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Revisiting Indian Knowledge System in Contemporary Contexts

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Abstract: The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a holistic, integrated and indigenous framework of learning and living that has evolved over millennia. The IKS offers a unique blend of theoretical depth and practical wisdom. It is embedded in the Vedas, Upanisads, Sastras, Purans, epics, classical literature, folk traditions, and oral narratives, and continues to shape India's cultural and intellectual ethos. In the current global scenario, there is a renewed interest in traditional knowledge systems to address modern challenges such as ecological crisis, mental health, educational reforms, ethical leadership, and cultural identity. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the inclusion of IKS into mainstream education to promote critical thinking, holistic development, and self-reliance rooted in cultural values.The core of IKS lies in its emphasis on holistic understanding, experiential learning, and the integration of knowledge with contemporary contexts. Contemporary challenges are in areas like Health and Wellness, Education, Sustainable Development, Environmental Conservation. *Panchatantra* is ripe with entertaining stories loved with timeless teachings and moral values.*Arthashastra* is arguably the greatest treatise ever written on political, military, and economic strategies by a shrewd man popularly referred to as the Indian Machiavelli. Bharata's*Natyashastra* considered tobe the fifth *Veda* propagates righteousness, good reputation, long life, well being and increase in mental ability. My paper is all about how*Panchatantra, Arthashastra* and *Natyashastra* effectively deal with some of the contemporary contexts.

Keywords:IKS, contemporary contexts, theoretical depth, practical wisdom, self-reliance.

Introduction - Indian Knowledge System is marginalized due to lack of understanding and appreciation. This leads to lack of interest, preservation and promotion. The West for their own selfish interest forced our people to treat our indigenous knowledge as inferior and unscientific. Thus our youth is oblivions of our own glorious past. We do not know that a vast treasure of knowledge lies in our Vedas, Puranas and Shastras. The Britishers stopped publishing our classics and even did not allow our children to read Sanskrit in the school curriculum. After our independence a revival of the classical learning has been started. The real revival has taken place through National Education Policy 2020. I will not sound out of place if I say the Western perspectives often dominate our literature, culture and inclusive attitude. Our indigenous knowledge system is interdisciplinary and this teaches us that life and living believe in co-existence. IKS needs to be incorporated into modern curricula in a way that is relevant and engaging for students. Here lies the importance of my paper thatexplores how the ancient classical texts like *PanchatantraArthashastra* and the *Natyashastra* are still relevant in this era of science and technology.

Panchatantra is the book of tales rich in timeless wisdom and morals. Its aim was to educate the princes in the art of administration. Thanks to the foresight of the authorr that *Panchatantra* has become immortal. It is used as a guide to life. Through talking animals and cunning tricksters, it teaches essential values like friendship, resilience, and the importance of intelligence over brute. Here lies the beauty of Indian Knowledge System which is timeless. Wisdom is our goal of education. We want an education which enlightens us and *Panchatantra* does. It also makes us sensible to the animals, birds and other creatures making us sensitive to ecology. It also tells us how to tell stories and how to captivate the attention of the readers or the listeners. So it has permanent literary value. These stories shape character and decision making. The originator Vishnu Sharma was a great scholar and teacher. Teachers are man-makers and Vishnu Sharma justifies it. The author through *Panchatantra* deals with the art of teaching pedagogy. As legend goes he taught successfully the sons of a king who had lack of intelligence and leadership. He took on the challenge and devised a unique teaching method. He intertwined moral and political lessons into engaging fables featuring animals as their central characters. He divided these stories into five "tantras" or

sections. Vishnu Sharma's "tantras" teach the writers how they should plan their chapterisation. Each section of *Panchatantra* is meant to be used as a way to conduct our own way of life. All the five Section if to be told in capsule-form are meant to be used as guide to navigate the complexities of life. These chapters are: (i) Loss of Friends, (ii) Gaining Friends, (iii) Conflict and War, (iv) Loss of Gains, and (v) Reckless Actions.

Our rich tradition has always been looked down upon by the colonizers. That was their well thought of plan. They treated us as inferior, superstitions, lazy and dull. Remember our *Panchatantra* fables have travelled across cultures, even seemingly influencing some of the world's most famous collections of tales such as Aesop's *Fables*, *The Arabian Nights* and various European folktales. Even today, the *Panchatantra* is evolving. Its fables have been adapted into contemporary children's literature, animated films and interactive digital experiences.

About *Panchatantra*one of the renowned translators Arthur William Ryder writes:

> One Vishnusharman, shrewdly gleaning
> All worldly wisdom's inner meaning,
> In these five books the charm compresses
> Of all such books the world possesses
> (*Panchatantra*7).

Ryder also writes:

> The *Panchatantra* is a niti-shastra or text book of'niti'. The word niti means roughly the wise conduct of life. Western civilization must endure certain shame in realizing that no precise equivalent of the term is found in English, French, Latin or Greek(*Panchatantra*9).

This is 'niti', "the harmonious development of the power of man, a life in which security, prosperity, resolute action, friendship, and good learning are so combined as to produce joy. Joy comes when we believe in coexistence whereas the Western philosophy is all about anthropocentric living. The West believes that man has every right to exploit anything and everything under the sun for his own enjoyment. This selfish attitude has resulted in ecological disaster. The result is natural calamities and serious diseases like Covid 19.

Chanakya, also known as Kautilya and Vishnu Gupta was an Indian philosopher, statesman, royal advisor and a master of political strategist. Probably he was a man of fourth century BCE. *Arthashastra*/*Neetishastra* (*Chanakyaniti*) though is very old can be applied to situations in the modern day world. Translated as the science of gaining wealth, *Arthashastra* is a treatise on state governance written with in idea that the able government will lead to a generation of wealth for in the people of the nation. This text has become a source of national pride, rivaling work by philosophers in the West. It is a record of Chanakya's philosophies on taxation, foreign policy, punishment for crimes, defense and war. This work promotes the idea of a ruler to use any means possible to hold on to his power, from trickery and surveillance to even espionage and propaganda. *Arthashastra* has two main objectives. Firstly it seeks to show how the ruler should protect his territory and secondly it shows how a territory should be acquired. Hence*Arthashastra* deals with varied themes like training of the prince for duties of rulership, the question of theappointment of ministers, administration of justice, punishment for various criminal offences, measures that can be adopted by a state in its relations with foreign states, means of taking a fort etc.

L.N. Rangarajan, a diplomat whose work on the *Arthashastra* has argued that in so far as the nature of human beings remained the same and states behaved in the manner as they always have done, Kautilya has relevance. K.M. Panikkar also opines that Kautilya is relevant even in today for his doctrines of 'sama-dama-danda-bheda'. Kautilyain *Arthashastra* says, "What produces unfavourable results is bad policy. That is a policy to be judged by the results it produces, and diplomacy is not concerned with ideals but with achieving practical results to the state."The quotation of Kautilya is ever relevant:"When the advantages to be derived from peace and war are equal one should prefer peace for disadvantages such as loss of power and wealth are ever attendant upon war. Similarly, if the advantage to be derived from neutrality and war are equal, one should prefer neutrality" (*Arthashastra* 97).

The value of *Arthashastra* as a piece of literature study also makes it universal and permanent. It has references to the art of performances like dance, music, musical instruments etc. Personality-studies remain as fresh as ever. *Arthasastra* is also a very good book of this field too:

> He who isself – sufficient; he who is fond ofhonours; he who is intolerant of his rival's honour; he who is esteemed low; he who is of a fiery spirit; he who is foolhardy as well as he who is not content with what he has been enjoying – all these come under the group of haughty persons (42).

Chanakya also writes:

> He who is impoverished; he who has lost much wealth; he who is niggardly; he who is addicted to evil propensities; and he who is engaged in dangerous transactions – all these constitute the group of ambitious persons (42).

Today, the figure of Chanakya and the endurance of his teachings can be seen through the heavy adaption of his life – story in plays and many immensely popular television series, proving that his life is an area of interest not only to scholars but to the masses as well. He was one of the greatest; perhaps the most cunning, political masterminds to have ever existed and his philosophy on Indian polity, economics, and statecraft will always hold relevance in the people's minds. Kautilyatalks about the ideals of a welfare state. Here the state controls and contributes of the resources, benefits and wealth of the

state. In the present day world, the challenges to national security are no different from the challenges that concerned the Mauryan Empire. Kautilya advocated the participation of the subjects in national security. In our own time we see how our fishermen work as watchmen of our country. Mention may be made that our shepherds reported the security forces about the presence of some Pak infiltrators, and the consequences was the Kargil War. Thus we may fairly statethat the solution to many of our present day problems in political, economic, social and security spheres are all dealt with in this ancient book called *Arthashastra*.

The *Natyashastra*, a text on performing arts is the main source of dramatic theory in classical India. Bharata Muni codified the rules and codes for drama and dance in this compilation. Bharata adopted a universal approach and affirmed that art universalizes emotions making them as a tool of appeal to the spectators. In reality *Natyashastra* has relevance more for practitioners than for academicians. Bharata has clearly stated that the theatrical experiments (proyoga) and the ideas relevant to the time should be added to the Shastra. The 'Rasa' theory developed by Bharata is extremely relevant till date, as many theatre personalities in the contemporary world are inspired by these 'rasas' and use these sentiments for their plays. At present, theatre is competing with all of the popular mass – culture and media, including television, video, music and radio. The content consumption is also different materially and economically. How Bharata's*Natyashastra* is still relevant can well be explained if we understand andanalyse it in relation to Keats' Negative Capability; Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" and Eliot's Unification of Sensibility. All these British concepts gained currencyworldwide because of the language politics though Bharata's *Natyashastra* encompasses all these three and many more, remains unknown and unappreciated because we have failed to place it in the world literary forum. Even *Natyashastra*is more inclusive and exhaustive than that of the much hyped *Poetics*. The 'sahridaya' reader is none but he who "willingly suspends his disbelief."Bharata's actor soaked in the 'rasa', the sentiment that he wants to arouse in the spectators is all that we talk about Eliot's "Unification of Sensibility.""Rasa" is a creative force too, as well as a force of arthetics. Keats' Negative Capabilitycan be well explained with Bharata's creative force of "rasa."Bharata argues that the desired 'bhava' can be roused in the audience only when the dramatist and the actors experience the same feeling negating their own consciousness.

Life is a drama. So drama is our all-timefavourite. Bharata's*Natyashastra*details, with all the aspects of performance including movements, emotional expression, theatre architecture, dance, music etc. This inclusiveness has made*Natyashastra*relevant even today while Aristotle's *Poetics* concentrated on the analysis of Greek tragedies. M. Winternitz says, "No country except India and no language except Sanskrit can boast of a passion so ancient or vulnerable" (54).

Bharata refers to 'bhavas", the imitations of emotions that the actors perform. He argues that there are eight-principal'rasas' love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy. Each 'rasa' experienced by the audience is associated with a specific 'bhava' portrayed on the stage. For example, in order for the audience to experience 'sringara' (erotic) rasa, the playwright, actors and musicians work together to portray the 'bhava' called 'rati' (love). We can boast of our own language and literature when John Dewey admits the absence of a word like 'rasa' in English language. 'Rasa' envisages complete continuity of the poetic process beginning with the creative experience of the poet, through the birth of his poem, to the aesthetic experience of the reader. So *Natyashastra*as a theoretical, creative and critical text remains immortal and universal. Bharata's 'rasa' theory comprises a significant contribution on understanding the exquisiterapport between the play and its audience, something akin to Aristotle's Catharsis theory. Seturamanwrites:

> In the subconscious and unconscious regions there are always lying dormant various types of emotio – motive complexes. When through artistic creation a purely universal emotional fear, amour, etc., are projected in the mind they become affiliated to this type of emotio – motive complexes and this mutual affiliation or appreciation transforms the presented artistic universal into artistic joy or 'Rasa'. It is for this reason that in experiencing artistic joy there is a Kinship and identity among all enjoyers (194).

Bharata says that 'rasa' is achieved as a result of functioning of the (i) 'vibhava', the objective condition causing an emotion (a lover on the stage), (ii) the 'anubhavas' (bodily gestures/expression) by which the emotion is expressed and (iii) 'vyabhicharibhavas' (secondary emotion and sensations) which feed the dominant emotion. 'Vibhavas' include persons (characters) as well as the circumstances that cause or excite the emotions. A love-lorn woman on the stage as a character in a play or a dancer expressing by gestures the feelings and sensations of love-lorn woman exciting a response in the spectator is an example. To get the art experience, the artist has to be disinterested, objective and capable of contemplating life experiences without being affected by them. What art communicates is the emotion of an emotion. There is the substratum of peace, delight and in the process what is particular and individual gets universalized. There is the freedom from involvement in life emotions of pain and pleasure and its pathological consequences caused by selfishness, struggle, personal loss or gain etc. Art takes us beyond the dualities of life to a state of delight against the background of peace. This critical approach of the *Natyashastra* to art makes it immortal.

Natyashastra is increasingly utilized not just for classical Indian dance, but as frame work for physical

theatre, actor training and emotional intelligence in acting globally. Modern actors use the Rasa-Bhava theory to understand emotional intelligence. Rasa and Bhava help performers evoke specific emotions in the audience. This text provides a detailed system of hand gestures, body postures and eye movements that are integrated into contemporary dance theatre and physical theatre. The *Natyashastra*is taught in global universities and studied in departments of English, theatre, and cultural anthropology to provide alternative, non-western parameters for performance analysis. *Natyashastra* is all the time relevant because drama is ever enjoyed and one of the important aspects of *Natyashastra* talks about how the audience derives the aesthetic pleasure from stage performance. *Natyashastra* enumerates eleven elements of drama including rasa (sentiment), bhava (emotion), abhinaya (acting), Dharmi (modes of representation), viritti (style of expression), pravtti (local usages), Siddhi (succes of production), Swara (note), atodya (musical instruments), Gana (song), and lastly Ranga (theatre). This wide range of *Natyashastra*is also anotherfactor that makes this great book ever relevant.*Natyashastra*can well be studied as a book on body language. The modern world has become a global village because of the development in the field of technology. Technology has also made the entire world a business centre. The business executives understand the psychology of their coworkers with the help of body language. So *Natyashastra* as tool to understand body language makes this book very contemporary.

Conclusion: My paper with the analytical study of *Panchatantra*, *Arthashastra* and *Natyashastra*has explored the multidimensional aspects of Indian Knowledge System–its historical development, lived practices, transmission across generations, and future potential in a globalized Knowledge economy. Thesetextshave been revisited and reinterpreted in the Indian knowledge traditions in contemporary contexts. My discussion has highlighted the relevance of our indigenous knowledge in pedagogy, governance, aesthetics, writing literature and sustainable living. *Natyashastra*is an organic, living and classical text in aesthetics and performing arts and not a fixed set of ideas and instructions. Our indigenous knowledge system lacks recognition in the Western World. This skepticism or dismissal in modern academic and scientific communities is to be well replied by our scholars exposing them to our vast treasure of art, literature culture and scientific advancement. The IKS should be incorporated into the modern curricula so that present generation becomes aware of the rich cultural past of India which was intentionally downplayed by the colonizers. By addressing contemporary challenges and leveraging global relevance, the IKS contributes to a more inclusive sustainable and enlightened world. My analysis has also highlighted that the IKS believes in interdisciplinary approaches and integrates science, philosophy, and spirituality inspiring new research areas. The Indian Government has also taken initiatives to promote IKS including the establishment of the Indian Knowledge System Division at the Ministry of Education. Traditional Indian knowledge requires specialized translators so that right knowledge comes to the present generation. India has suffered from language loss and it has immensely affected our cultural heritage. Too much of so called urbanization and modernization has also harmed our indigenous knowledge system.Our indigenous knowledge system can be made known to the world community through cultural exchange. Sri Aurobindo is one of the great critical and creative minds of the world literature. Aurobindo's synthetic vision has not only recovered for us the salient principles of ancient Indian aesthetics but their potentialities too. This is the time that we need to integrate IKS with modern knowledge systems for a sustainable growth of the mankind. The knowledge, wisdom and practical contents impregnated in *Panchatantra*, *Arthashastra* and the *Natyashastra* effectively challenge the modern contexts with a loud and clear voice to the world community that the Indian Knowledge System is holistic and sustainable.

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