

**KAUTILYA. *THE ARTHASHASTRA*. EDITED, REARRANGED,
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Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a fundamental and comprehensive work of ancient Indian political thought, centered on the principles and practice of statecraft. It encompasses various fields of state governance, ranging from domestic administration to foreign policy. The significance of the *Arthashastra* lies not only in its theoretical sophistication but also in its foundation in Kautilya's (Chanakya's) practical experience of governance, shaped through his influential role at the court of King Chandragupta. For this reason, the *Arthashastra* is considered an exemplary combination of theoretical knowledge and the author's rich background in the military and political spheres. The *Arthashastra* reflects both Kautilya's practical experience in governance and his engagement with the broader tradition of ancient Indian strategic thought. Recognized as a strategist, statesman, and influential state-builder, Kautilya embedded these experiences and perspectives into a systematic framework of statecraft, diplomacy, and political power.

Kautilya observes the model of the state as a part of a combined and naturally unified set of seven elements: (i) the king; (ii) [the group of] councilors, ministers and other high officials (the *amatya*); (iii) the territory of the state along with the population inhabiting it (the *janapada*); (iv) the fortified towns and cities (the *dur-*

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ga); (v) the treasury (kosa, the wealth of the State); (vi) the forces of defense (of law and order) and (vii) the allies (6.1.1; 97). It is precisely owing to the harmony of these abovementioned elements that the state can function viably; otherwise, it will weaken and be conquered by enemies. From this perspective, Kautilya can be regarded as one of the earliest political thinkers to articulate a systemic conception of the state. In the *Arthashastra*, the state emerges as a complex assemblage of interdependent elements extending beyond the ruler and the army, whose collective strength and effective interaction underpin political stability, resilience, and long-term viability. Consequently, he can be considered one of the architects of the concept of institutional monarchy in world history. The king requires a state apparatus (institutions) to execute his will. This, however, does not imply that Kautilya diminishes the role of the king or royal authority. He views the king precisely as the guarantor of the state and the bearer of absolute responsibility for its defense.

What, then, are the necessary qualities of a king? Kautilya develops a comprehensive and systematic response to this fundamental question, one that served as a guiding framework for the ancient Indian state and continued to shape political and strategic thought in subsequent centuries. For Kautilya, an ideal king is one who possesses the supreme qualities of leadership, intellect, energy, and personal attributes. The qualities of the king's intellect are a desire to learn, listening to others, grasping, retaining, understanding thoroughly, and reflecting on knowledge, rejecting false views and adhering to the true ones (6.1.1; 97). Essentially, Kautilya puts forth the concept of enlightened monarchy, which was formed in Europe much later. He develops the idea that the governance of the state by the king is not based solely on whims. It is carried out through a rational, intelligent, and well-calculated approach to state affairs—that is, from a position of pragmatism. In this work, the king's power also implies service to the people. In other words, the king possesses absolute power, but this power is not an end in itself. It serves the welfare of his subjects, which, in turn, is the primary source of the king's bliss. Kautilya essentially considers a king's laziness to be destructive to the state, as his inaction and carelessness can serve as a bad example for his subjects and become a significant advantage to his enemies.

Thus, according to Kautilya, institutionalism is the form (mechanism) of state governance, while enlightened governance is its content (purpose). The seven elements presented by Kautilya are the skeleton and body of the state, and the ideology of enlightened governance is the soul that breathes life into it. From this perspective, the relationship between form and content can be compared to the unity of body and soul. In this context, there is a striking similarity between Eastern thought—represented by Kautilya—and Western thought—represented by Aristo-

tle, who also speaks of the relationship between soul and body in his work *Politics*. Furthermore, we find a significant commonality in the perceptions of these two major figures of the ancient world regarding similar issues. Aristotle notes that any human being consists, first of all, of a soul and a body, of which, by their very nature, one is the ruling principle and the other is the subject principle.¹

According to Aristotle, within every human being, one can principally observe both a despotic (absolute) and a political authority. The soul rules over the body as a master, while the intellect rules over human desires like a statesman.² Kautilya approaches this issue with equal gravity and importance. He considers self-control to be one of the king's most vital qualities: "Self-control, which is the basis of knowledge and discipline, is acquired by giving up lust, anger, greed, conceit, arrogance, and foolhardiness. Living in accordance with the shastras means avoiding over-indulgence in all pleasures of [the senses, i.e.,] hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell" (1.6.1–2; 121). Though Kautilya and Aristotle represent different civilizations, their ideas about the inner structure of the human being and the art of governance likely follow the same logic: a hierarchy of soul and body, where the governance of the state begins with the internal self-governance of the individual. A central theme in both authors' works is that an individual (the king) cannot govern others or the state unless he governs his own body and passions through reason.

Kautilya also defines a unique "indexing" of state power for the ancient world, one that does not depend solely on a strong army. He posits that the real power of a state is formed by a combination of strategic intelligence (mind), economic might (the treasury), and internal will (energy). In modern political science, this unique "indexing" is viewed as a combination of hard and soft power. The *Arthashastra* emphasizes the complementarity of domestic and foreign policy as a fundamental condition of effective statecraft. It posits that foreign policy success is contingent upon internal stability and cohesion, and that external ambitions depend fundamentally on a consolidated domestic foundation of power.

Kautilya consistently demonstrates a systemic approach to state policy issues. The systemic logic of the *Arthashastra* is particularly evident in Kautilya's treatment of foreign policy. His Mandala Theory, or Theory of the Circle of States, conceptualizes interstate relations as a structured geopolitical system shaped by geography, proximity, and relative power. Within this framework, the six methods of foreign policy—peace, hostility, neutrality, military preparation, alliance-

¹ Aristotle, *Politika* [Politics], trans. S. A. Zhebelev and T. A. Miller (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2018), 13 (bk. 1, chap. 2, 1254a35) [Аристотель, *Политика*, пер. С. А. Жебелева и Т. А. Миллер (Москва: Издательство АСТ, 2018), 13 (кн. I, гл. 2, 1254a35)].

² Aristotle, *Politics*, 13 (bk. 1, chap. 2, 1254b5–10).

seeking, and dual policy—form a coherent strategic repertoire through which both strong and weak rulers can pursue security, preserve autonomy, and advance their political interests.

In the context of the state's foreign policy, Kautilya discusses the concept of the "natural enemy," which at first sight seems to contradict the famous principle of classical political thought that "there are no permanent enemies, only permanent interests." However, Kautilya does not contradict this golden rule of diplomacy, as he clearly notes: "Even an enemy who helps is fit to be allied with, not an ally who does not act like one" (7.13.27; 511). Thus, the characteristic feature of Kautilya's approach is that geography dictates interstate relations, and the permanent interest of the state is determined by its geographical position. Accordingly, if an enemy is "natural" (an immediate neighbor sharing a border), then for interests to change, the borders themselves must change.

However, the value of Kautilya's work lies in the fact that, in the context of foreign policy, he does not limit himself solely to advising a victorious king. Kautilya's theory would be incomplete if he did not also focus on the adverse realities of statecraft. Recognizing the inherent instability of political power, including the possibility that a ruler may be defeated or overthrown by a stronger rival, Kautilya also elaborates a systematic framework governing the conduct of weaker kings under conditions of strategic asymmetry. In this regard, Kautilya resembles the scientist-artist later described by Niccolò Machiavelli in the preface of his work *The Prince*, in a letter addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici. Machiavelli observes, "Just as artists who draw landscapes get down in the valley to study the mountains and go up to the mountains to look down on the valley, so one has to be a prince to get to know the character of a people and a man of the people to know the character of a prince."³ Similarly, Kautilya ascends to the "mountain peak" to advise the conquering king on how to crush the enemy, and then descends into the "valley" to the position of the weak king, explaining how to survive when the aggressor is incomparably more powerful. Kautilya notes: "The weaker king shall offer, by one means or another, that which the other will, in any case, take by force. It is life that is worth preserving, not wealth which, being impermanent, can be given up without regrets." (12.1.32; 624)

Here, his pragmatism is demonstrated once again. Kautilya avoids extreme positions and warns against blind submission and thoughtless courage. He argues that when resistance is unlikely to succeed, it is preferable to concede what would otherwise be taken by force, thereby preserving survival and maintaining the capacity for renewed struggle under more favorable conditions in the future.

³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Tim Parks (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 4.

Kautilya never advocates unjustified maximalism in his work. He consistently argues from the position of political realism (*Realpolitik*), demonstrating absolute pragmatism free from unnecessary moralizing. Thus, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* represents a work of enduring global significance, offering a systematic account of how states can safeguard their strategic interests while pursuing expansionary objectives. It continues to constitute a valuable reference point for research in foreign policy, diplomacy, and historical studies. It is therefore essential to introduce this fundamental historical work more widely to the global and local academic communities.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.