

Chānakya ([Sanskrit](#) : चाणक्य *Cāṇakya*) (c. 350–283 BCE) was an adviser and [prime minister](#) ¹

to the first

[Maurya](#)

Emperor

[Chandragupta](#)

(c. 340-293 BCE), and was the chief architect of his rise to power.

Kautilya

and

Vishnugupta

, the names by which the

[ancient Indian](#)

political treatise called the

[Arthaśāstra](#)

identifies its author, are traditionally identified with Chanakya.

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Chanakya has been considered as the pioneer of the field of

[economics](#)

and

[political science](#)

, having first written about the subject a millennium and a half before

[Ibn Khaldun](#)

's

[Muqaddimah](#)

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In the Western world, he has been referred to as The Indian

[Machiavelli](#)

, although Chanakya's works predate Machiavelli's by about 1,800 years.

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Chanakya was a teacher in

[Takṣaśīla](#)

, an ancient centre of learning, and was responsible for the creation of

[Mauryan empire](#)

, the first of its kind on the Indian subcontinent.

He is generally called Chanakya (derived from his father's name "Chanak")^[8] but, in his capacity as author of the

Arthaśhāstra

, is generally referred to as Kautilya derived from his gotra's name "KOTIL"(Kautilya means "of Kotil"). He was the master of shrewd act of diplomacy. He believed in four ways, namely, Treating with Equality, Enticement, Punishment or War and Sowing Dissension.

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The

Arthaśhāstra

identifies its author by the name Kautilya,

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except for one verse which refers to him by the name Vishnugupta.

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One of the earliest

[Sanskrit literatures](#)

to explicitly identify Chanakya with Vishnugupta was

[Vishnu Sarma](#)

's

[Panchatantra](#)

in the 3rd century BC.

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K.C. Ojha puts forward the view that the traditional identification of Vishnugupta with Kautilya was caused by a confusion of editor and originator and suggests that Vishnugupta was a redactor of the original work of Kautilya.^[2] Thomas Burrow goes even further and suggests that Chanakya and Kautilya may have been two different people.

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Kautilya's role in the formation of the Mauryan Empire is the essence of a historical/spiritual novel [The Courtesan and the Sadhu](#) by Dr. Mysore N. Prakash [[13](#)].

[[edit](#)] Works

Two books are attributed to Chanakya: [Arthashastra](#) and **Neetishastra** which is also known as Chanakya Niti. The

Arthashastra

discusses

[monetary](#)

and

[fiscal](#)

policies,

[welfare](#)

,

[international relations](#)

, and

[war strategies](#)

in detail.

Neetishastra

is a treatise on the ideal way of life, and shows Chanakya's in-depth study of the

[Indian way of life](#)

. Chanakya also developed

Neeti-Sutras

(aphorisms - pithy sentences) that tell people how they should behave. Of these well-known 455 sutras, about 216 refer to *raaja-neeti* (the do's and don'ts of running a kingdom).

Apparently, Chanakya used these sutras to groom Chandragupta and other selected disciples in the art of ruling a kingdom.

Death of Chanakya

Chanakya lived to a ripe old age and died around 275 BC and was cremated by his disciple Radhagupta who succeeded Rakshasa Katyayan (great-grand son of Prabuddha Katyayan, who attained Nirvana during the same period as Gautam Budhha) as Prime Minister of the Maurya Empire and was instrumental in backing Ashoka to the throne. There were three non-traditional belief paths in society those days, Jaina, Buddhist and [Ajivaka](#) . [Ajivaka](#) practising Chanakya brought about the downfall of the Nandas and their coterie of ministers. Later on, Chandragupta Maurya took Jainism on abdicating his throne which passed to his

Son Bindusara who was an

[Ajivaka](#)

. Even Ashoka was practising

[Ajivaka](#)

who before accession to throne became Buddhist. Ashoka's daughter was married in 265 BC and his son Kunala was 18 years of age in 269 BC which means that even the princes married early, Ashoka was born 310 BC and Bindusara around 330 BC. Bindusara means one who encompasses all that is need to be known.

Later on, [Ajivikism](#) which was the official religion of the empire since the [Kalinga War](#) (261 BC) and for 14 years afterwards, declined and merged into traditional Hinduism. What has been left is a mixture of conflicting Buddhist and Jaina legends which are rejected by Sinhalese chronicles.

According to a Jaina tradition, while Chanakya served as the chief administrator of [Chandragupta Maurya](#)

, he started adding small amounts of

[poison](#)

in Chandragupta's food so that he would get used to it. The aim of this was to prevent the Emperor from being poisoned by enemies. One day the queen, Durdha, shared the food with the Emperor while she was pregnant. Since she was not used to eating poisoned food, she died. Chanakya decided that the baby should not die; hence he cut open the belly of the queen and took out the baby. A drop (

bindu

in

[Sanskrit](#)

) of poison had passed to the baby's head, and hence Chanakya named him

[Bindusara](#)

. Bindusara would go on to become a great king and to father the greatest Mauryan Emperor since Chandragupta -

[Asoka](#)

.

When Bindusara became a youth, Chandragupta gave up the throne and followed the [Jain](#) saint

[Bhadrabahu](#)

to present day

[Karnataka](#)

and settled in a place known as

[Shravana Belagola](#)

. He lived as an ascetic for some years and died of voluntary starvation according to Jain tradition.

Chanakya meanwhile stayed as the administrator of Bindusara. Bindusara also had a minister named Subandhu who did not like Chanakya. One day he told Bindusara that Chanakya was responsible for the murder of his mother. Bindusara asked the nurses who confirmed this story and he became very angry with Chanakya.

It is said that Chanakya, on hearing that the Emperor was angry with him, thought that anyway he was at the end of his life. He donated all his wealth to the poor, widows and orphans and sat on a dung heap, prepared to die by total abstinence from food and drink. Bindusara meanwhile heard the full story of his birth from the nurses and rushed to beg forgiveness of Chanakya. But Chanakya would not change his mind. Bindusara went back and vented his fury on Subandhu, and killed him.

Chanakya after this incident, renounced food and shortly died thereafter. Bindusara revered Chanakya and the loss of his advisor was a considerable blow to him.