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More Human Values: Chanakya, Satyarthi, Patkar, Seshan

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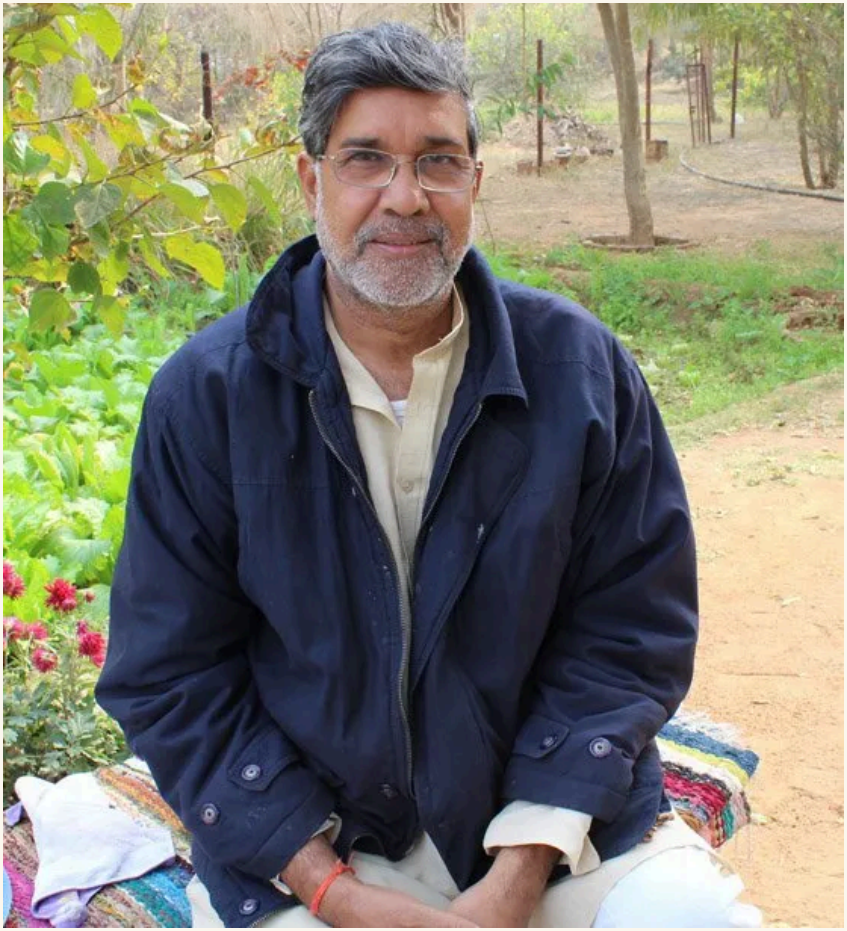
What do a royal adviser, a child-rights campaigner, a dam protester, an election chief and a fasting activist share? Each tried to change society for the public good.

This lesson compares five reformers. It covers Chanakya, Kailash Satyarthi, Medha Patkar, T. N. Seshan and Anna Hazare. It also covers the January 2026 acquittal of Medha Patkar.

The idea in brief

- **Chanakya:** adviser of Chandragupta; the Arthashastra on statecraft.
- **Satyarthi:** Bachpan Bachao Andolan, 1980; Nobel Peace Prize 2014.
- **Patkar:** Narmada protests from 1985.
- **Seshan:** CEC, 1990-96; enforced the Model Code of Conduct.
- **Hazare:** April 2011 Jantar Mantar fast; Jan Lokpal Bill.
- **2026:** Delhi court acquits Patkar in 2006 defamation case.



Kailash Satyarthi, who campaigned against child labour. Photo: Leandro Uchoas, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0.

Chanakya and the Arthashastra

Who was Chanakya?

Chanakya is better known as Kautilya. He was a Brahmin minister under Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Mauryan Empire.

Tradition says he helped the young Chandragupta rise to the Nanda throne. The details of his life come mostly from legend, not from firm records. So write ‘according to tradition’ in an exam answer.

Sources: southasia.ucla.edu

What is the Arthashastra?

The Arthashastra is a political treatise attributed to Kautilya. He is said to have written it as an instruction manual for the young ruler.

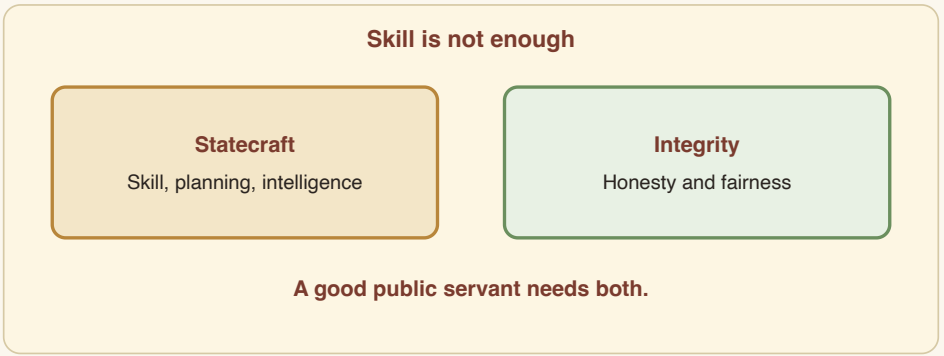
Scholars note that the book in its present form probably is not the exact text Kautilya wrote. It is likely based on a text he wrote.

Sources: worldhistory.org

Why does Chanakya matter for ethics?

The book recommends spies and secret agents on a large scale. Many readers call it a work of realpolitik, meaning politics based on power, not on moral principle.

This makes it a useful test case. A leader needs skill and planning. But a modern public servant must stay honest, even when deceit looks useful. So read the Arthashastra as history and as a study of power, not as a guide to personal conduct.



Clever statecraft must be matched with honest conduct.

Quick check 1. Historians agree that Chanakya and Kautilya were certainly the same person. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 2. The Arthashastra is a treatise on statecraft attributed to Kautilya. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Kailash Satyarthi: Freeing Children from Work

Who is Kailash Satyarthi?

Kailash Satyarthi was born on 11 January 1954 in Vidisha, India. In 1980 he gave up a good career as an electrical engineer to start a crusade against child servitude.

He founded the Bachpan Bachao Andolan, or Save Childhood Movement, in 1980. It works for the education and freedom of children.

Sources: nobelprize.org

Why did he win the Nobel Peace Prize?

In 2014 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Malala Yousafzai. The Nobel Committee honoured their struggle against the suppression of children and young people, and for the right of all children to education.

The Committee said Satyarthi, maintaining Gandhi's tradition, led peaceful protests against the grave exploitation of children for financial gain. It also noted that a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, joined in a common struggle.

Sources: nobelprize.org

How big is the problem he fights?

The Committee noted that about 168 million children worked as labourers around the world. In 2000 the figure was 78 million higher.

So the numbers fell, but the goal is still far away. The prize was meant to push the world closer to ending child labour.

Quick check 3. Kailash Satyarthi shared the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize with Malala Yousafzai. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 4. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan was founded by Medha Patkar. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Medha Patkar and the Narmada Movement

What did Medha Patkar start?

In 1985 Medha Patkar began organising marches and rallies against the Sardar Sarovar project on the Narmada river. The movement became known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, or Save the Narmada Movement.

The protests were peaceful. She was repeatedly beaten and arrested by the police. The project's dam and canal system would displace some 320,000 villagers, mostly from tribal communities.

Sources: goldmanprize.org

What was the ethical question?

A dam gives water and power to many people. But it also drowns the homes of some. Who pays that price, and were they asked first?

This is the clash between a larger public good and the rights of a few. Good policy needs fair rehabilitation for those who lose their homes.

What happened in court?

In October 2000 the Supreme Court decided, by a two-to-one majority, to allow work to continue on the half-finished dam. Medha Patkar vowed to keep fighting.

So the movement lost this round in court. But it kept public attention on displaced people for years.

Sources: greenleft.org.au

> **Quick check 5.** In 2000 the Supreme Court, by a two-to-one majority, allowed work on the Sardar Sarovar Dam to continue. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 6. The Narmada movement's main concern was displaced villagers. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

T. N. Seshan: Reform Without a New Law

Who was T. N. Seshan?

T. N. Seshan was the 10th Chief Election Commissioner of India. He served from 12 December 1990 to 11 December 1996.

His term is remembered as a turning point for the Election Commission. He did it largely by enforcing existing rules more firmly, not by making new rules.

Sources: businesstoday.in

What did he change?

He turned the Model Code of Conduct into a much more visible tool of election discipline. During his term the Commission acted against bribing voters, misuse of government machinery and religion in campaign speeches.

He also pushed strongly for photo identity cards for voters. Their rollout was hard because the electorate was huge.

Why is his example important?

Seshan showed that a public servant can raise standards by using the full power of the office he already holds. He did not wait for Parliament to act.

This is ethical courage. It means doing your duty firmly, even when powerful people dislike it.

Sources: newslaundry.com

Quick check 7. Seshan served as Chief Election Commissioner from 1990 to 1996. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 8. Seshan's main method was getting Parliament to pass a new election law. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Anna Hazare and the Lokpal Movement

What did Anna Hazare do in 2011?

In April 2011 the 73-year-old Gandhian Anna Hazare began a fast unto death at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. He demanded a joint committee of government and civil society to draft the Lokpal Bill.

The civil society draft was called the Jan Lokpal Bill. The government soon issued a gazette notification forming a joint committee headed by Pranab Mukherjee. Hazare called off his fast on the fifth day.

Sources: deccanherald.com

Why did the fast get so much support?

Hundreds of people came out to support him in the first two days. Many young people said that an old man giving up food for the country had inspired them.

This shows how a moral appeal can move public opinion. A fast works because the public cares about the person and the cause.

Sources: aljazeera.com

Quick check 9. Anna Hazare began his April 2011 fast at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 10. The Jan Lokpal Bill was a draft prepared by social activists. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Different Routes to Reform

How do these five compare?

Chanakya shaped the state from inside, as an adviser.

Satyarthi used peaceful protest and rescue work for children.

Patkar organised people who would lose land to a dam.

Seshan used the power of an office to enforce the rules.

Hazare used fasting and public pressure for a law.

What do they share?

Four of the five put a public cause above personal gain and used lawful, mostly peaceful means. Chanakya is the odd one out, because his book accepts deceit as a tool of power.

For the exam, link each name with its method. Examiners like to ask ‘who did what, and how’.



Same goal of public good, different methods.

Quick check 11. All five leaders used exactly the same method to bring change. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Current Affairs: Medha Patkar Acquitted in a 2006 Defamation Case

What did the Delhi court decide?

On 24 January 2026 a Delhi court acquitted Medha Patkar in a criminal defamation case filed by Delhi Lieutenant Governor V. K. Saxena. The case was nearly two decades old.

The court held that the key fact, that she made the alleged statements, remained unproved. She got the benefit of doubt.

Sources: business-standard.com

How did the case begin?

It arose from a TV programme aired on 20 April 2006. Saxena said Patkar made damaging remarks about him there.

The case began in Ahmedabad. In 2010 it was moved to Delhi on the Supreme Court's directions.

Quick check 12. The Delhi court in January 2026 held that Medha Patkar was guilty of defamation. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Traps

Say 'according to tradition' for Chanakya being Kautilya.

Satyarthi: Bachpan Bachao Andolan (1980), Nobel Peace Prize 2014, shared with Malala.

Patkar: began the Narmada protests in 1985; the Supreme Court allowed the dam to go on in 2000 (2-1).

Seshan: 10th CEC, 1990-96; enforced the Model Code of Conduct.

Hazare: April 2011 fast at Jantar Mantar for the Jan Lokpal Bill.

Practice MCQs

1. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan, a movement against child labour, was founded by:

A. T. N. Seshan

B. Kailash Satyarthi

C. Anna Hazare

D. Medha Patkar

See answer ↓

2. The Nobel Peace Prize for 2014 was awarded to Kailash Satyarthi along with:

A. Wangari Maathai

B. Mother Teresa

C. Malala Yousafzai

D. Aung San Suu Kyi

See answer ↓

3. Medha Patkar began mobilising marches and rallies against the Sardar Sarovar project in:

A. 1975

B. 1985

C. 1995

D. 2005

See answer ↓

4. In October 2000 the Supreme Court, in the Sardar Sarovar dam case, by a two-to-one majority:

A. Handed the project to the Election Commission

B. Moved the dam to another river

C. Allowed work on the half-finished dam to continue

D. Cancelled the dam project

See answer ↓

5. T. N. Seshan, known for strict enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, served as Chief Election Commissioner during:

A. 1980 to 1986

B. 1990 to 1996

C. 2000 to 2006

D. 1970 to 1976

See answer ↓

6. Anna Hazare began his April 2011 fast, demanding a joint committee to draft the Lokpal Bill, at:

A. Sabarmati Ashram

B. Marina Beach

C. Jantar Mantar, Delhi

D. Ralegan Siddhi

See answer ↓

7. In January 2026 a Delhi court, in the criminal defamation case filed by V. K. Saxena, held that Medha Patkar was:

A. Guilty and fined

B. Acquitted, with the benefit of doubt

C. Sent to a jail term of two years

D. Barred from public life

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** The correct answer is **Kailash Satyarthi**. He left engineering in 1980 and founded the movement. He shared the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize with Malala Yousafzai. Memory hook: Satyarthi saves childhood. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** The correct answer is **Malala Yousafzai**. The Nobel Committee honoured their struggle against the suppression of children and for the right of all children to education. Memory hook: a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, in one struggle. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** The correct answer is **1985**. Her peaceful protests grew into the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The project would displace some 320,000 villagers, mostly from tribal communities. Memory hook: Narmada protests, 1985. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** The correct answer is **allowed work on the half-finished dam to continue**. The movement lost this round, and Medha Patkar vowed to keep fighting. Memory hook: dam allowed, fight goes on. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** The correct answer is **1990 to 1996**. He served from 12 December 1990 to 11 December 1996 as the 10th Chief Election Commissioner. Memory hook: Seshan means 1990s election reform. ↑ Q5
6. **C.** The correct answer is **Jantar Mantar, Delhi**. The 73-year-old Gandhian called off the fast on the fifth day, after the government formed a joint committee headed by Pranab Mukherjee. Memory hook: April 2011, Jantar Mantar. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** The correct answer is **acquitted, with the benefit of doubt**. The court said the key fact, that she made the alleged statements, remained unproved. The case arose from a 2006 TV programme. Memory hook: not proved, so acquitted. ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** Tradition links them, and the details of his life come mostly from legend. ↑ 1
2. **True.** It is a political treatise written as an instruction manual for a ruler. ↑ 2
3. **True.** The Committee honoured both for children's rights and the right to education. ↑ 3
4. **False.** It was founded by Kailash Satyarthi in 1980. ↑ 4
5. **True.** The decision let the half-finished dam go ahead. ↑ 5

6. **True.** The project would displace some 320,000 villagers, mostly from tribal communities. ↑ 6
7. **True.** He was the 10th person to hold the post. ↑ 7
8. **False.** He mainly enforced existing electoral rules more firmly. ↑ 8
9. **True.** He demanded a joint committee to draft the Lokpal Bill. ↑ 9
10. **True.** It was a civil society draft for a stronger ombudsman. ↑ 10
11. **False.** Their methods differed: advice, rescue, organising, enforcement and fasting. ↑ 11
12. **False.** It acquitted her and gave her the benefit of doubt. ↑ 12

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