



Indian Ancient Literature and Concept of Good Governance

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Abstract India-the land of spirituality is basically the land of practical applications of the philosophy of good governance since the early days of human civilization. The descriptions of Indus Valley and vedic civilizations bear implicit details of this concept. Ancient Indian philosophers and political thinkers termed polity as 'Raj Dharma'-the Code of Conduct and duties of the sovereign towards his subjects and the conduct and duties of the subjects towards their sovereign.

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Introduction

The concept of '**RAM-RAJYA**' is basically the concept of good governance which was the basis of Ram's polity during the period of age of Ramayana.

India-the land of spirituality is basically the land of practical applications of the philosophy of good governance since the early days of human civilization. The descriptions of Indus Valley and vedic civilizations bear implicit details of this concept. In Hindu mythology Manu is recognised as the first sovereign on earth and he was a great philosopher, whose teaching find place in Manusmriti which directs the sovereign of the state to look after his people like his sons.

Ancient Indian philosophers and political thinkers termed polity as 'Raj Dharma'-the Code of Conduct and duties of the sovereign towards his subjects and the conduct and duties of the subjects towards their sovereign. Here it may be noted that during ancient India the sovereign was also known as 'Lok-Palak' which implicitly means that the sovereign must look after the welfare of his subjects and the subjects were asked to follow the 'Rastra- Dharma' which means that people owe the responsibility to help for the security and prosperity of the state. Hereunder, we will briefly discuss our politico-cultural heritage in brief.

Before defining "Good Governance" we have to define "Governance". It simply means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented. The quality of governance depends, in a large measure, upon the indulgence by subjects.

Good Governance signifies the way an administration improves the standard of living of the members of its society by creating and making available the basic amenities of life; providing its people security and the opportunity to better their lot; instill hope in their heart for promising future, providing on an equal and equitable basis, access to opportunities for personal growth; affording participation and capacity to influence, in the decision-making in the public affairs; sustaining a responsible judicial system which dispense justice on merits in a fair, unbiased and meaningful manner; maintain accountability and honesty in each wing or functionary of the government.

Dharma and Good Governance

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Let us now examine the foundations of good governance which is required to protect and sustain the common good, and the requisite duties and conduct of public officials as described in some scriptures and ancient writings of the Hindu religion and culture. Among the main scriptures, let us start with the advice given to Arjuna by Lord Krishna in Gita:

Tasmacchastram pramanam te karyaknyavyavasthitau
 Gyatva shastra vidhanoktam karma kartum iharhasi.
 तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्ये व्यवस्थितौ ।
 ज्ञात्वा शास्त्र विधानोक्त कर्मकर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥

[One ought to understand what is duty, and what is forbidden in the commands laid down by the scriptures (Shastras). Knowing such rules and regulations, one should behave as ordained by scriptures.^{2]}

Lord Krishna further says:

Pravrittim cha niurittim cha knryaknye bhayabhaye
 Bandham moksham cha yavetti buddhah sa Partha sattviki.
 प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।
 बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥

[O Partha! that understanding by which one knows what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not, what is obligatory and what is permitted, leads to the righteous path.^{3]}

Yajurveda and Good Governance

Dharma of rulers has been described in many places; at the same time, it is mentioned that such a ruler will be an elected one who will administer justice with the help of an elected assembly⁴. For example, in Chapter VIII, the good conduct as a prerequisite of the common good has been emphasised:

O virtuous and prosperous king must be knowledgeable about your conduct as protector of the learned, and impeller towards our progress and prosperity. Be in control of your passions, and conduct yourself in a righteous manner. Be a friend to us. Know the conduct as laid down by all sages⁵.

Such a conduct is founded on such virtues as humility, discipline, and voluntary conduct because the king is "elected" to undertake the duty of State. This is illustrated by the verse in Chapter 9, which describes the King follows:

[O King elected by the learned and wise for carrying out the duty of state, I accept thee who is knowledgeable, practices yoga, full of humility, leader among leaders, expert in science, and is kind. The administration is thy mainstay. I accept thee. Though has been elected by the people, I accept thee ...]⁶

There are many examples from Yajurveda which are also full of similar advice to that elected ruler. Another example is the following verse from Chapter 20 where the King is asked to maintain the common good (righteousness) of his Loka:

Assembly of Learned Vidya Sabha (विद्या सभा), Assembly of Spiritual Leaders Dharma Sabha (धर्म सभा), and the Assembly of the Administrators Rajya Sabha (राज्य सभा) are the three organs of government of a ruler. These should provide speedy justice and solution of problems, should consist of well-qualified persons, fully constituted to manage the affairs of state with prowess and skills, and to maintain the righteousness [common good] of government⁷.

Through these and similar verses, a King has been advised to preserve the common good by acting in a moral and virtuous way.

Mahabharata and Good Governance

² Gita, Chapter XVI, Verse 24

³ Gita, Chapter XVIII, Verse 30

⁴ Chapter VII, Verse 45

⁵ Yajurvedn, Chapter VIII, Verse 50)

⁶ Yajurveda, Chapter IX, Verse 2

⁷ Yajuroeda, Chapter XX, Verse 43



In Mahabharata, after the Great War, King Yudhishtira approaches his wounded grandfather, asks him to give a discourse on the concept of common good, duties and morality of a King, his officials, and the public. Bhishma, the grandfather, thus answers:

1. The eternal duties of kings are to make their subjects happy, to observe truth, and to act sincerely⁸.
2. A King guided by conducting righteously Vyavaharen Shuddham (व्यवहारेण सुधर्म) and devoting his life in the service of his subjects acquires fame and immortality both here and hereafter⁹.
3. The foundation of good governance is Dharma (righteousness). The King, his ministers and state employees who have taken the oath of their offices to uphold Dharma and to act in accordance with the common good, must not act unjustly or unethically so as to secure their private good through selfishness. If they don't behave appropriately, they all will surely go to hell along with destroying the moral basis of governance¹⁰.
4. The main purpose of a King is to protect Dharma and to bolster righteousness, and to be free from indolence and desires. One should know that a King is the defender of all Lokasya Rakshita (लोकस्य रक्षितः)¹¹
5. The Lord of Creation, Brahma, has devised Dharma for the care and well-being of all; it is the duty of a King to follow and advance the dictates of Dharma¹². These and various other verses contain advice for a righteous King.

Manusmriti and Good Governance

Among the all Hindu Smritis, Manusmriti is considered the most important and comprehensive codification of Hindu laws. It includes not only the precepts for the moral duties of all persons, but also the special rules regarding the conduct of kings, officials, and administration of justice. The following two verses illustrate the basic thinking to symbolise duties for the King, his ministers and other officials:

Brahma has created the King to be the protector of the Verna and public order [common good] so that they discharge their several duties according to their Dharma and rank¹³.

Thus conducting himself (and) ever intent on (discharging) his [prescribed] royal duties, a King shall order all his officials (to work) for the good of his subjects¹⁴.

Through these and various other verses, moral tone has been set for the conduct of a King and good governance of the kingdom.

Kautilya's Arthasastra and Good Governance

Although the book written by Kautilya (Prime Minister of King Chandragupta, 321 BC-296 BC) is not considered a part of Dharma Shastras (scriptures), nevertheless, it is the greatest Indian treatise on the art of government and administration, the duties of kings, ministers, officials, and the art of diplomacy. For example, a King is expected to behave in a most righteous manner.

1. In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases him (personally) he shall not consider as good, but whatever makes his subjects happy, he shall consider good¹⁵.
2. The King should look to the bodily comforts of his servants by providing such emoluments as can infuse in them the spirit of enthusiasm to work. He should not violate the course of righteousness and wealth ...

⁸ Shanti Parva, Chapter LVIII, Verse 11

⁹ Shanti Parva, Chapter LXXXV, Verse 2

¹⁰ Shanti Parva, Chapter LXXXV, verses 16-17

¹¹ Shanti Parva, Chapter XC, Verse 3

¹² Shanti Parva, Chapter XC, Verses 19

¹³ Manusmriti, Book VII, Verse 35

¹⁴ Manusmriti, Book IX, Verse 324

¹⁵ Arthasastra, Book I, Chapter XIX, 39



Thus, the King shall not only maintain his servants, but also increase their subsistence and wages in consideration of their learning and work¹⁶.

The illustrations given above denote a high moral tone assigned to those who govern and act as stewards of governance. For them, there is ample spiritual guidance for good behaviour. People who govern have been advised the good governance is sustained by adhering to a trinity of moral duties ultimately resulting in Sarva Kalyankari Karma (सर्व कल्याणीकारी कर्म), maintaining Sarva Loka Sangraha (सर्व लोक संग्रह) and aiming for the Sarva Hitetj Ratah (सर्व हितेज रतः). These three dictums emanate from certain religious foundations which have been examined above, and which support the contention that governance is a moral endeavour.

Good governance Ram Rajya (राम राज्य) has been an idealistic ideal of political thinkers round the ages; but the end of good governance has changed from the strength of the State or king and his associates and men on the horse-back to protect its citizens and provide security to them and thereby, justify ruler ship to a limited, controlled and constitutional State serving by being subservient to the public or publics or the masses in general.

¹⁶ Arthasastra, Book V, Chapter III, 247,249

