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The expedient of policy in Panchatantra real politik: The tale of crows and owls on the cards

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The famous allegorical text “The Panchatantra” is highly influenced by the Kautiliya Arthashastra regarding the State Craft. In the preamble of the text Panchatantra. the author Vishnu Sharma pays his obsequence to Manu, Brhaspati, Shukra, Parashara, Vyasa, Chanakya the composers of science of Royal Polity.

मनवे वाचस्पतये शुक्राय पराशराय ससुताय ।

चाणक्याय च विदुषे नमोस्तु नयशास्त्रकर्तृभ्यः ॥ ¹ ॥

The Panchatantra where in animals and birds represent the human emotional graph, is the first text on the globe that depicts the animal kingdom, clearly a transformation of the basic structure of the state craft is ArthaShastra.

Vishnu Sharma, an adept in the art of the upbringing of children has taken the task of educating the three refractory sons of the King AmaraShakti in the science of Royal Polity. SO he skilfully employs the concepts of real politik in the stories to instruct the princes who find them more palatable like sweetmeats.

We can witness how the Panchatantra deals with the classic expedients of a policy laid down in texts on StateCraft meant for princes and others concerned in government. The six fold policy or the six expedients of policy in the Kautiliya ArthaShastra is depicted in he “Tale of Crows and Owls” in Kakolukiyam - the third book of Panchatantra. The tale begins with the maxim:

“Trust not a former enemy who comes professing amity” -

न विश्वसेत्पूर्वविरोधितस्य शत्रोश्च मित्रत्वमुपागतस्य ॥ ² ॥

In their bitter enmity the cave thronged by owls was burned by deadly fire the crows kindled. Meghavarna the king of crows, nested, attended by hundreds of crow-retainers on the huge banyan tree abound with plenty of branches.

Another king of Owls by name Arimardana being served by countless numbers of OWls was obsessed by some ancient enmity with Crows and invariably killed any crow that passes his path. On account of his daily forays at night, there formed a circle of dead crows.

Any enemy or a disease disregarded due to sheer indifference and is allowed to proceed unchecked leads to devastation in no time.

Hence, the crow kin of Meghavarna summoned his ministries who sat in a council to confer in private and thought of the ways and means to area vengeance on the owls. Every minister when his turn is solicited, proposes his view. The views are in complete conformity with the six fold policy state in the text of state craft, especially the ArthaShastra of KAutiliya.

Kautilya says: The circle of states is the source of the six fold policy.

षाड्गुणस्य प्रकृति मण्डलं योनिः ॥³॥

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Kautilya first mentions the views of his Acharya and then Vatavyadhi before giving his view.

1. My teacher says that peace (sandhi) war (vigraha), observance of neutrality (asana), marching (yana) alliance (samshraya) and making peace with one and waging war with another double policy (dvaidhibhava) are the six forms of state policy.

सन्धिविग्रहासनयानद्वैधीभावाः षाड्गुण्यमित्याचार्याः ॥⁴॥

2. Vatavyadhi holds that there are only two forms of policy, peace and war, in as much as the six forms result from these two primary forms of policy.

सन्धिविग्रहाभ्यां हि षाड्गुण्यं सम्पद्यत इति ॥⁵॥

Kautilya holds that, as their respective conditions differ, the forms of policy are six

षाड्गुण्यमेवैतदवस्थाभेदादिति कौटिल्यः ॥⁶॥

1. Sandhi (Peace) Agreement with pledge पणबन्धः सन्धिः
2. Vighraha (War) - Offensive operations is war अपकारो विग्रहः
3. Asanam (Neutrality) - Indifference उपेक्षणमासनम्
4. Yanam (Marching) - Making preparations is marching - अभ्युच्चयो यानम्
5. Samshrayah (Alliance) - Seeking the protection of another is alliance परार्पणं संश्रयः
6. Dvaidhibhava (Double Policy) - Making peace with one and waging war with another- सन्धिविग्रहोपदानं द्वैधीभावः

The Panchatantra, the crow king Meghavarna addressing his ministers asks as to which of the six expedients of policy should be made use of to deal with the enemy whose power cannot be denied.

तदत्र किं युज्यते सन्धि- विग्रह-यान-आसन-संश्रय-द्वैधी भावानां मधयात् ॥⁷॥

The first minister puts for the his view: The enemy is powerful and also knows when to strike. It is not wise to start hostilities against him. The best option is to be conciliatory. He quotes the supporting maxim : An enemy who is powerful, virtuous, rich in kin and resources, victorious in many battles is worthy for citation.

सत्याद्यो धार्मिकश्चार्यो भ्रातृसङ्घातवान् बली

अनेकविजयी चैव सन्धेयः स रिपुर्भवेत् ॥⁸॥

One has to make peace even with the unpleasant when the very life is in danger, because the entire realm becomes secure once life is protected.

सन्धिः कारयोऽप्यनार्येण विज्ञाय प्राणसंशयम् ।

प्राणैः संरक्षितैः सर्वं यतो भवति सक्षितम् ॥⁹॥

A firm alliance with the victor of many wars make the other enemies come to the heel awed into submission by the allies over.

अनेकयुधविजयी सन्धानं यस्य गच्छति ।
तत्प्रभावेण तस्याशु वशं गच्छन्त्यरातयः ॥¹⁰॥

Vishnu Sharma quotes Brhaspatis view here- victory is never a certainty and it is better not to take risk and one has to make peace with equals in strength –

सन्धिमिच्छैत्समेनापि सन्दिग्धोविजयी युधि ।
न हि सांशयिकं कुर्यादित्युवाच बृहस्पतिः ॥¹¹॥

And also the other three expedients - negotiations gifts and bribery sowing dissension should be tried first before opting for hostilities -

सन्दिग्धो विजयो युद्धे जनानामिह युद्ध्यताम् ।
उपायत्रितयादूर्ध्वं तस्माद्युद्धं समाचरेत् ॥¹²॥

Man blinded by wounded pride, reluctant to sue for peace may be destroyed even by his equal and unable to make a stand he comes apart like an unbaked clay pot -

असन्धानो मानान्धः समेनापि हतो भृशम् ।
आमकुम्भ इवान्येन करोत्युभयसंक्षयम् ॥¹³॥

The purpose of war is specified here - one should not go for war when the fruits of war - land, friends, gold are not on the cards.

भूमिमित्रं हिरण्यं वा विग्रहस्य फलत्रयम् ।
नास्त्येकमपि यद्येषां विग्रहं न समाचरेत् ॥¹⁴॥

When only the fury of fighting is foreseen without any gain, one should not start war on this own and carry it on at any cost.

It is further suggested to deal with diligence one seeking unremitting prosperity should not rear like an angry serpent when a stronger enemy assails him. IT is better for him to bend like the reed by the stream, because a man gains great prosperity in time following the low profile the reed keeps. Adopting the continued in the next page. Adopting the overbearing manners of the serpent he will simply court death –

बलीयसा समा क्रान्तो वैतसीं वृत्तिमाचरेत् ।
वाञ्छन्न भ्रंशिनी लक्ष्मीं न भौजङ्गी कदाचन ॥¹⁵
कुर्वन्ति वैतसीं वृत्तिं प्राप्नोति महतीं श्रियम् ।
भुजङ्गवृत्तिमापन्नो वधमर्हति केवलम् ॥¹⁶

Wisdom lies in retreat and ripe time to act. VishnuSharma gives the comparison of a tortoise which wisely retreats into his shell and suffer cruel blows; and will rear up ready to strike like a deadly serpent when the time is ripe

कौर्म सङ्कोचमास्थाय प्रहारानपि मर्षयेत् ।
काले काले च मतिमनुत्तिष्ठेत्कृष्णसर्पवत् ॥¹⁷

There is no such test that prescribed to fight a powerful enemy at any cost for a rain cloud never moves ahead if contract winds prevail. This counsel is in conformity with the view of Kautilya that who ever is inferior to another shall make peace with him

तत्र पणबन्धः सन्धिः ॥¹⁸॥

Under what circumstances, conciliation is no recommended: The second minister opines that conciliation is not recommended and the prospect of peace should not be entertained when the enemy is cruel rapacious and unscrupulous. Inborn viciousness will in not time change its course -

सत्यधर्मविहीनेन न सन्दध्यात्कथञ्चन ।
सुसन्धितोऽप्यसाधुत्वाक्षचराद्यति विक्रियाम् ॥¹⁹ ॥

This counsel recommends to go for war as it is quite easy to uproot an enemy who is cruel, greedy, false, lazy, unprepared, cowardly and a laundering fool who desires warriors to loot.

क्रूरो लुब्धोऽलसोऽसत्यः प्रमादी भीरुस्थिरः ।
मूढो योधावमन्ताच सुखेच्छेद्यो भवेद्रिपुः ॥²⁰ ॥

Hence, offensive operations against such enemy is preferred. अपकारो विग्रहः

The most important point is that the peace talks should not be proposed with the enemy who has humiliated once badly. Peace talks with him will amount to be becoming so exasperated and is bound to resort to further violence. When it is clear that an enemy can be contained only by recourse to the final expedient of four classic expedients - sama, daana, danda and bheda, peace, bribes, discord, war .i.e., use of force, conciliation not only proves a disservice but serves to further inflame the man sputtering with violent rage. Drops of water suddenly falling on boiling butter only makes it spatter.

सामवायाः सक्रोपस्य शत्रोः प्रत्युत दीपिकाः ।
प्रतप्तस्येव सहसा सर्पिषस्तोयबिन्दवः ॥²¹ ॥

The king must wield a cruel rod like death if the enemies are to crumble before, or else enemies are quick to fall upon a king by compassion ruled.

मृत्योरिवोग्रदण्डस्य राज्ञो यान्ति वशं द्विषः ।
सर्वसहन्तुमन्यन्ते तृणाय रिपवश्च तम् ॥²² ॥

Referring to the episode of Bhima killing Kichaka in the Mahabharata, he says “where force cannot over power and enemy, guile might do the trick.

मायया शत्रवो वध्या अवध्याः स्युर्बलेन ये ॥²³ ॥

Strengthening his argument he concludes that the kingdom of a monarch will boast of its glory when it is drenched with blood of enemies and tears of their wailing wives -

रिपुरक्तेन संसिक्ता तत्स्त्रीनेत्राम्बुभिस्तथा ।
न भूमिर्यस्य का श्लाघा तस्य जीविते ॥²⁴ ॥

The third minister gives his counsel in accordance with the opinion of Kautilya - If the king thinks that he has made proper arrangements to safeguard his own works, he may increase his resources by marching -

यानसाध्यः कर्मोपधातः शत्रोः प्रतिविहितस्वकर्माक्षस्मि इति यानेन
वृद्धिमातिष्ठेत् ॥²⁵ ॥

The counsel fears that the enemy is vicious, superior in strength and unscrupulous in behaviour. In such circumstances, neither war nor peace ought to be considered. Only option is withdrawal, moving out which takes two forms; retreat or flight. One is fearing for one's life, the other is marching forwards thirsting for victory.

द्रिधाकारं भवेद्यानं भये प्राणार्थरक्षणम् ।
एकमन्यज्जिगीषोश्च यात्रालक्षणमुच्यते ॥²⁶ ॥

He further concludes saying: The king should first make his own realm secure, well guarded by loyal and valorous warriors and their march against another, once his trusted spies are in right places.

स्वस्थानं सुदृढं कृत्वा शूरैश्चातैर्महाबलैः ।
परदेशं ततो गच्छेत्पिण्णधिव्याप्तमग्रतः ॥²⁷ ॥

The text on StateCraft quite clearly state that withdrawal should be effected with due regard to cause and effect. The counsel strengthens this view quoting an example of a Lion. The lord of beasts first crouches, in cold fury before he makes his deadly spring. Hiding enmity deep within their hearts, keeping secret their counsel and their moves, the wise wait bidding their time and endure whatever happens to them meantime.

यदपसरति मेषः कारणं तत्प्रहर्तुं मृगपतिरपि कोपात्संकुचत्युत्पतिष्णुः ।
हृदयनिहितभावाः गूढमन्त्रप्रचाराः किमपि विगणयन्तो बुद्धिमन्तः
सहन्ते ॥²⁸ ॥

Driven by overwhelming pride, of a weak king sets out to fight a powerful enemy will bring his own line to an end

युध्यतेऽहङ्कृतिं कृत्वा दुर्बलो यो बलीयसा ।
स तस्य वाञ्छितं कुर्यादात्मनश्च कुलक्षयम् ॥²⁹ ॥

Hence he concludes suggesting that this is a time for retreat but not for peace or war.

The fourth counsel to whom peace, war and retreat do not appeal strongly opposes, especially the policy of retreat: HE strongly refutes dislodging giving the example of a Crocodile who at home in his own world can seize and hold a lordly elephant but once dislodges from his habitat even a dog can beat him hollow.

नक्रः स्वस्थानमासाय गजेन्द्रमपि कर्षति ।

स एव प्रच्युतः स्थानाच्छुनापि परिभ्रुयते ॥ 30 ॥

A monarch when attacked by a powerful enemy should withdraw to his fortress but preserve in his efforts and stationed with in the fortress should send calls of distress to friends seeking their aid. Otherwise once dislodges at the sound of the approaching enemy and never enter it again.

Entrenched in his strong hold man can singly fight a hundred men and should therefore never give up his strong hold.

Of the six forms of state policy, a wise king shall observe that form of policy, which, in his opinion, enables him to build forts, to construct buildings and commercial roads to open new plantations and villages, to exploit mines and timber and elephant forests and at the same time to harass similar works of his enemy.

तेषां यस्मिन्वा गुणै स्थितः पशयेत् इहस्य शक्यामि
दुर्गसेतुकर्मवणिक्पथशून्यनिवेशरवनिद्रव्यहस्तिवनकर्माण्यात्मनः
प्रचर्तयितुं परस्य चैतानि कर्माण्युपहन्तुम् इति तमातिष्ठेत् सा
वैद्धिः॥³¹॥

King should make his strong hold secure with deep moat, ramparts bristling with machines of war, well -stocked with arrows and other weapons, with supplies and transport and reinforcements; laying in a goodly store of provisions waiting with in should be ready and resolved to fight. If alive gains great glory of dead, attains paradise.

तस्माद् दुर्गं दृढं कृत्वा सुभटासारसंयुतम् ।
प्राकारपरिखायुक्तं शस्त्रादिभिरलङ्कृतम् ॥ 32 ॥
तिष्ठेन्मध्यगतो नित्यं युद्धायकृतनिश्चयः ।
जीवन्संप्राप्स्यति राज्यं मृतो वा स्वर्गमेष्यति ॥ 33 ॥

Shrubs growing together close-kinit clumps stay unscathed even when buffeted even by contrary winds. Likewise the weak landing together are unassailable by however powerful an enemy

वलिनाऽपि बाध्यन्ते लघवोऽप्येकसंश्रयाः ।
विपक्षेणापि मरुता यथैकस्थानवीरुधाः ॥ 34 ॥

Firmly owned mighty lone tree is no match for even for a moderate wind, where as firmly rooted densely packed in groves; stand tall even when swift winds rip into them, for they stand together

महानप्येकजो वृक्षः बलवान्सुप्रतिष्ठितः ।
प्रसह्य इव वातेन शक्यो धर्षयितुं यतः ॥ 35 ॥

Similarly an extremely heroic man if lone becomes an easy prey to the enemies

एवं मनुष्यमप्येकं शौर्येणापि समन्वितम् ।
शक्यं द्विषन्तोमन्यन्ते हिंसन्ति च ततः परम् ॥ 36 ॥

So concludes the minister suggesting the policy of indifference that is neutrality.

Next the king Meghavarna solicited the advice of another minister who gives his counsel in favour of the fifth expedient

forming an alliance which is the most suitable for the current situation the king is in.

Kautilya says whom the alliance be formed with: one shall make an alliance with a King who is stronger than one's neighbouring enemy.

यद्वलः सामन्तः तद्विशिष्टबलमाश्रयेत् ॥ 37 ॥

Following the same, the minister suggests the king to stay put right in his territory and seek a powerful ally whose strength could offset the enemy's. He strongly advocates not to abandon his position and go else where because non will come forward to throw even a friendly word his way. He gives the example of wind and fire: The wind and the forest fire are friends indeed, but the same wind extinguishes the flame of the lamp.

वनानि दहतो वह्नेः सखीभवति मारुतः ।
स एव दीपनाशाय कृशेकस्यास्ति सौहृदम् ॥ 38 ॥

He further adds that it is not the absolute rule however the only those powerful are to be sought as allies. Alliances with those warts can also provide one security just as a slender swaying bamboo that grows in a thicket, enriched by other bamboos is hard to uproot, so too a monarch however powerless he may be. So much the better to find a truly great and noble ally, because nothing but a proper alliance can possibly offset the enemy's power.

Now the king solicits the advice of an elder statesman and an ancient counsellor who had served as a minister to his father and also who had possessed complete mastery of the texts on the political sciences. The elderly minister speaks that whatever the other ministers proposed are in complete conformity with the teaching of the texts on polity. Each is good for its own time. But in the present situation the king is facing requires the practice of last expedient Dvaidhibhaava - double dealing.

Kautilya proposes double policy when if a king thinks:” By making peace with one, I can workout my own resources, and by waging war with another, I can, destroy the world of my enemy”. hen he may adopt that double policy and improve his sources.

So too the elderly and ancient counsellor proposes to practice double dealing justifying through the proverb: towards and enemy powerful and evil always harbour deep distrust, now offering peace, then again making war, adopting a policy of duplicity.

अविश्वासं सदा तिष्ठेत्सन्धिना विग्रहेण च ।
द्वैधीभावं समाश्रित्य पापशत्रौ लीयसी ॥ 39 ॥

By offering tempting bait and thereby instilling confidence in him while remaining cautious oneself, the enemy can be easily extirpated. Men adept in diplomacy do encourage the enemy they wish to see destroyed to grow and prosper a while: just as phlegm increased by molasses vanishes without a trace.

उच्छेद्यमपि विद्वांसो वर्धयन्त्यरिमेकदा ।
गुडेन वर्धितः श्लेष्मा सुखं वृद्ध्या निपात्यते ॥ 40 ॥

A man who acts with candour towards an enemy, a false friend, or towards some especially of easy morals will not survive long

स्त्रीणां शत्रोः कुमित्रस्य पुण्यस्त्रीणां विशेषतः ।
यो भवेदेकभावोऽत्र न स जीवति मानवः ॥ 41 ॥

Man must act with candour towards gods, brahmanas, onesie and one's preceptor and it is best to soft double dealing with all others.

कृत्यं देवद्विजातीनामात्मनश्च गुरोस्तथा ।
एकभावेन कर्तव्यं शेषं द्वैध समाश्रितम् ॥ 42 ॥

Candour is ever extolled towards ascetics rpruified by prayer and meditation but never with men especially kings who lust after wordy things -

एको भावः सदा शस्तो यतीनां भावितात्मनाम् ।
स्त्रीलुब्धानां न लोकानां विशेषेण महीभृताम् ॥ 43 ॥

Very confident about his advice the elderly counsellor concludes "By restoring to double dealing you will remain secure in your own realm. death will quick by extirpate the enemy obsessed with greed and hate".

After the discussion of the six classic expedients the Panchtantra speaks about another alternative that the elderly counsellor adopts to lead himself to victory. He makes himself to be noticed by the nemies. He deceives the enemy- the Owl king Arimardana and his retinue puts them in a vulnerable position where they could be extirpated easily. He becomes successful in his mission just because the Owl king disregards the sae counsel of his minister who knew the twists and turns of real politic in and out. His sage counsel reflects the statement: "Trust not a former enemy who comes professing amity"

न विश्वसेत्पूर्वविरोधितस्य शत्रोश्च मित्रत्वमुपागतस्य ॥ 44 ॥

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