

## The Architecture of Influence: Strategic Communication as an Instrument of Statecraft

In an information-saturated world, the entity that controls the narrative often controls the outcome.

In the high-stakes arena of global geopolitics, the strength of a nation is often measured by its kinetic capabilities, such as its economic output, military hardware, and technological edge. However, there exists a more subtle yet equally potent dimension of national security known as strategic communication. Often misunderstood as mere public relations or propaganda, strategic communication is the deliberate use of words, images, and actions to shape perceptions and influence the behaviour of foreign audiences. It is a vital instrument of statecraft that operates on the premise that in an information-saturated world, the entity that controls the narrative often controls the outcome. While the tools of this trade have evolved from stone pillars to social media feeds, the underlying logic remains rooted in an antiquity that understood the power of the word long before the advent of the digital age.

The roots of strategic communication are deeply embedded in ancient political thought, perhaps most notably in Kautilya's Arthashastra. Composed over two millennia ago, this manual of governance treats communication not as a secondary function of the state but as its very foundation. Kautilya famously noted that royal edicts are the root of a king's authority, asserting that peace and war are ultimately determined by the quality and clarity of these communications. In this view, state relations are not merely transactions of goods or territory; they are shaped by mutual perception. If a nation is perceived as resolute, just, and powerful, its deterrence is strengthened without a shot being fired. Conversely, a failure to articulate intent can lead to miscalculation and conflict. For Kautilya, the actor who controls the story effectively controls the strategic environment in which they operate.

If Kautilya provided the theory, the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka provided a masterclass in execution. The Ashokan edicts, carved into rock surfaces and pillars across the subcontinent, represent perhaps the most sophisticated early example of a global communication strategy. The placement of these edicts was a calculated move in geopolitical communication, as they were rarely hidden in the deep interior of the empire. Instead, they were positioned at frontiers, along busy trade routes, and at points where travellers moved between different cultural spheres. They were designed to be seen by the "other"—the foreign merchant, the travelling monk, and the neighbouring rival.

The sophistication of these edicts also lay in their linguistic targeting. In the heartland, the edicts were written in Prakrit using the Brahmi script, but in the northwestern frontiers, where the echoes of Alexander's conquests remained, the language shifted to Greek and Aramaic. This was not a simple translation; it was a deliberate attempt to speak to



**JUSTICE AK SIKRI**  
FORMER JUDGE,  
SUPREME COURT  
OF INDIA



**TEJUSVI SHUKLA**  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
(RESEARCH), BHARAT  
KI SOCH FOUNDATION

a community in its own cultural and linguistic register. The content emphasised universal values such as religious tolerance, welfare, and harmony. By projecting these values, Ashoka transformed the image of a vast military machine into a moral authority, understanding that a nation's soft power provides the necessary legitimacy for its hard power to operate effectively on the world stage.

This tradition of using physical monuments as narrative anchors continued through the Gupta Empire, as seen in the layered history of the Allahabad Pillar. This monument carries the inscriptions of Ashoka alongside the Prayag Prashasti, composed by the court poet Harishena to celebrate the conquests of the Emperor Samudragupta. Interestingly, Harishena held the title of Sandhi-vigrahika, or the Minister of War and Peace. This fusion of roles is telling, as the person responsible for the empire's military strategy was also the person responsible for its story. The Prashasti used sophisticated Sanskrit to frame Samudragupta not just as a conqueror but as a protector of the social order. By placing this narrative at a confluence of immense religious and cultural significance, the state ensured its message reached the widest possible domestic and foreign audience.

building an architecture of influence through which the nation's intent was understood.

Modern strategic communication serves several critical functions for national security, starting with deterrence and signalling. In a complex global landscape, clear signalling of "red lines" and capabilities prevents the miscalculations that lead to accidental conflict. Furthermore, in an era of hybrid warfare, where adversaries use disinformation to weaken a nation from within, a robust communication framework is essential for maintaining domestic cohesion and projecting a factual account of events to the global community.

Beyond security, strategic communication is a pillar of economic diplomacy. A nation's economic prospects are increasingly tied to its global brand, and strategic outreach highlights a country's stability, technological prowess, and reliability as a partner. This directly influences foreign direct investment and the strength of trade alliances. During times of crisis or regional instability, the speed at which a nation tells its story determines the level of global support it receives. Proactive transparency ensures that the international community receives an accurate account of ground realities before a vacuum can be filled by hostile actors or misinformation.

The Arthashastra identifies six qualities for well-crafted state communication that serve as a gold standard for public diplomacy today. These include 'Arthakrama', or the proper sequence of ideas, and 'Sambandha', which ensures the message is relevant to the specific audience. 'Paripurnata' demands completeness to leave no room for ambiguity, while 'Madhurya' suggests a persuasiveness or sweetness that makes the message appealing. 'Audarya' refers to the grandeur and vision projected by the state, and 'Spastatva' ensures absolute clarity of intent. When these elements are combined, a nation's communication moves beyond mere information to become a tool of influence that can shape the international environment.

The current global landscape is defined by a contest of narratives where the outcome is rarely decided by facts alone. Whether it is a maritime dispute, a trade negotiation, or a security summit, the results are often dictated by who can frame the situation most effectively for a global audience. As nations navigate this complexity, they find that the art of storytelling is not a soft supplement to statecraft but a vital component of national security. The ancient masters understood that power is not just the ability to act but the ability to define the meaning of that action. In a world where information moves at the speed of light, the challenge for modern states is to tell their story faster, more accurately, and in a language that every shore understands, ensuring their voice is not just heard but believed.

**IN A WORLD WHERE INFORMATION MOVES AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT, THE CHALLENGE FOR MODERN STATES IS TO TELL THEIR STORY FASTER, MORE ACCURATELY, AND IN A LANGUAGE THAT EVERY SHORE UNDERSTANDS, ENSURING THEIR VOICE IS NOT JUST HEARD BUT BELIEVED.**

### Fable with Moral

## A Mother's Command

(Mahabharata, Book 5 Udyoga Parva)

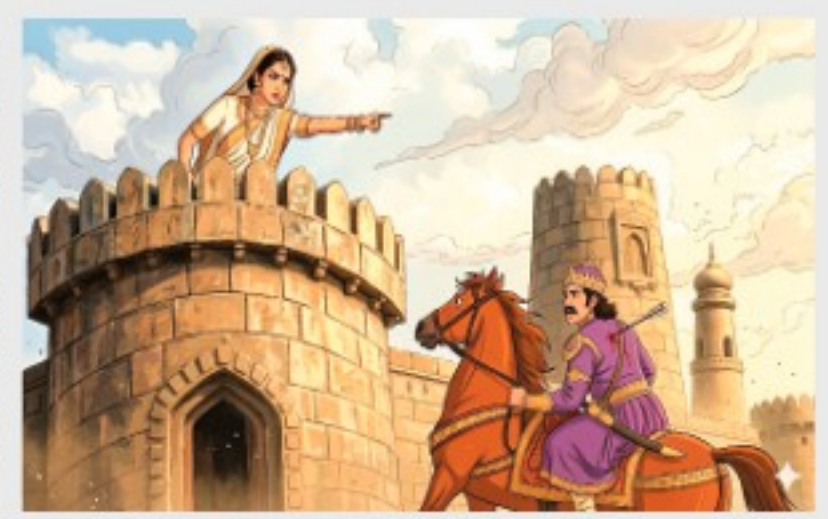
Before the Kurukshetra War, Kunti sent a message to Yudhishthira, using Vidula's story to exhort him to fight and reclaim what was rightfully theirs like a true Kshatriya.

Upon his father's death, prince Sanjaya became the leader of Sauvira. He was young and inexperienced. The neighbouring king of Sindhu saw this as the perfect opportunity to attack Sauvira. Sanjaya was petrified when he heard the news of the Sindhu army marching towards his capital. Sanjaya's mother, Vidula, urged him to lead his men to confront the rivals.

Stoked by his mother's words, Sanjaya led his army out of the fort. The Sindhu king had thought that he would capture the fort easily without any opposition. However, he was proven wrong by the young monarch. As the Sindhu king's army attacked the Sauvira forces, warhorses thundered and blades clashed across the field. Unnerved by the fatal attack, Sanjaya turned his horse and rode back to the fort.

Seeing her son returning from the battle-field, Vidula ordered the guards to shut the gates of the fort ensuring Sanjaya could not enter. Badly injured, the young king was anticipating words of consolation from his mother. Instead of showing sympathy, she prodded him to rush to the battle field immediately. "Put aside your fear and rise, O coward!" Vidula screamed from the fort ramparts. To rouse her son's bravery, she said,

"blaze like tinduka wood, even if only for a moment; do not, like damp chaff [or a paddy-chaff fire], smoulder



without flame, clinging to life. Better to burn bright for a moment than to smoke forever and ever."

अलातं तित्दुकस्येव नूर्तमपि विज्वल ।  
मा तुषाम्निरिनामिः काकरुखा जिजीविषुः ।  
मूर्तं ज्वलितं श्रेयो न तु घृमायितं विस्म ॥१३॥

Mbh Book 5, Chap 131, verse 13  
These words implied that either he vanquished the enemy and returned home victorious, or fought till his last breath. This tremendously encouraged Sanjaya, boosting his morale and he turned back with full might. Such was his exceptional bravery in the battle that Sanjaya's soldiers too fought with immense courage and resolve. Soon the tide turned against the Sindhu leader who fled with his men and Sanjaya returned victorious!

Vidula's call echoed during India's freedom struggle. Sri Aurobindo drew on queen Vidula's words from the Mahabharata to inspire Indians fighting for freedom, translating her fierce exhortation into the spirited poem, 'The Mother to Her Son'.  
Moral of the Fable: Be courageous. Never give up in adversity.

### Did you know?

The princely state of Travancore, in present day Kerala, pioneered state sponsored education more than 200 years ago and laid the foundation for the region's high literacy rates today. In 1817, the visionary young queen, Rani Gowri Parvati Bayi, issued a historic royal rescript declaring that the state would bear the full cost of educating its people. The decree established education as a fundamental responsibility of the government and extended its benefits irrespective of caste or gender. Under this policy, the state-built schools, paid teachers directly from the royal treasury and actively encouraged the



enrolment of girls. This bold and progressive model of governance, implemented decades before many Western nations embraced free public education, transformed Travancore into one of the most forward-looking states in the subcontinent and profoundly shaped human development in South India.

### Wisdom Word Search

C H A T T A M F V W N  
H G A L I B A N A H A  
E K A P A D A Q R N T  
P O U S P O E A I Y T  
P Y A D G J K L M O U  
E M J Y I L A V A A K  
D A T L A S F G H T O  
U Y H A O S S V A H O  
O B P D E F G I I A T  
A W Q P T Q R Y K Z T  
V A Z H A K B A M A A  
Q V I L A M B A R A M

#### WORDS TO FIND

Chattam, Cheppedu, Kaaval, Koyma, Kudissika, Nattukoottam, Pada, Vari, Vazhakkam, Vilambaram

**CHATTAM** – (Rule, regulation, or law) This is the closest pure Dravidian equivalent to the Sanskrit Niyamam.

**CHEPPEDU** – (Royal grant or edict) Documents etched into copper plates (Cheppu = copper, Edu = document/page).

**KAVAL** – (Guard, Protection, or Policing) The basis of early civil security. The state's guards were known as Kaavalkkar.

**KOYMA** – (Authority or sovereignty) Derived from Ko / Kon, the ancient Dravidian word for a King or supreme ruler.

**KUDISSIKA** – (Arrears or dues) Derived from Kudi (settlement or tenant subjects).

**NATTKOOTTAM** – (Village assembly) A localized parliament where the public (Naattukar) would gather (Koottam) to make decisions.

**PADA** – (Army or military force) The native term for the armed forces.

**VARI** – (Tax or levy) A pure Dravidian root for state-collected revenue.

**VAZHAKKAM** – (Customary law or precedent) Rooted in Vazhi (the way/path), referring to the established way things are done.

**VILAMBARAM** – (Public Proclamation). The official method of broadcasting a royal decree to the masses

Note: These terms come from MALAYALAM, one of India's 22 Scheduled Languages.

## Marvels of India

### SABHA AND SAMITI

**Vedic Origin**  
As early as roughly 1500 BCE, ancient Bharat had institutionalised collective governance through two remarkable assemblies: the Sabha and the Samiti. The term Sabha occurs eight times in the Rigveda and 17 times in the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda exalted both these institutions by calling them the two daughters of Sage Prajapati, i.e., a theologically significant honour affirming their sacred centrality to public life.

#### Role and Function

The Samiti represented a larger, broad folk assembly open to the general population for public deliberation. The Sabha functioned as a smaller, exclusive assembly composed of village elders, nobles and elites that primarily handled judicial cases, administrative guidance and pastoral affairs. Together, they ensured both popular participation and expert institutional guidance.

#### Balance in Governance

They demonstrate the existence of consultative traditions in early Indian society, suggesting that political authority was moderated through discussion and collective participation, allowing members to get involved in decision-making processes.

#### Living Legacy

They provided a platform for freedom of speech, debate and critique, thereby presenting a picture of ancient Indian democratic elements that resonates with Bharat's constitutional ethos to this day.



## panchatantra

## The Crane and the Mongoose



**1** In a forest, a number of cranes lived on a banyan tree. A cobra also lived inside a hole in the same tree. He regularly ate the crane chicks before they developed wings.



**2** One day, a mother crane found out that it was a cobra that had killed all her babies. She felt very sad and started crying.



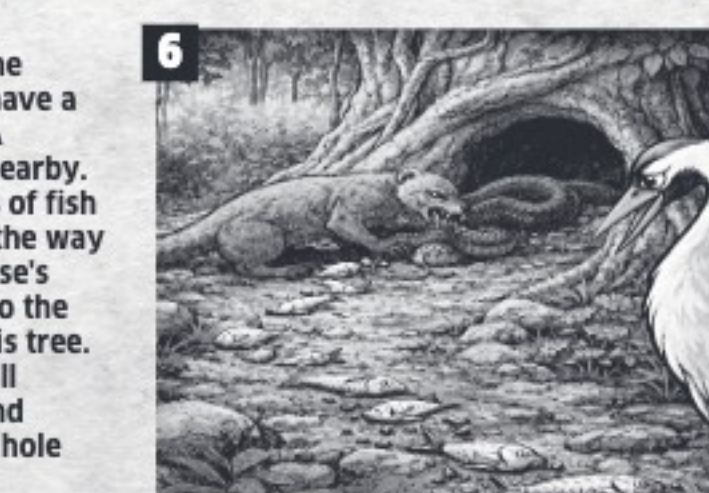
**3** A crab, which saw the crane crying asked, "Why are you crying? What has happened to you? If you tell me your problem, I can help you."



**4** The mother crane told the crab, "Friend, I have lost all my babies. The cobra that lives in the hole of the tree eats away my babies. I don't know how to destroy this cobra and save my children?" On hearing this, the crab thought, "These cranes are always our enemies. Why should I help them? This seems to be a good chance to take revenge on them."



**5** Then he said to the crane, "Friend, I have a very good idea. A mongoose lives nearby. Take some pieces of fish and put them all the way from the mongoose's burrow right up to the cobra's hole in this tree. The mongoose will follow the trail and reach the cobra's hole and will kill him."



**6** The crane followed the crab's advice. As expected, the mongoose followed the trail of the fish pieces, reached the hole and killed the cobra.



**7** After killing the cobra, the mongoose soon turned his attention to the cranes living on the tree. He killed and ate them one by one.



**MORAL OF THE STORY:**  
Be cautious in hardship, for careless trust may lead to danger.

### QUIZ Governance (Fundamental Duties)

Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
<b>1</b> The concept of 'Yogakshema' often appears in the ancient Indian texts for good governance. What is its dual meaning?	Practising yogic exercises & achieving spiritual liberation	Emergency taxation & free grain distribution during droughts	Building external military alliances & interior border fortresses	Acquiring what one does not possess & preserving what one possesses
<b>2</b> Which of the following was a strict disqualification criterion for a citizen contesting a seat on a village committee during the Chola period?	Not owning enough land or assets	Failure to serve in military forces	Failure to submit accounts or committing moral crime	Lack of fluency in multiple regional languages
<b>3</b> Which of these queens overcame her physical disability and became a powerful monarch from Kashmir, remembered for her fierce political acumen and iron-fisted rule?	Rani Didda	Rani Nayanika	Rani Prabha-vatigupta	Rani Rudramma Devi
<b>4</b> Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar is celebrated for her just, compassionate and visionary governance of the Malwa region. Which of these is included in her reforms?	Modernization of imperial military	Curbed the power of hereditary feudal elites	Decentralization of agricultural administration	Disallowed the confiscation of properties of childless widows
<b>5</b> In which of these ancient South Indian texts, is this famous universal declaration of global citizenship and duty towards all humanity, "Yaadhum Oore Yaavarum Kelir" ("To us all towns are one, and all men are our kin") found?	Silappathikaram	Tirukkural	Manimegalai	Purananuru

ANSWERS: 1 - D, 2 - C, 3 - A, 4 - D, 5 - D