

## **Inter-state Relations in Kautilya's Arthashastra**

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[Editorial Note: The present paper has discussed about the political ideas and institutions existing in ancient India through an analytical study of the Arthashastra. The author has highlighted the inter-state relations as reflected in the text as well has also discussed in detail the ancient strategy of policy making, statecraft and administration and its relevance in the present times.]

**Abstract:** *The western world has been plagued with a wilful misconception that ancient India was uninformed or rather oblivious of elements such as statecraft, strategy, or administration. They intended to colour India's past as one having no historical sense even though the ancient Indian treatises and epics spoke volumes about vast kingdoms, their war strategies and administrative skills and about major battles that were fought. Such vast treasures on ancient skills in strategizing warfare and defining inter-state relations could not have been possible without a fine sense of policy-making and application. They, in fact, further the very idea of ancient Indian wisdom in statecraft and related aspects. Some 2300 years ago, Kautilya described the principles of statecraft, diplomacy and inter-state relations. He described the principles of inter-state relations as Mandala theory. The strategic thinking in Kautilyan grand strategic design becomes evident through the six measures of foreign policy, also known as Shadagunya theory, which was closely related to the strength and weakness of the state. The present study will make an effort to interpret the Kautilyan ideas and concepts with respect to inter-state relations and will try to explore Kautilya's significance and relevance in the present Indian and global context.*

**Keywords:** *Statecraft, Inter-state relations, Mandala, Shadgunya, Upaya, Strategic Culture*

### **Introduction**

Arthashastra, for Kautilya, was the art of statecraft where *artha*, an all-embracing term used in the sense of the material well-being of people, prevailed as the most important objective to be secured by the king. Kautilya considered it ultimate as the attainment of all other goals, viz. dharma, kama and moksha depended on the material well-being of people. In ancient times, the land was the main source of securing material well-being. Hence, acquiring the land became one of the main ideas or goals in the Arthashastra and the state was, naturally, meant to be aspiring for acquiring more land, near and far. In this scheme of things, neighbours became natural enemies and hence the relations between the two states were seen as

relations of war, though circumstances remained the deciding factor in formulating any scheme. The main idea in the Arthashastra is unequivocally strategic planning and war; and geopolitics and inter-state relations. Kautilya's intent in Arthashastra is to "lay bare the study of politics, wealth and practical expediency, of ways of acquiring and maintaining power" (Modelski 1964: 549). At the same time, it establishes the fact that "because size enhances security, the objective is to consolidate one's strength at the expense of other powers" (Zimmer 1967: 119-20). It was for these very astute ideas and propositions forwarded by Kautilya that Johann Jakob Meyer, the German Indologist and translator of Arthashastra from Sanskrit to the German language in 1927, designated the Arthashastra not as a book but as a library of ancient India (Sarkar 2010: 261).

Arthashastra can, in fact, be contemplated as the first textbook in geopolitics and realism which talks of the state as an organism that will either grow or perish. Kautilya, thus, challenges the western view that Indians (ancient past) lacked strategic culture. In reality, he presented a comprehensive theoretical framework of inter-state relations and foreign policy which continues to deeply influence contemporary Indian strategic culture even today. Written around 300 BCE, it explains the entire course of state formation and the conduct of foreign policy through war and diplomacy to maximize the power of the conducting state. This maximization of national power through material economic strength gained by conquering territories next to the aspiring state was considered a prerequisite for regional ascendancy which, in turn, was seen as the ultimate foreign policy objective of a state.

S. Kalyanaraman (2015: 1-2) succinctly draws the meanings and contexts out of Kautilya's Arthashastra when he says that:

The state is based on power backed by legitimacy, and consequently, there is a need for constant efforts to enhance both its power and legitimacy. The state ceaselessly engages in the pursuit of wealth and power and self-aggrandisement in an anarchic inter-state system in which *matsyanyaya* (the concept of big fish swallowing smaller fish) prevails and frequent wars and struggles for supremacy occur; and the doctrine of *mandala* provides both a categorisation of states and their inter-relationships as well as prescriptions on how to exploit this matrix to one's advantage.

Kautilya, as a political realist, thus, assumed that every nation acted to maximize power and self-interest. He envisioned national interest as the realpolitik behind shaping the foreign policy of a state; and to pursue it, the state must be proficient in political, economic and military terms. This approach to politics, which the modern world views as the concept of balance of power, thus, had its place in the Kautilyan scheme of things around 300 BCE. Kautilya was of the view that while it was good to have an ally, the alliance would last only as long as it was in that ally's as well as one's own self-interest, because "an ally looked to the securing of his own interests in the event of similarity of calamities and in the event of the growth of the enemy's power" (Kautilya 8.1.59: 389). Moreover, one kept an ally not because of goodwill or moral obligation, but because one was strong and could advance one's own self-interest as well as the self-interest of the ally, for "when one had an army, one's ally remained friendly, or (even) the enemy become friendly" (Kautilya 8.1.56: 389). Kautilya, thus, provides a comprehensive understanding of various aspects related to statecraft. An objective analysis of these aspects is necessary to understand the meanings, perspectives and contexts of the Kautilyan grand scheme.

### **Inter-state Relations: Contemplating Realism**

Shyam Saran (2017: 16-7), the former Indian diplomat, said that India cannot insulate its security from developments within the neighbouring states. Long back, Kautilya had deeply analyzed the subject in his text when he looked at the Indian subcontinent as a geopolitical unit and, therefore, comprehended that the strategic compulsions needed to be defined by sub-continental concerns. Even Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of non-alignment, hailed as a realistic policy reflecting India's geopolitical situation, loudly echoes Kautilya's advice of following self-interest instead of getting trapped into a permanent enmity or friendship with any other nation (Dar 2021: 3). Manmohan Singh, during his second tenure as Prime Minister of India, also stated the essence of Arthashastra by arguing that, "whatever policy we may lay down, the art of conducting the foreign affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country" (Baru 2015). Similarly, the realistic foreign policy followed during the previous term of the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi further reflects the themes from the Arthashastra. His *Neighbourhood First* policy was indicative of the Kautilyan wisdom of converting neighbours from challenges to opportunities. The conduct of inter-state relations in

the modern days from Nehru to Narendra Modi, thus, closely takes inspiration from the strategic foundation provided in the Arthashastra.

Writing on inter-state relations and diplomacy, Kautilya laid down some basic principles, viz. a) No state can exist in isolation; b) there are no permanent friends or enemies in inter-state relations; c) any kingdom is an ally or enemy according to its geographical position with respect to the intending conqueror; d) A wise king, trained in politics, though in possession of only a small territory, can conquer the outside world with the help of the best elements of his sovereignty and will never be defeated (Mukherjee 1998: 253).

The main ideas in Arthashastra that deal with inter-state relations and foreign policy are *Mandala Siddhant*, *Saptanga* theory (*Saptaprakar*), *Sadgunya* Niti (Sixfold policy), the four *Upayas* (Fourfold measures), and the types of wars.

### **Mandala Siddhant**

Kautilya developed his idea of realpolitik in the form of the Mandala theory which is essentially a description of alliances a king has to make with friendly states to deal with the enemy states. Kautilya was not the first Indian thinker to talk about the mandala. In fact, mention of the mandala system is to be found in several ancient texts such as the Mahabharata and Agnipurana but Kautilya probably is the first thinker to systematize the theory and write elaborately on it (Mehta & Thakkar 1980: 58).

Kautilya considered the application of the mandala theory to be a prerequisite for an aspiring king to conduct his inter-state relations. In the circle of competing states, there is the need to know, establish and measure one's own capability and also that of the adversary or adversaries including what is the state of 'power' or *Shakti* (Gautam 2017). While the Mandala theory as propagated in Arthashastra is often considered merely as an "arrangement of states in concentric circles, the idea essentially was one of the inter-state linkages with its own complex degree of friendliness or animosity or in modern parlance of having allies and adversaries" (Muralidharan 2020).

Elaborating further on the subject, the text advises that while seeking hegemony and balance of power in one direction, the king must not ignore enemies and friends

in the opposite direction. Thus, the mandala siddhant consists of and represents balance of power among 12 states, viz. a) vijigishu (the would-be conqueror); b) ari (the enemy); c) mitra (the vijigishu's ally); d) arimitra (ally of enemy); e) mitramitra (friend of ally); f) arimitramitra (ally of enemy's friend); g) parshnigraha (enemy in the rear of the vijigishu); h) akranda (vijigishu's ally in the rear); i) parshnigrahasara (ally of parshnigraha); j) akrandasara (ally of akranda); k) madhyama (middle king bordering both vijigishu and the ari); and l) udasina (lying outside, indifferent/neutral, more powerful than vijigishu, ari and madhyama) (Kangle 2010: 248). These twelve kings constitute the Kautilyan international system in which the concerned kings constitute their own allies and mandala of states. Chakraborti (2016: 9) says:

There are three levels of analysis in the Kautilyan model of an international system. At the first level, there are four mandalas, viz. the vijigishu's circle of states, the ari's circle of states, the madhyama's circle of states, and the udasina's circle of states. At the second level, there will be independent kings who are allies with other kings in the circle. The third level is the lowest level of the king and his kingdom. Each king has 5 sovereign elements in his kingdom. Therefore, each mandala consists of 18 elements (6 elements in each state including the king and there are 3 states in a mandala) and the international system will contain 72 elements.

In this scheme of inter-state relations or foreign policy, the immediate neighbours were considered as enemies, but any state on the other side of a neighbouring state was regarded as an ally. Kautilya put this basic principle in different ways, but most simply as, "One with immediately proximate territory was the natural enemy" (Kautilya 6.2.19: 318). He further said, "With respect to the middle king [he himself], the third and the fifth constituents were friendly elements. The second, the fourth, and the sixth were unfriendly elements" (Kautilya 7.18.1: 380). The basic premise for this concentric circle of kings was that the king should aspire to become *Chakravarti Samrat* (hegemon), the reason Kautilya addressed the king as *Vijigishu*, i.e. one who aspires for victory.

Further, a powerful and wise king had always tried to make himself the centre (*nabhi*) of the Circle and to make the friendly powers the spokes of the wheel (*nemi*) (Kautilya VII: 2). Thus, under the Mandala framework, Kautilya projected kingdoms or states as a series of adjacent or interconnected circles and described

their relationship to each other. The power of encirclement was, however, greatly determined by the alliances and capacity of individual states and the capacity of their constituent elements (Bisht 2020: 168). In order to determine the kind of policy to be adopted in each case, foreign rulers or states were classified by Kautilya under four heads, namely, enemies (*Ari*), friends (*Mitra*), mediators (*Madhyama*), and neutrals (*Udasina*) (Kautilya VI: 2).

Before making decisions in foreign policy, the task of the ruler and his advisers is ascertaining the relative strength or weakness of powers (Kangle 2010: 406). Thus, the ratio of prakriti aggregates or the correlation of forces is the key concept of the Kautilyan theory of inter-state relations. Liebig and Mishra (2017: 8) rightly say that:

The seven parameters of the saptanga theory provide objective and substantive criteria for making a sound assessment of the correlation of forces between competing or adversary states and deciding on the course of action in foreign policy. The correlation of forces (in terms of prakriti aggregates) determines which of the six foreign policy methods has to be chosen.

In Kautilya's view, expediency was to be the main consideration in foreign policy. "If a king," said Kautilya, "was weaker than his neighbour, he had to adopt a peaceful policy; but if he was superior in strength to his rival, he was to make war. If the circumstances be such that it was desirable to crush a rival, but this could only be done with the assistance of some other Power, then the king had to adopt a policy of double-dealing" (Kautilya VII: 1).

Medha Bisht deciphers the Kautilyan grand strategy in terms of balancing personal with political along with prioritizing the interests of the state. She says (2020: 59):

Mandala theory represented a unique order of states, wherein one could identify one's foes and allies on the basis of geographical proximity, but also in terms of material strength and cognitive intentions. To read mandala theory without the state (in terms of its capacity and strength) is therefore misconstrued, given the Kautilyan emphasis on the saptanga theory.

Talking about the actors, other than the vijigishu, in the form of allies and enemies and their role as facilitators who also regulated order in the mandala, she further says (Ibid.):

The five independent actors, which therefore need to be reckoned with are: the conqueror, the enemy, the ally, the middle king and the neutral king. The rest of the actors were classified as per the sequence established for identifying enemies and allies. These actors were important as they acted as facilitators to measure the success of diplomacy. The intent of these actors can be approached by articulating the cognitive aspect which gave meaning to 'friend' or 'enemy'.

She also calls the mandala theory a fluid concept where transformations were possible owing to internal and external influences and factors. She says (Ibid: 60):

If the state declined in terms of its capacity and influence, it had to adapt to various situations in order to regain its relative influence in the mandala. The circle of states was thus a fluid entity, which was prone to transformational elements dependent on state capacity and influence. The inside-outside or the internal-external dichotomy thus seems superficial in Arthashastra, as the strategy which the state was expected to adopt had to be in resonance with its internal capacity and strength. Order thus was not an arrangement which was fragile, but was a grand strategic design, taking a long-term view of things holding the states in the mandala together.

Thus, with 72 constituent elements, each having its own peculiar excellence, the Kautilyan diplomacy was about managing, regulating and balancing them through tactics and strategies.

### **Shadgunya and Upaya: Methods and Means of Inter-State Relations**

In order to exploit the doctrine of rajamandala effectively, Kautilya propounded six methods of foreign policy called the shadgunya theory. These six methods of foreign policy contribute to increasing the effective national power of the state (Rangarajan 2000: 512). For Kautilya, the only way the vijigishu could attain success in the mandala system operating under the conditions of matsyanyaya was by following the shadgunya (six-fold) policy (Zaman 2006: 237). Scattered throughout the book in various chapters, this consists of six foreign policy methods that the vijigishu uses to achieve his goals, i.e. foreign policy consists of six gunas.

Talking of shadgunya theory, Kautilya says that the attitude of a ruler towards foreign rulers depended upon the special circumstances of each case. He was supposed to adopt one or other of six sorts of policy, namely, peace (*sandhi*), war (*vigraha*), neutrality (*asana*), preparedness for war (*yana*), alliance (*samsraya*), and double-dealing (*dvaidhibhava*) (Kautilya VII: 1). Kangle (1986: 251) quotes that Kautilya advises the *Vijigishu* to opt for:

1. *Sandhi* or alliance, if the enemy is strong or making a treaty containing conditions or terms, that is, the policy of peace;
2. *Vigraha* or war (Break the Sandhi, start war if you are strong) or the policy of hostility;
3. *Asana* or halting (Stationing of the forces near enemies' territories) or the policy of remaining quiet (and not planning to march on an expedition);
4. *Yana* or military expedition (Sanskrit word for mobilization – it means military exercise near enemies' territory);
5. *Samsraya* or seeking shelter with another king or in a fort (Joining hands with those who have similar aims); and
6. *Dvaidhibhava* (Dual policy – it means friendship with one enemy for the time being and enmity with the other – don't open two fronts at the same time) or the double policy of Sandhi with one king and Vigraha with another at the same time.

Kautilya says, “Of these, agreement with pledges is peace; offensive operation is war; indifference is neutrality; making preparations is marching; seeking the protection of another is an alliance, and making peace with one and waging war with another, is termed a double policy (*dvaidhibhava*) (Kautilya VII: 370).

Elaborating on the various aspects of the six-fold policy, Kautilya further says (Ibid: 370-1):

Whoever is inferior to another shall make peace with him; whoever is superior in power shall wage war; whoever thinks “no enemy can hurt me, nor am I strong enough to destroy my enemy,” shall observe neutrality; whoever is possessed of necessary means shall march against his enemy; whoever is devoid of necessary strength to defend himself shall seek the protection of another; whoever thinks that help is necessary to work out an end shall make peace with one and wage war with another.



The selection of one of the six methods of foreign policy is, thus, wholly dependent on situational factors, yet it follows an inherent logic. Kangle (2010: 321) opines that, “the guiding principle, in determining which of the six foreign policy options is to be adopted, derives from the intrinsic connectivity between the shadgunya and saptanga theories: The circle of constituent elements [the seven prakritis] is the basis of the six measures of foreign policy [shadgunya]”. Kautilya says (Kautilya VII: 365), “the application of the six-fold royal policy is the source of peace and industry where the absence of disturbance to the enjoyment of the results achieved from works is peace and efforts to achieve the results of works undertaken is industry (vyayama)”.

Talking about the nature of the alliance, Kautilya emphasises the fact that when the advantages derivable from peace and war are of equal character, one should prefer peace. He says (Ibid: 375):

One shall make an alliance with a king who is stronger than one’s neighbouring enemy; in the absence of such a king, one should ingratiate oneself with one’s neighbouring enemy, either by supplying money or army or by ceding a part of one’s territory and by keeping oneself aloof; for there can be no greater evil to kings than an alliance with a king of considerable power unless one is actually attacked by one’s enemy.

Other examples of Arthashastra’s practical foreign policy prescriptions to a king can be seen in the following specific advice he gives to a king (Ibid: 375).

A king who is situated between two powerful kings shall seek protection from the stronger of the two; or from one of them on whom he can rely; or he may make peace with both of them on equal terms. Then he may begin to set one of them against the other by telling each that the other is a tyrant causing utter ruin to himself, and thus cause dissension between them. When they are divided, he may pat down each separately by secret or covert means. Or, throwing himself under the protection of any two immediate kings of considerable power, he may defend himself against an immediate enemy.

Kautilya suggests the six-fold policy to be applied together as well. When a king finds himself threatened by imminent dangers or troubles, he should, though

superior, seek the protection of another (Ibid: 378). This is the realist approach nations in the modern world also take into consideration when such a need arises.

Kautilya talks about various alternatives, other than the six-fold policy, as well. He says, “Whoever thinks that in the course of time his loss will be less than his acquisition as contrasted with that of his enemy, may neglect his temporary deterioration” (Ibid: 371). Overall, the ultimate aim of the king shall be passing from the state of deterioration to that of stagnation and from the latter to that of progress. Kautilya, thus, draws upon the Pendulum theory of history in which Kautilya depicts the kingdom passing through three phases – decline, stability and advancement (Boesche 2002: 99). Kautilya says that when in decline, make peace, when prospering, make war, if equal in strength, remain neutral, depleted in power, seek shelter, with help, seek dual policy and when blessed with excellence, prepare for war (Kangle 2010: 373).

At the same time, Kautilya realises that the shadgunya methods are effective only if they are implemented through various instruments, means or upaya (influence techniques). The upayas, in the Arthashastra, are introduced as means of politics in the tenth chapter of Book II. They are: (i) conciliation (*sama*); (ii) making of gifts (*dana*); (iii) causing dissensions (*bheda*); and iv) war of punishment (*danda*). These measures were to be adopted by the Vjigishu to carry into effect their foreign policy and the sadgunya cluster can be seen as a derivative of the upayas in the field of foreign policy. Kautilya sees a ranking among the upayas when he says (Kautilya VII: 425):

This is the group of four means. Each preceding one in the enumeration is the easier and lighter one. Conciliation is simple. Gifts are twofold being preceded by conciliation. Dissension is three-fold, being preceded by conciliation and gifts. Use of force is four-fold, being preceded by conciliation, gifts and dissension.

For fruitful application of the upayas, as components of inter-state relations, Kautilya further talks about the efficacy of three kinds of diplomats, viz. a) Nisrishtartha or plenipotentiary; b) Parimitartha with definite instructions for a particular mission; c) Shasanahara or royal messenger (Kautilya I: 16). Kautilya also discussed classification of ambassadors (*duta*), his qualifications, status, immunity, duties, salary etc. in great detail. A successful adviser (Minister) was deemed suitable for the post of ambassador. This practice continues till date.

The maintenance of balance of power was one of the problems in foreign politics that engaged the diplomats' attention in ancient days. Kautilya insisted that a monarch should always take care that none of the other powers grow either too strong or become too weak. Kautilya also talks of the importance of diplomatic espionage and the institutions of internal and external spies. He enlists the role and duties of the ambassador in terms of collecting information on the state of affairs of neighbouring kingdoms and the need to ascertain and neutralise any plans they may hatch against others. The ambassador was:

expected to strike up friendships with enemy officers, become familiar with their military strengths as well as ascertain their weak points. He was also expected to cultivate and gain insights into the state of thinking of those in power in enemy territory. In the modern era, our diplomats and defence attaches too are expected to gain insights into the country they serve in. Thus, the basic principles of foreign policy as enunciated in the Arthashastra are as applicable today as at the time of its writing (Muralidharan 2020).

Kautilya also talks of war as a method for ascertaining victory for the *vijigishu*. When war becomes inevitable, Kautilya suggests three types of wars depending on the situation, viz. *Parakrama-yuddha* – open fight at a place and time indicated; *Kuta-yuddha* – concealed warfare involving use of tactics in battlefield; and *Tusnim-yuddha* – silent (proxy) fighting implying the use of secret agents for enticing enemy officers or killing them (Kangle 1986: 258). He also mentions three types of victories (conquests), viz. *Dharmavijay* – righteous; *Lobhavijay* – Greedy Conquest (by giving economic inducement to the enemies' forces); and *Asuravijay* – Demonical (by cunningness or unfair means) (Chakravarty 1992: 197).

Overall, Kautilya offered wide-ranging and truly fascinating discussions on war and diplomacy, including his wish to had his king become a world conqueror, his analysis of which kingdoms were natural allies and which were inevitable enemies, his view of women as weapons of war, the spread of disinformation, and his humane treatment of conquered soldiers and subjects (Kaur 2011: 114).

Kautilya's use of the word *vijigishu* is for purely theoretical purposes as he gives sufficient advice to a weak king to pursue against a strong king (Rangarajan 2000: 550). Through this evidence, the application of the Arthashastra's theories can be

done to all states, regardless of their policies and can be a useful tool to model state behaviour and understand motivations, behaviour and outcomes.

Kautilya places great emphasis on relative power in a bilateral relation to support a course of action (Rangarajan 2000: 543). Kautilya warns that power is not constant over time and advises a course of action based on deviations by factoring the variations in power on a temporal frame (Ibid.). The sub classification of types of neighbours, types of allies and types of vassals permits an analysis of the motives of the actors and allows a reasoned response through the models that Kautilya proposes (Ibid: 544).

Strategic partnerships, thus, in many ways can be seen as the heart of Kautilyan foreign policy and states routinely engaged in such activity and that it was a crucial part of interstate relations, allowing for strategic breadth and nuance in both the achievement of specific goals as well as competition with adversaries (McClish 2016: 29-30). Thus, in the seminal text on conducting inter-state relations, Kautilya draws various elementary strategies to be adopted by a ruler for securing and advancing the interests of the state and its people. Many of the prognoses Kautilya predicts for a ruler surrounded by predicaments happen to be the norms practiced even today.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Arthashastra**

Deepshikha Shahi in *Kautilya and Non-Western IR Theory* calls the text a classic of IR theory providing lasting insights and intellectual stimulus for IR theorizing (2018: 167). Kautilya has been studied with variational alacrity in the scholarly world. Max Weber was the first Western social scientist to recognize Kautilya's Arthashastra as a foundational text in the evolution of political thought. Relations among states are shaped by a complex mix of capabilities, correlations of forces, intentions and values and all these four factors, congruent with political realism, are featured in the Arthashastra.

Defining the modern concept of security in relation to sovereign states, Michael Liebig (2020: 548) explains:

The 'state' and 'security' are intrinsically intertwined concepts because the capacity to apply violence constitutes the essence of the sovereign state and is the basis of its internal and external security. For each state, its security

has a 'strategic' quality precisely because it relates to the threat of use of force or the actual use of force, thus bearing upon the most fundamental and lasting of state interests, self-preservation.

He further states that "the inherent logic of strategy is a necessary condition to understand the actual behaviour of actors engaging in the external and internal security of a given state. All states pursue a security strategy and there are apparently universally valid 'guiding principles' that feature in the strategic conduct of all states" (Ibid.). Kautilya, in his *Arthashastra*, devoted three chapters related to these aspects of the state and its relations with others, viz. security, warfare and strategy. He opined that the ways in which states conduct their strategies should never be uniform and should, in fact, be guided by their experiences, preferences and orientations. The *modus operandi* for strategizing the essentials towards the conduct of foreign relations remains the same till date.

R.P. Kangle in his study, *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, has made very pertinent observations on the relevance of Kautilya in the modern era. He says, "We still have the same distrust of one nation by another, the same pursuit of its own interest by every nation tempered only by the considerations of expediency, the same effort to secure alliances with the same disregard of them in self-interest" (Muralidharan 2020). While the Mandala theory as propagated in *Arthashastra* is often considered merely as an arrangement of states in concentric circles, the idea essentially was one of inter-state linkages with its own complex degree of friendliness or animosity or in modern parlance of having allies and adversaries. This makes the notions and ideas of Kautilya still relevant.

Shiv Shankar Menon, former National Security Advisor, had succinctly summed up the relevance of *Arthashastra* by stating, "the concepts and ways of thinking that the *Arthashastra* reveals is useful, because in many ways, the world which we face today is similar to that in which Kautilya operated in when he built the Mauryan Empire to greatness" (Ibid.). The strategic relevance of *Arthashastra*, thus, lies in understanding the philosophy behind it, as it was the intangible/ideational elements that gave meaning and direction to concepts such as power, state and statecraft, and inter-state relations. Senior Indian diplomat, K.P.S. Menon, noted in 1947 that the "realism of Kautilya is a useful corrective to our idealism in international politics" (Kapur 1976: 77). However, Kautilyan realism is not 'pure power politics' but intrinsically rooted in what Liebig (2020: 553) calls political normativity

(*rajadharma*). He says that “Kautilya inter-relates ‘realist’ calculation of hard-power capabilities (military and economic strength) with political normativity (*rajadharma*) in making policy decisions. The central normative paradigm is that all-out-war is *ultima ratio* and ‘indirect’ strategic policies are preferred” (Ibid: 556-7).

Tracing the evolution of this rational approach to statecraft in Indian context, JN Dixit (2003: 24) notes, “It is very important to note, however, the moderate and rational approach to politics and inter-state relations in each stage of the evolution of Indian history as an independent political entity followed a process of political consolidation which required the application of concepts and prescriptions of Chanakya who predated Machiavelli nearly 2000 years”. There are, undoubtedly, constants or ‘lasting patterns’ in the strategic posture and behaviour of these pan-Indian politics even though the political regimes have greatly differed.

Arthashastra’s discourse on foreign policy and diplomatic practice can, thus, be described as a profound timeless classic of realism with inquisitive resonance with the modern times and thoughts. The pursuance of these policies led to establishment of India’s first empire by Maurya dynasty which at its peak straddled well beyond South Asia’s natural boundaries. In urging the king to rely on science and not the precepts of religion, Kautilya separated, for the first time in India, political thought from religious dictum (Sachdev 2014). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, interestingly the context of what Kautilya wrote for his times now assumes importance as the very character of war has changed. Surely war-craft, statecraft and diplomacy are now conjoined as was in the time of Kautilya in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Gautam 2017). The use of diplomacy and political guile was propagated in preference to outright war. Rulers were also advised to calculate long-term and short-term gains before launching a war. It also talked of how every resource or element of national power should be utilized by a ruler. With most modern nations looking at issues through a similar prism, it would be evident that the Arthashastra is relevant even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Muralidharan 2020).

S. Kalyanaraman (2015: 1) rightly points out that “the Arthashastra continues to be relevant because of the key insights it provides about the enduring nature of the state and of the inter-state system as well as because of the framework of thought and action it prescribes for states to navigate through this system”.

James Cook, modern strategist and war expert, defines strategy as something “designed to link *ends* (national interests), *ways* (concepts that describe how something might be done) and *means* (resources that are employed as capabilities)” (Cook 2013). What Cook and other modern strategists and thinkers explain was all embedded in Kautilya’s Arthashastra and can well be related with the concepts in the text written more than two millenniums ago.

## Conclusion

India had evolved her own ancient concept of statecraft which included an elaborate tradition of diplomacy, both inclusive (among rulers of India) and exclusive (beyond the subcontinent). From being initially rooted in the concept of dharma, the practice of diplomacy subsequently moved to realpolitik. The practice of inter-state alliances based on strategic or tactical considerations, thus, came into being. Kautilya’s Arthashastra, written around 300 BCE and mainly concerned with statecraft, contained lengthy descriptions of strategies for the conduct of inter-state relations and diplomacy in the same tradition. The Arthashastra is, thus, a rich treasure of strategic thinking in ancient India.

The *Arthashastra*’s legacy and influence have been substantial throughout the evolution of politics, strategy, statecraft, and intelligence on the Indian subcontinent. The impact of Kautilyan thought can be seen engraved on the present Indian policy-making as well. Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ concept is key to understanding this analogy, “which can be defined as the efficacious presence of past patterns of thought and behaviour in the present” (Bourdieu 1990). The habitus concept does apply to Indian strategic culture because it transcends the exclusivity of the conscious ‘re-use of the past’, i.e. the deliberate reference to past ideas and experiences as the precondition for impacting present thinking and behaviour (Mitra 2011).

Kautilya was very much aware of the evolving geopolitical realities and his prescription for interstate relations was inclusive of all the strategic realities and impending threats from which the state needed to be secured. The text, therefore, needs to be studied in the right perspective keeping into consideration the realities Kautilya and his state was grappling with. The inter-state relations in Arthashastra encompasses internal and external dimensions of security, possibilities, and policy making in statecraft as the boundaries during the period of the text were fluid. Thus,

an empirical analysis of the text will bring the normative and practical aspects of conducting internal and foreign relations where flexibility was always an option towards attaining the ultimate goal of *yogakshema* (welfare of the people). The vast reservoir in the Arthashastra and the comprehensive genius in Kautilya still remain untapped to a certain extent and various concepts and ideas discussed in the text need further elaboration.

Finally, for a better understanding of Kautilyan thought and framework, state and statecraft must be read together as complementing each other, i.e. internal policies (governance) and external policies (diplomacy) must be perceived as interconnected and interdependent towards achieving the holistic and grand objective of the state, that is, augmenting the capacity of the state and welfare of its people. Kautilya's Arthashastra is, in every sense, topical and further research on the subject must be conducted for a considerate understanding of the inherent logic and thought in the text rather than judging it by modern parameters.

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