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Kautilya: Theory of State

Introduction

When there was renewed interest in and exploration of Indian philosophy and political thought during and after the Indian Renaissance in British India, the streams of the initial rediscoveries tended to flow into one of the following channels: (a) Orientalist-Indological (b) nationalist (c) idealist-philosophical and (d) the pluralist-philosophical concerns with varieties of schools of Indian philosophy and thought. Orientalism or its India-centered vision made pioneering discoveries of texts and later of forgotten and obscure Eastern/Indological/Indian traditions in the realm of letters and arts, and it projected them as distinctly different traditions from the Western ones.[1]

The nationalists were primarily concerned with bringing to light ancient Indian concerns with political ideas and institutions, systems of law and living, and transcendent nationalistic identities beyond tribe, caste, and other forms of ethnicity The nationalist stream, in the present context, is represented by K. P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity*, which tried to demonstrate during the nationalist movement that ancient India had had democratic ideas and institutions.[2]

The best protagonist of the idealist-philosophical restatement of the *advait* or non-dualist metaphysics of Shankara was Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. Shankara's metaphysical monism is the archetype of Indian idealist philosophy, which rejects the duality of *Brahman* and *atman* and considers the material world illusory. Philosophical pluralism is propounded by the *Sankhya* school. The concern with the pluralist-philosophical system of ancient Indian thought is best represented in Surendra Nath Dasgupta's five-volume *History of Indian Philosophy*.[3] A common thread running strongly through all these works, by and large, was the ubiquitous metaphysical assumption that Indian philosophy and thought were primarily religious and society-centered rather than being concerned with material life, political life, logic and epistemology.[4]

It took longer for Orientalists, Indologists, and students of political thought to establish a new trail that showed that ancient Indian thought was as much preoccupied with theories of reliable knowledge about this world and theories of state and government as with metaphysics. The ancient Indian epistemological thought is brought to the fore in the pioneering researches of Tsherbatsky and Bimal Krishna Matilal.[5] A similar new window opened when the political theories of origin of state in the Vedic and Buddhist texts and the treatises of Kautilya, Manu, Kamandaka and others were brought to light by textual scholars and historians, increasingly in combination with archeology and epigraphy.[6]

The Kautilya Text

Legend has it that Kautilya was a teacher in the famous ancient Indian university at Takshshila. He helped one of his students Chandragupta in dislodging the Nandas, the ruling dynasty of Magadh, and establishing the Maurya dynasty. The text of the *Arthsashtra* is attributed to this teacher, who is also known as Chanakya and Vishnugupta.

A new English translation of the *Arthashastra* has recently become available.[7] L. N. Rangarajan's translation follows in the trail of R. Shamasastry's and R. P. Kangle's.[8] Shamasastry had discovered the text from a pandit in Tanjore in 1904, translated it into English first and published it in 1915. Kangle later critically edited and numbered the *sutras,* translated them, added his commentary, and published the outcome in three volumes between 1960 and 1965. Rangarajan has attempted a new translation and reorganized the chapters in the original text into what he considers a more reader-friendly version. He goes on to say that 'presently available translations suffer from archaic expressions, voluminous footnotes, incomprehensible literalness, muddling of the text with tedious facts, difficultly in understanding a topic scattered in different places, divergence of opinion and personal prejudices or predilections'.[9]

The subjects dealt with prominently are: constituent elements of the state, major departments of the government, taxation system, armed forces and network of spies and the theory of *rajamandala* and foreign policy. A series of interpretative inferences can be made here. The first would be about the structure of the text itself. As the *Arthashastra* itself candidly admits, the text generally attributed to Kautilya is not the first in the tradition of the *arthashastra,* as distinguished from the tradition of *dharmashastra.* However, only the Kautilyan text has survived and was discovered early in the 20th century. Moreover, even in the case of the Kautilyan version, there are two different points of view as to whether it was 'created' or 'compiled' as a file by a series of scholars at different or the same point of time.[10]

The dating of the *Arthasashtra* is the subject of a great deal of controversy. The range of possible dates places the text at times in the Mauryan and at others in the Gupta period. According to Romila Thapar, the text was originally written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta Maurya (c. 322–298 BC) but it was commented and added on to by various later writers until about the third or fourth century AD.[11] T. R. Trautmann seeks to establish through the syntax and grammatical structures used in different chapters of the text that they must have been

authored by different people and/or in different periods.[12] Kangle, who does not reject this argument out of hand, concedes that 'composition of a text has different connotations in ancient India, with the persistent tradition of oral transmission, from what it means in modern times'.[13]

The Social Structure

We could make some inferences about the structure of the society, economy, and the state that are consistent with the factual details provided in the text. The structure of the society that emerges is one based on the *varnashrama* system. The *varna* system refers to the four orders into which society was ideally divided, and the *ashrama* system refers to the four phases of a life-cycle viz. *brahamcharya* (the celibate learner), *grihasthya* (the house-holder), *vanaspratha* (the anchorite), and *sanyasa* (the renouncer). The society was divided into four *varnas*: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, and Sudras. There were two kinds of Brahmins or the priestly class: *srotriya* and Brahmins in general. The special function of the Brahmins was the performance of ceremonial and sacred rituals. They, especially the *srotriyas,* enjoyed special privilege in social relations, property ownership, and laws. The *srotriyas* ranked next only to the temple establishment, hermits, and heretic ascetics. *Purohita,* the royal chaplain and adviser, enjoyed a position secondary to the royal family but exercised a good deal of influence on the king. In settling virgin territories, *srotriyas* were given tax-free land which could be transformed into hereditary property. Debt to a *srotriya* was treated second only to sovereign debt. Brahmins could bear arms as well but they were not supposed to be overtly martial in temperament and war. Kshatriyas were regarded as the 'protectors of the land'. Nobility of birth and royal lineage were considered matters of overriding importance. Only a male heir could succeed a king, though the rule of primogeniture was not a settled convention. Ksahtriyas were valued as the best recruits to the army as compared to other *varnas*.

Vaishyas as a *varna* are seldom mentioned in the text. But traders and merchants were an important and mobile segment of the society. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were apparently more equal than others, for Vaishyas are singled out in the text in the context of differential punishment. But they were also wealthy, for they feature in the section on laws of inheritance as well. They were apparently so ubiquitous that secret agents often disguised as traders. Sudras were agriculturalists, artisans, craftsmen, and actors and entertainers. A Sudra was also an Aryan and could never be taken as a slave. They, like the Vaishyas, formed a large section of society and usually lived in uninhabited areas. Both Vaishyas and Sudras were also recruited in large numbers in the army. However, Kshatriyas were highly regarded as the best soldiers.

Women were supposed to be always subject to patriarchal control by father, husband, or son. Non-Aryans were outside the pale of the four *varnas*. Their numerical strength is not clear though they were apparently not immune from slavery. The most frequently mentioned non-Aryans are called *chandals* who were probably 'untouchable' in their relation to an Aryan woman. Historians of ancient India are unanimous in their assessment that unlike the ancient Greek society, slavery was almost nonexistent in ancient India. This is borne out by the *Arthashasthra*, which refers to *Vrishalas* and *Pashandas* who were non-Aryan ascetics belonging to the *Sramana* (non-brahmanical) sects.

The *Arthashastra* also refers to the 'unsubdued jungle tribes [who] live in their own territory, [and who] are more numerous, brave, fight in day light and, with their ability to seize and destroy countries, behave like kings' (8.1. 41-43). Rangarajan's surmise is: 'on the whole, tribal chieftains seem to have been independent of the kings so long as they did not harass the country and came to king's help when called upon to do so'.[14] The jungle tribes were obviously outside the pale of the *varna* system at the time of the *Arthashastra.*

Occupations and professions listed in the *Arthashastra* are numerous and it mentions over 120 of these. They were mainly from agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, manufacturing based on arts and crafts, food products and vending, forestry, white-collar workers, defence services, textiles, jewelry, etc.

The Kautilyan text also refers to foreigners (*baharikas, agantuh, agantukah*), although Rangara-jan adds that some of 'these terms may refer to strangers to the locality rather than true foreign-ers'. The text also has three references to ports and ferries (2.28) and sea-faring vessels. Foreign traders could visit these only if they were frequent visitors or vouchsafed by local merchants.

Movements within the country, especially into the countryside and new settlements were regulated by passports and immigration rules. The entry into the fortified city was rigorously controlled by regulator officers and secret agents.

The Economy

The structure of the economy as revealed in the text appears to be considerably developed with regard to terms of ownership of property and division of labour. The institution of private property existed and so did state-ownership. This flies in the face of the Orientalist theories such as, for example, the Asiatic mode of production *a la* Karl Marx and oriental despotism *a la* Karl Wittfogel.[15] Both these theories are premised on the absence of the institution of private property and royal absolutism.

The state claimed ownership of common resources such as water and all residual, abandoned or disputed but unsettled private claims to property. Birds, fishes, vegetables on waterworks, ir-respective of whether built by the state or private parties belonged to the state. The state also appropriated all treasure troves in the excess of l00,000 *panas* (the unit of money, from Sanskrit *parnas*) and 5/6th of smaller troves.

The king is advised to maintain a diversified economy efficiently and profitably. Silver coins of one, half quarter, and one-eighth *pana* and copper coins of one *mashaka,* half a *mashaka,* one *kakani* and half a *kakani* were in circulation. Land, livestock, mining and fishing were all both in state and private ownership. Virgin land tracts were state-owned but arable land was cultivated both by the state and the private parties. However, state monopolies existed in gold, silver and gems, liquors, gambling. The state and local and foreign merchants were involved in trade and commerce. Multiple sources of revenue are indicated in the text: from the *durgam* (fortified towns), from the *rashtram* (the countryside), from *khani* (mines), *setu* (irrigation work), from *ayamukham* (account-ing), from warehouses, saving from expenditure, from *ayudhiyam* (supply of soldiers in lieu of tax barter, confiscation) and so on. The rates of tariff schedules is also given in the text.

One gets the impression from the text that the economy was predominantly agrarian. The crown lands (*sita*) were either cultivated directly under the administration of chief superintendent of crown land or let out to share-croppers at the rate of l/4th or l/5th of the harvest going to the tiller if they invested only on labour and one-half if they contributed all inputs. Private cultivators were under obligation not to keep their land fallow and pay land revenue at the rate of 1/6th of the produce. Animal husbandry was the second most important activity, and trade was 'the third pillar of economic activity'.[16]

The *Saptang* Theory of State

The pre-Kautilyan theory of state in ancient India closely resembled the early states in great many tribal or lineage-based societies where the role of the state was proposed to uphold the *varnashram* laws, i.e., laws of society given by customs and traditions. It is similar in some sense to the early *laissez fair* state in mercantile economies of Europe in the early stages of commercial and industrial revolution, where a minimalist state only facilitated commerce and contract rather than actively intervened in the economy. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* made a significant break with this tradition by stipulating that the state could make its own laws and that in case of conflict between the laws of the *dharmashastras* and the *dharmanaya* of the state, the latter would prevail.[17]

True to the *arthashastra* tradition, the *Arthashastra* does not concern itself so much with the social customs and laws as with secular economic activity and the structure of the state and government. As the *saptang* (seven-organ) theory of state suggests, the state was a corporate entity comprising (1) *swami* (king), (2) *amatya* (ministers and other high officials); (3) *janpada/rashtra* (territory and the population inhabiting these), (4) *durga* (fortified town and cities), (5) *kosa* (treasury), (6) *danda* (forces), and (7) *mitra* (allies). This is in the order of the seven constituents of the state presented in the *Arthashastra.* They are supposed to be organically interdependent and interlinked according to Kautilya. The argument we find here is that earlier authorities cited by Kautilya opinied that a calamity befalling a constituent higher in the order is more detrimental to the state than the lower one, but Kautilya shrewdly disagrees and ends up arguing that each element is equally important and indispensable. But, he admits reminiscent of ancient Greek teleologists and modern functionalists, 'that partial calamity of one element is more likely to be functionally substituted by more healthy elements than a simultaneously debilitating calamity affecting more than one part of the state.' But '[lastly,] a calamity which threatens to destroy all other elements shall be considered as [the most] serious, irrespective of what position the element affected occupies in the list of priorities' (*Arthashastra,* 8.1.63/Rangarajan, 1992:127).[18]

Departments of Government

Agriculture appears to be the most important economic activity of the time, and yet other economic activities were also considerably developed. In verse 2.12.37 the *Arthashastra* says:

'The source of the financial strength of the state is the mining [and metallurgical] industry; the state exercises power because of its treasury. With [increased] wealth and a [powerful] army more territory can be acquired thereby further increasing the wealth of the state'.[19] The Kautilyan state demonstrated a considerably high degree of functional specialization and structural differentiation. It mentions 34 different departments of government, their respective *adhyakshas* (heads) and their qualifications and duties. They are as follows as per Rangarajan's (1992) summary:

1. *Samahartri/Samnidhatri*—Chief Controller of Accounts
2. *Akshapatalamadhyaksha*/Nagavanadhyaksha—Chief Elephant Forester
3. *Koshadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Treasury
4. *Akaradhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Mining and Metallurgy
5. *Lohadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Metals
6. *Lakshanadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Mint
7. *Khanadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Mines
8. *Lavanadhyaksha*—Chief Salt Commissioner
9. *Suvarnadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Precious Metals and Jewellery
10. *Kostagaradhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Warehouses
11. *Panyadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of State Trading
12. *Kupyadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Forest Produce
13. *Ayudhgharadhyaksha*—Chief of Ordinance
14. *Pauthavadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Weight and Measures
15. *Manadhyaksha*– Chief Surveyor and Time Keeper
16. *Sulkadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Custom and Octroi
17. *Sutradhyaksha*—Chief Textile Commissioner
18. *Sitadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent Crown Lands
19. *Suradhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Alcoholic Beverages
20. *Sunadhyaksha*—Chief Protector of Animals and Controller of Animal Slaughter
21. *Ganikadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Entertainment
22. *Navadhyaksha*—Chief of Shipping
23. *Pattanadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Ports and Harbours
24. *Go-adhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Crown Herds
25. *Ashwadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Cavalry
26. *Hastyadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Elephant Corps
27. *Rathadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Chariot Corps
28. *Pattadhyaksha*—Chief Commander of Infantry
29. *Mudradhyaksha*—Chief Passport Officer
30. *Vivit Adhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Pasture Lands
31. *Dhyutadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Gambling Superintendent
32. *Samsthadhyaksha*—Chief Controller of Private Trade

33. *Bandanagradhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Jails
34. *Devtadhyaksha*—Chief Superintendent of Temples

These were the top echelons of the ministerial or administrative hierarchies of the central state. The distinction between the two categories, ministers and officials, is not very clear in the text, nor is the division between the central and provincial administration self-evident. The only vertical administrative hierarchies clearly mentioned appear to be those for the village and city/town level, including fortified cities. The administrative structure outlined above is by and large horizontal; the vertical chain of command and responsibilities is mostly left unarticulated. Only in few instances do the readers get a glimpse of explicit or implied hierarchical control, supervision, and coordination. However Rangarajan (1992: 308) makes bold to assert: '[T]here were at least two grades of ministers and head of the departments, apart from the councilors who need not have had direct administrative responsibilities. … Kautilya says that one who fails all four tests (*dharma, artha, karma* and fear) shall be sent to difficult posts such as forests, mines or factories. Hence the salary of the head of the department could have been anywhere between 1000 to 12,000 panas per annum, with or without perquisites'. Romila Thapar reads into the Kautilyan text the reference to ministers as well as council of ministers ('*mantrino-mantriparishadamcha*')[20].

It goes without saying that the monarch himself occupied the apex of ministerial and/or bureaucratic hierarchy(ies). But it would have been an incredible task of supervision and coordination of policy making and coordination for one sitting at the hub of such a huge and sprawling state structure. It is the simultaneous presences of the institution of private property along with royal ownership, some implied autonomy of the *janapada/rashtra* from the state, and the differentiation between the state and the kingship within it that clearly demarcates the political system of the *Arthashastra,* on the one hand, from Marx's theory of the 'Asiatic mode of production' and Karl Wittfogels 'oriental despotism', on the other.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that, besides the huge bureaucratic apparatus, the Kautilyan blueprint of the state also outlines large armed forces and espionage. This is probably inevitable for a structure envisaged for the victor. As per their understanding of the evolution of state in ancient India, historians visualize the lines of development such as from *gopati* (owner of livestock) to *bhupati* (owner of land), from *janapada* to *mahajanapada, ganasanghas* ('republics') to the monarchies.[21] In the opinion of Burton Stein, 'these so called 'republics' are far better viewed as social 'communities *as* states' '.[22] 'In some reckonings, they existed from about 800 CE to the time of Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, conventionally ascribed to the fourth century CE. As clan-based polities, 'republics' have been identified from Pali sources to early Buddhism and from Jaina texts. Other source such as the *Mahabharata,* the *Arthashastra,* and Panini's *'Asthtadhyayi,* add to this evidence and also shift the ground of investigation from northwestern to northeastern India during the sixth to fourth centuries CE'.[23] As already hinted above, the *Arthashastra* appears to be the most crucial text mirroring the above transition. Even though it could be used as a manual of statecraft by any king, it was primarily meant for the *vijigsu* (the one desirous of conquering the entire Indian

subcontinent). Such a king was described in later Buddhist texts as the *chakravarti.*[24] The early Indian lexicographical source *Amarakosha* (a text apparently post-dating the *Arthashastra* to perhaps sometime around the Gupta period) defines the *chakravarti* as follows:

> *Raja tu pranatosheshasamantah syadadhiswarah.*
> *Chakravarti sarvabhaumo nriponyo mandaleshwarah (8.2).*

(The *Chakravarti* king owns all the lands and is the master of the *mandala*.)

A Centralized State?

What is the extent of political centralization evident in the *Arthashastra*? Some may argue that centralization was greatly enhanced by giving considerable powers to the monarch and the officials. Centralization of state power is implied also in the very fact that the Kautilyan text departed from the society-focused *dharmashastra* tradition to join the state-focused *arthashastra* tradition emphasizing *raja dharma* (discussed in the following section). The same statist bias is reflected in the conquest-motivated and anti-'republican' temper of the *rajamandala,* the large extent of state-monopoly in some cultural and economic activities and regulatory role of state in the rest of the economy, the state-directed settlement of virgin tracts of land and immigration rules, and a huge network of spies. At the same time, however, lack of a tight centralization in the state may be argued on the basis of the limits of human ability on the part of the monarch to work such a bureaucratic apparatus, the fairly elementary and commonsensical nature of some of the exhortations, the rather pre-capitalist monetization and pre-modern technological development, and the lack of articulation of horizontal and vertical organizational control in the bureaucratic structure having multiple levels.

An analysis of Rangarajan's English translation of the *Arthashastra,* commentaries on the political thought of Kautilya, and the historiography of the Mauryan state suggest that arguably three different interpretations have been made and are possible. These are textualist, nationalist, and Marxist. In the literature previously available, textual scholars or Indologists either downplay the centralist interpretation,[25] or vigorously refute it.[26] Kangle refers to H. Jacobis's comparison of Kautilya with Bismarck, but refutes it citing A. Hillebrandt by arguing that 'the comparison was unfair' as one was a teacher and the other a statesman; besides, 'the whole spiritual atmosphere in which the two moved was different'.[27]

One could still make a comparison at the level of ideas, history, and politics, but being Indologists and ideographs Kangle and his company obviously do not believe in such abstract comparative exercise. But, then, Kangle slips into a more detailed treatment of the comparison between Kautilya and Machiavelli. Citing approvingly W. Ruben's comparison between the two, Kangle concurs that 'the standpoint of both is that of 'realpolitik' ', yet both the political thinkers add that the ruler must be simultaneously 'self-restrained and active' (that is, not fatalistic).[28] Heesterman makes the most unequivocal and sustained argument against the centralist/bureaucratic interpretation of the *Arthashastra.* He argues that the objective of the text may well

have been to break the mould of tribal political organizations and give them a bureaucratic form and purpose, but it has not really succeeded in this enterprise.[29] To quote Heesterman:

> Thus a second book deals at considerable length with a long list of administrative departments but significantly leaves out the important point of how these departments tie in with each other and with the whole of the administrative machinery. Specifically, the text leaves its student in the dark about who is responsible to whom. Delegation, chains of command, and reporting are conspicuous by their absence. It is even possible to be in doubt as to whether the important official called *samahartr[i]* is a provincial 'collector' or the chief administrative officer of the state as a whole in the manner of a [medieval Indian] divan.

The second major strand in Heesterman's argument is that the procedure and the occasion of the auditing of accounts presented by the *mahamatras* and its approval, by penalty-enforced unanimity, without the presence of the monarch smacks of a social and religious moment than a bureaucratically and rationally meaningful process subject to royal veto. The *mahamatras* are thus shown to be co sharers of authority with the king who is 'no more than a primus inter pares'.[30] [First among equals.]

Historian R. S. Sharma takes up cudgels with Heesterman but the latter's argument is not without chinks:

> When Kautilya provides for several heads of a department, he is not really concerned with ensuring equality of peers, which is a feature more of the kin-based society, but with preventing them from being detrimental to the state. Kautilya faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he wants the work to be done, for which he provides that departmental heads should not quarrel. On the other, he wants that these heads should not act in concert, as they may grab the income from the undertaking.[31]

The nationalist interpretation of the *Arthashastra* appeared keen to show to the colonial masters that the ancient Indian/Hindu text was enough to disprove the contention that India lacked a tradition of political thought. They were also inclined to highlight any textual or historical evidence of popular democratic, republican, and federal political ideas, institution, and values in the antiquities.[32]

V. R. R. Dikshitar was at pains to argue, not always very convincingly, that the Mauryan state was 'federal', 'not unitary', 'roughly a composite of federal states', although he conceded that it was 'an intricate task to set forth the substantial relations which existed between the imperial government and each of the provinces or states now united in the empire as its member'.[33] He approvingly cited S. K. Aiyangars's view that

> Empires in India under the Hindus attempted to be no more than kingdoms, of a small compass comparatively, which gathered together under the aegis of the leading state, which

went by the name of imperial state for the time being, other kingdoms constituting merely an expanding *mandala* in political dependence. The administration that had to be carried on by the imperial state was a comparatively simple one, as by a well-established principle of devolution, most of the actual administration was carried on by local bodies for comparatively small states ….[34]

We may clarify here that the devolutionary interpretation of Aiyangar (a parallel, for example, would be the Mughal *subas*) appears to be more persuasive than the federal one offered by Dikshitar, (something like the states in the USA).

The Marxist interpretation is, frankly speaking, more historiographical than textual and nationalist. Their interpretation is swayed by two additional factors: archeological, and the historiography of European feudalism. Being primarily historians, they are compelled by their craft to study a text in the context of, or in combination with, archeological effects: while this is methodologically more sophisticated, it tends to rob the text of its autonomy and its timelessness. Besides, the historiography of European feudalism prompts them to discover a parallel of the Roman Empire in India in the Mauryan state in Magadha. Just as the decline of the centralized competence of the later Roman Empire led to the subsequent rise of feudalism, similarly, the feudal historiography of Indian history needs a centralized Mauryan state whose decline caused feudal fragmentation and compartmentalization of state sovereignty from the emperor to the Brahmans and *samantas*.[35]

R. S. Sharma and Romila Thapar theorize that the Vedic political organizations were pre-state social formations, and proto-states or states in Indian history first materialized in the post-Vedic period when the primary egalitarian ethos of the tribal society in the mid-Ganga valley gave way to the class-stratified society in which monarchy and aristocratic oligarchy and coercion were needed for the perpetuation of inequalities of property. First the Nandas and subsequently the Mauryas in Magadh founded the first large-scale states. Sharma finds emphatic passages in the *Arthashastra* that prescribe 'the unquestioned loyalty of the officials to the head of the state', primacy of a 'royal decree based on the customs of the people (*dharmanyaya*)' over the '*shastra* (the brahmanical law book)' whenever the two come into conflict, appointment of candidates as *amatya* who are discovered by conducting secret tests (unknown to them) owing 'primary allegiance to the king, even in violation of prevalent religious practices laid down by the brahmanical religion, which [e.g.] does not permit the teaching of the Veda to one who is not entitled to the performance of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajya*)', and 'the state control of even brahmanical institutions'.[36]

Romila Thapar also interprets that the *Arthashastra* 'endorsed a highly centralized system where the king's control over the entire exercise remained taut'. However, she argues that it would not have been humanly possible to exercise control over such a vast and diverse territory, economy, and population as that of the Mauryan Empire. Accordingly, she speculates that there must have been 'three variants in the administrative pattern': (a) a centralized one in the 'metropolitan hub' (b) a devolutionary one in 'core areas' of 'strategic importance and of agrarian and commercial potential', and (c) a decentralized one in 'the peripheral areas.[37] R. S. Sharma concedes that it

is not clear whether the over 30 superintendents of Book II of the *Arthashastra* worked in 'the hinterland of the capital or in a wider area', but does not find a wider administrative network improbable if the text is put in the context of nearly 500 excavated sites showing shreds of Northern Black Published Ware (NBPW) at Mauryan levels and nearly 30 sites showing NBPW as well as punch-marked coins carrying similar symbols giving 'clear indications of supralocal provenance'. These archeological effects 'presuppose constant contact between the various town settlements' 'in the middle Gangetic plains and its periphery'.[38]

The Theory of *Rajamandala* (The Circle of States)

Kautilya formulated a detailed theory of foreign policy and inter-state relations based on the maxim that a friend's friend is likely to be a friend and an enemy's friend an enemy. He laid down six basic principles of foreign policy, viz,

1. pursuit of resources by the *vijigsu* (the one desirous of conquest) for campaigns of victory
2. elimination of enemies
3. cultivation of allies and providing help to them
4. prudence rather than foolhardy valour
5. preference of peace to war
6. justice in victory as well as in defeat

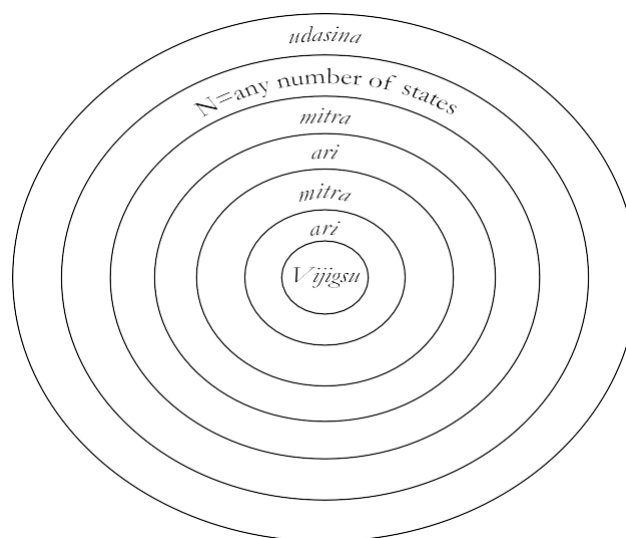   The theory of inter-state relations in the *Arthsashtra* can be represented in a diagram as seen below.

Fig. 1.1 A Rajamandala

The circle of states keeps expanding to include the 'middle kingdoms' of enemies until the distant states that may turn indifferent (*udasina*) to goings on in the circle relevant to the victor at the centre of the *rajamandala.*

We have already noted the novelty of the *Arthashastra* in treating statecraft as one that sought to recognize the state as the source of positive law, independent of social custom and tradition, and with a basis of authority and legitimacy that went beyond an ethnic or orthodox sectarian communalism. The theory of *rajamandala*, sketched out as a Weberian ideal type rather than as a historical case study of a particular state, draws attention to its other robust originality in the Indian tradition. It differs from the earlier brahmanical writings and texts dealing with social contract theories of origin of states.[39] It aims rather at laying down the function and structure of an inter-state subsystem of the cultural and civilizational zone of the ancient Indian subcontinent, now called the South Asia.[40] In the sound historical judgment of Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund:[41]

> In ancient Indian history, the period which corresponds most closely to Kautilya's description is that of the *mahajanapadas* before Magadha attained supremacy. Thus it seems more likely that Kautilya related in normative terms what he had come to know about this earlier period than that his account actually reflected the Mauryan empire during Chandragupta's reign.

(Note that Kulke and Rothermund date Kautilya to the pre-Mauryan period, differing from most Indian historians.)

The word 'foreign policy' thus used by Rangarajan (1992: chapter x-2) in the context of the *rajamandala* theory is not exactly apt for a fluid inter-state subsystem within the larger inter-state system—going beyond the range of the Indian subcontinent. At the center of this political network was the political system ruled by the *vijigsu* (the victor or rather one desirous of victory). It was most probably positioned as the state with pretentions of political sovereignty. Relations with the kings who formed the concentric wider circles were based on the major premise that the immediate neighbour, more likely than not, may have reasons or pretentions of being the enemy *(ari)* of the victor while the neighbour of the neighbour could be a friendly king *(mitra).* Exceptions to this rule are admitted all along as a minor premise. Thus a middle king *(madhyama)* in any of these circles could turn out to be an ally or an enemy and intervene on the side of the victor by supporting him or decide to be neutral *(udasina)* or an enemy *(ari).* The policy of the victor should, of course, be to turn as many of the kings as possible into allies or take neutral positions.

Logically, I may add here, there could be a king/state in the non-internationalized or non-globalised world of that period, who/which could be totally disinterested or unaware of the kingpin of the *rajamandala* of the Indian subcontinent. The objective of the victor would or should be propelled by the motive of the prosperity (*artha*) of the ruler, and the king ruled within the teleology of the text. The closest concept to the Greek teleology in the *Arthashastra*, to my mind, could be said to be the *purushartha* of the king as well as his subjects. The term *purushartha* in the ancient Indian texts means the four-fold purpose of life, society and state comprising *dharma* (law), *artha*

(material well-being), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (salvation). In the *Arthashastra,* however, the last element seems not to be emphasized.

The victor of the centre of the *rajamandala* could use the domestic resources of his state and its allies in pursuit of his conquest. Using the seven factors of power, 'the qualities of the king, then that of his ministers, his provinces, his city, his treasury, his army and last but not the least, his allies'.[42]

I am inclined to agree with the centrist interpretation of the text. V. R. Dikshitar[43] finds in the Sanskrit text of the *Arthashastra* that besides the primary *rajamandala* of the conqueror, in the circle of the adversary kings (i.e., 'the *madhyama* king's circle of states and *udasina* king's circle of states') besides the seven elements of sovereignty, every competitive state possessed two additional emergent factors out of the seven-fold combination: consummation (*sidhi*) and the transcendental power (*shakti*). Dikshitar goes on to state 'that monarch who is possessed of these elements and the means above mentioned becomes the overlord of not only his *mandala* but of the whole of the *mahamandla* through further exertion of his power (*shakti*)'.[44]

The strategy of the victor is contingent on four factors: (a) relative power equation among the victors, (b) objective or empirical deviations from the ideal policy prescribed, (c) classification of the motivations of the actors involved, and (d) the unanticipated and unpredictable or chance factors. The power in such a fluid structural and motivational context is not a constant quality. To quote from the text: 'One should neither submit spinelessly nor sacrifice oneself in a foolhardy valour. It is better to adopt such policies as would enable one to survive and live to fight another day'.[45]

There is a parallel between the theories of *saptang* state and *rajamandala* of Kautilya in the modern neo-realist or structural-realist theory of international relations formulated by Kenneth N. Waltz.[46] Waltz earlier postulated three levels of international politics, namely, the level where state behaviour is explained in terms of action and psychological motivations of individual functionaries of state, the level where international relations are shown to be a function of the domestic regime of state, and the level where international anarchy bereft of a sovereign power makes inter-state relations to be caused and conditioned by the structure of world politics, whether multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar.

The history of political ideas regarding states in ancient India also shows a similar line of evolution: the ideal kings Rama and Yudhishtir in the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata culminate into the theory of *saptang* state and *rajamandala* in *Arthashastra.*

The continuing relevance of Kautilyan models is underlined by my comparison between Kautilya and Waltz above. This is further underlined by texts like the *Kamandaka Nitisar*, separated almost by a millennium from the *Arthashastra* and discovered probably in East Asia.[47] It draws heavily on the previous text and in the opinion of Kulke and Rothermund[48]: 'The relevance of the *Arthashastra* for medieval Indian polity is that the coexistence of various smaller rivaling kingdoms was much more typical for most periods of Indian history than the rather exceptional phase when one great empire completely dominated the political scene'.[49] Read with Dikshitar (1932), the theory of *rajamandala* may have a universal applicability.

Conclusion

A glance at the wider corpus of the textual tradition of ancient India from the evolutionary perspective would suggest an interesting line of development that seems to be along these lines: We see the philosophical and social visions of Vedic, Jain, and Buddhist thought ranging from monism to dualism to pluralism, on the one side, and concern with the theoretical and practical problems of the political community that gradually transited from tribal republican and confederal states to monarchical bureaucratic states of the Nandas and Mauryas of Magadha, on the other. Subsequently, after its decline there emerge the states of later and ancient and early medieval Indian history, first characterized by Marxist historians of India as feudal, a view more generally accepted later. To which phase of this evolutionary—I hesitate to use the word historical here—narrative could the Kautilyan *Arthashastra* have belonged? The most probable phase would appear to be the period of the replacement of the Magadhan state of the Nandas by the Magadhan state of the Mauryas. We lack clinching literary, historical and/or archaeological evidence for this inference. Yet as a student of political ideas and institutions, I find it more consistent with the legend, literature and historical interpretation now prevalent. It could not have belonged to an earlier period when Vedic and post-Vedic poetic and metaphysical speculations were profound but political ideas and institutions were singularly simpler, localized, and less clearly demarcated from social formations and organizations. Like the 'frontier' in American and Canadian history, there have also and always been frontiers of the Himalayas and the *aranyas* (forests) of mind and space in Indian life, letters, and imagination. The *Arthashastra* could not have belonged to a period later than that suggested by the great political transition from the Nandas to the Mauryas too. The *Arthashastra* sits uncomfortably with the temper and texts of the post-Mauryan phase, when the forms of states, with the possible exception of the Gupta state, were less bureaucratically centralized.[50] The weakened central state(s) then took frequent recourse to land grants to Brahmins (presumably for ideological domination) and *samantas* (feudal lords), a practice not unknown earlier, but very limited and infrequent. This resulted in fragmentation of sovereignty to feudal classes and communities, especially in peripheral areas. This continued through the early and later medieval Indian history[51] and in an attenuated and regionally limited way even during the British Raj.

A frontal attack on feudal institutions and mentality had to await the social reform movements of the elite and the subaltern classes and communities at the turn of the 19th century, and post-independence land reforms and the 'silent revolution' of the political rise of the lower classes, dalits and the tribal communities through electoral politics and public policies of the state in India.

As for the centralist versus decentralist debate over the *Arthashastra*, the protagonists of the former point of view can be said to be, speaking metaphorically, silently subscribing to the subsuming of Kautilya to the Ksahtriya's possessive motif, and the latter to the brahmanical renunciatory motif. I find it more persuasive to agree with those who argue that rather than being an incumbent prime minister, Kautilya may have been a kingmaker in the Gandhi–JP tradition of politics of renunciation in democratic India, and Sonia Gandhi emulating the same in federal India today. The freedom with which the *Arthashastra* offers advice to all kinds of kings, strong

and weak, lend it an authority or legitimization that is wider and detached from any *purohit* and the prime minister in office, the two functionaries that are stipulated by the Sanskrit text to be present by the sides of the monarch at the time of consultation with any minister. None of the Pali royal edicts of Ashokan rock and pillar inscriptions mention these super-ordinates, apparently next only to the king.[52] But do not pay too much heed to that. Authority and legitimation in the brahmanical tradition is more ideological than coercive any way.

Finally, while the general consensus among scholars has been that the theory of *rajamandala* is situated in the Indian subcontinent, yet a wider applicability of the model beyond this region may not be far-fetched. Dikshitar[53] in fact finds theoretical evidence for it right in the text. In the present age of democratization, federalization and globalization, the theory of *rajamandala* has the potential of being transplanted into what may be called *'vayaparamandala',* both regional and global.

Notes and References

1. The terms 'Orientalism' and 'Indology' are of Western origin and are used to refer first to Westerners, and subsequently to Indians as well, specializing in Eastern and Indian/South Asian cultures respectively. Orientalism, of late, has been roundly decried as a misrepresentation and a veiled attempt to colonize and dominate the Eastern societies and cultures. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
2. See, for example, K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*: *A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times* (Calcutta: Butterworth, 1924); A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1958, [1949]).
3. Surendra Nath Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, five volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).
4. Even S. Radhakrishnan sees Indian philosophy through metaphysical lenses. See his *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; first published 1923, revised 1929.
5. See Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Language and Reality: Indian Philosophy and Contemporary Issues* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1990, 2nd ed., first published 1985); *Perception*: *An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
6. See, for example, the works of R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and others cited below. Other scholars in this regard are B. N. S. Yadav, D. N. Jha and Vivekanand Jha, among others.
7. L. N. Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992).
8. R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra* (Bombay: Bombay University Press, 1965), three vols; *Kautilya Arthashastra* (Sanskrit Text, English translation, Introduction), Translated by R. Shamasastry, edited by V. Narayan (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratisthan, 2005), 2 vols.
9. Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra,* p. 27.
10. S. C. Mishra, *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Inscriptional Approach,* Foreword by R. S. Sharma (Delhi: Anamika, 1997). Mishra argues:

   'The final emendation of the text seems to have been done around the 12th century AD. The inscriptions from the 9th to 12th centuries assume importance as they have incorporated some very significant terms of our text in large numbers. The epigraphs of this time-bracket not only give the continual echoes of the

designations and officers of the functionaries of the *Arthashastra* but also numerous references to *adhyaksap-racara,* the very title of Book II in our text. Book II of the *Arthashastra* appears to have come down to us as a result of some kind of overhauling, reshuffling and/or recasting during this time-bracket, and the aggregate of the chapters has derived the name of *adhyaksapracara'* (p. 209–10).

Sharma in his Foreword finds 'many of the findings of the author acceptable' and hopes a scholarly debate may lead to some rethinking of some long-held inferences of other scholars.'

11. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, rev. ed.), pp. 218–225.
12. T. R. Trautmann, 'The Structure and Composition of the Kautilya Arthashastra', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1968, cited in Rangarajan, *Kautilya Arthashastra,* pp. 19–20. See also S. C. Mishra (1997), *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra.*
13. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, 1965, part III, p. 104.
14. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra*, p. 53.
15. The idea/concept of 'oriental despotism' has a long lineage going back to Aristotle and Montesquieu. Karl Wittfogel developed it further, linking it to the concept of 'hydraulic' civilizations/societies as the structural basis of 'total power' by dint of control over water resources for population and irrigation managed by an agrarian bureaucracy. Marx and Engels also fell into this misconstrued Orientalist conceptual trap by postulating a specific mode of production in Europe, i.e., feudalism. In the Asian context, they thought, Asiatic mode of production (AMP) rather than feudal mode of production reigned supreme. In their imagination the Asiatic climatic and geographical conditions, coupled with the absence of private property and stagnant peasant production and craftsmanship, created atomistic village communities at the base and the despotic state at the top. See Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (1957). Even Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) is not completely free of Orientalist biases. These Orientalist distortions stand refuted by D. D. Kosambi and other Indian historians. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Asoka's edicts are the self-evident textual and archeological refutation of both oriental despotism and Asiatic mode of production.
16. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra,* p. 86.
17. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas.*
18. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthashastra,* 8.1.63, p. 127.
19. Ibid., p. 304.
20. Romila Thapar *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), ch. IV, p. 98.
21. R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 3rd rev. ed.), chaps. xIV, xxII. See also his *India's Ancient Past* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), chaps. 12, 13, 15 and 16.
22. Burton Stein, *A History of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 22.
23. Ibid.
24. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), p. 8.
25. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra.*
26. J. C. Heesterman: *The Inner ConÁict of Tradition: 5ssays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (*New* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).
27. Kangle (1965), *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, p. 269.
28. Ibid., p. 270.
29. Heesterman (1985), *The Inner ConÁict of Tradition,* chapters 1 and 9.

30. Ibid., 133.

31. R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (1991), p. 393.

32. K. P. Jayaswal (1924); V. R. R. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932, reprint 1993).

33. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), p. 78.

34. Quoted in Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), p. 77.

35. For illuminating discovery of feudalism in Indian history and the pioneering contribution to this interpretation, see the nine papers published together under the caption 'D. D. Kosambi: The Man and His Work', guest-edited by Romila Thapar in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xLIII, No. 30, July 26–August 1, 2008: 34–108. For an excellent review of the feudal school of historiography and a few dissenting, voices, see Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000–1700* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially the Introduction by Kulke and Harbans Mukhia 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?'

36. Sharma (1991), *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 263–4.

37. Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 195–7.

38. Sharma, 1991, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 399–400.

39. Ibid: Chapter V.

40. See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Kosambi and the Discourse of Civilization', *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 31 July 2008, p. 9.

41. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1991), p. 63.

42. Ibid., p. 63.

43. Dikshitar, 1992, *The Mauryan Polity,* pp. 74–77

44. Ibid.

45. Rangarajan, *Arthashastra* (1992), 7.15.13–20,12.1.1–9, p. 543–544.

46. For works of a leading Neo-realist theorist, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); and Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz (eds), *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003). Waltz thinks that more nuclear powers may be good for international peace due to deterrence, while Sagan is a non-proliferationist as new nuclear-weapons-states are more likely than not to lack organizational and political ability. Ironically, two modern works of geopolitical nature K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (Mumbai: Somaiya, Special Indian edition, 1999, first published 1953; and Sanjay B Chaturvedi 'Representing Post-Colonial India: Inclusive, Exclusive Geopolitical Imaginations', in Klaus Dodds and David Alkinson (eds), *Geographical Traditions: A Century of Geographical Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000) pass *Kautilya's Arthshastra* by without even a nod!

47. J. R. Mitra (ed.), *Kamaandakiya Nitisara* (Calcutta, 1984).

48. Kulke and Rothermund (1991), *A History of India*, p. 63.

49. Ibid.

50. Kulke and Rothermund, *A History of India* (1991). In a passage quoted in the text above (note 34) discount this probability, but their argument is as speculative as ours here. So it is their word against ours, without any positive historical evidence.

51. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and the structure of Polity in Early Medieval India', and M. Athar Ali, 'Towards an Interpretation of the Mughal Empire', both in Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India* (1995).

52. Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997), p. 96.

53. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (1932), chap. II.