**A man of tolerance**

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Numerous websites of different organizations, operating from India and other countries, reflect that the name of ancient Hindu philosopher Kautilya Chanakya, who was born in present-day Pakistan, is still alive even after the passage of many centuries. At that time when the armies of Alexander the Great were conquering almost half of the world, Indian ruler Chandragupta followed the valuable advice of his mentor Chanakya to defend his homeland and defeat the Greek army.

On several occasions, I have highlighted that it is regrettable that Chanakya is being portrayed as a negative character in his own country of birth. Ironically, while the people of Pakistan are disowning him, the world recognizes him as a great visionary philosopher and strategist. His book ‘Arthashastra’ is still very popular the world over among those wishing to understand politics and democracy among different nations.

However, in recent days I have been pleasantly surprised when I came across a research paper by Pakistani scholars on Chanakya. In their joint research paper titled ‘Tolerance in the Great Intellectual Kautilya Chanakya's Thoughts and Islamic Teachings: a comparative study ’, Dr Abdul Qaddus from the University of Science & Technology (Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Dr Shams ul Arafeen from the University of Sargodha (Lahore Campus) highlight the teachings of the ancient philosopher with a focus on tolerance, religious freedom and co-existence. Significantly, this research study has been carried out by professors affiliated with the departments of Islamic Studies in their respective universities.

According to the researchers, tolerance is the basic component of any society. There is a common factor in Chanakya's thoughts and the primary sources of Islam – tolerance is the foundation of stability, unity, progress and prosperity. “It is a common and idealistically beautiful notion that most of the teachings of reformers essentially practice and preach the same teachings for the betterment of the world,” says the research, emphasizing that “Unless people of different religions live in peace harmony and mutual respect and cooperation, all our hopes and aspirations will be futile and all our wonderful achievements will be fruitless.”

Discussing the early life of Chanakya, the researchers maintain that great nations used to respect their heroes and preserve the lives of the great philosophers, thinkers and intellectuals who preceded them in their knowledge and art. In my view, such intellectuals are indeed a gift to humanity, and whoever follows their visionary teachings can achieve success in life goals.

Internationally, Chanakya is also called the Indian Machiavelli. However, Chanakya was comparatively a more influential and greater character, both in intelligence and in action. Besides being a man of wisdom, he devised a complete roadmap to the ideal way of living in a society. Chanakya described courage and endurance as the most powerful weapon by which one can conquer the entire world. The research paper covers Chanakya's teachings that one should not lose heart just by regretting the mistakes of the past. The most strong and wise person is the one who controls his/her anger and emotions. “Don't be afraid of failure when you start working on something.”

Compared with Islamic teachings, the research has shown that the significance of religion in human life cannot be neglected. It is the responsibility of the leaders and followers of every religion to struggle for the betterment of society, keeping in view the basic ethics of respect, dialogue, understanding and cooperation. In my view we must feel honor for living in the land where once the great philosopher Chanakya used to spread wisdom.

While reading this study by Pakistani researchers, my suggestion from five years back also echoed in my mind: to establish a world-class international university in Taxila offering various degree courses, such as political and social sciences, international relations and diplomacy. The admission of foreign students will ultimately result in projecting a knowledge-friendly and positive image of Pakistan in the eyes of the international community. We need to develop a spirit of tolerance and understanding among the followers of all faiths.

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