

Machiavelli, a Modern European Avatar of Kautilya

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Resumo

Uma pesquisa rápida na internet poderá apresentar várias referências ao Kautilya como *Machiavelli indiano*, apesar dos dezanove séculos que os separam. É mais uma ilustração do eurocentrismo da formação colonial-imperial do Ocidente imposta sobre o mundo não-ocidental, que foi condicionado a procurar modelos no Ocidente, ainda em casos de pessoas e eventos que os antecederam por muitos séculos, ou mesmo milénios.

Na sua obra *A Ideia de Justiça* (2009), Amartya Sen, Prémio Nobel de Economia, afirma que não deixa de ser divertido que um analista político indiano do século IV a.C. tenha de ser apresentado como uma versão local de um escritor europeu que haveria de nascer no século XV. Considera isto uma aberração, e lamenta a atitude dos intelectuais ocidentais que exageram a importância do iluminismo europeu, ignorando o contributo de outras culturas para o pensamento humano.

Palavras-chave: Arthashastra, Kautilya, Machiavelli, eurocentrismo, multiculturalismo, economia política

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164 *Abstract*

A quick search in the internet throws up a spate of references to Kautilya who is presented as *Indian Machiavelli*, despite nineteen centuries that separate them. This is just one more illustration of the eurocentrism imposed by the Western colonial-imperial formation imposed upon the non-Western world, which is conditioned to seek models in the West, even for persons and events that preceded them by centuries and even millennia.

In his book *The Idea of Justice* (2009), the Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers it amusing that an Indian political analyst of the IV c. B.C. should be presented as a local version of an European writer who would be born only in the XV c. A.D. Considers this attitude an aberration, and laments the tendency of the Western scholars to exaggerate the importance of the European enlightenment, ignoring the contribution of other cultures to the human thought.

Keywords: Arthashastra, Kautilya, Machiavelli, eurocentrism, multiculturalism, political economy

1. Eurocentric Models

A quick search in the internet throws up a spate of references to Kautilya as *Machiavelli of India* despite nineteen centuries that separate them. It is just one more illustration of the eurocentrism imposed by the Western colonial-imperial education worldwide (Satya, 2005). The non-European world was driven to seek models in Europe, even for persons and events that anticipated Europe and Europeans by centuries and millennia. In his *The Idea of Justice*, the Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen points to this aberration and laments the one-sidedness in Western approach to knowledge and exaggerated claims in favour of European Enlightenment. Machiavelli's importance is one such illustration of the Italy-based upsurge of the European renaissance. Amartya Sen (2010: 18) is kind enough to attribute this to the ignorance of other cultures in the West, rather than to a wilful exclusion.

Over the past two thousand years or so, the Indian elites have drawn from the traditions of *Arthashastra*. Since the first English translation of 1915, there have been German (1926), Russian (1959) and Spanish (2008) translations. Up to the 1990s, there was hardly any interest in Kautilya outside India, but, since – parallel to the growing international weight of India – the importance of Kautilya is increasingly being realized in the West.

The Indian elites can rightfully boast of an Indian precursor of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). Amartya Sen has made references to Kautilya in his important writings, besides the above quoted reference in *The Idea of Justice*. He cites Kautilya in *Poverty and Famines* (1981) as providing information about the earliest recorded famines in India (Sen, 1999: 64, 326). Sen also presents Kautilya as an important, though not exclusive illustration of measured concerns for human rights in Asia in the context of a recent debate about the Human Rights and Asian Values. He found in *Arthashastra* ideas and suggestions on such practical subjects as famine prevention and administrative effectiveness that considers relevant even today, more than 2,000 years later. Kautilya advises the king about how to get his way, if necessary through the violation of the freedom of his adversaries (Sen, 1977).

Kautilya was contemporary of Aristotle, and helped placing the Mauryan dynasty on the throne. He served as royal counsellor and produced *Arthasashtra* as a treatise on strategy and political economy.

The proof of its success can be calculated from the expansion and power that a native Indian empire in the subcontinent ever achieved in the pre-colonial times.

Due to the fact that the original text of *Arthasashtra* was not published in English translation till early 20th century, it failed to contribute to the world thought, while it contained for instance all the modern principles of political economy, including whatever concerns internal revenues, international trade and value of labour and just price, which Hume, Smith, Ricardo and J.S. Mill sought to define around mid-18th century¹.

Arthashastra refers to its author as Kautilya, and once as Vishnugupta. But there is an outside contemporary reference to *Arthasashtra* of Kautilya, and that is in *Panchatantra*. This classic Indian contribution to the world literature has a long saga of transmission through oral and regional translations, much before the sanskrit version was published for the first time in Bombay by M.R. Kale in 1912.

The original version is presumed to belong to an unknown Jain scribe of 9th or 10th century. That was translated into French in 1871 by E. Lancereau, and reedited by L. Renou in 1965. An earlier version of L'Abbé Dubois in 1826 was based upon south Indian versions in Telegu, Kanada and Tamil languages. The Fables of La Fontaine have their deep source in India, having travelled through Kashmir, Persia and the Middle East, along the silk route (Deleury, 1995).

It is not very different from the Indian contribution to mathematics, which through the mediation of Arabs permitted Europe to move into modernity and continues to be known erroneously as Arabic numbers (Souza, 2012). More significant and crucial for the Europeans to leap into modernity and its modern forms of capitalism was the pre-existence of the rich markets of China and India, as Andre Gunder Frank insisted in recent times to much annoyance of the Western sociologists and politicians defending the Iberian Discoveries as the beginning of the world modernity (Frank & Gills, 1993).

For Andre Gunder Frank the Europeans of the Age of Discoveries bought the ticket to the Asian train by plundering African gold and Latin American silver, but very soon revealed their true genius by highjacking the train with the brute force gained from the Industrial Revolution.

1. R. Shama Shastri, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, Mysore: Padam Printers, 1988 (First edition, 1915).

What had been a trade among partners, following the Industrial Revolution it became an unequal trade, in favour of Imperial Europe. Without such loot the European modernity was hardly likely, or at least at the pace it happened.

Andre Gunder Frank was a distinguished western economist, a rare Chicago-boy who did not hold candle to the Chicago school of neoliberals and paid dearly for his advice to the Chilean president. His dire predictions about the ephemeral nature of European modernity and the need to *re-orient* the global economy are coming true (Souza, 2004).

We wish to emphasize in this brief essay that not unlike its contemporary *Panchatantra*, also *Arthasashtra* may have part of the world thought and lost its original Indian moorings. I praise this feature as a true hallmark of human thought heritage, namely its universal reception. It then ceases to belong to any individual or group patent. The contemporary Chinese legalist school that sought a centralized Qin empire of the Han dynasty could also belong to the same trend of thought as promoted by *Arthasashtra* in Mauryan India. The Roman law was a western equivalent, and Machiavelli sought to recover it during the European Renaissance.

I wish there would be more interest among European scholars to trace the linkage of the *Arthasashtra* impact on the western thought, through the mediation of the satrapies that Alexander the Great left behind in north-western India. Seleucus and Menander were prominent among them and had close dealings with the Indian empire of Chandragupta Maurya, and presumably with his Indian minister Vishnugupta, author of *Arthasashtra*, through diplomatic agents like Meghasthenes (302 B.C.-288 A.C.), who may have taken home the Indian text of strategic thought. It is known that his chronicle *Indica* served Flavius Lucius Arrianus as a source of documentation for his classic history of the campaigns of Alexander of Macedonia. Could there be more than just a Roman inspiration for Machiavelli's *Prince*?

It is interesting to note the modern appropriations of Machiavelli in the West and of Kautilya in India for training in management, and promotion of executive's guides, on the basis of their teachings in psychology and politics of power. Kautilya (name derived from *katu*, meaning astute) leave no doubt that beneath all sanctimonious rhetoric and

pretense lay the basic struggle of life and instinct of man for survival at all cost (Buskirk, 1984)².

Our reflections on this theme were initially expressed a couple of years ago in an Indian newspaper column and were provoked by an Italian project entitled *Machiavellism and Machiavellisms in the Western Political Tradition (16th-20th centuries)*³ under the direction of Professor Enzo Baldini (Università di Torino). A connected exercise was held in Lisbon in the form of a colloquium on *Maquiavel Dissimulado: Religião, império e herança romana no mundo português*, analyzing the linkage of religion, empire and roman heritage in the context of the Portuguese imperial experiences. We look forward to the publication of its proceedings⁴.

The organizers of the Portuguese colloquium, associated with the European University of Florence, had announced their interest in discussing the issues raised by the Florentine author, and also the reception and reinvention of his ideas in the Portuguese context. The privileged point of discussion would be the theories and political praxis of acquisition and conservation of territories in the Portuguese empire as related to Machiavelli's suggestions, paying special attention to the articulation between religion and politics, and how far the Roman inspiration influenced the process.

Hopefully, the discussants sought to widen their analysis to include the contribution of the Indian precursor of Machiavelli, whose teachings and influence on Indian political culture may have affected the Machiavellic/Roman inspired Portuguese imperial politics and praxis in India and elsewhere. The Indian strategy of combining *satyagraha* with Operation Vijay during 1954-1961 to take over Goa from the Portuguese may not have been entirely devoid of the home-grown Kautilyan touch, rather than any borrowed European Machiavellian praxis. Portugal felt itself cheated by Nehru's proclamations of pacifism, or was it a failure to grasp the Indian tradition of Kautilyanism? Adriano Moreira, the Minister for Overseas Affairs (1961-63) had failed to convince the last Governor-General of Goa to transfer to Portugal the body of St Francis Xavier, which he viewed as a very important tool for negotiating

2. <http://bit.ly/1kUncfp> and <http://www.kautilyagroupofinstitutions.com/> are links to two of several such management and research institutions dedicated to Kautilya in India.

3. <http://www.hpermachiavellism.net/>.

4. <http://ml.ci.uc.pt/mhonarchive/archport/msg12330.html> and <http://bit.ly/1m9mqvp>.

the future status of the territory, playing thereby upon the feelings of the Catholic community («uma arma que parecia importantíssima de negociação do estatuto futuro do território, incluindo a tranquilidade dos católicos»). He laments that General Vassalo e Silva ignored his request and denied to Portugal such an opportunity. Had Kautilya got the better of Machiavelli (Moreira, 2009: 211-215)?

2. Cultural Multiversity

Living cultures are never autarchic; cultures influence each other and borrow from each other. We did not have to wait till modern globalization to realize this. In the coming decades, European culture will be strongly influenced by Chinese and Indian culture – both outside Euro-Atlantic cultural space. The Chinese and Indian cultures are very ancient cultures with great internal resourcefulness. Like European culture, they are more than 2500 years old – and they are alive and growing.

Already in the 18th and 19th century, at least some of Germany's great minds recognized that the interchange with Asian cultures represents an enormous opportunity for European culture. From a perspective of cultural history, the German indologist Heinrich Zimmer (1890-1943)⁵ and the psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) studied the interactions between Vedic-Brahmanic and European thought. Both are distinct expressions of self-developed cultures with specific, quasi-genetic features which are the result of an evolutionary process, a succession of intra-cultural transformations triggered by internal and external influences.

In my earlier essay entitled *Orientalism, Occidentosis and Other Viral Strains* contributed to a Festschrift in honour of Prof. K.S. Mathew (Souza, 2001)⁶ I had concluded, after analysing the thought of some of the more East-friendly thinkers, that western pluralism falls short of multiculturalism. What seems to prevail in the west is a globalizing monoculturalism. It contained a quote from Carl Jung, who had discovered that there were other ways for the civilized human beings to organize their lives without a slavish dependance upon thinking.

5. Zimmer (1951).

6. Souza (2007) is an updated Portuguese version of the essay.

Carl Jung wrote in *What India Can Teach Us?*: «We should thank God that there is still a man who has not learned to think, but has the ability to perceive the thoughts as visions or live things... the logic of India is interesting and it is fantastic, to see how pieces of western science co-exist with what we would call superstition. The Indians are not bothered by the contradictions that are apparently unacceptable. If they exist, it is the thinking that produces them, and a person may not be considered responsible for them. An Indian is not interested in minute details of the universe. He is interested in understanding *the totality*» (Jung, 1939: 97-98).

When we reflect upon *society, power, economy, state or inter-state relations* in Euro-Atlantic space, the influence of Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke or Marx has at least a latent presence. When the educated Indian or Chinese does the same, they refer to the European thinkers, but they think first of Confucius, Menzies and Sun Tzu or the *Mahabharata* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. We have to acknowledge that there is an asymmetry in the mutual understanding of these cultures. The asymmetry is the result of the superiority of (modern) European culture and its scientific-technological manifestations which turned India into a colony and China into a semi-colony. Now the balance between Asia and Euro-Atlantic space is being re-established and the Euro-Atlantic peoples have an opportunity to grasp better the history of ideas within Chinese and Indian cultures. Any failure to grasp this opportunity may lead to nasty surprises.

India today is a country with over a billion people and is marching fast to becoming a world power. Its political thinking and statecraft did not begin with Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru or the latest computer guru Sam Pitroda in the 20th century. There is a tradition of Indian statecraft and diplomacy which goes back at least 2500 years. And, one can safely assume that this tradition has exerted a formative influence on Indian politics up to the present.

3. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*

In 321 B.C., 26 years after the death of Plato and one year after the death of Aristotle, Chandragupta Maurya became the ruler of the Maurya Empire which extended from the Indus Valley to the Ganges plains. Four years earlier, in 325, after reaching the Indus, Alexander

the Great had to abandon his attempt to conquer India. Kautilya was the mentor and counsellor of Chandragupta. He was not just a political operative, but also a theoretician. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a well-structured treatise of statecraft containing 15 *adhikaranas* or books with 150 chapters, 180 *prakaranas* or sections, and 6,000 *slokas* of 32 syllables each⁷. It is a theoretical treatise of universal validity, but to be adapted to circumstances. It is intended for the guidance of rulers in general, and it claims to be based mainly on earlier treatises. It is much more comprehensive than the relatively puny *Prince* of Machiavelli (2000) with 26 chapters and much more historically contextualized and geographically limited.

The first five Books cover primarily the internal administration, and the remaining ten refer to foreign relations and diplomacy. Unlike Machiavelli's *The Prince*, it should not be viewed as a historical account describing the actual conditions in the kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya. Any differences with the account of Megasthenes cannot be any argument for defending that they were not contemporaries (Kangle, 2000: 67-74)⁸.

The structure of contents is defined in Book XV, the closing Book of *Arthashastra*. Book I with 21 chapters sets out the scientific basis of politics and governance, emphasizing that discipline and self-restraint are essential for success. The four-fold science for Kautilya includes *Anvikshaki* (Philosophy of Sankya-Yoga-Lokyata), *Trayi* (Three Vedas which sanction social system of castes and rules of *dharma* or civil law), *Varta* (agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade), and *Dandaniti* (Rule of Law).

Kautilya's objectives of politics is acquisition (*labha*) of territory, and protection, development and defence of territory (*rakshana-palana*).

7. I have consulted presently three editions based on various manuscripts found so far in south and north India: Shastri (1988); Kangle (2000) (5th reprint of 1969 Bombay University edition). Contains in Part I a genealogy of original manuscripts and transcripts available in India and abroad. Part II is the English translation and Notes of the Devanagari text in Part I. Part III is a critical study of *Arthashastra*. The third and more recent edition utilised here is Rangarajan (1992). Rangarajan dedicates his translation to the two earlier editors, acknowledging his debt to the scholarship of Kangle and Shama Shastri. However, takes liberty to rearrange the verses, and even to drop Book XIV, which deals with secret and occult practices, because of the futility of trying to guess what sort of herbs, plants and occult material is listed therein.

8. The *Indika* of Megasthenes is known only in fragments quoted by later authors like Strabo, Arrian, Diodorus, etc. On "Megasthenes' visits to India", cf. Bongard-Levin & Bukharin (1991-1992).

Power-sharing with collaborators and subsidiarity are considered essential in ensuring sovereignty (*rajatva*). The appointment of ministers and counsellors is to be made on the basis of their knowledge of science of polity and practical experience. All need to be subjected to regular tests of honesty and corruption. Book II is the longest with 38 chapters defining land organization, construction and administration of forts, functions of every type of state officers. The organization, recruitment and modus operandi of spies is subject-matter of various chapters, indicating the importance that Kautilya assigns to them. Chapter VI lists all possible sources of revenue to be tapped and modes of collecting and accounting them. Chapter VII defines a working year as consisting of 354 days and nights. Book III with 20 chapters is largely devoted to civil law, including family law, covering marriage and inheritance disputes, rules regarding slaves and labourers and their respective rights. Book VI with 2 chapters lists the following eight elements of sovereignty: the king, the minister, the country, the fort, the treasury, the army, the friend and the enemy. These last two elements are a novelty and can be better understood in *Arthashastra's* geostrategic relations described later in this essay.

Even a cursory reading of *Arthashastra*, will convince that Kautilya is a political realist. Max Weber wrote that, compared to *Arthashastra*, Machiavelli's *The Prince* is *harmless* (Boesche, 2002). Kautilya's central notion is power. The purpose of the state is preserving and expanding its power. Strengthening the state internally and externally, is the supreme duty of a ruler. But strong rule did not imply personal tyrannical excesses. If the ruler failed in his duty, his overthrow was not only legitimate, but mandatory, because a weak ruler brings disaster upon the state.

When reading Kautilya one can recall several past empires: The Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great, Alexander's Graeco-Persian Empire, the Roman Empire or the empire of Frederick II Hohenstaufen, and also the Chinese Empire at its height. The Kautilyan state has similarities with Plato's *Politeia*. The religious-intellectual elite, the Brahmins; the warrior caste, the Kshatriyas; the merchants and land-owners, the Vaishyas; and the peasants and artisans, the Shudras – and there are the indigenous/non-Aryan outcasts, socially even below Greek or Romans slaves.

The Kautilyan state and society have a *logical* design: While the ruler is absolute and the supreme functionary of state, the Kshatriyas serve the internal and external security of the state, along with an elaborated judicial system. The Kautilyan state is administered by a wide network of technocratic bureaucracy. The *working castes* of the Vaishyas and Sudras provide the material foundation for the state and society. Their capacity to generate wealth is the basis of the strength of the state. Their economic activities are thoroughly supervised and regulated – but they must not be unduly oppressed, because arbitrary treatment reduces economic efficiency and output and nurtures political unrest. The key position in Kautilyan state and society is reserved to the Brahmins. They shape the beliefs and thinking of society, and help steering state policy by their intellectual and political guidance of the absolute ruler.

Kautilyan doctrine respects the core concepts of Vedic-Brahmanic philosophy and praxis as defined by the *Dharmashastras*. Contrary to the prevailing modern impressions of the Indian society as spiritually oriented, it has never lost sight of the *purushartas* as defined by the *Dharmashastras*. Firstly, the acquisition of wealth (*artha*), secondly constituting a family and enjoying natural pleasures (*kama*), but all this within the rules of morality (*dharma*) – then, only towards the end of life, comes the attainment of spiritual salvation (*moksha*). Thus, Indian culture features an equilibrium of materialism and spirituality. The Brahmins are expected to be masters and teachers of this combination. They are educated to be a-materialistic, never anti-materialistic. The materialist dimension of India's culture challenges the Weberian belief that the West's capitalist dynamism is the unique result of Protestant-Puritan or Calvinist ethics, which sees material success as evidence of God awarding salvation (Tawney, 1977).

Arthashastra is not merely about ancient political science, it is a treatise of political economy. It elaborates on various economic activities – agriculture, crafts, mining, trade – and their regulation and taxation. Various infrastructure of roads and bridges, water management, agricultural projects – are discussed. It does not fail to tap all likely revenue sources, recommending state-control of brothels, liquor bars, or gambling houses. I have yet to know of any contemporary western treatise of political economy that is so comprehensive in its coverage

- 174 that could compare with *Arthashastra* – at least not until the mercantilist literature of the 17th century. *Arthashastra* includes a large and detailed section on criminal and civil legislation.

4. Diplomacy and Intelligence

The largest sections of *Arthashastra* are devoted to diplomacy and warfare. Kautilya advocates prudence in pursuing the two basic foreign policy aims: Ensuring state's security against external aggression and expanding the state at the expense of other states are defined as the prime objectives of foreign policy. To these ends, diplomacy and covert operations (intelligence) are preferable to waging war. Employing guile in statecraft is considered as better than the use of military force. The ruler and his advisers must carefully calculate the correlation of forces before launching war. Short-term gains through immediate action need to be balanced against a long-term gains by waiting for the right and opportune moment for action.

Arthashastra develops a geostrategy of its own, or the *rajamandala* in Book VIII with 18 chapters and presents the state as surrounded by concentric circles of immediate and more distant neighbours. The states of the first circle are *natural* enemies, as they stand in the way of the state's *natural* expansionist interests. A second circle of states represents potential allies because their interests collide with those of the second circle. The third circle of states is made of potential enemies because they have converging interests with the first circle and conflicting interest with the second. Kautilya anticipates the dictum: «The enemy of my enemy is my friend». The book deals with superior, equal and inferior kings and how the relationships with them need to be organized, including choices of alliances, war and treaties. Book X with 6 chapters covers war strategies and battlefield options. Book XI is the shortest with just one chapter, but not less important. It points to the importance of controlling the artisans and their guilds through spies and policies of conciliation of their rivalries.

Kautilya lists various diplomatic ruses, such as: secretly preparing an aggression and achieve surprise; sowing dissent for weakening a targeted state; isolating a targeted state from potential allies; delaying/diverting aggression by another state to camouflage one's own

weakness until strength has been recovered; inciting conflict between other states to gain advantage.

Arthashastra's section on intelligence is particularly noteworthy: Kautilyan views the intelligence service as a crucial instrument of state policy – internal and external. It has to find a respectable place in the state organization and bureaucracy. He distinguishes intelligence officers and operational agents, and elaborates on various intelligence functions.

Most important for internal security is the information gathering to sense the mood of the population; to monitor the state bureaucracy and pre-empt high treason. Gives importance to counterintelligence to ward off the penetration by foreign spies. In respect to foreign intelligence, Kautilya lists: spying in foreign countries and courts for identifying their strengths and weaknesses; covert operations for destabilizing foreign countries, even by poisoning or killing some key officials of other kingdoms if necessary.

Kautilya specifies various intelligence techniques for gathering information and recruitment of agents to check corruption and attempts at treason. He suggests use of money, sexual entrapment, blackmail and exploiting resentments. Recommends placing variety of undercover agents as merchants, wandering monks/nuns, entertainers/showmen, astrologers etc. Intelligence reports must be transmitted in code. For internal security, Kautilya sees informants in bars, brothels and gambling houses as particularly valuable for collecting information.

The Portuguese had some taste of the Kautilyan menu of the Indian intelligence service as described by the Portuguese military official Francisco Cabral Couto in his published memoirs. He was held as POW following the invasion of Goa by the Indian armed forces in 1961. Among the guards of the POW camp where he was detained he recognized three individuals: one was a train TC (ticket chequer) in Margão-Mormugão sector, another a servant in the Longuinhas bar in Margão where the officer often had his meals, and a third whom he often found sitting under a banyan tree as a beggar. They obviously belonged to the Indian armed forces and were deputed to serve as spies, without the author or even the Portuguese police department sensing it (Souza, 2010; Couto, 2006: 107).

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