

Kautilya's Views on Espionage and its Current Relevance

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Abstract

Kautilya's *The Arthashastra* is considered one of the finest political and war discourses ever written in prose form. Dating back to the 4th century, it contains a whole plethora of views on espionage elements carefully embedded in them. Kautilya, is often referred to as the modern-day economist of his times. Having belonged to one of the oldest Indian civilizations, he has spelt out clear principles for espionage and stressed the importance of spies in securing the livelihood of about six billion global citizens living across the world. The espionage discourse is filled with courage, dedication and commitment. And is also equally watered down with anxiety and unparalleled justice toward a greater cause. Kautilya is a realist and a naturalist in his approach and his discourses often contain animal analogies. This paper attempts to study the aspects on espionage laid down by Kautilya and fundamentally tries to address the modern day issues like containing terrorism, securing country's borders and ultimately guaranteeing security of an individual.

Keywords: Kautilya, The Arthashastra, espionage, spies and security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent unparalleled growth of ISIS terrorism and the shootouts across Europe is due to the growth in religious fanaticism. At what point of time does an act of religious intolerance become a noble deed? Well, at most times, innocent lives have been lost and quite often for the fault of not their own at all.

The year is 2015 and the wars fought across the globe does not necessarily limit itself to be occurring due to the conventional reasons but has been changing its character in every possible way known and unknown to the mankind.

We need a stronger base of spying system in order to cut the head of the viper before it had a chance to strike. In this case, the brute force of terrorism that should be given the complete focus which needs to be eradicated.

It has become harder for the security forces of individual nations to combat the scourge of terrorism for the safety of their people. Kautilya has spoken millenniums ago about the role of the state to establish a strong spy network to secure its citizens.

Kautilya (370 – 283 B.C.) is considered ruthless in his teaching and writings. His primary focus always centered toward achieving many objectives and in this very case on espionage strategy and the importance of the role of spies.

The Arthashastra's Book 1, Chapters 11 & 13 deal with the art and importance of espionage strategy. It has a significant pull over convictions than preferences in his objective writings. This helps the reader realize that preferences are negotiable and convictions are not. And under sheer pressure, preferences tend to become weak and convictions gathers significant strength. So was the impact of his teaching that we need to submit our complete attention.

The role of spies and their mental self in the modern day world talk on exact opposites. The rewards could be followed with punishments, morality to be encapsulated with immorality and honesty accompanied by dishonesty. And human actions are justified with rational chances that are presented to them and not necessarily in the form of choices.

"He suggests using spies and operatives who are either religious leaders or disguised as such or part of such institutions that most closely match the beliefs and habits of these discontent citizens".

- Sunny Singh, *Blogging the Arthashastra*.

The espionage strategy laid out by Kautilya is extensively dealt not only in literal terms but in principle is figurative about managing conflicts and winning battles. And Kautilya has in many ways realized the importance of spies in a conflict scenario.

It completely minimizes the human casualties and on economic fronts it clearly remarks sustainable management of resources. The focal point of contention is heavily rested upon many facets of human action and behavior. And it becomes imminent to decode those actions involving human emotions and therefore psychoanalytical introspection becomes mandatory.

The works significantly portray values and habits. In the world of espionage Kautilya deals quite extensively on anger, greed, fear, affection and flattery. Although, most aspects are ruthless in their nature, Kautilya is crystal clear in military principles that his treatise is for strategic and tactical gains and hence important values such as morality and honesty do not gain prominence.

2. REALIST

Kautilya, Chief Minister to the Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta Maurya is perhaps considered one of the first realists in the world of political discourses. He attributes a whole plethora of human activities through the use of animal analogies. In modern parlance we could attribute it to a psychoanalytical term called “mind games”. Kautilya quotes,

“Angry ruler is like an angry snake”
- (13:1:14-16)

Kautilya stresses here on the emotion of anger. This in reference denotes the role of spies who belong to the enemy state. He argues that in order to win an enemy, one needs to convince him that his/her ruler is like a snake and will bite in their pathways. This therefore would enable the enemy to disown his native state and defect to the other.

Kautilya also refers to the phrase:

“Maddened Elephant”
- (13:1:14-16)

He stresses on the importance of rights and freedom to be ascribed to a citizen. When the citizen’s rights and freedom are questioned, the spies should convince the citizens that their ruler has become a maddened elephant and that their rights and freedom are uncontrollably trampled. This would necessarily put the onus on the part of the victimized citizen to take rational decisions.

Kautilya refers to

“Demonstrating Omniscience”
-(13.1.2)

In psychological warfare, to which Kautilya attaches utmost importance, he stresses on the aspect of “demonstrating omniscience”. To Kautilya, the king’s subjects in his court should be made aware that the king is omniscient.

To this effect, he adds that this would project that the king is being well informed. When in reality, it is the role of spies to bring forth information on king’s subjects and important facts from foreign lands. We find when king is showcased in the limelight; the spies do the homework in the background.

The real strategy to be devised is a psychological war. In modern parlance, we refer to “proxy wars”. The idea is to subdue the enemy that a war is in progress; but in stark reality the enemy is deceived into the trap. The mind-set of the enemy is thus tricked.

He also stresses on the importance of foreknowledge for a spy to succeed against a disastrous act by stopping it from happening in the first place. Ultimately, human intelligence is very carefully constructed through extensive planning.

Intelligence Gathering Capabilities (IGC) by far, can be collated only through human endeavors. And to minimize the casualties and thereby forbid a disaster altogether, spying become the focal point of the nerve center of a strategy for combating terrorism.

3. KAUTILYA’S THE GAME OF CHESS

The game of chess, which is traditionally a fight between two team members armed with equal strength. The winning depends on either of the kings being checkmated or stalemated. War strategists and experts have long debated the extent of employing strategies in a war scenario to capture a territory or regain a lost one.

Kautilya’s treatise clearly speaks extensively about the need for a stronger system of espionage network rooted strongly like witnessed on the game of chess. But it packs a punch with a strong note that in order for the king to be protected, every chance has to be taken secretly and in disguise.

Kautilya’s treatise deals with the art of out winning the enemy without even entering the fort. Luring the enemy out of the fort is the trick to which he lays his significance. The game of chess, though tries to corner the king, refers to him directly as an object of defeat in order to win it.

4. CLASSIFICATION OF SPIES: PSYCHOLOGICAL INFERENCE:

Kautilya strongly believes in propaganda to be not only used for political discourses but chiefly also to employ and recruit spies for the kingdom.

He preaches thus:

“Soothsayers, readers of omens, astrologers, reciters of Puranas, intuitionists, clandestine agents, those who helped the king perform the tricks and those who had witnessed them shall

advertise them inside his own territory”.

(13.1.1-3).

The chief duty of these various people could be utilized for the spread of propaganda. To add colour to the palate of propaganda, Kautilya employs “divine intervention” tactic to have led the local communities to believe something good or bad has happened. Demonstrating association with Gods becomes the root cause for high propaganda.

Kautilya quotes,

“The conqueror shall make gullible people believe that he is in direct contact with Gods by various tricks.”

[(13.1.3-6) In IX.iv]

Natural disasters, passage of comets or asteroids in the sky are attributed to bad and good situations respectively. The analogy is directed toward people through the assigned artisans by the King. And once when a foreign land is conquered, the same technique could be employed to win the support of his new citizens. Super natural situations and black magic tricks are given huge impetus in this regard and carry significant weightage.

In chapter XI, Kautilya talks about the duties of a ‘raksha’ (spy). One of most important duties is toward the protection of the state. He also mentions four kinds of wars.

- a.) Mantrayuddha (War by Counsel/Diplomacy)
- b.) Prakasayuddha (Open War – Specific Time and Place)
- c.) Kutayuddha (Concealed Warfare. ‘Upajapa’ – Psychological Warfare)
- d.) Gudayuddha (Clandestine War)

Among the kinds of Wars he has mentioned, ‘Gudayuddha’ (Clandestine war) is given the priority. Because of the sole reason that it is kind of a war that is fought or waged against an enemy without actually waging a battle.

Kautilya also articulated on the use of ‘vyanjana’ (Occupational Cover). And these clandestine agents are to be spread everywhere. He also emphasized about the extra legal protection given to these agents in order to provide a sense of security to them.

According to Kautilya, these agents are key to one’s state because they could be called on to serve for precise use in different situations. The same tactics also apply today among many countries’ clandestine services. The agents are spread using covers such as a scientist, doctor or a layman.

Kautilya has specially created a hierarchy for covert agents to be placed in the organizational structure of the kingdom. In today’s world we call it the secret and security services. He has created a chart right from the “Gudapurusha” the chief of intelligence services to the common householder to be included in the secret services of the state.

Kautilya says,

“Miraculous results can be achieved by practicing the methods of subversion”

- (13.1.21)

Kautilya gives a special mention to the use of ‘Double Agents’. In modern parlance we attribute it to ‘Operation Double Cross’ successfully employed by the British Security Service during the Second World War. Wherein, Spy agents from Russia and Germany were caught by the British and in-turn were overturned to spy on their native states.

5. CONCLUSION

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is commonly referred to as “Science of Politics” He himself clarifies that his treatise is not the origination of science but is based on the similar treatises of the past. Chandragupta Maurya ascended the throne about 321B.C. And during his tenure, the illustrated work of Kautilya appeared.

And roughly about 2000 years later, the principles laid out by Kautilya astonishingly sounds relevant today. The first translations to English from Sanskrit were compiled and published by R Shamasastri in 1915.

The chapters dealing with the espionage strategy and the use of spies concerning human behavior are heavily debated on the lines of human excellence. Kautilya clearly makes a distinction between achieving objectives and foregoing human values directed toward a larger cause.

Toward achieving larger causes, Kautilya chooses consistently to establish a parallel consensus between the minds of the individual and achieving objective. And the role of the spies are heavily relied upon to negate wars and to avoid the casualties. However ruthless in his ideology, he is considered to be a true *realpolitik*. The human mind is thoroughly utilized out of fear, anger or greed.

Kautilya and has laid out clear principles for the purposes for human survival in the harshest conditions possible. But when clarified in closer perspectives, they have created some of them.

One priority he has surmised is to denote the extensive roles of surviving and converted spies. They can be appointed for special occasions. Weddings, Throne Ascensions and major festivals according to them could be utilized as occasions for the purposes of insertion or defection of spies.

This, in modern day parlance could perhaps be referred as clandestine operations; assassinations could be referred to as the black operations. These characteristics and strategies involve deep human intellect and require consistent patience to have them established. The discourse depicts accurate endeavor of human conditions and reiterates the importance of survival.

Max Webber, the famous sociologist famously quoted on the importance of the security to be ascribed to the citizens. He quotes “The State is the single legitimate monopoly over securing the rights of an individual” And true, to his words, governments across the world need to work on sharing intelligence on securing not only their borders but strive toward the world of global human excellence and prevent major disasters from happening.

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