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Kingship in Ancient India: Origin and Development

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ABSTRACT: Monarchy was the form of administration in ancient India, as evidenced by early and later Vedic literature, epics, and Puranas and, among other sources. Because there is no theory on the beginning of the State, hypotheses by ancient Indian political theorists and Historians about the genesis of Kingship may be considered as evidence for the origin of the State as well. The oldest mention of the hypothesis of royal origin may be found in Brahmana literature. The same notion of kingship's divine origin is emphasized in the Mahabharata's Ashvamedha Parva. Kingship and its council of ministers is supposed to be of exceptional importance during the Mauryan period, which saw the development of an all-India empire with close diplomatic ties to the rest of the globe for the first time.

KEYWORDS: Monarchy, Kingship, Ancient India, Council of Ministers

I. INTRODUCTION

The term Rajan, as well as its root Rat, literally means 'ruler'. It has something to do with the Latin word rex. Hindu political thinkers, on the other hand, have given it a philosophical foundation. The king is known as Raja because it is his responsibility to delight the people via effective governance. Throughout Sanskrit literature, this philosophic understanding has been recognised as an axiom. This constitutional understanding of the phrase was likewise adopted by the monarchs. The Rigveda is where the term 'Raja' first appears. Rajas have been given names including 'Indra', 'Varuna', and 'Soma'. 'Yadu', 'Manu', and 'Chitra' are some of the deadly rajas named. During the repeated battles between gods and demons, the latter was always triumphant, according to Vedic literature. As a result, the gods gathered and pondered, eventually concluding that their failure was due to their lack of a leader. They chose Indra to be their ruler. Varuna likewise desired to be ruler of the gods, but the gods rejected his claim. It suggests that kingship arose as a result of a military need.

As per the Mahabharatha, there was no sovereignty, ruler, or governance in the early years of the Krita Yuga. All men used to sacrificially protect one another. After some time however they found the task of righteously protecting each other painful. Error began to assail their hearts. As a result of being exposed to wrong, men's perceptions grew muddled, and their virtues began to wane, resulting in chaos. Brahma was contacted by the gods for protection and guidance. Brahma produced a son named Virajas and declared him the world's king by a decree of his will. The Manusmriti is another essential source for tracing the origins of kingship. The seventh canto of Manusmriti explores the origins of kingship. Manu claims that God created kings to safeguard humans from the evils of anarchy. Raja was formed by God using particles from several deities. That is why he was not an ordinary man.

Paddy was the principal crop in eastern India, as per the Buddhist canonical text DighaNikaya. The main source of contention was some people stockpiling more rice than they needed for their own use and stealing rice from the farms. As a result, people gathered and decided a chief to prevent the scenario described above. They promised to give him a share of their grain in exchange. That person hold three titles: Mahasammata (selected by the entire people), Khattiya (lord of the fields), and Raja (one who pleases via dharma or action).

According to Jinasena, a 9th century Jain author, the world was once a paradise where all human desires were met by desire-producing plants (Kalpavrikshas). These trees, however, vanished, and anarchy ensued. The first Thirtankara, Rishabanatha, restored order by introducing monarchs, officers, classes, and professions. R.S.Sharma claims that the institution of state did not exist in the early stages of man's life, citing from Shantiparva of Mahabharatha. Only with the formation of the institutions of marriage, family, and private property have the right-thinking members of society begun to sense the need for someone to defend them. It was thought that without the state, chaos would ensue.



One person's wife would be abducted by the other, and one person's possessions would be taken by the other. As a result, R.S. Sharma believes that the growth of the state is inextricably linked to the presence of institutions such as property, family, and class.

Prof. Altekar claims that the establishment of the united family contributed to the emergence of kingship. The family patriarch was adored and obeyed, and the leader of the village or tribe, who eventually rose to the rank of chief or king, was also revered and obeyed. As the states grew larger, the king's authority progressively grew as well. The theories on the origins of kindred that have been addressed so far all agree on one thing: kinship sprang from the need for safety and security of life and property.

II. CEREMONIES ASSOCIATED WITH KINGSHIP

Mahabharatha's Ashvamedha Parvad describes that consecration (Rajyabhisheka) was frequently followed by a digvijaya (conquest), in which the monarch despatched his troops to ensure his authority over the surrounding lands. This digvijaya was followed by a new consecration, a large royal sacrifice attended by numerous monarchs, which commemorated the exchange of valuable gifts as well as generous gifts to priests and others. A king would sometimes devote his son or sibling as Yuvaraja at the same time as his own consecration. Yudhishtara, for example, assigned his brother Bhima to such position. A monarch would execute a ritual designed for the purpose at each level of his rise to power and rank. According to the Gopatha Brahmana, doing Rajasuya, Samrat by performing Vajapeya, Svarat by performing Ashwamedha, and Virat by performing Purushamedha, one becomes a Raja. The kingship took on a hallowed quality as a result of these rites.

Rajasuya: A succession of rites such as Agnistoma, Panchavattiya, Indraturiya, Apamargahoma, Abhishekaniya, and others were performed during the Rajasuya ceremony. Only a consecrated Kshatriya was eligible to celebrate the event, which took two years and three months. The Rajasuya was conducted by exceptionally strong monarchs after they had finished a digvijaya. Even small rulers performed this ceremony throughout the Vedic period.

Vajapeya: Initially, the Vajapeya rite had less political significance than Rajasuya and could be conducted by Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. However, it was eventually elevated to a greater rank, as the Taittiriya scriptures state that Vajapeya provides imperial places whereas Rajasuya just confers royal dignity. As a result, Vajapeya was conducted following the Rajasuya ritual. The Vajapeya celebration, like the Rajasuya, had ceremonies such as Agnistoma, animal sacrifice, and a chariot race in which the patron of the ceremony competed against 16 friendly rivals. He is enthroned after winning the race.

Ashwamedha: As the major goal of this sacrifice was to demonstrate one's political authority, the performer of this ceremony was a particularly strong Kshatriya monarch. This rite was also performed to get prosperity, strength, male progeny, and sin-free status. This ritual lasted a total of one year and fifteen days. A horse was released loose in this ritual, followed by 400 armed men, including princes and chiefs. Normally, the horse is only allowed to travel inside the patron's kingdom, as entering a foreign region as a challenge to the sovereign might end in war. Other rites and sacrifices were performed in conjunction with this occasion. When the horse returned unharmed, the monarch called a large meeting, which was attended by his chiefs, and the ceremonial horse was sacrificed in their presence.

Constitutional Monarchy

Hindu kingship was the pinnacle of personal sacrifice for the one whose honour was to rule the Hindus. The king's timetable, as laid down by Kautilya, permits him only four and a half hours of sleep and three hours of eating and amusement, with the rest of the time devoted to state management. To be able to handle this duty, the monarch was taught the four areas of knowledge: Anviksiki (philosophy), Trayi (the three Vedas), Varta (economics), and Dandanithi (history) (science of governance). In addition, the king had to exercise self-control and overcome desire, wrath, greed, and pride. Hunting, gambling, intoxicating beverages, and women were all forbidden to him. Hindu rulers saw their realm as sacred trust rather than personal property.

In the Vedic period, monarchy was practically elective, with chiefs of Kulas (tribes) having a say in the king's election. Even after a hereditary monarchy was firmly established, the people had the right to be consulted and to replace an ineffective heir with one who was more capable. Dhritarashtra, for example, was pushed aside because he was blind. While popular assemblies like the Sabha and Samithi served as constitutional checks on the monarch, religious and spiritual penalties served as a deterrent to royal tyranny.



According to Kautilya's theory, the king's primary duty is to ensure the welfare of his subjects. The term 'Yogasema' is a combination of two ideas. Yoga denotes acquisition of the necessities of life, and ksema means maintenance of the same for continued enjoyment. So it is clear that according to ancient Indian political thinkers, the aim of the king is to help people in their pursuit of happiness. For the fulfillment of this objective, the king has been asked to perform his duties with dedication.

The king's duties include-

- To safeguard the subjects against livestock lifters, as a man's social status in Rig-Veda was determined by the number of cows he owned.
- To fight battles in order to repulse external attacks.
- Private property protection. The king's obligation was so severe that he had to return the stolen money to the subject at any cost.
- Preservation of family and prevention of adultery.
- With the passage of time, the concept of welfare state arose and the king undertook the responsibilities of development of agriculture, expansion of trade, commerce and industries, etc. His other responsibilities included alleviating his subjects' poverty and misery, as well as providing assistance to the defenceless, elderly, blind, crippled, orphans, and widows.

Ministerial Council

The Ministerial Council was the kingdom's highest administrative body. The rise in the Council of Ministers (Mantri-Parishad) cannot be sudden. Its origins may be traced back to various Vedic institutions and political instruments. The Sabha and Samiti, the two twin bodies, enjoyed a great influence in Vedic polity. The Mantri-Parishad can be said to present a combination of the ancient Ratnins, Sabha and Samiti. Ancient Indian political theorists considered ministry as an important function of the body known as the politic. As ministers, only those of intelligence, purity of purpose, bravery, and loyalty were chosen. These ministers were noted for their honesty, leadership abilities, and care for the kingdom's welfare. In ancient India, the king was assisted by the followings:

Ratnins: The monarch was assisted by the Purohit (royal priest), Senani (army commander), and Gramani (village chief) during the early Vedic period. We discover references to elite officials known as Ratnins (jewels) in later Yajurvedic and Brahmana literature, who most likely composed the king's council. Purohit (priest), Mahisi (queen), Suta (chronicler), Gramani (head of the village), Senani (general), Kshatri (chamberlain), Samgrahitri (master of the treasury), Bhagadugha (collector of revenue), Aksavapa (superintendent of gambling), Govikartana (king's companion in the chase), and Palagala were among the Ratnins (courier). The Ratnins played an essential role in the king's consecration ritual. The monarch took his coronation oath in front of them, delivered by the priest.

Thirthas: According to Mahabharata, there were 18 thirthas who assisted the monarch in the governance of the realm. Mantri- councillor, Purohit- priest, Yuvaraja- crown prince, Camupati- army commander-in-chief, Dvarapala- chamberlain, Antaveshika- superintendent of the ladies apartments, Karagaradhikari- prisons overseer, Dravyasamcayakrt- steward, Krtyakrtyesvarthanamviniyojaka- in-charge of treasury, Pradestr- an officer, Nagaradhyaksha is the city overseer, Karyanirmanakrt is the engineer, Dharmadhyaksha is the judge, Sabhadhyaksha is the assembly overseer, Dandapala is the guardian of punishment, Durgapala is the overseer of forts, Rashtrantapala is the protector of the frontiers, and Atavipala is the guardian of the forests.

From the ancient literature, it can be assumed that the ministerial council was of exceptional importance during the Mauryan period, which saw the development of an all-India empire with close diplomatic ties to the rest of the globe for the first time. The combined evidence of Kautilya's Arthashastra, Meeasthenes' Indika, and the Ashokan Inscriptions necessitated a revision of the council's general nature and scope of operation (Arora, S.K, 1984). With the inception of Mauryan authority, India adopted a structured administrative structure. The Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya or Chanakya, created the Arthashastra, which included the lessons of prior works on government and administration. The Arthashastra offers teachings on statecraft and was used as a guidebook to manage the kingdoms of succeeding generations of monarchs throughout India. The council of ministers during the Mauryan period was known as the Parishad. There were two categories of ministers: Mantris, who were the king's councillors who oversaw the Amatyas' work, and Amatyas. Matyas- Those in charge of the day-to-day administration (executive officers). The council (mantriparishad) was of different sizes. Brihaspati says it should be 16, while Usanas says it should be 20, and Manu says it should be 12. Chanakya believed that it should be determined by the demands of the state. The Ministry's



responsibilities included overseeing and directing governmental revenue and expenditure policies, as well as foreign policy.

III. CONCLUSION

One of the problems concerning ancient Indian kingship is whether it was democratic i.e. subject to popular control or autocratic power. Scholars have joined issues making the subject controversial. The meanings of words change in the context of a given situation; democracy and popular control are very modern terms. Therefore, it seems a contradiction in terms to utter them in the same breath. The term modern can be interpreted in two ways. It means contemporary in time. It may also mean contemporary in spirit. It is in the latter sense we maintain that ancient Indian kingship breath the spirit of modern democracy. Modernity it is observe nor is the cause of number the cause of democracy. It is the worship of quality- that quality of thinking and discoursing minds that can dare to raise and face conflicting views of the Good- and to seek some agreed and accepted compromise through discussion whereby a true national will, and a national good that is truly good because it is freely willed- is secured. Democracy is also described as an institutional system that allows for free involvement in the process of exercising ultimate political power. The analysis of the cited definition brings forth the following important features of democracy. These features are- a) Acceptance of the principle of peoples sovereignty, b) Peoples' participation in the process of controlling ultimate political power, c) Seeking or arriving at some agreed and accepted compromise through discussion which is freely willed and d) Good of the people as its ultimate end.

The first and foremost question is whether the ancient Indian theorists ever accepted the idea of people being sovereign. At the very outset it need to be made clear that the ancient Indian Theorists do not discuss or define peoples' sovereignty. They, however seem to have accepted peoples' sovereign authority. This is evident from the Vedic ceremony of receiving the mani, the symbol of sovereignty, from the representatives of the people called 'ratnins'. The ratnins, it is significant to note, represented all classes as is evident from the mention of the Rathakaras, Karmakaras, Suta, Gramani and so on. The Vedic king was supposed to repair to their houses and receive the mani. It is only after receiving the mani that the king was entitled to get consecrated. The under lying principle in the ritual seems to be the acceptance of the idea of people' sovereign authority.

The expression indicates that the theorists in ancient India looked upon the people as masters and king as their servant receiving his wages for the service he rendered to them. Sukra explicitly states that king is the servant of the people for he receives one sixth of the share as his wages. The theorist therefore repeatedly remind the king to strive for people's pleasure and happiness. They consistently and constantly stressed the point that a violent outburst of people's discontent was the worst evil to be feared.

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