



RELEVANCE OF RETHINKING OF ANCIENT INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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INTRODUCTION

As we know, when we use the word Political thought suddenly the names of western Political thinkers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavali, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, J. S. Mill, T.H.Green, Hegel, Kant, Karl Marx etc will come to our mind, very rarely we remember the contribution of ancient Indian political thought and the names like Kautilya, Shukra, Kamandhaka, Vyasa, Valmiki etc. G. P. Singh said “Ancient Indians were highly organized Polity with a well established world view of the Rajya”(state).¹ We find very valuable Political ideas in Vedas Upanishads, Epics of India. Arthashastra authored by Kautilya, Nithisara of Kamandhaka and Manusmriti of Manu also having bunch of Political ideas and many insights of political thought.

Of Course, lot of academic work is being done by some dedicated scholars in this regard. But is it enough? I think it is essential to project the quintessence of the ancient Indian political thought systematically with separate headings and proper bifurcation of Political ideas from others ideas, in a way how western thinkers have done.

In this article an effort has been made to focus the special features of Indian Political thought and see similarities with the western Political thought by giving few examples.

NATURE OF INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Before Knowing the nature of ancient Indian political thought let us realize the importance of it. Alan Finalayson said Political thinking is essential to life and it is an unavoidable fact of life, He also said ‘Political thinking is thinking about how the world should be’.² Political Thought is concerned to establish how we ought to live, how we do live and how we may come to live as we might.³ Political thinking enables the man to think about state how it should be and what is his part in its development, the relation between it and him, how it takes different shape in different situation. And also it helps to analyze the political as well as moral commitment of state and citizens. The very purpose of political thought(may of India or Western) is to enable the citizen to know or realize the role of state in is his life and his role in the development of state as a natural process of life. Ancient Indian political thought gives us such insights of life and how other aspects of life have correlated with the state life or Political life.

THE NATURE OF ANCIENT INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Ancient Indian political thought is special in many aspects. It involves number of concepts of Politics or Political Science. The very important thing to note here is Indian political philosophy emerged as part of Philosophy of India.

Regarding this Professor Filmer S.C Northrop of Yale University stresses the unity and the aesthetic and intuitive nature of oriental culture as contrasted with the theoretic component in knowledge characteristic of Greek, Anglo American and even Marxian ideologies⁴.

A Study of the sources of Indian Philosophical theories as applied to Politics law would be of assistance not only to the student and Philosopher, but also to the man of affairs who is grappling with the crucial problems of the present day⁵. In the Philosophical sources of Indian certainly we find vital bearing on the day today practical life.

Binoykumar S Sircar said, we had in India a succession of thinkers who, like churchmen in Europe, were the founders and partakers of what may accurately be called a University tradition and an educational system was based on and culminated in religious training, but, included also in its scope an attempt at universe research born of catholic sympathies and curiosities. The term ‘Upanishad’ meant etymologically sitting near a person and is the synonym of French séance or session. Upanishads profoundly influenced Indian thought, and, through China and Persia, Asian thought but also filtered to Europe through Persia, Arabia and Asia Minor and left their impress on Thales and Pythagoras as also on Gnostics and neo Platonists and also on Machiavelli, Descartes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer have become part of most European Culture⁶.

CONCEPT OF DHARMA

Indian political philosophy mainly based on concept of Dharma. In Indian Philosophy the concept of Dharma is very unique in nature, Dharma means righteous path that everyone should follow it. Rajadharm (Duty of King), Shikshak Dharma (Duty of Teacher), Archaka Dharma (Duty of Priest) Dharma guru so and so forth.



The base of Ancient Indian Polity was Dharma. Ancient literature of India in which we find the sources of Political thinking mainly profound the concept of Dharma. It is very difficult to solve the problems confronting humanity today by Individualism or collectivism. But it may be possible if we conveyed the message of concept of Dharma has mentioned in any ancient literature and in history or Puranas of India In Indian Philosophy much importance is given to Raja Dharma, and it is discussed in almost all ancient literature.

Dharma or Righteousness which has to be maintained followed and enforced by the king. Veda, Upanishads always insisted the king should be righteous in nature and must give importance to natural law more than that to conscience. In ancient India the King was the source of Political authority the law and order to be maintained by him was dharma or right order of the world. Kings main dharma was to maintain peace and order and elimination of conflict and strife avoidance of neighbour's violence to his Polity. In General, any philosophic scriptures of ancient India such as Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Smritis, Buddhistic literature and Epics specially Mahabharata propounded the qualities of King or Rajan or Rajdharma.

In Raghuvamsha Kavya of Kalidasa, it is said that Rajan become possessed of meaning when he made himself lovable to his subjects and Manu says he should behave towards his subjects as father to his children. In Mahabharata it stated that he is the best king in whose reign people moves fearlessly as a son in the house of his father. Ramayana also gives us valuable ideas in this regard. Kautilya said that king should find his happiness in the happiness of his subjects.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ANCIENT INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

To convey the message of the contribution of ancient Indian political thought comparative study with western Political thought is inevitable and essential. Here some examples have given such as the qualities of king explained in various Philosophies of India resembles with the ideas of Plato ,Aristotle St. Augustine and St.Thomas Aquinas etc. Some similarities also observed in modern western political thought. But they have not explained under the title of Political science or Political Philosophy. Political system has been explained as part of the social system of that time. So most of the political aspects and ideas merged in the philosophy of India in general.

If we made elucidate study in this regard by giving suitable titles like western thinkers, then the Indian Political thinking certainly will get real significance in the field of Political Science. Just to confirm this idea some examples are given how they resemble with western political thought. We can see the number of similarities between qualities philosopher king of Plato and qualities of king explained in Indian Philosophy and stratification of society made by Manu resembles with bifurcation of three classes (Ruling, Guardian and Economic) made by Plato, concept of Justice of Plato remembers the concept of duty of India.

The explanation of duties and aim of king in Indian we can see the synonym of characteristics and End of the best of state of Aristotle. Aristotle said that citizenship should not be given to slaves and women. Manu also said same thing in different manner that shudras those who have not self thinking capacity are not eligible to get citizenship he also said women are not able to lead independent life.

The character and stand of a king as a ruler and chief of military explained in Kautilya's Arthashastra where we find much similarity with the ideas of Machiavelli. Righteous obligations laid on king in ancient India is nothing but he should act as representative of divine or God which resembles with the divine law of St. Thomas Aquinas . As explained in various Philosophies of India, if king is a good human being, Knowledgeous how will be the nature state and society reminds us the descriptions of city of God of St. Augustine.

We can see the similarities between ancient Indian political thought and modern western political thought. For example if we see the theory of social contract, concept of human nature and state of nature and theory of state of Thomas Hobbes we will find such explanation in the process political thinking of India. Ramaswami Aiyar said "Hindu Political thinkers tried to understand the state by differentiating it from the non state", their method was logical as well as historical. That is, in the first place they tried to investigate in what particulars the state analytically different from the non state and in the second place they tried to picture to themselves how pre state condition developed into that of state lie how the pre state grew out of non state⁷.

The Picture of non – state explained in Hindu thinking resembles with the state of nature pictured by Thomas Hobbes. Likewise we can see the similarities with the philosophy of Idea of Hegel, Kant etc. And Purpose Utilitarianism of modern thinkers can be seen in Indian Philosophy.



CONCLUSION

The very purpose of this article is to insist the need of rethinking and revival of ancient Indian political thought and project it systematically by using proper technical words of Political Science and right interpretation Indian Political words. As C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar said 'A proper interpretation of Itihasa or Puranas would be to regard them as the works of gifted seers who availed themselves of certain ancient or recent historical and religious traditions, and wove those traditions into narratives, anecdotes, episodes and homilies, these works reflecting and reproducing certain attitudes towards life. The Ramayana furnishes pictures of kings who led a spiritual life and of ascetics who played a great part in the affairs of nations. Difficult situations are pictured whose impact on several human souls is marvelously analyzed. Dharma, as the chief factor in the shaping of human life is the underlying motive of the Ramayana and its many episodes.⁷ The Mahabharatha is not only a picture of a great internecine struggle illustrating the conflict of human motives and human attributes but a repertory of comprehensive secular and religious learning⁸.

Therefore it is essential to step forward to understand the ancient Indian literature where we see the most significant insights to know the purpose of Political Science and inspiration to find the solution to the problems of present life. Our Vedas, Agamas, epics are written by seers saints, whose main motto was welfare of all. While analyzing importance of Ramayana a scholar has said "Valmiki has wisely upheld the ideal of Dharma which has a comprehensive sweep and which enables its votaries, irrespective of their vocation or status in society, to enjoy inner perfection and freedom while dedicating their virtues to the welfare of others. If this ideal, exemplified by the sage in the motives and activities of his numerous characters, is grasped and put into practice, all the creeds may survive the present crisis, work side by side without the feeling of hostility, and make people intelligent, efficient and self sacrificing enough to solve the problems of the family, country, or even of the world as a whole⁹. So there is a great need of rethinking and revival of ancient Indian political thought.

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