

## Influence of Kautilya's Philosophy in Prithvi Narayan Shah's Unification Campaign

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### Abstract

*Before Prithvi Narayan Shah, the King of Gorkha, found out the possibilities of solidifying Gorkha kingdom, Nepal was divided into many smaller states. Although his statecraft shows his strategic acumen in winning and consolidating states to formally make a unified Nepal there is a gap in academia about the the source of the strategies applied by him. This paper has examined the unification strategy and statecraft of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, through the lens of Kautilya's ancient wisdom portrayed in the Arthashastra and seeks to uncover the possible influence of Kautilyan principles on his strategies. This qualitative research design based on secondary sources explored the historical context of Prithvi Narayan Shah's reign and the political landscape of 18th-century Nepal. It argues that Prithvi Narayan Shah's methods of diplomacy, military conquests, and internal administration resembles key aspects of Kautilya's teachings provided in Arthashastra specifically the Mandala Theory as a defense strategy. The paper based on exploratory research design with comparative study of Kautilya's philosophy and Prithvi Narayan Shah's strategies has*

*found out that there are tactical similarities with Kautilya's ideas and Prithvi Narayan Shah's approach during the unification.*

## **Introduction**

Nepal is a country with a rich and ancient history that dates back thousands of years. Although detailed studies on its early statehood are still being explored, it is very clear and established that Nepal as a state has existed for a remarkably long time (Stiller, 1968). Over the centuries, there has been the rise and fall of several dynasties, each contributing to the shaping of the nation (Adhikari, 2017).

In the last 2,500 years, Nepal has been ruled by at least six distinct dynasties, reflecting its dynamic and complex political history. These dynasties have included some of the prominent ones, such as the Lichhavi and Malla, leaving behind lasting legacies in every front of statecraft (Adhikari, 2012). Each dynasty brought its own unique cultural, political, and social influences, leaving a lasting impact on the development of the Nepali state (Rana, 2018).

The Shah dynasty, the most recent and perhaps the most well-known, played a pivotal role in modern Nepal's formation. The Shah's from the small Gorkha Kingdom located in the west of Kathmandu Valley unified the country (Pradhan, 2009, pp. XXVI-XVII). It remained a monarchic state from the late 18th century until the monarchy was abolished in 2008 AD after 250 years under the Shah. Under the Shah's, Nepal transitioned from a collection of small, fragmented states scattered into a centralized kingdom, establishing the foundations of the modern Nepali state we recognize today (Gautam, 2006).

Prithvi Narayan Shah or PN Shah is credited as the key architect of modern Nepal, building upon the foundations laid by his ancestor, Drabya Shah, who established the Gorkha Kingdom in 1559 AD (Yadav, 2012). Drabya Shah's legacy was one of strong leadership and the establishment of a principality that would later serve as the launching belt for the unification of Nepal. Although almost illiterate in formal education, PN Shah, ascending to the throne of Gorkha in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, recognized the vulnerability of the numerous small, fragmented states that existed in the region (Panta, 2021). He understood that to protect his kingdom from external threats, particularly from the expanding British Empire in India, it was crucial to consolidate these states into a single, unified nation (Mainali, 2019). This vision drove his lifelong mission of unification, which he pursued with strategic diplomacy, military campaigns, and a deep understanding of the geopolitical landscape of the time which was way ahead of his peers (Rana, 2018). Through a series of well-planned and executed military campaigns, PN Shah began merging the nearby

neighboring kingdoms, including the powerful states of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley (Mainali, 2019). His success in merging these states laid the ground work for a unified Nepal, a process that was fought with challenges but ultimately transformed the political map of the region. PN Shah's unification efforts did not end with his death in 1775 AD, while his son, Bahadur Shah, continued his father's mission with equal determination; however, it was all in the legacies of PN Shah which his son carried on (Gautam, 2006).

PN Shah became the King of the Gorkha Kingdom at a very young age, inheriting a status that was smaller in size but rich in potential. Although very young and the limitations of his formal education, which was largely informal and confined to the palace with his mother and two Rajgurus, PN Shah emerged as one of the prominent figures in the history of Nepal. His contributions to the unification and consolidation of the Nepali state are not only vast but also serve as an exemplary model of leadership and statecraft (Acharya & Naraharinath, 2018).

PN Shah's reign was marked by his vision for statecraft and strategic acumen. He recognized early on the necessity of unifying the fragmented states in the region, which were vulnerable to external threats, particularly from the British East India Company (BEIC), which was already flexing its muscle after the conquest in the Battle of Plassey and was rapidly expanding its influence in the Indian subcontinent (Stiller, 1968). Shaha 1990 states that, under PN Shah's leadership, the Gorkha Kingdom expanded its territories through the planned military campaigns, which were based on PN Shah's shrewd use of alliances, intelligence, and dedication. His decision to isolate Nepal from potential European influences by implementing a policy of non-alignment, famously encapsulated in his metaphor of Nepal as a "yam between two boulders," highlights his foresight and understanding of the complex geopolitical environment of his time. However, PN Shah's statecraft was not limited to military conquests because he was also equally connected with the internal administration, where he emphasized the promotion of agriculture, trade, and economic self-sufficiency of the state (Vaidya, 1993).

Despite the monumental impact of PN Shah's leadership on the creation of the Nepali state and his ideas on Nepal's national security still being relevant, the sources of his strategies and the intellectual foundations of his statecraft remain under-researched in academic circles. It is yet to be fully explored on both internal and external sources that shaped his vision and strategies. Likely, a combination of organic wisdom, his observations of the political dynamics, and perhaps observations of regional political dynamics might have played a role in the foundation. However, the lack of comprehensive academic inquiry is still prevalent, requiring a thorough study of his strategies and statecraft.

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta is a prominent figure of an ancient Indian philosophy who has contributed to the field of economics and statecraft. The thoughtful statesman has had a monumental impact in ancient India around 4th Century BCE. He is credited for the formation and solidification of the Maurya Empire in the 4th century BCE. He was the chief advisor and mentor to Chandragupta Maurya, the first emperor of the Maurya dynasty. Kautilya is best known for his seminal work *Arthashastra*, a comprehensive treatise on statecraft, politics, economics, military strategy, and diplomacy.

Kautilya's philosophy revolves around *realpolitik* and pragmatic governance for that Kautilya believed for a strong central authoritative regime. Further Kautilya's philosophy shows his beliefs towards the orientation that the stability and prosperity of a kingdom also depends upon efficient administration, and strategic foreign policy. His ideas often emphasize the importance of intelligence, surveillance, and calculated diplomacy over idealistic notions of morality.

One of Kautilya's most notable contributions to international relations is the Mandala Theory of state relations. According to this theory, neighboring states are natural enemies, while the neighbors of those enemies are potential allies which is famously quoted as "Enemy's enemy is your natural ally". This realist approach to diplomacy was aimed at maintaining a balance of power and securing the interests of the state. Therefore, Kautilya's legacy lies in his profound understanding of state survival through the means of *Sama-Dama-Danda-Bheda*, which had a profound impact as an ancient political thought. This political thought might have been applied by the ancient states in India and beyond.

Thus, this paper seeks to examine PN Shah's unification campaign and statecraft strategies through the lens of Kautilya's traditional wisdom portrayed in '*Arthashastra*'. It aims to contribute to the academic literature by tracing the influences of ancient Hindu philosophy on PN Shah's strategic approach.

## **Review of Literature**

This paper aims to explore the strategies applied by PN Shah during his campaign of winning against other states and their similarities with *Kautilya Niti*. For that purpose, the researcher has done two types of literature reviews. First, a thematic review focused on PN Shah's effort to consolidate state from available sources has been conducted, including his *Dibya Upadesh* and secondary literature on his statecraft and unification strategies. Second, the study reviewed the principles of *Kautilya Niti* as outlined in the *Arthashastra* to establish a philosophical framework for analysis.

After the Khas kingdom officially collapsed in the fifteenth century, the region West side of Kathmandu got divided into numerous small federations. Generations of interstate rivalries and territorial conflicts started to again gain prominence. However, by the mid-sixteenth century, Dravya Shah, the King of Gorkha, successfully subdued most of the neighboring principalities and confederations, establishing a formidable state (Rana, 2018). While Nepal was facing internal fragmentation, it was also at the same time encountering significant external pressures. Specially with the presence of the BEIC, which was expanding its control over Indian states, steadily consolidating its dominance in the region challenging the survival of small states (Gautam, 2006). Meanwhile, China's growing influence in the Himalayas further complicated the survival of the smaller states that would later form modern Nepal. The simultaneous advance of British power in the south and Chinese presence in the north posed formidable challenges to modern Nepal's sovereign standings (Shaha, 1990). Vaidya (1993) asserts that, although being a young and economically fragile kingdom relatively, Gorkha managed to rise as the dominant power and ultimately consolidate the fragmented states into a single national entity as Nepali state which was a result of military strength and of strategic leadership, diplomatic maneuvering, and strategic play on the weaknesses of rival states. The central figure in this transition was PN Shah Panta who according to Acharya & Naraharinath, (2018) contributed to unifying the fragmented and very vulnerable Nepali state into a consolidated and strong nation is remarkable, particularly using the principles of *Sama*, *Dama*, *Danda*, and *Bheda*. Although having a very informal education PN Shah was able to build on a very powerful state because of his wisdom (Stiller, 1968). Therefore, it is evident that PN Shah has had a monumental impact on unification of Nepal under his astute strategic application.

PN Shah's strategies can be traced primarily through *Dibya Upadesh*, according to Panta (2016) who provides a brief account of the biography of PN Shah along with a detailed explanation of *Dibya Upadesh*. It is a document written by PN Shah during the last days of his life in the Nuwakot Palace which contains wisdom for foreign relations and domestic administration including policies for land, military, industry, and general administration. Beyond their historical significance, PN Shah's ideas in *Dibya Upadesh* provide Nepal with important strategic insights in the modern geopolitical environment which is still very relevant in today's geopolitical context. The philosophical assumptions of *Dibya Upadesh* hold a significant contribution for Nepal's survival and unification. Pulami (2022) investigates the inception, development, and contemporary relevance of the "*yam theory*" particularly to Nepal's geopolitical environment. According to him, the "*yam theory*" is still relevant for Nepal because it provides a framework for comprehending the necessity of balance, neutrality, and strategic positioning for the nation in the face of significant power

dynamics. Therefore, PN Shah's original ideas of accommodation, balance, neutrality, and equi-distance continue to serve as the foundation for Nepal's foreign policy. His focus on maintaining national security and the cautious balance of the major powers is still highly pertinent today, providing direction for Nepal in negotiating its delicate position between potent neighbors and beyond. Nevertheless, despite their continuing relevance, these ideas have mostly been restricted to scholarly discussion and textbooks rather than being actively used in the real-world context of statecraft. Reinforcing the significance of King PN Shah's wisdom in shaping Nepal's foreign policy and national security framework, revitalizing these strategies in contemporary policymaking could improve Nepal's capacity to maintain sovereignty, stability, and strategic autonomy in an increasingly complex global environment (Bhattarai, 2022).

"From Buffer to Bridge" 2013, covers the historical geo-economics ties with India and China, including the unification strategies of PN Shah and the foreign policies of King Mahendra and Birendra. While the article describes King Mahendra's foreign policy as "balancing dynamism" and King Birendra's as "equal friendship," it lacks a thorough exploration of how Nepal's foreign policy principles emerged, neither particularly from the *Dibya Upadesh* nor the sources of *Dibya Upadesh*. Furthermore, the concept of small state diplomacy, exemplified by Nepal's historical position between larger economies, is not new in international relations. Nepal has consistently practiced a balanced foreign policy with its neighbors and global entities, a principle rooted in the teachings of late King PN Shah's *Dibya Upadesh*, which remains relevant today (Jayshwal & Shah, 2022).

From building a strong kingdom from a weak base to governing the state with profound legacies on every fronts like military and economy, the ideas and applications of PN Shah's strategies of unification and statecraft holds great relevance today. His innovative approaches to diplomacy, governance, and nation-building were key in transforming Nepal into a strong, consolidated state from very fragile situations with weak economic and military base following external pressures. These strategies included not only military conquests and campaigns but also political alliances, proper economic management, and cultural integration, which collectively strengthened the foundation of the kingdom. Despite their importance in contemporary statecraft too, there remains a significant gap in academia regarding the sources of PN Shah's ideas of statecraft and his strategies during the war. The historical contexts and the intellectual foundations that shaped his strategies have not been thoroughly examined, leaving a void in our understanding of how these concepts were developed and implemented by him. Therefore, this new attempt has first explored the foundations of the Gorkha Kingdom, unification, and statecraft under PN Shah and check the influence of Kautilya's philosophy in his strategies.



Chanakya, also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta, was a renowned political thinker whose writings span a broad spectrum of politics and statecraft. Born in 375 BCE, Kautilya made significant contributions to the vision of statecraft, particularly through his insights on diplomacy, economy, and military strategy (Sharma, 2015). Chanakya's strategic counsel guided Chandragupta Maurya to establish the Mauryan Empire.

Arthashastra remains the cornerstone of ancient Eastern political theory in the Indian subcontinent, which touches upon, economics and military organization, composed during the Mauryan Empire. Kautilya emphasized the role of economic policy in maintaining state power, advocating for a strong bureaucracy to centralize control over key economic activities. He also stressed the importance of strict supervision of officials to prevent corruption (Kautilya, 1915). Kautilya's philosophy is grounded in practical and strategic state administration, emphasizing the importance of a ruler's intelligence, adaptability, and ability to maintain power. Kautilya advocates for a form of governance where the ends often justify the means, endorsing tactics such as espionage, sabotage, and military aggression to attain the goal of the national interest. The text underscores the primacy of state stability and sovereignty, often prioritizing these over the individual rights and moral considerations. However, Kautilya's support for a strictly autocratic, agrarian state, he also recognized the importance of social welfare, integrating it into his philosophy, which does not neglect the significance of social welfare within a framework that favors strong and centralized authority (Kautilya, 1915).

Kautilya, rendered as a "science of politics", which has two major aims in politics: first, preservation of the state and acquisition of the territory (Kangle, 1997). The Mandala theory, which provides a strategic framework for interstate relations and power dynamics, is essential to Kautilya's foreign policy strategies. According to this belief, there is a way for a ruler, called *Vijigishu*, or "the king with aspirations for world conquest," to become a *Chakravartin*, or global conqueror or emperor (Kumar, 2011). Kautilya's teachings provide a thorough blueprint for rulers looking to increase their dominion and establish themselves as supreme sovereigns since they emphasize the significance of both offensive and defensive methods (Kumar, 2011).

The fundamental principle of the Mandala theory is encapsulated in the phrase, "*the enemy's enemy is a natural ally*" (Sharma, 2015). According to this theory, there are 12 types of states. *Ari*, the neighboring state, is considered an enemy of *Vijigishu*, while *Mitra*, located beyond *Vijigishu*, is a friend of *Vijigishu* and an enemy of *Ari*. *Parshnigraha* is another enemy, positioned at the rear of *Vijigishu*, serving as a potential supplanter when *Vijigishu* advances.

*Akranda* is *Vijigishu*'s ally, positioned behind *Parshnigraha*. Additionally, *Madhyama* is a king whose territory lies between *Vijigishu* and *Ari*, while *Udasina* is a neutral state, more powerful than *Vijigishu*, *Ari*, and *Madhyama* (Kumar, 2011).

For the conduct of foreign policy, Kautilya has suggested four tactics, which he calls 'Upayas' (Sharma, 2015). The four Upayas are *Saman* (conciliation or making of peace), *dama* (gifts), *danda* (force), and *bheda* (dissension) (Sharma, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

This research paper adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on the exploration of historical events, patterns, and processes. By employing historical comparative analysis, the study has examined similarities across two time periods to draw meaningful insights into the subject matter. Process tracing is used to systematically trace the sequence of events that have shaped the historical outcomes being studied. This approach allows for a detailed understanding of the complex interplay between different factors in the development of statecraft and unification strategies. The data is purely qualitative and is based on secondary sources mainly borrowed through books, journals, and academic literature which relies on physical and online sources like libraries and the internet. The data is analyzed in descriptive ways. Moreover, the exploratory nature of this research is designed to open new avenues for inquiry, providing a foundation for future studies in related areas. This research primarily employs content analysis for data examination. Following this, the concept is applied to compare the two types of documents to uncover reflective patterns. During the data analysis, key subjects that signify reflection between the documents are identified and finalized. The indicators or explanatory variables are geopolitics, security, defense, military, economy, diplomacy, and statecraft are used in this study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Even though Pithivi Narayan Shah has been credited as the unification campaigner who brought the Gorkha Kingdom together to become the state of Nepal, it's crucial to remember that the groundwork for his achievements was laid before he ascended to the throne (Rana, 2018). It was not just him who had the idea of bringing the weak and divided states into control of the Gorkha Kingdom. Under the reigns of previous king Drabya Shah and Narabhupal Shah, the Gorkha Kingdom had already started to show signs of ambition, reaching beyond the frontiers it had initially gained. The military preparations, alliances, and strategic planning by his predecessors started laid some sort of ground work for the unification effort, even though it ultimately failed (Vaidya, 1993).



### **Gorkha Kingdom before Prithvi Narayan Shah: Formation and Foundation**

Drabya Shah was the founder of the Gorkha Kingdom, which was established in 1559, (Yadav, 2012). During the Dashain festival, there was a tradition, known as the race at *Liglig Fort*, where the Ghale ruled. The winner of this race would become king for a year. On the day of the race, Drabya Shah from Lamjung invaded the Ghale Kingdom while the spectators were unarmed. After successfully conquering Ghale, he later took control of Gorkha from the Khadka Magar (Gautam, 2006). During his reign, Drabya Shah began expanding the kingdom by conquering strategically significant areas like Siranchowk and Ajigarh (Shrestha & Singh, 1972). After his death, in 1570 B.S. Purender Shah became the King of Gorkha, followed by Chhatra Shah, who died shortly after his enthronement. In the period between Chhatra Shah's death and PN Shah's rise to power, six other kings ruled the kingdom: Ram Shah, Damber Shah, Krishna Shah, Rudra Shah, Prithvipati Shah, and Nara Bhupal Shah (Vaidya, 1993, pp. 67-111).

PN Shah was born in 1722 A.D. to Kaushalya Devi Shah, the second queen of Narabhupal Shah, and was raised by the elder queen, Chandra Prabhawati Shah (Shrestha & Singh, 1972, p. 87-89). Before he ascended to power after his father's death, Gorkha was a small kingdom amid a fragmented Nepal, consisting of 22 to 24 states and various kingdoms like Kantipur, Lalitpur, and Bhadgaun. The Gorkha Kingdom faced economic constraints, relying primarily on agriculture, it quickly conquered a large portion of Nepal, highlighting PN Shah's effective leadership. He married Indra Kumari, daughter of Hemkarna Sen, but the marriage was unsuccessful, he later married Narendra Lakshmi, daughter of Abhiman Singh Rajput from Kashi (Bhattarai, 2012). After the death of Narabhupal Shah in 1742 A.D., PN Shah became the king of Gorkha at just 20 years old (Stiller, 1975) and aimed to attack Nuwakot, initiating his unification campaign.

Following the death of Narabhupal Shah in 1742 A.D., PN Shah ascended to the throne at the age of 20 years of age marking the beginning of the campaign of the unification of Nepal.

### **Prithvi Narayan Shah as a King: Cases and Strategies**

PN Shah, a benevolent ruler, governed Nepal for thirty-two years. The following sections deal with how he transformed a small and weak kingdom into a formidable and consolidated state.

### **Geographical Awareness and Use of Sama, Dama, Danda**

Before PN Shah ascended to the throne of Gorkha, the kingdom had already suffered a defeat against Nuwakot during the reign of his father, Narabhupal Shah. Gorkha's

neighboring states included Lamjung and Nuwakot, with Nuwakot holding immense strategic importance due to its position as a gateway to Kantipur (Mainali, 2019).

Following a strategic visit to Bhaktapur and after viewing the landscape of Kantipur from Chandragiri, PN Shah, driven by ambition, became increasingly eager to conquer Nuwakot, recognizing it as a crucial step in his larger plan (Pradhan, 1991). Nuwakot was not only a critical transit point between Tibet and Kantipur but also vital for encircling the valley, which was central to PN Shah's strategy for unifying the region (Vaidya, 1993, p. 128).

As he advanced eastward with the vision of capturing the valley and the surrounding territories, Nuwakot was seen as an "*Ari*," or enemy, in the context of Kautilya's Mandala theory. Meanwhile, Lamjung, located to the west of Gorkha, posed a significant threat from behind as a powerful rival, serving as the "*Parshnigraha*" or potential supplanter when PN Shah would be engaged in the eastward expansion. Understanding the potential danger posed by Lamjung, PN Shah was acutely aware that he needed to secure his western flank while pursuing his eastern ambitions. Simultaneously, Gorkha maintained a cordial relationship with Bhaktapur, ensuring that his eastern approach was strategically supported (Bhattarai, 2012). This multifaceted strategy highlighted PN Shah's diplomatic and military acumen as he laid the groundwork for the unification of Nepal. Likewise, recognizing the strategic importance of Nuwakot, Gorkha directly confronted it. However, with its campaign focused eastward, Gorkha was also wary of Lamjung, which posed a threat from the rear. To neutralize this danger, PN Shah agreed with Lamjung, ensuring they would not interfere with Gorkha's eastward advance (Gautam, 2006). This allowed him to adopt a *Danda* (force) policy with Nuwakot and *Sama* (diplomacy) with Lamjung. To better understand Kantipur, PN Shah stayed in Bhaktapur as a guest of Ranajit Malla, exchanging his father's '*pagari*' as a gesture of goodwill. During his stay, he gathered valuable intelligence on Kantipur, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, learning about the Malla kings' weaknesses. This information, obtained through gifts (*Dama*), significantly eased his eventual conquest of Kantipur (Gautam, 2006).

### **Military and Espionage**

PN Shah prioritized military strengthening, with Nuwakot as a key target. After an initial defeat, he restructured and modernized his army, travelling to Banaras to acquire arms and bring back skilled craftsmen like Bhekh Singh, Sheikh Jawar, and Mohammad Taki. He expanded the military from two to seven battalions and diversified the forces into different units, including a standing army, militia, reserve, and conscripts (Vaidya, 1993). This sophisticated restructuring led to Gorkha's success. His focus on the military

is also evident in his *Dibya Upadesh*, where he emphasized the importance of soldiers to a king's power. He advocated for recruiting from diverse ethnic groups Khas, Magar, Gurung, and Thakuri mixing them in units for strength, and ensuring proper provisions and commands for soldiers in every fort while providing them with good financial facilities as an encouragement (Stiller, 1968, pp. 76-78).

Likewise, PN Shah recognized the critical importance of intelligence in overcoming his enemies and skillfully employed this strategy throughout his reign. He was aware that Jayanta Rana, who had been expelled by his father Narabhupal Shah, was now working for Kantipur in Nuwakot (Mainali, 2019). Knowing this, PN Shah attempted to bring Rana back into the Gorkha Kingdom, but Rana refused. In response, PN Shah sent Kalu Jaisi to Nuwakot, pretending that he had been expelled from Gorkha. This deception allowed Kalu Jaisi to serve as a spy for Gorkha. With the intelligence gathered, and after two unsuccessful attempts, Gorkha finally captured Nuwakot on the third try, aided by Rana's covert assistance (Mainali, 2019). To conquer Kantipur, PN Shah needed detailed knowledge of the situation there. To gather this information, he strategically stayed in Bhaktapur as a guest of Ranajit Malla, even exchanging his father's pagari (turban) as a sign of trust (Gautam, 2006). During his stay, PN Shah gained insight into the conditions of Kantipur, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, and identified the weaknesses of the Malla kings. His time in Bhaktapur, coupled with the intelligence he had previously gathered, was a calculated act of espionage. This information proved invaluable, ultimately enabling him to capture the Kathmandu Valley with greater ease (Gautam, 2006).

### **Good Governance and Citizen's Welfare**

PN Shah held the firm belief that both those who offer and those who accept bribes are enemies of the state. He understood that a nation's strength and stability are intrinsically linked to the well-being of its citizens, "*Praja Mota Bhaya Durbar BaliyoRahanchh*." When the people are prosperous and content, the state naturally thrives. These principles formed the foundation of Shah's vision for good governance and the welfare of his subjects. In his *Dibya Upadesh*, PN Shah outlined a clear and comprehensive framework for ensuring the welfare of the citizens. His guidelines emphasized the importance of the rule of law, active public participation in economic activities, the pursuit of justice, and the strict control of corruption. By advocating for these principles, Shah sought to create a state that not only protected and nurtured its citizens but also promoted their overall prosperity and happiness. He continued to give people leverage with the rituals they were following in their Kingdom for example, he never interfered with culture and rituals of Kathmandu valley including Kumari culture and various Jatra's (Mainali, 2019).

PN Shah strategies could be understood from his multidimensional approach through which he succeeded. First, Shah's strategic acumen lay in his mastery of the four instruments of national power Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) (Rawal, 2022). He skillfully leveraged each of these tools, ensuring that their application was not only maximized but also carefully synchronized to achieve his objectives. Shah had a keen understanding of when and how to deploy each instrument, adapting his approach to the specific circumstances he faced. Diplomacy was his preferred tool. However, Shah was pragmatic and did not hesitate to resort to hard power when necessary. His ability to balance diplomacy with military force, while also effectively utilizing information and economic resources, was a key factor in his success in unifying Nepal and establishing a strong, resilient state.

PN Shah highlights the need for a disciplined army as he freely suggests that military preparedness should serve the purpose of national defense (Stiller, 1975). Therefore, PN Shah recommendations are to build forts and deploy the forces in these hills for not allowing invaders to come forward marching into Nepali territory. Ditya Upadesh suggests military strategies such as engaging in guerrilla warfare and holding on to hills, weapons self-production. Shah made it a point that Nepal doesn't rely on foreigners' arms but rather construct its military infra at its own will and determinations (Stiller, 1968). As a specific strategy of defense through military P.N. Shah urged not to engage in offensive rather to fight in defensive offense if the fighting can't be averted by other means (Silwal, 2021). Shah also highlighted the importance of geography and terrain in the war fighting by suggesting waiting for the enemies in the hills rather than advancing to the plains as the Delayed Action Battle (DAB) seemed to be one of the major war fighting strategies according to the strength of Nepali military. Furthermore, PN Shah's military success in the conquest of Nuwakot was the result of carefully crafted strategies which included surprise attacks, multi-directional offensives, disguising troops, exploiting terrain and weather, neutralizing leadership, securing logistics, and aligning military tactics with broader unification goals to lay Nepal's foundation (Lamichhane, 2025).

Shah's strong focus on military discipline and loyalty implies that Shah probably was aware (even at that time) of inner threats like rebel or conspiracy further making the military more professional at their tasks. With the call for a disciplined and inclusive army, was not just directed to foreign threats but also to consolidation of Nepali (national) strength at a full fledge as military was a key national security element (Stiller, 1968).

On the administrative and domestic front, PN Shah welcomed all royal supporters and displaced courtiers, assigning them responsibilities based on their skills and abilities. After

the initial defeat at Nuwakot, he bolstered Gorkha's military by importing weapons and bringing in Muslim experts to train the forces and maintain the arms. To resolve conflicts among his courtiers, he orchestrated a strategic marriage between Kalu Pandey's daughter and the son of Shiva Ram Singh Basnet, thereby strengthening alliances. Additionally, he implemented the merit-based Pajani system, which rewarded soldiers with Jagir and Birta lands, and introduced the Marwat policy, providing compensation for fallen soldiers and taking responsibility for the welfare of their families (Vaidya, 1993). During the conquering effort to the Nuwakot and Valley, the threat of back stabbing from Chaubise King was addressed. Lamjung, Tanahu, Kaski, and Palpa were among the people he concentrated on making friends with. An endeavor was made to build friendly relations with Lamjung, as well as other *Chaubise Rajyas* as a strategy of PN Shah.

Similarly, diplomacy to disunite the enemy camp is another strategy of PN Shah. Gorkha evaluated the threat and challenges posed by the rival kingdom's unification. To prevent conflict, PN Shah employed diplomatic tactics. Gorkha established amicable relations with Lamjung before invading Nuwakot, with Kantipur after the first war at Kritipur, and with Bhaktapur after encircling Kantipur with the win over Nuwakot, strategy was to divide and conquer. He also had a Mit relationship with the Prince of Bhaktapur (Mishra, 2000).

PN Shah's key strategy was to control strategically important areas, particularly trade routes to Lhasa. Recognizing the significance of these locations, he targeted kingdoms like Nuwakot, Makwanpur, Kritipur, and Thimi before attacking Bhaktapur, with Kantipur as his ultimate goal. By encircling these key sites, he effectively implemented an economic blockade. His control over Nuwakot, Kritipur (by controlling Chobhar, Pharping, and Chitlang), and the valleys through Makwanpur disrupted trade and weakened his enemies. The blockade created instability in Patan, leading its leaders to request PN Shah's rule after Kritipur surrendered following a six-month siege and a water cutoff.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's strategies closely resemble the principles outlined by Kautilya, whether or not he was directly influenced by them. His approach to statecraft and military campaigns appears to be similar in line with the ideas found in Kautilya's Arthashastra, an ancient treatise that has shaped governance and warfare in the Indian subcontinent for centuries. Among Kautilya's many philosophies, the Mandala theory used to understand political relationships and alliances aligns perfectly well with PN Shah's strategies during the unification of Nepal.

Additionally, Shah employed vivid metaphors such as the eagle, snake, and frog to symbolize different strategic elements. The eagle represented the power and reach of his

kingdom, the snake symbolized the cunning and potential threats from neighboring states, and the frog depicted those weaker states caught in between stronger powers.

Shah viewed his immediate neighbor as a natural enemy, while the enemy's enemy was seen as a potential ally, which is a key approach of Mandala Theory in understanding the neighbor and beyond. This perspective guided his diplomatic and military decisions, allowing him to outmaneuver rivals and build strategic alliances that were crucial to his goal of unifying Nepal. For example, As PN Shah advanced eastward to capture the valley, he viewed Nuwakot as an "*Ari*" (enemy) under Kautilya's Mandala theory. Meanwhile, Lamjung, a powerful western rival, posed a threat from behind as a "*Parshnigraha*" (potential supplanter). Aware of this danger, he secured his western flank through diplomacy while focusing on his eastern campaign. Gorkha maintained cordial ties with Bhaktapur, aiding its strategic expansion. To neutralize threats, he used force (*Danda*) against Nuwakot and diplomacy (*Sama*) with Lamjung. Staying in Bhaktapur as Ranajit Malla's guest, he gathered intelligence on the Malla kingdoms, using gifts (*Dama*) to weaken Kantipur before conquest.

Furthermore, Shah also seems drawing upon the '*Saptanga*' theory from the *Arthashastra*, which identifies seven fundamental components necessary for a state's stability and strength: *Swami* (the Ruler): PN Shah himself, who embodied the vision and determination to unify Nepal, *Amatya* (the Minister): his trusted advisors and administrators who helped implement his policies and strategies, *Janapada* (the Population), *Durga* (the Fortified Capital), *Kosa* (the Treasury), *Danda* (the Army), *Mitra* (Allies). Kautilya emphasized that information is crucial for defeating an enemy, advocating for the use of spies to gather intelligence from opposing camps. Skilled spies can infiltrate enemy states and integrate themselves into various aspects of society, allowing them to collect valuable information. While Kautilya acknowledged the importance of internal intelligence gathering, he placed a greater emphasis on external espionage to aid a king's efforts in invading and subjugating rival states (Kautilya, 1915). PN Shah effectively implemented these principles during his unification campaign, employing various tactics inspired by Kautilyan's strategies. He utilized encirclement to isolate key targets, established blockades to disrupt enemy supply lines like water and other supplies, choked the major transit points of Kathmandu valley, and engaged in guerrilla warfare as a surprise attack. Additionally, he employed intelligence operations to gather information on the opponents like in the case of Nuwakot and Kathmandu. By integrating these espionage tactics into his military strategy, Shah was able to gather critical information and maintain the upper hand in his efforts to unify Nepal.



Although, PN Shah demonstrated a great impact through his leadership on the creation of the modern Nepali state, and his ideas on Nepal's national security still being relevant the sources of his strategies and the intellectual foundations of his statecraft has yet to be fully explored. This study identified that there are significant parallels between the strategies applied by PN Shah during Nepal's unification campaign and the principles outlined in Kautilya's Arthashastra referred to as Kautilya Niti. Kautilya, a quintessential realist, emphasized the application of the four dimensions of national power that is DIME to strengthen and then to sustain a state through all aspects of national power. Similarly, PN Shah's strategic approach aligns with these principles, showcasing his focus on leveraging these elements effectively during the unification process.

Furthermore, PN Shah's vision and tactics extend beyond conventional strategies. He emphasized the importance of espionage, effective governance, citizen welfare, geographic awareness, and the pragmatic application of the sama-dama-danda-bheda principles conciliation, gifts, punishment, and division to achieve his goals. These elements highlight his deep understanding of statecraft, reflecting a resemblance to the doctrines of Kautilya, who advocated for a realistic and multifaceted approach to state consolidation and governance.

## Conclusion

PN Shah, who laid the foundation for modern Nepal bringing from a radar of small Gorkha Kingdom into the larger form of modern Nepal, demonstrated exceptional statecraft and strategic grit, transforming a small, resource-constrained kingdom into a large and consolidated state. This achievement is not merely a reflection of his ambition but also of his keen understanding of the complex political environment of his time. Internally, it is seen that he astutely managed other states and carried the legacy of his ancestors to create a formidable state, where PN Shah's campaign reveals the masterful exploitation of all four dimensions of national power diplomatic, information, military, and economic. Externally, Shah astutely navigated the regional dynamics, including the expansionist pressures from the British East India Company to the south, the power struggles in Bengal under Mir Kasim, and the geopolitical tensions with Tibet to the North. PN Shah's strategic genius lay in his ability to harness every available resource and opportunity to the benefit of his state. Therefore, the research finds out that the use of strategies by PN Shah during his reign resembles the ancient strategies outlined by Kautilya in the Arthashastra, basically Mandala theory, *saptanga* theory and four *upayas*. This parallel suggests that Shah may have consciously applied these time-tested principles to his own context since, he had

visited India to learn about the science of modern warfare and procure modern weapons. However, the resemblance of Kautilya's grand strategy and PN Shah's unification strategies requires further research to find out on the influence of philosophical discourses of that time which might have had effect during PN Shah's reign. Regardless, it is undeniable that PN Shah's efforts laid the foundation for the modern nation of Nepal, a testament to his enduring legacy as a visionary leader.

### Author Introduction

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