



Relevance of Chanakya's Raja Mandala theory in diplomacy and foreign policy in today's modern world

Dr. S Krishnan

Associate Professor, Department of Seedling School of Law and Governance, Jaipur National University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya, an ancient scholar said "Your neighbor is your natural enemy and the neighbor's neighbor is your friend". Indian foreign policy is based on the philosophy of Kautilya. Kautilya has been recognized as a statesman and classical Indian philosopher of political realism. He presented a comprehensive theoretical framework of inter-state relations and foreign policy, known as the Mandala Theory in his work Arthashastra, which has deeply influenced contemporary Indian strategic culture and regional domination strategy. Written around 300 BC, it explains the entire course of state formation and the conduct of foreign policy through war and diplomacy to maximize the power of the conducting state.

Kautilya explicated maximization of national power through material economic strength gained by conquering territories adjacent to the ambitious state; this was seen as a prerequisite for regional domination, the ultimate foreign policy objective of a state. He was advisor and minister to Indian king Chandragupta Maurya who established a vast centralized Hindu kingdom in India on the former's advice. Kautilya explained that the best strategy for protection and defence of state was regional expansion, and saw neighbouring states as perpetual enemies because of conflicting geopolitical interests. This article is written from the historical perspective and looks at how Kautilya's classical realist thought has influenced contemporary Indian strategy?

Keywords: Mandala Theory, national interests, Arthashastra, diplomacy, strategy, foreign policy

Introduction

As a political advisor and minister of Indian king Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya sought unification of India through the acquisition of military might and economic strength. He advocated merciless political decision-making to confront the challenges of the given period. India was facing severe attacks and military encroachments from the descendants of Alexander the Great and the Persian Kings during his reign. Adhering to Kautilya's philosophy, he unified India into a strong centralized state through the conduct of muscular foreign policy.

The essentially dynamic conception of Mandala is the unique contribution of Kautilya to the theory of diplomacy. The circle of the states is known as the Mandala or groups. Warfare had, no doubt, modified the ethics of diplomacy from centuries, by the time of Kautilya, the formula for diplomacy involved deception appeasement of the powerful, suppression of the weak, hypocrisy, bribery, economic exhaustion, lightening onslaught, ruthlessness, vigilance, secrecy, and readiness to take risk and sacrifice. Uncritical trust was an invitation to disaster.

The major theme of Mandala is the dependence of peace upon power. The intricate system was based upon the assumption that contiguous states were hostile. The Mandala theory was aimed at creating a balance of power in a system of small states. The maintenance of the state was the immediate goal of the foreign policy. Foreign policy must be based on the careful assessment of the resources and support available to the state and to its enemy.

The doctrine of Mandala is one of the remarkable ideas of Indian statecraft. It is governed by geographical conditions also. Political relations were considered the most effective method of attaining a particular end. The geographical position was a very important consideration in dealing with

the alliances. The theory contains some diplomatic practices. Kautilya advocated a judicial balance of power in which geographic and economic factors were taken into considerations. The status and prestige of different states differed according to other geographical position and resources. By this, the Mandala theory explains the normal types of state relations. Kautilya warns his ruler to be watchful of his mighty neighbours and it was through these systems of alliances that peace could be maintained. In pursuit of diplomatic objectives, all policies were adopted. The diplomacy marked the culmination of the combination of ethical principles with treachery, deceit and ruthlessness. An aspect of the reality of diplomacy was nothing more than a struggle for power.

Kautilya advised the king to be pragmatic in his approach towards his enemies and prudence in choice of foreign policy. He was against spineless surrender or foolhardy valour. He preferred peace over war in most cases. He said that when the degree of progress to be made from choosing between war and peace were same, the king must choose peace. He took into consideration the losses of troops, expenditure and absence from home while giving this advice. He also said that if the balance of power were not to become favourable as a result of war, peace must be chosen. Under the Mandala framework, Kautilya projected kingdoms or states as a series of adjacent or interconnected circles and described their relationship to each other. He classified these states into four categories. The ambitious state was Vijigishu, which was placed at the centre of the circle. The others were Ari (the natural enemy state with a contiguous territory to the former), Madhyama (the regional power having adjacent borders with both Vijigishu and Ari), and Udasina (the extra-regional superpower, lying outside the circle of states). Based on this classification, states were

categorized as enemies, friends, allies and neutral states in an international system. War, diplomacy and foreign policy were conducted accordingly.

Enemy states, Ari, were divided into two categories, the natural and the artificial, on the basis of geography and psychological perception. Ari-Mitra and Ari Mitra-Mitra were considered as natural allies of the enemy, thereby making them natural enemies as well. Further, Parshnigrah and Parshnigrahasara were identified as potential enemies which could attack Vijigishu from the rear flank as the latter expanded; thus, both the former were classified as its artificial enemies.

Kautilya categorized friendly states as natural allies and artificial ones; these, known as Mitra and Mitra-Mitra, were geographically adjacent to the natural enemies and were considered friendly to Vijigishu. Akrand and Akrandsara were conceived as potential allies and friends of Vijigishu, owing to their geographic proximity to Parshnigrah and Parshnigrahasara.

To protect the interest of Vijigishu and establish a favourable regional order, Kautilya advocated pursuing a balance of power by means of both self-help and alliances. If we apply the Mandala framework onto current Indian strategic thinking and foreign policy behaviour, what is seen is revealing. Similar to the Kautilyan conception, India has conceived Pakistan as its natural enemy and tried to sabotage it by using strategies of conventional military preponderance, nuclear deterrence, limited war Cold Start, and surgical strikes; all are coercive security policy mechanisms.

Under Modi's government, this coercive approach intensified towards Pakistan. India tried to isolate the latter by cancelling foreign secretary-level bilateral talks in 2014. It also boycotted the SAARC Islamabad summit 2016, attempting to postpone it by influencing regional states to abstain from participation in it. Militarily, India increased skirmishes across the Line of Control to engage Pakistan in a two-front war. The arrest of Kulbushan Yadav, a serving Indian Navy officer from Pakistan, is another manifestation of India's sub-conventional warfare.

Historically, India has tried to coercively manoeuvre its neighbours in South Asia either by use of force or its projection. It perceives Afghanistan and South East Asia as its natural allies while it sees the Middle East as a potential ally region. India had asserted itself in the neighbouring states through the invasion of Kashmir in 1948, the annexation of Sikkim in 1975, and aggression against Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh during the 1980s. India forced Bangladesh for a border settlement treaty immediately after its independence in 1971.

Historical Perspective of India's defence diplomacy

In ancient India, diplomacy was considered a quasi-military activity. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata speak of alliances between powerful kingdoms built through marriages, but occasionally coercion was utilized, backed by military power. Expanding regional influence through the conduct of "Ashwamedha Yagna" was an Indian way of exploiting military capability as an instrument of coercion for transacting inter-state relations (Basham, 2004) and the last Ashwamedha Yagna was conducted by Maharaja Jai Singh II of Amber, Jaipur in 1716 (Narayanan, 2015). Kautilya was aware that the stratagems would work only when backed up by credible military power. He maintained

that the ruler of the State of Magadh, Chandragupta Maurya, had a large and professionally trained standing army maintained by the State, although Kautilya recognized that there was no glory in the war. In this context, he believed that negotiation was a strategic device, designed to lead to victory rather than compromise, and should be pursued until the end. While never questioning the primacy of politics in warfare, Kautilya viewed diplomacy and foreign policy as instruments of war (Boersche, 2003).

Indian Kingdoms relied not only on their armies but also their navy to project power. The peninsular kingdom of the Cholas in the far South in Medieval India was a notable maritime power, leading naval expeditions to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in South Asia and a campaign to Southeast Asia in 1025 CE. Their overseas campaign against the Kingdom of Shrivijaya in Southeast Asia involved both the army and the navy. The Cholas were engaged in a maritime trading relationship with China, and when Shrivijaya threatened this trade, which passed through the Straits of Malacca, the Cholas responded with the show of strength. The chief reason for their naval venture in Southeast Asia was to gain control of the strategic points along the Straits of Malacca, although they had no territorial ambitions outside South Asia (Malone, 2011). Today, the Straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok have gained extreme strategic importance for India, China and many other countries, as a large percentage of their trade, and particularly energy resources pass through these choke points. India is worried for security reasons too, with Chinese nuclear submarines reportedly venturing into the Indian Ocean and passing through these channels, ostensibly on Anti-Piracy Mission.

Briefly, the theme of strategic thought in the Arthashastra encompasses:

- Politics has to be free from the influence of religion and morality to achieve political/strategic objectives. Kautilya is the first thinker who secularised politics and infused subterfuge and deceitful methods into policy and strategy to gain victory in wars.
- The most important aspect of Kautilya's strategic thought is his conception of elements of state (prakritis), such as the king, the minister, the country, the fort, the treasury, the Army and the ally. According to him, power lies in the use and application of these elements by the conqueror effectively.
- The mandala concept is a strategic reality perceived by Kautilya, consisting of eleven kingdoms that are strategically situated/located which the vijigisu (conqueror) has to tackle in order to achieve his goal. These are the declared aims of the Arthashastra.
- Kautilya formulated a six-fold foreign policy (sadgunya), i.e. making peace, hostility, neutrality, show of force for war, seeking refuge with another king, and the dual policy of making peace with one king and hostility with another.
- Kautilya dilated on the use of various means for security of the king and the country, including the use of espionage against ministers and enemies, conduct of treacherous fighting, employment of secret weapons and even the use of chemical weapons in warfare.

Whether Kautilya maintained an ethical dimension to the Arthashastra in terms of diplomacy, is moot. However, following Vedic moral principles, he regards the state as a moral institution; but in terms of international relations, he

emphasised on the separation of politics from theology and morality. He averred a political rationalism based on pragmatism, and traditional Vedic dharma (the path of righteousness and living one's life according to the codes of conduct as described by the Hindu scriptures). The state is a fragile organisation, and the statesman does not have the moral right to risk its survival on ethical restraint.

Contiguous regimes, in Kautilya's analysis, existed in a state of latent hostility. Whatever professions of amity a ruler might make, when his power grows significantly, it would eventually be found that it was in his interest to subvert his neighbour's realm. This was an inherent dynamic of self-preservation to which morality was irrelevant. (This represents the ancient Indian philosophy of 'matsya nyaya' or law of the fishes, where the big fish ate up the smaller fish.) Kautilya concluded that the ruthless logic of competition allowed no deviation: "The conqueror shall [always] endeavour to add to his own power and increase his own happiness." The imperative was clear: "If... the conqueror is superior, the campaign shall be undertaken; otherwise not" [1].

Specific actions attributed to Kautilya's advice include deterring Alexander from following up on his initial success in Punjab in 327 BCE by playing up the Greek Army's fear of war elephants; and exaggerating the number in the elephant corps of the Magadha forces in a clever disinformation campaign that compelled Alexander to withdraw his war-weary army from India before it fought another major action [2].

International system

Some of the *Arthashastra's* most timeless observations are on international relations and foreign policy, found mostly in books seven, eleven, and twelve. Kautilya lays out a theory of the international system called the "circle of states," or *rajamandala*. According to this theory, hostile states are those that border the ruler's state, forming a circle around it. In turn, states that surround this set of hostile states form another circle around the circle of hostile states. This second circle of states can be considered the natural allies of the ruler's state against the hostile states that lie between them. Put more succinctly, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Elements of this logic are found in India's foreign policy today, which sees states such as Japan and Afghanistan as natural allies against China and Pakistan, respectively.

The idea of the *rajamandala* also holds that relations between two contingent states will generally be tense, a fact that was definitely true of many regions, such as Europe, until fairly recently (this does not preclude the possibility of a neighbor being friendly or a vassal). This idea may explain the perception among India's smaller South Asian neighbors that India is an overbearing and dominating neighbor.

The theory of a circle of states entails that every ruler within an international system will find his (or her) state at the center of its own circle of states. This ruler is described as a *vijigishu*, or would-be conqueror, whose power ought to gradually radiate into ever more distant circles. According to Kautilya's view of human nature, "the possession of power and happiness in a greater degree makes a king superior to another; in a lesser degree, inferior, and in equal degree, equal. Hence, a king shall always endeavor to

augment his power and elevate his happiness." Thus, according to Kautilya, a ruler will always try to increase his (or her) power and territory to the greatest extent possible. Such a viewpoint is similar to offensive realism in International Relations theory, which depicts states as being power maximizers (although suggesting the drive for power is rooted in human nature is consistent with the kind of Classical Realism Kissinger is associated with). The ultimate strategy of a state is not to maintain a balance of power between states but to overcome this equilibrium in order to establish stability through hegemony.

Nonetheless, in the *Arthashastra*, the cardinal virtue is *realpolitik*, which emphasizes the state's self-interests and security above all else. This necessities policies and attitudes that subject the ultimate objective of a state—to maximize power—to temporary objectives such as the creation of various alliances, coalitions, and balances of power. This viewpoint fits with the idea that states only have permanent interests, and will do whatever necessary to pursue these interests. The attainment of these possibilities is a practical necessity and is the subject of Kautilya's discussion on foreign policy.

Six methods of foreign policy

The states participate in diplomacy and war using the six methods of foreign policy. To understand the concept of Raja Mandala theory, the six methods of foreign policy enunciated by Chanakya must be understood. These cater for different situations in international relations.

- a. **Samdhi.** The peace treaties were to be concluded with specific conditions that enabled the state to promote welfare and development, strengthen alliances or use the period as one arm of dual policy. Chanakya said that treaty could even be entered into with one's enemy and may be broken when one grows strong. The interests of the state being supreme, such betrayals were justified.
- b. **Vigraha.** The policy of hostility was recommended to be followed by the stronger state. The hostilities could be conducted as open, secret, undeclared or clandestine attacks. Diplomatic wars too were discussed extensively by Chanakya. Having had to fight conventional and proxy wars, India in addition to fighting militarily, has been dealing with this on a diplomatic level as well.
- c. **Asana.** The policy of remaining neutral was recommended by Chanakya to be followed when both states were equal. The Chinese observed neutrality in the cold war between USA and erstwhile USSR and utilized their efforts towards development. India was the leading proponent of non-alignment and in following the policy was able to get the best of both the Western and Eastern Blocs. India must be amongst the few nations in the world that can acquire weapon systems, nuclear technology, industrial knowhow and even support for permanent membership of UNSC from USA and Russia.
- d. **Yana.** Posturing for war was an important decision that the king had to take. The preparation for war and the long march entailed heavy expenditure and prolonged absence from the capital, thus necessitated careful

consideration before taking such a decision. After the attack on Parliament on 13 December 2001, the armed forces were mobilised. The forces remained in the offensive posture for a complete year. While the war never took place, many skirmishes on the line of control occurred. The tensions on the line of control brought international pressure upon Pakistan resulting in imposition of sanctions on the terrorist groups and the leaders in February 2002. The continued pressure resulted in a ceasefire agreement in 2003 that holds good till date.

- e. **Samsraya.** The policy of seeking protection of a stronger king could be practised by entering into alliances or by signing a treaty. Various alliances formed during the cold war indicate that this policy is relevant even today. In 1971 when war with Pakistan was imminent, India signed a treaty of Friendship with USSR as a safeguard against intervention by USA and China on behalf of Pakistan. Pakistan's alliance with China in can be seen as a means of seeking protection against India.
- f. **Dvaidhibhava.** This was the policy of seeking peace with one king in order to pursue hostilities with another. China, which has territorial disputes with both India and Japan, maintains cordial relations with one while getting into a diplomatic row with other in order to channelize the complete effort of the state to achieve the objectives it sets for itself.

Special Cases. Chanakya envisaged certain situations wherein he considered the role of kings who could influence the outcome of a conflict without being directly involved. In context of India-Pakistan relations, China could be classified as middle king as described by Chanakya. Pakistan could create some problems in the course of Sino-India conflict, but would not fit the description of a middle king, being weaker than both India and China. However, USA, Russia and even UN fit the bill of a neutral king, a king who is more powerful than the belligerents but does not share the borders with the two.

Parshingraha. The attack in the rear in diplomatic, economic or psychological sphere had been described as an important aspect of foreign policy by Chanakya. It could be in form of posturing or supporting insurgency movements as well. China has been increasing her influence in India's neighbourhood through economic and diplomatic initiatives. In the last week of November 2012, Maldives annulled the contract of an Indian firm soon after its cabinet had returned from China. India too has developed closer ties with countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam in order to counter the influence of Pakistan and China in their neighbourhood.

Objectives of foreign policy

Chanakya said that the objective of foreign policy was to increase the power of a state. Military, intellect and morale were vital components of power according to Chanakya. The king had to continuously project his power by using appropriate foreign policy. The dynamic relationship between power and progress was essential to be understood

and had to be attained through implementing the right policy and correct execution within the circle of states.

Both India and China have been projecting their power in a different way. While India has laid emphasis on soft power, China has embraced the policy of projecting comprehensive national power to include military and economic might in addition to its cultural influence around the world to exert influence on the policies of other nations.

Chanakya had said that peace could be made with the enemy albeit as a temporary measure to gain time to enhance own power. The wars in modern era are also fought on economic and cyber space. Both India and China are growing economies and the growth is expected to stabilise in another 20 to 30 years. They have bilateral trade running into billions of dollars every year despite being rivals for markets and captive resources. If the two were to engage in any form of war at present, the impact on their growth would be catastrophic. Moreover, the modern economies being inter-woven, it would have a domino effect on all the leading economies of the world. Thus, the setback the two countries would receive would be dynamic and would set their progress back in a big way. The two countries have adopted a very pragmatic approach and cooperate at various international and not let the disputes over boundary or South China Sea over shadow the areas of cooperation.

China maintains friendly relations with India at the same time supports Pakistan in all its misadventures. China has invested a great deal in infrastructure in Pakistan. The armed forces of Pakistan are being equipped by the Chinese at a frantic pace. China has little to gain directly from Pakistan except for access to the sea through Gwadar Port. The main purpose of propping up Pakistan is to divert India's focus. Although growing at a fast pace, the resources with India are limited and thus can optimally focus on one front only.

Relative Power. Chanakya said that the king must always strive to enhance his power in comparison to the enemy. The relative power can be improved by making oneself stronger or by denuding the power of the enemy.

India's military strength is dissipated on two fronts externally and internal security duties. India must strengthen her relations with Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and other littorals of South China Sea to force China to focus on many fronts at the same time. USA has provided all possible help to India in recent years to make China focus more on India. The aim of USA is to further her own interests in the Pacific Ocean region, Indian Ocean and the oil rich West Asia. The policymakers have to be careful in using the US card while dealing with China. Reliance on USA to provide deterrence against China, though beneficial in short term, would be counterproductive in long run. India will have to become stronger economically, diplomatically and militarily to enhance her relative power in long run.

Having realised her inferiority in conventional battlefield, Pakistan resorted to proxy war. The diversion of resources of Indian Army helped it achieve parity on the conventional battlefield. India responded by raising Rashtriya Rifles Battalions to deal with insurgency. The situation is now returning to normalcy. In 1998, Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in response to trials by India. The acquisition of nuclear weapons and missile delivery system by Pakistan gave her the deterrence capability and thus it avoided a war in 2002. However, the development of ballistic missile

defence system by India would nullify the deterrence capability built by Pakistan.

Relative power is dynamic and its balance continues to change at all times. Every move by India, China or Pakistan draws response by the adversary. India would have to continually monitor the development in China, Pakistan and also within the countries that can be described as the inner circle of these countries in the circle of states.

Preference of peace over conflict

The king had to adopt policies that would enhance the power of the state and economic and material well being of its subjects. This would necessitate improving infrastructure, increasing avenues for employment, to exploit mines and natural resources, and at the same time to deter similar progress of the enemy. A state that was in a position to grow in power more rapidly both in quality and quantity than the adversary could neglect the enemy's progress some time. Two states were to make peace when growth could be achieved by doing so. Hostility with the enemy was to be opened if it ensured better growth than the enemy. If the adversaries were neither in a position to destroy the progress of each other nor in a position to safeguard their own progress in case of hostilities, every endeavour was to be made to maintain peace.

Pakistan. India is developing faster than Pakistan in all fields. The tool of Jihad that had been used by Pakistan to disrupt peace in India and to enable USA fight USSR in Afghanistan has become bane for very existence of Pakistan. Peaceful and stable Pakistan is essential for India's growth. India has offered assistance to Pakistan to help her overcome these challenges.

Chanakya had advocated destruction of enemy as and when the opportunity presented itself. The world order today is different from the times of Chanakya. Any hostile act by India would bring immediate sanctions from the comity of nations and thus will destroy the economic progress and well being of the state. Moreover, if the state of Pakistan were to disintegrate, the terrorist groups would reign supreme and they would most likely target India like never before. A large swell of refugees would migrate and cause demographic and economic catastrophe for India. The population that has been brought up on the staple of blaming India for every misery will turn their anger against India. Thus, when seen in the larger context, the policy being adopted by India is in sync with Chanakya's thought process that professes economic growth and welfare of citizens as a primary duty of the state.

China. Despite the size of the GDPs and the growth rate, India and China are yet to acquire a truly middle class status. The Chinese economy is industry driven while Indian economy is services driven. In order to continue on the path of growth, both need to add millions of new jobs every year. The creation of so many new jobs requires unhindered economic activities. The present path of economic growth leaves adequate space for both the states to coexist peacefully.

In order to create millions of jobs every year, India will have to change to an industrial economy. In a decade or two, the two countries would end up competing for the raw materials and markets. This could lead to conflict between the two. It would be prudent for India to develop her military capabilities. Improvement in human development index would ensure that the manpower is educationally and

technically qualified to absorb the technology at the given time.

India is surrounded by large number of small countries that are being wooed by China. These countries resent the perceived big brotherly attitude of India. In November 2012, the government of Maldives cancelled the contract of GMR for development of the airport. Nepal-India relations have taken a downward spiral due to neglect by Indian government as well as the bureaucracy's inflexible and inconsistent behaviour. One of the glaring examples of such neglect is the absence visit to Nepal by any of the Indian Prime Ministers, since 2002. Bangladesh too has been antagonised over India's reluctance to finalise the water sharing agreement. India has to work towards bringing these countries back to her fold.

Dealing with threats posed by China and Pakistan using Arthashastra

Forging Alliances/ Partnership

- a. Chanakya was of the opinion that forging alliances should be resorted to when needed. War being one of the methods of executing foreign policy of the nation, the diplomacy has to garner a favourable opinion and if not, at least a neutral attitude from the comity of nations.
- b. From the very beginning Pakistan entered into military alliances like CENTO and SEATO. India entered into a 20-year treaty of friendship with USSR. Since the 90s Pakistan became closer to China to overcome the impact of sanctions imposed by USA. The alliance between Pakistan and China assures Pakistan of some degree of deterrence against India.
- c. India has forged closer relations with USA and maintained the historical relations with Russia. The cooperation achieved has been catalyst in enabling the Indian military to modernize at a rapid pace, thus gradually building up a deterrence capability against China. Herein India needs to maintain a very fine balance, as close relations with USA, China and Russia are important for the development of the country. The challenge for India is to manage her ties in such a manner that she is not seen as leaning towards any country in particular, nor is seen as a country that is indecisive.
- d. USA. During the visit of Mr Leon Panetta in June 2012, India politely told USA that there is a need to recalibrate the US policy called 'Rebalancing of Military Strategy with focus on Asia-Pacific' that envisages deployment of at least 60% of US Naval assets in Asia-Pacific. The concern of India being that the policy would increase the militarisation in its immediate neighbourhood and such rapid militarisation would throw India's modernisation plans out of gear.
- e. India has enhanced bilateral cooperation with US and participates in a number of joint military exercises without entering into any formal military alliance. The support that had been extended by USA to Pakistan in last half a century plays in the minds of Indian policy makers while deciding on the extent of military cooperation with USA. The US insistence on signing

- CISMOA, LSA, EUMA and BECA make the policy makers in India sceptical. Moreover, by openly embracing USA, India does not want to upset China.
- f. Littorals of South China Sea. India has indicated that she would prefer cooperation with countries like Japan, Vietnam, Philippines and others in working out an amicable solution to the South China Sea dispute. In last few years, India has participated in number of military exercises with Japan, Singapore and Vietnam. If the navies of these countries enforce a blockade of Malacca and Sunda Straits, China will be put on the back foot. The entire transshipment of oil and gas would then be channelised through Arakan region of Myanmar and Gwadar port in Pakistan. The domination of Bay of Bengal and Arabian Seas by the Indian Navy would quickly result in enforcing a blockade to shape the outcome of war.
 - g. Myanmar. India has improved her relations with the Myanmar in recent years. The people of Kachin have been known to resent Chinese activities in the region. India should exploit this resentment and persuade the government of Myanmar to limit the Chinese activities, China can be further contained.
 - h. Iran. To avoid the SLOCs dominated by India, China needs to open a transshipment route through Central Asia. The Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports in Iran could be the ports of transshipment. India lost some ground in Iran after siding with USA over nuclear issue. By attending the NAM conference in Tehran, Dr Manmohan Singh tried to make some amends to the earlier mistakes. In his visit, the India's energy and security issues were discussed by the PM.
 - i. Iran could be a partner of strategic significance for India. The relations between Pakistan and Iran took a downward spiral during the 80s whereas India and Iran cooperated in supporting the Tajik groups opposed to Pakistan backed Pashtun groups in Afghanistan. Pakistan became closer to Saudi Arabia, who is a staunch rival of Iran. The officials of Iran and Pakistan have accused each other of aiding the insurgents in Baluchistan.
 - j. India has stood by its commitments in Iran despite the pressure from US and EU. China too has supported Iran and done so more boldly than India. In addition to the vast reserves of oil and gas, Iran is significant as it is a littoral state of Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea. It provides a gateway to the landlocked Central Asian Republics. China has been wooing Iran to gain a foothold in West Asia and enhance energy security. The route from Iran, Central Asian Region (CAR) and into China would enable China to avoid the SLOCs that are vulnerable to interception by India and other South East Asian countries.
 - k. It is unlikely that Iran would become a party to containing Chinese influence due to her animosity with USA. However, India should work towards exploiting Iran's sensitivities towards developments in Baluchistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan's proximity to Saudi Arabia. India should exploit get Iran onboard in containing Pakistan from the West.
- l. Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been apprehensive of Pakistan's intentions in the region. On many occasions President Karzai has blamed Pakistan for the troubles in his country. Pakistan's open support to Taliban means that barring South and Eastern Afghanistan, rest of the country is unlikely to warm up to Pakistan in near future. Afghans are known to be fond of Indian culture. India's contribution towards development activities in Afghanistan has further endeared her to the Afghans. Unlike China, India has not yet acquired any stakes in the unexplored natural resources of the country.
 - m. India should work very closely with the Afghan government and keep Pakistan out of the region. India must be prepared to provide security forces for filling the void left by the withdrawal of ISAF in 2014. The aid being provided to Afghanistan could be linked with keeping Pakistan out. India must ensure that Taliban does not gain entry into Afghan political arena. This would deny the strategic depth that Pakistan so badly craves.
- Create a Divide between China and Pakistan. Chanakya talked of creating division amongst the enemy to weaken them. Sino- Pakistan relations are not as deep as are made out to be. China tilts towards Pakistan to secure its own geopolitical interests. It props up Pakistan militarily to keep India's armed forces engaged on the Western borders. The Gwadar port and Karakoram highway provide China with an overland trade j and Islamists in Pakistan.
- a. Make Gwadar Port Unviable Option. The port held a vision of prosperity for Pakistan and to provide the Pakistan Navy with strategic depth along its coastline. It provided China with an opportunity to diversify its oil import routes and extend its presence in the Indian Ocean. China's interests in Gwadar port are to diversify and secure its crude oil import oil routes and to extend its presence in the Indian Ocean. It would enable monitoring naval activities of both US & India in the region.
 - b. India & Iran have had reservations about the project from beginning. Iran responded by constructing Chabahar port and road links joining Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan with India's assistance. Plans to extend a road from Iran through Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Sherkhan Bandar in Afghanistan and onwards to China too have been discussed ^[48].
 - c. The fragile state of lines of communication in POK region was highlighted in January 2010 when the Attabad landslide cut off the Karakoram highway ^[49]. The Baluchistan province in Pakistan remains restive with ever increasing levels of violence.
 - d. Iran remains peaceful and stable making Chabahar port more attractive alternative to Gwadar. China has repeatedly used its veto power in support of Iran over the nuclear standoff. Iran's energy reserves and good relations with Afghanistan & Central Asian countries are of significance to China as well. India and Iran

enjoy good relations. Like Iran, India too enjoys good relations with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. If situation in Afghanistan stabilises in near future, Iran remains peaceful but Balochistan remains restive, use of Chabahar would become more attractive and economical in comparison to Gwadar.

Relevance of Rajamandala and Shadguna Siddhanta

In Arthashastra, Kautilya has made arguments about power, governance, statecraft etc. without any reference to any religion or divinity, which makes him eligible as true founder of what we call realpolitik. However, above description makes it very clear that Kautilya suggests a state to act in order to enhance its power and self-interest. There does not seem to be any moral / ethical or religious obligation in his policy. War and peace are solely on basis of profit. Many criticize this policy of Kautilya as ruthless realpolitik, intrigue, deceptive and immoral. Despite of criticism, the policy holds relevance because Kautilya said something which has always been actually practiced by states everywhere.

At the same time, when discussing about India's foreign policy, many observers connect the ancient Indian strategic thought of Kautilya with contemporary Indian strategy, whereby foreign policy takes place within three widening concentrics, with the first circle encompassing India's immediate neighbourhood region, the second its extended neighbourhood; and the third the entire global stage. Many observers consider such principles to be both applicable to, and evident in, the conduct of Indian foreign policy since 1947.

Today's India's Foreign Policy in the context of Chanakya's Mandala Theory

Chanakya's Mandala Theory, as detailed in his Arthashastra, remains a valuable framework for understanding the intricacies of international relations even today. The theory categorizes a state's foreign relations into four types:

- **Ari (Enemies):** Nations that pose direct threats to the state's security or interests.
- **Mitra (Allies):** Countries that share common interests and form strategic partnerships.
- **Madhyama (Mediators):** States that act as neutral arbitrators between conflicting parties.
- **Udasina (Neutral States):** Nations that remain uninvolved in direct conflicts but can influence the balance of power.

Explanation and relevance

a. Strategic alignment and alliances

Chanakya emphasized that the foundation of all international relationships is self-interest. Countries align with others based on mutual benefits, whether it's for economic gains, security, or strategic positioning. For instance, India's deepening ties with the United States and Japan as part of the Quad alliance is a clear application of the Mitra principle. This alliance is designed to counterbalance the influence of Ari states like China in the Indo-Pacific region.

▪ Dynamic and adaptive foreign relations

The Mandala Theory recognizes that foreign relationships are not static; they evolve based on shifting geopolitical realities. India's recalibration of its ties with Russia is a prime example. While Russia has traditionally been a Mitra, recent differences over global issues like the Ukraine conflict have introduced complexities. India continues to balance this relationship, maintaining strong defense ties while also aligning more closely with Western nations.

▪ Multi-Layered approach to diplomacy and security

The framework stresses the need for a holistic approach in foreign policy, where diplomacy, conflict management, and alliance-building are all integral. For example, India's engagement with neutral countries (Udasina), like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, showcases how it is managing relationships with nations that are not directly involved in its regional disputes but play a crucial role in its energy security and economic growth.

▪ Conflict management through mediators (Madhyama)

Chanakya's theory also highlights the importance of involving Madhyama states when resolving disputes. India's participation in multilateral platforms like the BRICS and SCO leverages such mediatory states to diffuse tensions, especially in managing rivalries with Ari states like Pakistan and China.

▪ Realpolitik and long-term strategy

Chanakya's approach underscores the importance of pragmatism in foreign relations, where idealism is secondary to realpolitik. The recent focus on Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) reflects this mindset, pushing for strategic autonomy while engaging selectively with global powers.

In essence, Chanakya's Mandala Theory is more than just an ancient framework; it is a sophisticated tool that continues to influence India's approach to global diplomacy. Whether it's navigating complex relations with neighboring countries, balancing ties with great powers, or forging alliances based on shared interests, India's foreign policy remains deeply rooted in these timeless principles.

Relevance in modern foreign policy

Chanakya's six strategies provide India with a versatile toolkit for handling complex international relations. Whether through treaties, strategic neutrality, military readiness, or forming alliances, these principles offer flexibility to adapt to changing geopolitical landscapes. By blending ancient wisdom with modern diplomacy, India continues to navigate the intricacies of global power dynamics while protecting its national interests.

Conventionally, the Mandala Theory is not applied to analyse trade strategy. Nevertheless, it would be naive to assume that the theory has not left indelible marks on the consciousness of India's policymakers and leaders.

Thus, exploring the extent to which the theory has permeated into trade strategy would provide insights as to how Indian policymakers think.

India's current trade strategy seems to be characterised by a focus on regional economic integration and strategic partnerships to foster greater interdependence. This objective seems to suggest that India is pursuing a trade

strategy that facilitates its ability to keep its “natural enemies” close.

India has signed several bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, including the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), a multilateral trade agreement between India and the following South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Notably, of the other seven partners, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are India’s immediate neighbours (natural enemies).

Interestingly, certain neighbours like Nepal have taken a step further towards greater economic integration by pegging their currencies to the Indian rupee.

Similarly, Bangladesh and India have recently announced that they intend to do away with the dollar as the official currency for trade settlements and carry out bilateral trade denominated in Rupee and Taka. With Bangladesh’s currency being perceived as generally weaker (due to rising imports and falling reserves), it is anticipated that the Rupee will gain predominance in trade settlements between Bangladesh and India. Thereby, further deepening the economic relationship between the two “natural enemies.” With respect to the neighbours (the “natural allies”) of India’s immediate neighbours, such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Maldives, Mauritius, India has played the role of an effective ally for many decades.

For instance, India and Maldives have also signed many bilateral agreements, including \$500 million in grants and financing to support maritime connectivity and an \$800 million line of credit from the Export-Import Bank of India. Separately, India is a major player in the “hardware” and “software” of Afghanistan. India is one of the top donors of foreign aid grants and top investors of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan (with more than 400 projects underway across Afghanistan, including the construction of the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, and the construction of the Afghan Parliament building). In terms of Afghan “software,” India is providing scholarships to and supporting around 14,000 Afghan students studying in India.

One important lesson from Chanakya that remains relevant today is his knowledge of human nature and his skill at assessing people’s strengths and weaknesses. He stressed the importance of being able to recognize the character and intentions of individuals, as understanding human nature is crucial for effective communication and leadership. This concept is still applicable in today’s world, as successful leaders and communicators are often those who can understand why people behave the way they do and what drives them.

Alongside his understanding of education and human nature, Chanakya’s teachings on strategic thinking and diplomacy retain immense relevance in today’s world. He offered valuable guidance on constructing and preserving power, as well as employing diplomacy to resolve conflicts and negotiate disputes. These teachings have direct applications in contemporary scenarios, including negotiation and conflict resolution, as well as power dynamics within the realms of business and politics.

Another crucial principle highlighted in Chanakya’s teachings is the significance of ethics and morality in leadership and governance. According to him, a leader must uphold moral and ethical values to retain the support and trust of the people. In the present era, this principle finds

application in leadership within government and corporate contexts, where ethical and responsible leadership plays a pivotal role in establishing trust and credibility with stakeholders. Additionally, he stressed the significance of financial stability and prudent wealth management. According to him, a ruler must possess a robust financial footing to ensure the stability of the state. This principle extends to personal finance and wealth management, as establishing a strong financial foundation is vital for personal stability and security.

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