

## Āsamudrahimācalam: Cānakya's Supposed Construction of a Cultural Weltanschauung for Hindutva

**Gautam Chakrabarti**

*young scientist*

*Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India*

*E-mail: [gautamcind@musician.org](mailto:gautamcind@musician.org)*

The *Arthasāstra*, a seminal text on the political economy of Mauryan India, written by Viṣṇugupta, a *Brāhmaṇa*-scholar, who was, perhaps, better known by his patronymic-honorific Cānakya-Kautilya, has long been the focus of attention, from scholars and laypeople, as a defining academic/polemical narrative of the various structural and theoretical precepts that could, and did, much later on, furnish the politico-legal framework for an Indic State-apparatus. This is attested to in the alacrity with which Brāhmanical figures like Gāga Bhatta, from Varanasi, had no qualms in taking recourse to the precepts of governance and kingship laid down by Cānakya for the purpose of validating and establishing the Hindu Svarājya of Shivaji. The preponderance of dharma on the Indic State had begun to disintegrate after the Brāhmaṇa-period; but this was, nevertheless, effectively arrested by Cānakya, whose renowned, and somewhat mysterious text offers a profound insight into how the State came to be dominated once again by the sacerdotal class. He was a past master of the science and craft of realpolitik, besides being a political philosopher and thinker of a superlative order; and had managed, once again, to bring the Brāhmanic paradigm into the operations of the State. Through Candragupta Maurya, whom he installed as practically the first Indic Emperor in the Magadhan principality in what is now Bihar and Jharkhand in Northeast India, Kautilya shackled the state to the responsibility for the preservation and promotion of dharma, a role that the modern-day proponents of Hindutva, from Savarkar downwards, have been demanding from the modern Indian State. My paper/report shall seek to establish that, in this construction of the notion of the State as a guarantor of the Indic/Hindu aspects of Indian nationhood, Cānakya seems to have played a major role as the provider of a cultural, and even social, paradigmatic framework, even a Weltanschauung for the delineation of the Hindu State.

Cānakya belonged to the class of *purohita*-s, and, this fact does demonstrate the continuation of this class's considerable influence and power in the State. It does seem that the *Brāhmaṇa*-s had, by Cānakya's time, emerged as a privileged entity, the privileges of which were also enshrined by the laws enforced by the State. Cānakya lays down that the *purohita* should not only be adept in interpreting *dharmic* laws, but also have sufficient knowledge of astrology as well as omens and portents and the capacity for remedying human and providential catastrophes. The King, even if he had been a *Cakravartin*, was beholden to his priestly advisers to help him deal with famines and droughts through the propitiation of gods like Indra and goddesses like Ganga. Even in matters of internal security, *vis-à-vis* raids by demons (*rākṣasa*-s) the King relied on sacerdotal guidance. Cānakya invested Indic kingship with dimensions of divinity and the simulacrum of omniscience, as he believed that only an absolutist monarch could motivate his subjects to defeat external aggressors. However, this act was resonant not only with monarchical prerogatives, but resounded with the ordering of society on lines that should help it to crystallize as a single geo-political entity with a shared socio-cultural mindscape; *Jambu-dvīpa*, ultimately, would be one bloc.