

PSIR Power 50 – Day 10 Capsule: Power + Practice Qs

Hello Aspirants

Today it's about first part of Indian Political thought– **Nature, Sources, Characteristics, Dharma shastras, Mahabharata Tradition, Buddhist Political Thought, Jain Political Thought, Kautilya's Arthashastra.**

Some of you take it lightly but **UPSC** likes to **ask big questions** from this section (**either 15 or 20 Marks**). So, across Dharmashastra, Arthashastra, and the Buddhist tradition you have **8 fifteen-mark questions and 2 twenty-mark questions; none are ten-mark questions** in last 12 years.

1 | Nature of Early Indian Political Thought

- Multiple labels for “politics”: **Rajadharma · Kshatravidya · Rajyasastra · Dandaniti · Nitisastra · Arthashastra.**
- **Concept of Matsyanyaya**: in a law-less state of nature the “big fish eat small fish” ⇒ need for **Danda** (coercive authority).
- **Dharma + Danda**: moral order (*dhr* = “to hold”) upheld by disciplined punishment; king prevents **Varnasankara** and enforces **Varnashrama-dharma**.

2 | Sources & Historiography

- **Textual base**: Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva Vedas · Dharmasutras & Smritis · Mahabharata · Ramayana · Arthasastras (esp. **Kautilya**) · Buddhist & Jain canons · Epigraphs, coins, Greek & Chinese accounts.
- **Nationalist recovery**: K. T. Telang · R. G. Bhandarkar · Radhakumud Mookerji · K. P. Jayaswal · R. C. Majumdar · B. K. Sarkar highlighted India's political heritage; R. S. Sharma exposed their caste-blind romanticism.

3 | Characteristic Features (after Bhikhu Parekh)

- Politics fused with **Dharma**; divine sovereignty limits rulers.
- **Ethical kingship** internally, pragmatic realism (**Kautilya**) externally.
- **Varnashrama** hierarchy: Brahmana–Kshatriya governance compact, Vaishya support, Shudra subordination.
- State & society indistinct; monarchy normal though **Ganasanghas** existed.
- Writing style **didactic, conservative, apologetic**; plural loci of authority.

4 | Buddhist Contributions

- Kingship via **social contract**: people elect **Mahāsammata**; revolt against tyranny justified.
- **Sangha** models **democratic procedure**: assemblies, quorum, voting, committees.
- Upholds **Dharma over Danda**; ideal **Chakravartin** rules by virtue.

5 | Muslim-Period Inputs

- Theoretically **Islamic state** under Caliphal legitimacy; *jizya* for non-Muslims.
- **Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak** (*Ain-i-Akbari*): king radiates **Divine Light**; duties—protection, justice, paternal care, conquest.

- Contrast “true” vs “selfish” monarchs.

6 | Political Wisdom of the Mahābhārata – Śāntiparva

- Authored by **Krishna Dwaipayana Vyāsa**; treated as historical-political text by **D. D. Kosambi**.
- Three books: **Rajadharmanushasana** · **Apaddharmānushasana** · **Mokshadharma**.
- Two state-origins: **Divine** (story of **Prithu Vainya**) & **Social contract** (people seek order)—underscored by historian **R. Sharan Sharma**.
- **Saptāṅga elements** (echo **Kautilya**): *Swāmin, Amātya, Janapada, Durga, Kosha, Danda/Bala, Mitra*.
- Kingship = dean of **Dandaniti**; promotes **Purusharthas** (Dharma-Artha-Kāma-Moksha).
- **Anant S. Altekar**: royal authority rests on both divine sanction & popular consent.
- Foreign policy: spies, cautious alliances, underestimate none.

7 | Manusmṛti — Brahminical Law-State

- **Smṛiti** source: combines **shruti** (Veda) & human tradition; four legal founts: *Veda, conduct of Vedic learned, practice of holy men, conscience*.
- **K. P. Jayaswal**: rulers like **Puṣyamitra Śuṅga** used divine-law claims for legitimacy.
- Kingship averts **Matsyanyaya**; **Danda itself is king**.
- Governance counsel: noble ministers, *saam-daam-bhed-dand* diplomacy, forts, spies, bee-like taxation (never taxing Brahmins).
- **Varna-centric justice**: Brahmin leniency vs Shudra severity; Brahmin courts, Shudra barred.
- **Marriage code**: eight rites; *anuloma* tolerated, *pratiloma* condemned.
- Women under perpetual male guardianship; likened to property.
- Mixed castes stratified (*Anuloma* · *Pratiloma*) with set occupations.
- **B. R. Ambedkar** burned *Manusmṛti* (25 Dec 1927): “clog on the wheel of civilisation,” symbol of Dalit oppression.
-

8 | Buddhist Political Thought (Dīgha Nikāya)

Key modern interpreters → **T. W. Rhys Davids** · **S. J. Tambiah** · **Max Weber**

Evolution (per B. G. Gokhale)	Core doctrines, texts & scholars
Phase I – Mahāsammata social-contract	Agganna Sutta : beings fall from self-luminous state → greed, property, theft; elect the “ Great Elect ” to police society. Analysed by V. P. Varma , linked to A. B. Keith (subtle-body idea). Legitimacy by consent (U. N. Ghoshal), challenges Brahmanical divine right. Ernest Gellner → psychological drivers; Steven Collins echoes.
Phase II – Monarchic ascendancy	Four functional classes; coexistence then eclipse of oligarchic republics (Shākya polity). Decline traced by Uma Chakravarti . Sovereignty terms ānā · ādhipacca · issariya · vasa · siri . Saptaratna (wheel, elephant, horse, councillor, woman, jewel, householder). Dasa-rājadhamma (dāna → avirodhana). Welfare & “king without thorns” ideal (noted by Gail Omvedt).
Phase III – Dhamma &	Dhamma as cosmic regulator; state = instrument. Dual spheres ānā (command) & Dhamma (moral law) – recognised by Bimbisāra ·

Chakravartin	Ajātasattu. Ānā-attha linkage (wealth/welfare). Chakravartin / Dhammiko Dhammarājā : universal monarch, seven treasures, conquers by righteousness; analysed via Laksiri Jayasuriya & Gail Omvedt (Aśoka). Mahāpurisa idea (super-human iddhis).
---------------------	--

Critiques – tyranny risk, lack of checks (**Romila Thapar**), quasi-Brahmanical ritualism (**V. P. Varma**).

9 | Jain Political Perspective

Key names → **Somadeva · Mahāvīra · Sutrakṛtāṅga · Bhikhu Parekh**

- Tenets: state a “**necessary evil**”; king should be welfare-oriented (**Somadeva**).
- **Ahimsa, Anekāntavāda** (pluralism), **non-possessiveness** guide law.
- Sovereignty of **wisdom**, multi-level collaborative leadership; reasonable taxation.
- Rugged **individualism**: self-conquest > external conquest; karma—no ritual salvation.
- **Theory of Relativity**: graded righteousness; lay **limited ahimsa**.
- Modern relevance: dialogic tolerance, non-violent debate, stabilising identity through openness.

10 | Kautilya / Chanakya (c. 4-th cent. BCE)

Rediscovered by **R. Shamasastry**; hailed by **Roger Boesche, Max Weber, Hans Morgenthau**.

Saptāṅga Theory

Swāmin · Amatya · Janapada · Durga · Kosha · Danda/Sena · Mitra – state as living organism.

Mandala (“circle”) Diplomacy

Vijigīṣu · Ari · Mitra · Ari-Mitra · Mitra-Mitra · Madhyama · Udāsīna – “enemy of my enemy”. Twelve-king geometry.

Policy Toolkits

- **Upāyas**: **Sama · Dāna · Bheda · Daṇḍa** (conciliate → coerce).
- **Ṣaḍguṇya**: **Sandhi · Vighraha · Āsana · Yāna · Saṁśraya · Dvaidhibhāva**.
- **Envoys (Dūta)** & multi-layer **spy** network; counter-intelligence stressed.
- Warfare modes: **Mantra-, Prakāśa-, Kūṭa-, Tuṣṇīm-yuddha**.

Security & Yogakṣema

Defence, internal order via **Dharma**, economic resilience. Anticipates non-traditional threats (famine, epidemic).

Realist yet Moral

National interest supreme, international anarchy accepted; nevertheless governance anchored in **Dharma**.

Modern Echoes (India) – observed by Jawaharlal Nehru et al.

Non-alignment cum power-balancing, 1971 USSR treaty, nuclear deterrent, Quad participation mirror **Mandala/Upāya** logic.

Comparative glances

Pair	Shared threads	Divergences
Kautilya–Plato	Elitism, functional roles, virtue	Philosopher-king vs split Brahmin/Kshatriya; Plato idealist, Kautilya pragmatic.
Kautilya–Aristotle	Organic state, contemporaneity	Aristotle probes origins, wary of wealth; Kautilya wealth-positive, operational focus.
Kautilya–Machiavelli	Realpolitik, centralised power	Kautilya demands genuine virtue; broader socio-economic canvas.

Scholars Index:

A. B. Keith | Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak | Ajātasattu | Anant S. Altekar | Aristotle | Aśoka | B. G. Gokhale | B. K. Sarkar | B. R. Ambedkar | Bhikhu Parekh | Bimbisāra | D. D. Kosambi | Ernest Gellner | Gail Omvedt | Hans Morgenthau | Jawaharlal Nehru | Kautilya (Chanakya) | K. P. Jayaswal | K. T. Telang | Krishna Dwaipayana Vyāsa | Laksiri Jayasuriya | Mahāsammata | Mahāvira | Niccolò Machiavelli | Max Weber | Plato | Prithu Vainya | R. C. Majumdar | R. G. Bhandarkar | R. S. Sharma | R. Shamasastri | R. Sharan Sharma | Radhakumud Mookerji | Roger Boesche | Romila Thapar | S. J. Tambiah | Somadeva | Steven Collins | Sutratrāṅga | T. W. Rhys Davids | U. N. Ghoshal | Uma Chakravarti | V. P. Varma

Practice Questions (Write before 4 p.m.)

Question 1. Dharmashastra presents a duty-centric worldview for individuals and communities. Comment.. [2015/10m]

Question 2. Compare and contrast the views of Kautilya and Machiavelli on statecraft.. [2015/15m]

Question 3. Do you think that the Buddhist traditions have lent greater ethical foundation to the ancient Indian political thought? Give your arguments. [2021/20m]

♦ Model answers drop this evening on the Telegram channel:
<https://t.me/psirbyamitpratap> – keep notifications on.

See you tomorrow on Day 11. Keep practicing!

—Amit Pratap Singh & Team

A quick note on submissions of copies and mentorship

- **2025 Mains writers: Cohort 1 of O-AWFG** kicks off **12 June** and **ATS** on **15 June**. The above practice set will serve as your *revision tool*, just **do not miss booking your mentorship sessions** for personalised feedback especially for starting tests. Come with your evaluated test copies.
- **2026 Mains writers** – keep uploading through your usual dashboard. Act on the feedback and improve consistently.
- Alternate between mini-tests (**O-AWFG**) and full mocks (**ATS**) has been designed to tackle speed, content depth, and structured revision—line-by-line evaluation pinpoints your weaknesses and errors. Follow your **PSIR O-AWFG & ATS** schedule and use the model answers to enrich your content, as rankers recommended based on their own success.