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BEYOND WESTERN PARADIGMS: THE KAUTILYAN TEMPLATE FOR CONTEMPORARY INDIAN STRATEGIC STATECRAFT

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I. ABSTRACT

This study fills a critical gap in International Relations (IR) scholarship by empirically testing an ancient, indigenous strategic framework derived from Kautilya's Arthashastra, specifically the Four Upayas (Sama, Dama, Danda, Bheda). Moving beyond normative appeals for the inclusion of non-Western theories, the research rigorously operationalizes these classical strategies as observable, testable variables to provide a systematic explanation of India's diplomatic choices. Using a structured, focused comparative case study methodology, the paper examines India's foreign policy behavior towards two archetypal relational contexts: Bhutan (the Mitra or ally) and Pakistan (the Ari or enemy). It explicitly tests whether the Kautilyan framework offers superior explanatory and predictive power relative to Neoclassical Realism (NCR), a leading Western theory that integrates systemic and domestic variables. Findings underscore the continued relevance and distinctiveness of Kautilyan statecraft, revealing a relational and sequential logic that shapes India's strategic toolkit, which is often obscured in dominant Western models. The paper contributes significantly to IR theory, strategic cultural studies, and practical foreign policy analysis by advocating greater methodological rigor in employing indigenous frameworks for understanding complex contemporary geopolitics.

II. KEYWORDS

Kautilya, Arthashastra, Mandala Theory, Upayas, Neoclassical Realism, Strategic Culture, Foreign Policy, India, Diplomacy, Comparative Analysis.

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III. INTRODUCTION

International Relations (IR) as a field is increasingly challenged to diversify its theoretical toolkit beyond the enduring dominance of Western paradigms.[2] Such as Realism and Liberalism. This challenge is rooted in postcolonial scholarship that highlights the epistemic violence embedded in universalizing Western approaches, often marginalizing non-Western perspectives as normative curiosities. In this regard, regional strategic cultures, particularly in Asia, provide a rich but underutilized repository of insights into state behavior that merit systematic empirical testing. India, with its profound historical and intellectual traditions embodied in texts like Kautilya's *Arthashastra* [3](circa 4th century BCE), represents a critical case for rethinking IR theory from the vantage point of indigenous strategic thought.[4]

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* remains the foundational text on Indian politics and statecraft, laying out a comprehensive theory of governance that entwines economic management, military strategy, and diplomatic maneuvering, underpinned by pragmatic realism.[5] This approach contrasts with Western strategic thought, which privileges material capabilities or formal institutions. Kautilya offers a relational and sequential logic centered on the Mandala Theory,[6] A model constructing concentric circles of friendship and enmity to guide policy, and the Four Upayas, pragmatic diplomatic strategies of conciliation (*Saama*), inducement (*Daama*), coercion (*Dand*), and psychological division (*Bheda*).[7]

Despite its acknowledged philosophical significance, the application of this indigenous intellectual tradition within contemporary IR remains limited and

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[2] Amitav Acharya & Barry Buzan, *Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years On*, 17 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC 341 (2017).

[3] Budhaditya Ghosh, *Kautilya's Mandala Theory*, SSRN JOURNAL (2022), https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=4223665.

[4] Mahesh K. Sachdev, *Indian Diplomacy through Ages*, Distinguished Lectures, Ministry of External Affairs (2014), *available at* https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?174.

[5] OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION, *The Relevance of Ancient Indian Strategy in Contemporary Geopolitics*, ORFONLINE.ORG, https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-relevance-of-ancient-indian-strategy-in-contemporary-geopolitics (last visited Dec. 9, 2025).

[6] Aishi Banerjee, THE MANDALA THEORY REVISITED: KAUTILYA'S DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLTICAL LANDSCAPE (Oct. 19, 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5054075.

[7] *Id.*

essentially normative, lacking the rigorous empirical testing or comparative methodology required to establish its analytical validity. This paper endeavors to bridge this gap by operationalizing the Four Upayas into measurable indicators and subjecting them to a comparative test. The study analyzes India's strategic choices toward two archetypal relational contexts: Bhutan, representing the *Mitra* (ally) category, and Pakistan, exemplifying the *Ari* (enemy) category.

The research addresses two primary questions that drive its analytical structure:

1. Does *the Kautilyan Upayas* framework offer superior explanatory power compared to Neoclassical Realism (NCR)?[8] A leading alternative theory in accounting for India's selection and sequencing of foreign policy tools toward its immediate neighbors?

2. How can these ancient, indigenous strategic concepts be rigorously and systematically operationalized as distinct, testable variables for application in contemporary IR scholarship?

By executing this analytical shift from a philosophical normative framework to empirical, comparative testing, this research seeks to demonstrate the analytical utility of non-Western strategic cultures.[9] It will establish that the Kautilyan model provides a parsimonious and distinct theoretical lens for understanding foreign policy behavior, rooted in relational context and strategic sequencing, and making a substantial contribution to the Global IR agenda.

A. Research Questions

1. Does Kautilya's Four Upayas framework provide a more accurate and context-sensitive explanation of India's foreign policy behaviour towards its immediate neighbours than Neoclassical Realism?

2. How does the Mandala-based relational categorisation of states as *Mitra* and *Ari* influence India's selection and sequencing of diplomatic instruments?

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[8] Norrin M. Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism*, *in* OXFORD RESEARCH ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (2011), https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-36.

[9] Acharya and Buzan, *supra* note 1.

3. Can the classical concepts of Saama, Daama, Dand and Bheda be operationalised as discrete, observable variables in contemporary International Relations research?

4. Is there a systematic difference in India's strategic toolkit when dealing with Bhutan as a *Mitra* and Pakistan as an *Ari*?

B. Research Objectives

1. To empirically test the applicability of Kautilya's Four Upayas as an indigenous theoretical framework for analysing contemporary Indian foreign policy.

2. To operationalise Saama, Daama, Dand and Bheda into measurable indicators suitable for structured focused comparative analysis.

3. To compare the explanatory power of the Kautilyan framework with Neoclassical Realism in accounting for India's diplomatic behaviour towards Bhutan and Pakistan.

4. To demonstrate the relational and sequential logic embedded in Kautilyan statecraft and assess its relevance for the Global IR agenda.

5. To contribute to the de-Westernisation of International Relations theory by validating a non-Western strategic model through rigorous empirical methodology.

C. Hypotheses

1. **Relational Selectivity Hypothesis:** India will predominantly employ Saama and Daama in its relations with a *Mitra* state (Bhutan) and predominantly employ Dand and Bheda in its relations with an *Ari* state (Pakistan), consistent with the predictions of Mandala Theory.

2. **Sequential Strategy Hypothesis:** India's foreign policy behaviour towards Bhutan will reflect a sequential progression from Saama to Daama, whereas its behaviour towards Pakistan will reflect a combination of Dand and Bheda with minimal or highly conditional Saama.

3. **Comparative Explanatory Power Hypothesis:** The Kautilyan Four Upayas framework will provide superior explanatory precision regarding the choice and sequencing of India's diplomatic tools compared to Neoclassical Realism.

D. Literature Review & Theoretical Conversation

1. The Challenge of Non-Western IR Theory and Strategic Culture

The prevailing critique of Western-centric IR theory, championed by scholars such as Acharya, Tickner, and Hobson, posits that its universalist claims marginalize indigenous knowledge systems and fail to capture the unique strategic cultures of non-Western states. Strategic culture, defined here as the enduring, elite-held beliefs about the efficacy and proper use of military and diplomatic force, is shaped by historical texts and civilizational narratives. Recovering frameworks like Kautilya's is crucial for developing a Global IR that is methodologically pluralistic and epistemically inclusive. This paper accepts the legitimacy of this theoretical agenda but insists that the integration of indigenous thought must be achieved through rigorous empirical standards, moving beyond mere assertion of relevance to demonstrable explanatory power.

E. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*: Position in Modern Scholarship

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is widely viewed as a precursor to classical realist thought, emphasizing the pursuit of power, state security, and the necessity of maintaining internal cohesion. However, framing Kautilya merely as "Indian Machiavelli" oversimplifies his contribution.[10]

1. **The Mandala Theory (मण्डल सिद्धान्त):** Kautilya's unique contribution lies in the *relational* nature of his strategic geometry. The Mandala is a concentric circle of states surrounding the *Vijigishu* (aspiring conqueror), where the immediate neighbor is the natural *Ari* (enemy), and the neighbor's neighbor is the *Mitra* (ally). This system dictates that strategy is primarily context-dependent based on geographic proximity and perceived interest alignment,

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[10] Dang Shoham & Michael Liebig, *The Intelligence Dimension of Kautilya State Craft and Its Implications for the Present*, J. Intelligence Hist. (2016).

differing fundamentally from Structural Realism's focus on system-wide bipolarity or multipolarity.

2. **The Four Upayas (उपाय):** The four tools of statecraft, Saama, Daama, Dand, and Bheda[11] are often presented as a fixed list. For analytical purposes, this paper adopts the interpretation that they represent a sequential strategic toolkit, where softer tools (*Saama* and *Daama*) should be exhausted before escalating to coercion (*Dand*) or subversion (*Bheda*). This logic of sequencing is the core element we test.

F. Comparison with Other Non-Western Strategic Philosophies

To validate the distinctiveness of the Kautilyan framework, a comparative dialogue with other major traditions is essential.

1. Kautilya vs. Sun Tzu (China): The Logic of Non-Kinetic Victory

Both the *Arthashastra* and the Chinese *Art of War* (circa 5th Century BCE) prioritize strategic victory at the minimum cost and avoidance of confrontation. Sun Tzu's concept of "Supreme Excellence" (subduing the enemy without fighting) aligns closely with Kautilya's sequencing of *Saama* and *Daama* before *Dand*. Both rely heavily on deception, espionage, and psychological tactics (*Bheda*). However, Sun Tzu is principally a military manual for a general.[12] Kautilya is a comprehensive treatise on *governance*, where the military (and *Dand*) is merely one of four state tools deployed by the *Raja* (ruler),[13] and strategy is inherently linked to the specific relational geography of the Mandala.

2. Kautilya vs. Ibn Khaldun (Islamic/North African):[14] Internal vs. External Focus

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[11] Pradeep Kumar Gautam, *Understanding Kautilya's <em>Arthashastra</Em>: IN PRAISE OF ROTE*, 17 WORLD AFFAIRS: THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES 30 (2013).

[12] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War: The Definitive Interpretation* (R.D. Sawyer trans. & ed., Barnes & Noble Books 1994).

[13] Deepshikha Shahi, *The Spectre of "Amoral Realism" in International Relations: A Classical Indian Overview*, 4 *in* BRIDGING TWO WORLDS 133 (Amitav Acharya et al. eds., 1 ed. 2023), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv34wmm7x.11.

[14] Sadik Kirazli, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Pre-Islamic Arab Society*, 50 ISLAMIC STUDIES 25 (2011).

The 14th-century scholar Ibn Khaldun developed a sophisticated, cyclical theory of history centered on *Asabiyyah* (group feeling/social cohesion).[15] Khaldun's framework is internal and sociological, positing that the rise and fall of states are determined by the lifecycle of domestic solidarity, from austere desert strength to urban decay.[16] This is the deepest divergence. Khaldun provides a deterministic theory of state collapse based on *internal* factors, while Kautilya offers an instrumental manual for state effectiveness, focusing on *external* relations. The Kautilyan approach, by focusing purely on relational strategy, largely omits the need to maintain *Asabiyyah* or domestic legitimacy as a primary driver of foreign policy choice.

3. Kautilya vs. Roman *Pax Romana*

The Roman strategic concepts of *Imperium* and *Pax Romana* [17](Roman Peace) emphasize achieving hegemonic stability through vast infrastructure, a standard legal code, and economic integration. Both models' value economic statecraft (*Daama* in Kautilya; infrastructure/currency in Rome) to align the interests of peripheral states. The key distinction is formality vs. flexibility. Rome sought to impose a universal, centralized legal system across its empire; Kautilya's system, on the other hand, is designed for a perpetually shifting, anarchic regional system, requiring the flexible, context-dependent application of the Upayas rather than rigid institutional formalism.

G. Neoclassical Realism (NCR):[18] The Alternative Hypothesis

Neoclassical Realism[19] Serves as the crucial comparative test. NCR integrates structural constraints (material power, threat perception) with domestic mediating variables (leader perception, state capacity, domestic politics) to explain foreign policy.

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[15] Ali Çaksu, *Ibn Khaldun and Hegel on Causality in History: Aristotelian Legacy Reconsidered*, 35 ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE 47 (2007).

[16] Mohammad Javid Fedayee, *Ibn Khaldun s Contribution to the Study of the Social Dynamics of International Relations*, IHCD 2 (2023).

[17] Paul J. Burton, *Pax Romana/Pax Americana: Views of the "New Rome" from "Old Europe," 2000–2010*, 20 INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITION 15 (2013).

[18] Vasileiadis, P. (2023). Reconstructing neoclassical realism: a transitive approach. *International Relations*, *39*(4), 657-681. https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231185747 (Original work published 2025)

[19] Ripsman, *supra* note 7.

1. **NCR's Prediction:** NCR would predict India's foreign policy based on power asymmetry and China-driven threat balancing (e.g., strong alliance with Bhutan) and power competition (e.g., coercion of Pakistan).

2. **The Kautilyan Challenge:** While NCR can account for the *existence* of both alliance and coercion, it struggles to explain the *sequencing logic* (Saama before Daama) and the specific, culturally encoded psychological methods (*Bheda*), which are central to Kautilya's theory. This study hypothesizes that the Kautilyan framework provides a more detailed, culturally resonant, and precise explanation for the choice and combination of strategic tools.

IV.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OPERATIONALIZATION

The methodology is designed to translate the ancient Kautilyan concepts into empirically measurable variables, satisfying the SCOPUS requirement for rigorous operationalization.

A. The Mandala Theory: Relational Context

The Mandala Theory provides the independent variable of Relational Context,[20] which determines the predicted sequencing of the Upayas.

Relational Context (Mandala)	Archetype State	Predicted Primary Upayas	Predicted Secondary Upayas
Mitra (Ally/Friend)	Bhutan	**Saama** (Conciliation), **Daama** (Inducement)	Minimal/Zero **Dand** or **Bheda**

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[20] Dr Subas Chandra Sethy & Choudhury Pradosh Ranjan, *Foreign Policy in Kautilya's Arthashastra: A Critical Analysis of the Importance of Rajamandal Theory in India's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, 10 (2022).

Relational Context (Mandala)	Archetype State	Predicted Primary Upayas	Predicted Secondary Upayas
Ari (Enemy/Rival)	Pakistan	**Dand** (Coercion), **Bheda** (Division)	Minimal/Conditional **Saama** or **Daama**

B. The Four Upayas: Discrete Strategic Variables

Each Upaya must be defined to ensure mutual exclusivity and analytical rigor, distinguishing them from standard IR terms.[21]

Upaya (Sanskrit)	Analytical Definition	Observable Indicators (DIP-E)
1. Saama (Conciliation)	Strategies to build confidence, trust, and common ground through diplomatic engagement, communication, and cultural ties.	High-level state visits, Joint Declarations of Goodwill, cultural exchange programs, and signing of non-contingent cooperation agreements.
2. Daama (Economic Inducement)	The strategic use of material benefits, aid, and concessional financing to create dependency or align foreign policy interests.	Non-reciprocal development aid, concessional loans, investment in key infrastructure projects, preferential trade status, and energy subsidies.

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[21] Viswanathan, H. H. S., *India's Soft Power Diplomacy: Capturing Hearts and Minds*, 14 Indian Foreign Affs. J. 129 (2019).

Upaya (Sanskrit)	Analytical Definition	Observable Indicators (DIP-E)
3. Dand (Coercion)	Application of direct punitive costs, economic, military, or diplomatic, aimed at altering specific behavior or deterring actions.	Withdrawal of trade status (e.g., MFN), military mobilizations, sanctions, targeted diplomatic isolation (e.g., UN), and punitive tariffs.
4. Bheda (Division)	Psychological and divisive strategies aimed at exploiting or generating internal fragmentation, discord, or confusion within the target state's political elite or populace.	Disinformation campaigns, diplomatic support for non-state actors/dissidents (if publicly acknowledged or credibly reported), strategic information leaks, cyber-enabled political interference.

C. Hypotheses

This research tests two core hypotheses:

1. **H1 (Relational Selectivity):** India's foreign policy will exhibit a statistically significant predominance of **Saama and Daama** when engaging a *Mitra* state (Bhutan) and a corresponding predominance of **Dand and Bheda** when engaging an *Ari* state (Pakistan), demonstrating the predictive value of the Mandala Theory.

2. **H2 (Superior Explanatory Power):** The Kautilyan framework will offer a more precise explanation of the **sequencing and specific content** of India's

strategic tools than Neoclassical Realism, which would predict a less nuanced, capability-driven response.

V. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Structured Focused Comparison (SFC)

This study employs Alexander George's Structured Focused Comparison (SFC) methodology. SFC enables systematic comparison across cases by using specific, theory-driven questions to test competing hypotheses.

1. **Focus:** The analysis focuses on India's foreign policy tool selection and sequencing.

2. **Structure:** The structure is provided by the two hypotheses (H1 & H2), which are applied consistently to both case studies (Bhutan and Pakistan).

3. **Comparison:** The *actual* policy behavior (coded by Upayas) is compared against the *predicted* behavior from both the Kautilyan framework and the Neoclassical Realist (NCR) framework.

B. Case Selection and Timeframe

1. **Case 1: India-Bhutan Relations (Mitra)**: Selected as the canonical example of a *Mitra* state, geographically contiguous, historically allied, and highly dependent, providing the ideal context to observe *Saama* and *Daama* in action.[22]

   Timeframe: 2014-2024 (The Modi administration, allowing for analysis of a single, coherent strategic culture).

2. **Case 2: India-Pakistan Relations (Ari)**: Selected as the canonical example of the *Ari* state, the immediate, perpetual rival, providing the ideal context to observe *Dand* and *Bheda* in action.

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[22] Tuhina Sarkar, *India - Bhutan Relations*, 73 THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 347 (2012); T. T. Poulose, *Bhutan's External Relations and India*, 20 ICLQ 195 (1971).

Timeframe: 2016-2024 (Post-Uri/Surgical Strikes, representing a phase of heightened, active coercion).[23]

VI. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: INDIA-BHUTAN (THE MITRA STATE)

Predicted Kautilyan Pattern: Dominance of Saama (trust-building) and Daama (economic alignment), with an absence of Dand and Bheda. The sequencing should favor diplomatic conciliation before significant economic inducement.

A. The Primacy of Saama (Conciliation)

1. **Hypothesis Testing:** The period 2014-2024 demonstrates a high frequency of diplomatic engagement. Prime Minister Modi's choice of Bhutan for his first foreign visit (2014) and subsequent high-level visits (2019, 2024) are clear instances of Saama, signaling goodwill and respect for sovereignty.

2. **Qualitative Evidence:** Joint statements invariably emphasize "unwavering friendship" and "mutual trust," explicitly fulfilling the *Saama* objective of building a foundation of confidence. Specific cultural exchanges, such as cooperation on digital governance and educational scholarships, fall under this category, fostering alignment of soft power.

3. **NCR Comparison:** NCR would explain this as alliance behavior driven by the shared threat perception of China's increasing influence in the region. However, NCR does not require the intensity or personalized nature of the Saama effort. The Kautilyan model uniquely predicts that the effort to create confidence is a necessary precondition for the next step.[24]

B. The Application of Daama (Economic Inducement)

1. **Hypothesis Testing:** India's economic strategy towards Bhutan is overwhelmingly defined by non-reciprocal financial and developmental

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[23] OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION, *India-Pakistan Tensions After Pahalgam: A Kautilyan Perspective*, ORFONLINE.ORG, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-pakistan-tensions-after-pahalgam-a-kautilyan-perspective (last visited Dec. 9, 2025).

[24] *Kautilya's Arthashastra: Strategic Cultural Roots of India's Contemporary Statecraft*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2023/09/kautilyas-arthashastra-strategic-cultural-roots-of-indias-contemporary-statecraft?lang=en (last visited Dec. 9, 2025).

support, classic Daama. This strategy is designed to ensure Bhutan's prosperity and, consequently, its geopolitical alignment with India.

2. **Key Indicators**: The cornerstone of this relationship is the hydropower sector cooperation, where India funds major projects (e.g., Punatsangchhu, Mangdechhu)[25] through a combination of grants and concessional loans, and then buys the surplus power, ensuring a steady, profitable revenue stream for Bhutan. This dual mechanism of aid and guaranteed market access is a perfect application of *Daama*.

3. **Analytical Sequence:** The robust use of *Daama* follows the establishment of trust through *Saama*, confirming the Kautilyan sequential logic: trust (Saama) enables effective resource transfer (Daama).

4. **Absence of Coercion:** Crucially, there is a near-total absence of Dand (coercion) and Bheda (division). When the Government of Bhutan briefly wavered on its ties with China (e.g., border talks), India responded not with coercion, but by subtly reducing subsidies (a gentle form of *Daama* reduction), which rapidly corrected the alignment, demonstrating the self-correcting nature of the *Mitra* strategy.

VII.   EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: INDIA-PAKISTAN (THE ARI STATE)

Predicted Kautilyan Pattern: Dominance of Dand (coercion) and Bheda (division), with minimal or strictly conditional *Saama* or *Daama*.

A. The Ascendancy of Dand (Coercion)

1. **Hypothesis Testing:** Following major terror attacks (e.g., Uri 2016, Pulwama 2019), India's response aligned with the *Ari* status, utilizing explicit **Dand** measures intended to inflict punitive costs and alter behavior.

2. **Military Dand:** The **2016 "Surgical Strikes"** and the **2019 Balakot Airstrike** represent direct, kinetic applications of *Dand*, aimed at deterring future non-

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[25] Sameena Hameed, *Invigorating India's Economic Diplomacy in South Asia*, 10 INDIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS JOURNAL 146 (2015).

state aggression by challenging Pakistan's nuclear threshold and conventional military superiority narrative.[26]

3. **Economic Dand:** In 2019, India unilaterally revoked the Most Favored Nation **(MFN)** trade status granted to Pakistan, significantly increasing tariffs, a textbook application of economic *Dand* aimed at damaging Pakistan's export economy.

4. **NCR Comparison:** NCR easily explains these actions as a conventional security response to a proximate threat (*Ari*). However, the Kautilyan framework provides a stronger explanation for the specific type of coercion used (surgical strikes and targeted tariffs over prolonged war), focusing on punitive action that limits escalation while maximizing behavioral change.

B. The Deployment of Bheda (Division and Psychological Warfare)

1. **Hypothesis Testing:** India's post-2016 strategy has significantly incorporated Bheda to exploit Pakistan's internal political, ethnic and resource vulnerabilities, consistent with the Kautilyan prescription for a principal enemy.[27]

2. **Diplomatic Bheda (Isolation):** India has consistently pursued a campaign of diplomatic isolation, pushing Pakistan onto watchlists (e.g., FATF gray list) and pressuring its allies (e.g., Saudi Arabia, UAE) to restrict engagement. This tactic sowed division by increasing the cost of Pakistan's external relationships.

3. **Informational Bheda:** The strategic use of information operations, often documented in reputable Western media and think tanks, regarding uprising of separatist movements (e.g., Balochistan) or highlighting political instability within Pakistan, serves to bring to light the mistreatment of the minorities by the Pakistani regime.

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[26] FOUNDATION, *supra* note 22.
[27] AKANKSHA SINGH & TOBIAS VON LOSSOW, INDUS WATER TREATY 2025: A PAUSE OF COOPERATION, NOT AN END (2025), https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71543.

4. **Absence of Saama:** The notable feature is the near-total cessation of high-level *Saama* initiatives, demonstrating the relational shift predicted by the Mandala Theory. Diplomatic engagement, when it occurs, is highly conditional, serving as a tactical measure rather than a foundational strategy for building relationships.

VIII.   DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The empirical evidence strongly supports the primary hypothesis (H1) that the relational context of the Mandala Theory systematically guides India's strategic behavior toward its immediate neighbors. The differential and predictable use of Upayas with Bhutan (*Saama* and *Daama*) versus Pakistan (*Dand* and *Bheda*) is not merely coincidental. Still, it reflects a deep-seated strategic logic rooted in Kautilya's philosophy.

Furthermore, the study confirms the secondary hypothesis (H2) by demonstrating the Kautilyan model's superior explanatory power over Neoclassical Realism, particularly in terms of sequencing and specificity. NCR correctly predicts the *outcome* (alliance with a weak neighbor, coercion against a strong rival) but fails to account for the detailed *process, specifically*, the Kautilyan prioritization of confidence-building (*Saama*) before resource alignment (*Daama*) with the *Mitra*, and the systematic combination of coercion (*Dand*) with psychological tactics (*Bheda*) against the *Ari*. This sequential logic is the key theoretical contribution of the Kautilyan framework to IR theory.

By rigorously operationalizing the *Upayas*, this research establishes that ancient, indigenous strategic frameworks can be translated into valid, measurable variables for contemporary comparative IR research, fulfilling the agenda for Global IR and strategic cultural studies.

IX.   CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research validates Kautilya's Four Upayas as a functional, analytically distinctive model for interpreting India's foreign policy behavior, outperforming Neoclassical Realism's explanatory power in these crucial bilateral cases. The finding establishes a

strong foundation for integrating India's strategic culture into the mainstream theoretical conversation.

Limitations: The current study is limited to two binary relational contexts (*Mitra* and *Ari*). Future research should apply this rigorous framework to India's relations with middle powers (Madhyama), such as Iran, South Africa, or even China, where relational ambiguities and multipolar dynamics necessitate the simultaneous or alternating application of mixed Upayas, thereby testing the full complexity and adaptability of Kautilyan statecraft. The continued refinement of operational indicators for covert *Bheda* actions also remains a methodological priority.

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