

## **Kautilya: War, Justice & Diplomacy**

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Kautilya was the minister in the kingdom of the Chandragupta Mauryan during 317 B.C to 293 B.C. He has one of the judicious ministers of the times. He has explained his views on the war, justice and diplomacy very clearly in the *Arthaśāstra*.

Kautilya's work is initially a book of political realism where state is supreme king shall carry out duties s advised in his book protect his state. Kautilya's work is so deep rooted in practicality that he goes to explain the gory and cruel means a King must adopt to be in power. This could have been one reason why Aśoka, whom Kautilya advised renounced violence and war thus taking the path of *Dharma* or Morals.

I shall primarily focus on Kautilya's view on war, justice and diplomacy in this paper.

### **War**

Kautilya was a proponent of a welfare state but definitely encouraged war for preserving the power of the state. He thought that the right to power and happiness in kingdom enhances a king should always strive to increase his power. He further believed that it was the duty of king to attain material gain, spiritual well-being and happiness. In this he has clearly become a realist and a believer in principle of responsibility. 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.

The ancient Indians were equipped with all requisite weaponry to meet the challenges of war. The Indian army was categorized into several groups and the roles of the army men were specified according to their rank and abilities.

Climates played an important role in figuring out the military campaigns. In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya says that *mārgaśīrṣa* (november and december), *fālguna* (february and march) and *caitra* (march and april) were regarded ideal for military campaigns.

The ruler should fast and refrain from his food while he should sleep near his vehicle of war.<sup>1</sup> During the march, observing the threat perception, the army was arranged in various styles. In case of an attack in front he should march in the crocodile (*makara*) array. In marched cart (*śakata*) array and the thunder-bolt (*vajra*) array when the threat comes from rear and flanks. Threat comes from all sides then march in the excellent-on-all-sides array, in a region where march in a single file alone is possible, in the needle (*sūcyā*) array.<sup>2</sup>

*Mahābhārata* classifies wars into two broad categories- *Dharmayuddha* and *Asurayuddha*.<sup>3</sup> But kauṭilya refer to eight types of warfare, namely, *nimna-yuddha* or naval war, *prakāśa-yuddha* or open war, *sthala-yuddha* or land war, *kūṭa-yuddha* or secret war, *khanaka-yuddha* or trench war, *ākāśa-yuddha* or missile war, *diva-yuddha* or day war and *rātri-yuddha* or night war.<sup>4</sup>

Kauṭilya offers a detailed account of espionage system covering all aspects of polity. He said that the king should appoint persons in secret service namely, the

1. 'श्वो युद्धम्' इति कृतोपवासःशास्त्रवाहनं चानुशयीत (*Arthaśāstra*, 10.3.34)

2. 'पुरस्तदभ्याघाते मकरेण यायात्, पश्चाच्छकतेन, पार्श्वयोर्वज्रेण, समन्ततः सर्वतोभद्रेण, एकायनेसूच्या' (*Arthaśāstra*, 10.2.9.)

3. *Mahābhārata*, śānti. 96.1.

4 'निम्नस्थलप्रकाशकूटखनकाकाशदिवारात्रियुद्धव्यायामं च' (*Arthaśāstra*, 2.33.8.)

sharp pupil, the apostate monk, the seeming householder, the seeming trader and the seeming ascetic.<sup>5</sup>

The word *Caturangabala* denotes the four traditional army sections namely infantry, cavalry, elephants and the chariots. Kauṭilya said that these types of army were fighting in various suitable places. With big tree-stems, stones, trees, creepers, ant-hills, without thorns, not very uneven, this is ground for infantrymen. With double the room for retreat, free from mud, water bogs and devoid of pebbles is excellence for horses. With dust, mud, water, reeds and growth of rushes, free from 'dog's teeth' and free from obstruction by big branches of tree, is ground for elephants. Shelters, not causing jolting, with-out field under water and enabling a turn round, is excellence for chariots.<sup>6</sup>

Kauṭilya also took the societal structure and king's power as given and never challenged it. His focus was not on war per se but on the strategy and tactics of war which elaborate in his work. In describing his opinion on war, I think he has been very right in saying that a state which seeks power is in war all the time if we use his classification of war.

### **Justice**

Kauṭilya believed that for the success of a state, the state must be devoid of internal conflict and the King should be in control of the state. To maintain this internal peace he believed in a just and realistic rule of law. His definition of a state was one which had power and wealth and hence he put property rights and protection of wealth as one of the important themes in his jurisprudence. In fact he advocated that one could get rid of corporeal punishment by paying off fines.

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<sup>5</sup> 'उपोधभिःशुद्धामात्यवर्गो गूढपुरुषानुत्पादयेत् कापटिकदास्थितग्रहपतिवैदेहकतपसव्यञ्जनान् सत्त्रितीक्ष्णरसदभिक्षुकीश्र्च .  
(*Arthaśāstra*, 1.11.1.)

<sup>6</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, 10.4.4-10.

Kauṭilya maintained that it is vital duty of government to maintain order. He defines ‘order’ in particular to include both social as well as order in the sense of prohibiting and punishing criminal activity. *Arthaśāstra* thus contains both the civil law and criminal law. Kauṭilya ascribed a lot of importance to ‘*dharma*’. According to him, ‘the ultimate origin of all law is *dharma*’. He appealed in the name of ‘*dharma*’ to the sense of honour and duty and to human dignity, to moral duty and to enlightened nationalism. It’s quite intelligible that the judge in the *Arthaśāstra* was called ‘*dharmastha*’ or upholder of ‘*dharma*’. He maintained that so long every ‘*ārya*’ follows his ‘*svadharmā*’ having due regard to his ‘*varṇa*’ and ‘*āśrama*’<sup>7</sup> and the king follows his ‘*rājadharmā*’, social order will be maintained.

Kautilya did not see the law as an expression of the free will of the people. Thus authority – the authority to make laws, did not vest with citizens. Laws were derived from four sources – *dharma* or sacred law, *vyavhāra* or evidence, *carita* or history and custom, and *rājasāsana* or edicts of the King.<sup>8</sup>

In case of conflict amongst the several laws, *dharma* was supreme. The distribution of the other laws was case specific. *Rājasāsana* ordered the relationship between the three major social groupings, the citizen, the association and the state. The constitutional rules at the state level were specified in the *rājasāsana* but the constitutional rules at the level of the association were to be decided by the members of the association. The collective choice and the operational level rules of the association were also decided by the members of the association though the state did circulate laws to protect the individual member from the autocracy of the majority in the association.

<sup>7</sup> “चतुर्वर्णाश्रमस्यायं लोकस्यचाररक्षणात्।  
नश्यतां सर्वधरमानां राजा धर्मप्रवर्तकः॥” (*Arthaśāstra*, 3.1.38.)

<sup>8</sup> “धर्मश्च व्यवहारश्च चरित्रं राजशासनम्।  
विवादार्थश्चतुष्पादः पश्चिमः पूर्वबाधकः॥” (*Arthaśāstra*, 3.1.39.)

Kauṭilya's understanding of justice makes him unique in his times. In ancient India there is no one comparable who could have stood the test for justice being a tool for states craft. Kauṭilya believed that while it is as much important for the state to wage a war and conquer, it is also important to maintain law and order within the state in order to make it more powerful.

### **Diplomacy**

Kauṭilya believed that nations acted in their political, economic and military self-interest. He thought that 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 the world was in such a state that a kingdom was either at war or was preparing for a war and diplomacy was another weapon applied in this regular warfare. He believed that diplomacy is an order of actions taken by a kingdom such that it gains strength and finally conquers the nation with which diplomatic bonds were created.

Three types of political system namely rule making, rule application and rule adjudication were described by Kauṭilya. He has been recognized for his contributions to bringing diplomacy at the controls of state's affairs. In his words he defines diplomacy as, 'A King who understands the true implication of diplomacy conquers the whole world'.<sup>9</sup> To understand his concept of diplomacy it is important to understand the *maṇḍala* concept, *ṣāḍaḡuṇya* or six types of foreign policy.

The *maṇḍala* concept is one in which there are circles of friends and foes with the central point being the King and his State. *Vijigīṣu* or the invader, *Ari* or immediate enemy, *Mitra* or invader's ally, *Arimitra* or enemy's ally, *Mitrāmitra* or invader's ally's ally, *Arimitrāmitra* or enemy's ally's ally, *Pārṣṇigrāha* or rear enemy,

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<sup>9</sup> Bharati Mukherjee, "Kauṭilya's Concept of Diplomacy"

*Ākranda* or rear friend, *Pārṣṇigrāhasāra* or ally of rear enemy, *Ākrandasāra* or ally of rear ally,<sup>10</sup> *Madhyama* and *Udāsīna* are the kings included in *Maṇḍala*.

*Ṣādḡuṇya*<sup>11</sup> has been translated in several ways, such as six fold incidents, six fold policies, and six fold actions or methods.<sup>12</sup> However, they are *sandhi* or peace, *vigraha* or war, *āsana* or maintaining a post against an enemy, *yāna* or preparedness for attack, *saṃśraya* or friendship, *dvaidhībhāva* or double dealing. There are contradictions of conception among political theorists with regard to their number and classification.

The six methods of foreign policy were applied through the four means of *sāma*, *dāna*, *bheda* and *daṇḍa*, either individually or jointly.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Kauṭilya's foreign policy was formed by his strong belief in King and the state's continuous thirst for power and wealth. His diplomacy tactics were also affected by Hindu religion and the social structure which shaped his thinking in terms of division of foreign policies and their application.

Kauṭilya was a statesman of one of a kind in the east especially in India. While he made a great achievement to statecraft and challenging the Hindu religious thinking by condemning morals in war and justifying the end, I think his key weakness was that he was not a fanciful. He was a great thinker with vast fantasy as his book is not written with experiences or drawn from empirical records but out of myths and possibilities. He did not clear any concrete vision for the Mauryan empire. He proposed the *maṇḍala* concept in war and diplomacy and created complex web of relations but he did not forecast an outcome for this empire.

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<sup>10</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, 6.2.18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1.1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1.6-12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.16.3.

I greatly respect is his quality to manage war and diplomacy. His six diplomacy tools and *maṇḍala* concept is still applicable though the nations are now separated by oceans.

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