

What Does Prosperity Mean? Revisiting Artha for a Rising India



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Artha in the ancient Indian political and philosophical thought is a complex and multivalent concept. It has multiple meanings. 'Artha' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'ॠ' meaning to acquire, to obtain. It literally means 'that which is sought' or 'purpose'. A deeper foray into classical Indian texts, particularly on statecraft like Kautilya's Arthashastra, the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata and various Niti shastra works, conceptualise 'artha' within a broader semantic field. Here it includes purpose, meaning, material security and economic resources, pointing to a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between economics, governance and social order. Commonly it is also understood as 'wealth' or 'material prosperity'.

In the classical Indian texts, like Kautilya's Arthashastra, artha is not distinct from politics. It is very much an integral part of sovereign power. The Saptanga (seven limbs) theory is the cornerstone of the conceptualization of state: the ruler (svami), ministers (amatya), territory (janapada), fortified cities (durga), treasury (kosha), army (danda) and allies (mitra). Here the treasury (kosha) and territory (janapada) are the pillars of economics which cannot be isolated from military power and governance.

In the Purushartha theory (human objectives), artha is placed along with dharma, kama and moksha as one of the fundamental objectives of human existence. The Arthashastra says, "prithiviam labhe sarvam hi prayojanam" (in the acquisition of earth lies all purpose), signifying that in the context of statecraft, beyond individual pursuit, artha denotes the material wherewithal required for the social and political order. Kautilya goes on to say, "sukhasyamulam dharmah, dharmasya mulam arthah, arthasya mulam rajyam." (happiness is rooted in dharma, dharma is rooted in artha, and artha is rooted in the state). This implies that economic prosperity is created through an organised political structure which in turn enables righteous governance.

Kautilya shows a developed understanding of the role of the state in exercising economic authority. The Arthashastra outlines detailed policies for agriculture, trade, monetary affairs and industry. The state appointed officials, for instance Samaharta (chief revenue officer) and official in charge of trade (panadhyaksha) to ensure fair trade practices. There were attempts to standardize currency and regulate lending practices. There is a provision for fining monetary frauds. In fact, the Arthashastra is a precursor



to industrial policy with its emphasis on regulation of private craft guilds and state workshops. The idea of dharmartha yuktam i.e. 'the integration of righteousness with material prosperity' is discussed in the Rajadharma Parva of Mahabharata.

Moreover, the Arthashastra establishes the central importance of economic resources for political stability ('rajasya mulam arthah' --wealth is the foundation of the state). However, this is immediately qualified by another verse, 'arthasya mulam rajyam' (the state is the foundation of wealth), signifying that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two and that political authority and economic resources mutually reinforce each other. Kautilya treated the management of income and expenditure as a direct responsibility of the state and the king reviewed it daily. Maintaining a robust treasury was part of Kautilya's financial architecture and played a vital role in monetary policy management. This happens today through the RBI, which also has a treasury function. Instead of delegating the responsibility of constant supervision of officials to his subordinates, the ruler made sure that economic governance was exercised at the

highest political level. Trade promotion was equally critical to the Arthashastra's economic vision. The taxation was not arbitrary. Revenue needs were balanced with commercial vitality. In this sense, the Arthashastra approaches what may be described as an early administrative model of economic policy, combining regulation, infrastructure support and fiscal oversight into a coherent framework of governance.

For Kautilya, economic prosperity is closely linked with the well-being of the subjects, because the happiness of the king lay in the happiness of his subjects. This can be taken to mean access to health care, education, clean drinking water, nutrition, and employment. A variety of state policy initiatives have endeavoured to convert economic growth into material well-being, social security and risk management for the weakest segments of society. Schemes for food security (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana), financial inclusion (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana), housing (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana), health (Ayushman Bharat) and digital connectivity, direct benefit transfers, formalization of labour, banking and credit facilities are reminiscent of Kautilya's emphasis on the need to maintain granaries, treasuries and multiple revenue streams in order to shield the population from distress: famines, epidemics and political instability. Artha here is not just wealth creation or fiscal surplus, but the creation of conditions in which secure, dignified, meaningful lives can be led.

The Arthashastra's emphasis on maintaining roads and passes reflects an early statecraft understanding that market integration depends on secure connectivity. This is reflected in modern logistics frameworks such as PM Gati Shakti (emphasis on infrastructure through massive public capital expenditure) and the Golden Quadrilateral (the highway network in India connecting Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai).

Instead of conceptualising prosperity purely in terms of aggregate metrics such as GDP, India offers a template that underscores resilience, equity and sustainability. Cumulatively, all these schemes conceptualise Artha broadly, where the state's authority and its prosperity is defined through the collective prosperity of its citizenry. In this sense, the current governance approach is in continuity with indigenous political thought, illustrating how classical concepts could be reimagined to meet the ethical and material imperatives of a modern nation state.

The sparrows and the elephant (strategy over strength) Panchatantra, Book I

The story of the Sparrows and the Elephant is one of the most popular tales from the Panchatantra. It is found in the first book, Mitra-bheda (The loss of friends).

A pair of sparrows lived happily in a nest built on a tamala tree. The female sparrow had laid her eggs and the arrival of new babies was eagerly anticipated. One afternoon, a wild elephant struck by the heat and his own arrogance began rampaging through the trees in the forest. Upon reaching the tamala tree with a powerful stroke of his trunk, he broke the branch which carried the sparrows' nest. The nest fell to the ground. While the adult sparrows managed to fly away, their eggs were crushed. The female sparrow began to cry inconsolably due to the loss of the unborn young ones. A woodpecker, who was her friend, comforted her by saying that wailing would not bring back the dead and it was essential that justice be served.

The woodpecker realizing that they couldn't fight the elephant alone, called upon his companions, namely, a gnat (fly) and a frog (the chief of frogs). The four small creatures gathered to devise a strategic plan to defeat the trouble making elephant.

The gnat was to fly into the elephant's ear and hum a hypnotic melody. This would make the elephant close his eyes in a trance-like state of mind. Once the elephant's eyes were shut, the woodpecker would peck out his eyes, turning him blind. With the passage of time, the elephant would become dehydrated due to heat. The frog would go to the edge of a deep, rocky pit (far from any water body) and begin to croak at a high volume. Hearing the

croaking frog, the blind elephant would assume the presence of a pond nearby. Following the sound of the frog, he would tumble into the pit.

The plan was executed with absolute precision. As the gnat sang, the elephant closed his eyes, and the woodpecker struck. Visionless and crying in pain, the elephant wandered the forest for hours, searching for water to soothe



his wounds. When he heard the frog's croaking, he rushed toward the sound, thinking he had reached a lake. Instead, he fell into the deep pit and died.

The tiny sparrows had successfully gained victory over the mightiest beast in the jungle.

Moral of the Fable
Even the weak can overcome a powerful enemy if they work as a team using their intelligence. It emphasizes that unity is strength. Unity and team spirit is of utmost importance for a Viksit Bharat.

WISDOM WORD SEARCH

V A N I J Y A T H I K A
O G A L I B M U D R A N
A L V Q M I B H E Y A V
T K A S H R E N I A K I
I P A T G J K L M P N K
V A J R T L S I I A O S
A A T A A V U G A N T I
R Y M I T R L V S Y L K
T R P D E F K H N A Q D
A I A Q P W A L A A D S
K N J K R I S H I S U A
A A D A S D L N M O I W

WORDS TO FIND

- Kara, Kosa, Krishi, Mudra, Panya, Rina, Shreni, Sulka, Vanijya, Varta
- KARA** - Tax collected for governance and public works.
 - KOSA** - State treasury supporting administration and welfare.
 - KRISHI** - Agrarian foundation of the economy.
 - MUDRA** - Certified monetary system facilitating exchange.
 - PANYA** - Trade commodities circulating across markets.
 - RINA** - Structured credit and borrowing practices.
 - SHRENI** - Merchant and artisan guilds maintaining trade ethics and financial cooperation
 - SULKA** - Trade toll ensuring regulated commerce and state revenue.
 - VANIJYA** - Professional and long-distance commerce activity.
 - VARTA** - Classical economic activity including agriculture, cattle economy, and trade.

Marvels of India

SURYA MANDIR, KONARK



A Marvel of Ancient Indian Astronomical Ingenuity: The Sun Temple at Konark stands as a striking example of Bharat's synthesis of science, architecture and symbolism. Built in the 13th century on the Odishan coast, it is designed as a giant stone chariot dedicated to the Sun God, reflecting deep astronomical insight.

Astronomical Precision and Solar Alignment: The temple is oriented along an east-west axis, allowing the first rays of the rising sun to illuminate its entrance and sanctum during key moments such as solstices and equinoxes. This alignment demonstrates a refined understanding of the solar movement that was crucial for ancient calendrical systems and ritual timings.

Ingenious Timekeeping Mechanism: Its 24 intricately carved stone wheels function as sundials. The spokes cast shadows that enable precise measurement of time, from hours down to minutes, across seasons, thereby showcasing mastery over solar geometry.

Civilisational Significance: More than a place of worship, the temple foregrounds Bharat's advanced engagement with astronomy and mathematics, embodying a civilisation where scientific knowledge and sacred expression coexisted seamlessly.

Did you know?

Did you know? The Ayyavole-500, a powerful medieval South Indian merchant guild from Aihole, operated across Asia between the 8th and 14th centuries. They managed extensive trade networks, financed production, standardized commercial practices and even maintained private armies to guard pepper and silk shipments across the ocean. They were also major donors to temples and provided loans to local artisans and farmers. In many ways, they functioned like early multinational corporations and mobile banking systems, centuries before modern economic institutions emerged.

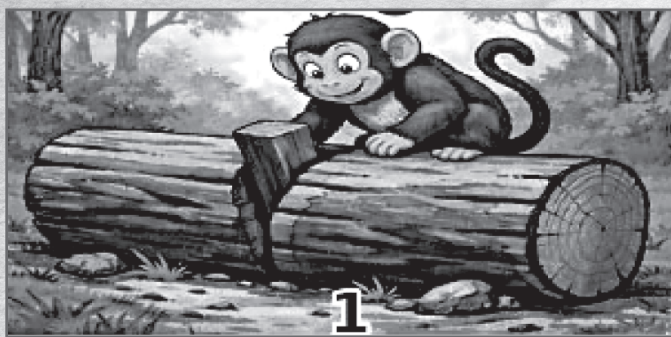


QUIZ Economy, Commerce & Finance

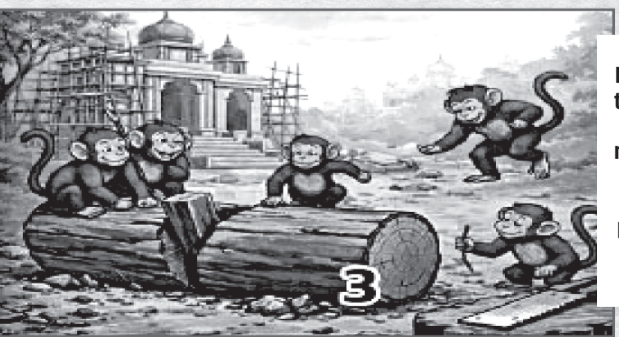
Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1. "Kosh Mulo Dand" is the official motto of the Income Tax Department of India in Sanskrit. In which famous ancient text are these words found?	Arthashastra	Brihatsamhita	Shukranitisar	Yajnvalkyya-smriti
2. Which are the dynasties that first introduced superior cavalry with better horse breeds, reins, saddles and stirrups to India?	Nandas & Mauryas	Sungas & Kanvas	CHOLAS AND PANDYAS	Sakas and Kushans
3. Which Satavahana King is known for his love for overseas trade and navigation, whose coins also depicted a ship on them?	Gautamiputra Satakarni	Vashishtiputra Pulumavi	Yajna Sri Satakarni	Simuka
4. Which of these was a Land Tax levied by the Cheras or Keralaputras from the Tamil Sangam period?	Karai	Vetti	Sungam	Iravu
5. India since ancient past has had trade relations with countries on land as well as sea routes. What is the 11th century Sanskrit text Yukti Kalpataru, written by King Bhoja of the Paramara dynasty particularly known for?	Monsoons & Climate	Maritime Piracy	Shipbuilding Tech	Sea Routes

ANSWERS: 1 - A, 2 - D, 3 - C, 4 - A, 5 - C

hitopadesha The Monkey Who Pulled Out a Wedge



Once upon a time, a writer decided to build a temple in his city. While the work was in progress, a carpenter sawed a log in half, put a wedge in between so that it would stay apart and went for lunch.



It so happened that a group of wandering monkeys came to this spot and began to play about, on and around the logs.



One of the monkeys sat on the half-split log, put both his legs into the gap and tried to pull the wedge out.



Suddenly, out came the wedge and the log closed in, trapping the monkey's legs and crushing them.



MORAL OF THE STORY: It is not wise to poke one's nose into another's affairs.