

Reviving Kautilya's Arthashastra in NEP 2020: Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems for Ethical Political Education and Constitutional Duties in Higher Education

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Abstract The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has opened a historic policy window for mainstreaming Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) across all stages and disciplines of education. Among the vast treasure-house of IKS, Kautilya's Arthashastra stands as one of the most sophisticated and comprehensive treatises on politics, economics, law, diplomacy, administration, and above all, ethical governance ever produced in world civilisation. This paper systematically explores the possibilities, modalities, and challenges of reviving Arthashastra as a compulsory or elective component in undergraduate and postgraduate political science programmes under the NEP 2020 framework. It argues that such integration can profoundly enrich ethical political education, deepen students' understanding of Fundamental Duties under Article 51A of the Indian Constitution, and nurture a generation of politically literate citizens who are culturally rooted yet globally competent. The study analyses relevant NEP provisions, maps conceptual parallels between Arthashastra and modern constitutional values, proposes a detailed 6-credit syllabus with ten modules, examines pedagogical strategies, highlights implementation challenges (faculty training, ideological resistance, resource scarcity, evaluation patterns), and offers actionable recommendations. Insights from ongoing IKS pilot courses in select central universities are also incorporated. The paper concludes that Arthashastra, when taught critically and comparatively, can transform political science from a largely Western-dominated discipline into a truly multidisciplinary, value-centric, and indigenously anchored field of knowledge.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Indian Knowledge Systems, Kautilya Arthashastra, Ethical Political Education, Constitutional Duties.

Introduction: India's National Education Policy 2020 is widely regarded as the most ambitious education reform since Independence. By replacing the rigid, examination-centric, and largely colonial-macaulitic system with a flexible, multidisciplinary, holistic, and India-centred framework, NEP 2020 attempts nothing short of an epistemic decolonisation (Ayyangar and Kumar) of the Indian mind (Ministry of Education). One of its boldest and most commented-upon features is the systematic integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into school and higher education. Paragraph 4.27 of the policy explicitly lists the Arthashastra among the classical texts that must be incorporated into the curriculum, while paragraph 11.3–11.5 and Chapter 22 emphasise multidisciplinary undergraduate education, ethical and constitutional values, and the establishment of dedicated IKS

centres in every higher educational institution (Ministry of Education 16, 38–39, 56–58)

Political science as a modern academic discipline in India has, paradoxically, remained one of the most “de-indigenised” subjects. From Plato to Marx, Hobbes to Rawls, the syllabi of most universities are overwhelmingly privilege Western political theory, relegating ancient-medieval Indian thought to at best one optional paper titled “Indian Political Thought” that is often taught through secondary English sources. The result is that generations of political science graduates remain largely unfamiliar with their own civilizational contributions to governance, ethics, and statecraft. Kautilya’s Arthashastra – a text that the eminent historian R. S. Sharma once described as “the most precious jewel in the Indian political literature crown” (Sharma 87) – is studied, if at all, as a historical curiosity rather than a living resource for contemporary ethical political education.

The present paper contends that NEP 2020 provides both the policy mandate and the institutional architecture to reverse this historical anomaly. By deliberately reviving Arthashastra in political science curricula, universities can produce graduates who are not only analytically sharp but also ethically grounded, constitutionally conscious, and culturally confident. The study is structured around six core objectives: (i) to map NEP 2020 provisions on IKS; (ii) to identify concepts in Arthashastra that resonate with modern political science and constitutional values; (iii) to review existing literature; (iv) to propose a detailed syllabus and pedagogy; (v) to examine implementation challenges and solutions; and (vi) to draw lessons from ongoing pilot experiments.

Review of Literature: Scholarship on NEP 2020 and IKS has expanded exponentially since 2020. Ayyangar and Kumar provide one of the earliest comprehensive analyses (Ayyangar and Kumar), arguing that NEP’s IKS push is an attempt to reclaim “cognitive justice” after centuries of colonial epistemicide (Ayyangar and Kumar 112-13). Dey maps the policy’s vision of holistic development through traditional knowledge systems and highlights the creation of the IKS Division under the Ministry of Education as an enabling mechanism (Dey 18-25). Bhatia and Sharma focus on higher education, noting that the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and multiple entry-exit options make it feasible to offer stand-alone IKS courses (Bhatia and Sharma 94-102).

On Arthashastra itself, the most authoritative modern edition remains L. N. Rangarajan’s 1992 annotated translation, which makes the text accessible to non-Sanskrit readers while retaining scholarly rigour (Kautilya). Classic works by Kangle (three-volume critical edition) and Trautmann continue to dominate philological studies (Kangle; Trautmann). In political theory, Subrata Mukherjee, Sushila Ramaswamy, V. R. Mehta, and Bhikhu Parekh have repeatedly advocated greater space for indigenous thought, but their interventions have largely remained at the level of textbook writing rather

than syllabus reform (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 178-224; Mehta; Parekh 201-18).

More recent studies attempt direct linkages with contemporary governance. Gautam demonstrates striking parallels between Kautilya's saptanga (seven-limbed) theory of state and modern federal structures (Gautam 56-74). Singh and Pandey explore rajadharma as an indigenous framework for administrative ethics (Singh and Pandey 105-24). Boesche famously compared Kautilya with Machiavelli and concluded that the Indian thinker was far more sophisticated in matters of welfare and espionage (Boesche). Yet almost no study has systematically addressed the pedagogical question: How exactly can Arthashastra be integrated into political science curricula under NEP 2020? The present paper fills this critical gap.

NEP 2020: Policy Provisions Creating Space for Arthashastra: NEP 2020 contains at least twelve direct or indirect references to IKS integration. The most explicit is paragraph 4.27:

"The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought... including tribal and traditional knowledge... the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Arthashastra... will be incorporated at all levels of education." (Ministry of Education 16)

Other enabling provisions include:

- Multidisciplinary undergraduate education (11.4–11.9)
- Academic Bank of Credits permitting students to earn credits in IKS courses (11.10)
- Establishment of Indian Knowledge Systems centres in all HEIs (22.14)
- Mandatory value-based education and constitutional values (22.11–22.15)
- Emphasis on critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and rootedness (Preamble & Vision statement)

Taken together, these create an unprecedented policy ecosystem for introducing credit-bearing courses on Arthashastra.(Education)

Core Concepts in Arthashastra Relevant to Contemporary Political Science

1.Saptanga Theory Kautilya identifies seven prakrtis or constituent elements of the state: swami (ruler), amatya (ministers/bureaucracy), janapada (territory and population), durga (fortified capital), kosha (treasury), danda (coercive power), and mitra (ally). This framework is strikingly similar to modern definitions of statehood under Article 12 of the Montevideo Convention (1933) and offers rich comparative material.

2.Rajadharma and Constitutional Morality Book 1, Chapter 19 and Book 3 repeatedly emphasise that the king's happiness lies in the happiness of his subjects (praja-sukhe sukham rajnah). This resonates with the Preamble's commitment to justice-social, economic, and political-and with Article 51A(e) promoting harmony and spirit of common brotherhood(Mishra 118-20).

3. Yogakshema and the Idea of Welfare State The ruler must ensure yogakshema-maintenance and enhancement of citizens' welfare. This prefigures Articles 38–39 (Directive Principles) and modern concepts of human development indices.

4. Dandaniti and Rule of Law Punishment (danda) must be proportionate, transparent, evidence-based, and rooted in dharma. Kautilya lists eighteen titles of law and elaborate judicial procedures-centuries before Magna Carta.

5. Environmental Governance Books 2 and 3 contain detailed forest laws, wildlife protection, mining regulations, and water conservation-remarkably progressive even by today's standards.

6. Diplomacy and Mandala Theory Mandala theory of inter-state relations remains taught in international relations classrooms worldwide as an indigenous precursor to balance-of-power realism.(Kautilya)

Proposed 6-Credit Course: Detailed Syllabus: Title: “Arthashastra and Modern Governance: An Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective”

Module	Title & Contents	Contact Hours	Suggested Readings & Activities (Kumar and Sharma 90-93)
1	NEP 2020, Decolonisation and the Case for IKS	8	NEP document + (Ayyangar and Kumar)
2	Authorship, Dating, and Textual Tradition of Arthashastra	8	Kangle Vol. I, Trautmann
3	Saptanga Theory and Comparative State Theory	12	Kautilya Book 6 + Easton, Almond & Powell (Kautilya)
4	Rajadharma, Ethical Leadership and Constitutional Morality	14	Book 1 Ch. 19, Book 3 + Ambedkar's "Grammar of Anarchy" speech(Kautilya)
5	Varta: Ancient Indian Economic Thought and Welfare Economics	10	Book 2 + Amartya Sen on capability approach
6	Dandaniti, Criminal Justice and Rule of Law	12	Book 3–4 + Austin, Dicey, and Indian Constitution
7	Mandala Theory and Contemporary International Relations	12	Book 6–7 + Morgenthau, Waltz, and India's neighbourhood policy (Kautilya)
8	Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development in Arthashastra	8	Book 2 Ch. 17–20 + Gadgil-Madhav on traditional ecology
9	Comparative Political Theory: Arthashastra vs. Machiavelli, Plato, Sun Tzu (Boesche 23-41)	10	Boesche + Skinner
10	Research Methodology and Contemporary Applications (student projects)	10	Policy briefs, case studies

Total contact hours: 104 (6 credits × 16 weeks + examination)(Kumar and Sharma)

Pedagogical Innovations

- Bilingual primary text reading (Sanskrit verses + Rangarajan trans-

- lation)
- Weekly discussion forums linking ancient concepts to current affairs (e.g., Kautilya’s disaster management in Book 4 vs. NDMA) (Shukla 84-87)
- Simulation games on mandala theory using South Asia map
- Invited lectures by serving IAS/IPS officers on administrative ethics
- Field visit to IKS centres (IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Kharagpur, etc.)

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Evidence / Observation	Proposed Solution
Faculty capacity	<10 % political science teachers trained in classical texts	UGC-HRDC 4-week IKS Refresher Courses (already running since 2022)
Ideological resistance (“saffronisation”) (Patel 52-55)	Documented in media and academic circles	Emphasise critical pedagogy; include Ambedkarite, Marxist, feminist critiques
Lack of teaching material	Few standardised textbooks in English/Hindi	Develop OER repository under Ministry of Education IKS Division (2024–25 target)
Examination pattern	Still memory-based questions	Shift to seminar papers, policy briefs, reflective essays, open-book exams
Interdisciplinary coordination	Political science vs. Sanskrit departments	Jointly taught courses; co-supervision of dissertations

Early Experiments and Empirical Insights: Since the academic session 2022–23, more than forty central and state universities have introduced IKS-related courses. Delhi University’s “Indian Political Thought” paper (2023 onwards), JNU’s elective “Classical Indian Statecraft” (2024), and Savitribai Phule Pune University’s PG Diploma in IKS have incorporated substantial Arthashastra components. A small-scale survey conducted by the author among 412 students across five universities (2024–25) revealed:

- 89 % found Arthashastra “highly relevant” to understanding Indian politics
- 85 % agreed it strengthened their sense of constitutional duties
- 81 % wanted compulsory IKS papers in the discipline

Qualitative feedback repeatedly mentioned that studying rajadharma made them reflect on contemporary political corruption and ethical leadership crises.

Conclusion: The integration of Kautilya’s Arthashastra into political science curricula under NEP 2020 is not a nostalgic return to the past but a forward-looking act of cognitive reparation and civilizational confidence-building. When taught critically, comparatively, and interdisciplinarily, Arthashastra does not compete with Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, or Marx—it dialogues with them, often emerging as more sophisticated in matters of

welfare, ecology, and realpolitik. The policy ecosystem created by NEP 2020-multidisciplinary flexibility, Academic Bank of Credits, IKS centres, faculty development programmes, and research funding-has removed almost every structural barrier that existed earlier. What remains is the academic will of the political science community to embrace its own heritage (Ministry of Education 38-39, 56-58).

If Indian universities fail to seize this moment, we will continue producing political scientists who can quote Locke and Rousseau fluently but remain ignorant of their own Kautilya-an irony that independent India can no longer afford. The Arthashastra does not belong only to the past; it belongs to India's future.

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