

Vārtā and the Foundations of Commerce in Classical and Modern Economics

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Abstract - This paper examines the ancient Sanskrit concept of Vārtā, which integrates agriculture, commerce, cattle-rearing, and finance, as articulated in classical Indian texts such as the Vāyupurāṇa, Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra, Śukranīti, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and Devī Purāṇa. It explores how this ancient framework of livelihood and economics aligns with modern commercial systems, revealing a deep and holistic understanding of commerce as a pillar of statecraft, national wealth, and ethical economics. The study highlights the relevance of Vārtā in today's interconnected, sustainability-driven, and ethically conscious economic landscape.

Keywords - Vārtā, Commerce, Kauṭīliya, Ancient Indian Economics, Agriculture, Cattle Rearing, Money Lending, Sustainable Livelihood, Classical Texts, Ethical Finance.

INTRODUCTION

The term Vārtā, as found in several classical Sanskrit scriptures, refers to the science and practice of livelihood, encompassing agriculture (kṛṣi), commerce (vāṇijya), cattle-rearing (gopaśūpāla), and finance or money-lending (kuśīda). Rather than viewing commerce in isolation, ancient Indian scholars like Kauṭīliya conceptualized it as part of an integrated economic system that supports governance, military strength, and social welfare. This study draws on these texts to outline how the ancient doctrine of Vārtā anticipates many aspects of modern commerce and economic theory.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To define and contextualize the term Vārtā in classical Sanskrit literature.
- To explore how commerce was integrated with agriculture, animal husbandry, and finance.
- To compare ancient economic structures with modern commercial practices.
- To examine the ethical and strategic role of commerce in both historical and contemporary contexts.

THE CONCEPT OF VĀRTĀ AND SANSKRIT VERSES:

Sanskrit Verses and Translation

"ततः प्रादुर्बभौ तासां सिद्धिरेतायुगे पुनः । वार्तासाधिकाप्यन्या वृत्तिस्तासां हि कामतः ॥" - Vāyupurāṇa, 8.124

"कृषिपाशुपाल्ये वाणिज्या च वार्ता । धान्य पशु हिरण्य कुप्य विष्टि प्रदाना दौपकारिकी । तथा स्वपक्षं परपक्षं वा वशीकरोति कोशदण्डाभ्याम् ॥" - Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra, 1.4

"कुसीदकृषिवाणिज्यं गोरक्षावार्तयोच्यते । संपन्नो वार्तया साधुन वृत्तेर्भयमृच्छति ॥" - Śukranīti, I.311

"कृषिवाणिज्यगोरक्षा कुसीदं तुर्यमुच्यते । वार्ता चतुर्विधं तत्र वयं गोवृत्तयोऽनिशम् ॥" - Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X.24.21

"पञ्चादिपालनाद्देवि कृषिकर्मान्तकारणात् । वार्तायां नित्ययुक्तः स्यात् पशूनां चैव रक्षणे ॥" - Devī Purāṇa, Ch. 45

INTERPRETATION

Commerce as Part of a Livelihood System: Ancient Indian economics integrated commerce with agriculture, animal care, and finance-emphasizing sustainability and interdependence.

Resource Creation and Statecraft: Kauṭīliya's views on Vārtā generating essential resources align with how modern economics fuels national power and public administration.

Ethical Finance: Inclusion of kuśīda (money lending) highlights both the value and ethics of finance, paralleling modern microfinance and financial inclusion.

Artisanry and Industry: The mention of karmānta (manufacturing) shows early awareness of secondary economic sectors akin to today's industries.

Modern Correlation: Vārtā reflects development economics and economic statecraft, reinforcing commerce's multifaceted role.

CONCLUSIONS

The ancient Indian concept of Vārtā provides a robust, ethical, and inclusive framework for understanding commerce-not as a standalone activity, but as a foundational pillar of livelihood, national policy, and societal well-being. Its relevance today is profound. In an era where economic sustainability, financial inclusion, and strategic commerce are critical, Vārtā's holistic vision offers valuable insights. It bridges classical wisdom with modern economic realities, inviting a reimagined approach to commerce-one rooted in ethics, sustainability, and integrated prosperity.

References

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