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The Enemy Within

Sir,

In his otherwise interesting and thought provoking article "The Enemy within" in the USI Journal (Oct-Dec 2009), Lieutenant General S Talwar, PVSM, VSM (Retd) is dismissive of the impact of Kautilya's thinking specifically the concept of Circle of Neighbouring States on Indian psyche. The author makes the astounding assertion that "Kautilya's teaching led to an inflexible stance in our thinking"! Further, the Author has deduced that lack of cooperation amongst Indian kings against external aggression was due to the doctrine of Rajmandala (Circle of Neighbouring States) propounded in Arthashastra by Kautilya (or Chanakya as he was variously addressed). I would like to suggest that the Statal Circle concept has to be understood in its entirety before such an inference can be drawn. That does gross injustice to arguably the greatest thinker ancient India has produced. I shall confine my brief to Statal Circle Concept and Chanakya's thoughts on the importance of military in a nation state.

In fact Chanakya's Rajmandala (Statal Circle) Concept was for a Vijigishu (Conqueror) and was used with telling effect by him in pursuance of statecraft, higher direction of war and strategy to create an empire in a brief period for Chandragupta. To explain the concept succinctly I quote from Arthashastra-"Throwing the circumference of the Circle of States beyond his friend's territory and making the Kings of those States as the spokes of that Circle, the Conqueror shall make himself as the nave of the Circle".¹ The idea is marked by aggrandisement, of expansion, of dominating maximum possible lands in and around the vicinity of own territory. *En passant*, I may mention that the present day US policy in the Far East is termed as Hub and Spokes System where the USA is the hub and Australia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea and Thailand are the spokes!² Is there a similarity of concept here?

It was obvious to Kautilya that the dynamic situation in a Statal Circle would always be in a state of flux and hence he laid emphasis on a flexible strategy. Rigidity in thinking as mentioned by the author was anathema to him. In addition to the standard model Kautilya discusses various contingencies e.g. when the Vijigishu is strong or when he is weak etc. The Rajmandala Concept was to be synchronous with the Strategy of Sadgunya (Six Fold Policy). These were – Sandhi (Peace), Yana (Active Preparations), Asana (Neutrality), Samsraya (Alliance), Dwaidibhav (Double Policy) and Vighraha (war). Kautilya enjoins the Vijigishu to adopt policies that would lead the nation state to Vriddhi (prosperity) and avoid those that result in kshya (decline)³.

Was Chanakya's Rajmandal Concept merely a high sounding theory or did it produce tangible results? This can be easily gauged from the fact

that his protégé Chandragupta, in a very short span of time, rose from humble beginnings to become the first emperor in ancient India. In 321 BC he destroyed the powerful army of Magadh that was feared even by Alexander's army. In 305 BC when Selukus Nikator, (Alexander's famous commander) attempted to regain the provinces of India that had been won earlier by Alexander from Porus, Chandragupta thrashed him decisively. Terms of peace included giving up the provinces of Kabul, Herat, Kandhar (Afghanistan) and Gedrosia(Eastern Iran)⁴. Additionally, Selukus gave the hand of his daughter in marriage to Chandragupta and appointed Megasthenes to his court as an ambassador^{5,6}. Thus the empire founded by Kautilyan thinking that spanned from Bengal to Afghanistan and beyond continued to flourish even later during the reign of Bindusar and Asoka.

Further, Kautilya believed in creating a formidable military machine as he considered it a *sine qua non* for governance. According to Plutarch, Chandragupta had 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 9000 elephants, 8000 chariots and an Admiralty.⁷ These figures compare favourably even with the present day Army! Chanakya ensured that this large standing army was extremely well paid and in the order of precedence the Senapati (C-in-C) ranked higher than the Yuvraj (Crown Prince)!⁸ To India's misfortune the latter day rulers of Indian states did not follow the precepts outlined by Kautilya and paid little attention to matters military.

The question why rulers of Indian armies in the 18th Century employed foreign mercenaries is answered by Shelford Bidwell himself when he says that "they (Indian commanders) saw in the European methods – order, drill and discipline – simple qualities but alien to the native military"⁹.

Yours sincerely

Major General Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

End Notes

1. Shamashastry R, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Book VI, Ch 2.
2. Power Realignment in Asia: China, India & the United States, Alyssa Ayres and C Raja Mohan, Sage Publications, 2009.
3. Ibid, BookVII, Ch 16.
4. Ancient India & Indian Civilisation, by Paul Masson, Helena de Willman-Grabowska & Phillipe Stern, pp34-37.
5. Asoka by Vincent A Smith, Ch I pp15.
6. Ancient India & Indian Civilisation, by Paul Masson, Helena de Willman-Grabowska & Phillipe Stern, pp34-37
7. Singh Nagendra, The Theory of Force & Organisation of Defence in Indian Constitutional History, pp51.
8. Ibid, Book VII, Ch 5
9. Bidwell Shelford, Swords for Hire