

# Leadership Qualities and Foreign Policies from Kautilya's Arthashastra

## Introduction

Acharya Chanakya or Kautilya was the minister in the Kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya during 317 – 293 B.C. He has been considered as one of the shrewdest ministers of the times who has explained his views on State, War, Social Structures, Diplomacy, Ethics, Politics and Statecraft very clearly in his book called *Arthashastra* that he wrote in around 4<sup>th</sup> century before Christ (Shabbir,n.d.). It is one of the most important text from the ancient Bharat. The *Arthashastra* was expanded over a period of time and redacted between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. This famous text was influential till the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. After that it lost its influence due to the invasions of several rulers. Finally, after many centuries it got rediscovered in the year 1905 by Shri R. Shamasastri, who had published it in 1909. It was also translated by him in English for the first time ever and got published in 1915. The text of the *Arthashastra* is considered to be a manual or a guidebook which transformed Chanandragupta from a normal citizen into a great monarch.

## Objectives

State has its soul in leadership. An effective and pragmatic leadership is thus a sine qua non in statecraft. Acharya Chanakya or Kautilya's magnum-opus 'Arthshastra' is a treatise that primarily deals with the economic administration but equally holds the notions of ethics, diplomacy, politics, qualities of a leader and the foreign policies.

This article aims:

- To find out the leadership qualities from the *Arthashastra* and to find the relevance of them in the modern management scenario.
- To analyze the foreign policies as mentioned in the *Arthashastra* with comparison to the modern management.

## **PART 1: Leadership qualities from the Arthashastra**

Kautilya is of the opinion that for efficiently running an organization or the State, an elaborate machinery has to be established. He emphasizes on the organizational aspects with respect to the human dimensions of an organization, and the leadership required to make the organization functional (Veda Gurukulam, 2020).

Effective leadership is about not postponing decisions; when problems are not solved in time, they become hard or sometimes impossible to accomplish. Nations and organizations face most problems because of delayed decision making (Hattangadi, 2022).

Here is an indicative list of leadership qualities taken from the Arthashastra:

### **Your People Come First.**

*“In the happiness of his subjects lies the King’s happiness, in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects.”*

Chanakya believed that a King should always put his subjects before himself. The common man creates the King. Hence, the very existence of a King depends upon the happiness and well-being of his subjects. Similarly, business leaders of today should put their people at the forefront and not themselves when making decisions.

A good leader’s top priority is his peers and subordinates. Every person matters in an organisation. No job is small or insignificant. Chanakya talks about these essentials of leadership, that are core organisations, as taught in modern day business schools.

It is important to give due importance to every person in an organisation as the growth of the organisation depends on it. Very often, leaders get enamoured by their titles and privileges so much that they start ignoring their own employees. One of the keys to becoming a successful leader in any organisation is to put the needs and well-being of the employees before their own. A more employee-centric approach should be adopted by leaders where there is mutual understanding and respect. This essence would create harmony within the organisation and therefore, impact other factors in a positive way.

### **People In Power Must Be Accessible.**

*“When in the court, he shall never cause his petitioners to wait at the door, for when a king makes himself inaccessible to his people and entrusts his work to his immediate officers, he may be sure to engender confusion in business and to cause thereby public disaffection, and himself prey to his enemies.”*

It is not uncommon for a King to be surrounded by his ministers and noblemen. However, if he does not listen to and is not accessible to his subjects, he endangers not just his kingdom but also himself. Likewise, usually the leaders who are at the top-most positions in their organizations are mostly inaccessible to the lowest positions of employees. This creates a disconnect between the people of the organisation and the executive body.

A related issue is also that of ignorance towards the employees in lower positions of the organisation in decision making and other essential choices.

Chanakya therefore says that the leader should be accessible in nature – to all people of the organisation – since the employees are in direct contact with the customers and understand their needs and preferences much better than anyone else. Keeping communication open with your frontline employees may give ideas that wouldn't have been thought by anyone else from the perspective of a customer and a frontline employee.

What sets apart great business leaders from the rest is that they keep communication channels open-both horizontally and vertically. A good business leader values the importance of good communication and takes time to answer people's queries and explain their deliverables. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to have open communication channels with their subordinates and work with transparency.

### **Hold People Accountable For their Work.**

Chanakya believed that rewarding those who are performing well motivates them to continue doing their best. It is important to hold people accountable for their work – both good and bad. The ones performing well must be encouraged and rewarded. The underperformers must be put on the spot. Rewarding the employees for their hardwork and good performance can boost their motivation to work more as well set an example for the other employees to look up to them. They would also be aware that hardwork does get rewarded. However, leaders should also be aware not to overburden the good employees as that might decrease their performance if they are unable to cope with the amount of work given, irrespective of the rewards kept at the end of completion.

Likewise, a firm standing should be there for employees who go out of track and indulge in malicious practices. They too should be held accountable for their actions.

### **Don't Delay Your Decisions – Do The Right Thing At The Right Time.**

*“All urgent calls he shall hear at once, but never put off; for when postponed, they will prove too hard or impossible to accomplish.”*

Chanakya understood that a good leader did his duties the right way and most importantly, at the right time. That is the only way that a King could also expand his empire.

Even some of the most effective decisions, if made at the wrong time are of no use and would rather make blunders. Therefore, the implementation of good decisions should also be done without delay and when there is a need for that to happen.

Chanakya understands that time, once lost, can never be gained back. A good leader knows the importance of time management and how crucial it is to the success of an organisation. Delayed decision making can slow down organisational growth. When you do not solve problems on time, they often snowball into larger problems that are hard or cannot be solved.

One of the likely reasons that decisions made in organizations take so much time to be processed is that key decisions are only made by the higher-ups creating a bottleneck. Outdated processes are another reason why decision making becomes slow. If the same problem crops up over and over, an effective leader will see to it that the process is, redesigned. Fast and effective decision making is the sign of a great leader. (Kumar, N. S., & Rao, U. S., 1996).

[Selected shlokas from the Arthashastra which discusses Leadership are listed below:](#)

**आत्मज्ञानं समारंभस्तितिक्षा धर्मनित्यता यमर्थान्नापकर्षन्ति स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते |**

*They who are not overwhelmed by the challenges of life owing to their knowledge, persistence, patience, and virtue are the wise deserving position of leadership.*

निषेवते प्रशस्तानि निन्दितानि न सेवते अनास्तिकः श्रद्धा एतद् राजर्षिनः लक्षणम् |

*The wise are those who adhere to their duties, who stand by their words, who praise the deserving, criticize the undeserving, who untouched by selfish interest and who is revered not for their virtues. Such people deserve the position of leadership.*

क्रोधो हर्षश्च दर्पश्च ह्रीस्तम्भो मान्यमानिता यमर्थान्नापकर्षन्ति स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते |

*That person who overwhelms his anger, joy, sorrow, and pride, who has no false modesty, neither confusion nor vanity, who can stay equanimous in mind at all times, is undoubtedly a wise deserving position for leadership.*

यस्य कृत्यं न जानन्ति मन्त्रं वा मन्त्रितं परे कृतमेवास्य जानन्ति स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते |

*That person whose envisioned plans and strategies remain obscured from their adversaries, they whose acts become known after they are achieved is undoubtedly wise. Only such a person deserves the position of leadership.*

यस्य कृत्यं न विघ्नन्ति शीतमुष्णं भयं रतिः समृद्धिरसमृद्धिर्वा स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते |

*That person who can achieve things beyond the limitations of external and internal circumstances, whose judgments are not impaired by attachments, who remains sane in prosperity or adversity is an undoubtedly a wise person capable of the position of power.*

यस्य संसारिणी प्रज्ञा धर्मार्थावनुवर्तते कामादर्थं वृणीते यः स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते |

*That person whose judgment, dissociated from desires, follows both virtue and profit; who disregarding fleeting pleasures seeks to achieve everlasting bliss, is to be known as wise and deserve the position to lead.*

यथाशक्ति चिकीर्षन्ति यथाशक्ति च कुर्वते न किञ्चिदवमन्यन्ते राजर्षिः|

*They who exert their best of might, and also act to the best of the strength, and disregard no threats as insignificant, are most certainly the wise and have great potential in them to be just leaders.*

*That individual who understands effortlessly heeds unwearingly, pursues his objective with a keen sense of logic and not from desires or blind beliefs, is sure to be a person who has realized the greatest of wisdom and therefore deserving of leadership.*

**नाप्राप्यमभिवाञ्छन्ति नष्टं नेच्छन्ति शोचितुम् आपत्सु च न मुह्यन्ति नराः राजर्षिः बुद्धयः ।**

*They who do not strive for things with detrimental consequences, who do not grieve for what is lost, who do not suffer in their minds even while facing severe calamities, are to be regarded as intellectuals who have realized the wisdom in their life. Only such a person make the most exceptional leaders.*

**निश्चित्य यः प्रक्रमते नान्तर्वसति कर्मणः अवन्ध्य कालो वश्यात्मा स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते ।**

*They who, once having commenced a task, keep striving and never stop until it has achieved, who seldom wastes their time brooding, and who have their mind under their control is undoubtedly a wise person.*

**आर्य कर्मणि राज्यन्ते भूतिकर्माणि कुर्वते हितं च नाभ्यसूयन्ति राजर्षिः ।**

*They who are wise always delight in honest deeds, they are inclined to seek their happiness and prosperity without hurting others, and they never sneer at virtues.*

**न हृष्यन्तयात्मसंमाने नावमानेन तप्यते गाङ्गो हृद इवाक्षोभ्यो यः स राजर्षिः उच्यते ।**

*They, who are never overwhelmed by pride, even on receiving highest honors, and those who remain relaxed and un-agitated like a lake in the course of Ganga, even amid the greatest of their crisis are verily the wise. Only such individuals are deserving of the position of leadership.*

**तत्त्वज्ञः सर्वभूतानां योगज्ञः सर्वकर्मणाम् उपायज्ञो मनुष्याणां नरः राजर्षिः उच्यते ।**

*That individual who lives realizing the ultimate truth that everything that is born must die, who is aware of the law of cause and effect (Karma), and who is proficient in the ways to achieve one's just goals without compromising on integrity are deserving to be called as wise. They are the ones who deserve the position of leadership.*

**प्रवृत्त वाक्क्रित्रकथ ऊहवान्प्रतिभानवान् आशु ग्रन्थस्य वक्ता च स वै राजर्षिः उच्यते ।**

*They who speak honestly, who can converse on various subjects, know the ways of just criticism and arguments, who have proper perspectives on all matters and are well-read are the wise deserving of power.*

श्रुतं प्रज्ञानुगं यस्य प्रज्ञा चैव श्रुतानुगा असम्भिन्नार्य मर्यादः राजर्शाभ्यां लभेत सः ।

*That individual whose studies are regulated by rationale, and whose reason follows objectivity, and who seldom fails to respect those who are kind, is very a wise person. And such a person alone deserves to lead. (Prabhu, M. 2022).*

Thus, Arthashastra holds some pearls for leadership which are presented below:

- A great leader shows ability to make decision and act boldly in the face of setbacks and adversity.
- Power goes to the person who uses it most effectively.
- Leaders are sensitive to and are aware of the needs, feelings and motivation of those they lead.
- Foundation of leadership consists of honesty, truthfulness and straight dealing.
- Leaders develop ability to predict and anticipate the future.
- Self-discipline is the most important personal quality of a leader. (Shabbir, n.d.)

## **PART 2: Foreign policies from the Arthashastra**

Foreign or external affairs have received a great deal of attention through the ages. Though there has been no direct reference to the existence of a foreign department in the *Rig Veda*, the *Aitareya Brahman* in the *Brahman* literature mentions *Indra* having referred to the *Marut* as his *Sachiva* (the post of the minister who looked to the relations of the state with foreign nations). In the *Taittiriya* and *Atharva Vedas*, in the sense of an emissary or a messenger, the word *Prahit* is used. In the Bharatiya policy, *doot* is the emissary of a state in a foreign court and this usage can be traced as a root to the present day conventions and practices with regard to an ambassador.

The existence of a foreign relations department in the Mauryan statecraft has a recurring reference in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. This is confirmed as being so by the Greek philosopher Megasthenes.

The Arthashastra viewed as a perfect culmination of the pros and cons of the Aryan policy and political philosophy advocates the re-ordering of the priorities of the Purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha) and gives precedence to materialism over religion and morality at the macro level. The concept of Mandalayonihi akin to the Rajamandala theory describes the circles of friendly and hostile states surrounding the king's state. The Kautilyan polity seems to go well with the adage 'Nayagyaha prthivim jayathi' meaning one skilled in diplomacy wins the world.

Though today's world is different from that of Kautilya, especially with respect to the realms of consciousness and technological developments, the relevance of the six facets of Nyaya (diplomacy) would not go amiss. (Radhika, 2015)

The six types of foreign policy that he talks about are:

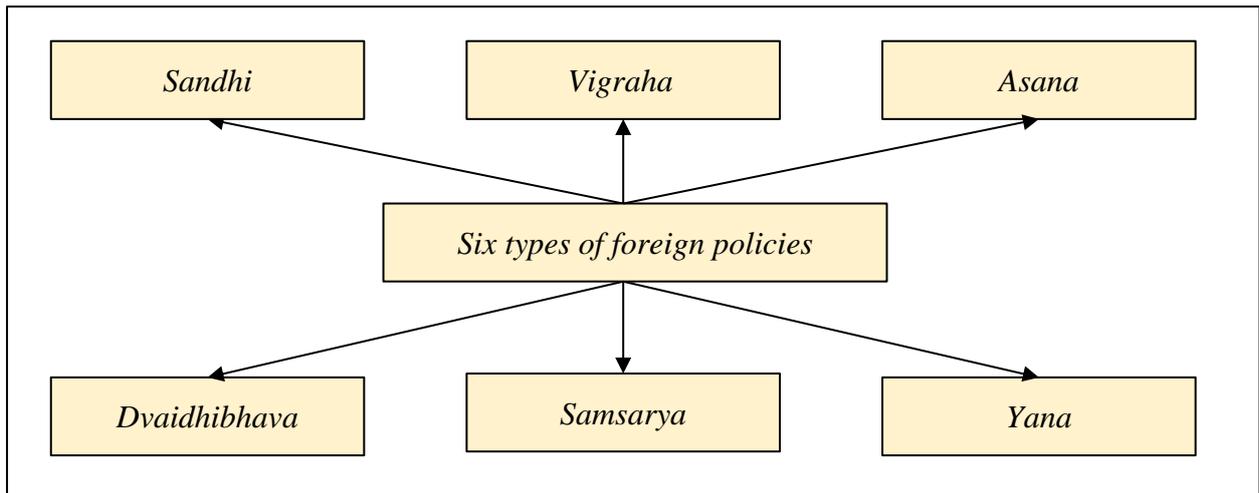


Fig. 1: Six types of foreign policies of Kautilya

1. **Sandhi:** Sandhi simply means to accommodating others and living with harmony. The nature of these Sandhis to be temporary or permanent depended on various other factors such as the environment and the relative powers of the king.

The various sub-forms in this *sandhi* have been practiced by statesmen in later ages. For example, Bismarck had used *Karmasandhi* with Austria and Britain's foreign policy has been to maintain *Anavasitasandhi* with the United States.

2. **Vighraha:** It is understood as the hostility shown to neighbor or a state. Kautilya strongly believed that the states are always at war and seek power hence it is necessary to have hostile foreign policy towards few states which are either equal in power or subordinate in power.

3. **Asana:** This means indifference and he chooses this policy for states which are neutral in his mandala concept of nations. He also believes that an indifferent foreign policy works well in the case of equal power. However, this idea is not used as much in the modern age as the nature of states have changed. The states with equal power atleast are connected to the other countries in some or the other way, thereby losing the chance of being indifferent to those states. Actions are measured in the way one state acts with the other.

4. **Dvaidhibhava:** Dvaidhibhava means double policy which was very well practiced by Bismarck. Kautilya advocates this foreign policy for states which are superior militarily. Kissinger followed this strategy where he made alliance with China such that at no time Russia

and China could become closer in ties than US and China. Kautilya advocated the same concept within his Mandala framework.

5. **Samsarya:** This policy of protection is followed where a stronger state intervenes and shelters a weak state. Kautilya advocates this policy when a stronger state needs a shield to protect itself from an equal power it is good to use this policy of protection for a third state and use this alliance to defend against the potential enemy. In one sense the colonization was followed where European powers started controlling weak nations in Africa and Asia and thus strengthening their position against one another.

6. **Yana:** This policy is to attack. Kautilya does mention that peace and stability in a state makes the state even powerful but never shies away from attacking the weak and unjust king. He thinks that an unjust king keeps the society unhappy which makes that state a potential target as it is weak due to social unrest. Who knows may George W. Bush read Kautilya before pursuing the Yana policy on Iraq! (Kautilyam Arthasāstram, ed.1909)

These *Shadgunya* (six-fold foreign policy) are made effective by the four-fold *upayas* (devices) mentioned in the *Arthashastra* which are considered as a doctrine of settling conflicts among the political powers. The devices *Sama* (conciliation or the art of gentle persuasion), *Daana* (placating with gifts or the usage of carrots), *Bheda* (the art of aggravating dissension amongst parties opposed to each other) and *Danda* (punishment or the usage of sticks) (Radhika, 2015)

According to Kautilya the primordial sense of selfishness and insecurity in human beings is the prime driver of all inter-personal and interstate relations which makes his teachings relevant, both in the present and foreseeable future.

## **Conclusion:**

The Arthashastra is a text in which the policies and qualities are given in a manner so that the leaders and monarchs coming from different backgrounds could implement and serve for the betterment of the nation. Chandragupta was a normal citizen of the Magadha empire later on Chanakya chose him and made him a monarch. The Arthashastra's knowledge was followed by Chandragupta for the welfare of the kingdom. In the modern days scenario also all most of

the policies and qualities of a leader as mentioned by Chanakya in the Arthashastra are relevant, they solve numerous problems of a company. Several researches have been conducted on the problem solving strategies and the qualities of a manager of a company, based on the Arthashastra.

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<https://www.vedic-management.com/15-qualities-of-an-ideal-leader-according-to-kautilya-chanakya/>

**About the reference:** Almost every Vedic Rishis (sage), starting from Bharadwaja, Parashara, Manu, Shukracharya, Pishuna until Chanakya a.k.a. Kautilya lay significant emphasis on earning Gynana or Knowledge and realizing Vigyana or wisdom in our lives. One of the most standard teachings of all Vedic text is that: Without wisdom, life is a living pain. Right, knowledge helps us to achieve material wealth, but that material wealth is no guarantee for happiness. For, with wealth comes its own set of challenges that often takes a toll on one's mind, body, and life. Wisdom is the only thing in life that is capable of helping you remain aloof from pains and in a state of perpetual bliss. Until a person has realized the wisdom in his life, that person can only be in pain and, if in the position of leadership, will make the life of his people, a living hell.

RANGARAJAN, L. N. (1992). Kautilya: The Arthashastra (300 BCE). PENGUIN BOOKS.

<https://ncjindalps.com/pdf/HUMANITIES/The%20Kautilya%20Arthashastra%20-%20Chanakya.pdf>

**About the reference:** This is the book in which the Arthashastra has been explained in details.

Ojha, S. (2016). The Ingenious 'Upayas' In The Arthashastra Could Still Be Used In Administration Today.

<https://swarajyamag.com/culture/the-ingenious-upayas-in-the-arthashastra-could-stillbe-used-in-administration-today>

**About the reference:** In an earlier article on the Arthashastra, 'artha' was explained as one of the goals of individual human existence. Understood in an extended universal sense, it assumes the form of the desire for well-being in general, which can be made possible only by the state. The state has the two-fold aim of palana (administration) and labha (acquisition of territory) if this well-being is to be achieved. In the context of the second of these two aims, Kautilya's Arthashastra deals with defence and external relations of the state at length.

Defence and foreign relations are intertwined; if the vijigishu, the all-conquering king with a powerful army (as envisaged in the Arthashastra), wants to extend his territory and expand his influence — how should he interact with other states? Foreign policy is summed up in the famous ‘rajamandala’ theory, which details the way to conduct relations with each type of constituent of the ‘circle of kings’. These relations are established and carried on with the help of envoys, and policies can be classified into six gunas; sandhi (the policy of peace), vighraha (the policy of hostility), asana (the policy of remaining quiet), yana (marching on an expedition), sanshraya (seeking shelter) and dvaidhibhava (combined policy of sandhi and vighraha). Intimately connected with these are the four means, or upayas, which can be used to make an antagonist bend to the will of the vijigishu; saman, dana, danda and bheda, translated as conciliation, gifts, dissension and force. They appear to be even more ancient than the concept of the six gunas and more universal in their application, although there are clear similarities between them and the gunas. Saman is a policy of peace similar to sandhi, danda is vighraha combined with yana.

Shabbir, S. (n.d.). Kautilya on leadership: Lessons from Arthashastra

**About the reference:** State has its soul in leadership. An effective and pragmatic leadership is thus a sine qua non in statecraft. Acharya Chanakya or Kautilya’s magnum-opus ‘Arthashastra’ is a treatise that primarily deals with the economic administration but equally holds the notions of ethics, diplomacy and politics. Taking his this work as a collection of thoughts on political realism, here is a humble attempt to peep inside and ponder over the elements of leadership by one of a great diplomat of ages.

Mohanty, A., & Das, G. (2017). Revisiting the Arthashastra : An Approach to Emotional Intelligence. Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management.

<https://doi.org/10.17010/pijom/2017/v10i5/114253>

**About the reference:** The concept of emotional intelligence is a well known behavioral construct among students, teachers, and researchers in the area of organizational behavior and psychology throughout the world. Still, it is imperative to redefine the different aspects of emotional intelligence in the context of the prevailing aggressive global atmosphere. The achievement and failure of a company chiefly depends upon the productive and effective handling of resources available within the organization. Resources are categorized into two like: human and non-human. Successful and productive uses of non -human resources are

possible only through highly motivated and committed human beings. Motivation and commitment among the work force are shaped and injected through the dynamic leadership of managers. One of the vital aspects of effective leadership is to develop the ability to perceive emotions within one self and others. Leadership also involves expressing emotions effectively. The whole process of perceiving and expressing emotions effectively pose a greater challenge before today's managers to motivate and mobilize their subordinates. In order to bridge the expected gap existing in the present emotional intelligence aspects, a paradigm shift came into view by means of instilling contemporary management thoughts through the nuances of age-old insights. The article examined the book Arthashastra authored by Kautilya, the chief exponent in the field of economics and management. Arthashastra etymologically explains “the science of wealth” and is one of the ancient Indian works that emphasizes upon the effective management of wealth through leadership. Arthashastra illustrates the contribution of Kautilya in ancient India regarding the role of an emotionally intelligent king towards the effective administration of the state. The paper explored the lessons in emotional intelligence from Arthashastra and interpreted its relevance in the present day business context. The relevance of Arthashastra in the perspective of emotional intelligence was analyzed in this paper.

Kumar, N. S., & Rao, U. S. (1996). Guidelines for value based management in Kautilya's Arthashastra. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 15(4), 415–423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00380362>

**About the reference:** The paper develops value based management guidelines from the famous Indian treatise on management, Kautilya's Arthashastra. Guidelines are given for individual components of a total framework in detail, which include guidelines for organizational philosophy, value based leadership, internal corporate culture, accomplishment of corporate purpose and feedback from stakeholders.

Sonwalkar, J., & Maheshkar, C. (2018). Chanakya's “Arthashastra”: management practices by Indian values. *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management*, 16(4), 460.

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**About the reference:** India is the country with the longest history. It is the world's most culturally varied country. Arthashastra is the ancient book by Chanakya presented a balanced socio-economic and political structure of ancient India. Revelation of the texts in the Arthashastra informs a range of concepts of administration, economic development,

management principles and practices, and society. This study presents the management practices propounded in this ancient scripts of Arthashastra and has compared with the modern practices of management.

Arthashastra. (n.d.). In Google Books.

[https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hrPzapOaUwgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=arthashastra%2Bleadership&ots=qyC7bt5xxJ&sig=4BhWG1h40Dc2JXlkybgEWTbiF3s&red\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=arthashastra%2Bleadership &f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hrPzapOaUwgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=arthashastra%2Bleadership&ots=qyC7bt5xxJ&sig=4BhWG1h40Dc2JXlkybgEWTbiF3s&red_esc=y#v=onepage&q=arthashastra%2Bleadership &f=false)

**About the reference:** This book talks about the growth of the Arthashastra and the leadership qualities in it.

Nallisamy, V., & Muniandy, R. (2022). Kautilya's Arthashastra as a Precursor to the Concept of Servant Leadership. In *Advances in logistics, operations, and management science book series* (pp. 192–207). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-5812-9.ch012>

**About the reference:** The Arthashastra is an Indian text which was written by Kautilya around 2500 years ago. Mainly intended to be a textbook on statecraft for kings, this treatise covers various aspects of leadership and management that are still relevant today. On the other hand, servant leadership is a growing leadership theory that is gaining popularity due to its unique focus on followers' wellbeing. Using hermeneutic techniques, the authors have analyzed the verses in the Arthashastra related to the servant leadership theory. Based on this analysis, the authors have identified at least four dimensions of modern servant leadership that are present in this ancient text, namely authenticity, stewardship, altruism, and interpersonal acceptance. The authors recommend that further research is conducted into Indian culture and literature (including the Arthashastra) to explore the Asian roots of servant leadership.