



## Relevance and contribution of Kamandaka's Nitisara in contemporary international relations with reference to strategic and diplomatic discourse

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### Abstract

The paper is an analysis of the applicability of Kamandaka Nitisara in modern international relations, especially in the strategic and diplomatic discourse. The Nitisara, written around the sixth to the eighth centuries CE, forms a highly developed statecraft framework that concerns itself with striking a balance between political prudence and restraint, as well as with ethical restraint and adaptability. Among the main aspects of governance, the formation of alliances, intelligence, negotiation, and the use of force are measured. The text presents the background of power management and relations between states. Focusing on contextual judgment, moral responsibility, strategic flexibility, Kamandaka has returned to a modern understanding of deterrence, multi-alignment, conflict management, and strategic autonomy of the multipolar world. According to the study, the revisit of this classical Indian treatise enhances the international relations theory as it allows a non-Western indigenous point of view that defies Eurocentric theories. Finally, Nitisara offers timeless values of how to become a responsible leader, sustainable security, diplomatic practice in the conditions of modern geopolitical insecurities, and unstable world power balances.

**Keywords:** Nitisara, Kamandaka, international relations theory, strategic and diplomatic discourse

### Introduction

The ancient Indian political theory is one of the oldest and most advanced in maintaining the information on statecraft, diplomacy, military strategy and ethical government (Mishra, 2004) <sup>[4]</sup>. The Mahabharata, Manu Smriti, Arthashastra of Kautilya, and Nitisara of Kamandaka provide systematic conceptual schemes that can be used to explain the nature of power, the constitutional structure of the political order, international relationships, and the ethics that defined the rule of a king or a prince (Gopal, 1966) <sup>[5]</sup>. These authors promote a practical ethic, which combines realpolitik with ethical values, a method which has become more and more topical in the sphere of contemporary international relations discourse (MP-IDS, 2024) <sup>[1]</sup>. Nitisara by Kamandaka, written around the time between the fifth and the eighth centuries of the Common Era, is a turning point treatise on politics and diplomacy which has often been described as a transitional point between the epic tradition and the strategic realism of the kind found in the Arthashastra (Gautam, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>. The main themes covered in it include the vital qualities of a ruler, the state structure, diplomatic behaviour, the process of alliance, military strategy, peace-making, negotiation, and the ethical aspect of state behaviour (Verma, 2025) <sup>[2]</sup>. Kamandaka, though influenced by Kautilya, gives parallel developments more focus on ethical restraint, prudence, psychological insight, and situation adaptability, thus making a unique contribution to the classical Indian political theory (Gopal, 1966) <sup>[5]</sup>.

### Nitisara and its Content

The Nitisara provides an elaborate list of the structure of governance, outlining the moral attributes that a ruler must have, the structure of the administrative institutions, the strategic aspects of diplomatic relations, warfare, and intelligence. The original verses of Sanskrit and political maxims of Kamandaka propound the idea of mantra

(deliberation), mitra (alliance-building), shakti (power), and yukti (strategic technique). It emphasises the unique formulation of Kamandaka, which is an attempt to enforce morality and statecraft into a pragmatic balance, providing a fine nuance in the interpretation, which goes beyond the purest realist views of ancient political thought. The interstate relations, spycraft, and military strategy are especially interesting to note as they demonstrate a sharp insight Kamandaka had concerning the psychology of a human individual, the nature of negotiation, and the contribution of contingency to decision-making. It is commonly stressed by scholars that, compared to some other contemporary treatises on politics, the Nitisara subjugates the moral considerations to the context of the strategy, hence providing an example of a ruler being guided by the principles of prudence, wisdom, and long-term stability. This masterpiece on political statecraft forms a significant resource in the modern research on the strategic culture, the behaviours of foreign policy and the applicability of the ancient Indian political philosophy in the context of the multipolar world. (Dutt, 2018) <sup>[10]</sup>

Nitisara addresses the virtues of kings, the management of states, international relations, the strategy of war, how to form alliances, and the importance of intelligence. The political reasoning of Kamandaka and the rest of the tradition of Niti literature in ancient India encompass a vividly relational relationship, and shows the interesting ethical-strategic balance that pervades the thinking of Kamandaka. (Sastri, 1912) <sup>[12]</sup>. Kamandaka's political thought holds great relevance in relation to the current issues of international relations such as realism, diplomacy, soft power, and strategic autonomy.

Further, the Nitisara provides a critical explanation of the manner in which Kamandaka characterises politics, violence and warfare in the greater context of ancient Indian political realism. Kamandaka brings danda (force), bala (power), kala (timing), and mantra (deliberative counsel) together

and relates them as the components that must work together to generate good statecraft. (Singh, 2010) <sup>[13]</sup> But the paramount thought acting as the stark distinction between Kautilya's Arthashastra and Kamandaka's Nitisara is that Kamandaka does not glorify violence, but he uses it as a carefully regulated political tool that is contained within restraints and the ethical values, prudence and strategic calculations. According to him, this should offer a tool for the detection of the delicate middle way, which the normative moral prescriptions take in the name of pragmatic realpolitik, as followed by Nitisara. Opposite interpretations, which assume the texts of ancient Indian political traditions as monogenic or amoral in their conclusions, Kamandaka incorporates the element of morality in the reality of a realist, stressing that rulers have to consider the consequences, the stability of the society, and the long-term interests when declaring war. The context of the regional fragmentation and the power relations that had changed during early medieval India in the context in which Nitisara was placed, and thus the necessity of flexible diplomacy and military politics. In the modern context of research about international relations, it is especially applicable. The relevance of what was said in Nitisara, like calculated coercion, proportion in war, moral restraint, and strategic coalitions, with current arguments on deterrence, limited war, conflict management, and politically wise decisions in uncertain conditions. Therefore, the Nitisara is a critical text of value since it provides timeless lessons on the logic of political violence, and this is of great use in the quest by scholars to find indigenous theoretical approaches to add to the world of global IR.

Kamandaka dates to the history of the early medieval period, between the sixth and the eighth centuries of the Common Era, a time of strong political fragmentation and consolidation of the regional forces. It is necessary to know the historical context in which the composition of the Nitisara was placed to interpret its interest in cyclical diplomacy, strategic flexibility and the art of using force in moderation. The intellectual system of Kamandaka presents the practical issues of rulers in the competitiveness of the decentralised political structure, where alliances, bargaining and espionage networks played key roles in the survivability of a ruler. The continuity and misalignment of the text with and without the Kautilya version of the Arthashastra are another aspect of the intertextuality, which makes it even clearer why Nitisara holds the exceptional role in the Niti tradition. To modern scholars studying the issue of strategic culture and indigenous IR theory, it is important to place Kamandaka in a real socio-historical context to understand the literature's significance. Hence, Nitisara emerges not as a manual that is only theoretically-based, but a complex reaction to actual political issues in the geopolitical arena, and is thus of great interest in exploring current geopolitical behaviour, politics of alliance, as well as the strategic decision-making process. (Gupta, 2014) <sup>[14]</sup>

### Kamandaka's Strategic Vision

The *Nitisara* by Kamandaka can be described as a more sophisticated and ethically aware concept of statecraft that deserves larger academic recognition (Thakuria, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. Although the *Arthashastra* has always been viewed as a foundational text in the study of ancient Indian political realism, Kamandaka differs with Kautilya, who sets forth only arguing prominently on the prescriptions of political

realism, and often harsh, accepting instead the pre-emption of prudence, moral restraint and psychological insight in the management of the state and in the conduct of diplomacy (Shahi, 2019) <sup>[7]</sup>. His study of terms like *mantra* (counsel), *mitra* (friendliness), *shakti* (power), and *yukti* (manoeuvre) provide a subtle way of understanding political behaviour. These aspects still have high topicality to the modern world system on an international level, with states focusing more on strategic communication, limited engagement, and multi-layer partnerships to cope with uncertainty (Kohl, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. This makes the synthesis of ethical politics and realpolitik found in *Nitisara* remarkable, which adds to the interpretive power of new geopolitical behaviours in the modern era (Gadeock, 2025) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### Kamandaka's Nitisara & International Relations

The recent decades have seen the emergence of a growing scholarly interest in international relations in terms of the need to diversify the scope of international relations, beyond Western-centric models (Mishra, 2004) <sup>[4]</sup>. This tendency has given a new academic life to the discussions of indigenous strategic traditions, such as Indian, Chinese, and Islamic (MP-IDSA, 2024) <sup>[1]</sup>. Although far more attention is paid to the Arthashastra, the Nitisara is relatively under researched, although it provides a subtle and self-worth approach to the world of diplomacy and tact (Gautam, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>. Such classical texts have become more relevant in a multipolar international system that is defined in terms of balancing of power, alliances grounded on competitive pressures, both strategic signalling and economic coercion, as well as asymmetric conflict (Verma, 2025) <sup>[2]</sup>. The ideas expressed by Kamandaka, including prudential diplomacy, limited warfare, strategic autonomy, as well as multi-layered alliances, have a lot of relevance to modern problems like the rivalry of the two new powerhouses in India and China, the Indian subcontinent geopolitics, nuclear deterrence, hybrid warfare, and the strategic ideas of other rising powers (Mishra, 2004) <sup>[4]</sup>. A dedicated analysis of the Nitisara, by extension, can add to the modern discourse of IR, offering an indigenous approach to the study, with an Indian strategic history (Gopal, 1966) <sup>[5]</sup>. Although Nitisara by Kamandaka is a classic work of political thought of ancient Indian society, the work has received sparse academic focus in the present-day international relations field (Gautam, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>. Although the Arthashastra of Kautilya is widely covered, quoted and analysed in present-day strategic theories, the Nitisara is marginalised despite being a detailed and advanced summary of diplomacy, statecraft, ethical principles, power control, as well as how states relate to one another (MP-IDSA, 2024) <sup>[1]</sup>.

These gaps in the systematic development of the principles of Kamandaka have formed a profound lack of insight into the concept of the indigenous Indian strategic tradition and its possible application to modern political regimes in the world. The contemporary global society is marked by realignment strategies, the shift of power, the competition of the regions, and sophisticated diplomatic bargaining-circumstances that are quite similar to the majority of scenarios in the Nitisara. However, the contribution of IR scholarship on how the insights of Kamandaka could either augment or oppose the mainstream Western approaches of realism, neo-realism, constructivism, or strategic culture is uncommon. This oversight restricts the emergence of a more pluralistic and culturally based conception of global politics.

Thus, the main issue of concern is the lack of a thorough academic study that could relate the political philosophy of Kamandaka with the modern state of strategic and diplomatic discourse. The systematic analysis is necessary to determine the way in which the Nitisara can enrich theoretical discussions and shape the practical policy directions in today's multipolar world.

### Modern Relevance of Nitisara

In the modern multipolar world, where dominant forces are challenged by newly rising ones, and when diplomacy has often adopted new hybrid and non-traditional forms, the revival of native strategic traditions is an essential part of extending the analytical language of international relations (Thakuria, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. The Indian foreign policy, epitomised by strategic independence, multi-alignment and gradual deterrence, reflects a number of aspects that can be discerned in the Kamandaka thinking, but these links have not been given much focus in the scholarly literature (Shahi, 2019) <sup>[7]</sup>. In addition, the recent trends in the world, including the Indo-Pacific rivalry, the existing India–China border disputes and the changing alliances, provide a rich ground on which to reconsider the classical concepts of conflict management, negotiation, and wise state behaviour (Kohl, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. A detailed enquiry into the works of *Nitisara* concerning contemporary international relations is thus necessary, not just to revive the intellectual tradition of India but also to overall add to a more pluralistic, culturally contextual and internationally relevant approach to the discourse of strategies and diplomacy (Gadeock, 2025) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Summing up, it is the mature combination of ethics and prudence with strategic realism that makes Kamandaka Nitisara still relevant to the topic of international relations in the modern world, where the dilemma of a state functioning in a more complex and multipolar world order continues to be topical. Instead of being a purely historical or literary piece, the text expresses an active theory of leadership where the political power is maintained by balancing diplomacy with its adaptation, influences through alliances, intelligence collection, and meticulous control of coercive and persuasive means of power.

These understandings have a deep echo in the current strategic language where states are forced to continually struggle with uncertainty, asymmetric capabilities, and changing alliances without losing validity and stability in the long term. The contextual judgment and situational flexibility that is emphasized in this classical model is similar to the present-day concept of autonomy in strategic direction, hedging actions and coalitions of issues which identify twenty-first century diplomacy. It is also important that the work argues that ethical responsibility and political necessity are not necessarily opposing, but should be put in concordance by the means of prudent leadership and judicious decision-making that is directly applicable to the issue at present where responsibility in state behavior and humanitarian ethics are at odds with morality thresholds in the international arena. The treatise anticipates current issues of concern, by foregrounding prudence, restraint, and foresight, on the matter of escalation management, sustainable security and reputational implications of foreign policy decisions in an interconnected world.

Furthermore, the recovery and critical scrutiny of this indigenous culture adds to the larger project of de-centering Eurocentric discourses of international relations theory, to show that complex musings of diplomacy, balance of power, and interstate behavior were no recent development in non-Western tradition. This proliferation of theoretical sources does not only serve to enrich scholarly knowledge but it also offers modern policymakers to the Global South, in particular, conceptual instruments that resonate with the cultural specifics of their explanations of power, negotiation, and cooperation outside of inherited colonial structures. In a world where the forms of global governance are in a state of flux and where normative authority is more and more challenged, a revisiting of classical strategic thinking allows the realization of continuity in political thinking over centuries of time, and most of the apparently modern predicaments of security, legitimacy, and alliance politics, can be seen to be ancient characteristics of the organization of political life.

What the tradition offers, then, is not a prescriptive formula, but rather the development of a way of strategic thinking based on balance, adaptability and moral sense -qualities that are necessary in order to cope with competition without falling into anarchy. After all, what makes Nitisara so important in the context of modern strategic and diplomatic literature is the fact that it managed to cross all the boundaries of time and culture as well as theory to prove that timeless principles of wise rule can remain always, despite the fact that they are going to be implemented in various ways in different historical periods. With the current shift in international relations towards a more plural intellectual, geopolitical environment, the lessons inherent in this classical vision of the statecraft remain important in terms of its emphasis on incorporating multiple civilizational approaches into the current analytical thinking, and thus, leading to a more inclusive, more adequate comprehension of how power may be practiced responsibly to achieve a stable, cooperating and just political order in the twenty-first century.

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