



Critical study on Mandal theory of Kautilya's Arthashastra and modern geopolitical realism

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Abstract:

This study focuses on Kautilya's Arthashastra's Mandal Theory and its applicability in the contemporary world. In Arthashastra, mandalas are represented by concentric circles that represent varying levels of influence and power. The theory emphasises the significance of diplomacy, war, and territorial expansion in the consolidation of power. Both the Mandal Theory and contemporary geopolitical realism acknowledge the pre-eminence of power and the pursuit of national interests in international relations.

The theories highlight the significance of power, security, alliances, and territorial expansion in shaping the behaviour of states. The comparative analysis of Kautilya's Arthashastra and contemporary geopolitical realism reveals their enduring significance for comprehending international relations.

Arthashastra, Kautilya, Mandal Theory, Foreign policy, political treatise

DOI NUMBER: 10.48047/NQ.2022.20.19.NQ99440 NEUROQUANTOLOGY2022;20(19):4780-4787

Introduction:

The Mandala Theory of Kautilya's Arthashastra and the principles of modern geopolitical realism offer compelling insights into the complexities of international relations and statecraft, despite being separated by millennia. Ancient Indian political strategist and advisor to Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan Empire. In his seminal work, the Arthashastra, he expounded the "Mandala Theory" as the foundation of his statecraft and foreign policy recommendations.

In contrast, modern geopolitical realism, which has its roots in the works of scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, provides a contemporary framework for comprehending state behaviour in the global arena. Despite being separated by time, cultural context, and terminology, the Mandala Theory and modern geopolitical realism share striking similarities in their fundamental principles. Among them are the

emphasis on state-centric politics, the pursuit of national interests, the role of power in international relations, and the strategic management of neighbouring states.

This critical study examines the Mandala Theory of Kautilya's Arthashastra and its relationship to contemporary geopolitical realism. It seeks to untangle the historical and theoretical ties between these two paradigms, revealing how ancient wisdom continues to resonate in the contemporary global landscape.

Literature Review:

According to tradition, Chanakya, a Brahmin, served as Chandragupta's (321–296 B.C.) prime minister. The Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta (G Modelski, 1964). After Alexander the Great's death, Chandragupta won his first campaigns against some of the satraps the Macedonian conqueror had established west of the Indus.



Eventually, he turned against the Nanda Empire and was successful in destroying it. The conquests over Nanda's gave Chandragupta control over a large portion of the Indian subcontinent, including the Ganges and Indus valleys and parts of the Deccan. According to the Kautilyan Arthashastra by (R Shamasastry, 2015), the Historical Context indicates that Chanakya composed arthashastra and one of the seminal works, mandal theory.

a. Key Principles of the Mandal Theory:

The Mandal Theory focuses primarily on mandalas, which are concentric circles representing various levels of influence and power. To protect national interests, according to Kautilya, a ruler must establish alliances and maintain a balance of power with neighbouring states. This theory emphasises the significance of diplomacy, war, and territorial expansion in the consolidation of power. In contrast to contemporary geopolitical realism:

Modern geopolitical realism, as developed by scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, has a number of parallels with the Mandal Theory. Both theories acknowledge the importance of power and the pursuit of national interests in international relations. In an anarchic international system, realism emphasises the role of states as rational actors.

b. Power and Security:

In both the Mandal Theory and geopolitical realism, the importance of power and security is a fundamental principle. Kautilya argues that a ruler should work to improve their military capabilities and maintain a strong defence to deter potential enemies. To ensure the survival and stability of a state, realist scholars emphasise the importance of a strong military and a secure homeland.

c. Alliance:

Both theories emphasise the significance of diplomacy and alliances in achieving national objectives. The Mandal Theory emphasises the formation of alliances with nearby states in order to counteract potential threats. Additionally, geopolitical realism acknowledges the importance of alliances as a

means of enhancing security and influence in the international arena.

d. Territorial Expansion:

The Mandal Theory supports territorial expansion as a means of consolidating power and resources. Kautilya argues that a ruler should pursue strategic conquests to ensure the economic well-being and safety of the state. Similar to geopolitical realists, geopolitical realists acknowledge that territorial control and access to resources are essential components of state power.

e. Limitations and Critiques:

Although the Mandal Theory and geopolitical realism offer insightful perspectives on statecraft and international relations, they are not without limitations. Critics argue that the emphasis on power and self-interest in international affairs may overlook the significance of ethical considerations and cooperation. Moreover, the Mandal Theory's emphasis on territorial expansion may not be consistent with contemporary norms and principles of sovereignty.

While history demonstrates that his teachings were popular amongst statesmen, the manifestation of Kautilyan thought can be seen in independent India's policies, and the article urges a thorough reading of The Arthashastra as India assumes a leading role in international politics. (2009, R Zaman)

(L. K. Jha and K. K. Jha, 1998). Examines the content of the treatise Arthashastra by the scholar Chanakya (economics). It provides a framework for the economic management of India and was written between 321 and 296 BCE. The conclusion is that Chanakya's Arthashastra is an ancient treatise of great significance to the study of economics.

The article by (KavushAbosov, 2019) adds new insights to the existing literature on Russia's policies toward the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including incapacity and identity, with implications for a better understanding of Russian foreign policy as a whole. The author observes parallels between the tactics employed by the Russians and those proposed by Chanakya in arthashastra.

The Arthashastra is a science of material gain'. Arthashastra is a science of political economy, according to D.D. Koshimbi

(1964).The agreement reached by these scholars is unambiguous. According to (Boesche, 2004), the Arthashastra is a work of profound historical significance; it reveals the clarity of thought of one of the most successful political philosophers of the ancient period. It may also prove useful for discussions of the current state of multilateral diplomacy. For the purposes of this discussion. According to (Kangle, 2014), it is an art insofar as the practitioner must rely on experience and prudence, informed by Kautilya's general rules and guidelines, to apply them in particular contexts. In this manner, Arthashastra provides a strategy for governments to protect their territories, acquire the territories of others, and maintain all of these territories effectively. It includes the state's administration and foreign policy. It is the art and science of politics and administration. The historical and theoretical context of Mandala Theory in Kautilya's Arthashastra (L.N. Rangarajan, 1992), examines the principles and central concepts of contemporary geopolitical realism, as well as the works of eminent realist scholars.

Research Questions & Objectives

To study closely the tenets of Kautilya's Mandala Theory align with those of modern geopolitical realism in contemporary international relations.

To study the Mandala Theory and contemporary geopolitical realism that shed light on current territorial disputes and conflicts.

To study how does Kautilya's Mandala Theory differ from or complement modern geopolitical realism in its understanding of state behaviour, alliances, and conflicts?

To study in what ways do cultural, historical, and geographical factors influence the application and interpretation of the Mandala Theory and modern geopolitical realism in various regions of the globe?

To understand the limitations and critiques of applying ancient theories, such as the Mandala Theory, to contemporary international relations, and how can these obstacles be overcome?

Hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1: Mandala Theory is an early instance of realism in international relations.
- Hypothesis 2: Mandala Theory is a Roadmap for Diplomacy and Foreign Policy
- Hypothesis 3: Ancient India's historical and cultural context is reflected in the Mandala Theory.

Research Methodology:

1. It is proposed that pertinent Arthashastra verses be analysed to identify references to geographical concepts and borders, and then compared to contemporary geopolitical theories.
2. Analyse Kautilya's recommendations on diplomacy, foreign policy, and dealing with neighbouring states.
3. Examine the historical and cultural context of ancient India during the time of Kautilya in order to comprehend how it influenced the development of the Mandala Theory.
4. Secondary data is used for reference and analysis. Books like Kautilya's Arthashastra by RShamasastri, Kautilya Arthashastra by Udaiveer Shastri, The Arthashastra by L.N Rangarajan. These are authentic books available for reference.
5. Also commentary by experts have also been used for analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

We've utilised Arthashastra's original verses to demonstrate our hypothesis. We consulted the book Kautilya, The Arthashastra by L.N. Rangarajan, in which the verses are mentioned and translated into English. We also confirmed the verses and their translation using Udaiveer Shastri's Arthashastra book, which is considered the authority on the topic.

Hypothesis 1: Mandala Theory is an early instance of realism in international relations.

The Mandala Theory in Kautilya's Arthashastra and the Realism school of thought in

international relations share a number of fundamental tenets.

1. State-Centrism: verses referred [7.1.20,22,24,26]

Mandala Theory: The Mandala Theory highlights the importance of the state. It emphasises that the primary obligation of a state is to protect its own interests.

Realism: Additionally, realism is state-centered in that it asserts that nation-states are the primary actors in international relations. States place their own interests first and foremost.

2. Self-Interest: verses referred [7.12.29,30,31]

Mandala Theory: Kautilya emphasises the significance of pursuing self-interest and national security as the state's top priority. He advocates for strategies that increase the strength and prosperity of a state.

Realism: The premise of realism is that states are primarily self-interested, seeking to maximise their power, security, and wealth.

3. Balance of Power: verses referred [6.2.21,22,24-29]

Mandala Theory: The Mandala Theory emphasises the need to maintain a balance of power within a state's immediate neighbourhood (mandala) in order to prevent any one neighbour from becoming too powerful and posing a threat.

Realism: Realist theory also emphasises the importance of the balance of power, which serves to maintain stability and prevent any one nation from dominating the international system.

6. Geopolitical Considerations: Verses referred [6.2.15, 6.2.16,17,18,19,20], Kautilya, The Arthashastra.

Mandala Theory: When evaluating the behaviour of neighbouring states, the Mandala Theory takes geographical and geopolitical factors into account. It suggests that geography has the ability to affect alliances and strategies.

Realism: Realists recognise the importance of geography in international relations, but tend to place greater emphasis on power dynamics, capabilities, and the distribution of resources.

6. Self-Help and Aggressive Tactics: verses referred : [7.1.32,33,34,35,36,37]

Mandala Theory: Kautilya advocates for proactive and, at times, aggressive strategies to protect the state's interests, such as espionage, diplomacy, and the use of military force.

Realism: In an anarchic system, states must rely on self-help and may resort to coercive measures, such as military force, to protect their interests, according to realism.

While the Mandala Theory and Realism share a fundamental realist perspective that emphasises the pursuit of self-interest and the centrality of states in international relations, the Mandala Theory places a greater emphasis on the dynamics within a state's immediate geopolitical environment. Kautilya's approach is distinguished from conventional Realism by its emphasis on the mandala and strategies for managing neighbours.

Hypothesis 2: Mandala Theory is a Roadmap for Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

The Arthashastra is a treatise written by Kautilya, also known as Chanakya, that contains extensive advice on diplomacy, foreign policy, and dealing with neighbouring states. His writings emphasise statecraft and the pursuit of national interests within the context of an anarchical international system. Here are a few of his key recommendations:

Neighbourhood Diplomacy: verses referred [7.18.30,29]

Kautilya emphasises the necessity of establishing and maintaining cordial relations with neighbouring states. He recognises that neighbours are the most immediate and, therefore, most crucial actors in a country's foreign policy. The objective of diplomacy should be to prevent these neighbours from becoming threats.

Alliances and Treaties: verses referred [7.3.10,13,10,12,14,15]

Kautilya emphasises the significance of establishing and maintaining amicable relationships with neighbouring states. He acknowledges that neighbours are the most immediate and, consequently, the most crucial actors in a state's foreign policy. The focus of diplomatic efforts should be on

preventing these neighbours from becoming threats.

Espionage and Intelligence Gathering: verses referred [1.12.20, 13.1.21, 9.6.54,55]

The emphasis on espionage is a noteworthy aspect of Kautilya's counsel. He considers intelligence gathering and covert operations to be essential foreign policy instruments. Espionage assists a state in anticipating threats, gathering intelligence on rival states, and maintaining an advantage in negotiations.

War as a Last Resort: verses referred [7.4.14,15,16,17,18]

As a first option in foreign policy, Kautilya does not advocate for war. He proposes that war should only be employed when all other options have failed. He describes various strategies for exhausting diplomatic, economic, and psychological alternatives prior to resorting to military force.

Economic and Trade Policy: verses referred [2.15.1-11,2.15.3, 2.6.21,2.15.10]

Kautilya recognises the importance of economic prosperity in strengthening the state's position. He suggests that the state should encourage trade and protect its merchants and trade routes. Considered indispensable for financing the state's diplomatic and military endeavours.

Assessment of Neighbour States: verses referred [7.6.24-29,32]

Deception and Psychological Warfare: Kautilya's recommendations include the use of deception and psychological warfare to gain an advantage in negotiations and weaken the opponent. He suggests employing tactics such as sowing discord among rivals and utilising disinformation.

Kautilya's advice on diplomacy and foreign policy in the Arthashastra reflects a realist perspective. It emphasizes the pursuit of self-interest and the use of a wide range of tools, including diplomacy, espionage, alliances, and military force, to protect and advance the state's interests in a competitive and anarchic international environment. His insights continue to be studied and have relevance in contemporary discussions of international relations and statecraft.

Hypothesis 3: Ancient India's historical and cultural context is reflected in the Mandala Theory.

The historical and cultural context of ancient India during Kautilya's time, commonly known as the Mauryan period (circa 4th to 3rd century BCE), had a significant impact on the development of Kautilya's Mandala Theory and his work, the Arthashastra. The following is a brief summary of the context:

1. Political Fragmentation: verses referred [2.29-7-12]. Before the rise of the Mauryan Empire, India was politically divided into a multitude of small kingdoms and republics. This political environment influenced Kautilya's understanding of statecraft and diplomacy, as he sought to establish a powerful, centralised state capable of consolidating power and managing relations with neighbouring entities.

2. Social and Cultural Diversity: verses referred [3.7.36,3.6.17-18]The cultural and religious diversity of ancient India was remarkable. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, as well as numerous other religious and philosophical traditions, coexisted. This diversity contributed to a rich tapestry of ideas and values that shaped Kautilya's views on government and diplomacy.

3 Foreign Intrigues: verses referred [2.25.12,15, 2.28.19, 2.28.25]. It had interactions with neighbouring states and empires, such as the Seleucid Empire and the Nanda Empire. These interactions exposed the Mauryans to the complexities of international relations and diplomacy, influencing Kautilya's views on how to navigate these international relations.

4. Political Philosophy: verses referred [13.4.5,7.1.9,7.1.24-26,8.4.50]Ancient India provided a fertile intellectual environment for the development of political philosophy. The Arthashastra of Kautilya is regarded as one of the earliest works on statecraft and political science. It was influenced by the earlier writings of thinkers such as Manu and Brihaspati, as well as the contributions of contemporaries to the emerging field of political thought.

5. Economic and Trade Networks: verses referred [3.8.26-27,3.5.20,3.12.12]. Ancient

India's extensive trade networks, which included the famous Silk Road, facilitated economic interactions with neighbouring regions. Kautilya's political and foreign policy strategies were fundamentally influenced by the economic factors of trade and resource acquisition.

Mandala Theory and the Arthashastra were profoundly influenced by the historical, political, cultural, and philosophical context of ancient India during Kautilya's time. His work demonstrates a pragmatic approach to statecraft and diplomacy, tailored to the complexities of the time and the ambitions of the Mauryan Empire.

Case Studies and Discussion:

There are real-world examples and case studies that demonstrate the application of the Mandala Theory and modern geopolitical realism in various historical and contemporary contexts. I will also provide a brief analysis of how these theories have influenced state policies, alliances, and conflicts in these instances.

1. Cold War Power Dynamics:

During the Cold War, the Mandala Theory had a profound effect on the strategies of both superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. They focused on their respective neighbouring regions and endeavoured to establish spheres of influence. The United States, for instance, implemented the Mandala Theory by forming alliances in its adjacent regions, such as NATO in Western Europe.

Influence of Geopolitical Realism: Modern geopolitical realism is compatible with the bipolar power structure of the Cold War era. States vied for power and influence, with a concern for a balance of power at the forefront. In superpower strategies, the realist approach of deterrence and containment was evident.

2. South China Sea Dispute:

China's territorial claims and actions in the South China Sea can be analysed using the Mandala Theory as a lens. China seeks to establish dominance in its immediate geopolitical environment and expand its sphere of influence, which frequently causes

tensions with neighbouring states like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

Modern geopolitical realism can be used to comprehend the power balance dynamics in the South China Sea. Reflecting realist concerns about maintaining power balance, the United States and its allies have engaged in containment efforts to counter China's rise in the region.

3. Russian Annexation of Crimea and Ukraine War:

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 is an illustration of the Mandala Theory in action. Russia viewed Crimea as a part of its immediate geopolitical sphere and sought to maintain its influence there, resulting in a conflict with Ukraine.

Influence of Geopolitical Realism The international response to Russia's actions reflects realist principles. Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia and supported Ukraine to counterbalance Russian expansion, demonstrating a realist commitment to maintaining power balance and safeguarding national interests. Now these sanctions resulted in Russia invading Ukraine.

4. India's Foreign Policy in South Asia:

The Mandala Theory can be utilised to analyse India's foreign policy toward its South Asian neighbours. India seeks to maintain influence and form alliances in its neighbouring regions, frequently engaging in diplomatic, economic, and military endeavours to protect its interests.

Influence of Geopolitical Realism: India's realist approach aims to balance the power dynamics in South Asia, particularly in response to China's influence in the region. India's strategic alliances with Bhutan and Nepal reflect its realist concerns regarding the expansion of other regional powers.

These cases demonstrate how the Mandala Theory and modern geopolitical realism can be applied to comprehend and analyse state policies, alliances, and conflicts in various historical and contemporary contexts. In today's complex geopolitical environment, these theories continue to be useful in the study of international relations and statecraft.

Conclusion:

- The Mandala Theory, an early form of Realism in international relations, emphasises the importance of the state and self-interest. It recognises the anarchic nature of the international system and stresses the need for a balance of power in the state's immediate neighbourhood (mandala) to prevent any single neighbour from becoming overly powerful and posing a threat.
- Realism, on the other hand, acknowledges the absence of a global government or authority, which leads to self-help and competition among states. The Mandala Theory stresses the significance of pursuing self-interest and national security as a state's primary objective, advocating for strategies that increase a state's power and prosperity. It also takes into account geographical and geopolitical factors when assessing the behaviour of neighbouring states, suggesting that geography can affect alliances and strategies.
- In the Arthashastra, Kautilya offers extensive counsel on diplomacy, foreign policy, and dealing with neighbouring states. He emphasises the significance of establishing and maintaining cordial relations with neighbouring states, forming alliances and treaties, espionage and intelligence gathering, war as a last resort, economic and trade policy, deception and psychological warfare, assessment of neighbouring states, maintenance of internal strength, balance of power, pragmatism and flexibility in foreign policy, and self-interest.

Recommendations:

recommendations based on the topic of comparing Kautilya's Mandala Theory with modern geopolitical realism:

- Encourage Further Comparative Research Given the complexity and evolution of international relations, it is important to encourage further comparative research that explores

the overlaps and differences between Kautilya's Mandala Theory and modern geopolitical realism.

- Scholars should continue to investigate how these theories apply to various regions and contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of their implications for state conduct and alliances.
- Promote Cross-Cultural Dialogues: Cross-cultural dialogues between academics and policymakers can assist in bridging the gap between ancient Indian political thought and contemporary international relations. Encourage academic institutions and think tanks to organise conferences and seminars that bring together experts from diverse backgrounds to discuss the modern relevance of ancient theories.
- Diplomats and policymakers can benefit from understanding the insights provided by Kautilya's Mandala Theory and contemporary geopolitical realism. It is crucial to promote educational programmes and training that acquaint practitioners with the historical and theoretical foundations of statecraft and diplomacy, allowing them to make more informed decisions within their roles.
- Analyze the Ethical Aspects: An examination of the ethical aspects of these theories should be encouraged. Academics and policymakers should investigate how the application of Kautilya's Mandala Theory and contemporary geopolitical realism aligns with international norms, human rights, and ethical considerations. This can contribute to a more principled and ethical approach to state conduct and diplomacy.
- The significance of ancient political thought in the contemporary world should be brought to the attention of the public at large. Educational institutions, the media, and



government agencies can play a role in disseminating information about Kautilya's Arthashastra and other historical texts in order to improve the public's understanding of statecraft, diplomacy, and international relations.

Future Study:

The significance of ancient political thought in the contemporary world should be made known to the general public. Educational institutions, the media, and government agencies can play a role in disseminating information about Kautilya's Arthashastra and other historical texts in order to increase the public's understanding of statecraft, diplomacy, and international relations.

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