

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT INDIAN SCRIPTURES ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The ancient scriptures of India imbibe treasure of profound knowledge in almost each and every aspect of life. The education system in ancient India attracted scholars from different parts of the world and the teachings of Acharyas like Chanakya, who were involved in providing education and advisory to the Prince and kings of various regions in various administrative matters including foreign policies, has been embedded in many of our ancient scriptures like Arthashastra. The ancient scriptures like Arthashastra, Shukra niti, Agnipurana gives an idea of India's foreign policy during the ancient ages and our present study delves deep into these ancient scriptures to make an analysis whether these have significantly influenced the present policies of the nation on international forefronts. A detailed study shows that most of the foreign principles followed by India presently lay its foundation stone long back, during the ancient times, and hence the importance of our ancient scriptures as a strong reference in the present and any future policies under consideration cannot be undermined.

Keywords: Ancient Indian Scriptures, Foreign Policy, Arthashastra, Agnipurana, Shukra Niti.

Introduction

Foreign policy of a nation comprises of the principles, objectives and interests of a country while interacting and dealing with other nations. Foreign policy of any nation, in general, is directed to ensure its sovereignty and security, while contributing towards its growth, influence and stature in the eyes of the world. India has a rich cultural, traditional and political history and many famous scriptures like *Arthashastra* by Chanakya suggest that ancient India had a well established concept of "external" sovereignty and robust foreign policies when dealing with outside states. *Arthashastra*, written by Chanakya, also known as Kautilya, is one of such collections of timeless concepts on theories on political wisdom, welfare society and statecraft which could provide enrichment to the contemporary world. Hence, there exist a need to analyze that with a passage of time, whether these ancient scriptures still provide a base and whether they are and can further be referred to while dealing with international relations. Some early works by Sarkar and more recent works by Modelski, Boesche, Gautam, Liebig have already tried to connect Kautilyan perspective with various political insights and strategies relevant in today's world. The history provides strong intellectual base and it is important to appreciate ideas, legacies and diverse elements of people. Revisiting the past, exposes both strength and weaknesses of a nation and hence should be used judiciously with confidence to move forward steadily, instead of just using it as a mere idea of great civilization and bailing out of existing inadequacies (Mallavarapu S., 2018).

The foreign policy of India seems to have its base since ages and the ancient scriptures like *Arthashastra*, *Agnipurana*, *Shukri niti*, etc. provide an evidence of that. Policy plays a very important role in determining the position a nation holds in the international forum and India's foreign policy seems to be highly influenced by Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Even the diplomatic enclave of New Delhi, the capital city of India, has been named Chanakypuri, showing great reverence for Chanakya and his philosophy.

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Chanakya in *Arthashastra* mentions that policy and impolicy (naya and apanaya) are the causes of human make which affect position, while fortune and misfortune (aya and anaya) are the providential or unforeseen causes. Policy is man-made and it helps in attaining the desired end in accordance with what has been anticipated.¹ Thus it becomes important to understand the relationship between power and progress, which can be attained through the implementation of right policy and its execution within the circle of states or international forum, in today's context.

According to Kautilya, every nation in the international system finds itself in the centre of the circle, at the position of conqueror, known as *vijigishu*, whose power ought to be spread to more distant circles. The ruler should try to increase his power and happiness is the ultimate goal or end². According to the theory of circle of states or *mandala*, a natural enemy is that territory which is close to that of the conqueror and is equally powerful.³ Thus, the circle that borders the ruler state comprise of the hostile states, while the states surrounding the hostile states are the natural allies of the ruler state, for they are the enemies of the hostile states of the ruler. Elements of this logic can be found in the fact that India naturally considers Japan, Iran, Afganistan, South Korea as its natural allies against China and Pakistan.

According to Kautilya, the Circle of States is the source of the six forms of state policy or foreign policy which are peace (*sandhi*), war (*vigraha*) observance of neutrality (*ásana*), marching (*yána*), alliance (*samsraya*), and making peace with one and waging war with another (*dvaidhibhava*). The concept of 'sovereignty of states' finds it mention in various places in Shukra niti as well. Hence there is a need to study how these ancient scriptures have influenced the foreign policy of India and how they can be serve as a guiding light while taking decisions related to foreign matters.

Basic principles of Indian foreign policy and how they are influenced by ancient Indian scriptures

- **Principle of Anti Racism**

India believes that a person should never be discriminated on the basis of race, and hence anti racism plays the basic role in India's foreign policy. The concept of equality and non racism finds its place in our ancient scriptures also. *ShukraNiti*, also known as *ShukraNitisara*, said to have originally written by Brahma in the Vedic age and later by *Shukracharya*⁴, is a set of virtues and morals which must be followed in every sphere of life and invariably in governance. It is clearly mentioned in *ShukraNiti* that the caste of a person, whether Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaistya, Shudra, or Mlechchha, is not decided by birth or his colour, but by his works (karma) and virtues⁵. It further states that it is the deed of a person that decides his fortune, prosperity or adversity. Thus highest attribute has been placed to karma and character of a person in deciding the strata of the society in which he will be placed. India, as is seen today, also has time and again established and proved its stand against racism in the International forum, which is in accordance with what *Shukra niti* states on race or birth of a person. Anti racism is one of the basic principle of India's foreign policy and its stand against racism has been supported with several exemplary instances, one of which was the way India opposed the prevalent apartheid policy in South Africa and had cut off diplomatic relations with it in 1949.

- **Principle of Anti Colonialism**

Arthashastra, originally written by Kautilya in around 300 B.C⁶, is one of the finest treatises on politics, wealth and ways of acquiring and maintaining power. It states about foreign rule that if a country is not treated as its own, its wealth is carried off, is impoverished and is just treated as a 'commercial article'.⁷ Hence, the concept of independence holds a very important place since ages, and 'anti colonialism' has been a dominant theme in India's foreign policy.

¹ Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book VI, "The Source of Sovereign States", chapter II translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915

² Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book VI, "The Source of Sovereign States", chapter II translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915, converted into pdf by Sabhlok S.

³ Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book VI, "The Source of Sovereign States", Chapter II, compilation of the original text translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915 into pdf by Sanveej Sabhlok in pdf.

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shukra-Niti>

⁵ Sarkar, Benoy Kumar (1913), Sukra-niti-sara, pg 8

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Artha-shastra>

⁷ Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book VIII, "Concerning Vices and Calamities", Chapter II, compilation of the original text into pdf by Sanveej Sabhlok in pdf. The text has been interspersed with original Sanskrit text and its translation made by R. Shamasastri, 1915

Since Independence, it has fought actively for decolonization in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. In recent times also, India stood against China and brought the concern to International forum, when China grew its military presence in the South China Sea, which embroiled it into a maritime dispute with Vietnam. It also highlighted how various activities of China, including its associated projects and various financing practices, might push various countries of Asia into a debt trap, which might lead to neo colonialism.

A deep analysis of *Arthashastra* shows a constructive way of how to manage these conflicts and threats. According to Juutinen (2018), following the strategies of Kautilya, India should take the position of a *vijigishu* or the conqueror, which has the potential to convert threat into cooperation through constructive engagements, like inviting China to SAARC. Multilateralism instead of competitive blocks and rivalry for power, also seems to provide a better direction for maintaining international order in future fulfilling the normative conditions of Kautilya's *vijigishu*.

The principle of anti colonialism in India's foreign policy, finds its mention in *Shukra Niti* as well where utmost importance has been given to independence and it has been clearly mentioned that great misery comes from being dependent on others and there is no greater happiness than being self ruled.¹

- **Panchsheel**

It comprises of the five principles of peaceful co existence, which was signed on April 29, 1954 between the governments of the Tibet region of China and India on peaceful co existence. These are the principles of mutual respect of each others' territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non aggression, mutual non interference in each other' internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit along with peaceful co-existence. The Hindu philosophy of states mentions the importance of having both internal as well as external sovereignty, as sovereignty cannot be said to have fully attained until a state can exercise its internal sovereignty without the interference of other states.²

The concept of sovereignty mentioned by Kautilya in *Arthashastra* provides some timeless theories on national interest, which can be obtained by fulfillment of three basic objectives, namely good governance, which plays a major role in development of a welfare state and ensures internal peace and harmony; sound economy, which stress upon acquisition of wealth and third is the expansion of territory, which can be attained once the wealth is acquired. In today's context, expansion of territory might be taken as expansion of influence, where one nation would be revered by others. The main theme of *Arthashastra* for a welfare state and national interest revolves around three main concept of security, wealth and prestige (Vittal V., 2011).

- **The Constitutional Principle**

The directive principles of the state policy as laid down in Article 51 of the Indian Constitution clearly mentions that the state shall strive to maintain international peace and security, follow international law and treaty obligations and maintain fair and honorable relation with various nations. The principle of ensuring world peace has been inspired by many of the rulers like Ashoka, who ruled based on the principle of moral and peace and played a pivotal role in the spread of Buddhism. In *Arthashastra*, it is clearly said that when the benefits from war and peace are of equal character, peace should be preferred, for the disadvantages from war like loss of wealth, sin associated with it are ever attending in war.³ The Hindu theory of sovereignty ultimately culminates into the doctrine of unity, which is attained through the *sarva-bhauma*, which is the concept of universal state, where there would be no enmity among different states for all of them would ultimately bow before and owe allegiance to *raja-raj* meaning the king of kings (Sarkar, 1919). The league of nation or multilateralism, where the world is heading towards, seems to be the ultimate destination of a prosperous world.

- **Principle of Non Alignment**

Since independence, India follows a principle of non alignment, wherein during peacetime it refuses to act as a military base of any other country or be aligned with their military blocks. In other words, it assumes a position of positive neutrality. This principle also seems to have been inspired by Chanakya's advice of looking into self interest and not getting involved in permanent friendship or enmity

¹ Sarkar, Benoy Kumar (1913), *Sukra-niti-sara*, line 646, pg 126

² Sakar (1913), *Hindu theory of International Relations*, pg 400

³ Kautilya's *Arthashastra*: Book VII, "The End of the SixFold Policy", Chapter II, compilation of the original text translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915 into pdf by Sanveej Sabhlok in pdf.

with any nation. For instance, however friendly relation India maintains with USA, it has never surrendered before it and have always maintained its independent foreign policy. It remained neutral between the two power blocks of USA and USSR and hence was able to get the best of the two western and the eastern blocks.

- **Foreign Economic Aid**

India believes in helping each other to grow economically. Kautilya in *Arthashastra* mentions four *upayas* or means of policy, namely *sama* or conciliation, *daan* meaning gifts or help, *danda* or punishment, *bhed* meaning dissention, which can be applied universally. 'Daan' in international context means foreign aid, which forms one of the basic principle of India's foreign policy. Financial aid is a measure of favorably influencing the disaffected¹, and thus can be a great measure to build strong relation with these countries.

In *Agnipurana* also, sixteen types of treaties (*sandhis*) have been mentioned, four most important treaties out of which were that of mutual favour, friendship, relation and gifts.² Introspection into the reasons for the growing influence of China shows the huge investments it has made in various South Asian countries because of its strong economic position compared to India. It is very unfortunate that one hand, half of the population in India falls below the poverty line earning less than \$3 a day, on the other hand, the country is ranked among the top ten richest countries in the world in terms of total individual wealth, showing huge disparity of income. According to Oxfam report, India's top 10 percent of the population holds 74.3 percent of the national wealth. The concept of a welfare state as advocated by Kautilya should be followed in various government strategies for governance to ensure the prosperity and welfare of its people. The king or the administrator plays a vital role here and Chanakya mentions in *Arthashastra* that the happiness and welfare of a king lies in the happiness and welfare of his subjects, and that should be considered as good which actually pleases the subjects and not what pleases the king alone.³

Further, to make allies with neighboring nations and to develop economic, political, military, educational, security and socio economic cooperation and integration among its member countries, India has become a part of BRICS, G 20 and ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

- **Nuclear Doctrine**

According to Kautilya, strength is power and happiness is the end. The three kinds of strength are intellectual strength, which means the power of deliberation, the strength of sovereignty which comes from a strong army and prosperous treasury, and the physical strength which comes from martial power.⁴

To maintain its strength, India refused to sign Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty as it only allowed nations which have manufactured and exploded nuclear weapons before Jan 1, 1967 to retain those after signing the treaty. It did not agree with the discriminative nature of the treaty and successfully conducted nuclear tests, Pokhran II in 1998, thereby joining the list of nuclear power countries. However, after becoming a de facto nuclear power country, India came up with its Nuclear Doctrine, which is based on the following two main themes, which again reflects the shades of wisdom advocated by Kautilya:

- **No first use**, under which India will not use its nuclear power first, until and unless forced to.
- **Credible minimum deterrence**, wherein deterrence theory is applied which is possessing only that much weapon which is essential to deter an adversary from attacking, so that unnecessary arms race can be avoided.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to develop conceptual tools to study foreign policy and international relations of India through interpretative analysis of various ancient Indian scripture like *Arthashastra*, *shukra niti*, etc. The relevance of these ancient scriptures holds good today as well, even in the 21st century, in many forms and the principles mentioned can be used as basic texts of realism in political

¹ Modelski (1964) Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World; pg 553

² Jha T. and Tripathi G. Agnipuranam (Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 2007), Chapter 240, pp 734

³ Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book 1, Chapter XIX, compilation of the original text translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915 into pdf by Sanveej Sabhlok in pdf.

⁴ Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book 6, Chapter II, compilation of the original text translated by R. Shamasastri, 1915 into pdf by Sanveej Sabhlok in pdf.

maneuvering. They have significant impact in shaping the foreign policy of the country and must be referred to in future uncertainties. These timeless scriptures provide importance source to rethink and reconceptualize the present and sometimes a source to even challenge some of the established theories. It provides guidelines on not only international relations and foreign policy followed in ancient days, but also on governance, maintenance of peace and formation of a welfare society. The ultimate aim is to attain happiness and being strong- intellectually, economically and physically, is the pre requisite to that.

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