

# 1 The Perspective

Of the many ills of civilization, corruption and crime have caused maximum suffering to the humankind. And it is because of this that wise people are met with in the corridors of history throughout the world, warning their people to keep away the twin curses as far as possible.

The ancient Chinese rulers provided an extra allowance called *yang-lien* (nourish incorruptness) to keep their officials 'clean'. The Greeks kept a watchful eye on those who were used to 'servicing for presents and bribes'. Several other ancient leaders took similar measures in their respective lands.

## ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

Nearer home, our forebears devised an

elaborate moral code of conduct to fight the menace. They were perhaps the first to think of institutionalizing anti-corruption and crime initiative. The famous Vedic prayer to the divine power to identify and put to use its knowledge and power to exterminate the degenerate, the criminal and the corrupt, for the sake of humanity (Rig, I, 4, 10.8) is perhaps the initial brick in its foundation.

### Inviting divine wrath on the corrupt and the criminal

वि जानीहय्यां ये च दस्येवो ।  
बर्हिष्मते रम्या शासदब्रतान ॥

Rig. I, 4, 10.8

Oh Lord, knowing everybody and everything in the most accurate manner, Thou knowest the regenerate of good conduct and the degenerate, the destroyers of good works for general public. Do Thou exterminate the latter from their roots.

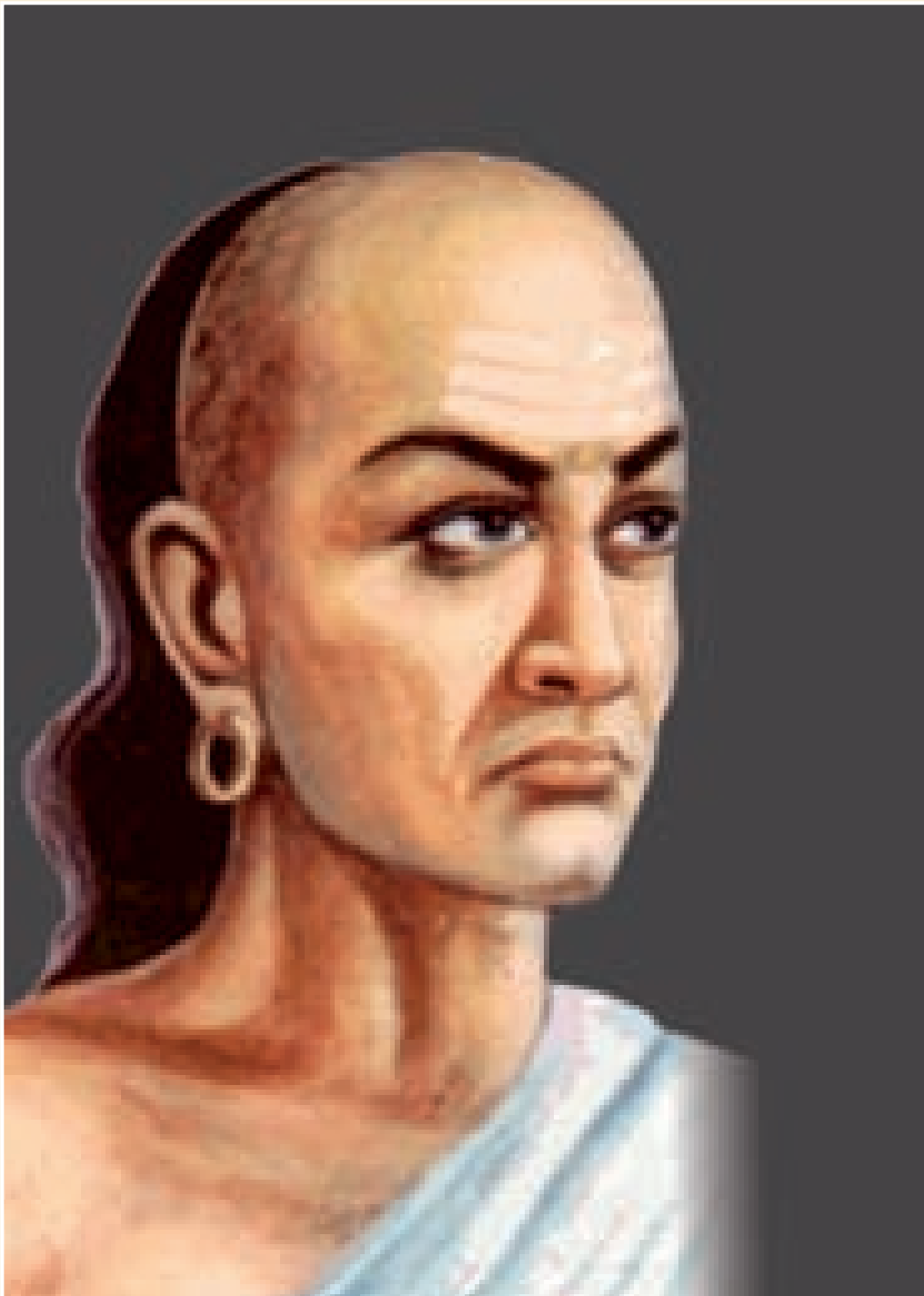
The fight against corruption and crime is as old as hills.



A rare ancient statue recovered from antique thieves by CBI, it is now displayed at the CBI Museum

As time passed and life became more complex, more positive efforts were made in this direction. By the time of Kautilya, 4th century B.C., the edifice had taken, in a major way, a definite shape. The proof is Kautilya's Arthashastra, by far the best and most comprehensive work on the subject in question. Kautilya said that since detection of corruption was a difficult job, the rulers should employ intelligent persons for this work.

Thirukural, a great Tamil saint of a little later times also spoke in the same vein. He advocated clean living. There were others – hundreds of them, literally – in other parts of the country, advocating similar *mantras* and mechanisms to keep away corruption, crime and other evils. And it was, precisely, owing to such wise counsels that our social, economic and cultural milieu became clean and we made huge progress in different fields of life.



### **Kautilya on Corruption**

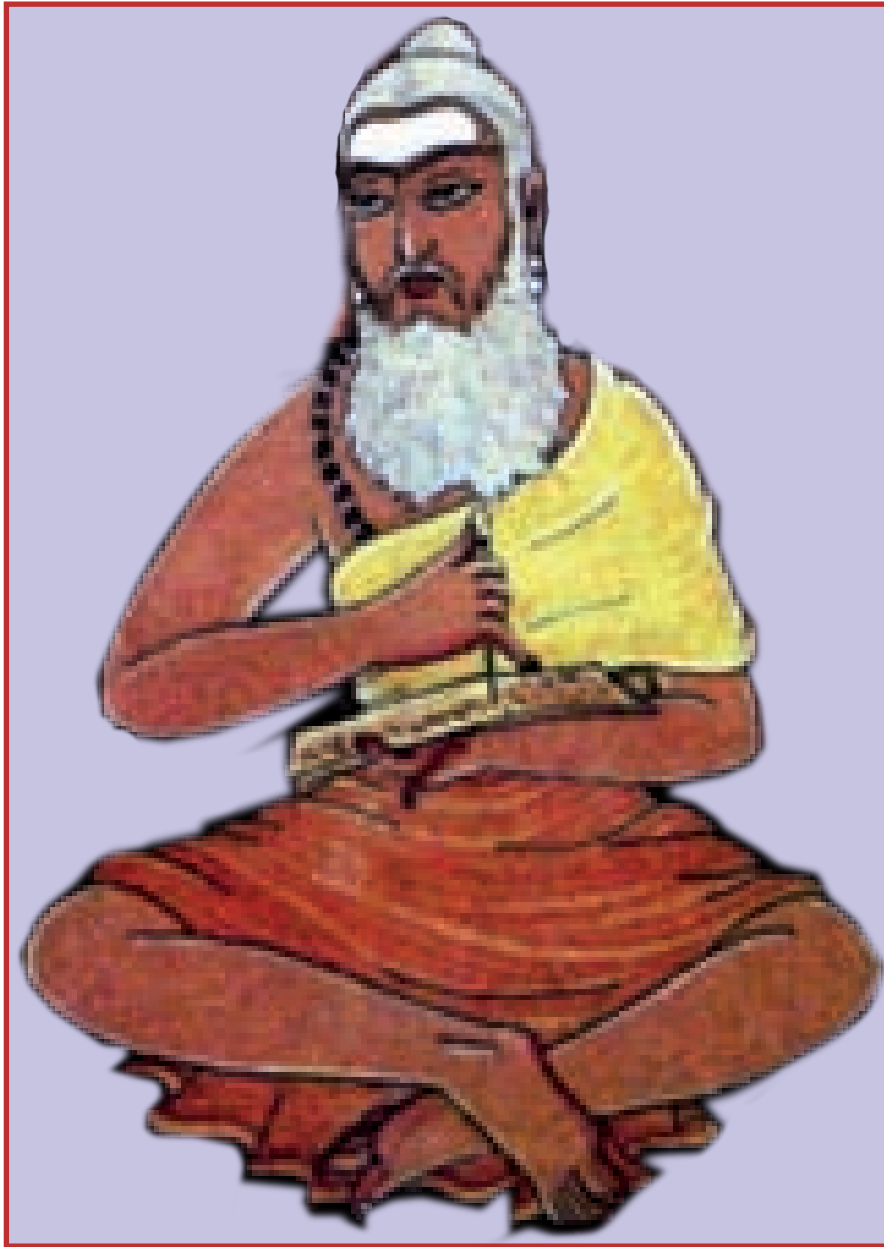
#### **On corruption's presence**

Just as it is not possible, not to taste honey or poison put on the surface of the tongue, so it is not possible for the Government servants dealing with money not to taste it in however small a quantity.

#### **On difficulties of corruption detection**

Just as a fish moving under water cannot possibly be found out either as drinking or not drinking water, so Government servants employed in the Government work cannot be found out taking money.

It is possible to mark the movements of birds flying high up in the sky but it is not possible to ascertain the clandestine movements of Government servants



**The great Tamil saint Thirukural, emphasized on truthful and honest living.**

## THE MEDIEVAL MUDDLE

This happy situation seems to have lasted, roughly, till about the eighth century. But in the times that followed, that is, after the emergence of medievalism, the old age yielded place to new – but, mercifully, not without leaving behind a legacy – a noble legacy – having, among others, two glaring characteristics : (i) detestation of the wrong, and (ii) appreciation of its destroyer. The new feudal elite of this age, who were given to enjoyment and abuse of the advantages of wealth and luxury, had wanted no like or taste for such things. But, the ordinary folks, living in humble huts and hamlets, had a thing left behind by their forebears, they cling to it as opposite ends do. And, surprisingly, they still continue to do so in some way or other, as we shall see later.

Corruption was, in short, a hallmark of high places in the medieval age. It was pretty widespread in the Sultanate period. Even the regimes of the great Mughals, which are praised for several nice things, were badly mired in it. 'Extortion of revenue and perversion of justice were the orders of the day' – in most of them. 'Those serving the kings and feudal barons became the instruments of tainted money.' The anti-corruption measures taken by some rulers – Akbar, for instance – were more often, than not, far from effective. Their failure to check corruption and other evils cost the Mughals their empire.

Corruption was rampant in the domains of Delhi Sultans including the Lodhi's. A monument built by the Lodhis at the Lodhi Garden, New Delhi.







### Corruption in Mughal Empire

Corruption was one of the reasons for the fall of the great empire of the Mughals, say the knowledgeable.

'Whoever has money, whether loyal or disloyal, can get his business settled as he likes by paying for it,' said Sher Shah about the Mughal Government during the reign of Babur. Akbar introduced several regulations to discipline the officers, but not with much success. The *amirs* did as they pleased,' says Badauni curtly.

"In these days... everybody's only thought is to steal", says Manucci about the conditions.

In India, towards the close of Aurangzeb's reign, an honest Government official was, as the saying goes, as rare as a horned rabbit.

- Eraly, *The Mughal World*

A rare Mughal gold coin much in demand for corrupt dealings.

