. Just 10 weeks after its creation, it was annulled by the Pope and the country was plunged into civil war. Yet this was by no means the end of the charter's journey. Professor David Carpenter explores the events that led to the reissue and revival of Magna Carta by Henry III and Edward I."

### **Significance of Magna Carta and Arthashastra in Modern Era**

Arthashastra speaks about political and economic policies both, while Magna Carta talks about economic policy based on political policies. Today is the era, when such policies focused towards subject welfare are highly needed, hence significance of both the documents cannot be less than each other.

Both the documents were meant to establish good governance and stability of the Government in the states. Chanakya's Arthashastra maintains a perfect balance between the king's and the people's interest. As he said, the king's happiness lies in the happiness of the subject. On the other hand Magna Carta proved to be a failure as a peace treaty between the King and the rebel barons, but it may help even today in developing a new framework for the relationship between the King and his subjects.

### **Limitations of the Study**

For the purpose of this research, the researcher should have studied Chanakya's Arthashastra and Magna Carta originally, but both being historical and protected documents, access to these original documents was not possible.

### **Conclusion**

The research questions have been answered and inform us that the two documents- Chanakya's Arthashastra and Magna Carta, acted as social and political contract respectively. Magna Carta does not take the responsibility of the welfare of

the subject, but in Arthashastra, the king takes the responsibility of the welfare of his subject and is not considered to be a good ruler if he fails to do so. Both of these documents, if revised to suit modern business and political environment may bring revolutionary developments.

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