

The end justifies the  
means history essay



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“ A prince being thus obliged to know well how to act as a beast must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from snares, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognise snares, and a lion to frighten wolves. Those that wish to be only lions do not understand this.”

-Niccolo Machiavelli

The Arthashastra is an Indian book or a treatise that details the right qualities of a good king and how to achieve this state. It is a book detailing how to manage a kingdom, or basically it deals with the art of government and politics. Much of the book's contents and principles will be covered later on. The Arthashastra is often credited to Kautilya, a scholar and an advisor for the Mauryan Dynasty. But his credit as the author and even his very existence are very much debated. Rashed Uz Zaman quoted that “ Many consider The Arthashastra to be a piece of literary forgery from about the third century A. D.; doubts also have been voiced over whether Kautilya really existed.” Uz Zaman stated three points on why Kautilya could have possibly not been the author of the Arthashastra: 1. The Mahabhashya doesn't mention Kautilya, 2. Megasthenes wrote about the Mauryan Dynasty the time when Kautilya lived, but doesn't mention Kautilya and 3. The Arthashastra could be a compilation of various texts. However, Uz Zaman stated that the Mahabhashya is not a historical book and Megasthenes' text is only available in bits and pieces, we cannot conclude that Kautilya did not exist just because he wasn't mentioned in Megasthenes' text and that much of the description of the period in the Arthashastra actually fits the description provided by Megasthenes. Uz Zaman addressed the third point

by saying that Kautilya himself said that his masterpiece was a result of the knowledge of earlier texts. But in some sense, we can say that the historical context of the book is much more important than who the author is, being a book of wisdom and all. The important thing is that we know that the Arthashastra is written sometime during the Mauryan Empire, and this historical context could serve as a clue for the reasons of the writing of Arthashastra and its place in the history of India.

### **Arthashastra as the book**

Knowing that the Arthashastra was written sometime before and during the Mauryan Dynasty, we can say that the chaotic period prior to the Mauryan Dynasty could have led to the writing of the Arthashastra. Kautilya, being the advisor of Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, could have written the Arthashastra as a form of guide for Chandragupta. As Uz Zaman stated “ Invasion, sometimes violent competition among various small polities, and anarchy was the context in which Kautilya set to write his ideas and make Chandragupta a great king. Thus, The Arthashastra is not only about effectively running a great empire but also about creating one in a chaotic period.” The historical context then, is very important. Owing to the fact that the Arthashastra was written during in time of anarchy, it is written as a method of advising kings on how to manage a state. It is ultimately a guide on keeping a nation running, to survive the period of anarchy and possibly pacify the enemies of the nation. This is much like the Art of War, which was written by another mysterious figure Sun Tzu for the king of Wu. It is also the same in the fact that the Art of War was written during a time of anarchy, during the time of the warring states period and that it gives advice

to a certain ruler or general. It could be considered as a significant piece of literature, especially the Indians because it could have helped usher forth the Mauryan dynasty, considered as one of the greatest periods in Indian history. It is also important because of the wisdom that the book contains. The book is also important because in India, where religion is one of the defining characteristics of a person, the book presents pragmatic realism, in contrast to religion. Roger Boesche said “ Because he was offering his readers a science with which they could master the world, Kautilya believed that a passive stance toward the world—for example, one who trusted in fate or relied on superstition—was outlandish.” The piece is so relevant that the Arthashastra was contrasted to many famous related works, like Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and the works of Han Feizi. Another evidence of the relevance and importance of the Arthashastra are the numerous expansive studies about the book. The book continued to exist as an ancient classic and regarded by many as a must-read.

## **The Arthashastra and Other Works**

Due to its pragmatic realism, the Arthashastra is frequently contrasted to many works like Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Roger Broesche said that “ Machiavelli and Kautilya shared the ethical conviction that a leader may, and sometimes must, use morally dubious means to obtain a good end, some version of the general good. And each put a high priority on unifying a state, with Machiavelli wanting to restore the greatness and glory of ancient Rome and with Kautilya seeking to establish and maintain a united kingdom on the Indian subcontinent.” Although Machiavelli and Kautilya both aim for the same goals, there’s a lot of difference between the two, especially in the

historical and cultural context. Roger Broesche noted that Machiavelli's concept of gaining power for glory is very much different from Kautilya's, because of the citizens are incapable of escaping their labor because of the caste system, and instead that the citizens should be capable of fulfilling their duties. Another major difference is Kautilya's accepting violence more than Machiavelli. The Arthashastra have very detailed instructions on use of spies, espionage, torture and assassination, even dedicating chapters for them, while Machiavelli doesn't offer any detailed methods. Another work that is frequently contrasted to the Arthashastra is the works of Han Feizi. Both defends the ultimate power of one ruler, possibly a monarch over the people. Both explains that the only way to create order is to have a strong leader that can exert state power over the people. Social justice is revered and the use of secret armies, of spies and espionage are both covered by Kautilya and Han Feizi. Both offered bureaucratic solutions to the anarchy and considers the leader as the law itself. This reflects the states of the Qin dynasty and of the Mauryan dynasty, which both unified their nations of China and India respectively. Although Kautilya and Han Feizi indeed have a lot of similarities, Kautilya presses for a more productive economy. Kautilya also discussed warfare more, considering war as an important aspect of a kingdom. It is great to note that although separated by both time and space, great thinkers like Kautilya, Machiavelli and Han Feizi developed almost the same philosophy albeit differed because of culture. Up until now, the works of these three thinkers continued to appear in different studies due to the wisdom they offer.

The Teachings of Kautilya

The Arthashastra is divided into three parts: administration, law and justice, and foreign policy. The content of the book mainly deals with what a king should do and should not, and how to ultimately become a rajarshi, or a great king. The book is divided into 15 books each detailing different situations and different descriptions and solutions. The books are - "Concerning Discipline," "The Duties of Government Superintendents," "Concerning Law," "Removal of Thorns," "The Conduct of Courtiers," "The Source of Sovereign States," "The End of the Six-Fold Policy," "Concerning Vice and Calamities," "The Work of an Invader," "Relating to War," "The Conduct of Corporations," "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," "Strategic Means to Capture a Fortress," "Secret Means," and "The Plan of a Treatise." The first book details the importance of discipline, not just of one's subjects but also of oneself. The book said that whoever is not in control of oneself will perish and discipline will only be achieved if the organs of senses are restrained. This echoes Sun Tzu's emphasis on discipline, that the more disciplined troops will win the battle. Just the same, a more disciplined ruler could easily overpower his enemies. The second book deals with the different positions in the government and the duties they have to perform. This part of the Arthashastra also details how the superintendents should perform their duty, and that each superintendent is vital to the state, because of their work. The third book details how laws are to be made and their coverage, much like to our constitution. This part of the Arthashastra is important because the laws become the basis for the reward and punishment system of the kingdom. The fourth book details how to remove thorns, or in other words, remove potential dangers in the kingdom. It details on how to eliminate criminals and the like. This part also details the different

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punishment, including mutilation, torture and even death. The removal of thorns is defended as essential to protect the other citizens in the kingdom and could be interpreted as a necessary evil. This part of the book also echoes the concept of Han Feizi as total power by the state, since criminals are described to be seized even with only suspicion. Again, the Arthashastra advertises the use of spies to detect the thorns in the kingdom. The fifth book concerns the rewards and punishments in the government, and how to rule over the courtiers, or the people in the court. This also concern the creation of absolute sovereignty. The sixth book opens up the part in foreign policy, detailing the elements of a sovereign and the different qualities that each should possess. The book then details the effects of the competence of the ruler, the benefits got from a good ruler and the disadvantages of having a mediocre one. The book then details the positioning and relating to the neighbors of the kingdom. The seventh book concerns more again about foreign policy. The book details the nature of the six-fold, the different methods of relating with a neighbor. The book also details the nature of alliances, of agreements and of wars. The book offers the different solutions to different solutions for different kinds of neighbors and studying the different attitudes of different kinds of enemies. The eighth book concerns about vices and calamities. A very much straightforward book, the book details about the weight of different problems and which problems should be answered first. The book also weighs the importance of solving the troubles of men and of the king, and that much of the problems arise first from the problems of the king and his ministers. The ninth book is the book detailing the economy of war. Much like the chapter two of the Art of War, the book studies the effects of engaging in war and how to effectively prepare for one.

The book also studies the effects in the resources and possible alternatives for the war. The tenth book extends the subject of the previous war, but this time details the actual battles. The book tells how one should act in battles and how to win battles, the different units, positions and study of tactics and strategies. The eleventh book tells of treacherous and deceptive methods of winning a war. The book details on how to sow dissension among the enemies' men so that the enemy will be weakened. Likewise, the monarch should protect his own corporations. The twelfth book details how to defeat a more powerful enemy by indirect means. The book details the different methods like assassinations, contrivances and destruction of property. The thirteenth book details how to commence sieges in towns. The book also details on how to make it easier to capture the town by using again deceptive means like spies. The fourteenth book details the use of secret means for different means, most of the times sinister. Again, Kautilya, being a pragmatic writer, emphasizes on the use of secret armies to create productive results. The last book shows the reader the different paragraphical forms in the book, the different meanings of the phrases found in the book and how to read them. In general, the Arthashastra shows us the value of pragmatism, and that this pragmatism is necessary to run a nation. The book shows us the different strategies, ruses and deceptions that a ruler could use to get things his way and to manage his way around problems. However violent it is, Arthashastra remains to be one of the most realistic, and reliable books when dealing with problems.



## **Arthashastra in Modern Context**

Today, we can see much of the principles stated in the Arthashastra in the corporate world. Although rulers, monarchs and kings are gone, many of the principles are still being used today. One of these principles is the use of espionage. Armies all over the world use spies and other espionage methods to monitor foreign movement. We even embrace the concept of spies, with James Bond and the modern depictions of spy. Little do we know about the sinister work of these spies, but as the Arthashastra says, spies play a very significant role in running a nation, since they do the dirty work the king couldn't do himself. Corporations conduct espionage against each other, to know each other's secrets and to exploit one another. Even Kautilya's concept of a single ruler is present in the corporations. However bureaucratic, a corporation is still handled by a president and a lot of power is given to him. A lot of the qualities of a leader written by Kautilya are still being followed today. The discipline of a person and the ability to restrain one's organ of senses is a very rare ability nowadays. It is an ability necessary to run kingdoms, or in our case, organizations. The legacy of Kautilya which is the efficient running of a organization remains ingrained in us, and can be further exploited if we study the Arthashastra more

“ Nay, an honest man can do no good upon those that are wicked, to reclaim them, without the help of the knowledge of evil.”

- Francis Bacon