

## **From Book “Maxims of Chanakya” by VK Subramaniam**

**Introduction:** Kautilya, Chanakya and Vishnugupta are three names of the same person. Chanakya's works were produced during the period 321 BC to 290 BC. Chanakya was Chief Minister of Chandra Gupta Maurya. He was a sage statesman who helped establish the first Indian empire and was ruthless in dealing with enemies, was himself an austere bachelor, and retired to a life of seclusion and contemplation, as soon as his political objectives were achieved. The maxims of Chanakya are translated from three works—“Chanakya Sūtras”, “Chanakya Nītidarpan” and “Arthashastra”

### **1. Maxims from Chanakya Sūtras**

#### **1. Ethical Roots:**

Righteousness (dharma) is the root of happiness. Wealth is the root of righteousness. The state (Rajyam) is the root of wealth. Victory over senses is the root of the state. Humility is the root of sense control. Worship of elders is the root of humility. Wisdom results from the worship of elders. With wisdom one can prosper. The prosperous one becomes the victorious one. The victorious one attains all the riches

#### **2. Economic Prosperity**

Economic prosperity creates prosperity for the people. If the people are prosperous, even a leaderless state can be governed. People's fury is the greatest of furies

#### **3. Need for Right Ruler**

To be without a master is better than having an arrogant master

#### **4. Advisors, Aides, Counsellors, Ministers**

After equipping oneself fully, one should seek an ally (aide)

One without an advisor has no certainty of counsel

The true aide serves alike in prosperity and adversity

A self-respecting ruler should appoint as counsellor, one who is inferior to him and respect him

He should not take into counsel out of love, one who is impertinent (irrelevant)

One who is learned and free from fraud should be made minister

All things begin with counsel

Accomplishment of the task depends on guarding the secret of the counsel

One who leaks out counsel destroys the task

Defection to the enemy takes due to negligence

Ministerial advice should be kept secret from all quarters

Counsel is a beacon (signal station) to the one blind of action

Through ministerial eyes others' weaknesses are seen

At the time of taking ministerial advice there should not be any quarrel

A decision should be taken on the unanimous opinion of three

Counsellors (Ministers) are those who see the true implications, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done

#### **5. Allies, Friends:**

One who is affectionate in difficulties is the friend

In the acquisition of allies, one develops strength

The strong one tries to get what has not been obtained

#### **6. Evils of Laziness**

The lazy one does not get what has not been obtained. The lazy one can not guard even what has been begotten. The lazy one can not even command servants

### **7. State Policy:**

Getting what has not been got, guarding it, developing it and then distributing it—these four constitute state policy. Politics is the tool of state policy. Internal administration and foreign relations are dependent on state policy. Deployment of the four fold policy (conciliation, donation, division, and punishment) in one's own country is internal administration

### **8. Foreign policy:**

Foreign policy is deployment of the same (four fold means) towards neighboring states. Neighboring states are the source of treaties and hostilities. A ruler with a contiguous (sharing a border) territory is a rival. Power is the cause of an alliance. One should fight with a superior or equal. If there are many enemies, treaty should be entered into with one.

### **9. Duties of Citizens:**

A ruler should be approached like fire. One should not wear provocative clothes

### **10. Evil of Vices:**

One addicted to vices does not accomplish tasks. One addicted to gambling does not accomplish any thing

### **11. Advice for Rulers:**

An enemy should be won over by the use of political science. The scepter links one to riches. In the absence of **scepter** (the imperial authority symbolized by a scepter), there are no ministers. All activity is understood in wielding (of authority) the scepter. Acquisition of wealth has its root in activity. Righteousness (morality) and pleasures have their root in wealth. Work is the root of wealth. A little effort accomplishes the task. A task in which an expedient (appropriate to a purpose; practical) is used is not difficult to achieve. If no expedient is used, a task, even if attempted, fails. Expedient is the aid to those who seek success in undertakings. A task attains its objectives through human effort. Fortune follows human effort. Without God's grace, even excessive effort proves fruitless. One who is not calm and collected (in full control of your faculties) can not accomplish tasks. One should decide first and then commence the task. There should not be any delay in undertaking of a new task after completing one. The fickle – minded one does not accomplish tasks. If what is obtained is despised (look down, lack of respect), things go awry (not functioning properly). A work which is obstacle ridden should not be started. One who knows (opportune) time accomplishes the task. One should commence a work after understanding the country and the consequences. Prosperity lasts long one who acts after proper consideration. All types of riches should be amassed by all means. Prosperity forsakes even a lucky one, if he acts without foresight. The one who knows the means makes the impossible possible. Only accomplished deeds should be publicized.

Every one should be yoked to task for which he is befitted.

Destiny has to be counteracted through propitiatory (intended to reconcile) deeds.

Man made obstacles should be overcome through one's skills.

Those who seek to achieve things should show no mercy

The milk seeking calf strikes at the mother's udders. Due to lack of efforts task fails.

Those who blindly believe in destiny do not achieve any thing.

Things should be examined with reference to facts patent and latent, and inferences.  
Prosperity forsake one who does things without proper examination  
Danger should be overcome after proper analysis  
One should begin a venture after assessing one's strength.  
The favour seeker accomplishes his end after knowing the nature of his master.  
The one who knows cow's nature gets the milk  
A good one should not reveal his secret to a mean one  
The soft natured one is disregarded even by those dependent on him  
One who can not control himself is destroyed by his anger  
Rashness does not accomplish tasks  
When opportunities are lost, obstacles definitely arise  
Custody of others riches is undertaken by purely out of selfishness.  
Honest and upright people are rare  
A single defect overshadows many qualities  
A slanderous (tending to discredit or malign) listener is forsaken (desert) even by his wife and children  
Excessive courtesy should never be trusted  
Through association of good even one without virtue becomes virtuous  
A lazy one can not attain happiness in this world or the other  
Till the enemy's weakness is known, he should be kept on friendly terms.  
An enemy should be struck at his weak point  
One's weakness should not be revealed, enemies strike at weak spots  
Good behavior wins even an enemy  
The foolish wish to speak out what was spoken in secret by the master  
Even after attaining great prosperity, the one without fortitude (courage and strength when facing trouble) perishes.  
The one without fortitude (courage and strength when facing trouble) does not enjoy anything either materially or spiritually  
Intellect is that which can decide on action in difficulties.

Moderate eating is healthy. In indigestion, no food (wholesome or otherwise) should be taken. Diseases does not touch one who digests his food. In an old body, a growing disease should not be neglected. Eating is painful in indigestion.  
Disease excels an enemy.

When the tasks are great, abundant rewards should be made the incentive.  
Donation is **righteousness**. One can conquer the world with righteousness  
The world is borne by righteousness. Vice and virtue pursue even the departed spirit.  
Kindness is mother of righteousness. Truth and charity are the roots of righteousness.  
Even death protects the righteous. Righteousness is the ornament of all

One should earn wealth as if one is immortal.  
The wealthy are respected by all.  
There is enemy equal to hunger. Poverty is death while living. There is nothing uneatable for a hungry one. The poor one is despised (hated) by his own wife.  
Learning is wealth for the poor

One should serve a learned master.  
Excess sex ages man . Lack of sex ages women.  
There can be no marriage between the high and low  
Association with low(characterless) women reduces life span, reputation and virtue  
One should not envy other's good quality  
A good quality should be learnt even from an enemy.  
A person is honored according to his status. Men are respected only in their positions.  
There is no jewel equal to a good woman  
Dress should befit age.  
A mother is the greatest teacher. In all circumstances, the mother should be looked after. Modesty (lajja) is the ornament of women.  
Knowledge is the ornament of the learned.  
Learning is wealth to poor. Fame is glorified by learning. Fame is immortal  
A wife is a non metallic shackle

## **12. Advice for Citizens:**

One should have friendly connection with the ruling elite  
When children are good, homes are heaven  
Children should be made to reach the shores of knowledge ( that is given maximum education)  
The greatest gain is gain of a son  
He who protects parents from difficulties, is the son.  
The good son spreads the family's fame.  
Possession of maid servant enslaves one.  
Evil one should not be helped  
A sound intellect in a sound body.  
Prosperity depends on the intellect.  
Righteousness should be practiced always  
Saints should be worshipped.  
Truth is the means to heaven  
Evil speech, though un intended, remains long in memory  
A man who does his duty is a good and righteous man  
Like the seed , the fruit  
Intellect depends on education  
Conduct depends on family  
A comfort which as been obtained should not be given up  
One's action are cause of one's sorrow  
In the absence of knowledge of the scriptures, the conduct of good people should be followed. People are tradition bound. One should not speak ill of the person who is responsible for one's livelihood  
The essence of penance (*tap*) is control of senses  
Stay in heaven is not permanent , it lasts only till the reserves of accumulated virtue remain.  
To fall from heaven is greatest sorrow.  
Liberation is the remedy for all sorrows.  
No pleasure is greater than touch of one's children.  
Every morning, the days task should be planned.

### **There is no attraction equal to a gift**

All worldly beings are bound by desire.

Those who have excess desire have no firmness.

The one blinded by prosperity does not see the imminent nor listens to sane advice.

Company of the good is like residence in heaven

One should not question God's will

One's son should not be praised

The master should be praised by subordinates

Even in the performance of allotted duties, the master should be praised.

The intelligent does not have enemies.

One's weakness should not be divulged.

### **Money should be saved for difficult days**

The daring ones love their duty.

Tomorrow's deed, do it today. Whatever is to be done in the afternoon should be done in the forenoon

What is right depends on the nature of the case

### **Experience of the world is all knowledge**

Proper behaviour is more important than being virtuous

The soul is witness of a transaction

The spirit (soul) is the witness of every thing

In behaviour, the outer form indicates the inner core

Wealth should be protected from robbers and ruling officials

### **13. Rulers and People**

Inaccessible rulers destroy the people. Easily accessible rulers please the people. The people deem a just ruler a mother. Such a ruler attains material happiness and later heaven

There is only sorrow in birth and death

One should try to escape the cycle of births and deaths

## **2. Maxims from Chanakya Rajniti Shastra**

### **1. Duties and Qualities of the Ruler:**

The ruler's duties are stated to be five: punishment of the wicked (*dusht*), rewarding the righteous, development of state revenues by just means, impartiality in granting favours and protection of the state

The characteristics of a ruler are five: he gives up wealth in favour of the needy, loves virtues, enjoys pleasure in company of friends and relatives, is anxious to learn the sciences and is a fighter in war.

The ruler should learn one quality each from the lion and the crane, four from the cock (*murga*), five from the crow, six from the dog

One should learn from **lion** to undertake a task well-prepared, whether it is a big one or small. Like a **crane**, the learned one should control his senses and know the aptness of time and place, accomplish all tasks

From a **cock** one should learn four things: getting up in time, fighting, division of responsibility among allies and enjoyment after attacking oneself

From the **crow** one should learn five things: sex in secrecy, secret action, catch in time, unruffled behaviour and distrust of every one. These are six qualities of the **dog**: desire for much, satisfaction with little, deep slumber (A natural and periodic state of rest during which consciousness of the world is suspended), quick awakening, devotion to master and bravery

From the **donkey** three things should be learnt: to carry the burden even though tired, not to mind heat or cold and to trudge (walk heavily and firmly) ever satisfied. The discerning one who practices *these twenty virtues mentioned conquers all enemies and him self remains unconquerable*

### **5. Financial Policy**

He who has **wealth** has friends, relatives, he counts in the world as a person and is deemed as a scholar

He who has **wealth** is deemed noble, scholar, proficient in scripture, discernor of qualities, eloquent speaker, and attractive to look at. All qualities are dependent on wealth

**Wealth** is caste, wealth is beauty, wealth is learning, wealth is fame, what can those deprived of wealth (and hence of life and qualities) aspire for?

The wealthy one buys beauty with enticement (temptation), strength through servants, noble respect through guests, lineage through marriages with big families.

All virtues are dependent on wealth, wealth captures pleasures, everything is dependent on wealth. Wealth enriches and enhances life.

**Wealth** is unbewildered (un-perplexed by many conflicting situations or statements;) beauty, wealth is auspicious family, wealth is unfaded youth, wealth is lasting life

Qualities are attained by wealth, not wealth by qualities, the wealthy one is served by one with good qualities, not vice versa

**From where does it come? Where does it go? it is impossible to know the path of wealth**

As the bee collects honey gradually from the flowers, so should the ruler fill the treasury, collecting revenue gradually

### **6. Need for Learning and knowledge:**

Read, son, read. Why be lazy? The illiterate is burden carrier. The scholar is venerated (respected) by the ruler. Read son every day

Read, son, always. Memorise what you learn. The ruler is worshipped in his country. Learning is worshipped every where

### **8. Modus operandi of Governance:**

People are controlled by punishment, the intrinsically pure man are rare. Out of fear of punishment the world enjoys blessings

One can regain wife, wealth, friend, children, importance, but not a body

### **10. Friends and Enemies**

He is the friend who stands by in illness, adversity, famine, attack by enemy, at rulers door and the cremation ground

One should not be too straight forward. Go and see the forest. The straight trees are cut down, the crooked one are left standing

### **11. Strategy towards Enemies and Friends:**

All beings are pleased by sweet words. Hence only sweet words should be spoken. Where is poverty in words?

The union of even small people can become irresistible. The elephant is tied by the rope, made of grass

The enemy should not know one's own weakness, but one should know enemy's weakness. One should hide one's intention, as tortoise withdraws its limbs, and watch enemy's posture

The miser should be won over by means of wealth, the proud man by offering respect, the fool by flattery, and the learned by truthfulness

The superior one should be dealt with by submission, the valiant by division, the low one by gifts and equal by prowess (superior skill to be learned by study, practice and observation)

### **13. Service with Rulers: Duties and Qualities of state officials**

**Five things burn the body without fire:** serving a bad ruler, an unclear debt, disgrace of one's people, separation from beloved, a friend who turns his face away because one is poor

**Six things burn the body without the aid of fire:** living in a bad village, serving a bad ruling family, bad food, short tempered wife, idiotic son, widowed daughter

A man is tested in four ways: with reference to his family, conduct, quality and action, just as gold is tested in four ways: by scratching, breaking, heating and beating. Servants can be known when sent on errands (a short trip that is taken for performance of a necessary task), relatives when difficulties arise, a friend in times of distress, and the wife when prosperity declines

A fool should be avoided, he is a two-footed animal. He hurts with sharp words like an unseen thorn

The ruler's scribe (Secretary) should understand what is spoken forthwith, write fast, have a good hand writing, well versed in all arts and sciences and be distinguished

He is the scribe, who is able, eloquent, wise, honest, who has controlled his senses, who has learnt all arts and sciences, and who is good

If the ruler is righteous, people are righteous, if he is a sinner, the people are also sinners, if he is equal in vice and virtue, so are people. People follow the ruler. Like ruler like people

**Seven sleeping ones should not be woken up:** the ruler, the lion, the snake, the hog (greedy), the infant, another's dog, and an idiot

**Seven sleeping ones should be woken up:** the treasurer, door keeper, the student, the traveler, the hungry one and the one who is afraid

Deity, teacher, wife, doctor, astrologer, if visited empty handed do not bestow desired objects

### **Maxims from Arthashastra**

Difficulties stabilize friendship.

Rendering help is the sign of a friend.

Those with established relationships do not desert, even if offended

### **Financial Policy**

The treasury has its source in mines.

From the strength of the treasury the Army is born.

Through the treasury and the army, the earth, whose adornment is treasury is obtained.

Material wealth alone is important, says Kautilya, for, both righteousness and pleasure are based on material wealth

Riches, righteousness and physical pleasures- these are three kinds of wealth. This is preferable to attain the earlier mentioned ones than the latter

### **Corruption:**

Just as it is difficult not to taste honey or poison placed on tongue, similarly, it is difficult for one handling the ruler's money to refrain from tasting it in at least small quantities

Just as it is not possible to know when the fish moving in water drinks water, similarly, it is difficult to find out when officers employed in execution of works misappropriate money

He who is responsible for loss of revenue shall be deemed to have eaten the ruler's property

He who doubles the revenue eats up people's property

The intellect of the brave, trained to be steadfast, once corrupted may not return without reaching the end (the summit of corruption)

### **Guarding of Secrets**

A person under the influence of carelessness, intoxication, or prattling (talking foolishly) while asleep or enjoying carnal (sensual) pleasures, or one hidden or dishonoured discloses secret counsel

*Wise men exhibit in their gestures and expressions the opposite of their feeling in the pairs: love and hatred, pleasure and sorrow, determination and fear etc in order to **hide their secrets***

### **Law, Justice Punishment**

In all cases an offence concerning women or relatives, professional rivalry, hatred of opposition, market association, or trade guilds, any of the legal disputes, the origin is anger. Anger results in murder

A case in dispute is four legged. It depends on: 1) what is right according to ethical principles, 2) evidence, 3) custom, and 4) the ruler's order. The last one overrules all the earlier ones

What is right is based on truth, evidence on witness, custom on available tradition of the people and the law is ruler's command

Punishment meted out after due consideration keeps the people attached to righteousness and tasks conducive to material wealth and enjoyment

If no punishment is given the law of fishes (strong swallowing the weak) is created

Punishment, the root of discipline, is the source of prosperity for the people

New men deem the dispenser of punishment as Yama incarnate do not commit crimes

**It is to meet unforeseen difficulties that a woman is given property (dowry) (at the time of marriage)**

### **9. Causes of People's discontent**

By undertaking schemes which result in loss and stopping those which will result in gain

By not protecting people from thieves and robbers and enriching himself at their cost

Discontented people go over to the enemy or destroy the ruler themselves

### **Ruling family, Ruling Class**

The power of ruling class, augmented by the learned preceptor (Guru), buttressed (make stronger) by the counsel of good ministers, armed with the compliance of scriptures and sciences triumphs and ever remains unvanquished

Corporations (or groups of exclusive ruling class) being close –knit are not easily assailable (un defendable) by enemies

A ruling family composed of in disciplined and dissolute (unrestrained by convention or morality) members breaks like moth-eaten wood

### **Duties of officials**

One may seek to serve a ruler devoid of wealth or loyal subjects. for a characterless ruler disregards the tenets of political science, associate himself with evil company and comes to ruin even after inheriting a large and prosperous kingdom

Undesirable persons become favourites by acting according to the reading of the ruler's mind

The wise ones should first look to their own self protection. Those who serve rulers are said to function in fire

### **The occasions when one should leave one's post are**

-When one's work gets destroyed without fruition

- One's power gets reduced –When one's learning is treated like a tradable commodity

-One's hope are frustrated

- One is eager to be in new countries

–When one loses the confidence of the master

-when one comes in conflict with powerful people

### **13. Philosophy**

The three Vedas deals with righteousness and unrighteousness, economics deals with wealth and poverty, politics deals with good and bad state policies. Philosophy , which sifts (Distinguish and separate out) with reason the relative importance of these sciences , benefits the world, keeps the intellect steady in adversity and prosperity and creates excellence in thought, word and deed

Philosophy is considered the light of learning , the means for the accomplishment of all tasks, and the refuge of all righteous beliefs (of all religions)

### **14. Miscellaneous dicta**

**Time (opportunity) approaches a man desirous of it only once. And will not come a second time when he wants to do his work**

Success and failure are common on all paths. Power alters the mind

Sons kept engaged in pleasures do not rise against the father

Only the display of valour (heroism) can tackle trouble

**Among thousands there is hardly one or not even one (fit to be a ) leader**

Peace is one which allows the enjoyment of results without disturbance

Artisans are generally dishonest

Peace and activity (industry) are the source of security and welfare

**Power, place and time (opportunity) mutually help**

One's body should be protected, not wealth. Why feel for transient riches?

----- from Dipti-----

**"A person should not be too honest. Straight trees are cut first and Honest people are screwed first."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC 75 BC)

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**"Even if a snake is not poisonous, it should pretend to be venomous."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"The biggest guru-mantra is: Never share your secrets with anybody. It will destroy you."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interests. This is a bitter truth."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"Before you start some work, always ask yourself three questions - Why am I doing it, What the results might be and Will I be successful. Only when you think deeply and find satisfactory answers to these questions, go ahead."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"As soon as the fear approaches near, attack and destroy it."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"The world's biggest power is the youth and beauty of a woman."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-

275

BC)

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**"Once you start a working on something, don't be afraid of failure and don't abandon it. People who work sincerely are the happiest."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275

BC)

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**"The fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind.**

**But the goodness of a person spreads in all direction."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275

BC)

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**"Whores don't live in company of poor men, citizens never support a weak company and birds don't build nests on a tree that doesn't bear fruits."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275

BC)

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**"God is not present in idols. Your feelings are your god. The soul is your temple."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275

BC)

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**"A man is great by deeds, not by birth."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275

BC)

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**"Never make friends with people who are above or below you in status."**

**Such friendships will never give you any happiness."**  
Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"Treat your kid like a darling for the first five years. For the next five years, scold them. By the time they turn sixteen, treat them like a friend. Your grown up children are your best friends."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"Books are as useful to a stupid person as a mirror is useful to a blind person."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)

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**"Education is the best friend. An educated person is respected everywhere. Education beats the beauty and the youth."**

Chanakya quotes (Indian politician, strategist and writer, 350 BC-275 BC)