Preface

This dissertation presents the results of a comparative study of the Kautiliya Arthashastra, a masterpiece on statecraft in ancient India, and the court-epic Śiśupālavadha (i.e. annihilation of Śiśupāla) by Māghapāṇḍita, a poet of 7th century A.D. From the kavivarṁśavarṇana, annexed to the poem, it is known that Māgha was the son of Dattaka, also called Sarvāśraya, and the grandson of Suprabhadeva, an adviser to the king Śrīvarma.

Flourished in the decadant post-Gupta period of Sanskrit classical literature, Māgha composed the Śiśupālavadha to the height of his talent and scholarship. His poem is in twenty cantos and contains the story of annihilation of Śiśupāla by Kṛṣṇa. The Kernel of the story of this mahākāvya may traced in the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata. The poet furnishes a fenciful elaboration of the events connected with the Rājasūya sacrifice performed by Yudhiṣṭhira and also the battle between Śiśupāla and Kṛṣṇa. A vivid description of the combat between Kṛṣṇa and Śiśupāla, and their auxilaries is given. Not only the combat but also the principles and policies, military ethics, strategies etc. in general are depicted in a very lucid and effective manner. Thus the poem itself reflects the theories anticipated by the authorities on statecraft in ancient India.
In this connection, the celebrated name of the *Arthaśāstra* occurs to reader’s mind. It is a compendium of all the earlier works composed on the subject. In the words of Kauṭilya himself - “*prthivyā lābhe pālane ca yāvantyarthaśāstrāṇi pūrvacāryaiḥ prasthāpitāṁ prāyaścātāṁ sarvāḥ taikamidam arthaśāstrāṁ kṛtam*.” meaning, ‘This single (treatise on the) Science of Politics has been prepared mostly by bringing together (the teaching of) as many treatises on the Science of Politics as have been composed by ancient teachers for the acquisition and protection of the earth.’ This treatise influenced Māgha to a great extent.

Apart from the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, the *Nītisāra* of Kāmandaka, the *Nītīprakāśikā* of Vaiśampayana, the *Manuśāhita*, the relevant portions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also taken for our study. The works of modern writers on the science and art of statecraft and warcraft are utilised with profit for our present study as secondary sources with due recognition.

After consultation of the works of those ancient authorities and the modern works on the subject the following observations are made:

War generally implies hostilities and armed conflicts between nations or states or between parties within the same country or state. War leads to perpetration of cruel acts involving wanton destruction of human and animal lives, disturbing social and
ecological balance and enormous damage to the state's economy. The ancient Indian thinkers on statecraft, in spite of their being fully aware of these evil effects of warfare that afflicted the Indian subcontinent during most of its history, have accepted war as an unavoidable concomitant of man's political activity. In their view warfare is a normal activity of the state administration which is concerned not only with the acquisition and protection of territory, but also with the security of life, property and traditional customs against the internal and external forces. In the circumstances, militarism was considered a necessary factor of statecraft.

Interstate war, being found inevitable in ancient India, studded with too many independent kingdoms, and the expedition of conquests could not be tabooed in the face of the ideal of universal conquest placed before the vijigāyu, the ancient Indian thinkers on statecraft accepted war as a fact of life.

Since conquest is the principal objective of waging war, the authorities on statecraft have postulated theories on warcraft, and evolved various principles of war, strategy and tactics, ethics and expediences etc. as guidelines to the aspiring kings in the conduct of warfare. There are also factors that the aspiring king should take into account before launching a campaign of conquest, such as the organisation and training of army, appropriate time and place and methods to be followed while on the march, the
expedients to be tried, the deployment of troops, the strategems in the conduct of the battle, arms to be used, the codes to be observed in the battle-field while fighting, the treatment to be meted out to the vanquished army, attitude towards the conquered king and his subjects, espionage etc. Such and many other factors are discussed in the treatises on statecraft and the influence of the treatises are fully noticed in the Śiśupālavadha.

The discussion on the political as well as the military affairs found in the Śiśupālavadha shows the influence of earlier authorities on Māgha. In the second canto of his poem, Māgha raised a beautiful discussion on rājanīti and rananīti (argalāṁ durnayasya janitamudam) on the juncture of Kṛṣṇa’s accepting the invitation of Yudhiṣṭhira for the Rājasūya and the expedition against the tyrannical Śiśupāla as requested by Indra. As requested by Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma advised him to march against Śiśupāla immediately and stated about the state policies. On the other hand, Uddhava, an efficient minister, stated about the policies of warfare and tactics to be followed, and advised him to accept the invitation of Yudhiṣṭhira first and so on and so forth.

These and other discussions are noticed in the Śiśupālavadha. Taking into considerations all these aspects, the endeavours are being made in our present study to analyse and critically evaluate the art and the science of war as postulated by the authorities in
ancient India in the light of modern practices, pointing out their strong and weak points that have persisted through the ages in the following pages.