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STRATEGIC WISDOM: UNDERSTANDING THE KAUTILYA'S STATECRAFT THROUGH NEPAL'S GEOPOLITICS

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ABSTRACT

In the 'Arthashastra', the ancient Indian philosopher and statesman Kautilya laid out timeless rules for governing. His 'rajadharma' and 'rajamandala' theories provide insightful guidance for contemporary statecraft. This essay explores how these ideas relate to Nepal's domestic governance, trade strategies, security measures, and foreign relations as a small landlocked nation negotiating the geopolitical complexity of China and India. It makes the case that Nepal's inclusive administration, economic diversification, and diplomatic neutrality demonstrate Kautilya's ideas' applicability to modern geopolitics. The study's conclusion covers the broader ramifications of these tactics in influencing contemporary international relations.

Keywords: Arthashastra, Kautilya, Rajadharma, Nepal, foreign policy, security, trade, governance, India-China relations.

INTRODUCTION

Its connection with Chanakya, who first authored Arthashastra as the chief advisor to Emperor Chandragupta Maurya (**Kangle, 1965; Thapa, 2016**), and Kautilya was his other name. Kautilya's philosophy consists of raja dharma, which posits the importance of a ruler to promote the well-being and security of a state, and raja mandala, which is considered a way of pursuing inter-state relations involving a mutual alliance, foremost, neutral.

As a landlocked nation wedged between two Asian superpowers, India and China, these ideas can be explored from a Nepal case (**Ghimire, 2020; Pradhan, 2019**). Practically, applying Kautilya's principles to its strategic balancing act in foreign relations, efforts to maintain internal stability,

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trade diversification and transition to federal governance is a case in point (**Joshi, 2020; Lama, 2021**). Nepal's policies are discussed vis a vis these doctrines and explored for their applicability in dealing with current challenges (**Adhikari, 2019**).

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Nepal's geography between India and China is the reason why its foreign policy is precarious. Nepal functions guided by the *raja mandala*, seeking to maintain equidistant relationships with its neighbours and sovereignty.

India and China's historical and economic ties with India are deep-rooted (**Upreti, 2015**). It remains its largest trading partner and a significant aid and investor (**Sharma, 2017**). However, there have been times of friction, ranging up to the 2015 blockade, a humanitarian crisis that led to death, and food shortages in Yemen (**Sharma, 2017; Rai, 2022**). In response, Nepal intensified its connection with China, as seen in its participation in China's Belt and Road project in 2017 (**Gurung, 2021**). Such diversification tells us that *Raja Mandala* prioritises using relationships with competing powers to maximise strategic gains (**Bhatta, 2021; Poudel, 2021**).

On the other hand, China's increased influence in Nepal (through trade, infrastructure investment, and cultural exchanges) has enabled Nepal to wean itself off India's economic dependence. *Rajamandala* is consistent with a calculated approach where states manoeuvre alliances, prioritising security and economic benefit without alienating key partners.

Nepal's policy of non-alignment and neutrality is called *Rajamandala* (**Dhungana, 2020**). Nepal keeps its sovereignty by avoiding overt alignments in the geopolitical rivalry between India and China (**Pradhan, 2019**). Another example is that Nepal has not chosen sides in the maelstrom of its neighbours' border clashes and retains neutrality in regional disputes (**Joshi, 2020; Lama, 2021**). Nepal also participates actively in the multilateral setups of the United Nations, SAARC and BIMSTEC to increase its international prestige and secure development aid through *Rajamandala*'s plea for strategic partners (**Thapa, 2020; Adhikari, 2021**).

SECURITY POLICIES

External Defence and Internal Stability. Nepal's security policies, which are based on *raja dharma*, place equal emphasis on border management and internal stability.

Internal Security and Stability: Nepal's ten-year Maoist insurgency, which ended in 2006, severely disrupted its political and social fabric (**Adhikari, 2021**). The government's integrating ex-rebels into the political mainstream and security forces demonstrates *Rajadharma's* emphasis on inclusive governance (**Singh, 2018**). By addressing grievances and promoting reconciliation, Nepal has fostered social cohesion and minimised the risk of renewed conflict (**Sharma, 2022; Pant, 2020**).

Border security: However, opportunities for trade, immigration, and cultural interrelation with border security are relatively weak because it is open both to immigration to Nepal and smuggling activities and the infiltration of extremists from India amid concerns of immigration violations (**Thapa, 2020; Rai, 2022**). Thus, the Nepali attempts to improve border security while remaining friendly with India show that *raja dharma* is a realistic international conduct (**Pradhan, 2019**).

Likewise, Kathmandu's engagement with China in securing Nepal's north shows that the integrity of borders is preserved (**Gurung, 2021; Poudel, 2021**). Regarding combating cross-border smuggling and other threats, Nepal reveals its compliance with the *raja dharma* to protect the state's and people's interests (**Adhikari, 2021; Singh, 2018**).

TRADE POLICIES: ECONOMIC SECURITY THROUGH DIVERSIFICATION

Nepal gives prominence to trade in its economic planning, and its policies reflect balances that *Rajamandala's* claimed economic relationships offer for security.

India-Nepal Trade, Trade Partners of India and Nepal It turns out India is Nepal's leading trade partner. However, a strike on oil and transportation can affect Nepal, and the country has witnessed this during the Indian blockade of 2015. Nepal has tried to develop trade relations with other countries to avoid such risks.

Integration of China via BRI Nepal has expanded its relations with China in terms of trade and investment (**Gurung, 2021; Bhatta, 2021**). The construction of road and railway systems mainly aims to minimise dependency on Indian transportation networks (**Sharma, 2022**). This strategy aligns with *Rajamandala's* position regarding power relations, which seeks to level the power equation to improve economic guarantee (**Pradhan, 2019**). However, Nepal needs to navigate

this relationship so that overdependence on China does not compromise sovereignty (**Dhungana, 2020; Lama, 2021**).

INTERNAL GOVERNANCE: BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Nepal's transition from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic illustrates a modern application of *rajadharma*.

Transition to Federalism: Nepal's adoption of federalism addresses long-standing demands for autonomy and representation among its diverse ethnic and regional groups (**Lama, 2021**). Decentralising power empowers local governments, ensuring governance is more responsive to citizens' needs (**Adhikari, 2019; Pant, 2020**). This reflects *Rajadharma's* principle of prioritising the welfare of all citizens and promoting inclusive governance (**Thapa, 2020**).

Social Welfare and Inclusion: Policies promoting affirmative action for marginalised communities, such as women, Dalits, and indigenous groups, underscore Nepal's commitment to social inclusion (**Sharma, 2022; Rai, 2022**). Quotas in public employment and reserved parliamentary seats enhance representation, fostering social cohesion (**Pant, 2020; Adhikari, 2019**). These initiatives align with *Rajadharma's* emphasis on equitable governance and preventing internal conflicts that threaten state stability (**Joshi, 2020; KC, 2021**).

CONCLUSION

Today, too, we find the application of Kautilya's principles of *raja dharma* and *raja mandala* in the context of Nepal's foreign policy, national security options, commercial diplomacy, and policies of inclusive Democratisation. The Nepalese have effectively managed their geopolitical hob by overcoming internal and external security threats, forming relations with India and China, and competing for social issues. It does this concerning the strategic approaches outlined above and presents examples of how ancient statecraft is practical for contemporary governance issues.

Kautilyan concepts contain tremendous and untapped potential for contemporary political practitioners; they remain a rich source of advice on geopolitical strategy and power relations in the international state system. Dynamics in Nepal present how these principles can be

implemented in today's contemporary world to enhance policymaking. They can also be used as a reference for more extensive study of these principles in other settings.

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