UNIT 8 KAUTILYA MANDALA THEORY

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading Kautilya’s views on state in the last unit, students would be introduced to his views on diplomacy and statecraft in this unit. Centuries may have passed but Kautilya’s views on foreign policy continue to find a place in India’s contemporary engagement with the world. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Comprehend Kautilya’s views on foreign policy of a state
- Describe the six methods in foreign policy (Shadgunyas)
- Examine Mandala theory and its contemporary relevance

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Interstate relations and foreign policy find a prominent place in Kautilya’s Arthashastra. He has tried to explain the dynamics of interstate relations through his mandala theory. Kautilya has also explained upayas (peace politics) and shadgunyas (six war tactics). These were operational tips to the conqueror to

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conduct his foreign relations in times of peace and war. He also emphasised that a king should have a detailed system of diplomatic relations with different states and insisted on a sound system of espionage or intelligence to protect the state from internal and external threats. Kautilya argued that welfare of a state depends on its active foreign policy and he highlighted that there are links between the domestic factors and foreign policy of a state. He emphasised an active foreign policy which could be used by a king to further his kingdom’s interests. Apart from highlighting Kautilya’s views on foreign policy, this unit would also underline his arguments with respect to national security, a theme which is of critical importance in contemporary international politics dominated by geo-political interests.

8.2 CONCEPT OF MANDALA

*Mandala* is a Sanskrit word which means circle. Indians have ascribed pictorial characteristics to the universe representing it in essential form. *Mandala* projects the world in terms of geometry. Kautilya used the shape of mandala to develop a political geometry that accounts for different political realities. In the seventh book of *Arthashastra*, he described international relations as a *mandala* system. It was *not* a new concept given by Kautilya as it was earlier discussed by Manu and there were indirect references to it in *Rigveda*. However, it was Kautilya who gave a comprehensive theory of *mandala* for security and survival of state. Kautilya argued that acquiring power and its expansion is the main aim of any state. He argued that power and success are inter-related. Power and success resulting from its use are of three types. Intellectual strength (*mantra shakti*) gives the power of good counsel; a prosperous treasury and a strong army give physical power (*prabhav shakti*) and valour is the basis of morale and energetic action (*utsah shakti*). The success resulting from each one is, correspondingly, intellectual, physical and psychological. Kautilya further said that conducting relations with a state would require special insight and skill. He gave importance to geography and economic foundations of a state. In ancient India, due to lack of advanced means of transport and communications, there could not be a central government which could extend its control in far-off areas. India was divided in a number of small states and each state was tempted to annex its neighbours. Strong states would try to expand their territory while the weaker ones would try to maintain their independence by paying tribute to them. Kautilya described foreign policy of small states constantly at war with each other and not of big empires like the Mauryan. Kautilya listed six guiding principles of foreign policy as listed below.

- A king would enhance resources and power of his kingdom to embark upon a campaign of conquest
- Enemies to be eliminated
- Cultivation of allies
- Adoption of prudent course of action
- Peace to be preferred to war
- King must behave as just in both, victory and defeat
The central premise of the Mandala theory lies in locating the position of a kingdom as an enemy or ally with respect to the intending conqueror and the kingdom’s spatial placement in the mandala. Kautilya treats the vijigishu (the conqueror or the ambitious king) as the reference point of the mandala theory and advocates four basic circles. In the first circle, there are three primary kings forming a circle, the vijigishu, his friend and his friend’s friend. Each one of them possesses the five elements of sovereignty, such as the amatya, the janapada, the durga, the kosha and the danda. Hence, a circle of states would comprise of 18 elements (3 primary kings plus five elements of each which is equal to 15). This also applies to three other circles of states - ari (enemy of the vijigishu), the madhyama (the indifferent king) and the udasina (the neutral king) kings forming the core of each of the three circles. Finally, the mandala theory would consist of four primary circles of states, 12 kings, 60 elements of sovereignty and 72 elements of states. The 12 kingdoms are shown in the figure below.

Source: www.thetruepicture.org

- **Vijigishu**: The king who aspires to be the conqueror
- **Ari**: Shares border with Vijigishu, an enemy
- **Mitra**: Friend or an ally of Vijigishu, shares border with ari
- **Ari-Mitra**: Friend of ari, shares border with mitra
- **Mitra-Mitra**: Friend or an ally of friend
- **Ari Mitra-Mitra**: Friend of enemy’s friend
- **Parshnigraha**: Enemy in the rear of the Vijigishu
- **Aakranda**: Friend in the rear behind Parshnigraha
Political Concerns and Key Ideas

- Parshnigraha-asara: Friend of Parshnigraha behind Aakranda
- Aakranda-asara: Friend of Aakranda behind Parshnigrahasara
- Madhyama: Indifferent kingdom
- Udasina: Neutral Kingdom

The four circles are explained as below.

- Circle 1: Vijigishu, his friend, friend’s friend
- Circle 2: Ari (enemy of vijigishu), his friend, friend’s friend
- Circle 3: Madhyama (the indifferent king), his friend, friend’s friend
- Circle 4: Udasina (the neutral king), his friend, friend’s friend

The ordering principle of mandala scheme argues that a direct neighbour is an enemy (ari) while an indirect neighbour is a friend (mitra). It is commonly expressed as – enemy of my enemy is my friend. First and third circles would be hostile to the vijigishu state while second and fourth would be friendly. It is not an iron law and exceptions would always be there. The Madhyama or an indifferent king in any of the circles could turn out to be an ally or an enemy and intervene in favour of the victor by supporting him or decide to be neutral (udasina) or an enemy (ari). The victor’s policy should be to turn as many of the kings as possible into allies or take neutral position.

8.2.1 Peace Politics or Upayas

There are four upayas – sama (conciliation), dana (concession or gift), danda (punishment) and bheda (dissension) to realise an objective or aim and they have existed since the period of epics and the Dharmashastra. These upayas were to be used in times of peace by the king in his foreign relations. He said that foreign relations would be determined by self-interest, not by ethical concerns. Modern states have been practicing what Kautilya had advocated but nobody would say so. It is pertinent to mention that there is a hierarchy in use of these upayas in the order as sama, dana, bheda while danda or use of force would be the last resort. These tactics can be either used alone or in combination as well. In the case of allies and enemies, a combination of these methods ensures success because the different methods mutually reinforce each other. 20th century classic realist, Hans J Morgenthau, in his book Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, (1966) has given methods that can be used in balance of power. These methods are similar to those echoed by Kautilya, but Morgenthau does not give any reference of Kautilya. The methods discussed by him include divide and rule, compensation, armaments and alliances. The four upayas given by Kautiliya are explained below.

- Sama: There are five meanings attached to sama or conciliation. One, merit (actual or fictitious) of the target person is praised. Adulation is used to soften up the counterpart to erode his will to resist. Pedigree, personal qualities, occupation and good nature of the target are praised either personally or to a third party. Second, mutual connections like common kinship, ethnicity or social status and commonalities like taste
and education are often invoked to psychologically disarm the opponent. Third, the counterpart is made to believe that cooperation with the opponent is in his best interests. Fourth, benefits like material gains or other advantages are highlighted to the opponent and lastly, concession and compromise is promised to the opponent irrespective of the fact whether it would really materialize or not. Giving a high rank or awarding an honor is also a method of conciliation with a potential enemy.

- Dana: In case conciliation does not work out, one has to take recourse to dana or gifts. It may include cash payments, valuables, making territorial concessions or even handing over hostages. Doing a small favor to the opponent is likely to make him obliged. Dana would mean a price is to be paid for achieving one’s objectives but the price is to be kept as low as possible to have a good deal. Dana should be combined with sama to achieve effective results. Bribery could be one of the possible meanings of dana and state could use small expenses to achieve bigger political and economic gains. The state can prevent rebellions through bribery which would save economic and military resources which could be diverted towards foreign affairs.

- Bheda: The third upaya involves sowing discord, is also called divide and rule. By using methods like selective preference or discrimination, actors are isolated from each other and seeds of dissension are planted against each other in their thought process. Alliances of states that threaten the security of one’s own state should be broken or weakened. The attempt should be to prevent formation of such alliances. The first three upayas, sama, dana and bheda refrain from the use of force, but not the threat of use of force.

- Danda: It is the use of force or punishment and in inter-state relations, it means war. War is very risky and costly and that is why; Kautilya preferred covert actions – tusnim-yuddha. Sabotage and assassinations of leaders of a rival country are an effective means to achieve one’s own state interests. Covert operations have low cost while they can achieve bigger gains. Kautilya highlighted normative concerns and said that only those wars and covert actions are legitimate which aim for political unification of Indian subcontinent. Wars for mere plunder or indiscriminate destruction are morally reprehensible.

8.2.2 War Tactics or Shadgunyas

In Book 7 of the Arthashastra, Kautilya has argued that a state has six options to carry out its foreign policy and they are applicable in different set of circumstances. He wanted to politically unite the Indian subcontinent in the same way as Machiavelli wanted Italy’s political unification and liberation from foreign domination. Kautilya did not argue for military conquest of states bordering Indian subcontinent and he did not even mention any kind of maritime expansion. War and peace are two extremes and depending on certain circumstances, the king shall try to achieve either of them. The would-be
conqueror shall apply the six methods with due regard to his power. He shall make peace with an equally powerful or stronger king; he shall wage war against a weaker king. A king would go to a war if he has military superiority, if enemy’s undertakings are about to collapse due to a calamity or a part of enemy’s kingdom can be conquered as he is busy fighting elsewhere. Kautilya classified war into three categories – open war where time and place to fight are pre-decided, secret war is a sudden assault and undeclared war using covert operations. On the other hand, a king would try to achieve progress through peace if he can turn enemy’s allies against him, if the king and his rival have grown or declined equally in a same period of time or the king can ruin enemy’s undertakings by covert operations etc. When the degree of progress is the same in pursuing peace and waging a war, peace is to be preferred. For, in war, there are disadvantages such as losses, expenses and absence from home. If the state factors of an enemy are destroyed, they cannot be seized and appropriated by the victorious power which is the true aim of fighting a war for Kautilya. That is why; Kautilya speaks of injuring or weakening an enemy, but not its annihilation or destruction. If an enemy’s prakriti is destroyed beyond its fighting capability, it would be counter-productive for the victor. Kautilya said that the constituent elements or the seven prakritis is the basis of shadgunyas. In foreign relations, the ratio between the power potential (prakriti aggregate) of two or more states is decisive and before making foreign policy decisions, the ruler and his advisers should ascertain relative weaknesses and strengths of their kingdom. To know the capabilities of opponents, Kautilya laid emphasis on secret service. Based on this assessment, there are six foreign policy options in front of a king as explained below.

- **Sandhi or peace**: If the king is in a weaker position in relation to his adversary, a policy of peace and accommodation is prescribed. This time period of peace would be used by the king to build military capabilities to move from a position of inferiority to strength. New foreign policy options would open up once strong capabilities are attained.

- **Vigraha or war**: This policy is prescribed if the king has military superiority over its rivals as war can be won without too much loss. The king should only destroy the fighting capability of the opponent, not its prakriti. The winner should treat the defeated with generosity and leniency.

- **Asana or neutrality/wait and watch**: Policy of asana is prescribed by Kautilya if the rival of a king has equal power potential. Again, neutrality buys time for the king to upgrade his military capabilities and as that is achieved, the king should switch to active and offensive foreign policy.

- **Yana or coercion**: If the king’s adversaries decline or stagnate while the king grows stronger, he should follow the policy of coercion and military mobilization. Covert operations could be used to obtain far reaching concessions from the enemy and his surrender could be ensured even without fighting a war.
• **Samshrya or alliance:** If the king does not see a possibility of surpassing the capabilities of an adversary in the near future, than he should have an alliance with other states. It would be a defensive alliance, but the king should work to make it offensive against the common adversary.

• **Dvaidhibhava or duplicity:** Depending on a variety of complex situations and configurations, Kautilya has prescribed a policy of diplomatic *double* game. This policy is very demanding with respect to intelligence, deception, foresight and psychological aspects.

**8.2.3 Role of Envoys**

Envoy or *duta* was responsible for conducting diplomacy with other kingdoms. They were deployed in courts of other rulers and played an important part in conducting foreign policy. The envoys belonged to a noble family and were well versed in all types of sciences. They required a good memory in order to recall their conversations with important people in foreign kingdom. The envoys were divided in different categories depending on their qualities. The top most envoys had the power to negotiate on behalf of their king and they stayed in the country of their accreditation for a longer time to tilt the balance of power in favour of his king. Others could not exceed the brief given by the king while the lower most were mere messengers who would pass on the king’s message and fetch the reply. Certain immunities were enjoyed by the envoys like they could not be killed, had freedom of movement in the state and were exempted from paying ferry and custom duties. The king was advised by Kautilya to keep an eye on the envoys through spies and guards. Duties of the envoy included the following.

- Sending information to his king
- Ensuring maintenance of the terms of a treaty
- Upholding his king’s honor
- Acquiring allies
- Instigating dissension among the friends of the enemy
- Acquiring clandestinely gems and other valuable material for his own king
- Ascertaining secret information and showing valor in liberating hostages held by the enemy

**8.2.4 Role of Spies**

Kautilya favoured a highly developed system of espionage and intelligence gathering and their utility in some cases exceeded that of the envoys. *Intelligence* was the most important activity during the war. Any information corroborated by three different spies shall be taken to be true while any agent who was consistently unreliable shall be eliminated. There were agents who were based in one place like the intelligence officer, spies under the cover of monks, merchants or ascetics. Another type of agents was that of roving agents like the assassin or the secret agent. There were *double* agents also who spied for two kings. The
king should make efforts to uncover enemy agents operating in his territory. The intelligence was transmitted by a code and the transmitters would not know the identity of the information gatherer.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
   ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss Kautilya’s views about *Sandhi* or peace.

2) What are the duties of an envoy?

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**8.3 VIEWS ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

It was the duty of a king to protect his subjects from internal and external threats. To ensure this, an army was needed. In defending the kingdom from external threats, Kautilya has highlighted four basic forms of warfare.

- **Mantra-yuddha**: war by counsel or use of diplomacy by a weaker king who finds it unwise to fight against a strong adversary.
- **Prakash-yuddha**: regular warfare where opposing armies fight according to established rules and regulations.
- **Kuta-yuddha**: irregular warfare including ambushes and raids in enemy territory.
- **Tusnim-yuddha**: includes covert operations like sabotage and targeted killings. He favoured this type of war where mental faculties like intelligence, foresight, psychological skills and ingenuity matter.

Apart from the physical defence of the kingdom, Kautilya also advised to prevent internal threats like rebellion, treachery and revolts. It was *rare* in his times, but Kautilya adopted a multi-pronged strategy towards national security. In the
domestic policy, the king should follow dharma or the ethical code while in the foreign policy; national interest is supreme with no room for idealism. By advising the king to keep the welfare of people a top priority, Kautilya argued that threats like hunger and epidemics should be prevented. He argued that famine affects the whole country and deprives the people of their livelihood. Kautilya explained that a drought had twin impacts on the economy. First, supply shock would create unemployment which would decrease tax revenue. Second, decline in tax revenue would reduce government’s spending on public infrastructure and reduce growth in future income. Lower tax revenue would also reduce spending on defence. Hence, Kautilya linked economic prosperity with national security and advised the king to keep the economy in good health to ensure national security. He articulated the concept of Yogakshema, a combination of peace, prosperity and security. It was to be realised through dharma, danda and family (basic unit of society). Health risks and food insecurity are non-traditional security threats to any country in the contemporary context and Kautilya’s emphasis on them in those times shows his farsightedness. He raised the quality of being farsightedness to the level of national security. He argued that a king should be farsighted enough to avail himself of the opportunities to right time, place and type of action. Similarly, he said that a minister should have logical ability to foresee things. Farsightedness would help the king in preparing for a potential threat well in advance.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
    ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What is the concept of Yogakshema?

8.4 REALISM AND KAUTILYA

Despite having intrinsic theoretical value in international politics, Arthashastra has been largely ignored not only in India, but outside as well. Kautilya can be easily considered as the pre-modern founding father of theory of Political Realism later expressed by Machiavelli and Morgenthau. Roger Boesche in his book written in 2002, The First Great Realist: Kautilya and His Arthashastra, has argued that Kautilya was the first great, unrelenting political realist. Max Weber saw no role for any type of ideology in Arthashastra and talked about
Kautilya’s trained ability to relentlessly gaze at realities of life. Some of the realist foundations in Arthashastra are:

- National interest being paramount in foreign policy
- Anarchic nature of inter-state relations
- Centrality of power in international politics

Classic realist, Morgenthau identifies ancient political philosophy from Greece, China and India as the starting point of his theory. The methods discussed by him to maintain a favourable balance of power include divide and rule, compensation, armaments and alliances which are similar to four upayas given by Kautilya. The Peloponnesian War written by Thucydides is usually seen as the starting point of Political Realism, but it must be mentioned that this book is a historical narrative that mentions realist thought by implication only. Henry Kissinger saw Kautilya as a combination of Machiavelli and Clausewitz. Clausewitz said that war is just an extension of domestic politics; Kautilya said that diplomacy is really a subtle act of war, a series of actions taken to weaken an enemy and gain advantages for oneself, all to achieve the final aim of conquest. Another important point is that Arthashastra is generally perceived as a realist treatise, an interpretation that heavily depends on Western theoretical frameworks. It is very often forgotten that Arthashastra frequently uses the word dharma which stands for morality or righteousness. It is not possible for a text not to have normative and moral foundations which cites dharma as part of governance and daily life. Kautilya’s approach comes out as a holistic mix of idealism and realism.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss the realist ideas given in Arthashastra.

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8.5 GLIMPSES OF ARTHASHASTRA IN INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

There has been a visible impact of Kautilyan thought on evolution of independent India’s foreign policy, although it has been a slow and gradual process. There has been an eclectic mix of idealism and realism in India’s foreign policy. India’s first Prime Minister, J L Nehru followed an idealist foreign policy with emphasis on themes like anti-colonialism, disarmament, non-alignment, Panchsheel etc.
However, he followed a realist policy in India’s neighbourhood where he sought to project India as the main power in Indian subcontinent. The realist turn started in India’s foreign policy after the 1962 war with China. In 1971, under PM Indira Gandhi, India exercised wit and finesse by signing a Treaty of Friendship with the erstwhile Soviet Union to safeguard its sovereignty against the US-China-Pakistan nexus and India successfully helped in bifurcation of Pakistan as an independent state of Bangladesh was born. India began to understand the value of military power in international politics and India’s acquired nuclear power in 1998. A state that does not back its diplomacy with military and economic power cannot protect its national interest. To increase its influence at the global level, India wants to be a permanent member of UN Security Council. India’s strategic partners like the US, France, Germany, Russia etc have been instrumental in getting India membership in three export control regimes except Nuclear Suppliers Group. China’s rise is a foreign policy challenge for India and New Delhi is building its defence capabilities keeping in mind the long-term threat posed by Beijing to India’s security. India takes pride in its civilisation and cultural heritage reflected in its multicultural and inclusive ethos. China, on the other hand, is driven by Middle Kingdom mentality to dominate the world. India is standing up against China and to do so in future, New Delhi will require substantial hard power to deter China. Some of India’s relations can be understood using Kautilyan thought. His famous saying that an enemy of my enemy is a friend is applicable to China-Pakistan relationship as both the nations see India as a common enemy. Since China is an enemy of India and Pakistan sees India as an enemy, hence, Pakistan has cultivated an all weather relationship with China. During the Cold War, China remained India’s adversary and the former Soviet Union became an enemy of China, hence, India and Soviet Union came closer. India’s membership in new groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Group or Quad is an attempt to balance China and alliance against a common enemy as was suggested by Kautilya.

8.6 LET US SUM UP

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is a pioneering work in diplomacy and strategic studies. His contribution to international relations theory has not received the desired attention. Kautilya gave importance to geography and economic foundations of a state in conducting its foreign policy. He articulated the concept of *Yogakshema*, a combination of peace, prosperity and security to be realised through *dharma*, *danda* and family. It was rare in his times, but Kautilya adopted a multi-pronged strategy towards national security covering traditional and non-traditional security threats. The four *upayas* and *shadgunya* principles were important in carrying out foreign policy of a country. Kautilya is widely seen as a realist thinker, but he frequently mentions dharma in *Arthashastra*. A holistic reading of his work reveals that Kautilyan thought was a mix of idealism and realism. His vision continues to guide India’s foreign policy even in the 21st century.
8.7 REFERENCES


8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Your answer should highlight following points

- If the king is in a weaker position in relation to its adversary, a policy of peace and accommodation is prescribed
- This time period of peace would be used by the king to build military capabilities to move from a position of inferiority to strength
- New foreign policy options would open up once strong capabilities are attained

2) Highlight following points

- Sending information to his king
- Ensuring maintenance of the terms of a treaty
- Upholding his king’s honor
- Acquiring allies
- Instigating dissension among the friends of the enemy

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Your answer should highlight following points

- It is a combination of peace, prosperity and security
- Achieved through *dharma*, *danda* and family (basic unit of society)
Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1) Your answer should highlight following points

- National interest being paramount in foreign policy
- Anarchic nature of inter-state relations
- Centrality of power in international politics