

# Kautilya's *Arthashastra*: Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy"

---

## CHAPTER I. THE DUTIES OF A MESSENGER.

WHEN a king of poor resources is attacked by a powerful enemy, he should surrender himself together with his sons to the enemy and live like a reed (in the midst of a current of water).

Bháradvája says that he who surrenders himself to the strong, bows down before Indra (the god of rain).

But Visáláksha says that a weak king should rather fight with all his resources, for bravery destroys all troubles; this (fighting) is the natural duty of a *Kshatriya*, no matter whether he achieves victory or sustains defeat in battle.

No, says Kautilya, he who bows down to all like a crab on the banks (of a river) lives in despair; whoever goes with his small army to fight perishes like a man attempting to cross the sea without a boat. Hence, a weak king should either seek the protection of a powerful king or maintain himself in an impregnable fort.

Invaders are of three kinds: a just conqueror, a demon-like conqueror, and a greedy conqueror.

Of these, the just conqueror is satisfied with mere obeisance. Hence, a weak king should seek his protection.

Fearing his own enemies, the greedy conqueror is satisfied with what he can safely gain in land or money. Hence, a weak king should satisfy such a conqueror with wealth.

The demon-like conqueror satisfies himself not merely by seizing the land, treasure, sons and wives of the conquered, but by taking the life of the latter. Hence, a weak king should keep such a conqueror at a distance by offering him land and wealth.

When any one of these is on the point of rising against a weak king, the latter should avert the invasion by making a treaty of peace, or by taking recourse to the battle of intrigue (*mantrayuddha*), or by a treacherous fight in the battle-field. He may seduce the enemy's men either by conciliation or by giving gifts, and should prevent the treacherous proceedings of his own men either by sowing the seeds of dissension among them or by punishing them. Spies, under concealment, may capture the enemy's fort, country, or camp with the aid of weapons, poison, or fire. He may harass the enemy's rear on all

sides; and he may devastate the enemy's country through the help of wild tribes. Or he may set up a scion of the enemy's family or an imprisoned prince to seize the enemy's territory. When all this mischief has been perpetrated, a messenger may be sent to the enemy, (to sue for peace); or he may make peace with the enemy without offending the latter. If the enemy still continues the march, the weak king may sue for peace by offering more than one-fourth of his wealth and army, the payment being made after the lapse of a day and night.

If the enemy desires to make peace on condition of the weak king surrendering a portion of this army, he may give the enemy such of his elephants and cavalry as are uncontrollable or as are provided with poison; if the enemy desires to make peace on condition of his surrendering his chief men, he may send over to the enemy such portion of his army as is full of traitors, enemies and wild tribes under the command of a trusted officer, so that both his enemy and his own undesirable army may perish; or he may provide the enemy with an army composed of fiery spies, taking care to satisfy his own disappointed men (before sending them over to the enemy); or he may transfer to the enemy his own faithful and hereditary army that is capable to hurt the enemy on occasions of trouble; if the enemy desires to make peace on condition of his paying certain amount of wealth, he may give the enemy such precious articles as do not find a purchaser or such raw products as are of no use in war; if the enemy desires to make peace on condition of his ceding a part of his land, he should provide the enemy with that kind of land which he can recover, which is always at the mercy of another enemy, which possesses no protective defences, or which can be colonized at considerable cost of men and money; or he may make peace, surrendering his whole state except his capital.

\* He should so contrive as to make the enemy accept that which another enemy is likely to carry off by force; and he should take care more of his person than of his wealth, for of what interest is perishing wealth?

[Thus ends Chapter I, "The Duties of a Messenger, and Request for Peace," in Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya. End of the hundred and thirty-sixth chapter from the beginning.]

## **CHAPTER II. BATTLE OF INTRIGUE.**

IF the enemy does not keep peace, he should be told :--

"These kings perished by surrendering themselves to the aggregate of the six enemies; it is not worthy of you to follow the lead of these unwise kings; be mindful of virtue and wealth; those who advise you to brave danger, sin and violation of wealth, are enemies under the guise of friends; it is danger to fight with men who are reckless of their own lives; it is sin to cause the loss of life on both sides; it is violation of wealth to abandon the wealth at hand and the friend of no mean character (meaning the addresser himself); that king has many friends whom he will set against you with the same wealth

(that is acquired with your help at my expense), and who will fall upon you from all sides; that king has not lost his influence over the Circle of the *madhyama* and neutral States; but you have lost that power over them who are, therefore, waiting for an opportunity to fall upon you; patiently bear the loss of men and money again; break peace with that friend; then we shall be able to remove him from that stronghold over which he has lost his influence. Hence, it is not worthy of you to lend your ear to those enemies with the face of friends, to expose your real friends to trouble, to help your enemies to attain success, and to involve yourself in dangers costing life and wealth."

If without caring for the advice, the enemy proceeds on his own way, the weak king should create disaffection among the enemy's people by adopting such measures as are explained in the chapters, "The Conduct of Corporations," and "Enticement of the enemy by secret contrivances." He should also make use of fiery spies and poison. Against what is described as deserving protection in the chapter, "Safety of his own person," fiery spies and poisoners should be employed (in the enemy's court). Keepers of harlots should excite love in the minds of the leaders of the enemy's army by exhibiting women endowed with youth and beauty. Fiery spies should bring about quarrels among them when one or two of them have fallen in love. In the affray that ensues they should prevail upon the defeated party to migrate elsewhere or to proceed to help the master (of the spies) in the invasion undertaken by the latter.

Or to those who have fallen in love, spies, under the guise of ascetics, may administer poison under the plea that the medical drugs given to them are capable of securing the object of love.

A spy, under the guise of a merchant, may, under the plea of winning the love of an immediate maid-servant of the beautiful queen (of the enemy), shower wealth upon her and then give her up. A spy in the service of the merchant may give to another spy, employed as a servant of the maid-servant, some medical drug, telling the latter that (in order to regain the love of the merchant), the drug may be applied to the person of the merchant (by the maid-servant). On her attaining success (the maid-servant) may inform the queen that the same drug may be applied to the person of the king (to secure his love), and then change the drug for poison.

A spy, under the guise of an astrologer, may gradually delude the enemy's prime minister with the belief that he is possessed of all the physiognomical characteristics of a king; a mendicant woman may tell the minister's wife that she has the characteristics of a queen and that she will bring forth a prince; or a woman, disguised as the minister's wife, may tell him that, "The king is troubling me; and an ascetic woman has brought to me this letter and jewellery."

Spies, under the guise of cooks, may, under the pretence of the king's (the enemy's) order, take some covetable wealth (to the minister) meant for use in an immediate expedition. A spy under the guise of a merchant may, by some contrivance or other, take possession of that wealth and inform the minister of the readiness of all the preparations (for the expedition). Thus by the employment of one, two, or three of the strategic means,

the ministers of each of the combined enemies may be induced to set out on the expedition and thus to be away from the inimical kings.

Spies, under the service of the officer in charge of the enemy's waste lands, may inform the citizens and country people residing in the enemy's fortified towns of the condition of the officer's friendship with the people, and say: "The officer in charge of the waste lands tells the warriors and departmental officers thus:--"The king has hardly escaped from danger and scarcely returns with life. Do not hoard up your wealth and thereby create enemies; if so, you will all be put to death." When all the people are collected together, fiery spies may take the citizens out of the town and kill their leaders, saying: "Thus will be treated those who do not hear the officer in charge of the waste lands." On the waste lands under the charge of the officer, the spies may throw down weapons, money and ropes bespattered with blood. Then other spies may spread the news that the officer in charge of the waste lands destroys the people and plunders them. Similarly, spies may cause disagreement between the enemy's collector-general and the people. Addressing the servants of the collector-general in the centre of the village at night, fiery spies may say: "Thus will be treated those who subject the people to unjust oppression." When the fault of the collector-general or of the officer in charge of the waste lands is widely known, the spies may cause the people to slay either of them, and employ in his place one of his family or one who is imprisoned.

\* Spreading the false news of the danger of the enemy, they (spies) may set fire to the harem, the gates of the town and the store-house of grains and other things, and slay the sentinels who are kept to guard them.

[Thus ends Chapter II, "The Duties of a Messenger and Battle of Intrigue," in Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya. End of "Battle of Intrigue." End of the hundred and thirty-seventh chapter from the beginning.]

### **CHAPTER III. SLAYING THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AND INCITING A CIRCLE OF STATES.**

SPIES in the service of the king (the enemy) or of his courtiers may, under the pretence of friendship, say in the presence of other friends that the king is angry with the chiefs of infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants. When their men are collected together, fiery spies, having guarded themselves against night watches, may, under the pretence of the king's (the enemy's) order, invite the chiefs to a certain house and slay the chiefs when returning from the house. Other spies in the vicinity may say that it has been the king's (the enemy's) order to slay them. Spies may also tell those who have been banished from the country: "This is just what we foretold; for personal safety, you may go elsewhere."

Spies may also tell those who have not received what they requested of the king (the enemy) that the officer in charge of waste lands has been told by the king: "Such and

such a person has begged of me what he should not demand; I refused to grant his request; he is in conspiracy with my enemy. So make attempts to put him down." Then the spies may proceed in their usual way.

Spies may also tell those who have been granted their request by the king (the enemy) that the officer in charge of waste lands has been told by the king: "Such and such persons have demanded their due from me; I have granted them all their requests in order to gain their confidence. But they are conspiring with my enemy. So make attempts to put them down." Then the spies may proceed in their usual way.

Spies may also tell those who do not demand their due from the king that the officer in charge of waste lands has been told: "Such and such persons do not demand their due from me. What else can be the reason than their suspicion about my knowledge of their guilt? So make attempts to put them down." Then the spies may proceed in their usual way.

This explains the treatment of partisans.

A spy employed as the personal servant of the king (the enemy) may inform him that such and such ministers of his are being interviewed by the enemy's servants. When he comes to believe this, some treacherous persons may be represented as the messengers of the enemy, specifying as "this is that."

The chief officers of the army may be induced by offering land and gold to fall against their own men and secede from the enemy (their king). If one of the sons of the commander-in-chief is living near or inside the fort, a spy may tell him: "You are the most worthy son; still you are neglected; why are you indifferent? Seize your position by force; otherwise the heir-apparent will destroy you."

Or some one of the family (of the commander-in-chief or the king), or one who is imprisoned may be bribed in gold and told: "Destroy the internal strength of the enemy, or a portion of his force in the border of his country."

Or having seduced wild tribes with rewards of wealth and honour, they may be incited to devastate the enemy's country. Or the enemy's rear-enemy may be told: "I am, as it were, a bridge to you all; if I am broken like a rafter, this king will drown you all; let us, therefore, combine and thwart the enemy in his march." Accordingly, a message may be sent to individual or combined states to the effect: "After having done with me, this king will do his work of you: beware of it. I am the best man to be relied upon."

\* In order to escape from the danger from an immediate enemy, a king should frequently send to a *madhyama* or a neutral king (whatever would please him); or one may put one's whole property at the enemy's disposal.

[Thus ends Chapter III, "Slaying the Commander-in-Chief and Inciting a Circle of States," in Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya. End of the hundred and thirty-eighth chapter from the beginning.]

#### **CHAPTER IV. SPIES WITH WEAPONS, FIRE, AND POISON; AND DESTRUCTION OF SUPPLY, STORES AND GRANARIES.**

THE conqueror's spies who are residing as traders in the enemy's forts, and those who are living as cultivators in the enemy's villages, as well as those who are living as cowherds or ascetics in the district borders of the enemy's country may send through merchants, information to another neighbouring enemy, or a wild chief, or a scion of the enemy's family, or an imprisoned prince that the enemy's country is to be captured. When their secret emissaries come as invited, they are to be pleased with rewards of wealth and honour and shewn the enemy's weak points; and with the help of the emissaries, the spies should strike the enemy at his weak points.

Or having put a banished prince in the enemy's camp; a spy disguised as a vintner in the service of the enemy, may distribute as a toast hundreds of vessels of liquor mixed with the juice of the *madana* plant; or, for the first day, he may distribute a mild or intoxicating variety of liquor, and on the following days such liquor as is mixed with poison; or having given pure liquor to the officers of the enemy's army, he may give them poisoned liquor when they are in intoxication.

A spy, employed as a chief officer of the enemy's army, may adopt the same measures as those employed by the vintner.

Spies, disguised as experts in trading in cooked flesh, cooked rice, liquor, and cakes, may vie with each other in proclaiming in public the sale of a fresh supply of their special articles at cheap price and may sell the articles mixed with poison to the attracted customers of the enemy.

Women and children may receive in their poisoned vessels, liquor, milk, curd, ghee, or oil from traders in those articles, and pour those fluids back into the vessels of the traders, saying that at a specified rate the whole may be sold to them. Spies, disguised as merchants, may purchase the above articles, and may so contrive that servants, attending upon the elephants and horses of the enemy, may make use of the same articles in giving rations and grass to those animals. Spies, under the garb of servants, may sell poisoned grass and water. Spies, let off as traders in cattle for a long time, may leave herds of cattle, sheep, or goats in tempting places so as to divert the attention of the enemy from the attack which they (the enemy) intend to make; spies as cowherds may let off such animals as are ferocious among horses, mules, camels, buffaloes and others beasts, having smeared the eyes of those animals with the blood of a musk-rat (*chuchundari*); spies as hunters may let off cruel beasts from traps; spies as snake charmers may let off highly poisonous snakes; those who keep elephants may let off elephants (near the

enemy's camp); those who live by making use of fire may set fire (to the camp, etc.). Secret spies may slay from behind the chiefs of infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants, or they may set fire to the chief residences of the enemy. Traitors, enemies and wild tribes, employed for the purpose, may destroy the enemy's rear or obstruct his reinforcement; or spies, concealed in forests, may enter into the border of the enemy's country, and devastate it; or they may destroy the enemy's supply, stores, and other things, when those things are being conveyed on a narrow path passable by a single man.

Or in accordance with a preconcerted plan, they may, on the occasion of a night-battle, go to the enemy's capital, and blowing a large number of trumpets, cry aloud: "We have entered into the capital, and the country has been conquered." After entering into the king's (the enemy's) palace, they may kill the king in the tumult; when the king begins to run from one direction to another, *Mlechchhas*, wild tribes, or chiefs of the army, lying in ambush (*sattra*), or concealed near a pillar or a fence, may slay him; or spies, under the guise of hunters, may slay the king when he is directing his attack, or in the tumult of attack following the plan of treacherous fights. Or occupying an advantageous position, they may slay the enemy when he is marching in a narrow path passable by a single man, or on a mountain, or near the trunk of a tree, or under the branches of a banyan tree, or in water; or they may cause him to be carried off by the force of a current of water let off by the destruction of a dam across a river, or of a lake or pond; or they may destroy him by means of an explosive fire or poisonous snake when he has entrenched himself in a fort, in a desert, in a forest, or in a valley. He should be destroyed with fire when he is under a thicket; with smoke when he is in a desert; with poison when he is in a comfortable place; with crocodile and other cruel beasts when he is in water; or they may slay him when he is going out of his burning house.

\* By means of such measures as are narrated in the chapter, "Enticement of the Enemy by Secret Means" or by any other measures, the enemy should be caught hold of in places to which he is confined or from which he is attempting to escape.

[Thus ends Chapter IV, "Spies with Weapons, Fire and Poison; and Destruction of Supply, Stores and Granaries," in Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya. End of the hundred and thirty-ninth chapter from the beginning.]

## **CHAPTER V. CAPTURE OF THE ENEMY BY MEANS OF SECRET CONTRIVANCES OR BY MEANS OF THE ARMY; AND COMPLETE VICTORY.**

CONTRIVANCES to kill the enemy may be formed in those places of worship and visit, which the enemy, under the influence of faith, frequents on occasions of worshipping gods, and of pilgrimage.

A wall or a stone, kept by mechanical contrivance, may, by loosening the fastenings, be let to fall on the head of the enemy when he has entered into a temple; stones and weapons may be showered over his head from the topmost storey; or a door-panel may be

let to fall; or a huge rod kept over a wall or partly attached to a wall may be made to fall over him; or weapons kept inside the body of an idol may be thrown over his head; or the floor of those places where he usually stands, sits, or walks may be sprinkled with poison mixed with cow-dung or with pure water; or under the plea of giving him flowers, scented powders, or of causing scented smoke, he may be poisoned; or by removing the fastenings made under a cot or a seat, he may be made to fall into a pit containing pointed spears; or when he is eager to escape from impending imprisonment in his own country, he may be led away to fall into the hands of a wild tribe or an enemy waiting for him not far from his country; or when he is eager to get out of his castle he may be likewise misled or made to enter an enemy's country which is to be restored (to the conqueror); the enemy's people should also be kept under the protection of sons and brothers (of the conqueror) in some forts on a mountain, or in a forest, or in the midst of a river separated from the enemy's country by wild tracts of lands.

Measures to obstruct the movements of the enemy are explained in the chapter, "The Conduct of a Conquered King."

Grass and firewood should be set on fire as far as a *yojana* (5 5/44 miles); water should be vitiated and caused to flow away; mounds, wells, pits and thorns (outside the fort wall) should be destroyed; having widened the mouth of the underground tunnel of the enemy's fort, his stores and leaders may be removed; the enemy may also be likewise carried off; when the underground tunnel has been made by the enemy for his own use, the water in the ditch outside the fort may be made to flow into it; in suspicious places along the parapet (of the enemy's fort) and in the house containing a well outside the fort, empty pots or bronze vessels may be placed in order to find out the direction of the wind (blowing from the underground tunnel); when the direction of the tunnel is found out, a counter-tunnel may be formed; or having opened the tunnel, it may be filled with smoke or water.

Having arranged for the defence of the fort by a scion of his family, the enemy may run in an opposite direction where it is possible for him to meet with friends, relatives, or wild tribes, or with his enemy's treacherous friends of vast resources, or where he may separate his enemy from the latter's friends, or where he may capture the enemy's rear, or country, or where he may prevent the transport of supplies to his enemy, or whence he may strike his enemy by throwing down trees at hand, or where he can find means to defend his own country or to gather reinforcements for his hereditary army; or he may go to any other country whence he can obtain peace on his own terms.

His enemy's (the conqueror's) allies may send a mission to him, saying: "This man, your enemy, has fallen into our hands; under the plea of merchandise or some presentation, send gold and a strong force; we shall either hand over to you your enemy bound in chains, or banish him." If he approves of it, the gold and the army he may send may be received (by the conqueror).

Having access to the enemy's castle, the officer in charge of the boundaries (of the enemy's country) may lead a part of his force and slay the enemy in good faith under the

plea of destroying a people in some place, he may take the enemy to an inimical army; and having led the enemy to the surrounded place, he may slay the enemy in good faith.

A pretending friend may send information to an outsider: "Grains, oil and jaggery and salt stored in the fort (of the enemy) have been exhausted; a fresh supply of them is expected to reach the fort at such and such a place and time; seize it by force." Then traitors, enemies, or wild tribes, or some other persons, specially appointed for the purpose, may send a supply of poisoned grains, oil, jaggery, and salt to the fort. This explains the seizure of all kinds of supply.

Having made peace with the conqueror, he may give the conqueror part of the gold promised and the rest gradually. Thus he may cause the conqueror's defensive force to be slackened and then strike them down with fire, poison or sword; or he may win the confidence of the conqueror's courtiers deputed to take the tribute.

Or if his resources are exhausted, he may run away abandoning his fort; he may escape through a tunnel or through a hole newly made or by breaking the parapet.

Or having challenged the conqueror at night, he may successfully confront the attack; if he cannot do this, he may run away by a side path; or disguised as a heretic, he may escape with a small retinue; or he may be carried off by spies as a corpse; or disguised as a woman, he may follow a corpse (as it were, of her husband to the cremation ground); or on the occasion of feeding the people in honour of gods or of ancestors or in some festival, he may make use of poisoned rice and water, and having conspired with his enemy's traitors, he may strike the enemy with his concealed army; or when he is surrounded in his fort, he may lie concealed in a hole bored into the body of an idol after eating sacramental food and setting up an altar; or he may lie in a secret hole in a wall, or in a hole made in the body of an idol in an underground chamber; and when he is forgotten, he may get out of his concealment through a tunnel, and, entering into the palace, slay his enemy while sleeping, or loosening the fastenings of a machine (*yantra*), he may let it fall on his enemy; or when his enemy is lying in a chamber which is besmeared with poisonous and explosive substances or which is made of lac, he may set fire to it. Fiery spies, hidden in an underground chamber, or in a tunnel, or inside a secret wall, may slay the enemy when the latter is carelessly amusing himself in a pleasure park or any other place of recreation; or spies under concealment may poison him; or women under concealment may throw a snake, or poison, or fire or poisonous smoke over his person when he is asleep in confined place; or spies, having access to the enemy's harem, may, when opportunities occur, do to the enemy whatever is found possible on the occasion, and then get out unknown. On such occasions, they should make use of the signs indicative of the purpose of their society.

\* Having by means of trumpet sounds called together the sentinels at the gate as well as aged men and other spies stationed by others, the enemy may completely carry out the rest of his work.

[Thus ends Chapter V, "Capture of the Enemy by Means of Secret Contrivances or by Means of the Army; and Complete Victory," in Book XII, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasástra* of Kautilya. End of the hundred and fortieth chapter from the beginning. With this ends the twelfth Book, "Concerning a Powerful Enemy," of the *Arthasástra* of Kautilya.]

---

From: Kautilya. *Arthashastra*. Translated by R. Shamasastri. Bangalore: Government Press, 1915, 461-474.