

***Danḍanīti*: A philosophical Reflection**

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Abstract

I have discussed a prominent concept in social and political philosophy called *danḍanīti* in this article. *Danḍa* means not only a tangible stick but also an intangible situation that punishes for something good and it is a methodology for using punishment and maintain order in society. In the contemporary era, *danḍanīti* is used in politics, to protect the security of the state, etc. My aim is to identify its philosophical basis and to establish the supremacy of *danḍa* over the ruler. From three references, one needs to discuss it, i.e., *Arthaśāstra*, *Sāntiparva*, and *Manusmṛiti*. I have used qualitative research, basically a historical, descriptive, and conceptual analysis method. The most important outcome is that no one can deny the uses and utility of it in their lives; it develops various necessary aspects of life, and definitely no society can run without it. The main message in this article is that punishment is not always a bad thing; it also has a positive sense.

Keyword: Ancient Indian Philosophy, *Danḍanīti* and its philosophical basis.

Introduction

In ancient Indian political and philosophical studies, we find discussion of the celebrated notion of *Danḍanīti*. It has been a prominent concept from ancient India until now. We find that in contemporary times the value of it remains the same; it can be manifested through an instance, i.e., in Delhi, where the new Parliament was inaugurated on 28 May 2023, the symbol of *Danḍa* was situated over the chair of the Speaker, which shows the supremacy of *Danḍa* and that no one in ruling authority is prior to or greater than *Danḍa*. The core discussion of *Danḍanīti* originated in ancient times; from there, we find that the word *Danḍanīti* is coined out of two terms, viz., '*Danḍa*' and '*Niti*'. We use the term *Danḍa* in various meanings; some of them include: stick, coercion, punishment, etc. The fundamental meaning of '*Danḍa*' is considered as punishment and coercion. And we use '*Niti*' as primary rules and principles which should be followed to rightly use *Danḍa*, as well as the application of punishment and coercion according to the context.

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Sources of *Danḍanīti*

The main source of the discussion of Dandaniti arises out of three fundamental sources. These are,

1. *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya
2. *Sāntiparva* in the *Mahabharata*
3. *Manusmṛiti*

Arthasastra

Kautilya was a great influential figure in ancient times; he was the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya. He developed his thoughts about *Danḍanīti* in his famous book *Arthaśāstra*. *Arthaśāstra* is a great book on warfare with effective military strategy. In this book, he talked about how to save the state from internal enemies and protect outer security with the help of diplomacy. He talked about a strong military as a means of saving the state from the enemy and to expand the territory. He did not only advise to be physically strong but also to be mentally strong, not to deal only with force in war field, but also with psychological warfare; if needed, then use deception with intelligence. It allows the use of various deceptive ways to achieve the desired military target. *Danḍanīti* plays a very important role besides military power and the ruler's ability to protect the subjects of the state, prosperity and growth of the state. *Danḍanīti* can be considered as an integral component of *Arthaśāstra* to establish military strategy and effective governance for the welfare of the state's subjects. It is clearly mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* that *Danḍanīti* can be considered as a means for the preservation and acquisition of dialectics, all the Vedas, and *vārtā*. Actually, it has four special functions.

1. Acquisition of that which is not under control and possession
2. Preservation of that which has been acquired
3. Accentuation of that which has been preserved
4. Righteous and due apportionment of that which has been accentuated

For Kautilya, *Danḍanīti* is the art of government, and the progress of the world depends upon it because the other three branches of knowledge depend upon it: *Anvikṣiki*, *Trayī*, and *Vārtā*. " ānvīkṣikī-trayī-vartānam yoga-kṣemā-sādhano danḍah."

¹ *Anvikṣiki* is the philosophy of *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, and *Lokāyata*; here the king will acquire the knowledge of discrimination and also understand the value of materialism in the context of the development of the state and the subjects of the state. *Trayī* refers to the three Vedas, i.e., the *Rgveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Yajurveda*; here the king will acquire the knowledge of what is righteous and what is not. *Vārtā* is the knowledge of economics; here the king will acquire the importance of wealth for the state's development and also the difference between wealth and non-wealth. These three branches are controlled by the fourth branch of knowledge, i.e., *Danḍanīti*. Dialectics has a vital connection with political deeds and duties. In the context of the relation between *Danḍanīti* and dialectics and other branches of knowledge. Kautilya mentioned that "The scepter on which the well-being and progress of the science of *Anvikṣiki*, the triple Vedas, and *vārtā* depend is known as *Danḍa* (punishment). That which treats *Danḍa* is the law of punishment or science of government."²

Śāntiparva

Śāntiparva is a part of one of the greatest ancient Indian epic, *Mahābhārata*. In the *Śāntiparva*, one of the greatest warrior and ethical teacher Bhishma, shares his advice

about state, governance, and other things with Yudhisthira when he was lying on the bed of arrows. On the bed of arrows, Bhishma also talked about Dandaniti as an important component to run a state righteously. *Śāntiparva* is the book of peace, and here it is implied that politics should lead to peace, and for that control with *Danḍa* is necessary. *Danḍanīti* was under the great god Brahmā and the goddess Saraswatī, who are supposed to have originated this science of *Danḍanīti*:

"When the king acts fully in accordance with the norms of *Danḍanīti*, then the golden age arises; when the king acts only three-fourths in accordance with the norms of *Danḍanīti*, then the silver age (*Tretā*) comes into existence; when the king acts to half of *Danḍanīti*, then the brazen age (*Dvāpara*) comes into being; and when the king acts after leaving the whole norms of *Danḍanīti* and oppress the people through unrighteous techniques, then it is the iron age (*kali*)."³

It shows how important *Danḍa* is to be controlled by the king and over its subjects. Regarding the importance of *Danḍanīti*, it is said in *Śāntiparva*:

"When *Danḍanīti* becomes lifeless, the triple Vedas sink, and all the dharmas, however developed, completely perish. When traditional Rajadharma is departed from, all the bases of the divisions of the Āśramas are shattered. In Rajadharma are realized all the forms of renunciation, and in Rajadharma is revealed all knowledge. In Rajadharma are centered all the worlds."⁴

We find in *Śāntiparva* that Bhishma expressed the great importance of *Danḍanīti* for the maintenance of a wealthy, flourishing and ethical kingdom. He talked about various qualities of a righteous king for establishing righteousness (*Dharma*), which includes many ethical conduct of the kingdom. Social responsibility and the balance between power and justice are central to the *Mahābhārata*. It is *Danḍanīti*, which deals with the moral or ethical aspect of good governance. The righteous king never blindly uses force; he uses it for the enhancement of justice and as much as needed. With the help of the proper use of *Danḍanīti*, he introduces himself as capable of being compassion and wise. The fairness of the kingdom depends on the proper use of diplomacy and *Danḍanīti*, which are the guides for the well-being of subjects and to maintain social harmony. The concept of *Danḍanīti* as expressed in the *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata*, truly designates the importance of ethical governance and protects righteousness in the area of politics and proper leadership. The functions of *Danḍanīti* are comprehensive because all social, intellectual, and spiritual ends are dependent on its functioning. *Danḍanīti* is the art of punishment in a physical sense and regulates the principles of social and political existence.

Manusmṛiti

Manusmṛiti, an ancient Hindu legal text, discusses the concept of *Danḍanīti* as a means to establish and maintain social order, justice, and good governance. *Danḍanīti* can be understood as a system of rules and principles regarding punishment and governance. Manu mentioned that the king must use *Danḍanīti*; otherwise, he will not be able to survive because the stronger will roast the weaker. The ruler has a primary role to maintain the sustainability of the proper use of *Danḍa*. *Manusmṛiti* indicates the duties and responsibilities of a true ruler, certify justice and to protect the welfare of society. For him, *Danḍa* is the son of God, and it was created for the sake of the king. *Danḍa* confirms the protection of every creature by accomplishing the maintenance of its fear so that everyone performs their own duty. *Danḍa* alone governs, protects, and keeps

watch over the people. Here, the supremacy of *Danḍa* is effectively taken into consideration by Manu. It should be used by the king with full consideration of the time and place (of the office) and the strength and knowledge (of the offender). In the context of using *Danḍa*, a king should be pure, truthful, devoted to the concept and practice of justice, and rigorous in casting out enemies.

"If the king desisted from wielding punishment, then the crow would eat the sacrificial cake and the dog would lick the sacrificial viands, and ownership would not remain with anyone."⁵

The foolish man, covetous people, who cannot restrain their mind, addicted to sensual glorification, etc., are the people who are not allowed to use *Danḍa* as mentioned in *Manusmṛiti*. Only the person with rightness, act according to the injunctions of the Veda and practices moral self restrain are capable of using *Danḍa*. They have the ability to restrict injustice and to bring proper justice. In specified lines, *Manusmṛiti* is a text which deals with the proper duties and responsibilities of a righteous king. It plays a crucial role in maintaining a just and orderly society, such as upholding justice, proper punishment for crime, standing for the protection of the weak, etc. It has to be kept in mind that *Manusmṛiti* is not a text that was written in the contemporary era; it is a text of ancient times, and it was written to establish the social norms in the ancient era. One can argue by saying that it is not proper for the modern era; its principles are too old to apply in the contemporary era. Its principles do not fit this time; it allows a discriminatory and oppressive view towards women and lower castes of the society. Still, it is important because it provides valuable information, principles, and techniques followed in ancient times.

Necessity of *Dandanīti* in ancient time : Why *Danḍanīti*?

We find that different scholars in ancient times maintained differences in the acceptance of numbers regarding the branches of knowledge. Such as Ācārya Usnas or Śukrācārya admits only one branch of knowledge, i.e., *Danḍanīti*; Ācārya Vrihaspati admits only two branches of knowledge, i.e., *Vārtā* and *Danḍanīti*; Ācārya Manu and his followers admit three branches of knowledge, i.e., *Trayī*, *Vārtā*, and *Danḍanīti*; but Kautilya admits four branches of knowledge, i.e., *Anvikṣikī*, *Trayī*, *Vārtā*, and *Danḍanīti*. Though there is no absence of controversy regarding the number of branches of knowledge, no one among them denies *Danḍanīti*; everyone accepts it as a branch of knowledge. The acceptance of *Danḍanīti* by all as a branch of knowledge carries much importance in ancient political philosophy. Through the following reduction method, one can only admit *Danḍanīti* and the foundation of other branches of knowledge. If *Danḍanīti* is destroyed, then *Trayī* will not remain in existence and Vedic culture, i.e., āśramadharmā, will be annihilated. Without knowing *Danḍanīti*, the king will not be able to distinguish between policy (*naya*) and impolitical (*anaya*) and potency from impotency; therefore, it will not remain possible in his state, and his kingdom will also be destroyed. So, *Danḍanīti* is the sustainer of the other branches of knowledge. There are also some aspects where using *Danḍanīti* is very essential, such as

1. Applying the knowledge of *Anvikṣikī*, *Trayī*, and *Vārtā* will not be appropriate without knowing the application of *Danḍanīti*.
2. To keep the treasury full and to do good for the subjects of the king, it is very much necessary to know *Danḍanīti*.

3. To control enemies or an opponent king and to spread his own impact, the king has to know *Danḍanīti*, because, without sufficient spies, armies, etc., it is not possible to keep his own state safe or to control another state.
4. Without the knowledge of *Danḍanīti*, the Vedic culture could not be preserved.

Danḍanīti represents the science of politics and is concerned especially with the application of the conceive authority of the ruler. Although *Danḍa* should be used accordingly, the situation and right usage of *Danḍa* depend on the context. For example, a gun has no ethics in itself; it becomes moral or immoral depending on its usage in different contexts. So, without the knowledge of *Danḍanīti*, the *Danḍa* should not be applied. If the king applies *Danḍa* without the knowledge of *Danḍanīti*, then he makes mistakes by following an immoral policy. For example, when, without war, he surrenders himself to the stronger opponent and accepts the *sandhi*, he is making a great mistake. But if he knew *Danḍanīti* properly, then he would realize that when the opponent king is stronger, it is time to go to war, and without war, surrendering is nothing but performing some nonsensical acts. To gain knowledge of *Danḍanīti*, the king has to know the discussion of *Danḍanīti*. There are various aspects of the discussion of *Danḍanīti*, such as the principle of justice, types of offences and appropriate punishment, maintaining social harmony, discipline, the authority of the ruler and use of power to maintain law and order, the limitation of power, etc. The discussions and practices about the matter of punishment, justice, and maintaining social order should be studied very carefully for the development of the state and its subjects.

Ways of using *Dandaniti*

Danḍa symbolizes kingly power and the authority of the king to punish offenders. Punishment should be "as deserved." Using *Danḍanīti* according to the policy is an art, and it is also logical. Using *Danḍa* is very efficient, but it is very tough work to use it properly. Without the knowledge of other branches, it cannot be applied properly. Everyone cannot use *Danḍa* in a proper manner. He can use it properly if "he holds it firmly but applies it gently". So, *Danḍa* should be used in a very balanced way. Punishment that is dispensed after balanced reasoning leads to the growth of *Artha*, *Kāma*, and *Dharma* in the subjects. The *Danḍanīti* should not be treated as an end; rather, it should be treated as a means so that through its control, growth remains. In the context of applying *Danḍa*, it has to be kept in mind that in those cases, the output can be done without using *Danḍa*, which is very much unnecessary, and that will be a wrong usage of *Danḍa*. If *Danḍa* is not used in a proper manner, there will arise conspiracies against its usage, and easily the enemies will enter the kingdom to spread their land and grow their own wealth. So, wrong usages of *Danḍa* lead to destruction. For these reasons, *Danḍa* should be used in a balanced way. To use *Danḍa* in a very balanced way, balanced reasoning is very much necessary. Extreme or low reasoning is very harmful for the state. Through reasoning, the king should understand where to use it and where not to, which refers to using political morality. In other words, in political morality, the king has to understand whether the *Danḍa* is applicable to general immorality or not. To use *Danḍanīti* ethically in a general immoral situation, the king should have the capacity for balanced reasoning. Actually, *Danḍa*, or punishment, is used to make one disciplined. Discipline is an intellectual as well as a moral category.

The king has to learn discipline through daily contact with others who are proficient in knowledge. The emphasis on knowledge and restraint of the senses shows that he was conscious of the intellectual and moral foundation of kingly power. So, self-restraint is essential for the acquisition of knowledge, the development of discipline, the welfare of the subjects, and the right use of *Danḍanīti*.

Philosophical basis and utility of *Dandaniti*

The term philosophy is coined out of two terms, i.e., 'Philos' means love and 'Sophia' means wisdom. The literal meaning of philosophy is love of wisdom. But various meanings of philosophy are accepted, sometimes as a foundational basis, sometimes to identify proper ideology to be followed in life, sometimes to understand the fundamental structure of self-thought and others, etc. The aim of these different uses is the same, i.e., to enhance good towards a better position and find the way to the best.

Everyone tries to do it differently, as their thinking structure is different. Due to different thinking structures, their perspective of thinking about an object is different; some of them are better than others. As far as my observation is concerned, people think differently about their intelligence and capacity for understanding the intentional meaning. For example, some people observe air in the empty glass, and some people observe the empty space in a glass that is full of stone. They all try to enhance their own personalities with the help of philosophy. Unlike the fictive glittering water on the road due to sunlight, Philosophy never disappointed, rather it welcomes to do so and performs various activity related to various necessary aspect of life, such as: it promotes thinking critically and scientific enquiry with proper use of reasoning, it performs the act to enhance ethical, social and political position, duty and responsibility as human being towards self and others in this environment, it teaches how to do justice to own thought, our social and political position, developing moral and ethical framework within the scope of virtue and character development, it also helps to understand and clarify the notion of knowledge and truth, personal identity and nature of self, it illuminates the way to realize spiritual, existential meaning and actual meaning of life, so on and so forth.

It depends very much on us how we perceive the things that are in front of us and which are not in front of us. For example, one can argue by saying that Kautilya had talked about the use of *Danḍa* properly by the king, but there is no king at the current time and no relevance to talk about it. But another person can think that, by the term 'king' we can understand a ruler as it's intentional meaning. One can understand self-life as the residence of the king and self as the king, and so on. We can apply this principle in various aspects of our daily lives accordingly, not undergoing its literal meaning but with its intentional meaning.

We can use this principle in the context of *Danḍanīti* in various ways, which depends on its intentional meaning. I am expressing one of them: a teacher can use punishment on his students to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry with proper use of reasoning. Punishment can be useful when a friend uses it to enhance a friend's ethical or social position. People can express their political stance with the help of punishment called an election. Situations teach with punishment how to perform duty and responsibility as a human being towards self and others who are in this environment. Sometimes we do something bad under the subdue of anger; we have to punish that type of thought to do justice to our own thoughts. Sometimes punishment

brings mature thought, which develops a moral and ethical framework within the scope of virtue and character development. Some mental trauma as punishment can help to recall the lost memory of a patient, in other words, the truth and knowledge of his or her personal identity. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Gurumata Ancient One punished Dr. Strange for knowing about the nature of self, realizing spiritual and existential meaning, etc. Sometimes punishment brings peace or actual happiness. I am not talking about nuclear weapons that were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; I am talking about when a mother does not want to leave her son outside the home for study. After controlling her emotions, punishing her type of thought and finally allowing him to leave home for study. Fortunately, he succeeds through proper hard work; that situation provides the realizations of actual happiness and peace to his mother. There are so many uses of punishment in a positive sense.

Analysis and Evaluation

Danḍanīti, as presented in the *Arthaśāstra*, can provide insights into its strengths, weaknesses, and impact on governance and military strategy. After analyzing *Danḍanīti*, we found that it reflects on strategic thinking, an understanding of statecraft, and the use of intelligence to achieve the desired outcome; it places significant authority in the hands of the ruler, though the ruler is under the law of punishment; it outlines the organization and management of armies, principles of warfare, etc.; it focuses primarily on maintaining stability and security, though it was written in ancient time. While it offers valuable insights into governance and military strategy, its amoral and centralized approach, along with the limited consideration of social and economic factors, must be critically examined. Balancing its strengths with ethical considerations and adapting it to contemporary democratic principles can help derive meaningful lessons from *Danḍanīti*. Some principles, such as intelligence and strategic planning power as a means, can be applied to the post-modern era. However, it should be interpreted and adapted to suit modern democratic frameworks and ethical standards.

Endnotes

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2. For the *Arthashastra*, see *Wikisource*, < https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Arthashastra/Book_I >. Accessed: November 10, 2024.
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In-Text Citations

1. (Bandopadhyay 2014, p. 80)
2. (Varma 1974: 56-106.)
3. (Bhaduri 1998)
4. (cf. "Dandaniti," Britannica)
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