Research Article

Sources of Ancient Political Thought

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Abstract: Indian political thought aims at achieving synthesis rather than analysis. This all embracing idea of the State makes politics superior to all other branches or forms of human activity. Agriculture, irrigation, famines, communications are all treated as policy works. The Ancient Indian Thought did not emphasise that the State's Chief function is to make and enforce laws for the regulation of individual behaviour. The liberty of the individual had been the focus of attention in the political speculation of the west. As a result liberty of the individual received marginal importance. Further, the thrust on the welfare functions also seems to have minimised the liberty. This was essentially due to paternalism of the State. Mahabharatha and Arthashastra are two important works on the science of polity. The Mahabharata account seems to be partly legendary and partly historical. It is said that Brahmadeva composed a monumental work on science of polity which was successively abridged by Shiva, Vishalakhsa, Indra, Brihaspathi, Sukra, Manu and Bharadvaja. During the period, 200 A.D. to 300 A.D. few works on politics appeared presumably because of foreign invasions and alien rule. In fact there was no important work on polity except a few references.

Keywords: Rajyasastra, Dandaneethi, Nithisastra and Rajadharma.

Introduction

In ancient Indian thought Political Science was known by different terms like Rajyasastra, Dandaneethi, Nitisastra and Rajadharma.

The very nomenclature used in this regard is expressive of its mutlifacetedness and points to its astonishing range. Since Monarchy was the most common form of Government, the science of politics was called the science of State, i.e., Rajyasastra. According to Manu, the great law-giver of ancient times the sanction behind the State is force. It is said when all are sleeping, Danda keeps awake Danda is Law and Dandaneethi deals with social, political and economic relationships and directs how they are to be organized and integrated with one another. Works on Dandaneethi were done by Usanas and Prajapathi.

Nithisastra means proper guidance. Neethisastra denotes science of wisdom and right course. Since the 5th century A.D., when Kamandaka and Sukka called their books Nithisastra the subject had become very popular. Later, many works on State-craft appeared bearing the prefix Niti as in Nithikalpataru, Nithichandrika, Nithiratnakara, and Nithiprakasha. Nithisastra had become sin-education for the stability and progress of society in all directions (F.W. Thomas[1]). Arthasastra is another term used for the science of politics. The actual meaning of the word is science of wealth. The word Artha, also means territory, Koutilya says that Arthasastra is the science which deals with the acquisition and protection of territory. The most important book on the science of polity is supposed to be his work

Arthasastra. The Amarakosa equates Dandaneethi with Arthasastra. Gradually, the science of politics became popular as RajanithiSastra.

Sources
Literature on the science of polity has appeared science 500 B.C. The earlier-phase was the age of Vedas and the Brahmanas in which there were obvious references to the theory and practice of Government. There are references to Government and kingship in all the first three Vedas. In the Samhitas of Yajurveda there are numerous passages about different casts and political institutions. The Eighth Century B.C. was an age of specialisation. The beginning of the school of politics is traced to this age. It is noteworthy that prior to the 7th century B.C. (V. P. Varma[2]) the country was divided into small kingdoms ruled by kings assisted by kings assisted by sages and eminent scholars. The dialogues between the kings and their advisers on matters of state and state craft must have been illuminating. In that some of them cause to form real tradition in this regard and some found their way into books on political science, since quite a few books on politics had appeared by the 7th century B.C.

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The views of Manu, Brihaspati, Sukra, Usanas and Vishalaksha figuring in Shantiparva of Mahabharatha and Arthasastra of Koutilya give a fair idea of Ancient Indian polity. The Shantiparva has an extensive section devoted to the Raja Dharma. Sabhaparva of Mahabharatha projects an image of ideal administration. It is suggested that Mahabharatha might be dated back to a period than that of Manusmriti.

The approach of Arthasastra is secular. The main topic of discussion is the study of state including problems connected with kingship, civil administration, law, foreign policy, war and peace and welfare, etc. Arthasastra is mainly concerned with the practical problems of Government. But its authorisations and also the time to which the author belonged are in dispute and have given rise to controversies.

Koutliya was the founder of a school of politics. South Indian Epigraphs reveal that Koutilya was known for his statesmanship. Koutilya had superseded all his predecessors as a writer and thinker on politics.

The Smrutis were written during the period, 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. In these works the duties of the King, the functions of the different officers, law, and foreign policy were discussed. These works were not as systematic as Arthasastra. They also discuss Varnadharma, Ashramadharma and Prayaschitta.

Later, i.e., during the period, 200 A.D. to 300 A.D. few works on politics appeared presumably because of foreign invasions and alien rule. In fact there was no important work on polity except a few references to it in literary works like Tirukkural and Silappadikaram. The Kamandakiya Nitisara was composed in the Gupta age. The author of this work is unknown but the book contains the gist of Koutilyas Arthasastra. The Nitivakyamritha written by Somadeva Suri in 960 A.D. is a brief account of the earlier political thought which is useful to historians of political thought. The Sukraniti was written by Sukra, but the date of its composition is unknown. This work gives a comprehensive account of the administrative

machinery and the polity, envisaged by Sukra which is monarchical. Interestingly, it presents a vivid picture of judicial administration and welfare state. The work, undoubtedly, is more informative than the other works. The Puranas of the Gupta and post-Gupta period also deal with State and Government.

From 1000 A.D. to 1700 A.D. a number of works which treated Dharma comprehensively had appeared. The discussion of polity figured in these works viz., Abhilashitartha Chinthamani of Someswara, Yukthikapataru of Bhojha, Rajanithiratnakara of Chandeswara, Amukthamalayada of Krishnadevaraya, Nithimaykuha, Neelakantha and Rajanitiprakasha of Mitramisra were some of the important works. Manasollasa of this period of Chalukya King Someswara (1125-1138 A.D.) is not a treatise and deals mostly with the life of the Kings.

There are number of books on the science of polity in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrita literatures. Regveda, Atharvanaveda, Satapathi, Aitareya, Taittriya and PanchavimsathiBrahmanas present valuable material on the science of polity. These works refer to the origin of the science of polity too. The Dharmasurtras and Smritis are largely, elaborate works on the duties of the King. Even works like PratignaYaugandharaygna, the Raghuvamsha, Malavikagnimithra, the Panchatantra, theHitopadesa, the Kadambari, the Harshacharitha and DasakuaraCharitha and the Rajatarangini discuss the science of polity. Buddhist literature like Digghanikaya, Chullaragga and the Jatakas in Pali refer to the nature and working of ancient Indian Polity[3].

In scriptions on stone and copper are an extremely important source of informationabout the ancient Indian Polity. They furnish information concerning the actual state of affairs under different governments and different kinds of administrations, territorial divisions, interstate relations, aims of the Government, duties of the Kings and the responsibilities of the Ministers etc.

Accounts given by the workers of Greek historians like Magasthenes's 'India' and others relating to Alexander's invasion of India are sources of immence importance. Other sources include the source of which is called 'Numismatics' and the legends inscribed on them.

Features of Ancient Indian Thought
The Ancient Indian approach to questions of polity and society are different from the Teutonic. It is an approach marked by profound cultural considerations. Indeed, whether the thought is social or political, it does not have the kind of theoretical thrust that the Western thought has. This may be attributed to the characteristic metaphysical bent of the Indian mind. Indian thought is not concerned with particular aspects of life, but with its totality. This explains why the Indian thought may seem unscientific, while the Western thought is analytic.

It is no wonder that Politics came to be recognised as a science, ages after it had developed. But it was not independent of religion and ethics. This is true to be expected because for Indians, especially the Hindu religious concepts and beliefs provide the frame within which various kinds of experience political, social, economic and cultural assume a meaningful form. This explains why the devine is believed to chasten earthly life. With this belief the social theory becomes part of the universal theory which comprises theology, metaphysics, tradition, logic, law, ethics, and economics. Indian thought is pre-eminently ethical in its persuasion. The State's function is not negative but positive in that it must consciously and actively stimulate virtue and promote the moral life. Thus political science functions as ethics

for the whole society. It is a science of man's duties in relation to himself, society and the world.

Hence the Indian thought aims at achieving synthesis rather than analysis. This all embracing idea of the State makes politics superior to all other branches or forms of human activity. Agriculture, irrigation, famines, communications are all treated as policy works. Arthashasthra[5] which is supposed to be concerned with statecraft, deals more with economics than politics itself. Diplomacy and fortification are integral parts of the political theory enforced in it. Espionage is dealt in astonishing detail in ancient thought. Public Finance is at the core of Government theory. Political theory's intimate relation to social organisation is a dominant feature of Ancient Indian Political Thought.

The central theme of the Western Political Thought is mostly concerned with state an even the central theme of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle. Rousseau and Hegel is State. But the Ancient Indian Thought restricted itself to the practical problems faced by the Monarch. Koutilya and Sukra have discussed in their books how the monarch should acquire and preserve his domains and deal with his enemies. Indeed the Ancient Indian Thought is more an art of Government rather than a theory of the state.

State and Society

In Indiana Thought State has been viewed as a concrete element. Indian thinkers never tried to define state as Western thinkers did. "State' has been treated as a positive concept unlike Western Thought where the State is treated as a necessary evil. Indeed, in ancient Indian Thought, the State has been considered a highest good on the earth.

The State has been thought to be conducive to the four-fold way office-'dharma', 'artha', "kama' and 'moksha'. The primary duty of the king is to protect the people and promote prosperity. There was a clear distinction between State and Society. Society was a socio-economic organisation with fundamental Institutions which the State could not attack or change. The 'Varna' system and four-fold way of life of human beings were beyond the control of the State. The spiritual goal of life and the means to achieve it could not be touched by the State. The social ideal was considered to be sacred. The State was, in many fields, not allowed to interfere with the society. This is one of the reasons why the state had not become totalitarian. The State was never an end in itself. It was only a means for the realisation of the four-fold objective of life and social harmony.

Indian thinkers endorsed the concept of organic unity of the State. It is believed that inter-relationships subsist among the seven limbs of the state. This is what is known as 'Saptanga' theory of the state. The various parts of the State are linked with one another like the organs of the human body. If any one of the limbs gets diseased or begins to function in an abnormal manner, the state suffers. The theory advocated was organic unity.

The parts of the State are called its 'Angas'. They are 'Swamy' (the king), 'Janapada' (population and territory), 'Bala' (the army), 'Durga' (the fortified capital), 'Kosa' (the treasury) and 'Mitra' (the allies). Some writers add 'Danda' to the list. This seven element theory i.e.,Saptanga theory has an important place in the Ancient Indian political Thought(W. A. Dunning[4]).

State is not an abstract concept for Ancient Indian Thought similar to Western Though, but a concrete entity. There is a specific mention of the purpose and aim of the State, which

included inthe duties of the king. The Ancient Indian Thought believed that God gave people a ruler to save them from anarchy and chaos in the state. The Mathsyanyaya implies the stronger overpowering the weak and exploiting. In other words, the bigger fish living on the smaller ones in the sea. This being the situation, the purpose of the state is mainly the preservation of internal peace and order by wielding the rod of chastisement. 'Danda' is the name given to the coercive power of the State. This is evident by the fact that the king's foremost duty is held to be maintenance and the promotion of righteousness among the people. The post of king seems to have been created to ensure for the people a life of peace and happiness.

The Ancient Indian Thought did not emphasise that the State's Chief function is to make and enforce laws for the regulation of individual behaviour. The foremost duty of the State was to enforce and maintain Dharma. Althought he Brahmins were given a key position in maintaining Dharma, the State in India did not become a theocracy dominated by a single caste or religion as it happened in Europe.

Since the State came into being to prevent anarchy, it became the symbol of law, order, justice and security. The state exists for securing a happy life which can be achieved only by following 'Dharma' 'Artha', 'Kama', 'Dharma' is concerned with individual and social maintenance of social order and enjoyment of life. For the enforcement of Dharma, the State was permitted to use 'Danda'.

The liberty of the individual had been the focus of attention in the political speculation of the west. But in the case of Ancient India, the social hierarchy based on varna dharma and the administrative structures deviced were such that the basic emphasis was on the performance of the respective functions. As a result liberty of the individual received marginal importance. Further, the thrust on the welfare functions also seems to have minimised the liberty. This was essentially due to paternalism of the State.

Centralisation was another features of the Ancient Indian polity. Even the enforcement of justice and law tended to be a royal function. Villages came under royal officers. All ships were owned and let by the State. Prostitutes were placed under the control of Royal department. Gambling was regulated and licences were issued by the State.

The functions and activities of the State in Ancient India covered almost all aspects of life. This did not mean that the liberty of the individual was drastically curtailed. The bureaucracy worked in close cooperation with trade-guilds. In these guilds the voice of the people counted a great deal. Moreover with the implementation of the principle of decentralisation to some extent and the extensive delegation of powers to village Panchayats, individual liberty was ensured in Ancient India. But later the appointment of Royal officers to supervise the local bodies strengthened the Central Government's Control, resulting in the curtailing of individual liberty. The cause of individual liberty in Ancient India may be examined from the point of view of the social background and the political system prevailing at that time.

The basis of social order was the caste system, which had legal sanctity. There prevailed a system of social gradation which militated against the exercise of liberty. In the modern sense, it could be attributed to the system of privileges characterising the Hindu social order. Certain objective conditions for liberty were missing. As C.P. Bhambri observes 'Centralisation', bureaucratisation, concentration of powers in the hands of the king, caste gradation were the factors "which curtailed the individual liberty in ancient India".

In the later Vedic period the institution of caste grew and occupied a prominent place in the social thought of that time. The caste system had a direct impact on the Governmental theory. The origin of caste is in the 'varna' system. The 'varna' system seemed to have emerged when differentiation between the Aryans and the Dravidians was made on the basis of colour leading to division in the primary ranks. Initially economic forces and warfare divided the community Into different groups of functionaries 'Function' was the basis for categorisation and gradually it became an ethical principle. Every individual should fulfill the function assigned to him. Caste determines the function of an individual. The theory of function is embodied in caste. A warrior's son is held to best fitted to be a warrior and should marry into a martial family to continue the martial tradition. Here the principle of heredity is observed. All sections of the society should observe endogamy and follow their hereditary occupations. It is mentioned that "Sudra' has been given the lowest rank and hence has no right to complain.

'Function' as crystallised in caste acquired a conspicuous position in Hindu social Thought. The duty of the individual is identified with the duty of the society and his welfare with social welfare. Even the moral purpose of the society and that of the individual are held to same. The rights of the individual merged into those of society. The performance of his function is his right and his rights are social rights.

There was no clear distinction between State and the Society. The Government was part of the society. The society itself was viewed as a political, religious, economic and military organisation. The political perspective was not emphasised. As a result, a distinct concept of state had not emerged. The terms 'Government and 'State' were synonymously used. Generally, all governments were monarchical. Hence 'King' had become synonymous with Government and state.

There was no conflict between secular and religious forces in Ancient India. Government was not sovereign in the Austinian sense of the term. It could not alter the social order at its will. The preserving of the social order was merely its function. It has coercive power but had to use it only in the interest of the society. Law had its ultimate source in the Divine will. Sovereignty was embodied in the law. But, still, no component of the society was absolutely sovereign. The Pluralistic theory of sovereignty is applicable here. The individual was a member of several groups of the State. State was merged into the social order. The Principles behind the social order were ominipotent. These principles were known as 'Dharma', Law, Virtue and Duty.

Kingship
Political Thought in Ancient India mainly concentrated on Monrachy as it was the most common form of Government. There is not as much speculation about the origin of the State as about the origin of kingship. This aspect is dealt in the 'ShanthiParva' of Mahabharatha in the dialogue between Yudhishtara and Bhishma. The Ancient Indian Thought has advanced three main theories about the origin of kingship, the theory propounded in the AithareyaBrahmana in the Vedic age, the divine origin theory putforth in the 'ShanthiParva of Mahabharatha, the Smritis of Manu and Yagnavalkya, some of the Puranas and the Social Contract theory of Buddhist writings. Buddhist writings are secular in out look and emphasis. The Koutilya view is also secular in so far as the origin of the kingship is concerned. The Vedic theory holds that the origin of kingship was the result of military necessity(S Chand[6]).
"Shantiparva' of Mahabharatha constitutes an important source or the origin of the State. According to this, the origin of State took place through two stages. In the first stage people

exercised self-righteousness and governed themselves. However, this stage disappeared with degeneration of the character of the people, when they took to vices, like dirnking, greed, wrath and self-indulgence. This state of affairs disturbed the world order, destroyed sacred Vedas and created great concern for the God. As a result, the Gods sought the intervention of Brahma to remedy the situation. Accordingly Lord Brahma issued a sacred treatise which embodied the principle of the four-fold life of 'Dharma', Artha, Kama and Moksha. The concept ofDandaneethi has also emerged as an organic part of this theory which has come to be identified as a law of punishment. Similarly in response to the request made by the God, Lord Vishnu had selected a person to uphold and enforce the principles of the sacred treatise. Thus the institution of kingship seems to have had divine sanction. This was evident from the sources of Mahabharatha.

The main function of the king was to protect the earth in thought, word and deed and carryout the established laws in accordance with dandaneethi. In all the texts similar versions are given.

The secular theory of the origin of kingship is found in koutilyasArthashastra and Neethisastra and the works of Buddha and his followers. The anarchic situation made the people select from among themselves a person who could protect the righteous and banish those who deserved to banished. In return, they agreed to give him a portion of their rice production. This theory is contractual and secular in nature.

The writers made an attempt to limit the powers of the monarchy in order to ward off the dangers of despotism. But the society could not provide effective checks on the despotism of the King. People had the right to kill a despotic king. The choice before the people was between a despotic king and anarchy, i.e., a kingless state. People preferred the former to the latter. The ministry was also an important institution of the state in ancient India. The king, despite his proficiency in all the sciences, he could not act without reference to Ministers. As Sukra observed, "the Moarch who follows his own will is the cause of miseries, gets estranged from his kingdom and alienated with his subjects". The effectiveness and importance of the advice of the Ministry depended upon the personality of king. But normally, the advice of the Ministry was headed by the king. The Republican system forms a short-lived phase in the history of the Hindu Polity. But it marked a glorious period. The desire for self Government among Hindus was reflected in the rise of republican states.

Dharma
The concept of 'Dharma' is very comprehensive and includes topics like Law, Custom, Morality, Virtue, Religion, Duty, Piety and Religiousness. 'Dharma' is a concept which comprises rules that are intended to regulate the personal and social conduct of individuals and the collective behaviour of the community. The duty of the State, rather the aim of the State, is to protect and promote 'Dharma'. Dharma is eternal and has its source in Vedas. Both the king and the people are controlled by 'Dharma', Thus Dharma implies the democratic principle. The term 'Rita' is a derivative of Dharma' and stands for supreme law which governs and Controls nature. 'Nature' includes Gods also. Rita' is an organised principle of the Universe. Dharma insists on rewarding the right and punishing the evil. Manu says that 'Dharma' holds together the mineral, the plant, the animal and the human orders of life. 'Dharma' is a guiding principle to every individual.

Dharma's role in preserving the social and political order is more important than in ensuring the welfare of an individual, The study of politics was designated as 'Raja Dharma'. If a king

violates the dictates of the 'Dhamra' the people can revolt. The concept of 'Dharma' has made the Hindu Monarchy a limited one or a constitutional one.

Danda

The Means through which Dharma is established is 'Danda'. This concept has been referred to in Mahabharatha's 'Shanti Parva'. Bhishma tells Yudhistara that a king should always hold the rod of chastisement, and exercise 'Danda'. It is only through 'Danda' that a king can protecthis subjects. For fear of 'Danda' people would obey laws. There is a saying that 'Danda' keeps awake when everybody sleeps. Even 'Rajadharma' is identified with Dandaneethi. According to Koutiliya, 'Danda' is not merely a means or an instrument of punishment but a means of ensuring the security and prosperity of three sciences, the study of Vedas, the study of philosophy and the study of economics. It is said in 'Shanti Parva' that duly administered 'Danda' would make for virtuous action.

The role of 'Danda' in human life is both negative and positive. By making use of punishment to keep individual men and women away from the path of evil and wrong doing it can keepMathsyanyaya out of society which constitutes its negative aspect. On account of fear of Dana even robbers and decoits change their attitudes.

But 'Danda' has a positive role also to pay. The power of 'Danda' forces each individual and each 'Varna' to perform their respective duties. Morality and religion can flourish only under the shelter of 'Danda'. Law and order and peace are pre-conditions for social progress. Law and order can be maintained only when a king can punish all evildoers. In brief, 'Danda' is the instrument of public security, and as such it is the foremost political principle.

In Mahabharatha the concepts of Dandaneethi and Rajadharma have been developed. "Shanti Parva' of Mahabharata says that Bhishma considered Dandaneethi the science of Politics and Chastisement. He also considered the origin of Dandaneethi to be devine. But Koutilya consideres Dandaneeti a human work(S Chand[7]).

Bhishma says that in the beginning there was no king, no sovereignty, no evil and no chastisement, People lived righteously protecting one another. Gradually, greed for acquisition of property arose among men. This gave rise to rath, confusion, sexual indulgence and other evils. Righteous living disappeared. Gods were frightened and sought the help of Brahma, the Creator of the Universe(R. C. Gupta[8]). They complained that the human beings on the earth stopped doing pious deeds and indulged in vices. They requested him to do something to better their lot. Lord Brahma created a treatise of one lakh verses in which almost all the subjects were dealt with in detail.

Conclusion

This treatise was essential to the attainment of a happy and good life. It was a treatise on polity containing instructions for the proper organisations of the Government, the armed force alliance with other powers, enemies, allies, neutrals, Knowledge of weapons and their proper upkeeps, disorders among the troops, methods,dealing with the enemy, etc. There was also a chapter on virtues necessary for the growth and prosperity of the State as well as the vices which would cause decline and downfall. This treatise was a comprehensive document. The Lord said "For the good of the world and for establishing 'Dharma', 'Artha', and Kama,-virtue profit and pleasure-among them I have composed this science. Assisted by chastisement of Danda it will protect the world. Dealing with rewards and punishments, this science will operate among men. This came to be known as Dandaneethi. Dandaneethi was

studied and mastered by Lord Shiva. Since the span of human life was short, Shiva shortened the thesis to ten thousand verses Lord Indra reduced it to five thousand verses. Brihaspati further reduced it to three thousand, which was further cut down to one thousand verses. This is how the origin of science was traced to superhuman sources by Bhishma.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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