

Who was Kautilya and why did He wrote Arthashastra?

... Dr. Baldevanand Sagar

Kautilya as a great statesman

Kautilya was a shrewd politician and an excellent strategist. However, not many know that his original name was Vishnugupta and Chanak was his Gotra, therefore, he is called Chanakya. And his name, as the author of the famous treatise 'Arthashastra', was Kautilya. He followed Kutil [shrewd] policies, therefore, he is called “KAUTILYA”.

Chanakya is considered a pioneer in the field of economics and political science in India. He is regarded as a great thinker and diplomat in the World. He is the only personality who has been accepted and revered as a genius both by Indian and Western scholars. Chanakya is a historical milestone in the making of India. Although he lived around the third century BC, his ideas and principles show concurrence and validity in the present day world.

As we research deeper and in detail to know about this great philosopher and a statesman of outstanding class, we find many different versions in the history. Namely these are - Buddhist version, Jain version, Kashmiri version and Vishakhadatta's [Mudrarakshasa] version. In all the four versions, Chanakya feels insulted by the Nanda king and vows to destroy him. After dethroning the Nandas, he installs Chandragupta Maurya as the new king.

Born to a Brahmin family during the third century BC, Kautilya studied in Takshashila, one of the famous centers of education at that time. His father, a great teacher, Chanaka was a teacher himself. Kautilya was attracted towards political studies from an early age and with his education and experience he developed into a great political strategist.

Master Strategist

The small army raised by Chanakya and Chandragupta could never have taken the Magadha throne directly. Chanakya, therefore, strategized that making the people of the kingdom rise against the king - in effect, a civil war - was the only way to spell the end of the Nanda dynasty and establish the Mauryan dynasty.

Glimpses of His Brilliance

There is one particular incident which is always cited to depict Chanakya's brilliance. When the Nandas had been vanquished from their palace and the Mauryas had come to occupy it, Chanakya suddenly noticed a group of ants emerging out of a crack in the floor,

carrying grains. Chanakya immediately realized that some spies were hiding in the basement and asked his people to abandon the palace.

The famous treatise 'Arthashastra'

Kautilya's Arthashastra was not just an economic doctrine, but a political guide as well. He, thus, taught the young prince, Chandragupta the art of politics, which did not have a formal shape in traditional India.

Once, our popular National Security Advisor, **Shiv Shankar Menon** said –

'Arthashastra is serious manual on statecraft, on how to run a state, informed by a higher purpose, clear and precise in its prescriptions, the result of practical experience of running a state. It is not just a normative text but a realist description of the art of running a state.'

The title Arthashastra is a Sanskrit word which is normally translated as The Science of Material Gain, although Science of Politics or Science of Political Economy is other accepted translations for Kautilya's work. The Arthashastra summarizes the political thoughts of Kautilya. This book was lost for many centuries until a copy of it, written on palm leaves, was rediscovered in India in 1904 CE.

In Arthashastra, Kautilya mixes the harsh pragmatism for which he is famed with compassion for the poor, for slaves, and for women. Centrally, Arthashastra argues for an autocracy managing an efficient and solid economy. It discusses the ethics of economics and the duties and obligations of a king. The scope of Arthashastra is, however, far wider than statecraft, and it offers an outline of the entire legal and bureaucratic framework for administering a kingdom, with a wealth of descriptive cultural detail on topics such as mineralogy, mining and metals, agriculture, animal husbandry and medicine. The Arthashastra also focuses on issues of welfare, for instance, redistribution of wealth during a famine and the collective ethics that hold a society together. The Arthashastra discusses monetary and fiscal policies, welfare, international relations and war strategies in details.

The bureaucracy envisioned by Chanakya

The bureaucracy, as envisioned by Chanakya, must not only be in touch with every aspect of the administrative machinery, but also be efficient and honest. His emphasis was on the king being the focal point, however vast and sprawling the bureaucratic structure may be.

Arthashastra deals with the qualities and disciplines needed for a king

Arthashastra deals thoroughly with the qualities and disciplines needed for a king to rule his subjects more expeditiously. According to Kautilya, King is one who has self-control,

having conquered the unfriendly temptations of the senses, he cultivates the intellect by consulting with elders, he keeps his eyes open and stays updated through spies and he is always active in promoting the protection and welfare of the folks. He ensures the speculation of the themes of their Dharma by authority and example, he improves his own discipline by enhancing his learning in all branches of knowledge; and endears himself to his subjects by enriching them. Quarrels among individuals may be resolved by winning over the leaders or by removing the reason for the quarrel - individuals fighting among people themselves facilitate the king by competing with each other. Conflicts for power within the royalty, on the other hand, bring about harassment and destruction to the people and double the effort that is needed to finish such conflicts.

The Code of Conduct for a Ruler according to Kautilya

With enriching his self-discipline, a ruler should keep company with learned elders, for in them alone discipline has its firm roots. For a trained intellect pursues yoga because from yoga comes self-control. Only a king, who is smart, disciplined, dedicated to a just governing of the subjects & aware of the welfare of all beings, can get pleasure from the world unopposed.

Thus we can conclude that Kautilya's ideas and principles show concurrence and validity in the present day world.

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