

Theory of State in Kautilya's Arthashastra – An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study statecraft, economic policy and military strategy as imagined by Kautilya, in his work 'Arthashastra'. War has been a recurring element in the history of mankind. Most successful nations have been dependent on the strategy of using their Armed Forces to support their political goals. War of course is merely an instrument of state policy and often the last resort. Diplomacy or management of international relationships by negotiations is the most preferred option. It is also clear that even after a war or even minor skirmishes, nations look for political settlement of issues. It is also evident that unless a nation has a credible military deterrent, very often other nations tend to ignore its views and policies. It may even lead to attempts to usurp territory or economic interests of that nation. In an earlier era, British gunboat diplomacy ensured advancement of her national interests across the globe. In today's scenario, while missions of the armed forces are even more complex, it is the ability of United States to project military power at virtually every corner of the world that ensures safeguarding of her national interests.

Key words: Maurya, Kautilya, Economics, Arthashastra, Statecraft, polity

Introduction

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, states right at the beginning that Arthashastra is a compendium of similar treatises written by earlier teachers. Dr RP Kangle in his study, "The Kautilya Arthashastra", has made very pertinent observations on the relevance of Kautilya in the modern era and states, "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 same disregard of them in self-interest". He goes on to say that it is difficult to see how rivalry and the struggle for supremacy between nations can be avoided or how the teachings of Arthashastra based on these basic facts can ever become superfluous, until some sort of one world government or an effective supranational authority is established. As seen, neither the formation of League of Nations or later the United Nations Organisation has really transformed the world as envisaged. Therefore, the Arthashastra and its basic tenants would continue to be followed by Nations, as it deals with topics as diverse as politics, interstate relations, military organisation, war fighting, intelligence, economy, trade practices, shipping, and even gender relations. In short, it covers the entire spectrum of public administration and other aspects that modern citizens look for in their Nation.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze **Kautilya's Arthashastra** (flourished 300 bce), a statesman and philosopher. Also the position of Arthashastra identified as the 'formative' ideational strategic text which is assessed to illuminate the power of statecraft and the science

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Kautilya had a clear grasp of the distinction between means and end, even though he had conceived it more than 2,000 years ago. It is a concept that many strategic thinkers of today have not fully appreciated. Kautilya also spoke of intrigue, secret missions and covert operations and diplomatic offensives as instruments of state policy. All these ideas are still relevant and practiced even today. The prohibitive expenses of war were well appreciated by him and, therefore, he advocated that victory can best be achieved without bloodshed. Kautilya also spoke of utilisation of all elements of state power to achieve favourable outcomes. Arthashastra speaks extensively of military organisation including the Chief of Defence and covers each of the constituents of the army, the troops, the organisation into platoons and regiments. It talks of the infantry, cavalry, the chariots and the elephants. In essence, it covers all aspects of land fighting capabilities as known then. It also speaks of the training issues of the army, pay, emoluments, rewards and honours. Kautilya also mentions that families of soldiers killed in the line of duty would be provided with subsistence and wages. He also cautioned against committing troops to confrontation without looking at the aspects of training and possibility of escalation. Battle formations are discussed, so are tactics. He further talks of medical support and logistics supplies to be on standby to encourage fighting men. Arthashastra also speaks of fortifications and how enemy fortifications could be overcome. While some of the writings and recommendations may appear at variance with modern era norms, the fact that Kautilya envisaged many of these issues more than 2,000 years ago is noteworthy.

Power, place, time, strength

Kautilya has extensively spoken of the conduct of war focusing on power, place, time, strength, and of ascertaining the weaknesses of the enemy. The time of invasion is relevant even today. For example, in our own context, the monsoons, severe winter, time of harvesting and heat conditions would all play a role depending on the area of operations. It would also be appreciated that weather conditions play an even more significant role in maritime and air operations. Arthashastra also speaks of the type of equipment, manpower and the importance of finances in any mission. After the presentation of the Union Budget every year, we discuss the need for funds for upkeep and modernisation of the Armed Forces. Kautilya had emphasised more than two millennia ago, that an Army is dependent on strong finance for its upkeep. He also spoke of issues of leadership, industry, infrastructure and population, all of which as having direct bearing on the Armed Forces. Kautilya also spoke of villages which were exempted from taxation in lieu of military services rendered to the state. Kautilya did not ignore the maritime dimensions of security. Among various appointments, there was a post of Chief Controller of Shipping and Ferries, who was responsible for a variety of maritime activities including welfare of sea traders and seamen, ensuring sea worthiness of ships and tackling piracy. A Chief Controller of Ports is also mentioned. Port dues and customs duties are indicated. It also mentions that pirate ships and enemy boats violating territorial limits should be destroyed. Profit

margins for trade were fixed at five percent for local goods and ten percent for imported ones. In essence, the economic dimension of Kautilya's Arthashastra was both well developed and central to his national security policy. As mentioned earlier, Arthashastra extensively covers diplomacy and warfare. It advocates that rulers must carefully examine short term gains through immediate action, vis-à-vis long term gains, which could be attained by awaiting the right moment to act. 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. It should be appreciated that in the ancient world, there was fierce competition between States for survival. While in the modern era, especially since World War II, we have not seen major conquest of nations as such, minor annexations and control for power over limited territories are still pursued. Territorial integrity therefore remains an important element of security of a nation, more so in view of the increasing roles being played by non-state actors. While modern day international relations are largely based on the equality of States, it is observed that powerful Nations try and impose their will on others, be it in the form of trade sanctions or by imposing restrictions on movement of people.

Kautilya's Arthashastra: Principle of Strategy

The Arthashastra talks of achieving success by alternate strategic means. It speaks of creating dissention in the enemy camp. Espionage, both military as well as diplomatic, is spoken of. It also amplifies the need for local monitoring of intelligence, whether it is for watching the conduct of government officials or keeping the ruler informed of the general public feeling. It also talks of the need to collect information on state of affairs of neighbouring kingdoms and the need to ascertain and neutralise any plans they may hatch against others. Diplomatic espionage is also talked of while discussing the duties of the Ambassador. He 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. The need for economic and military might is emphasised for any nation to pursue its national interests. The Arthashastra also states that any calamity to the people of the country would affect its economic strength and therefore, the development of the country as a whole. Economic prosperity and its distribution among citizens were considered essential for development of a stable nation and its security, along with good governance, institutions and corruption free officials. On the aspect of internal security, it spoke of the need to guard against revolts, insurgencies and subversion apart from mere physical security of borders. Kautilya also spoke of spies or espionage for external as well as internal monitoring – shades of modern day RAW and IB! Cooperation of the citizens to bring in changes by giving them material incentives or by appealing to their good sense as citizens was considered preferable to confrontation. It was imperative for the ruler to place service to his people and their welfare, above his self-interests. Incidentally, are citizens of modern day nations not looking for something similar in their political and administrative leaders? The strength of the armed forces of a nation continues to play a significant role in pursuit of its policies. Therefore, in modern era, warfare is not purely a confrontation between armed forces, but is also aimed at achieving supremacy in the economic, diplomatic and political fronts. In today's world, challenges to global security are possibly no different from what existed at the time of Kautilya. While advances in science and technology have helped change the methodologies employed, the problem of inimical states, terrorism and insurgencies remain in different forms, including activities of non-state actors, financed by nations or elements who do not want to appear directly in front. As India grows economically and possibly emerge as a \$5-

trillion economy soon, our armed forces would become even more vital to international peace and stability, as we are seen globally as a nation with no hegemonic ambitions. Warfare in this Information Age has a greater emphasis on influencing political hierarchy as well as populace at large. Apart from the capability of waging pure warfare, there is also the need for military might to be seen as a threat in being to further national power. Kautilya's writings teaches us all this.

Conclusion

Our Armed Forces have been some of our most visible ambassadors abroad, be it in peacekeeping duties or in rendering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In the years ahead, our military diplomacy and presence may, therefore, be called upon for support and cooperation worldwide. As our national interests expand, our forces would need to reach out and build partnerships with nations big and small across the globe. In this regard, our Navy has been in the forefront by its mission based deployments, bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises across the world and by rendering disaster relief, sometimes even before the affected nation's forces could react. Of course, Navies have the unique advantage of being in international waters and yet being close enough to emerge on the scene when called for. The purpose of the Kautilya's Arthashastra is evident. It sought to establish a relationship both social and economic between the various groups comprising the State, and between the State and its neighbors; an ideal often initially achieved peaceably, but the ambitions of princes and the demands of the economy, especially those depending on overseas trade, led to wars to protect trade routes, and the acquisition of territory to provide new sources of food and raw materials. The Arthashastra is indeed a timeless compilation on complexities of governance and international affairs, and as relevant today as at the time of its compilation. In case of modern India, some of its policies such as non-alignment and no first use nuclear policy have shades of wisdom as advocated by Kautilya. Thus, even though written more than two millennia ago, Arthashastra would remain a referral guide in statecraft even in the 21st century or in the foreseeable future.

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