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DEPARTMENT OF MECHATRONICS ENGINEERING

19HST105 – ESSENCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIT 1 – ANCIENT INDIA & STATE POLITY

TOPIC 3 – KINGSHIP AND COUNCIL OF MINISTER ADMINISTRATION

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Kingship :

Monarchy was the form of government in ancient India as is clearly evident from early and later Vedic literature, from epics, Purāṇas etc. Different theories have been propounded by ancient political thinkers of India to account for the origin of the King and the State. The theories relating to the origin of Kingship may be accepted as the evidence for the origination of the State also, as there is no such theory on the origin of the State. Kauṭilya declared that the king is the State and therefore, the king is maintained as the head of the polity as he represents the State and thus it can be said that the theories related to the origin of the State ultimately ends up with the origination of the king. The State may be in existence from the same time the king came into existence.

The earliest reference to the theory of origin of king can be traced to the Brāhmaṇa literature. The Aitareyabrāhmaṇa has a passage where it is said that during the mahābhiṣeka ceremony, the gods with Prajāpati as their head agreed with the fact that Indra should be installed as the sovereign as he is the most vigorous, strong, valiant and perfect among the gods.This indicates the sovereignty of Indra through election.

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Regarding the origin of Indra's sovereignty another passage from the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa informs us that Prajāpati created Indra and sent him to the celestial world to rule over there. From these two passages the idea of divine origin of kingship can be gathered. The same theory of divine origin of kingship is emphasised in the passages of the Śāntiparva of the Mahābhārata where Bhīṣma told Yudhiṣṭhira how Pṛthu was crowned by the gods and sages for the protection of the people. [4] This account, according to P.V.Kane highlights the divine origin of kingship.

The Śāntiparva again contains passages to which the origin of kingship can be traced. Being devoid of a ruler when people went to Brahmā, he appointed Manu for this purpose to which Manu did not agree at first but later when people promised to offer him the shares of their produce Manu agreed and became the ruler.[6] P.V.Kane has opined that this theory points to the divine origin of kingship and not to a theory of contract.[7] On the other hand, Bhandarkar has accepted this same account as the Social contract theory of kingship where people afflicted with anarchy elected Manu as their king for safety and protection with the agreement of giving shares from their productions to the king.[8] [9] Kauṭilya has also given reference to Manu who was made king by the people suffering from anarchy like that of a large fish swallowing the small ones and the people even agreed to give share of their production to the king in return of protecting them.[10] This refers to the well-known maxim mātsyanyāya which is employed in describing the necessity of a king in anarchy.

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According to the ancient Indian political thinkers, there was a golden age when people were enjoying a harmonious life which was, in course of time, converted to the age of mātsyanyāya when people were degraded by evils of life. The Śāntiparva of the Mahābhārata puts forth the necessity of enthroning a person as a king for ending the evils of anarchy. It is said here that people living in an anarchical country cannot enjoy the wealth. Even the robbers of wealth can not enjoy their wealth as some other will again snatch the wealth and the process continues. So a king must be installed for protecting all or else the strong would have killed the weak like the way fishes do in the water.[11] . The Rāmāyaṇa has said that in a country devoid of a king no one could own anything, as people swallow each other like the fish.[12] Likewise, Manu in his Manusmṛti has said that in anarchy due to the absence of a king people kill the weak like fish do to other fish.

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Therefore, it can be summarised here from the above discussion that the kingship arose as a social need. That was the time of anarchy when people, run by the law of nature transformed to the law of inequality where distinction was made to strong and weak or rich and poor. When strong started extorting the weak, the balance of the society broke down and as a need the king was made who could govern all people under one roof. The Ṛgveda has also shown the failure of a society in the absence of a king.[14]

It is also said that the concept of kingship came into existence from military necessity. The Aitareyabrāhmaṇa has recorded a passage where it is described that when gods were defeated in a war against the demons they approached Soma and asked him to be their king. They pointed out that the reason behind their defeat was nothing but the absence of a king.[15] This shows that the kingship arose due to military necessity.

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Council of ministers :

Council of Ministers is a traditional name given to the supreme executive organ in some governments. It is usually equivalent to the term cabinet. The term Council of State is a similar name that also may refer to a cabinet, but the terms are not equal in certain countries (for example, in Spain and India[citation needed]). Councils of Ministers are usually composed of those government ministers who are responsible for a ministry. They are usually led by a President of the Council of Ministers, a term that is commonly translated, or used synonymously, as prime minister or premier.

In the beginning of the Vedic age people did not have a settled life and were nomads but with development in agriculture people started to settle down in groups. The organization was mainly tribal and the head of the tribe was supposed to be the raja or the King, though the concept of King had yet not developed. With the passage of time large kingdoms started to grow and by the 6th century BC there were 16 Mahajanapadas (Kingdoms).

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There were many small republics also in ancient India. These republics had some elements of democracy in their administration. The king (raja) was the supreme head of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches. He was assisted in administration by a number of officials. The members of the council of minister could give advice to the king, but final decisions were left to the king. The ministers and other officials were directly appointed by the king.

During the Mauryan period there existed both civil and military officials. They were paid a salary in cash. The highest official was paid the salary of 48000 panas (Unit of money) per year. The soldiers were paid 500 panas per year. There were officials who maintained the records of population, income and expenditure of government. We find reference to officials and clerks who collected income tax and custom duties. Spy system was an important feature of Mauryan administration.

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The royal agents and the spies could contact the king at any time and they reported to the king about various developments in his kingdom. The empire was divided into many provinces and each one of these provinces was governed by a governor and council of ministers. In the provinces there were local officials called rajukas, who became more powerful during the reign of Ashoka. There were certain departments which decided certain important matters of administration. There existed a standing army which was again controlled by certain committees.

Administration structure during the Gupta period was exceptionally good in spite of large empire. During the Gupta period also the administration was more or less like the Mauryas. The most important difference between the Gupta and Mauryan administration was centralization and decentralization of administration. In the Gupta administration, the governors of the provinces were more independent as compared to the Mauryans, where the administration was highly centralized.

Political ideals of ancient India :

In fact, very difficult to obtain a particular book or a piece of literature that describes the various sources of the ancient Indian political thought, which are scattered all over India. However, some dedicated scholars have made efforts to gather all the scattered information and arrange them in a comprehensive manner for better understanding of the subject.

Another difficulty in proper comprehension of the subject is the usage of certain terms and concepts. Despite these difficulties, it is important to acknowledge that some scholarly work was carried out in the field of ancient Indian political thought. Some of the widely available sources of classical Indian political thought are ancient monuments, religious works, epics and political system that were practiced during those times.

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1. The Vedas:

The Vedas are regarded as the authentic works of Gods at the time of the creation of the world and so are considered the original source of information. Though Vedas do not describe the political system that existed, information can be drawn from the concepts like King, Kingship, Saints or Rishis, etc., and their duties towards the subjects. It is interesting to note that institutions like sabha and samithi that are prevalent even in the modern days have their roots in the Vedic period.

2. The Mahabharata:

This Indian epic is considered a classic work on the art of politics. Certain episodes like Shanti Parva provide outstanding information related to political philosophy and administrative system and the political system of the time. The entire art of statecraft, diplomacy, war ethics and strategies, state relations and the like can be very well understood by making a reference to the Mahabharata.

3. The Arthashastra:

This work authored by Kautilya is again a masterpiece on polity. According to Prof Altekar, it is mainly concerned with the practical problems of governance and describes its machinery and functions both in times of war and peace. This work of Kautilya also highlights issues like taxation, diplomacy, war strategies and revolution. It is also a handbook of economics as well as administration for the kings.

4. Works of Thinkers:

Some of the great works that act as major sources of the political thought of ancient India are the Smrithis, Kamandakeya Neethisaara, Sukraneetisara and the like. Smrithis advocated that a king was the servant of the subjects and that it was not wrong to kill a tyrant. A king was expected to be virtuous, gracious and helpful. Similarly, Kamandakeya Neethisaara was also a source of ancient Indian political thought. It was, in fact, a summary of Kautilya's Arthashastra.

The work highlights on king and his family and the monarchical form of government. Sukraneetisara was supposed to have been written sometime between 1200 and 1600 BC. Though that is not available now, the work enlightens about the position held by high officials of the state and their functions, administrative system, monarchy and the political life of the people at large.

5. Inscriptions:

Stone and copper inscriptions throw light on the contemporary political life of the people and the administrative system of those days.

6. Accounts of Foreign Travellers:

The writings of foreign travellers to India like Megesthanes, Fahien, Huang Tsang and others provide great information about the ancient Indian society, administration, trade and industry and the like.

7. Other Sources:

Apart from the above sources on the ancient Indian political thought, the following books give an extensive knowledge:

1. Brihapati Sutra
2. Neeti Vakya Niritha of Somadeva
3. Rajaneethi Ratnakara
4. Veeramrityodaya
5. Rajaneethi Mayukha
6. Puranas
7. Coins and seals found in the excavations
8. The Jain and Buddhist literature

Conditions of the welfare societies :

The evolution of the discourse of "rights" is a very modern, Western phenomenon in the Indian context. The idea of social welfare has been entrenched in the Indic civilization since ancient times in the concept of duty as opposed to rights. This paper seeks to explore the underlying concept of duty in the notion of *Dharma* and its linkage with social welfare. The Indic being a self-centric civilization, conceived welfare as a duty which the individual owed both to the self and to the society at large. It was this spiritual sense of duty through *Dharma* which made an individual feel obliged to perform one's duties and work towards *Kalyan* and *Mangal*, which resembled the overall good of both the individual and the society. Discharging one's duties in accordance with *Dharma* was considered as essential for the spiritual upliftment of an individual. This fine blend of duty along with spirituality formed the basis of social welfare, where we see the blossoming of an inward-looking civic society. So

So, consequently the social welfare activities carried out by the State (king) were understood as the duties or *Dharma* of the king rather than the rights of the subjects which could be demanded from the state. The evaluation of the performance of a king could hence be judged on the basis of whether he had been successful in discharging the duties he owed towards his subjects and thus in fulfilling his *Rajadharma*. The Ashokan era could be argued to be one such example of a full-fledged welfare state of the Indic civilization. Ancient Indic literature is abound with instances where the fundamental duties of the kings (state) have been described at length. Through a description of the concept of social welfare of the ancient Indic era, including that followed by the state, the author seeks to argue that it would prove to be an excellent learning model for the present Indian state and its citizens because it emphasizes on one's duties rather than rights, which paves the way to the realization of one's social and spiritual upliftment, thus producing an overall elevation of the nation at large.