

***Cānakyasūtrāni*: Its Relevance in Contemporary Indian Society**

A Synopsis submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts) in Philosophy by Kanak Kumar Jana

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Title: *Cāṇakyaśūtrāṇi*: Its Relevance in Contemporary Indian Society

Ethics, *nītiśāstra*, remains a branch of philosophy that deals with moral aspects and values. Ethics derives from the *Greek ethikos*, which means a set of moral values. The word remains occasionally used to denote the moral values of a specific social or religious group or an individual. It analyses human character and conduct in terms of moral and immoral, right and wrong at the back of some moral principles set by individual practices in society.

The moral code of the individuals is a pointer of their social and divine ways of life. The real essence of human life is to live amidst worldly joy and sorrows. Ethics is primarily concerned with moral issues. Religion in its true sense remains to lay strain on good virtues. Individuals are required to discharge their duties according to the moral code of ethics. Proper knowledge of ethics would remain accomplished if one applies and imbibes these values. Ethics is of two kinds: Individual and Social. Individual ethics reveals the virtuous qualities that are essential for individual well-being and happiness. Social ethics represents the values that are needed for social direction and harmony.

In Indian tradition, ethics has its basis in its spiritual and philosophical thinking. From time immemorial, several religious convictions with this purpose have been imbibed through generation. Each religious and philosophical system of India has a prominent ethical module. Ethics remains to be the fundamental of all these systems. In each religious tradition, moral

state. *Cāṇakya* had a clear grasp of the distinction between ethical means and ends in this regard. Many thinkers have appreciated his vision. *Cāṇakya* also spoke about state policy under applied ethics and secret diplomatic mission as an instrument by the ruler. All these ideas are still relevant and in practice today. In *nītiśāstra*, it has been extensively shown that moral principles are necessary for the development of a welfare state. According to *J.S. Mackenzie*, 'ethics may be defined as studying what is right or good in conduct.'² About the subject matter, ethics includes a value system. Values are guiding principle of life that is conducive to the overall development of human beings as well. *Cāṇakya* also spoke about different values, namely moral values, religious values, aesthetic values, universal values, kingdom values, social values, community values, professional values, political values and economic values. Now we may say that *Cāṇakya Nīti* enhances moral thinking and raises the standard of moral culture. These prove beneficial when moral reflection and moral decisions are proceeding into the context of practical activity that changes socio-economic structure in such a way as to promote humanity/humankind.

Cāṇakya nītiśāstra contains golden maxims that can be used in modern-days because of its relevance. Anyone can follow the rules of ethics laid down in the *nītiśāstra* in conducting his daily duties. Many other *Nīti Śāstra* remains written by great men of wisdom like Shankaracharya, Brihaspati, and many others, but what makes *Cāṇakya's* works stand out is that he teaches us high ideals practically possible and if we work towards achieving a targeted goal, in a progressive and determined manner. *Cāṇakya Nīti Śāstra* has the most beautiful

conduct is measured important for a joyful and contented life. Without following the trail of righteousness, no one can attain the supreme goal (*mokṣha*) of life, for this one has to accomplish moral deeds and avoid immoral doings.

Nowadays human being, more associated with technical, economic and social structure. Contemporary humans believe that science will solve all the mysteries of the world. At the same time, man has forgotten to foster a spirit of unity for the ideal application of scientific insights towards a peaceful cosmic order. Consequently, the so-called modernisation brings agonies of inequality, disharmony, alienation, etc. Here the vision of moral order, moral principle and moral structure are imperatives for building a quality life. Ethics is the philosophical, reflective study in formulating moral ideals. *P.Sivaswaroop* writes, "It is important to note that competition between groups led to increase in mortality and standard of thinking. To fight against adverse forces of nature, the man felt that many societies should come together. So, new rules were created to work in groups. These rules are 'Ethics'.¹

This thesis will look into the ethical and social implications of the *Nīti śāstra* of *Cāṇakya*. The thesis remains divided into three chapters.

Chapter one: *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* & *Cāṇakya Nīti*: A Comparative Account

A study of the *Nīti śāstra* in Indian tradition, specifically Hindu tradition (*Dharma Śāstra*) and *Manu Smṛiti* has been elaborated here. The entire study here may appear to be a description of rituals and customs regarding *Manu Smṛiti* and *Nīti śāstra*, but the point vital in Indian tradition is that *nīti* is not only about being a civil code of conduct or a political or

pragmatic alliance. Its central concepts remain in *R̥g Veda*, one of the oldest texts of India and the entire world. In *R̥g Veda*, we come across the idea of an all-pervading cosmic order (*ṛta*) which stands for harmony and balance in Nature and human society. Here *ṛta* is described as a principle that controls nature's forces and moral values in human society. When this harmony and balance are disturbed in human society, disorder and suffering comes forth; Principle or strength lying behind nature retain all in balance. In Indian tradition, the idea of *ṛta* provides an increase in the knowledge of *dharma*. The term *dharma* here is used not to mean mere religious conviction; it stands for responsibility, compulsion and justice. It remains to be an entire way of life in which ethical standards are considered supreme, and everybody remains expected to perform their duty according to their social situation and position in the lifecycle. In Buddhism, the term *dhamma* is used, which in the *Pāli* sounds to be synonymous with the Sanskrit word *dharma*. The guidelines and rules regarding what remain considered appropriate behaviour for human beings remain prescribed in the *Dharma Śāstras*. These are scriptures that tell us about our duties and obligations as individuals and members of society.

The second chapter: Moral Standard Set by *Cāṇakya* in *Nītiśāstra*:

A description of the different forms of *Cāṇakya nītiśāstra*, which has been helpful in our day-to-day life and environment has been presented in this chapter. In this chapter, we come across the descriptive analysis of the maxims of *Cāṇakya nītiśāstra* roughly followed in the ancient Hindu social system. These forms of *Cāṇakya nītiśāstra* may have been practised by different sections of society in the ancient times but remained not uniformly followed by all sections. In this chapter, tried to find out the position of *Cāṇakya nītiśāstra* different found in forms as well as having any kind of similarity in their practice. *Cāṇakya's* political ideas and

maxims as specified in *Artha-śāstra* are completely practical. *Cāṇakya* explains *nītiśāstra* as the maxims of the science of ethics selected from the various *Śāstras*. *Cāṇakya* slokas of *nīti* are helpful for our day-to-day life and environment. These slokas play a unique and essential role in society.

Cāṇakya states that maxims from the *Śāstras* acquire of knowledge of calibrated principles of duty, code of conduct and what ought and what ought not to be followed, and what is good and what is wrong. Therefore, *Cāṇakya* always emphasises public good with an eye to their proper perspective. *Cāṇakya*'s thoughts applicable to today's society and the relevant thoughts applicable to the finding remain mentioned under the following heads: 1. Value of life-positive and prudential qualities; 2. Truthfulness; 3. Purity and impurity; 4. Culture and character; 5. Status of women; 6. Marriage- a duty; 7. Worship and obedience to all; 8. The morality of administration; 9. The Morality of maintaining Caste and *varnāśrama*; 10. Humanity and humankind.

Third chapter: Relevance of *Cāṇakya Nīti* in Contemporary Society:

An attempt has been made to analyse and evaluate its importance on the present social system. *Cāṇakya nīti* covered almost all aspects of human life. *Cāṇakya nīti* is of utmost importance historically and based on ethical code-conduct, socio-cultural structure and philosophical system of India. It needs to remain re-evaluated in the present age of developing

society. For convenience and clarity of idea, we have formulated few simple, comprehensive situations to make the thesis of analyses and evolutions easy. Also, *Cāṇakya Nīti* clarifies the concept of four ends of life, *puruṣārthas*, which is also very important. These four ends of the lifecycle are required goals in themselves and desirable for accomplishing human aspirations. These are (1) justice (*dharma*), (2) worldly gain (*artha*), (3) accomplishment of desire, (*kāma*) and (4) liberation, (*mokṣha*). The completion of entirely of these four ends of life is essential for all. In this cataloguing, *dharma* and *mokṣha* remain furthestmost significant from the ethical point of view. They stretch the correct path and determination to the human lifecycle. For example, acquiring prosperity (*artha*) is a required objective, provided though it too attends *dharma*, that is, the welfare of the society.

This research attempt to examine tactics, policies, applied by organisations or individual that remained prescribed by *Cāṇakya* in his work *nītiśāstra* as well as by *Kautilya*, in his *Arthaśāstra*. This research mainly focuses on checking the credibility and practicality of the tactics and policies in the administration, ethics, and supervision provided by *Cāṇakya*, which may be applicable to the contemporary world. However, the *Cāṇakya sūtrani* was a compilation of guidelines governing a vast empire covering aspects of internal administration, ethics, the strategy of socio-economy in a nutshell. It also advises the ruler to promote the welfare of his people as they were the source of strength of a nation. It also showcases how the ruler should utilise every resource or element of national power for the overall welfare of a

aspect that caters to all the four human life purposes: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣha*. So, the spiritual and the mundane sitting side by side in his maxims. *Cāṇakya* also writes about the importance and benefits of scriptures. "Righteousness becomes unrighteousness, and unrighteousness becomes righteousness, such as the power of place and time. Righteous *Kshatriyas*, doing even sinful acts, have attended to blissful ends. The *Brahmin*, taking up arms on the occasions, does not incur sin, for viz. for protecting himself, for compelling the other orders to take themselves to their duties".

The research work has taken up mainly the ethical thoughts of *Cāṇakya* and their implications in society. '*Sūtra of Cāṇakya*' is an ancient scripture consisting of various ethical aspects of society. *Cāṇakya*'s maxims cover a vast range of topics about different aspects of life, ranging from ethics, politics, administration, socio-political and much more. All these prove that *Cāṇakya* was a great visionary, and his maxims are relevant across the ages and even today. *Cāṇakya*'s *Nīti Śāstra* had the remarkable ability, eligibility of knowledge and understanding of all the subjects to give sound advice on any of them. While efforts have remained made to explain the various ethical concepts discussed in *Cāṇakya Nīti Śāstra*, there is no comprehensive study that can explain the contribution made by *Cāṇakya* in the area of ethics. A challenge has been made in this research work comprehending all the concepts, maxims, principles, code, conduct, etc. related to the concepts of *Nīti*(moral values) in the *Cāṇakya Nīti Śāstra*. This research establishes the relevance of *Cāṇakya Nīti* to the contemporary society by explaining various topics of the *Nīti* such as *Dharma*, Recognition

policies, Prudential qualities, Virtues, Morality of administration and humanity with critical studies into the socio-cultural contexts of various other scriptures like the *Manu smṛiti*, the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata*, *Veda*, *Upanisad*, the *Bhagavat Gitā*, which had an abiding influence on society since times immemorial. It may be undertaken as their principles, ideals, values and morals subject to a methodical and scientific enquiry to separate the relevant and irrelevant elements contained in them to ensure the continuance of systematic and Dharmic ones only in society.

In conclusion, *Cāṇakya* had surprisingly radical ideas for his time. *Cāṇakya*'s political ideas and maxims, as specified in *Arthaśāstra*, are convenient. *Cāṇakya* explains *nītiśāstra* as the maxims of the science of ethics selected from various *Śāstras*. *Cāṇakya Nīti* is helpful in our day-to-day life and environment. These play a unique and vital role in society. *Cāṇakya* states that maxims from the *Śāstra* acquire knowledge of calibrated principles of duty, code of conduct and what ought and ought not to remain followed, and moral and immoral. Therefore, *Cāṇakya* always emphasises public good with an eye to their proper perspective.

Through this attempt to study *the Nīti vidya* of *Cāṇakya*, several questions may spring up.

- A. Is *Cāṇakya Nīti* a practical convenience or a natural necessity?
- B. Is *Cāṇakya Nīti* a means only to perform duties and promote the common good of society?
- C. To what extent does the subordination of individual desires for the sake of duty and the common good of society help the individual's good?

- D. Can *Cāṇakya Nīti* be considered as having any value if it remains merely performed to further one's desires and choices?
- E. Is there any future for the *Cāṇakya Nīti*?
- F. We can now try to embark on giving answers to these questions.

In this thesis, an attempt has remained made for priority in *Cāṇakya nītiśāstra* to place forth the issues mentioned above.

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