

Chanakya and Good Governance

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Is corruption a new age phenomena?

Corruption, nepotism, deception and plundering of public funds have raged through human history. Both Plato and Socrates spoke extensively on justice, because injustice existed in the Greek and Roman empires too. That was 2300 years ago.

Much of Europe was in dark ages at that time. United States of America did not exist then – at least it was no more than a lump of unknown landmass in the far flung corner of planet earth.

The sage of the Taittiriya Upanishad (ancient Indian scripture dating from a period estimated to be between 3400 to 2600 years ago), exhorted as part of his convocational address to the departing students from his school “*Sathyam vada; Dharmam chara*” (Speak the Truth, Pursue Righteousness). This is because untruth and injustice had prevailed even then.

Chanakya who lived around the same time as Socrates, wrote “*Arthashastra*” and “*Nitishastra*”, (Economics and Political Justice), which are one of the earliest management texts on these subjects on our planet, and continue to remain extremely relevant even today.

Corruption is ageless and timeless.

Life of Chanakya

Chanakya identified, fostered, developed and installed Chandragupta Maurya as the first emperor of Maurya Dynasty (321 to 185 BC), which was one of the largest and strongest empires of the world at that time. They had even defeated the advancing armies of Alexander the Great, demolishing the myth of Greek military superiority. The Maurya Empire spread out from the borders of Iran to Assam and down to present day Karnataka in Southern India. Chanakya was also known as “Kautalaya” and “Vishnu Gupta” in history.

Born in a Brahmin family (priests by profession) of Magadha Kingdom, Chanakya had shown extraordinary brilliance and intelligence as a student. He was educated in Takshasila, which

was probably the first equivalent of the university of higher education in the history of mankind. Students and teachers flocked to Takshasila (located near to present day Rawalpindi in Pakistan) from many countries. Following his education in Takshasila, he became a teacher in the same university. He was a very popular and a highly respected Acharya (Professor). Chanakya was very influential amongst the Kings and rulers of his time – many of whom were his students.

That was the time Alexander the Great was invading Asia, razing everything that stood in his way. Conquering the myriad of Indus Valley kingdoms was far too easy for Alexander, since there was no unity amongst these kingdoms. They were all fighting amongst them and were busy with internecine squabbles.

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Dhana Nanda, the last monarch of Nanda Dynasty, was on the throne. Supported by corrupt and unjust advisers, Dhana Nanda was misgoverning the country and was mercilessly taxing his subjects to enrich his treasury.

It was easy for the master political scientist in Chanakya to recognize the impending danger to his country. On one hand, the hoof beats of Alexander's invading army nearing and on the other the blissfully ignorant and self-indulging Nanda Monarchy oppressing the subjects.

He left his teaching career at Takshasila and went to the capital city of Pataliputra to meet with the King Dhana Nanda. Being a famous and influential teacher, Chanakya was immediately accepted by Dhana Nanda as his chief adviser. Chanakya was fiercely fearless and spoke his mind to the king. The pressure he put on the King and his administration for good governance was too much for the King and his coterie to bear. Consequently, Chanakya was politically sidelined, humiliated and thrown out of King's court very soon, as would happen even in the present day politics.

The story goes that Chanakya untied the long lock of his tail hair that day and took a vow that he will tie it again only after he dismantled and removed the Nanda King and installed good governance in the country.

He started looking for the right person who can become a good, righteous King to rule the country. Soon he met Chandra Gupta Maurya, who was probably the son of a Nanda Prince, born to a maid servant. He was a rustic boy. Chanakya found young Chandra Gupta extremely intelligent and physically powerful and enduring.

That was the beginning of a long friendship and a great turning point in Indian history. Chanakya trained Chandra Gupta to become an ace military commander and a fine model emperor material. What followed in Magadha was a prolonged, turbulent and tumultuous period of internal uprising, extensive and unparalleled espionage and a series of battles both won and lost many times on either sides. Through single minded persistence, skillful scheming and

orchestrating public support, Dhana Nanda was eventually assassinated and Nanda rule was dismantled. Marking the end of dynastic lineage of rules of Nanda dynasty, Chandra Gupta Maurya became the First Emperor of what was to become the mighty Mauryan Empire.

Chanakya tied his long hair with his characteristic upper knot.

By this time, Alexander suffered a mutiny and he had returned after posting Governors in the conquered lands, many of whom continued the invasion. Alexander died in Babylon. Seleucus succeeded Alexander after his death. Under Chanakya's stewardship, Seleucus was defeated and he talked peace with Chandragupta Maurya, and even gave his daughter to Chandragupta in marriage.

The Essence of Chanakya

He was a master statesman who pulled down a rotten administration and founded an efficient and just administration. He was a political scientist who established a society with equal opportunities for everyone, an ace economist who developed a self-sufficient economy for the country, a diplomat who negotiated and established relationships with other countries, and a successful war strategist, who stopped the infighting and consolidated a vast empire and protected the nation from invasion. Agriculture, trade and mining prospered under his farsighted policies.

Chanakya was often criticised by a section of historians as being 'revengeful' and 'ruthless', and a 'spy-ring-leader', who did not care about the means to reach the desired end. In reality, his objective was to overthrow the unjust and repressive governance to relieve the people from sufferings and to establish a just and prosperous life in his country. In order to ensure this, he did two things after establishing the Mauryan empire. (1) He made Amatya Rakshasa, the able Minister of the defeated Nanda King, as one of the Ministers of the new empire (2) He wrote his magnum opus "Arthashastra" and "Nitishastra", which laid the foundation for good governance

and are as much valid even today as it was then. The essence of his philosophy and world view is the following:

- A free society with equal opportunities for all.
- Ensuring the development of the annexed provinces and kingdoms for increasing their resources for the welfare of the subject, which is usually unseen in imperial expansionists who only looted the defeated.
- Support and development of agriculture which he considered as a state subject. He wanted the state machinery to support all agricultural processes from sowing of seeds to harvesting.
- Development of internal trade to reduce the dependence on external elements over which he had little control. He applied only bare minimum taxes for goods. Thus it was less of a burden for any and no one would evade taxes. This benefited both the government to run the administration and provide facilities, as well as the traders to freely move goods and services across the vast empire. He wanted to remove all stumbling blocks to trade so that trade could flourish and nation and subjects could prosper.
- Recognising land as the most vital resource and its maximum utilization for creation of wealth and prosperity for the nation and for the subjects. For this reason, he wanted the state to monitor the excess land holdings of landlords and on its unauthorized uses.
- Giving importance to building of forts for protection against external aggression about which he knew only too well. He also wanted cities to be developed as a centre for trade both within the country as well as with other countries.
- Ensuring equality for every one and that no one was special or beyond law. He wanted the state to protect destitute women since they are the products of social exploitation, which was the Govt's job to prevent.
- Security of the citizens during peace times, which is the complete responsibility of the

state. He developed extensive spy network to control anti-social elements, so that people could live in peace.

- Creation of a society, where people are not too much engrossed in the material aspects of life. He wanted to develop the spiritual aspects of subjects so that they grew as balanced societies. He discouraged activities intended for sense gratification.

How did he ensure Good Governance?

It can be noticed that Chanakya was ruthless and fearless and he ruled with an iron hand. This was probably the only way to deal with a self-serving world of his life time, where kings and monarchs fought with one another and where might was considered right. But he was a learned person and had a golden heart with very high level of internal purity and a sparkling intellect. He was able to envision the higher purpose of life based on the principle of welfare of everyone, and tried hard to lift the masses towards a higher plane of life.

It can be further noticed that he searched for the right person to become the right type of King. He devoted several years to train him to become the right king-material. He selected someone from the streets of Magadha with the right qualities of intelligence, wisdom, physical strength and gave him the right length of right education to become one of the most powerful and effective rulers of his times. It must be particularly noted that Chandra Gupta was picked from the streets as a rustic boy, with no significant pedigree to boast about. But he had the right personal qualities and was given the right education and was under the right mentorship for the right length of time. These are valuable clues in deciding who can be our leaders.

Corruption and mismanagement are seen both in ancient and modern societies. It is seen rampantly practiced by ancient kings and modern day leaders. Both rich and poor are seen as corrupt. All political parties of various hues are seen indulging in corruption. None of these are, therefore, a passport for corruption free governance.



It is a matter of supreme personal qualities, supreme level of education and knowledge and

supreme mental refinement of the people that can make a country corruption free. All men are not born equal, although all men are born with equal potential to develop these. All are, therefore, not fit to govern – only some are.

Reference :

Quotes are taken from Transparency International India

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Chanakya Quotes

Some of the interesting quotations from Chanakya's works are given below.

- *“Just as it is impossible to know when a fish moving in water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when government servants in charge of undertakings misappropriate money.”*
- *“It is possible to know even the path of birds flying in the sky but not the ways of government servants who hide their [dishonest] income.”*
- *“Those officials who have amassed money [wrongfully] shall be made to pay it back; they shall be transferred to other jobs where they will not be tempted to misappropriate and be made to disgorge again what they had eaten.”*
- *“A proclamation shall then be issued calling on those who had suffered at the hands of the [dishonest] official to inform [the investigating officer]. All those who respond to the proclamation shall be compensated according to their loss.”*
- *“He is a true friend, who does not forsake us in time of need, misfortune, famine, or war, in a king's court, or at the crematorium “*
- *“The sacred task of a king is to strive for the welfare of his people incessantly. The administration of the kingdom is his religious duty. His greatest gift would be to treat all as equals.”*
- *“In the happiness of his [King's] subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects”*
- *“Taxation should not be a painful process for the people. There should be leniency and caution while deciding the tax structure. Ideally, governments should collect taxes like a honeybee, which sucks just the right amount of honey from the flower so that both can survive. Taxes should be collected in small and not in large proportions.”*
- *“The kingdom shall be protected by fortifying the capital and the towns at the frontiers. The land should not only be capable of sustaining the [native] population but also outsiders [when they come into the kingdom] in times of calamities. It should be easy to defend from [attacks by] enemies and strong enough to control neighbouring kingdoms. It should have productive land (free from swamps, rocky ground, saline land, uneven terrain and deserts as well as wild and [unruly] groups of people). It should be beautiful, being endowed with arable land, mines, and timber forests. It should not depend [only on] rain for water. It should have good roads and waterways. It should have a productive economy, with a wide variety of commodities and the capacity to sustain a high level of taxation as well as a [large] army. The people shall be predominantly agriculturists [artisans and craftsman], devoted to work, honest, loyal and with intelligent masters and servants.”*
- *“Spies in the guise of ascetics shall be [directly] responsible to the Chancellor for reporting on the honesty or dishonesty of farmers, cowherds, merchants and heads of departments (2.35).”*