

ILLUSTRATING POLITICAL THOUGHTS IN ANCIENT VIEW

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[The present paper aims at expounding Indian political thoughts as elucidated in ancient Indian literature. In Vedic literature we do not prescribe systematic political structure that existed but it can be understood through the concepts like kingship, duties towards subjects etc. The political theories are to be found in a rich variety of resources ranging from the early Vedas to the post Vedic literature.]

I

Literature on Politics

Sanskrit literature is certainly the literature of every human activity and a rich collective storehouse of wider aspects of life. It touches every sphere of life but political and socio-legal treatises cover a great deal of space. Political concepts are found in almost every branch of Sanskrit Literature. Vedas presents the concept of patriotism.¹ *Mahābhārata* in *śānti-parva* provides outstanding information about the political and administrative system of the time. *Dhanuroveda*, *Purāṇas*, *Smṛti-śāstrās-Manusmṛti*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, etc. illustrate political ideas.

In present outline mainly politically oriented few texts are as follows:

1. *Arthaśāstra*
2. *Kāmāndakī-nīti*
3. *Śukra-nīti*
4. *Rājanīti-Ratnākara* of Chandesvara
5. *Rajnītiprākāśa* of Mitramisra
6. *Nītimayūkha* of Nilakantha
7. *Nīti-vākyamṛta* of Somadeva Shastri

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya (fourth century B.C.) explicates following areas such as concerning discipline, the duties of government superintendents, concerning law, removal of thorns, conduct of courtiers, source of sovereign states, end of the six-fold policy, about vices and calamities, work of an invader, war, conduct of corporations, concerning a powerful enemy etc.

The *Kāmāndakī-nīti* by Kāmāndaka (fourth century A.D.) deals with the subjects like description of king, his duties, the constituents of a good government, the acquirements of a king, dangers of a king, an account of the essential constituents of government namely king, ministers, kingdom, castle, treasury, army and allies, how a king should protect himself and his son, The construction and the account of Maṇḍala, how a king should hold counsels with his ministers and their bearing on good government, A description of the military expedition. *Śukra-nīti* (the date of the work has not been fixed yet) is mainly based on Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*. It focus upon duties of princes, functions of the crowned prince and others state-officials, features of friends and allies, treasure, army etc. And so on other texts like *Rājanīti-Ratnākara* and *Rajnitiprākṣa* etc. refer to the models of polity.

In Vedic literature there are scattered passages which present significant account on the theory of practice of government in the contemporary times. The material is quite copious in *Atharvaveda*² than *Rgveda*.³

Rgveda refers two words for nation - *rāṣṭram* and *rāṣṭrī-*

(a) *rāṣṭrī īśvaranāmaidat*.⁴

(b) *rāṣṭrī rājanaśīlā*.⁵

(c) *rāṣṭram rājyam*.⁶

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa mentions word *rāṣṭra* many times —

(a) *śrīḥ vai rāṣṭra*.⁷

(b) *savitā rāṣṭram rāṣṭrapati*.⁸

(c) *rāṣṭram vāāśvamedhaḥ*.⁹

(d) *rāṣṭram hariṇaḥ*.¹⁰

Concept of the king and kingship

Exact historical details about the origin of kingship are not found. In Ṛgveda *Indra* is considered as the most powerful deity. A *rchā* clarifies that *Indra's* strength is derived from *devas*.¹¹ *Aitreyā Brāhmaṇa* states that when *devas* were defeated by *asuras* they thought that this defeat was because they had no king. So they decided to elect *Indra* as their king because he was the most powerful among them.¹² *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions that a king rules over many because he is the vicegerent of *Prajāpati*, the lord of beings.¹³ *Manusmṛti* points out that to protect everything God created a king and He took the elements from *Indra*, *Anila* (Vāyu), *Yama*, *Arka* (the Sun), *Agni*, *Varuṇa*, *Candra*, *Vitteśa* (Kuber).¹⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes the duties of a king before taking the responsibility of the nation which makes clear that the foremost duty of the king is to establish wellbeing of the subjects- *iyam te rāḍ itirāyamevāsminnetaddhadhātīyathainamāsādayati yantāsi yamana iti yantārāmevāinametadyamanamāsām prajānām karoti dhruvo'si dharuṇa iti druvamevāinametaddharuṇamasminloke karoti kṛṣyai toā kṣemāya toā rayyai toā poṣāya tveti sādhave tvetyevaitadāha*.¹⁵

The position of the king is described as servant and subjects are like master –

urje toā balāya toā rāṣṭrabṛtyāya paryuhāmi śataśāradāya.¹⁶

Concept of Rājadharmā

In Sanskrit literature a very extensive account is mentioned about *Rājadharmā*. In *Mahābhārata* a wide-ranging portion specially in śanti parva is devoted to *rājadharmā* or the duties of the king and about governance.

Mainly *dharmas* of kings are known as *rājadharmā* It covers all duties, responsibilities and code of conduct for a king in various circumstances.

It also includes all four *purṣārthas-dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa-trivargo* 'tra samāsakto *rājadharmeṣu kaurava*.
mokṣadharmāśca viśpaṣṭaḥ sakalo 'tra samāhitaḥ.¹⁷

- (i) Truth is the most important ethical value for a king. Except truth nothing is *siddhikāraka* for a king. It is only truth which provides immense happiness not only in *ihaloka* and *parloka*-

*na hi satyādr̥te kiṃcid rājāāṃ vai siddhikāraṇam.
satye hi rājānirataḥ pretya ccha ca nandati.*¹⁸

- (ii) A king should always use four types of means of knowing for *sva* and *para*- those are *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison and analogy), *śabda* (word testimony of past or present reliable experts)-

*pratyakṣṇānumānena tathaupamyopadeśataḥ
parīkṣyāste mahārāja sve pare caiva sarvadā.*¹⁹

- (iii) For the welfare of the subjects a king should drop off all the vices or evil habits-

*vyasanāni ca sarvāni tyajethābhèridakṣina.*²⁰

- (iv) A king should collect wealth just like *kuber* (lord of wealth) and in justice he should act like *Yamarāja*- *Kośasyopārjanaratir yamavaiśravaṇopamaḥ.*²¹

- (v) Characteristic of a king are as follows- he should wise, able to know the weak points of the enemies, capable to understand justice and injustice for every *varṇa*, free from anger, helpful to the needy and sheltered people, laborious, kind hearted, and also a king is perfect in all manner if his all started duties and deeds beautifully ends up-

*prājāo nyāyaguṇopetaḥ pararandhreṣu tatparaḥ
sudarśaḥ sarvavarṇānāṃ nayāpanayavit tathā.
kṣiprakāri jītakrodhaḥ suprasādo mahāmanāḥ
arogaprakṛtir yuktaḥ kriyāvān avikatthanāḥ.
arabdhānyeva kāryāṇi na paryavasitāni ca
yasya rājñāḥ pradṛṣyante sa rājārājasatta maḥ.*²²

Hence it may be believed that *rājadharmā* was the uppermost objective of the entire world that it comprises within itself all the rules of administration of justice.²³ *Śukra-nīti* prescribes that one should learn from *śāstra* what are good and evil actions. Perform only good ones and quit evil deeds. It is explicitly mentioned that a king is the cause of good or evil, he is the prompter of his age.²⁴

Justice and Penalties

Penalties and punishments are necessary to escape from discrimination. It is also important to achieve desired target and to

guard all that is achieved already. King should have both kind-heartedness and cruelty to maintain the balance.²⁵

Basically *daṇḍanīti* help out the individual and the state for new achievements to protect as well as to increase what has been acquired. It deals with the social political and economic relationships and points out how they are to be accurately systematized and assimilate with one another. This policy of punishment not only protects the state but also leads towards ideal path-

*daṇḍena sahitā hyeṣā lokarakṣaṇakārikā?*²⁶
daṇḍena nīyate ceyam daṇḍam nayati cāpy uta.
*daṇḍanīriti proktā triṃl lokān anuvartate.*²⁷

According to Manu it is *daṇḍa* who is the factual king, real leader and protector-

*sa rājā puruṣo daṇḍaḥ sa netā śāsītā ca saḥ.*²⁸

It is ultimately source of all well being, helpful to what is not achieved yet, protects all achieved sources -*Yogakṣemasādhano daṇḍaḥalabdhalābhārthā labdhaparirakṣiṇī.*²⁹

In *Manusmṛti* basic principle of *daṇḍa* is mentioned clearly that if it is used too insensitively, the subjects are troubled on the other hand if it is used too lightly then the king will not be held in terror but if it is used in the right way, the subjects are happy and kingdom progresses.³⁰

On the whole *daṇḍanīti* establishes law and order in society. To avoid discrimination it is the best strategy.

Fundamental sources for the prosperity of the state

Vedic literature prescribes the basic values to strengthen the state. *Atharvaveda* mentions eight the most important armours for a flourishing state or *Rāṣṭra*-

satyam brhadṛtamugram dikṣā tapo brahma yajñāḥ pṛthivīm dhārayanti.
*sa no bhūtasya bhavasya patyanurum lokam pṛthivī naḥ kṛṇotu.*³¹

(i) *Satya*-Truth is the highest virtue. It provides steadiness to earth.³² *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* remarks that truth alone triumphs- '*Satyameva jayate.*'³³

(ii) *Bṛhad*- Ambition is very important for citizen of the state. As Vedic lessons prescribe- *ucchrāyasva mahate saubhagāya.*³⁴

- (iii) *Ṛta*- Respect to law of nature is very essential because if a king or the citizens of the state behave against law of nature then it would turn in to adversity.
- (iv) *Ugra*- For the welfare of the nation *ugra* attitude is defined as *vasu* in Vedic literature.
- (v) *Dikṣā-saṁskar* ceremonies are required to get rid of bodily dirt.
- (vi) *Tapa*- It is very vital virtue to attain even a small goal. *Tattirīyaupaniṣad* emphasis on the importance of *tapa-rtam tapaḥ satyam tapaḥ śrutam tapaḥ damastapaḥ śamstapo dānam tapo yajāstapo bhrubhuvaḥ svaḥ brahmaitadupāsva etat tapaḥ*.³⁵
- (vii) *Brahma*- It denotes knowledge and science which is mandatory for the progress of the nation.
- (viii) *Yajāa*- Whole human life is a *yajāa* in itself. It is mingled in each and every sphere of life. All three meaning of *yajña-“devapūjā, saṁgatikaraṇa, and dāna”* are compulsory for the wellbeing of the nation.

Nirukta prescribes the unity of place and consumption of human beings-

*tatra saṁsthānaikatvam saṁbhogaikatvam copekṣitavyam.
Tatrānānararāṣṭramiva*.³⁶

Model of ideal nation

Yajurveda illustrates a perfect and prosperous nation. Accordingly, our nation may have great warriors, horses, oxen and cow etc. animals may be useful, attributed women, good speakers in assemblies, courageous youth, rain as per need, fruits, medicines and grains may plenty for everyone and everybody remain happy and safe-

*ā brahman brāhmaṇo brahmaparacasī jāyatāmārāṣṭre
rājanyaḥśūra iṣavyo' tivyādhi mahāratho jāyatām
dogdhi dhenurvoḍhānaḍvānāsuḥ saptiḥ purandhiryoṣā
jiṣṇu ratheṣṭhā sabhāyo yuvāsya yajamānasya
vīro jāyatām nikāme nikāme na parjanyo varṣatu
phalavatyo na'oṣadhayaḥ pacyantām yogakṣemo naḥ kalpatām*.³⁷

A very significant prayer for the constant progress and happiness is described in *Yajurveda*-

*Vayam rāṣṭre jāgryāma purohitāḥ.*³⁸

Notes and References :

- ¹ *vayam rāṣṭre jāgryāma purohitāḥ.*- *Yajurveda*, 5/9/23
- ² *atharvaveda*, 3/4-5; 6/88; 5/19; 7/12; 6/40/2; 20/127
- ³ *Ṛgveda*, 10/191/173; 166; 1/124/8; 97.6; 78.1; 4/42; 7/6/5, 6/28/6
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 6/4/5
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 8/100/10
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 7/84/2
- ⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 6/7/3/7
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 11/4/3/14
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 13/1/6/3
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 13/2/9/8
- ¹¹ *Ṛgveda*, 1/80-81
- ¹² *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 10/8/12
- ¹³ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5/4/7
- ¹⁴ *arāṅke hi loke'smin sarvato vidrute bhayāt.
raksārthamasya sarvasya rājānamasṃjatprabhuḥ.
indrānilayamārkāṇāmgneśca varuṇasya ca.
candravitteśayoścaiva mātṛā nirhr̥tya śāśvataḥ.*-*Manusmṛti*, 7/3-4
- ¹⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5/2/1/25
- ¹⁶ *Atharvaveda*, 19/37/3
- ¹⁷ *Mahābhārata*, śanti parva, 56/4
- ¹⁸ *Mahābhārata*, śanti parva, 56/17
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, śanti parva, 56/41
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, śanti parva, 56/42
- ²¹ *Ibid*, śanti parva, 57/18
- ²² *Ibid*, śanti parva, 57/30-32

- ²³ *evaṃ dharmān rājadharmeṣu sarvān; sarvāvasthaṃ saṃpralīnān nibodha. sarve dharmā rājadharmapradhānāḥ. sarvā vidyā rājadharmeṣu yuktāḥ sarve lokā rājadharme pravṛṣṭāḥ-Mahābhārata, śanti parva, 63/25; 63/27; 63/29;*
- ²⁴ *yugapravartako rājā dharmādharmaprasikṣnāt. yugānām ca prajānām na do aḥ kintu nṛpasya tu.- Śukra-nīti, 4/1/60*
- ²⁵ *Mṛdurhi rājā satataṃ laṅghyo bhavati sarvaśaḥ. Tikṣṇāccodvijate lokatasmādubhayam āśrya -Mahābhārata, śanti parva, 56/21*
- ²⁶ *Ibid, śanti parva, 59/78*
- ²⁷ *Ibid, śanti parva, 59/79*
- ²⁸ *Manusmṛti, 7/17*
- ²⁹ *Mahābhārata, śanti parva, 59/9*
- ³⁰ *Manusmṛti, 7/19*
- ³¹ *Atharvaveda, 12/1/1*
- ³² *Satenottabhitābhūmiḥ.- Atharvaveda, 14/1/1*
- ³³ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 3/1/6.*
- ³⁴ *Rgveda, 5/4/20*
- ³⁵ *Tattirīyaupaniṣad, 10/8*
- ³⁶ *Nirukta, 7/5/8-9*
- ³⁷ *Yajurveda, 22/22*
- ³⁸ *Ibid, 5/9/23*

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