

## Political thoughts of Kautilya: An overview

Mithun Howladar

Research Scholar, Department of Sanskrit, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

Kautilya was the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire, who defeated the Greek ruler Seleukos and the mighty Nandas whose empire stretched over a large part of eastern India. Political thoughts of Kautilya are summarized in a book he wrote known as the Arthashastra, a Sanskrit name. 'Arthashastra' can be explained as 'Science and art of politics and diplomacy.' Kautilya's Arthashastra is magnificent work on ancient political thought which was undoubtedly composed between 3rd -2nd century B.C. In his political and administrative ideas, the focus of attention was the king. Kautilya used power as a tool to control his society as well as his enemies. He also believed that it is the king's duty to seek material gain, spiritual good and pleasures. Kautilya thinks that for a king to attain these three goals must create wealth, have armies and should conquer the kingdoms and enlarge the size of his state. He thought that for the smooth functioning of administration and for the welfare of the people, the king had to be acquainted in the four vedas and four sciences of government (Anviksiki, Trayi, Varta and Dandaniti). Kautilya proclaimed that politics was the supreme science and supreme art. In this paper, I have discussed elaborately Kautilya's political ideology.

**Keywords:** kautilya, politics, arthashastra, war, diplomacy, mandala theory, dandaniti, anviksiki, trayi, varta

### Introduction

The historical process of tradition of Indian Politics is primeval and traced back to the period of Vedas. The deliberations regarding politics are found in 'Smritis' and 'Puranas' by the name 'dandaniti'. References to various political texts are available which studied and discovered the concept of 'dandaniti'. The study of ancient Indian political thought is considered incomplete without the knowledge of Arthashastra written by Kautilya. Arthashastra is one of the most persuasive and comprehensive treatises in political science in the Indian Vedic civilization<sup>[1]</sup>. Kautilya made politics a scientific study in ancient India, and attempted to test the political ideas on scientific lines with empirical orientation. Many stated Kautilya as the first political realist in the world. Kautilya was the minister in the Kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya during 317-293 B.C. He has been considered as one of the shrewdest ministers of the times. Kautilya's Arthashastra is a masterwork which includes an array of topics like statecraft, politics, strategy, selection and training of employees, leadership skills, legal systems, accounting systems, taxation, fiscal policies, civil rules, internal and foreign trade etc. After alexander left India, The Mauryan Empire was the most powerful Kingdom in India and kautilya was minister who advised the king. Chanakya (C.350-C.275BC) also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta<sup>[2]</sup>. He was the man to envision the first Indian empire by unification of the then numerous Kingdoms in the Indian sub-continent and provide the impetus for fights against the Greek conqueror Alexander. His foresight and wide knowledge coupled with politics of expediency helped found the mighty Mauryan Empire in India. Kautilya is perhaps less well known outside India compared to other social and political philosophers of the world like Confucius and Machiavelli, but is definitely considered to be the first genuine political theorist in Indian history.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is a draft constitution of an ideal state. Due to his political wisdom and diplomatic skills in empire building, Chanakya is called 'Machiavelli of India'<sup>[3]</sup>. Kautilya several times more clever and superior political thinker. If we compare statesman on the four dimension framework of war and peace, Human Rights, International Economic Justice and World order Kautilya had a strong opinion on all the four aspects. In fact people like Bismark and Woodrow Wilson in recent history had been able to demonstrate their views only on two of the four dimensions. Kautilya's work is primarily a book of political realism where State is paramount and king shall carry out duties as advised in his book to preserve his state. Kautilya's work differed from existing political theory in that it talked about ways of running the administration which were based more on self-interest than on morality. Kautilya was far more successful as he first taught his realist philosophy to Chandra Gupta right from his childhood and then helped him to become an emperor. In this way, Kautilya was a successful King-maker or he was successful in making a philosopher king.

Kautilya was a proponent of a welfare state but definitely encouraged war for preserving the power of the state. He thought that the possession of power and happiness in a state makes a king superior hence a king should always strive to augment his power. This actually coincides with the Weber's view that there is no moral in international politics which means that states must be at war all the times. Kautilya though did not state this explicitly but we can infer that he did presume to be at war is natural for a state. A war in certain cases is unavoidable, hence, preparation and maintenance of the army, the right moves in the battle field and warfare strategies all are essential in the defence of a country, subjects which Kautilya tackles with the extra sensory precision. Kautilya's goal remained to enable the king to achieve complete power. In his opinion, the king had to be disciplined

and hardworking, sleeping only four hours a night. A king also had to avoid anger and lust, because a kingdom was at stake. Kautilya advocated three types of war— Open war, Concealed war and the Silent war. Open war he describes as the war fought between states, Concealed war as one which is similar to guerilla war and silent war which is fought on a continued basis inside the Kingdom so that the power of the king does not get diluted. War fighting tactics. Kautilya was also very harsh in narrating the exact methods of fighting a war and use of various tools to reduce the strength of a state. He believed that there were three types of Kings who go into warfare and it is important to understand the distinction between the types of Kings and the appropriate warfare strategy to be selected. Kautilya wrote in detail explaining the war strategy because he was a strong proponent of social structure. He vehemently defends the state and believes that religion and morals are supposed to serve the state. kautilya believes that war is a means to an end for wealth and stability.

Kautilya believed that nations acted in their political, economic and military self-interest. According to Kautilya, foreign policy or diplomacy will be practiced as long as the self-interest of the state is served because every state acts in a way to maximize the power and self-interest. He thought that diplomacy is a series of actions taken by a kingdom such that it gains strength and eventually conquers that nation with which diplomatic ties were created. He also thought that treaties should be made in such a way that king benefits and serves the self-interest of the kingdom. Kautilya described three types of political system such as rule making, rule application and rule adjudication and has been recognized for his contributions to bringing diplomacy at the helm of state's affairs. To understand Kautilya's concept of diplomacy it is important to understand the Mandala concept, six types of foreign policy and four solutions <sup>[4]</sup>. "Your neighbour is your natural enemy and the neighbour's neighbour is your friend"—this was the basic thought behind Kautilya's Mandala theory. According to this theory foreign rules are classified into four groups. Ari, Mitra, Madhyama and Udasina. Inimical and friendly rulers are divided into two kinds natural and artificial. kautilya thought that the king and his immediate neighbours are the natural enemies to each other. A king who attempted to give trouble to another king without reasonable cause was an artificial enemy of that king. Kautilya believed that the best kind of friend who was constant, noble, straight forward and whose friendship is inherited from father or grandfather. A ruler whose friendship was courted for the sake of protection of life and property was the artificial friend. According to Kautilya, the ruler whose territory was situated close to that of a king and his wicked enemy and who was capable of helping both the kings or of resisting either of them was a Mediator and the ruler whose territory was situated between the territories of two rival kings and who was powerful enough to help or resist either of them or a mediating king was Neutral. The neighbouring king belong to either of four classes, Parshnigraha, Akaranda, Parshnigrahasana and Akarandasara. According to Kautilya, a powerful king should always try to make himself Nabhi of the Mandala. Depending on the situation the king should adopt any of Asana, Yana, Samsraya and Dvaidhibhava. A ruler should adopt his foreign policy by deploying the well-established four-fold policy of Sama (persuasion, conciliation), Dana (monetary and other gainful incentives), Bedhna (divide and rule policy) and Danda

(Punishment) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is mainly a work on the art of government. In his political and administrative ideas, the focus of attention was the king. According to Kautilya, the state is made of seven constituent elements the king, ministers, fort, rural area, treasury, army and friend. Of all the seven elements, the king is the most important as he provides leadership, dynamism and energy to other six elements. 'Artha' is the dominant matter in this world and politics is also subjected to it. This view is largely similar to materialist philosophy of marx. In modern terminology, Kautilya's Arthashastra can be dubbed as a book on political economy. Economic power precedes the political power. Kautilya's Arthashastra is, in essence, a book on science of government whose base is economic. According to Kautilya, Artha implies vocation of man. The earth, on which humans inhabit and depend for their livelihood, is also called Artha <sup>[6]</sup>. Arthashastra is science of "acquisition and maintenance of (inhabited) earth."

Kautilya has said, "This science brings into beings and preserves spiritual good, material well – being and pleasures and destroys spiritual evil, material loss and hatred <sup>[7]</sup>. He thinks that politics must be treated as an independent science. Only it needs to be fitted into general scheme of knowledge. According to Kautilya's beliefs, for the smooth functioning of administration and for the welfare of the people, the king had to be acquainted in the four Vedas and four sciences of government. First Anviksiki or philosophy including the materialistic Lokayata system which sharpens the intellect opens the heart and opens the gate to all knowledge and virtue. Secondly, the Trayi or the triple Vedas, Rig, Sam and Yjur. To these might be added the Atharvaveda and historical lore. Thirdly, Varta or economics was concerned with agriculture, Cattle – breeding and trade. Lastly, Dandaniti or politics was the science of government, of the enforcement of law and order <sup>[8]</sup>. According to Kautilya, politics was the supreme science and supreme art. It lay at the root of all. The welfare of all sciences depended on the well - being of politics <sup>[9]</sup>. Kautilya is exceptional Indian political philosopher who was both thinker and statesman. He contributed in various social and political revolutions of his age and abstracted from his study of conflicts some general principles capable of universal application and effective in all times and ages. With more and more studies in the field of politics and economics and with a modern outlook and understanding of world affairs, the significance and indebtedness of Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' is incontrovertible. In India today, the Arthashastra is considered analogoustoAristotle'sPoliticsandMachiavelli'sThe Prince <sup>[10]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Kautilya is one of the most renowned Indian political philosophers. Though, he lived a long time ago, Certain philosophies from his theory are still applicable in modern political frame work. The book, written in Sanskrit elucidates theories and principles of governing a state. Kautilya established an extremely vital imperative - governance, polity, politics and progress have to be linked to the welfare of the people. Covering various topics on administration, politics and economy. It is a book of law and a treatise on running a country which is pertinent even today. His philosophies remain prevalent today in India.

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