

# 1

## CHAPTER

# Indian Foreign Policy in Ancient Times and India's Strategic Thought

*After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:*

- India's strategic culture and its key elements
- Concept of Grand Strategy
- Ramayana and India Foreign Policy
- Why is Hanuman called India's First Diplomat
- Kautilya's Arthashastra in Indian Foreign Policy
- Application of Kautilyan ideology to 1962 Indo-China war
- Conception of National Power

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is aptly called the Asian Century, and India is being one of the key Asian players has a great responsibility. It can act as a great stabilizer and power projector. Before we attempt an analysis of India's relation with the world, our concern should be to analyse and see whether India has any strategic culture. As we shall study in this entire unit, India's Foreign Policy till now has had a high degree of consistency since independence. What is unique is that this has been the case despite different ideologies being in power over the last decades. This continuity hints at the presence of a strategic autonomy in the political ethos which is based on its civilization. One of the key elements is the cooperative behaviour India intends to achieve through peaceful resolution of conflicts as India gives preference to dialogue over coercion or violence. This point is most visible in India-Pakistan relationship, wherein one of the governments will initiate a dialogue, and then due to irritants posed by non-state actors, the dialogue will be halted. The act of non-state actor will increase suspicion between the two states. But again, after normalization, the two will resort to initiating dialogue. The most important aim India intends to achieve in its strategic culture is socio-political cum economic justice for all in the decolonised world.



Another key linked to its strategic culture is grand strategy. A grand strategy is an aggregation of national resources and national capacity of a country. It includes a

combination of military, diplomatic, political, economic, cultural and moral capabilities a nation deploys in the service of national security. A grand strategy is all about protection of domestic values. Every state has certain values and to uphold those values are the primary goals of every state. But as a state cannot protect all values, it resorts to satisfactorily protecting the few it holds most sacred. In case the value of a state may be threatened, say by a non-state actor or an act of nature like an earthquake or tsunamis, how the state manages to restore the value threatened is our concern here. The combination of its capabilities the state may deploy to protect its internal and external security is known as grand strategy. This takes us to strategic thought. Strategic thought signifies the resources a government has (like diplomacy, military, economic strength, cultural values, etc) and the way it uses these resources to achieve security for the society. For India, strategic thought means certain values and preferences which leads to the state evolving some ideas and using these ideas in its policies and approaches in foreign policy.

## **THE RAMAYANA AND INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

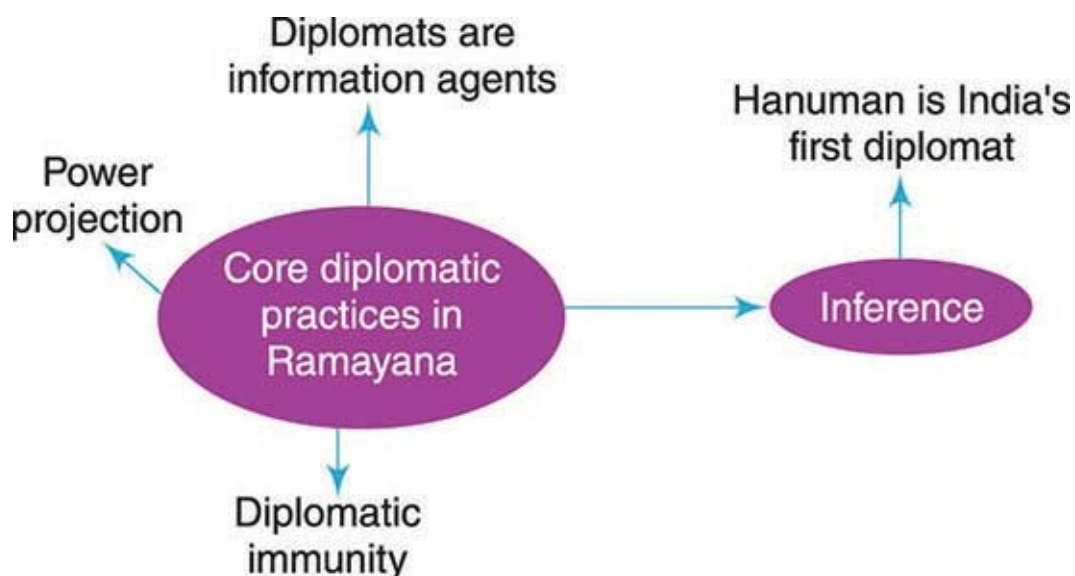
If we study *The Ramayana*, our ancient Indian epic, we get to know that there are many principles of modern diplomacy we follow today that owe their origin to the text. Our concerns in this section are to deduce the principles of modern diplomacy originating from *The Ramayana*.

As readers are possibly already aware, in this ancient epic, Sita, the wife of Ram, is kidnapped by Ravana, the king of Lanka. Ram entrusts on Hanuman the responsibility to locate Sita. Hanuman, who is able to locate Sita in Lanka, first tries to convince her that he is an agent of Ram and not that of Ravana. Once he convinces Sita that he has been sent by Ram, Sita conveys a message to Hanuman and Hanuman delivers the message back to Ram. From this situation, we may infer that Hanuman, who delivered the message to Ram of Sita, is seen to be doing what a diplomat does in modern times. In modern times, diplomats are called information agents. They carry information from one state and convey it to their own parent state. As the diplomats carry sensitive information, when they deliver it, the diplomats must provide a truthful account. They must not distort or manipulate information. This is precisely what Hanuman did. He carried the information to Ram and delivered the message without distortion.

The next scene that is important for us is the court scene where Hanuman argues with Ravana to liberate Sita. He initiates his dialogue by telling Ravana about the power of Ram. He tells Ravana of how popular Ram is back in Ayodhya. He informs the enemy about his leadership and his followership. He is thereby indulging in something called power projection. He is projecting the power of Ram in front of Ravana.

During ancient and medieval times in world history, power projection was always individual in nature. It meant that diplomats, during this time, always undertook power projection of an individual personality which was always invariably their own king. For instance, if a king in South India during ancient times sent a diplomatic mission to another state, says in West Asia or East Africa, the diplomat used to project the might of his king in the court of the other king. The diplomat would glorify his own king's power, and his military prowess and his territorial extent. That is why we say that in ancient and medieval times, power projection was always individual and personality-centric in nature. During the early modern times of colonial rule, the coercive elements of power projection

diplomacy emerged. However in the modern times today, power projection is more economic in nature. However, power projection continues owing its origins to the epic discussed.



Now in another scene we find Hanuman telling Ravana that it is against Dharma to keep Sita in captivity over a long period of time and if Ravana does not liberate Sita, Ram may burn Lanka into ashes. To this, Ravana reacts angrily and orders that Hanuman should be put to death. But Ravana's brother Vibheeshana says, that Hanuman, who has come to Lanka as an emissary from a foreign state cannot be put to death. This emerges as the first ever instance of diplomatic immunity. This practice continues in modern times even today.

## THE ARTHASHASTRA AND INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

It is important to understand Kautilya's *Arthashastra* as it is an Indian treatise on statecraft and diplomacy and also gives valuable insights into our international relations and foreign policy. Kautilya is India's own realist as his ideas resonate with realism. Realism, for example, Kautilya says, is when a state, as an instrument, focusses on power enhancement as the international situation is one of anarchy. In this context, the policy of the state should be to acquire power. This is also the basis of theory of Realism we have.

For Kautilya, the state is the most important and legitimate instrument which enjoys sovereignty. The responsibility of the king is to guard his subjects and ensure their protection and survival. This should be the primary national interest of the state. The core objective of the state is to acquire wealth, deliver justice and undertake expenditure. A state has to be strong and to be strong it needs good administration, stability and justice. This results in a conducive situation for wealth creation and leads to military expeditions for conquests. Kautilya talks about how a strong state is needed to create wealth. The wealth in the state is generated by an elaborate taxation machinery. The Dharma of the king is the welfare of the people. If the king is unable to make the people prosper, it is inevitable that people will become restless and they will rebel. The rebellion can take any form, including that of violence. Thus, the primary focus of the king should be welfare. Welfare can only be occasioned by the king if he takes steps to promote wealth creation as wealth augments power. The Kautilyan idea of national interest is, therefore, based on welfare of people. If people prosper, so will the state. Kautilya's concept of power begins

from society. He says power is of three kinds. The first is intellectual strength.

Kautilya's grand strategy is based on the idea that the king needs to be a conqueror. He needs to aim to increase his power over neighbours. The king is envisaged as a '*Chakravartin*'. *Chakravartin* (in Sanskrit *cakravartin*, and in Pali *cakkavartin*) is an ancient Indian term used to refer to an ideal universal ruler who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world. Such a ruler's reign is called *sarvabhauma*. The goal of such a king is to promote national economy and ensure national security and social order.

The state is primarily agrarian in nature. Cattle rearing and agriculture are primary activities. This leads to production of surplus which leads to trade. As trade is undertaken, economy is strengthened. A strong economy sustains the state and the army. To develop this kind of a state, which is based on powerful agrarian economy, the state needs to conquer new lands. The king undertakes expeditions to conquer new lands. The new lands conquered would allow citizens to expand opportunities to earn livelihood. This is the Dharma of the ruler. The goal of the ruler is a stable state which needs to be achieved for the welfare of citizens and to achieve such a state, the ruler is responsible for good governance. Governance is a means to achieve the aforementioned goals, as well as to achieve social harmony.

At the foreign policy level, Kautilya has a different thought. As stated previously, the ruler has to be a conqueror (*Chakravartin*). If he has to be a conqueror, then war is a natural outcome of his foreign policy. Kautilya says that the ruler has to be careful because his immediate neighbours are enemy states who are jealous of the social harmony and progress of the ruler and his kingdom. Thus, conflicts with neighbours are likely to be natural and to resolve the conflict the king has to decide if he would resort to conciliation and give gifts to another state to make it an ally, or sow dissension and use force if needed. All this depends upon the power of the king and options for war available to discussion and use of force when the need arises.

Kautilya propounds that the power exuded by the state is of three types. The first is individual power. This is the power and courage of the king. This is psychological in nature. The second is hard power. This is the military and economic capacity of the ruler and the state. The third is soft power. This is the diplomatic power of the ruler. Kautilya says that before a ruler declares war on an enemy state, he should measure his power. The ruler, before the declaration of war, should ensure that he possesses superiority over all three levels i.e., terrain of warfare (place), season and his own counsellors. Hence, if a ruler is intelligent and moral and has good counsel, he will win diplomatically. If a ruler has adequate economic and military strength he will win on the basis of physical power and achieve physical success (application of hard power). The ruler, Kautilya says, should strive for soft power rather than hard power.

Depending upon the situation, he has three types of war to wage. The first is *arma-yudha* which is outright, righteous war, fought while following certain predetermined rules. The second option is alternative to *Dharama-yudha* which is war by deception. There is no lawful framework governing this war. The third is silent warfare where a state undertakes war without public attention. Kautilya also says that aim of the state should be to expand national power. This can be done by conquests or alliances. The components of national power are called *prakritis*. There are seven components, viz,

political leadership, administration, resources, infrastructure, economy, security forces and alliances. The ruler should use hard, soft and individual power to expand national power. So, *shakti* and *prakriti* if used prudently, leads to rise of comprehensive national power.



## Kautilya and Indo-Pak War of 1948 and Indo-China War of 1962

In the preceding section we have attempted to explain how Kautilya's *Arthashastra* was used by Chandragupta Maurya to defeat Nanda and also to stop the advancement of Alexander, leading to the formation of a united India. Kautilya has explained state priorities and economic conditions and has propounded that the power of the state rests on seven *prakritis* and if any one of the seven *Prakritis* is weak, the state is fragile. We need to understand the contemporary security environment by applying his theories.

According to the political theories of Max Weber, a state could be said to "succeed" if it maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within its borders. When this is broken (for instance, through the dominant presence of warlords, paramilitary groups, or terrorism), the very existence of the state becomes dubious, and the state becomes a failed state. Political scholar Querine Hanlon says that states are of three categories—weak, failing and failed. Hanlon says that half of this world is in fragile category today and it is that leads to instability conflict and war which provide conditions for terrorism, militias and crime in 21st century. Fund for Peace's **Fragile States Index** underlines the democratic character of state institutions in order to determine its level of failure.

An application of Kautilya's ideas in 1948 Indo-Pak war explains the relevance of terrain, weather conditions and strategy as important dimensions. In August 1947, British rule in India came to an end. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was not clear. In October 1947, Pakistan, through tribal Pathans, began to invade Kashmir. Sensing a security threat, Hari Singh, Maharaja of Kashmir, acceded to India by signing an Instrument of Accession. The conflict between India and Pakistan on Kashmir ended on 1st January, 1949 with an agreed ceasefire. The ceasefire created a Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) region. The Indian Army could have marched ahead in POK zone to drive out Pakistan but the hostile climate and Pakistani guerrilla tactics prevented India from taking these measures. Kautilya clarifies that a state should not go and fight in an area which has a territory which is ungovernable. The inhospitable terrain of POK and its hostile climate made India land up in a situation where it could not, finally, capture POK. The logistics kept India back while poor military infrastructure compounded upon it to complicate issues. The two concepts of Kautilya, *Bhumisandhi* (not entering in territory which is ungovernable) and *Vyasana* (a state needs to take precautions and ensure logistics before war) were both missing.

In case of the 1962 conflict with China, which ultimately concluded in a ceasefire in Arunachal, the Chinese had indeed reached the foothills but retreated because the people of Arunachal did not support China and from the *Bhumisandhi* point of view, China refrained from getting into the business of capturing land (Arunachal) which was deemed ungovernable.