

WAS KAUTILYA A MISOGYNIST?

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Abstract

"Where women are revered, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not, no rite will yield any fruit." Those were the words of Acharya Vishnugupta Chanakya, also known as Kautilya. But there are also mentions of him saying "One should not place trust in rivers, animals with horns, armed ones, women or in ruling families" and labeling them fickle minded who could speak falsehood. So, what was his actual take on females? What did he instruct about their employment in different sectors by state, the social rules, those around the king, et al? For this enquiry, the Arthashastra's translated by R. Shamasastri and R.P Kangle have been scrutinized. Also, through a random sampling survey conducted among college youth, in order to delve into their perceptions regarding the status of women in ancient India and Kautilya's stance on feminism. (However, it was not revealed until the end that the views in the questions asked were of Kautilya's, to avoid any pre thought confirmation bias). The findings reveal a spectrum of opinions regarding Kautilya's views on women. While some respondents perceive him as a champion of women's rights, others condemn him as a patriarchal figure. At the end, it is found that he emerged as a product of his era (even if assuming the interpolations are true), influenced by prevailing societal norms and political exigencies. Through a nuanced examination of his writings, Kautilya is turned as a pragmatic opportunist, who manipulated through the intricate dynamics of ancient Indian society.

Keywords: Kautilya, Arthashastra, feminism, Vishkanya, women employment, disciplined segregation

AIM

- ❖ To verify whether Kautilya looked down upon women as a misogynist?
- ❖ What does the lay public think on the same?

HYPOTHESIS

He considered women as inferior.

METHODOLOGY USED

- ⇒ Literature Review: Translations of Arthashastra of R.P. Kangle and R. Shamasastri of Kautilya's Arthashastra
- ⇒ Random Sampling survey: to get opinions of youth, but the name of Kautilya was revealed at the end to minimise the confirmation bias.
- ⇒ Corroboration with Indica

INTRODUCTION

Witnessing the current politicized narrative of discourse today, when it comes to ancient India, people often remain either polarized or unambiguous, or both. Particularly when it comes to status of women, everyone just feels enraged during the discussions, turning it into a *Vivaad* debate, instead of a constructive *Samvaad*. The nationalists and the Marxists always seem to popularize their favourite characters of history, often in over-glorification, to the extent that laymen see everything in black and white, i.e., one personality is either completely bad, or else good. One such personality was Acharya Vishnugupta Chanakya, *a.k.a.*, Kautilya, of Taxila university, who was also the mentor (& later minister) of emperor Chandragupta Maurya. Everyone knows that he was the one who found a young Chandra and trained him to uproot the oppressive Nandas of Magadha; also, that how well of a gem he was in designing the wise stratagems. No doubt he was the magnum opus of the same, but seldom is enquired about how he opined on functions of women in society. We know all his commentaries in the treatise of Arthashastra.¹ But first let's get what oral traditions usually passed down about him.

Popular folklores surrounding Chanakya can be summarized as:

A patriot, who was worried about a possible upcoming Macedonian invasion of India by Alexander's Greek army, so he went to Dhanananda, the authoritarian cruel emperor of Magadha- the first Janapada to have

become Mahajanpada, to warn & advise him.² He, blinded by his rage full of alcohol, opium, greed & ego, insulted an apparently ugly-looking Chanakya in broad day light of court, which angered. Which many limit only to economics and management. In reality, he prescribed rules, regulations and functions of almost each persona in contemporary society.

Note: there were earlier Arthashastras as well, Kautilya referred them too, compiled down his commentaries. Usual structure of the treatise is that a verse, usually with a problem statement would begin, followed by the mid body of earlier schools of thought providing their solutions, such as Manu, Brihaspati, et al., and finally Kautilya would sassily comment on it in the end, either refuting or accepting them completely or partially. Thus, it can also be deduced that any chapter violating this format might be a possible interpolation too.

Magadha was the modern-day Bihar & nearby region, which was most prosperous at that time due to easy port & natural minerals and mines access in excess. The latter so much that he swore to never tie his Shikha until he washes it with the former's blood. He was thrown out, but accidentally found a tribal boy Chandra, who was efficiently guiding & managing his friends while playing king. He bought him off from his abusive parents & trained him to replace Dhana Nanda. Years later, they came back to attack him, but failed due to the strong alliances of Dhana Nanda. While they were running for life in disguise, Chanakya came across a hut, in which a mother was scolding his son to eat Khichdi rice not from directly at centre, but from sideways. He learnt his lesson, and encircled the Nanda Empire by either buying off (*Sandhi* alliance deal) his allied friends or by letting Chandra defeat them in battleground.

Soon, Nanda was left isolated, Chandra had a strong alliance system; meanwhile, rumours already came that Alexander died off yellow fever.³ Chandra defeated his weak successor Seleucus Nikator (ex-military commander of Alexander), married his daughter Helen as strategic matrimonial alliance, and attacked Nanda king- defeated him, establishing the Maurya empire.⁴ Chandra's advisory minister & chief economist was his erstwhile guru Chanakya.

MAIN BODY ANALYSIS

Now let's analyse this folktale to understand women' status, but first of all, let me define what I mean by misogyny: dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

In the above tale passed down via oral traditions:

A mother: feeding and guiding her child (even in eating). **A mother would surely have close relations with child at least from the perspective of basic life mentorship**, including the use of methods of scolding. However, she **has to be timid in front of husband** as a wife, even if he's selling the child off.

This also indicates that **male and female child trade as slaves** was common

Women in king's harem of a drunkard Nanda confirms the **tradition of male gaze was very much existent even in royalty**.

In another later Buddhist variation of the same tale, it is proposed that Chandra was just raised by lower caste tribal herder parents, but was biological son of Peempli clan's king Suryagupta Maurya, who was conspired against and attacked by a handsome barber Mahapadmananda, while having an affair with Suryagupta's queen(s). Others differ on name, they call him Mahanandin. Hence, this tells us about the **prevalence of polygamy in royalty**, and **that upper caste women had basic street smartness** (if not education and training) of conspiring strategies on big levels. His empire had reached until Beas river in Punjab, after which his Greek soldiers rebelled to fight the mighty Nandas as they had never seen scary elephants in warfare, nor they were happy with years of constant useless warring. Don't find this info in Arthashastra or folktale, but in Greek sources like *Indica*, which was written by Megasthenes (Greek ambassador to Chandragupta Maurya's court)

Dynasty of which would later bear one of the most influential kings in world history- Ashoka the great.

Matrimonial alliances: done by Chandra, on advise of Kautilya, with daughter of Dhanananda as well as that of Seleucus (Helen) to stop potential domestic revolts (to restore old dynasty) & foreign *Yavana* (Greek) invasions respectively. But nowhere was the consent of daughters was mentioned, instead, one finds the practice of **women as war trophies**.⁵ This objectification-via marriage was practiced worldwide in every era.

I do have some extrapolations from corroborative material: Megasthenes, in his *Indica*, famously mentioned:

→ The 7 social distinctions (philosopher, farmer, shepherd, trader, warrior, overseer and councillor) of Mauryan society. Nowhere is any adjective for females is used in front of any seven of them. So, what did he mentioned about them? **Female slaves involved in cooking, cleaning home and bathroom washrooms, manual scavenging. However, no right to inflict corporal punishment to slaves. Masters were kind of father figures** too as per the norms. Child of slave would become one as well, so would be the man who falls for a slave girl.

→ **Regent queen:** Satavahana queen, Nayanika ruled the kingdom on behalf of her minor son.⁶ Pandyan women running the administration. Twist: the time periods of Megasthenes (300 BCE) and Satavahanas (1st BCE-3rd century CE) don't match, hence this was an obvious interpolation by later Greeks, but the influence of Arthashastra might be still feeble.

→ **Keeping lady bodyguards, washing king and his hair by them**, etc. were the royal practices adopted by Chandra from Persians.

Personal life of Chanakya:

Coming back to Chanakya, one could have guessed his mentality by tracing back his personal life, but the only problem one would face is that not much info has survived about the same.

o Name: Maybe his name is derived from the word "*Kutila*" due to his cunning & witty nature, or it was just the name of his Kula lineage. No one is 100% certain yet.⁷

o Location: Thomas Burrow theorizes & narrows down his possible location as Gujarat-Maharashtra region of Western India as his location, by three stepped-hints: ~ somewhere on the Tropic of Cancer- as the treatise mentions his location as when "*the sundial's shadow disappears at noon during Ashadha Indian season, day & night are equal during Chaitra & Ashvayuja*".

Megasthenes mention that Chandra was attracted towards the beauty of a young **Helen, who was always submissive**.⁶ Further in history, we do know that so did Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Chandragupta II, on behalf of the minor Vakataka prince. A little after the Gupta period, queens used to rule in Kashmir, Odisha and Andhra. Princess Vijaybhattarika acted as the provincial ruler under the Chalukya King; Vikramaditya I. Women were provincial and village administrators in the Kannada region. Upper caste women also enjoyed education and other privileges as well.

Mudrarakshasa, a play written centuries later depicting Chandragupta's early life, puns Acharya's name as "*Kutila Mati*", i.e., crafty minded

~ In either Gujarat or Bengal- as he seems to have been familiar with Avanti Janapada, the rainfall figures in the text & his maritime trade knowledge attests.

~ In the Gujarat-Maharashtra: due to Sopara port mentioned. Plus, the Gotra bearing his name, i.e., Kautilya, is still found in Maharashtra Deccan.

o Definition of the treatise itself: he never provided one. But for the clarity, following are the ones given by famous scholars:

~ R.P Kangle: *Sustenance or livelihood of men*

~ Occidental College's Roger Boesche: *Science of Political Economy*

~ Greatest Marxist historian D.D. Kosambi: *Science of material gain*

~ Patrick Olivelle: *Science of politics*

For the clarity of reader, the paper goes with the definition that it is an ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on political science, statecraft, economics, military & geopolitical strategies.⁸

Now, if one observes the principles laid down by him for a ruler, he mentions the word "king" all the times, but some times he uses gender neutral adjectives or just generic instructions directly, like here:

सुखस्य मूलं धर्मः । धर्मस्य मूलं अर्थः । अर्थस्य मूलं राज्यं ।

राज्यस्य मूलं इन्द्रिय जयः । इन्द्रियाजयस्य मूलं विनयः । विनयस्य मूलं विद्वेषसेवा ॥

Kautilya, Chanakya Sutra (1-6)

Unabridged translation = *Hierarchy of roots of a leader:*

Happiness > Dharma > Artha > right governance > vicious inner-restraint > humility > serving aged

Virtue signalling: Hence, the 4 necessary fields of knowledge for a leader are Vedas, sciences of govt & Varta economics, and Anvikshiki (a combination of logical reasoning and critical thinking).

Espionage: Females as a secret agent (11.1):

"To undermine a ruling oligarchy, make chiefs of the [enemy's] ruling council infatuated with women possessed of great beauty and youth. When passion is roused in them, they should start quarrels by creating belief (about their love) in one and by going to another."

Hence, one can see the use of feminine appeals & sexuality of women as a utility tool by Chanakya. These **Vishkanyas** were immune to poison, since were given in little amounts since kid-hood, but knew about to seduce, fight, read, horse ride, etc. They were efficient assassins & spies. Which was lost in time and got rediscovered by Rudrapatna Shamasastri in 1905 as a librarian in Oriental Research Institute Mysore.

Pregnancy & Abortion:

- **Aborting was a serious crime**, punished according to classes of standard penalties, out of which procuring abortion of a female slave was lowest one. So, one can observe that higher the class of a women, the more important the rule has to be implemented, with more intense punishments than that of lower caste women.

Women cannot be tortured during and after a month of pregnancy. If convicted of murder, then drowning as easy death. They could use ferries free of charge. To deal with internal security problems and corruption he suggested establishing a 'spy state'. Hence, the Vishkanyas were employed there too.

Let's go for selected verses chapter-wise:

Book I Concerning Discipline

Chapter 7. Restraints of the organs of sense- life of a saintly king.

"Thus, with his [King's] organs of sense under his control, he shall keep away from hurting the women and property of others..."

“A poor widow of Bráhmán caste, very clever, and desirous to earn her livelihood is a woman ascetic (parivrájiká). Honoured in the king's harem, such a woman shall frequent the residences of the king's prime ministers (mahámátrakuláni). The same rule shall apply to women with shaved head (munda), as well as to those of súdra caste. All these are wandering spies (sancháráh).” [Shamashastry, p. 17]

Chapter 12. Institution of Spies.

“Of these spies, those who are of good family, loyal, reliable, well-trained in the art of putting on disguises appropriate to countries and trades, and possessed of knowledge of many languages and arts shall be sent by the king to spy in his own country the movements of his ministers, priests, commanders of the army, the heir apparent, the doorkeepers, the officer in charge of the harem, the magistrate (prasástri), the collector-general (samáhartri), the chamberlain (sannidhátri), the commissioner (pradeshtri), the city constable (náyaka), the officer in charge of the city (paura), the superintendent of transactions (vyávahárika), the superintendent of manufactories (karmántika), the assembly of councillors (mantriparishad), heads of departments (adhyaksháh), the commissary-general (dandapála), and officers in charge of fortifications, boundaries, and wild tracts. Fiery spies, such as are employed to hold the royal umbrella, vase, fan, and shoes, or to attend at the throne, chariot, and conveyance shall spy the public character (báhyam cháram) of these (officers).

Classmate spies shall convey this information (i.e., that gathered by the fiery spies) to the institutes of espionage (samsthásvarpayeyuh). Poisoners such as a sauce-maker (súda), a cook (arálika), procurer of water for bathing (snápaka) shampooer, the spreader of bed (ástaraka), a barber (kalpaka), toilet-maker (prasádaka), a water-servant; servants such as have taken the appearance of a hump-backed person, a dwarf, a pigmy (kiráta), the dumb, the deaf, the idiot, the blind; artisans such as actors, dancers, singers, players on musical instruments, buffoons, and a bard; as well as women shall spy the private character of these officers. A mendicant woman shall convey this information to the institute of espionage.”

*“...The hump-backed, the dwarf, **the eunuch, women of accomplishments**, the dumb, and various grades of Mlechcha caste shall be spies inside their houses.” [Ibid, pp. 28-30]*

Chapter 14. Winning over factions for or against an enemy's cause in an enemy's state. *“... those whose women are violently assaulted... come under the group of provoked persons.” [Ibid, p. 34]* Chapter 17. Protection of Princes

“Any one of the classmate spies,” say (politicians known as) Ambhíyas, “may allure the prince towards hunting, gambling, liquor, and women, and instigate him to attack his own father and snatch the reins of government in his own hands. Another spy shall prevent him from such acts.” [p. 46]

“... When under the temptation of youth, he (prince) turns his eye towards women, impure women under the disguise of Aryas shall, at night and in lonely places, terrify him; when fond of liquor, he shall be terrified by making him drink such liquor as is adulterated with narcotics (yógapána)...”

Chapter 19. Duties of King

“The king shall personally attend to the business of gods, of heretics, of Bráhmans learned in the Vedas, of cattle, of sacred places, of minors, the aged, the afflicted, and the helpless, and of women; all this in order (of enumeration) or according to the urgency” [p. 51]

Chapter 20. Duties towards the Harem

“On one side in the rear of the harem, there shall be made for the residence of women compartments provided not only with all kinds of medicines useful in midwifery and diseases, but also with well known pot-herbs (prakhýátasamsthávriksha), and a water-reservoir...”

“He (King) shall keep away his wives from the society of ascetics with shaved head or braided hair, of buffoons, and of outside prostitutes (dási). Nor shall women of high birth have occasion to see his wives except appointed midwives.” [Ibid, p. 54]

“Eighty men and fifty women under the guise of fathers and mothers, and aged persons, and eunuchs shall not only ascertain purity and impurity in the life of the inmates of the harem” [p.55]

Book II: “The Duties of Government Superintendents”

Chapter 1. Formation of villages.

“King shall provide subsistence to helpless women when they are carrying and also to the children they give birth to.” [Ibid, p.62]

Chapter 21. The Superintendent of Tolls

“Commodities intended for marriages, or taken by a bride from her parents' house to her husband's (anváyana), or intended for presentation, or taken for the purpose of sacrificial performance, confinement of women, worship of gods, ceremony of tonsure, investiture of sacred thread, gift of cows (godána, made before marriage), any religious rite, consecration ceremony (dikshá), and other special ceremonials shall be let off free of toll.” [Ibid, p. 156]

Chapter 23. SUPERINTENDENT OF WEAVING.

“Widows, cripple women, girls, mendicant or ascetic women (pravrajitá), women compelled to work in default of paying fines (dandápratikáriní), mothers of prostitutes, old women-servants of the king, and prostitutes (devadási) who have ceased to attend temples on service shall be employed to cut wool, fibre, cotton, panicle (túla), hemp, and flax.”

“Those women who do not stir out of their houses (*anishkásinyah*), those whose husbands are gone abroad, and those who are cripple or girls may, when obliged to work for subsistence, be provided with work (spinning out threads) in due courtesy through the medium of maid-servants (of the weaving establishment).

Those women who can present themselves at the weaving house shall at dawn be enabled to exchange their spinnings for wages (*bhándavetanavinimayam*). Only so much light as is enough to examine the threads shall be kept. If the superintendent looks at the face of such women or talks about any other work, he shall be punished with the first amercement. Delay in paying the wages shall be punished with the middlemost amercement. Likewise, when wages are paid for work that is not completed. She who, having received wages, does not turn out the work shall have her thumb cut off.”

Chapter 27.

Superintendent of prostitutes shall employ (at the king's court) on a salary of 1,000 panas (per annum) a prostitute (*ganiká*), whether born or not born of a prostitute's family, and noted for her beauty, youth, and accomplishments. A rival prostitute (*pratiganiká*) on half the above salary (*kutumbárdhena*) shall also be appointed. Whenever such a prostitute goes abroad or dies, her daughter or sister shall act for her and receive her property and salary. Or her mother may substitute another prostitute. In the absence of any of these, the king himself shall take the property. From the age of eight years, a prostitute shall hold musical performance before the king. Those prostitutes, female slaves, and old women who are incapable of rendering any service in the form of enjoyment (*bhagnabhogáh*) shall work in the storehouse or kitchen of the king.⁹

Prostitution tax: Every prostitute (*rúpájivá*) shall pay every month twice the amount of a day's earning (*bhogadvigunam*) to the Government.

Luxury to the mentor of prostitutes: *Those who teach prostitutes, female slaves, and actresses, arts such as singing, playing on musical instruments, reading, dancing, acting, writing, painting, playing on the instruments like vina, pipe, and drum, reading the thoughts of others, manufacture of scents and garlands, shampooing, and the art of attracting and captivating the mind of others shall be endowed with maintenance from the State.* [Ibid, pp. 175-178]

Book III. Concerning Law

Chapter 2. Concerning marriage. the duty of marriage, the property of a woman, and compensations for remarriage.

Note: for marriage, the textbook classification of types of marriage (Brahma, Prajapatya, Arsha, Daiva, Gandharva, Asura, Paishacha) are mentioned, out of which first 4 were encouraged.

Property of women: *“Means of subsistence (*vritti*) or jewellery (*ábadhya*) constitutes what is called the property of a woman, which valued at above two thousand shall be endowed (on her name). There is no limit to jewellery. It is no guilt for the wife to make use of this property in maintaining her son, her daughter-in law or herself whenever her absent husband has made no provision for her maintenance. In calamities, disease and famine, in warding off dangers and in charitable acts, the husband, too, may make use of this property”.* [Ibid, p. 219]

Remarriage: *“If a widow marries any man other than of her father-in-law's selection (*svasuraprátilo myenanivishtá*), she shall forfeit whatever had been given to her by her father-in-law and her husband”.*

*“The kinsmen (*gnátis*) of a woman shall return to her whatever property of her own she had placed in their custody. Whoever justly takes a woman under his protection shall equally protect her property. No woman shall succeed in her attempt to establish her title to the property of her husband”.*

“A barren widow who is faithful to the bed of her dead husband may, under the protection of her teacher, enjoy her property as long as she lives: for it is to ward off calamities that women are endowed with property”.

Special case: If a husband either is of bad character or is long gone abroad or has become a traitor to his king or is likely to endanger the life of his wife or has fallen from his caste or has lost virility, he may be abandoned by his wife.

⁹The same rules shall apply to an actor, dancer, singer, player on musical instruments, a buffoon (*vágvivana*), a mimic player (*kusílava*), rope-dancer (*plavaka*), a juggler (*saubhika*), a wandering bard or herald (*chárana*), pimps, and unchaste women.

Chapter 3. The duty of a wife; maintenance of a woman; cruelty to women; enmity between husband and wife; a wife's transgression; her kindness to another; and forbidden transactions.

Maintenance of women:

A woman who has a right to claim maintenance for an unlimited period of time shall be given as much food and clothing (*grásacchádana*) as is necessary for her or more than is necessary in proportion to the income of the maintainer (*yatha-purushaparivápam vá*).

Cruel domestic violence as punishment:

“Nagne vinagne nyange pitrke matrke vinagne ityanirdesena vinayagrahanam”

Women of refractive nature shall be taught manners by using such general expressions as “Thou, half naked; thou, fully naked”. Or, three beats either with a bamboo-bark or with a rope or with the palm of the hand may be given on her hips. Violation of the above rules shall be liable to half the punishment levied for defamation and criminal hurt.

*For holding **conversation in suspicious places**, whips may be substituted for fines. In the centre of the village, an **outcaste person (chandála)** may whip such women five times on each of the sides of their body. She may get rid of being whipped by paying a pana for each whip. [pp. 223-225]*

MY INTERPRETATIONS FROM EACH CHAPTER:

Book I:

Chapter 7:

- Women are mentioned in the context of being potential spies, regardless of caste or social status, suggesting **a lack of trust towards them**.
- Taking care of women is highlighted enough throughout the text. Plus, the accommodation of widows in espionage reflects the **utilitarian point of view of Kautilya**.

Chapter 12:

- Women are depicted as part of the espionage network, being employed as spies to gather information on both public and private matters.
- Notice how all the different types of spy jobs for women are menial odd jobs of servants only. Of course, a spy has to blend in the nature regulations of society during disguise.
- The mention of Eunuchs as spies began from Kautilya's era, or else they were used as bodyguards of harems only in medieval times.

Chapter 14:

- The assault on women is highlighted as a means to provoke individuals or groups, indicating **women's vulnerability to violence**.
- The typical present-day gimmick of 'how women, with her charms, can easily lure an apparently innocent boy'. And in doing so, she is ironically the perpetrator.

Chapter 17:

- Women, particularly prostitutes, are depicted as potential influences over princes, both in leading them astray and in preventing their negative behaviours.

Chapter 19:

- The king is tasked with attending to the needs of women among other vulnerable groups, suggesting a **paternalistic role towards women**.
- In the order of hierarchal enumeration of addressing needs, women are ranked last. Means they were usually important, but not as much Brahmins, cows, temples, old or poor.

Chapter 20:

- Women in the harem are segregated and closely monitored to maintain purity and control over their interactions, reflecting a restrictive environment for women.
- Hygiene of harem women is focused with all the medics & necessities, indicating the focus on health of king and about-to-be born as well ultimately.
- Notice how king was supposed to keep his wives away from monks (in fear of them getting impressed to leave for monkhood) and prostitutes (which sex work was now starting to be seen as demeaning, at least by the time this verse was compiled)

Book II:

Chapter 1:

- The king is responsible for providing support to pregnant women and ensuring care for the children they give birth to, highlighting the **importance of maternal welfare**.
- High status of aid services and prestige to pregnant women and newly delivered ones too. So basic humanity existed.
- Marriage is considered so pure & important that it is been rendered tax-free, speaks a lot about the priorities

Chapter 21:

- Certain exemptions from tolls are granted for goods related to women's ceremonies and rituals, reflecting a recognition of women's societal roles.

Chapter 23:

- Women, including widows and those in need, are employed in weaving establishments, indicating their economic contribution but also their vulnerability to exploitation.
- Chanakya don't want to go any human go waste, and turns them into a human resource. Thus, he **accommodated the marginalized and non-working population sections into employment circle of weaving** too.

➤ **Difference in wages depended upon the quality of threads produced, hence within women, the pay gap was bit meritocratic.** Also, if some punishment is thumb-cutting, then the industry has to be dead-serious in discipline. Notice how a stranger man is not allowed to even see the face or talk to the weaving women, signifying the **objectified sense of ownership of woman by a man**, combined with the '*us vs. them*' identity conflict chances.

Chapter 27:

- The state manages prostitution, including the employment of prostitutes and their families, highlighting the commodification of women's bodies.
- One can see the depth of male gaze when beauty-based meritocracy enters into it via prostitution. ➤ Prostitution slowly became hereditary as well as musical.
- The difference between performing artists and sex workers became so thin in very less time that later on these arts would be looked down upon as a pursuit of characterless women only. ➤ Kautilya was wise enough to tax the time immemorial industry of prostitution, since this would never face any recession; thus, even their teachers were given significance.

Book III:

Chapter 2:

- Women's property rights and remarriage practices are outlined, showing limitations and restrictions on widows' autonomy and agency.
- Women **can use whatever property they got ONLY when certain pre-conditions are met**, and all of them are either for sustaining sons or any other family member, or surviving through a calamity. She had **no right to spend it on herself only out of wish or for leisure**.
- Notice how a woman, if wishes to remarry to anyone of own choice which deviates with that to in laws, she would have to submit all properties given by them. Also, the repeated mention of the word protection makes a baggage out of women of family.
- Notice how the **chastity or piousness of maidens & their loyalty to "bed of husbands"** is given more importance than anything else, which signifies the societal urge to **chain and manipulate her sexuality** in all ways.
- There are so many "faults" for which a women can be abandoned, but a man would have to go to the extent of insanity or treason so that her women can lawfully dump him.

Chapter 3:

- Women's maintenance and treatment by husbands are regulated, but the text also suggests acceptance of domestic violence as punishment, reflecting a patriarchal and oppressive societal structure. ➤ Men of family are expected to **materialistically spoil the "high-maintenance women"** so that she can in turn entertain him by dolling herself up. It signifies the **beatification standards and pressure** of the same.
- The **nakedness angle in beatings as lesson-teaching punishments** says a lot about the **inhumane** treatment done to women once deviated from social norms.
- Also, the Brahmins are even okay with the lower caste untouchable Chandelas touching and beating them if done for punishment, or else not. Talk about heights of **male ego**. However, similar clause is in Dharmashastras, which were compiled later on, so might be an interpolation to validate at that time.

SURVEY RESULTS

A survey was conducted to gather what 32 lay youngsters of Mumbai thought about Kautilya's view on women, but to avoid the confirmation bias, his name was not revealed. Instead, the survey was presented as general awareness of commoners about women of ancient India. Here are some insights into the same:

- The present-day social conditions of women in rural areas might have influenced their perception about that in ancient era, such as majority of people agreed that birth of girl child was not celebrated (81.3%), not allowed to be educated (50%), no encouragement to love marriage (maiden's freedom to select partner) (56.3%), discouragement to inter-caste marriages (78.1%), possibility for wife to divorce (59.4%), daughters being unable to inherit family property (75%), same for wife for husband's (65.6%), women getting beaten down to pulp as punishment (50%)
- Some of the popular oral discourses catalysed by nationalist narratives might have had helped them have some concrete info on ancient period, like how women engaged in performing arts like dancing & singing (78.1%)
- But on some questions, they were far from right, like when they answered that performing artists were not highly paid (59.4%), women not allowed to remarry (59.4%), not allowed to work (56.3%), prostitution was illegal and looked down upon (50%), that women position overall was bad even according to that time

- Since post-Mauryan coronation, Kautilya is famous for his spy systems theories, laymen still know that women were employed at espionage work (71.9%), despite many of them saying they don't know about work status or they weren't employed (21.9% both)
- We also come to know that even laymen realise that prostitution is as old as human civilisation (68.8%)
- None of them, except one, knew about Niyoga, in which a wife is encouraged to marry the brother of dead/insane husband in order to produce at least one male heir with paternal families' genes. People knew only about Sati as an evil of ancients. Some even went as bizarre as ghosts as answers.
- People hold mixed opinions on Kautilya from feminist perspective: some consider him an objectifying jerk for whom women were war trophies or sex slaves only, whereas some are only limited to his concept of Vishkanyas, whereas some say he opined to respect & even worship them as devis or symbol of Laxmi; but some of people are honestly unaware about his views on women.
- The saddening part is that majority of people responded to mythological, Puranic or Epic women of Sita, Kaikeyi, Mandodari, Manthra, Radha, Parvati, Draupadi, Gandhari as ancient era women. Of course, some answered Rishikas Maitreyi and Gargi, but no one other than them (only 2 Brahmin women are representatives of entire ancient Indian women). Only 2-2 respondents knew about the existence of Prabhavati Gupta and Helen. Rest of them were just filling up answers for name-sake with medieval era famous women of Razia Sultan, Rani Laxmi Bai, et al.

CONCLUSION

✓ It is hard to say Kautilya was only a misogynist, he was a combination of that and a pragmatic protectionist opportunist, a product of his era. Hence, the hypothesis is partially true, that too considering we can't exactly date the interpolations.

✓ In simple terms, he was of the motto of "Doll, Toll, or Soul Patrol". Means, he, like other men of that era, wanted women to doll up in meek submissive chaste mannerisms, or pay toll/tax/fines when found discrepancies, or punished brutally.

✓ Today's urban youth is hardly aware about the women of ancient India, and is mixed in terms of opinions of Kautilya from a feminist perspective. There is a serious need of the hour to write history (an interactive 'History') from 'His-story' to also 'Her-story'.

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