

The Polity Of Ancient India Steering The Constitutional Approaches To Democracy & Secularism

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Preface :-

Couple of pivotally important aspects of 'ANCIENT INDIAN POLITY' and 'MODERN INDIAN Constitution-Oriented-Approaches To DEMOCRACY & SECULARISM' immediately captivate our attention once we resort to the evolution of Ancient Indian Polity since Time immemorial. The chronological passages of history together with the evolution of Indian CONSTITUTION advocating the gregarious strength of DEMOCRACY; a timeless testimony to the Right to Equality, Justice, Liberty & Fraternity; amply prove the veracity of the statement. It's no exaggeration to identify Modern Democracy & Secularism being a sustainable development right from the time of Vedas– the mother of ancient Scripture, Literature, Inscriptions, Royal Eulogies & Anthologies chiming with the chronological passages of Historical hallmarks. Craning back to Ancient India, we can discover at length, the spirit of an amicable fraternity with the celebration of a cohesive togetherness. A discovery of that heritage encompassing a journey through Veda; Epics, Mythologies and vast anthological volumes of scriptural literature; helps us discover the lineage of a sustained glory. Say for example, the 'Shanti Parva' in Mahabharata not only discusses the science of polity but also advocates its own theories regarding the origin of state and kingship; essential state prerogatives to be implemented by an emperor; duties of different officials; undeniable expediencies of revenue and tax collection. After Mahabharata, Arthashastra comes out to be more a manual cum textbook for the administrators than a mere theoretical directives on polity. It aimed to discuss the philosophy and fundamental principles of administration coupled with a neatly practicable political science. It is chiefly concerned with the practical problems of governance and its machinery; their functioning during peace and war both. The text discusses all the details with an exhaustiveness that hitherto remains incomparable except some possible exceptions of Sukraniti. Therefore, the rock solid

pillars of Indian Constitution are but a sustainable development upon a firm and consolidated groundwork of ancient Political texts.

Introduction

Objectives :

The Constitution stands for the integral strength of Democracy. Nowhere is it better revealed than VEDA, the mirror to a look-back passage to Ancient India. The collective spirit as evinced in the 'SAMJNANA' of Rig Veda sums up the very essence of a holistic good and cohesive harmony. The monarchy had always been there but its inherent character was fundamentally democratic. Turning back to 'Mahabharata', we find therein the references of Republican Unions or 'Gana' alongside its own assemblies. The Jain and Buddhist texts illustrate references of Confederations. Say for example, the republic of 'Lichhavis' was governed by a council of 7,707 Rajas. 36 Republics to the capacity of 'Lichhavi' built a confederation like 'Vriji'. The 'Shantiparva' of Mahabharata discusses another striking science of politics. It also advocates its own theories regarding the origin of state and kingship; the duties and responsibilities of the king; duties of different officials; and above all, the vision of a king for the well being of humanity at large. Koutilya, often held as the Machiavelli of east, put forward 'Arthashastra' as a manual for the administrators. It was a magnum opus on polity with the philosophy and principles of administration. The practical problems of governance and its machinery smell out the essence of the text. Trusting upon the heritage of that ancient Indian polity, we embark on the concept of modern Indian Democracy ensuring 1] Individual Dignity, 2] Decision of the Majority, and most importantly 3] an opportunity to admit a good variety of opinions as the crux of preserving National Integration at every walk of our socio-economic life. The article aims to deliver the content in approaching details with an insightful exegesis. Therefore, To be diplomatically and historically true, our persistent quest for National Integration essentially depends on two cardinal factors – 1] 'ANCIENT INDIAN POLITY' and 2] 'THE MODERN INDIAN DEMOCRACY'. Because they are spiritually intertwined. The chronological passages of history together with the emergence of the Indian Constitution prove the point with ample testimony.

Conceptual Evolution Of King & Kingdom:

kingship, according to the traditional school of thoughts, came into existence as an outcome of social contract. A sense of righteousness together with a striving for collective happiness predominantly dominated the motive force of people and that is why, it was considered to be a Golden Age. But an impending tragedy seemed to loom large and later onwards, vice conquered virtue following an inevitable consequence of anarchy and misrule. '**Matsanyaya**', rhetoric of anarchical disorder where the powerful tends to torment the powerless, began to rule the roost. A social contract was decided unanimously. Persons culpable for socially inimical acts like misappropriation and adultery were bound to be expelled, excommunicated and if required, to be terminated. To retrieve humanity out of such peril, God appointed His own Man as the saviour of mankind. Thus Manu emerged and was appointed as the King of the human race.

A great deal of variegated accounts tells us prolifically regarding the origin of King in oriental political context. Although Monarchy has always been there, still, together with that primordial form of Government, other forms of ruling regime also came to exist in oriental India. Regarding the origin of Monarchy, a lot of theories have been propounded. One of those rudimentary anecdotes was explicitly revealed in '**Aitareya Brahmana**'. The theory expounds that the kings were but a direct product of war. It tends to inform very much in the same way **Old Testament of Bible** does. It tells us how the gods had to eat a humble pie in the hands of demons and as a result of that, how a prolonged and devastating war broke out between them in heaven.

The Buddhistic version of choosing someone with Regal prowess advocates the fact that, instead of divine intervention, men, on their own accord, entrusted their faith and favour upon a truly trustworthy and capable one to transmute the disorder of chaos into a disciplined and orderly manner of cosmos. **The Great Community (Mahajanasammata)** had to be consensus regarding the unquestioned unanimity of that choice. Later afterwards, we observe that the king was advised to keep his finger on the pulse of the public feeling and never to offend it blatantly. We get a number of stories in the Buddhist Jatakas to show that the kings in some cases were deposed by mass revolts.

Taking it into account, we must admit the fact that monarchy was strongly prevalent and dominantly operant being the coherent force of administrative system but at the same breadth, a congregated spirit of en-masse was equally a considerable factor since the King evolved out of a common accord of commonplace humanity. The king was there to ensure and cater the greater good for the greater humanity.

Smacks of Democracy As Revealed in Ancient India:

The Rig Veda is so committed to democratic principles and ideals that it has made democracy a deity and aptly called it 'Samjnana'. The term Samjnana means the collective consciousness of the people, the national mind to which the individual mind is to pay its homage as the source from which it derives its potency. The hymn addressed to Samjnana (in Rig Veda) called upon the people to gather in their assembly (Samgachchaddhvam) and speak there in one voice (Samvadaddhvam), in a union of minds (Sammanah), of hearts (Samachittam), of policy (Samanmantrah), and of same hopes and aspirations (samaniba akuti).

Thus, democracy was taken to depend upon the 'inner unity' of its citizens and their emotional integration. The democratic principle was at work in different spheres of the public life—political, social and cultural. The democratic tradition of the Vedic era governed the entire growth of Indian polity through the ages.

Even though there was monarchy, it was a limited or constitutional monarchy and the generic pattern of monarchy remained fundamentally democratic. It was based on decentralization and local autonomy. The people formed the following appropriate associations and groups to exercise their rights in self-government in an ascending order: kula (clan), jati (caste), sreni (guild), puga or pura (village community) and janapada (state).

The Talisman Of State Politic As Envisaged in Arthashastra:

The Arthashastra, a primeval Indian discourse on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy upholds its unique excellence & importance among the anthological and political literature ever written in Sanskrit. Arthashastra entails the science (sastra) of wealth/earth/polity (artha). 'Artha' however is a bit wider and an all-embracing term with different meanings. In 'Arthashastra' itself, it has been used in various

contexts. The concept was clarified by L N Rangarajan in his translation of Kautilya - Arthashastra. It has been used in the sense of material well-being, in livelihood, economically productive activities, trade etc. It is likely to be the notion of 'wealth' as defined in 'Wealth of Nations'. In simple way, 'Arthashastra' can be explained as 'science and art of politics and diplomacy' with a systemization and uniformity of law to be upheld throughout the state.

Welfare State:

Arthashastra sets the conceptual groundwork for making India the first welfare state. He backed welfare in all spheres with a restless urgency to ensure a holistic good for the country and countrymen. He supported the protection of livelihood, of weaker section, consumer protection and even the welfare of prisoners also.

That's how, Kautilya allocates foremost importance to wealth, but he is always aware of the instrumental value of religion and principle norms in preserving the structure of society. The king ought to pinpoint state priorities on six cardinal factors:

1. - The ministers
2. - The populace
3. - The fort
4. - The treasury
5. - The army
6. - The ally

Good Governance:

Governance generally incorporates all aspects of the way a country needs to be governed, including its economic policies and regulatory framework. Arthashastra stated that good governance comes with peace and order which can be accomplished through the partnership of different factors in a community. The first of these factors is the leader. The leader is the one who is held responsible for everything that is happening in a community. In Indian society, the leader or the king plays a pivotal role as he is the foremost figure who is leading the nation and thus, must embody a lot of virtues.

Apart from state diplomacy, Kautilya also had a good knowledge of medicine and astrology as well. Such a comprehensive knowledge comprising multifarious affair

reminds us Western stalwarts to the stature of **Machiavelli, Plato, Aristotle & Seneca**. He followed a general approach to governance and enlightened several areas critical to the operation of a country in depth. The cardinal sections deal with National security and Foreign Policies, Administration of Justice, Strategies related to economic development, Taxation, Labour Management, and Financial Management with due emphasis on-

1. - 'Dharma' to be based on truth
2. - 'Evidence' to be based on witnesses
3. - 'Custom', i.e. the tradition accepted by the people
4. - 'Royal Edicts', i.e. indictments or law as promulgated for collective observances.

Arthashastra sketches a system of civil, criminal, and mercantile law which, now a day, is the characteristic feature of post colonial Global Economy.

Foreign Trade:

Foreign trade, another vital element of any state economy, happened to be a major source for snowballing the state wealth, according to Koutilya. He ascribed that foreign trade should be stimulated by providing some incentives such as exemption from taxes to turn out foreign trades more profitable. He gave huge importance to imports. He further advocated that foreign trade is instrumental to increase the supply of those goods which may not be available domestically. Through imports, a state can obtain goods more cheaply from foreign sources. In this way, he framed a comparative and advantageous vision of foreign trade. The Arthashastra favours foreign trade and urges the king to take part in it through his trading overseers. He ought to encourage the import of goods produced in foreign countries by permitting concessions. But at the same time, exporting should be permitted for those goods that are abundant in quantity (**Tom Trautmann, 2016**).

Taxation:

According to Koutilya, the fiscal significance of state taxing is the most priceless point to the path of prosperity but taxation should never occasion for burden or stringencies. He opinionated that tax base should be consolidated instead of tax rates. Kautilya clearly put forward his methodologies regarding the fact that Kings must collect taxes like honey bees, "enough to sustain but not too much to destroy."

Kautilya indirectly suggests a linear income tax pattern. He highlights fairness, stability of tax structure, fiscal federalism, avoidance of heavy taxation, ensuring of tax compliance and subsidies to encourage capital formation. He advocated a mixed economy and argued for a proactive role of government. He encouraged indirect taxes such as excise and custom duties and direct taxes like income tax on individuals; wealth tax, and profession tax too. He also promoted land revenue, water tax and toll, fines and penalties. According to him, tax receipts need to be divided into three parts; income earned through taxes on goods produced within a country: Income earned through taxes on goods produced in the capital and income earned through taxes on imports and exports and in order to elicit that, tax has to be levied once a year.

Growth Oriented Public Expenditure:

Kautilya supported that most of the revenue generated from taxation should be spent on creative activities and public welfare. He argued different items where state should incur expenditure such as national defense, public administration, salaries of the ministers, government departments, maintenance of national store houses and granaries, maintenance of armies, acquisition of wealth, treasure, precious stones and ornaments and having accomplished everything, the restored wealth needs to be deposited to the treasury.

Kautilya was equally sensitive to the economic bases of power and opposed to any distributing tendency that would wane the control of the state. Still the state should not venture to eradicate the independent group dynamics of the community living. The king was recommended to prioritize no interest greater than the interest of his subjects. However, Kautilya clarified that affluence and prosperity has to correspond with the good will of the people.. It stands out to be a genuine indicator of the power and resource of an ideal state. This idea of authority must necessarily include many functions formerly reserved to institutions that were not considered political.

A Western Perspective on Kautilya's Arthashastra:

However, the influence of Kautilya to economy has been ignored by western researchers despite the fact that his commanding authority on the subject was perhaps the most

sophisticated and remained a unique one internationally until Adam Smith published his Wealth of Nations in 1776.

The influential treatise, Arthashastra discovers issues of social welfare, the collective ethics that fasten a society together; counselling of the kings who in times and in areas were distressed by famine, epidemic and by furious ravages of nature, or by devastating war. It also adumbrated how a state leader should initiate public welfare projects such as irrigation, setting up edifices around major strategic holdings and towns, and exempt taxes on those who by some travesty of misfortune, had to undergo miserable plight. The text considerably impressed other Hindu scripts like **Manusmriti** dealing with the aspects like king & kingdom, government and governance, social and legal procedures. The Arthashastra was written at the end of the fourth century BC. It seems to have been revived only in 1905, after centuries of oblivion.

A Few Famous Quotes Of Koutilya:-

- कः कालः कानि मित्राणि को देशः कौ व्ययागमौ।
कस्याहं का च मे शक्तिरिति चिन्त्यं मुहुर्मुहुः ॥

Kah kaalah kaani mitraani ko deshah kau vyayaagamau
Kasyaaham kaa cha me shaktiriti chintyam muhurmuuh

How is the time? Who are the friends? Which is the kingdom (or country)? What are the expenses and income? Where do I belong? What is my strength? One should frequently ponder on all these matters.

- अत्यन्तकोपः कटुका च वाणी दरिद्रता च स्वजनेषु वैरं ।
नीचप्रसङ्गः कुलहीनसेवा चिह्नानि देहे नरकस्थितानाम् ॥

Atyanta kopah katukaa cha vaanee daridrataa cha
swajanesu vairam
Neechaprasangah kulaheenasevaa chihnaani dehe
narakasthitaanaam

Extreme of anger, harsh speech, poverty, enmity
with relatives, association with evil men, service of
people from not so good a family – these are the
marks of people .

- सत्येन धार्यते पृथ्वी सत्येन तपते रविः।
सत्येन वायवो वान्ति सर्व सत्ये प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

Satyena dhaaryate prithvee satyena tapate ravih
Satyena vaayavo vaanti sarvam satye
pratishthhitam

The earth is supported by Truth; by Truth the Sun
radiates heat; by Truth the air blows; everything is
established in Truth.

Tenets of Polity Revealed in Dharamshastra:

Although, the theoretical text of Arthasastra initiated inductive reasoning and a greater realism into political thought, the Dharma Sastras stood out basically deductive in nature. The shastras in Sanskrit Hindu literature were the texts of spiritual and legal principles. The Dharmashastra was inseparably integral to Dharma, the Golden Mean paving the path towards Righteous i.e. a constant persistence after moral and spiritual good. It aimed to integrate the nature of the world, eternal or cosmic law, social law integral with rituals and life-cycle rites, procedures for resolving disputes, and penalties for defilements and corruption.

Dharmashastras focused on the social and religious conditions of ancient India. Family life, gender, caste based distinctions, and principles of ancient jurisprudence were dealt with detailed discourse. In addition to that, it was a legal and civil code that sought to regulate domicile and social laws. It tended to focus on various socio-religious affair ascertaining three principal goals for human beings: Dharma (law), Artha (wealth, profit, and pelf) & Kama (material desire and temporal success)

Democracy & Secularism in Modern India

The timeless spirit of India epitomizes an amicable fraternity --
- a spirit of harmony in diversities, the crux of which belies not at the intent of destruction but with an urge of preservation. No dissention but amity, any distance but affinity is the hallmark of that spiritual integrity. The spirit of DEMOCRACY is another vital need of the hour. Nothing catches it better than that of the epigram of Abraham Linclon (1809-65) while professing as the maiden president of independent America: ".....a new birth of freedom and that too.....of the people,

by the people and for the people.....shall not perish from the earth.....". Breaking from the arena of politics, E.M.Foster promoted its connotation with wider access. He opines, "Not 3 but obviously 2 cheers for DEMOCRACY: 1 for admitting VARIETY and 2 for permitting CRITICISM." Who for heaven disobeys the truth not admitting variety being the spice of life and freedom being the soul of democracy! The ideal objective of any progressive populace is to ensure an umpteenth freedom lifting the choric voice of en-masse. Despite being inherited from classical antiquities [Athens & Rome more precisely], modern thinkers mended anew to free it from the shackles of rulers. Every letter of DEMOCRACY is ascribed with its holistic objective.

Let's have a smack of that as per its letter wise connotation:-

- **D>Dignity;**
- **E>Equality;**
- **M> Mutual Understanding**
- **O> Open-mindedness**
- **C>Co-operation**
- **R>Respect & Relationship**
- **A>Adult suffrage**
- **C>Concern**
- **Y>Yearning for togetherness**

INDIAN PERSPECTIVES:

- **Democracy in modern India is based on certain principles:**
- (1) That every individual has his potentialities, worth, and dignity;
- (2) That everyone has the capacity to learn and manage his life with others;
- (3) That an individual must abide by the decisions of the majority;
- (4) That every individual should have a part in making decisions;
- (5) That the control and direction of democratic action lies in the situation and not outside it;
- (6) That the process of living is interactive and that all individuals work towards commonly recognised ends; and
- (7) That democracy rests on individual opportunity as well as individual responsibility.

- After independence, India decided to have democratic political system. This system is characterized by three elements: one, there is a high degree of autonomy; two, economic agents and religious organizations are free from political interference; and three, competition between various orders does not endanger integration but helps it.

Now let's delve deep to evaluate those aforesaid reforms at the context of what INDIA professes in her worldwide commendable Constitution

The preamble to the constitution of India pledges to affirm:

- 1) JUSTICE [social, economic & political]
- 2) LIBERTY of [thought, expression, belief, faith & worship]
- 3) EQUALITY of [status, opportunity]
- 4) FRATERNITY [the spirit of brotherhood]

.....blossoming perfectly in a SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

SECULARISM:

The noble seers dreamt the nation emerge with all the aforesaid promises of universal humanism on the eventful day of **26th November, 1949**. The salient tenets of **SECULARISM** were yet to incorporate. Rather it kept us waiting till **1976** until the most significant amendment was unfolded [**42nd**] in order to achieve the vibrant cord of Global Peace, Cohabitation and International understanding. The connotation of **Secularism**, barring its material aspects, was perfectly pioneered by **George Jacob Hollyake**. He sublimated thoroughly a humanitarian text with an eye to ensure the freedom of religion, rituals, worship, spirituality, tolerance, individuality and plurality. Indian constitution proudly subscribed to such lofty saga of Humanism by inviting all but declining none. While advocating Secularism {derived from the Latin word **SECULUM** that seeks to denote the present state of social and ethical system}, **Dr. B.R.Ambedkar**, at the behest of the house, proclaimed the fact **[(during a Parliament Debate Session in 1951/ vol-3/5)]** that India being a trustworthy ambassador of Peace; imposes no particular religion at the detriment of others. Such impartiality together with comprehensive forbearance plays the prophetic role ever and anon within national as well as international

approach to living. **Dr.Radhakrisnan**, one step further with much stronger optimism, set it out that India, herself being an animated text of religion, shall never venture for any preferential priority at the pretext of religion. Religion without bias and bigotry cordially welcomes a newly emerged Religion with brimmed up Humanity.

Conclusion:-

Cascading down the unremitting passages of history with a journey from Ancient Indian polity to post independent Indian democracy, we discover a perennial truth that such a generous, philanthropic and bias free Constitution would have remained a far cry had it not been laid upon a fortified past with an inviting acclamation to the rest of the world,

● **“Shrinwantu viswe amritasya putraha”**

● **“Bhumi mata,aham putra prithivyah”**

....i.e. the world is but a family, earth is the progenitor, entire mankind is the progeny and regardless to that absolute truth, ‘we, the people of India’ are inextricably woven with one another saluting the gelled up spirit of Universal Humanism.

● **“Madhubata hritayate madhuksharanti sindhava”**

The **‘Madhumati Suktam’** articulates robust optimism. The earth, air, water, the vast greenery of Nature and every particle of animated and inanimate manifest are filled with the nectar of life. It sought to sing the saga of universal philanthropy.

The spirit of democratic justice, equality, fraternity; the notion of a harmonized humanity at the dissolution of all narrow, divisive determinants like caste, creed, colour, custom and community --- in fact, the inherent vita nova of Indian Constitution is but an eternal heirloom bequeathed to Modern India by Ancestral India.

Vis-à-vis a perilous crisis of pandemic pandemonium, worldwide disharmony and dissension, tireless threats of terror at every staggering minute --- we must redeem the immortal sagacity of Ancient India, an inexhaustible treasure house of Oriental Glory. It has to be a quest with renewed vision and mission to lift our innermost tribute to the Constitution, the voice of people and an ever ignited torch to Democracy. By no means, the spirit of cohesive humanity is to be balanced in the pendulum of power because as we all know,

Democracy is an eternal vigil and an indispensable need in such a turbulent time triggered with the splintering spark of intolerance. Following the enlightened wisdom envisaged by Veda, india, despite all the roughshods of violence, uphold her dulcet eloquence uttering two pristine glories of Global Fraternity : ‘SARVE BHAVANTU SUKHINAH’ & ‘SARVE SANTU NIRAMAYAH’

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