

# Reflections on Vidura Niti and Chanakya Niti

Dr Uma Maheswari Shankar,  
Principal, SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce

**Abstract:** Vidura is one of the central characters in the Mahabharata. He is described as the prime minister of Hastinapur engaged in the administration of the kingdom and also the uncle of Pandavas and Kauravas. His advice to the King Dhritharashtra forms the book called Vidura niti. The ethical conduct, advices, counsels, guidance and instructions are very relevant even today. Similarly Chanakya who tutored Chandra gupta Maurya and made him the emperor also advised him at all stages in life. At every step in decision making Chanakya's lessons were valuable to him. The striking connection between these two books is they are engaged in moral guidance for citizens and the ruler. The king cannot work in isolation or the subjects. In this modern world where values have moved to periphery and insignificant and inappropriate things have come to centre. Where is human intellect gone? Where is man's viveka buddhi? This paper attempts to examine few verses from both the books in order to revisit the application of their teachings in today's context. They are neither outdated nor dogmatic. Both the nitis are fresh in its content and substance.

**Key words :** Vidura niti, Chanakya niti, Advice , moral teaching, Ethical codes

**Vidura:** Vidura is one of the central characters in the Mahabharata. He is described as the prime minister of Hastinapur engaged in the administration of the kingdom and also the uncle of Pandavas and Kauravas. Vidura was most respected adviser for the Pandavas who on many occasions saved them from perilous plans of their cousins. He was straight forward, honest, righteous, compassionate and sincere in his work. As a minister he stands as the most illustrious light which dispelled the darkness of envy jealousy and corruption. He is held to be an epitome of truth, dutifulness and impartial judgment. He is considered the embodiment of the inner consciousness of the Mahabharata. He did not partake in war yet the nuances and dialogues of war can never be comprehended without dwelling into the dialogues of Vidura. His dialogues with king Dhritharashtra is compiled and known as Vidura niti. This work is considered as the forerunner in some way to Chanakyaniti. Hence an attempt is made to read and reflect on both Nitis and bring their relevance today. Vidura Niti comprises of maxims of Vidura on right conduct and the ethics of life. Time did reveal how much of it was imbibed by the blind king and how much were compromised. He acquired the title Mahatma for his unbiased thoughts and insightful wisdom.

**Chanakya:** Chanakya or Vishnu Gupta was the well-known minister of Maurya emperor Chandragupta who was tutored and moulded by him. Chanakya was considered as the pioneer of the field of economics, philosophy and political science in India. His advices to people, king and common men are considered even today relevant and meaningful. His two works namely Artha sastra and Chanakya neeti stand as testimonials to the wisdom of this great son of India. The Arthashastra discusses primarily monetary and fiscal policies, international relations, war strategies, administration and also outlines the duties of a ruler. While Chanakya Neeti is a treatise on the ideal way of life, importance of ethics and good behavior

He covers many areas which can be replicated for our own good. His themes were on determination, Peace, compassion, acceptance of change and flexibility. In today's world we are constantly concerned about the change around us.

## Vidura niti & Chanakya niti

It is a comprehensive book of advice to one and all though it's taken as a dialogue between the Vidura and King Dhritharashtra. As the story in the epic goes, Pandavas claimed their rightful land from their cousins Kauravas on completion of their exile. King Dhritharashtra sought Vidura's counsel. This collection called as Vidura niti contains profound insights which he shares with the king while admonishing him to return the kingdom to the Pandavas. This would be just and fair. The message and instructions are very useful and meaningful even today. Since it is part of the famous epic Mahabharata, the text dates back to three thousand years BC. Much of the stories, narrations, teachings and lessons from this epic though not well documented yet have survived to the test of time. The questions that rose in the mind of the king then

are not different today which rises in any ordinary mortal. Strangely the answers given by Mahatma Vidur continue to enlighten us albeit centuries have passed. The King is curious to get the right answers for his problematic questions. We shall dwell on few themes and revisit the wisdom of Vidura neeti. On simple themes like 'sleeplessness' the wise Vidura says People who suffer from sleeplessness are the lovers, those with no moral values, people with skills but lacking resources, people who seize the wealth of strong through deceit. This holds good even today undoubtedly.

Vidura opines that there are essential qualities for wise rulers such as self-awareness and self-control, have lofty ideals accompanied by clarity of goals. Being Industriousness is mandating as well as to have sound ethical conduct. In this conversation he says to the king

*Nishevathe prashasthani ninditani na sevate  
Anaasthi kashshradhadhaan yetath panditha lakshanam*

He is said to be wise who is unaffected by anger, joy, arrogance, shame, opposition, approbation or riches. He continues to say the wise is one whose acts are not inhabited by cold or heat, fear or love, lack or abundance. Wonder where is such wise men today?

Chanakya while referring to wise king says –a proud king should shed his pride and arrogance during difficulty. He must find out the solution and clarification adhering to unbiased ideas. (19) Similarly about ministers he says “A person who is capable of listening and thinking highly should be made a minister by the king. (21). The need to reiterate these advises to present rulers and ministers is to bring about a change in their attitude and to make one accountable for actions and responsibilities. How do we understand happiness and success? The wise Brahmin says success of a person is judged by others while happiness is felt you. Only peace of mind can give Happiness.

People can be classified into three categories -Exceptionally competent who are above average, ordinarily competent may be bit above average and just ordinary. He advises work must be allocated accordingly. First category involves work of strategic importance while second category implies work of moderate complexity and the third for others who are engaged in Routine work. Chanakya with his sharp intellect also suggests the way these people must be handled. He says manage the first category by *Sama* the second category by *Dana* and others by *Bheda* and *Danda*

Wise are those who are active listeners, have quick grasping ability of what others are trying to convey, not interfering in other domain and not longing for results. Their attitude reflects no false pride. If these attitudes are consciously imbibed even today they shall bring enormous peace to oneself and to others. The readiness to learn from anybody and being humble always are traits of wise and good man say both nitis. Vidura was an epitome of humility. We hardly recall Vidura's rage albeit the king and the prince of Hastinapur have defaulted, insulted, raged and censured others. As Vidura said to King that the sign of good practices adopted by wise men include competence acquisition and not adopt any shortcuts to reach the goal quickly. Chanakya says one must develop competence in at least one field and develop an overall perspective in other fields. It is like to be jack all and try to be master of at least one. It is necessary to communicate effectively with all sections of people warns both the nitis.

Chanakya says assertively that never to seek advice from the following four kinds of people namely persons with half-baked knowledge, persons who intentionally delay work, people who are inherently lazy and those who flatter others. Little do we realize how unworthy the advice would be from these four categories. In today's parlance advice seems free and takers and givers are as foolish as mentioned by this wise man of yore. The pearls of wisdom of Chanakya is felt by the researchers and students of Arthashastra that they are most pertinent today. He taught the practical philosophy and being in the present. Here is a sample -

*Yaddooram Yadduraaraaddhyam Yachcha Doore Vyavasthitam,  
Tattsarva Tapasaa Saaddhyam Tapo hi Duratikramam. 33*

Even if the objective or the desired object be far away or difficult to achieve, one can reach it or get it if one is determined. Nothing is impossible for a determined person. Every achiever should have this quality.

And again he says -

*Shaantitullyam Tapo Naasti NaSantoshaatparamsukham  
Na Trishnayaaparo Vyaadhirnacha Dharmo Dayaaparah. 37*

No penance is greater than the one done for maintaining peace, no peace is better than the one received from satisfaction, no disease as more damaging than greed and no Dharma is better than the one having compassion for all.

*Anaagat vidhaataa Cha Prattutpannamatistathaa  
Dvaavetau Sukhameveta Yaddbhavishyo Vinashyati. 153*

He who is aware of the future troubles and who possesses sharp intelligence remains happy. In contradiction to this stage, he who remains inactive, waiting for the good days to come destroys his own life. The futility of life is beautifully summed up by the mentor of Chandragupta. He says,

*Gatam Shoko na Kartavya Bhavishyam NaivChintayet  
Vartamaanen Kaalen Pravartante Vishakshanaah 188*

One should not grieve for the past and worry for the future. The wise care for the present and graph their life's course accordingly. What is the use of past worries and anxieties of future? The messages of Chanakya are deep and full of significance. It is rather amazing when we revisit his aphorisms, they are most pertinent and appropriate today. What a visionary!! In this verse he says, "*Prabhootam Kaaryampi Vaa Tattparah Prakartumichati Sarvaarambhen Tattkaarya Singhaadekam Prachakshate.*" (275) whether it is big or small, we must do every work with our full capacity and power. This quality we must learn from the lion. It seems this unique quality of lion. It is believed that the lion never does anything halfheartedly. It would kill a rabbit or attack an elephant with its full fierceness. There will be no compromise or set back. This speaks of attitude which we must have towards people and situations. Giving full attention and being focused marks the pathway to success

To conclude, it is time to revisit, reflect and reexamine the nitis of Vidura and Chanakya and makes them as our counsels and directives to lead a morally meaningful and peaceful life filled with peace and compassion towards one and all. Both gave great value to control over speech. All ill spoken word causes untold harm. A forest when cut down may grow again: but a heart pierced with sharp barbed tongue cannot be assuaged easily. Both the nitis gave much value to righteousness. These maxims are lessons for men and women to learn, unlearn and relearn the core messages. Let us salute the wise Vidura and prudent Chanakya who bore the light of wisdom only to dispel the darkness of ignorance, arrogance and conceit in us.

## Reference

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