

SAMVARDHINI :- 01/06/2025

Volume – 7

Issue – 1

(ISSN ONLINE:- 2583-7176)

<https://samvardhini.in>

Influence of Kautilya Arthaśāstra in shaping India's Foreign Policy in Modi Era

Niranjan Roy

ABSTRACT

Kautilya Arthaśāstra has immensely contributed in shaping foreign policies in independent India. The period beginning 2014 has marked a new era in India's transformative and assertive foreign policy paradigm under Prime Minister Modi. The horizon of India's relation with other nations has transformed within the principle of multipolarity. The recent approach in foreign policy dimension has focused of 'India First' principle to sustain and stabilise regional security concerns.

KEY WORDS

Kautilya Arthaśāstra (KAS), foreign policy, diplomacy, Indian culture, diaspora.

Niranjan Roy

Introduction:

Arthaśāstra was written by Kautilya during the fourth century BC. This has become a very important classic of governance of a state. His fundamental theories like, the Mandala theory, the Sadgunya principles, the Matsya.-Nyaya doctrine, Strategic diplomacy, Sustainable development models, etc., are very relevant even in modern times.

The present study has analyzed the relevance of Kautilyan principles and strategies in India's foreign policy formulations since 2014.

Kautilya's Mandala theory prescribes a circulation strategy of different layers towards friends and enemy states. He favoured pragmatism, which was the basis for the formulation of foreign policy of a country (Ganapathi, 2017). The focus on the historical traditions relating to Kautilya's statecraft in conceptualising the exclusive feature in the foreign policies of India has also been greatly deliberated by scholars (Saran, 2017).

During the independence a national consensus has emerged on the goal of self-reliance. In 1940, the National Planning Committee of the Indian National Congress stressed the need for 'self-reliance' and 'planning' in the economic development of India (Baru, 1983).

Foreign Policy strategies in the Kautilyan State:

Kautilya opined that a state's well-being depends on dynamic foreign policy. The '*Wise King*' is the foremost priority for Kautilya since a skillful ruler can cause happiness and prosperity. A '*Wicked King*' will bring destruction upon the prosperous elements of his royal dominion (Shamasastri, 1960). The six-fold foreign policy and the *Mandala theory* approach in dealing with the neighbouring nations formed the core policy framework of the Kautilyan foreign policy (Rangarajan, 1992). Kautilya recommended six strategies, i.e., forming alliances, engaging in hostilities, remaining neutral, preparing for advancement, seeking refuge and adopting a dual policy. This is the establishment of virtue {KAŚ...7.1.6-19}¹:

*tatra paṇabandhaḥ saṁdhiḥ*² { KAŚ...7.1.6 }

apakāro vighrahaḥ {KAŚ...7.1.7 }

upekṣaṇam āsanam { KAŚ...7.1.8 }

abhyuccayo yānam { KAŚ...7.1.9 }

parāraṇam saṁśrayaḥ { KAŚ...7.1.10 }

saṁdhivighrahopādānam dvaidhībhaḥ {KAŚ...7.1.11 }

iti śaḍguṇāḥ {KAŚ....7.1.12 }

parasmādd hīyamānaḥ samdadhīta {KAŚ...7.1.13 }

abhyuccīyamāno vighṛhṇīyāt { KAŚ...7.1.14 }

na mām paro nāhaṁ paramupahantuṁ śaktaḥ ityāsīta { KAŚ...7.1.15 }

guṇātiśayayukto yāyāt {KAŚ...7.1.16 }

śaktihīnaḥ samśrayeta { KAŚ...7.1.17 }

sahāyasādhye kārye dvaidhībhaḥvaṁ gacchet { KAŚ...7.1.18 }

iti guṇāvasthāpanam {KAŚ...7.1.19 }.

These six strategies include (refer to Fig. 1).

- (1) ‘*Samdhi*’ indicates that signing a treaty with specific conditions is the same as establishing peace. Kautilya mentioned several alternatives to agreement:

śamaḥ, samdhiḥ, and samādhi all mean the same thing {KAŚ...7.17.1, 2}.

śamaḥ samdhiḥ samādhirityeko'rthaḥ { KAŚ...7.17.1 }

rājñām viśvāśopagamaḥ śamaḥ samdhiḥ samādhiriti {KAŚ..7.17.2}.

- (2) ‘*Vigraha*’, which implies war, had been considered a prime foreign policy strategy having three forms of hostilities or war: open war, secret war and undeclared war [KAŚ...7.6.17, 40, 41].

vikramasya prakāśayuddhaṁ kūtayuddhaṁ tūṣṇīm yuddham
{KAŚ...7.6.17}

prakāśayuddhaṁ nirdiṣṭe deśe kāle ca vikramaḥ|

vibhīṣaṇamavaskandaḥ pramādayasānārdanam { KAŚ..7.6.40 }

ekatra tyāgaghātau ca kūtayuddhasya mātṛkā ||

yogagūḍhopajāpārthaṁ tūṣṇīm yuddhasya lakṣaṇam {KAŚ...7.6.41 }

- (3) ‘*Asana*’, that is, remaining quiet, is a mark of neutrality.

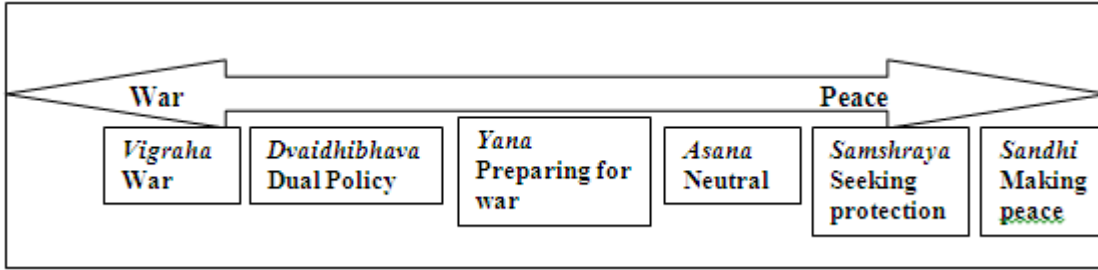
- (4) ‘*Yana*’ signifies heading toward conflict and preparing for war.

(5) '*Samsraya*' implies that allying is a way to seek safety from a more powerful King or shelter in a fort.

(6) '*Dvaidhibhava*' relates to dual strategy and involves making peace with one, particularly with a neighbouring King, to pursue the policy of engaging in war with another using his assistance.

According to Kautilyan teachings, the six-fold principles of foreign policy describe how states should behave based on their capabilities (Shamasastri, 1960). Kautilya describes three types of conquerors in his treatise: the 'righteous', the 'greedy', and the 'demoniacal' (Kangle, 1972).

Fig. 1 Kautilya's six-fold *Sadgunya* Policy



Source: Rangarajan (1987), More (2014).

Cultural Diplomacy, the root of Foreign Policy in India

India has a successful record of managing diversity and a distinct and coherent civilisation. Ancient Bharat integrated many different streams of humanity through creative engagement with other cultures, faiths and philosophies. Bharat was leading the world in all fields of knowledge, including science and the humanities. Both culturally and economically, India was a prosperous country at that time. India has used soft power to support cultural dialogue for 5000 years. As a result, a global base was established to aid humanity in general and the international crisis in particular. From the first century onwards, the maritime trade between India and Rome significantly contributed (Maddison, 2006). In the context of global traditional diplomacy, India has a long history, as demonstrated by its recent example of India's vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19, which exemplifies its dedication to the welfare of other nations.

Between the 5th and 7th centuries, *Buddhism* had a significant influence that promoted economic and cultural exchanges between India and China. Emperor Ashoka spread *Buddhism* far and wide by sending missionaries to strengthen his initiative throughout the

region. The intellectuals and pilgrims initiated intercontinental visits between India and China for around a thousand year. The *Ramayana* remains a popular cultural part of life throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia. Many Sanskrit terms entered the Cambodian language without modification, while the writing alphabets originated from South India (sources - Jaffrelot, 2003). Religion, art, music, dance, textiles, technology, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, language and literature were among the fields in which India led the world in inventions (Dalrymple, 2024).

Since achieving independence, India's foreign policy has progressed through time, owing to historical, regional, and global influences. *Kautilya* has influenced the principles which guide the evolution of the strategic frameworks in India's foreign policies. Kautilya's *Sadgunya* principles have significantly influenced the shaping of foreign policies in India (Paikh and Saikh, 2023).

Foreign Policies In India since 2014

Narendra Modi took oath on May 26, 2014, as the Prime Minister of India, with a popular mandate for a significant governance focusing on accountability and strengthening the institutional delivery. This change has brought considerable hope for upholding India in world politics under his leadership. Modi achieved the first majority victory in Lok Sabha as Prime Minister since the parliamentary elections 1984 (Basrur, 2017). The Islamic world considered the Hindu nationalist ideology of Modi as a significant barrier that might block India's strong international relations. By creating an 'India First' policy on realism principle, Modi surprised both his critics and supporters. The new foreign policy regime takes India's needs as its main priority while sustaining partnerships. India maintains beneficial international positions through specific diplomatic management. India's foreign policy practices followed profound realist principles Non-Alignment by Nehru, pragmatic strategies by Narasimha Rao and an assertive stance by Modi (Pant, 2019). Modi's foreign policy has been distinguished by its proactive, assertive and economically focused marking a noticeable departure from earlier approaches. The strategy followed by him prioritises India's status as a significant global power, centered on national security and economic growth.

Neighbourhood first Policy

The 'Neighbourhood First' policy is a regional strategy for foreign policy that aims to enhance prosperity in the region ensuring security and collaborative neighbourhood. He dedicated his attention to neighbouring countries by improving economic ties and cultural exchange and solving historic conflicts. India aims to drive its commitment to this Southeast Asian nations through the Look East to Act East policy transition. The *rajamandala*

framework of Kautilya has been the basis of Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy which is based on the contention of making India's periphery secure and stable. Like the *rajamandala* framework, this policy aimed to convince neighbours of the benefits and closer ties and then proceed to materialise the mutual benefits intentions (Jaishankar, 2024).

Strengthening Relations with USA and Assertive Relation with China

The foreign policy of India under the leadership of Modi has been marked by a deliberate enhancement of relationships with the United States and a pragmatic approach towards China. The USA-India Defence Framework Agreement, initially established in 2015, has recently been renewed to enhance military collaboration. Initiatives like the USA-India Trade Policy Forum (TPF) and the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (ICET) have strengthened technology and supply chain management co-operation. India's role in the QUAD, which included the USA, Japan, and Australia, was very significant in opposing China's domination over the Indo-Pacific area. These advancements have gone far beyond the long-standing relations for decades between India and the United States (Mulford, 2022).

In the case of China's assertiveness, India has a firm stance on the issue of border disputes and strategic rivalry between the two countries for a long time. In 2017, India halted China from road construction within the Bhutanese territory. The context of the clash with China in the Galwan Valley in 2020 resulted in the first lethal confrontation between the countries along their border in recent decades. As the border tensions with China intensified, India has banned more than 300 Chinese applications, including popular digital platforms like TikTok and WeChat. The government of India has strategically promoted the *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* to reduce the dependence on Chinese imports by increasing domestic production. India has subsequently made active efforts to consolidate its relations with Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries. The government works to outperform China in terms of economic and strategic achievements under Modi's leadership. The frequency of joint operations between India and China in the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) decreases in their zero-sum competition (Levesques, 2024)

Revamping relation with Middleeast

India has significantly improved Middle East relations because of strategic, economic and diplomatic initiatives under Modi. While developing ties with the Indian communities abroad and expanding commercial activities, the present foreign policy focuses on consolidating diplomatic relations and creating strong partnerships (Pant, 2024). His historic visits to Israel led to a new direction to India's previous support for Arabs and Palestinians.

Modi's foreign policy towards the Middle East has generated substantial opportunities for the promotion of trade relations with India (Hasan, 2022).

Prime Minister Modi has made several visits to the UAE, signing various agreements about energy, trade and security. The Modi government has enhanced relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE while maintaining ties with Iran (Peri and Haidar, 2024). Modi government has worked to improve labour rights and facilitate swift evacuations during emergencies of diaspora. He has also made personal contact with the Indian diaspora a priority during his visits to these countries.

Conclusions:

Kautilya *Arthaśāstra* has immensely contributed to shaping foreign policies in India at different phases since independence. On many grounds, Prime Minister Modi made a sharp departure in foreign policy perspectives from his predecessors. First, his strategy for improving global influence through soft power and engagement with the diaspora represents a significant priority. He has highlighted the significance of Hindu and civilizational identity, yoga and cultural diplomacy.

Secondly, Modi tried to reach out to diaspora engagements to build their confidence. There have been inclusive and wide-ranging personal engagement initiatives, for instance, *Howdy Modi*, *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* etc. Modi government explored all the possibilities of depending on the diaspora for domestic investment, support for technology and digitalisation.

Lastly, being a firm believer in spiritual diplomacy, Modi encourages close contacts and reach out to religious groups of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religious groups in different countries personally during his visits.

End notes:

Notes:

1. {KAŚ...7.1.6-19} refers to Kautilya *Arthaśāstra* Book 7, Chapter 1 verse numbers 6-19. All other similar mentions in the text follow same pattern.
2. The English transliteration of KAŚ is available at Wisdom Library, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/kautilya-arthashastra-sanskrit>.

References:

- Baru, Sanjaya (1983), Self-Reliance to Dependence in Indian Economic Development, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 11, No. 11.
- Basrur, Rajesh (2017), Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged, *International Affairs*, Volume 93, Issue 1, 1 January <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iw006>.
- Dalrymple, William (2024), *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*, Bloomsbury Publishing, UK.
- Ganapathi, M. (2017), Contours of India's Foreign Policy - An Overview. *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45342147>, Vol. 12, No. 1.
- Hasan, Alhasan (2022), The Middle East in India's Quest for Status. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*. 78. [09749284221089529](https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284221089529).
- Jaffrelot, C. (2003), India's look east policy: an Asianist strategy w,2.2,3568. *Perspective, Indian Review*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode/journalInformation?journalCode=find20>
- Jaishankar, S. (2024), *Why Bharat Matters*, Rupa Publications, New Delhi.
- Kangle, R. P. (1972), *The Kautiliya Arthashastra : An English Translation With Critical and Explanatory Notes*, 2nd edition, Part-III Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Delhi.
- Levesques, Antoine (2024), India–China relations under the Modi 3.0 government, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/07/indiachina-relations-under-the-modi-3.0-government>
- Maddison, Angus (2006), *The World Economy. Development Centre Studies*. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.
- More, Scabin (2014). *IDSA Monograph Series.Vol.31.Arthashastra.Lessons for the contemporary security environment with South Asia as a case study*. New Delhi. Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis. <http://www.idsa.in/system/files/Monograph.31.pdf>. (accessed on 16 January,2024).

- Mulford, David C. (2022), Strengthening US-India Relations, Hoover Institution, <https://www.hoover.org/research/strengthening-us-india-relations>
- Paik, Humayan and Saikh, Suraj (2023), Kautilya's Six-fold Policy and its Reflection on Indian Foreign Policy, International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, Vol.10, Issue 5, page no.c414-c418, May-2023, Available :<http://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2305262.pdf>
- Pant, Harsh V. (2019), New Directions in India's Foreign Policy Theory and Praxis, Cambridge University Press.
- Pant, Harsh V.(2024), Qatar Release is A Landmark in Modi's Middle East Success Story, Observer Research Foundation, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/qatar-release-is-a-landmark-in-modi-s-middle-east-success-story>.
- Peri, Dinakar and Haidar, Suhasisni (2024), India, Iran sign 10-year contract for Chabahar port operation, May 13, The Hindu, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-iran-sign-long-term-bilateral-contract-on-chabahar-port-operation/article68171624.ece>.
- Rangarajan, L.N. (1992), Kautilya's Arthashastra, Penguin Random House, India.
- Saran, S. (2017), *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Juggernaut Books.
- 1. Shamasastri, R (1960), Kautilya's Arthashastra. Mysore Printing and publishing House, Mysore.