

The *Arthaśāstra* as a Fount of Fun

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हेरमन् टीकेन् महाभागः अर्थशास्त्र-कामसूत्रयोः निबन्धनविधानगतं सादृश्यं व्यवस्थाप्य कामसूत्राणामनन्तरकालिकत्वं निश्चित्य उभयोरपि अनयोः ग्रन्थयोः विषयविवेचनपद्धतौ केवल-सैद्धान्तिकदृष्टेः अवलम्बनेन उभावपि हास्यास्पदं जातौ इति सहजसिद्धशैल्या निरूपयति। अर्थशास्त्रपेक्षया तन्त्राख्यायिकायां पञ्चतन्त्रादिषु, कामसूत्राणामपेक्षया गाथासप्तशत्यादिषु च बोधनीयांशबोधने अतिशयितत्वमनुभूयते इत्यपि निरूपयति।

The *Arthaśāstra* presents itself as a well-organized, utterly serious scholarly treatise.¹ Thus, it opens with an enumeration of the 180 topics treated, as they are divided over its 15 books and 150 chapters. After that it defines its subject matter, *artha*, or statecraft, and its methodology, *ānvīkṣikī*, and it concludes with a list of the *tantra-yuktis*, or rhetorical methods, it has made use of. The *Arthaśāstra* is, however, not a handbook providing ready-made answers to specific problems. Instead, it teaches a method, which as such could be applied to any problem which might arise. This method, called *ānvīkṣikī*, consists of a thorough and dispassionate analysis of a problem and its possible solutions.² In itself this seems to be a highly efficient, and effective, approach. It is, however, belied by the text itself, which, while treating only a fraction of the entire field of statecraft, is already quite

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1. References are to R.P. Kangle, *The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*. Parts I and II. Bombay 1969-1972.
 2. The term has been discussed by, among other scholars, Paul Hacker (“*Ānvīkṣikī*”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 2 (1958), pp. 54-83) and Wilhelm Halbfass (“*Darśana, Ānvīkṣikī, Philosophy*”. In Charles Talliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*. Oxford 2003, pp. 299-312).

voluminous. What the *Arthaśāstra* does is showing *ānvīkṣikī* at work, or showing how a situation or problem may be analysed and tackled. However, as reality is endlessly varied and complex the *Arthaśāstra* proceeds of necessity by example. A case in point is the fictional discussion, or *kathā*, in 1.8 between a number of authorities on what type of person a king should attract as trusted courtier (*amātya*).¹ Several possible candidates are passed under review, and one after the other rejected as useful only in particular circumstances. For instance, Bhāradvāja suggests that the king attracts a fellow-student, as he can trust him and knows exactly what he is capable of. Next, Viśālākṣa is put on the stage, who rejects this suggestion on the ground that such a person might, through familiarity, lack in respect towards the king. Instead he had better choose a fellow in vice who will not dare to go against the king's wishes for fear of being exposed. This candidate is then rejected by Pārāśara on the ground that he has the same power over the king as the king has over him. Instead, Pārāśara comes up with a person who saved the king's life at the risk of his own. This goes on for some time more, after which the exercise is rounded off by Kauṭilya, who as the reputed author of the *Arthaśāstra* has the last say in such matters. Kauṭilya concludes by saying that the number of possible candidates is endless (*sarvam upapannam iti kauṭilyaḥ*). According to him the choice should depend on a person's capacities, on the one hand, and the particular situation, on the other.

An investigation of possible candidates for the position of trusted courtier as anticipated in the *Arthaśāstra* here is clearly a time-consuming affair. The *Arthaśāstra* has been criticized for this in the *Tantrākhyāyikā* and its derivatives, the *Pañcatantra* and *Hitopadeśa*. For preparing his sons for their future roles as kings Amaraśakti rejects the *Arthaśāstra* in favour of the *Nītiśāstra*. Mastering the art of *nīti* would require a mere six months, against mastering the *ānvīkṣikī* method of the *Arthaśāstra*, which requires twelve years to begin with. Instead of going over the hundreds of

1. On these *kathās*, see Friedrich Wilhelm, *Politische Polemiken im Staatslehrbuch des Kauṭilya*. Wiesbaden 1960 and, especially, Albrecht Wezler, "Über Form und Character der sogenannten 'Polemiken im Staatslehrbuch des Kauṭilya'", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143 (1993), pp. 106-134.

things that could happen, *nīti* consists of insight in concrete situations. The example referred to by Ruprecht Geib¹ is the story of how the king's former adviser, the jackal Damanaka, is able to persuade the lion king Piṅgalaka to kill his present trustworthy adviser, the bull Sañjīvaka, by using an argument derived from the *Arthaśāstra*. The jackal, who wants to regain his former position of adviser to the king, manages to plant suspicion in the king's mind with quotations from a prestigious text like the *Arthaśāstra* to the effect that it is dangerous for a king to rely on one adviser only, as in the absence of others the latter can do and say what he wants. The king for his part fails to recognize Damanaka's motives. He kills the utterly reliable Sañjīvaka, only to become again the plaything of the sanctimonious Damanaka. The story demonstrates how useless the theoretical knowledge of the *Arthaśāstra* is for recognizing a concrete situation.

Incidentally, while at one point Kauṭilya does indeed say that a king should not rely on one adviser only (1.15.35), immediately after that he also argues that the number of advisers with whom the king should consult is basically to be determined by the concrete circumstances and the competence of the persons concerned (1.15.41 and, again, in 50).

A similar relationship as that between *Arthaśāstra* and *Tantrākhyāyikā* exists between the *Kāmasūtra* and *Sattasāi*.² Though the *Kāmasūtra* has often been characterised, and advertised, as a handbook on sex and I do not want to deny that that treatise contains many tricks and suggestions which may be used for spicing up one's sex life, its primary aim, like that of the *Arthaśāstra*, is to explore, map and label everything one might in theory encounter in one's sex life. And the result, as in the *Arthaśāstra*, are endless lists, enumerating and naming things or breaking down actions in consecutive steps, which lists, again, do not pretend to be complete: they serve merely as examples. The list of eight nail scratches, for instance, given in the fourth chapter of book 2, is just one such list, as the variety of nail

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1. Ruprecht Geib, *Zur Frage nach der Urfassung des Pañcatantra*. Wiesbaden 1969: 30-34. The reference is to *Arthaśāstra* 1.15.
 2. See Herman Tieken, *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*. Groningen 2001, pp. 72-79.

scratches is in principle endless.¹ Vātsyāyana's enumeration of the various ways of embracing is concluded in a similar vein by the following stanza (2.2.30):

Of course also those techniques for raising passion
which have not been mentioned in this learned treatise,
may be applied here with similar zeal.

The underlying assumption of this making of lists is that a complete overview of all the possible sexual variations will enable one to choose that particular course of action which will yield the most gratifying result. An illustration of this is found at the beginning of book 2. There, both men and women are each distinguished into three types (“high”, “middle”, “low”) on the basis of the sizes of their sexual organs, their temperaments and the time it takes for them to reach a climax respectively. For each of these categories there are nine combinations, in three of which the men and women are compatible and in six of which they are not. However, for the three categories taken together there are no fewer than 9 times 9 times 9, that is, 729 combinations. In order to have perfect sex prospective lovers are advised to go through all these possibilities, in the process identifying the ones which might apply to themselves.

This usefulness of making such lists has been questioned, and parodied, in the *Sattasāi*.² The short poems of this anthology present us with the counterpart of the ideal lover of the *Kāmasūtra*. The ideal lover is not a common man but a man who has the time, and interest, to spend all day in analyzing the complexities of love and sex. This sophisticated person is called *nāgaraka*, “man from town”. In contrast to him the inexperienced and blundering lover in the *Sattasāi* is typically situated in small villages in the countryside. The people living in these villages have to work hard to make a living, which, as seen in poem 324, has predictably negative effects on their love lives:

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1. References are to Devadatta Śāstrī (ed.), *Kāmasūtram. Śrīyaśodharaviracita “jayamaṅgalā” vyākhyāsahitaṃ hindīvyākhyābhāṣyopetañca*. Vārāṇasī 1964.
 2. Albrecht Weber, *Das Saptaçatakam des Hāla. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*. VII. Band, No. 4. Leipzig 1881.

When he fell asleep,
 Exhausted after a day of dragging the plow through
 thick mud,
 His wife,
 Angry at missing the pleasures of love,
 Cursed the rainy season.¹

Whereas the *Kāmasūtra* presents the winning over of a young innocent girl as a process consisting of a number of discrete, consecutive steps which one has to go through one after the other, the *Sattasāi* ridicules this approach by showing instead the importance of insight in the situation at hand, or of seeing how experienced the woman actually is, or what she expects of the man at that moment. One of the steps mentioned in the *Kāmasūtra* in the process of a man winning over a bashful girl is to take her on his lap to make her accustomed to being fondled (3.2.23). The husband, in poem 767, follows this scheme to the letter, failing to recognize that he is dealing with a less than innocent bride:

As soon as her husband took her on his lap
 Sweat poured from her
 Like an attentive servant,
 Washing the mud of last night's assignation
 From her feet.²

One of the last steps to be taken before actually entering the girl is that of loosening her waistband, untying its knot and putting aside her clothes (*Kāmasūtra* 3.2.28). Again, it is vital to know if the time is right for such a drastic step, as shown in poem 648, in which the man acts too hastily and frightens the girl, so that he will probably have to start all over again:

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1. The translation is by Peter Khoroche and Herman Tieken, *Poems of Life and Love in Ancient India. Hāla's Sattasāi*. Albany 2009: no 543.
 2. Ibid. no 403.

Feigning sleep
 The husband turned over
 And let a trembling hand fall as if by accident
 On the knot of his young wife's skirt
 Which she held firmly between her thighs.¹

In poems 351, on the other hand, he makes himself ridiculous, having left the girl wondering when he would finally take some initiative:

He was embarrassed
 But I laughed and gave him a hug
 When he groped for the knot
 Of my skirt and found it
 Already undone.²

The pointes of these poems seem to lie in the implicit references they make to the *Kāmasūtra*. In this connection it should be noted that in the very beginning of the *Sattasāi*, in stanza 2, we are told to be prepared to make the connection with that learned treatise:

Shame on those who cannot appreciate
 This ambrosial Prakrit poem
 But pore instead
 Over treatises on love.³

It has long been recognized that the *Kāmasūtra* was largely modelled on the *Arthaśāstra*.⁴ For example, like the latter text, the

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1. Ibid. no 149
 2. Ibid. no. 158.
 3. Ibid. no 2.
 4. See, for instance, Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*. Vol. III, Delhi 1967, pp. 657-663, Friedrich Wilhelm, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Kāmasūtra und Arthaśāstra". *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 116 (1966), pp. 291-310, and Jean Fezas, "Remarques sur la forme de deux traités de l'Inde Ancienne: l'Arthaśāstra et le Kāmasūtra". In: Nalini Balbir, *Genres*

Kāmasūtra begins with a table of contents, has been divided into books (*adhikaraṇas*), chapters (*adhyāyas*) and topics (*prakaraṇas*), and ends with a “book” on secret practices (*aupanīṣada*), and like the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Kāmasūtra* consists of prose passages summed up by verses. Furthermore, in the *Kāmasūtra* love and sex have been subjected to the same detailed analytical approach as in the *Arthaśāstra*, with the same result, namely lists and enumerations. The *Kāmasūtra* like the *Arthaśāstra* is ruthlessly practical. For instance, where in the *Kāmasūtra*, if a girl cannot be had in any other way, the man is advised to ply her with liquor or rape her in her sleep (3.5.25-26), in the *Arthaśāstra* under certain circumstances a king should not hesitate to eliminate his own son (1.17). In order to understand this macchiavellian element we should not forget, however, that in either case we are dealing only with possible courses of actions that one might take, and that they are part of a list, in which each following item tends to be more fantastic, though at the same time not necessarily less effective, than the preceding one.

Though both *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* defy exact dating, the *Kāmasūtra* is almost definitely later than the *Arthaśāstra*. In any case, in *Kāmasūtra* 1.2.10, which enumerates sources to which one might turn for information on *artha*, its reputed author, Vātsyāyana, seems to refer directly to the second book of the *Arthaśāstra*, called *adhyakṣapracāra*. And when in 1.4.34 Vātsyāyana describes the *pīṭhamarda*, *viṭa*, and *vidūṣaka* as *mantrins*, or “advisers”, of the courtezans and men from town, employed in their wars and truces (*sandhivigraha*; 1.4.34), he is transplanting terminology of the *Arthaśāstra* into the science of love and sex.

This resemblance of the *Kāmasūtra* to the *Arthaśāstra* is generally taken as the result of an inevitable development, as if Vātsyāyana did not have access to other models for the work. But there must have been other options open to him. If he had wanted to, he could easily have written a treatise entirely in didactic verse, like Manu's *śāstra* on *dharma*. As to the question what might have been behind Vātsyāyana's choice for the *Arthaśāstra* as a model we should, however, consider the effect

which must have been created by this choice: in the *Kāmasūtra* love and sex are treated as topics deserving of the very same treatment as such a serious matter as statecraft.¹ A gathering of *nāgarakas* enjoying themselves one evening by making a list of reasons for seducing another man's wife (*Kāmasūtra* 1.5.4-21) is implicitly compared to one of specialists in statecraft sitting in conclave discussing possible candidates for the position of trusted courtier. I believe that we should reckon with the possibility that the *Kāmasūtra* was intended as a parody of the *Arthaśāstra*. The lists of nail marks and sexual positions with such fanciful and evocative names such as the “hare's leap” and “splitting the bamboo” would thus be meant to make us laugh or at least draw a smile on our faces. The same would apply to the long list of reasons why one should seduce another man's wife or the learned exposé on economics in the book on the prostitute.

It is interesting to see how one text has ramified here into many others, and also how much sharp-witted humour was involved in all this. The *Tantrākhyāyikā* outsmarts the *Arthaśāstra*, making fun of its cumbersome *śāstric* approach of things. The *Sattasāi* does the same with the *Kāmasūtra*, while the latter text makes fun of the *Arthaśāstra* by subjecting love and sex to the same detailed, learned treatment as statecraft. In the process we go from one genre to the other: from *śāstra* to didactic animal fable, and from *śāstra* to mock-*śāstra*, and from the latter to erotic *kāvya* poetry. The authors of these texts seem to have been able to turn their hands at anything. And in doing so they were clearly not devoid of a sense of humour.

1. As one of the three *puruṣārthas*, *kāma* is as important as *artha*, but the *kāma* of the *Kāmasūtra* is a different *kāma* than that of the *puruṣārthas*.