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## **Cānākya's Cānākyaṇeeti : A Glimpse**

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# Cānakya's Cānakyaṇeeti : A Glimpse

Dr. Indrani Deka

## Abstract

Cānakya was a great educator of all times. His teachings are always relevant in today's world. His *Cānakyaṇeeti* is a treatise of knowledge. There are many verses on wisdom, value of erudition, utility of learning, verses on clever man, proper place for dwelling, how to survive in the society, individuality of a man, dealing with a child, etc. In the true sense, the book is an exposition on the ideal way of life. If we study his thoughts, we can understand the inner meanings of his writings. As older ethics are losing their importance in the present humanity, there is an expectation that the teachings of *Cānakyaṇeeti* will convey the convenient wisdom to the people of today's society. Hence, in this paper, I shall discuss some of the important verses from *Cānakyaṇeeti*, which are very much relevant in today's perspective.

**Keywords:** Cānakya, *Cānakyaṇeeti*, Learned, Knowledge, Learning.

## 1. Introduction:

We all know that Cānakya is famous by the name of Kautilya as well. He was an epoch-making personality. He was an adviser and a prime minister to Emperor Candragupta of the Maurya dynasty. He was a professor at Takṣasilla University. Cānakya is known as 'the Indian Machiavelli' in the western world. Two books are attributed to Cānakya, one is the *Arthasāstra* and the other is *Cānakyaṇeeti*. The second book is a treatise on the ideal way of life. The language of the *Cānakyaṇeeti* is very simple and

easy. All the verses were written in the context of the society and the times in which Cānakya himself lived. However, after going through the verses of the *Cānakyaṇeeti*, it is seen that those are very much relevant in the present society. The verses also contain a wealth of native wisdom, moral and practical advice. Many of these codes of conduct are of universal application. There are many verses on learning, the importance of learning, usefulness of learning, verses on wise man, proper place for residence, how to live in the society, qualities of a man, treatment of a child etc. There are some verses in the *Cānakyaṇeeti* that mention who are considered to be good parents, who is a happy householder, etc. As the old values are losing their relevance in the present society, there is a hope that the teachings of the *Cānakyaṇeeti* will impart the practical wisdom to the people of today's society.

## 2. Importance of Learning:

There are many verses in *Cānakyaṇeeti* about the greatness of learning. According to Cānakya, those who are good-looking, young and born in a good family do not shine if they are devoid of learning, just as the flowers of the kimshuka tree do not shine (i.e. attract people) because they are without fragrance. It is said in this way-

*Rupajauvanasampannā viūākulasaAbhavāḥ.*

*Vidyāhīnā na úobhante nirgandhā iva kimśukāḥ. (Cānakyaṇeeti 105)*

That means despite having a well-endowed physique and belonging to a high and established family, a man or a woman looks unimpressive if he or she is totally uneducated or ignorant. Therefore, education is very necessary for everyone in life. It makes us perfect. It teaches us what is right or what is wrong. In today's world, only external beauty does not matter, only a learned person is respected by all. Education helps one to get everything as per one's desire in life, so it is adored everywhere.

According to Cānakya, there is no eye (vision) equal to learning; there is no tapas (penance) equal to truth; there is no sorrow equal to desire or attachment and there is no happiness equal to renunciation (or sacrifice).

Actually, by knowledge of learning, we can see the world; we can distinguish what is wrong and what is right. As everything in this world is temporary, if we get attachment to anything, we feel pain in our heart after the demise of that thing. Again, if we love something or someone then we can sacrifice anything for the benefit of that person and it gives us immense pleasure in our heart. It is stated in this way—

nāsti vidyāsamaṁ cakurnāsti satysamaṁ tapaḥ.  
nāsti rāgasamaṁ dukhaṁ nāsti tyāgasamaṁ sukhaṁ.

Therefore, according to Cānakya, one should engage oneself in learning of knowledge and along with earning of wealth throughout one's life. Both learning and earning are equally important, in this practical life, to survive. He mentioned it in this way—

ajarāmaravat prājño vidyāmṛthaṁ ca cintayet.

Regarding the importance of learning, Canakya has mentioned that the Śāstras are like eyes for everyone. They clear many doubts that arise in one's mind. They bring us knowledge of things which cannot be known by our senses. One who has not studied the Śāstras is indeed a blind person. It is stated by Cānakya in this way—

anekasamsayocchedi paroḡsārthasya darsakaḥ.  
Sarvasya locanaṁ śāstraṁ yasya nastyandhaṁ eva saḥ.

Almost similar type of statement can be found in the *Hitopadesa* as well. It is said that an illiterate person is like an animal. e.g. Vidyāhīna vyakti paúutulya.

### 3. **Bad Habits of Human Being:**

Regarding the bad habits of people, Cānakya has stated that without practice learning becomes poisonous. He further stated in this context, that if we take food when we are not hungry, it will develop indigestion within our system. Similarly, drinking water immediately after eating a heavy meal is unhealthy. A wise man may have all qualities in him; but a fool has only faults. Therefore, a single wise person is better than a thousand

fools and an evil person, though adorned with learning, is to be avoided always. It is said in this way-

Durjanaḥ parihartavyo vidyaya alamkritoapisan.

#### 4. Concept of a Good friend:

Regarding the idea of a good companion, Cānakya has mentioned that even for one in an unknown land, learning is friend, as for staying at home, mother is friend. As with our mothers, we can share all our feelings. Similarly, for one suffering from illness, medicine is friend and for the departed soul dharma is friend. It is believed that one, who is attached to dharma religiously and firmly during his lifetime, gets the divine rewards after death also. So, it is said in this way—

Vidyāmitraṁ pravaseṣu matamitraṁ grihesu.

Vyadhitasya ousadhaṁ mitraṁ dharmo mitraṁ mritasya (*Cānakyaṇeeti*. 92).

Even in a foreign land, we can either spend our time by reading our favorite books or make friendship with the people of that particular land by the knowledge of learning, or we can learn a foreign language according to our wish.

It is seen in the modern day context that interacting with content through active learning has some compelling advantages. It helps us to maintain concentration and deepens learning towards the higher-level skills like critical thinking.

#### 5. Proper Place for Residence:

Regarding the proper place for residence, Cānakya has stated that one should not take up residence in a place where these five are absent—rich person, a Brahman learned in the Vedas, king, river and doctor. So, it is said in this way—

dhanikaḥ kṣatriorājanadivaidyaṣpancamah.

Panca yatra na vidyante tatra vāsan na kārayet. (*Cānakyaṇeeti*, 211)

If we study the inner meaning of this verse, then we realize that if we reside near a rich person, we can seek monetary help from that person if we need such help at any point of life. If we reside near a learned Brāhmaṇ, he can teach us the substance of the Śāstras. As in our society, there is a faith that Brāhmans are well equipped with wisdom. Here, the word king refers to the ruler, under whose governance we can live peacefully. If we reside near by a river, then there will be no shortage of water, the atmosphere will be cool and canal communication for shipping will be present there. We can also plant trees on the banks of a river, which would provide us fresh air to breathe, and fruits to eat. Last but not the least, as human beings we may get sick in any time of our life, so if we reside nearby a doctor, we can go to the doctor for medical help.

## 6. Qualities for a Human Being:

Cānakya has stated in one verse that one can live in the world that has good qualities. Again, that person who has dharma in life can survive in this world. The life of one, who has neither good qualities nor dharma, is without any purpose. It is said in this way-

sa jīvati guṇā yasya dharmo yasya sa jivati.

Guṇadharmā vihinasya jīvanam nisprayojanam. (*Cānakyaṇeeti*. 164)

The essence of this verse is that if we want to live peacefully in this world, we should have some good qualities within us. We should behave like a responsible citizen of the society. Here, by the word dharma, it may be understood that the various duties of a person in life are being referred to. According to Cānakya, dharma is equal to kindness (dharmodayāsamah).

Cānakya further says that one can bring the whole world under one's influence (power) by such sterling qualities as patience (or forgiveness), kindness, love, truth, straight-forwardness, humility and service. e.g.

kṣamādayāyapremnasunritenarjabena ca.

asikuryajjat sarbam vinayena ca sevaya.

He said that the body can die any minute but the good qualities stay for many ages. Because, people are remembered for their good qualities even after death, not for their bodily features. e.g.—isariram kṣanavidvarṇsi kalpantasthāyinoḡuṇāḡ.

Just as the purity of gold is tested by four means, namely, rubbing, cutting, burning and beating, a man is tested by four means, namely, learning, conduct, family background and action.

e.g.-- Yathacaturbhih kanakam pariksyatenikarsanachedanatapataranaih.  
tathacaturbhih purusahpariksyatesrutenasilenakarmana.

Even ugliness shines by good conduct. Same as poverty shines by courage. e.g.-

Daridratadhiratayavirajatekurupatasilatayavirajate.

If we want to be a good human being, we should be devoid of all the following things in our lives—extreme anger, harsh speech, poverty, enmity with relatives and association with evil men. e.g.-

Atyantakopah katukavanidaridrata ca svajanesuvairam.  
Nicaprasangah kulahinasevacihnanidehenarakasthitanam.

We should utter the words which are purified by truth and we have to do deeds which only our conscience approves. e.g.—

satyaputamvadedavacam manah. Putam samacaret.

According to Canakya, we should follow these things in our life—discard the company of evil men, associate with good and noble men, do good meritorious deeds day and night and always think that the world is momentary. Before one gives an answer, one should carefully think about it; one should not talk something on impulse. One should accept good qualities even from an enemy. One should reject bad qualities even of the guru. According to Canakya, one who is not wealthy may not be poor, but he is indeed rich if he is learned, but the man who is not learned is poor in every way.

## 7. Divergence between Scholarship and Kingship:

Regarding the difference between Scholarship and kingship, Cānakya has stated that Scholarship and kingship can never be equated. According to him, a king is respected in his own kingdom, whereas a scholar is respected everywhere. This is very much true in most of the cases. It is said in this way:

*Vidvatvam ca nṛpatvam ca naiva tulyam kadācana.  
Svadese pujiyate rājā vidyān sarvatra pujiyate.*



We have seen that there are some people like Professor APJ Abdul Kalam, who is respected as the president of India and as a great scientist at the same time all over the world. Even he was respected by people as scientist before he was the president of India and even after his death he is given the same respect for his deeds.

### **8. The Duties of a Parent or of a Guide:**

Regarding the duties of a parent or of a guide, Cānakya has stated that one's son or daughter should be pampered for five years, and for the next ten years, he or she should be disciplined and once he or she turns sixteen he/she should be treated as a friend. E.g.

lalayet pancavarcani dasavarsani tarayet.

Prapte tu sorase varse putram mitravadacaret. (Cānakyaṇeeti 47)

According to science as well, parents should always encourage and support their children, as this would greatly affect their self-esteem. Up to the age of five years, parents should show affection towards a child. Because a child's brain develop very rapidly up to the age of five years.

Cānakya has given more emphasis on good parenting, as according to him, the entire family will be destroyed by a son or daughter of evil character or tendencies. So, an incompetent son is not desirable in a family. He depicted one comparison with a dry tree. Just like this, even a single dry tree on fire can destroy the whole forest. e.g.-

ekena suskavriksena dahyamanena vahnina.

Dasyate hi vanam sarvakuputrena kulam tatha. (Cānakyaṇeeti 52)

### **9. Happy Householder:**

According to Cānakya, that person is a blessed householder in whose house there is a blissful atmosphere, whose sons and daughters are talented, whose life-partner speaks sweetly, whose wealth is enough to satisfy his desires, who finds pleasure in the company of the life-partner, whose servants are obedient, in whose house hospitality is shown, the auspicious Supreme Lord is worshiped daily, delicious food and drink is partaken, and who finds joy in the company of good people. Thus, Cānakya described all essential elements for a happy household in this verse, which is relevant in modern day context as well.

## 10. Conclusion:

In the discussion of some of the important aspects of *Cānakya-neeti*, we have found that Cānakya has given more emphasis on learning and on learned people. Because he knew that a learned person is always honoured by all. In addition, a learned person commands respect everywhere for his/her wisdom. Learning is honoured everywhere and a learned person is happy in the real sense. Continuous improvements in all aspects by learning is always important than late perfection. Updating ourselves is our responsibility and it has become very important nowadays to be updated. Learning is a process that should end only when life ends. Hence, when we learn something in life, we develop new skills that help us to do better in life. Because there are chemical reactions in the brain associated with learning new information. Learning is good for the overall mental health. Learning is good even for self-esteem. Just as learning, something can affect our emotions and sense of well-being; it is always important to learn at least one good thing, as it enriches our lives and gives us the necessary tools to become better citizens of the society. Through Cānakya's *Cānakya-neeti*, we can obtain such lessons as the essence of life to live in a right way. Further research is going on Cānakya's teachings on various aspect of life.



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