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## **Perspectives of Kautilya's Foreign Policy: An Ideal of State Affairs**

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**Abstract:** *Arthashastra* is one of the prototypical treatises on the political science and 'realpolitik'. It offers a very comprehensive and detailed account of foreign policy in order to conquer the world. Author of this great text is Kautilya the wise minister and key political adviser of *Chandragupta Maurya* and also of his son *Bindusara* in ancient India at about 300 B.C.E. His doctrine of foreign policy deals with the desire of an ambitious king to become world conqueror or world emperor. He reproduced the ancient political wisdom of India in the more pragmatic fashion. The *Mandala* theory is at the core of *Kautilya's* conceptualization of state affairs, which is the theory of omnipotence. The fascinating discussions on *Rajmandala* i.e. 'the circle of kingdoms', on the theory of *Shadguna*, i.e. sixfold policy or six measures, and on diplomacy, amazingly encompasses almost all of the aspects of foreign policy, which can be found relevant even today.

**Keywords:** Kautilya, foreign policy, Mandala, Shadguna, realpolitik.

### **Introduction**

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is one of the greatest compositions on political science in ancient world. It is the book of political realism which explains how the political world works actually, than that of it ought to be. It continues to recommend even immoral, burtal and cruel

means to preserve own state and the prosperity of its subjects. At Long before the realistic discussions of Machiavelli, Kautilya as the first great political realist (Boesche 2003, 5) who was the chief adviser to the *Chandragupta Maurya*, who united the India and subcontinent in the form of great empire at around 300 BCE?, and at the same time Kautilya wrote his *Arthashastra*, rendered as a “science of politics” (Kangle 1965, 1). Kautilya had admitted the sources, meaning and content of this *shastra* in the very beginning lines of book as, “*Arthashastra* is composed by the earlier teachers for the acquisition and protection of the earth and this book is nothing but the compilation of the knowledge of those predecessors” (1.1.1).<sup>1</sup> It is quite clear from this verse that *Arthashastra* has two fold aims: (1) Preservation of state means internal security and general wellbeing of subjects by good governance and by the law and order; (2) Acquisition of the territories from others by expansion through excellent code of foreign policy. This text contains 15 books, 150 chapters and 180 sections, along with 6000 *slokas*. Out of these books, the first 5 books deal with internal administration i.e. *Tantra*; and the next 8 books are concerned with the foreign policy i.e. *Avaap*; while remaining two are miscellaneous in nature. As per some modern realists foreign policy is “unregulated competition of states in which the parameter of the success is strengthening the state” (Waltz 1979, 117); also it is “struggle for power” (Morgenthau 1985, 195). It is often to very fair to say, in the sphere of international politics, end justifies the means where the ultimate end is self-interest of the state. These basic principles of political reality are grown side by side with the idealism at every stage of development of political science. Idealism and realism are coincides of the subject. Whereas the Greeks are pioneer of political philosophy, Kautilya stands there as a first political realist.

Kautilya is an expansionist who advised not only the preservation of the state but also to conquer territories of others. It is the *Mandala* theory which is the basis of Kautilya's foreign policy. In other words it is a theory of world conquest. He has paved the way for *Vijigishu* i.e. “the king who is desirous or aspirant to world conquest,” how to be a

<sup>1</sup> All verse references are to *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, translated and edited by R.P. Kangle.

*Chakravartin* i.e. world conqueror. This concept contemplated in this *Shashtra* does not necessarily imply the conquest of the whole world but the region lying between the Himalaya in the north and the sea from required sides (9.1.17-18). It denotes India. The *Mandala* theory is based on the geopolitical and geo-strategic assumption that all neighboring states are enemy and the enemy's enemy is the natural ally. This circle of kingdom includes 12 kings with explanations for their probable types of interrelations.

In this text, foreign policy is mainly discussed from the standpoint of *Vijigishu* and world conquest, and it is summed up with the *Shadguna* theory i.e. “six fold policy or six measures of foreign policy. Actually, this is like a formula to secure the competency of *Vijigishu* for world conquest. This formula is associated with presupposed *Mandala* theory. *Shadguna* theory consists of six strategic stances those can be employed as per the demand of situation, and one who will use them properly as right stance on the right time, would become a world conqueror” (7.18.41-44). Along with these two core concepts Kautilya suggested four more *Upayas* i.e. tactics, to overcome the enemy. Kautilya argued that at any given moment a kingdom is in a state of “decline, stability or advancement” and in the first two stages it has to focus on defending itself by making alliances, solving internal problems....in the last stage, if, however, a kingdom has a prosperous economy, well populace, no calamities, strong leadership, is in a position to conquest the neighboring states (Boesche 2003, 4).

### **Kautilya's concept of state: a brief account**

A.B. Keith is of the opinion that Kautilya “offers nothing that can be regarded as serious theory of politics ....but there was intensive study of the practical aspects of the government and of relations between the states” (Keith, 1921, v). However, *Arthashastra* is not about theoretical descriptions of the state, its origin, its functions, ideal state, etc. even though it has some theoretical assumptions about the state. Kautilya accepted the theory of origin of the state of his predecessors that it is created by humans by contract (1.13.5-7). He has provided some sort of speculation about the nature of the state, not literally, but by indications, that, the state is a “socialist monarchy” with centralized economy, good governance, welfare state and very

disciplined by law and order (Bosche 2003, 65). Kautilya also gives primacy to religion (3.1.38-45); he even used religion as a mean to accomplish political ends (10.3.30; 10.3.43; 13.1.7-8). To deal with internal security problems and corruption he suggested establishing a 'spy state'. Despite of all the realistic means or art of government he preaches, his ultimate aim is the prosperity and well-being of the subject. Thus he stated a very detailed account of duties of the king toward its subjects; as a part, he proclaimed the king should be the kind father of people and all his interests, happiness is not separated from those of the subjects (1.19.34-47). This assumption is also in favor of the king because it is necessary for legitimacy.

According to Ghoshal (1923), "Kautilya recognized the social justice as also a mean to strengthen the state ...which is in the king's interests" (144-145). At the starting of Book VI, Kautilya mentioned the seven constituents of the state – The king, minister, country, fortified city, treasury, army and the ally (6.1.1), out of which the king is of highest importance but all are supposed to be functioning like different limbs of an organism. They should work efficiently with highly maintained co-ordination, because these are the fundamental elements of the state's power and of course, plays wide role in external affairs as a "wise king who possesses the personal qualities, though ruling over the small territories being united with the excellence of the constituent elements (*Prakritis*) and conversant with *Arthasastra* does conquer the entire earth, never loses" (6.1.18).

## Foreign Policy

As a practical statesman and a realist, Kautilya realized that every state acts in order to enhance its power and self-interest; therefore moral, ethical or religious obligation does not have any scope in the international politics. "War and peace are considered solely from the point of view of the profit" (Dikshitar 1987, 15). Kautilya assumes that every move of the king desirous for victory towards its ally or enemy should have to be based on its own interests. As Bruce Rich says, "Kautilya's foreign policy was the ruthless realpolitik, intrigue and deception... Kautilya cold blooded realism and treachery with some remarkable enlightened policies" (121). Most scholars of political history, especially Westerners, blame Kautilya for his so called immoral

recommendations in foreign policy. But at least he is honest with his arguments and teachings, unlike those who are the idealist of daylight and opportunist in the dark. The fault of *Arthashastra*, as that of Machiavelli, lies in openly saying something that has always been actually practiced by states everywhere” (Kangle 1965, part III, p. 282). Was Kautilya immoral? The answer is obviously no! He just followed principles which were actually in practice at inter-state level at that time, and it is still being followed now. He “was unmoral not immoral; unreligious, not non-religious, in his political teachings” (Sen 1920, 17).

Kautilya set the goal of foreign policy before the *Vijigishu* that it is not mere preservation of the state but its expansion as well. It is the goal of world conquest and pertaining to this goal he propounded the theory of *Mandala* or circle of the states along with the six fold policy. The king is suggested to follow the right means at the right time with the flexible planning and complete determination. Kautilya preaches that there is nothing like ethics and moral in foreign policy but the goal and self-interest only; after all, end justifies the means.

### **Theory of *Mandala* i.e. *Rajmandala* i.e. Circle of the States**

“For Kautilya, this principle of foreign policy – that nations act in their political, economic and military self-interests was a timeless truth of his science of politics or *Arthshastra*” (Bosche 2003, 78). Kautilya is most famous for outlining the *Mandala* theory or the circle of the states which consists of 12 kingdoms as –

- 1) *Vijigishu*: Desirous for or would be, world conqueror
- 2) *Ari*: whose territory is contiguous to *Vijigishu*, is a natural enemy.
- 3) *Mitra*; it is ally of *Vijigishu* whose territory is immediately beyond the enemy or *ari*.
- 4) *Arimitra*; enemies ally indirectly is enemy, who is immediate beyond ally.
- 5) *Mitra-Mitra* : It is ally immediately beyond the enemy's ally.
- 6) *Ari Mitra-Mitra*: It is ally of enemy's ally situated at immediate beyond *Mitra –Mitra*.
- 7) *Parshnigraha*: The enemy, in the rear of the *Vijigishu*. Means Heal catcher when *Vijigishu* would be on the expedition in front.

- 8) *Akranda*: *Vijigishu*'s ally in the rear behind that of *Parshnigraha*.
- 9) *Parshnigrahasara*: enemy's ally, The ally of *Parshnigraha* behind *Akranda*.
- 10) *Akrandsara*: The ally of *Akranda* behind *Parshnigrahasara*, ultimately an ally.
- 11) *Madhyama*: the Middle king with territory adjoining those of *Vijigishu* and *Ari* and stronger than both.
- 12) *Udasina*: the kingdom lying outside or neutral and more powerful than that of *Vijigishu*, *Ari*, and *Madhyama*. (6.2.13-22)

Kautilya explained further that there are four principal states – *Vijigishu*, *Ari*, *Madhyama* and *Udasina*, each of these has an ally and ally's ally along with 5 material constituents each, thus making 12 kings and 60 material constituents, conforms the circle of 72 elements in all (6.2.24-27). These schemes are based on assumptions derived from the practical experiences found everywhere that two neighboring states sharing their borders are hostile to each other. And the hostile state to the enemy i.e. the enemy's enemy is a natural ally. The *Vijigishu* is situated at exactly the centre of this circle. It does not give the fixed account of the numbers of the kingdom in this *mandala*, but refers to a number of possible relationships that may arise when *Vijigishu* would be in the quest of suzerainty.

The neighboring princes, *samantas* may normally be supposed to be hostile but it is possible that some may have friendly feeling toward the *Vijigishu*, while others may even be subservient to him. Neighboring states of this kind falls in three categories – *Aribhavin*, *Mitrabhavin* and *Bhrytbhavin* the last are of course, vassals of *vijigishu* (Kangle 1965, part III, p.250).

*Mandala* theory is the plan, the blueprint of the expedition with the intention of world conquest because Kautilya believes in strength and power. For him, "Power is the possession of strength" (6.2.30) and it is in three forms: 1) *Mantrashakti*: power of Knowledge i.e. power of counsel; 2) *Prabhu shakti*: Power of might i.e. power of treasury and army; and 3) *Utsaha shakti*: power of energy i.e. power of valor (6.2.31). Likewise, success is also of three fold. By this theory Kautilya indicates towards reality, and made alert to the king to be a conqueror

or suffer conquest. All his discussion is revolving around the desire of victory over enemy and world conquest to establish unified, sovereign world empire that is the concept of Chakravarti – imperatively the Indian territories in between the Himalaya and the sea (9.1.17). G.P. Singh argues that the *Mandala* theory is ancient India's most notable contribution to political theory (115-130). Singh analyzed the *mandala* theory as a 'Balance of power' but Bosche contradicted this statement by stating that "it was not offering modern balance of power arguments where the ultimate status quo and peace is the purpose of such interstate activities in modern time" (Bosche 2003, 79). Moreover this theory provides Geo strategic analysis of interstate relations, therefore, it is the theory of geopolitics.

### ***Shadguna Sidhanta* i.e. Six measures of foreign policy**

This doctrine is about the six principles of foreign policy like a formula for attainment of one's national interests and goals at the level of international politics based on political reality. It is the archetype of foreign policy acting as a guiding force for the *Vijigishu* to become a world conqueror. It contains six basic principles as follows:

#### **1) *Sandhi*: (making treaty containing terms and conditions)**

The general principal in foreign policy is that, when the one is comparatively weaker than that of his enemy, the policy of peace i.e. *Sandhi* should be employed. When making a treaty one may be required to surrender troops or treasury or territory, called *Dandopanta sandhi*, *Kosopanta sandhi* and *Desopanta sandhi*, respectively. Kautilya advised the king to enter in to the treaty, thwart the strong enemy when fulfilling the conditions of the treaty and after bidding his time till he get strong to overthrow the strong enemy (7.3.22-35). It means this is the policy to seek or spare the time to become strong and waiting for weakening of enemy, till then one have to hold patience for right opportunity. It is practical opportunism.

#### **2) *Vigraha*: ( Policy of Hostility)**

If one is stronger than the enemy, policy of hostility should be adapted. This policy has two dimensions- i. Defensive ii. Offensive, while in first case, one who is sure about its strength to repel attack of



enemy, should resort *Vigraha*. And in the second case, that, one who feels from the secured position can ruin the enemy's undertakings or can seize enemy's territories, because he is engaged in the war on another front, can go for *Vigraha*. But Kautilya is very anxious about the profit and loses as he recommends *sandhi* instead of *Vigraha* when both, supposed to be lead the same result. Obviously, there are comparatively more loses, expenses and troubles in hostility (7.2.1-2).

### **3) Asana: ( A policy of remain quite, not planning to march)**

Asana is the state in which one is to wait in the hope that the enemy would get weaker or find himself in difficulties or in calamities, get involved in war on other front and one would be strong than enemy (7.1.34). Naturally this policy is often a concomitant of the policy of the *sandhi*.-But at the same time it can be corroborated with the policy of *vigraha*. For example, by seducing enemy's subjects from their loyalty by the means of dissension and propaganda, one will try to weaken enemy secretly (7.4.5-12).

### **4) Yana: (Marching on an expedition)**

The policy of *yana* is much clear and explicit among all of others, which can be persuade in the situation when one is surely strong than his enemy. "Normally, *yana* and *vigraha* are parallel but in *yana*, one is expected to be completely dominant in the strength" (7.4.14-17). However, even *sandhi- yana* is recommended, (7.14.18). This is to be obvious; it involves a downright breach of faith with one with whom one is at peace having entered in to treaty with him. "The joint expedition would be based on sharing benefits is also recommended in this policy" (7.4.19-22).

### **5) Sansraya: (seeking shelter with another king or in a fort)**

This policy is particularly recommended for a weak king who is attacked or threatened to be attacked by powerful enemy. The discussion about the king with whom the shelter should be sought is included in book 7, chapter 2, verse 6-25 and 7.15.1-8. *Sansraya* conforms to the status of Protégé, one's protection is assured thereby. It is also implied that the king would be making continuous efforts to

recoup his strength and independence. The shelter at one's own fort is also a suggestion. But if none of these remedies would help then the weak king should resort the last mean of surrender, this is vassalage (7.2.9). And he should be watchful for opportunity to strike back and obtain his previous position (7.2.10-12).

### **6) *Dvaidhibhava*: (The double policy of *Sandhi* with one king and *Vigraha* with Another at a time)**

It is obviously a policy of dual purpose, where *Sandhi* is for seeking help in the form of treasury and troops from one king to wage hostility toward another king. This policy is referred for the king who is equally strong to enemy and he cannot win the battle without additional strength of his ally (7.1.13-18).

The aim of provisions of these policies is to grow stronger in the long term competition than the enemy, though sometimes one may have to tolerate temporarily, the great strength of enemy. The expansion of ones power and state at the cost of its natural enemy's the motive behind this doctrine. While moving toward the ultimate aim of world conquest, the interests of one's own state is the supreme criterion for the external affairs. So the appropriate use of these means with deep regard for time, make *Vijigishu* enable, to play with the other members of *Mandala* as he please; they become as it were tied to him by the chains of intellectual power (7.18.44).

### **Four Upayas:**

These are the tactics or means of overcoming opposition mentioned as:

- 1) ***Saman*: Conciliation**
- 2) ***Dama*: Gifts**
- 3) ***Bheda*: Dissension**
- 4) ***Danda*: Force.**

First two are suggested to be used with subjugate weak king and last two are to overcome strong kings. *Gunas* are concerned only with foreign policy while *upayas* are having wide applications.

## Diplomacy

Kautilya finds the diplomacy also as an apparatus of war. “For Kautilya, all ambassadors were potential spies with diplomatic immunity” (Mujumdar 1960, 64). He argued that diplomacy is really subtle act of war, a series of consistent actions taken to weaken an enemy and get advantage for oneself all with an eye towards eventual conquest “and in entire circle he should ever station envoys and secrete agents becoming a friend of the rivals, maintaining secrecy when striking again and again” (Bosche 2003, 79-80).

## Geopolitical analysis

American scholar Bruce Rich compared Kautilya's geopolitical analysis in modern perspectives, with the concept of groupings of civilizations by Samuel Huntington and Brzvenski's explanation of the changing geo strategies of world powers, especially Eurasian. In his view he explained, after cold war world politics is divided among nine geopolitical groups, lie the elements of *Mandala* in Kautilya's theory. And on this basis we would be able to analyze the current problems at international level. “A number of treatise on post cold war geopolitics published in 1990's and in early 2000's, uncounsciously evoke Kautilya's anlysis, except that the entire planet is now the arena of play for the *Mandala* of states rather than as in Kuatilya's time, the Indian subcontinent” (Rich 2008, 125).

## Conclusion

Kautilya is the classis proponent of the political realism; of the foreign policy; of a craft of obtaining and increasing the power, without moralistic illusions. His discussion about national interest and national power are purely rational as well as practical. He set the ideal of world conquest and its measures have to be employed by a prosperous kingdom and discussed the ruthless realities of international politics through *Mandala* and *Shadguna* theory. He enumerated systematic ways to seek the power and dominance and according to him international politics is the lawless struggle among strong and weak states, for this purpose. Kautilya did not care about glory and fame, he just believed in basic principle of ‘end justifies the means’ His geo strategic analysis is amazingly advanced in nature, moreover it is relevant to the present day. Kautilya's foreign policy is still valid in the

sphere of world politics, because the basic principles of foreign policy stated by him, like struggle for power, national interests, alliances, hostility and diplomacy are remain unchanged unto the end of the world. Therefore, he is relevant even in the age of 'trans-modern global society'.

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