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Good Governance in Ancient India: An Analysis

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Abstract: The concept of good governance is not new in our India. We can see in our ancient Indian scripture and writings. With the development of civilization the idea of good governance gained its pace and can be traced in the writings of various western as well as Indian scholars. The elements of Good Governance found in our ancient Indian scriptures, can be the *Jataka tales*, *Shanti Parva-Anushasanparva of Mahabharat*, *Shukracharyas's Niūsar*, *Panini's Ashtadhyayi*, *Aitreya Brahmana*, *Valmiki's Ramayana* and especially in *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. A close study of these ancient Indian texts is required to understand the very concept of welfare state. This paper is an attempt to reconcile the political philosophy and ideals which leads to good governance which is the required even today in this modern world.

Keywords: *Governance, Good Governance, Participation, Welfare State, Vedic, India*

I. Introduction

The term governance is not new phenomena and it is as old as human civilization and gradually converted into good governance with its development. It is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). The Greek philosopher Aristotle has rightly remarked that state came into existence for the sake of life and continued for the sake of good life. Good life here stands for that favorable atmosphere provided to all the individuals by the state in which one can develop his/her personality up to the best.

Defining Good Governance may not be easy but we must admit that it is more about governance and less about government. A very popular quote related to this is of Thoreau (1964) according to whom "Government is best that governs the least". The word "good" derives from the word God and carries an innate sense of judgment and "governance" traditionally refers to forms of political system and the manner in which power is exercised in utilizing countries economic and social resources for development.

According to UN, The eight major characteristics of good governance are participation, rule of law, consensus oriented, transparency, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability. Minimum corruption, consideration of the interest of the minorities and inclusion of the most vulnerable in society in decision making are the important elements of the good governance. In ancient India, governance was basically the observance of *Rajdharam* i.e. duty to govern in the way that it may disseminate happiness amongst maximum number of subjects. The concept in ancient Indian polity of the rulers being bound by *dharma* was precisely that of ensuring good governance to the people. Even though monarchy prevailed, there was no place for any theory of the divine rights of the kings or of arbitrary rule. *Rajdharam* was the code of conduct or the rule of law that was superior to the will of the ruler and governed all his actions.

Concept of the welfare state and good governance can be found in our ancient Indian writings. So we will consider these Indian scripture one by one for better understanding the concepts. First, we start to trace the roots of good governance in our oldest scriptures of the *Vedas*. $cg\tau u \mid [k; cg\tau u fgrk; p$ is a dictum or aphorism which means, "for the happiness of the many, for the welfare of the many" has enunciated in our holy scripture *Rig-Veda*.

Rig Veda states $\{vkReuks eks\{kkFkZe txfk\}rk; p$ i.e., the dual purposes of our life are emancipation of the soul and welfare of the world .Or in other words, the public good should be provided without profit to all members of a society.

Now, we consider the second example i.e., ***Shukla Yajurveda*** to understand this concept. We can see the concept of welfare of all in its well-known prayer wherein a ruler prays thus "let my subjects be satisfied, my herds be satisfied, my people be satisfied, let not my people be needy" (6.31).

In another place ***Yajurveda*** says, "Assembly of learned (*Vidhya Sabha*), assembly of spiritual leaders (*Dharma Sabha*) and the assembly of the administrators (*Rajya Sabha*) are the three organs of the government of a ruler. (Chap XX verse 43). The rulers should be committed to provide speedy justice and solution of problems. About conduct of a king it says, "O virtuous and prosperous king, be knowledgeable about your conduct as protector and impeller towards your progress and prosperity (Chap VIII verse 50). Regarding qualities of a king it says, "We accept those who is knowledgeable, practices yoga, full of humility, leader among leaders, except in science and is kind", the administration is thy mainstay. (Chap IX verse 2).

While recognizing the importance of good governance ***Brihadaranya Upanishad*** stressed that, it is the duty of the king to protect Dharma, the public good, so that all citizens get equal opportunity and that the weak are not exploited and harassed by the strong. This ***Upnishad*** (1.4.14) calls Dharma as the kings and states there is nothing superior to Dharma.

$rnr-r-\& \{k=L; \{k=a; \} e\}A$
 $rLek) ekRi ja ukfLrA$
 $vFks vcyh; ku$ बलीयांसमाप्तं सते धर्मेण ।
 $; Fkk jkKk , oe.ii$

Manusmriti holds a position of pre-eminence in the Hindu literature. It is the oldest and well-known ***Smriti***. ***Manusmriti*** (7.3) says that without a proper ruler (i.e. government), the anarchy will result in citizens living in fear and thus kinship (i.e. government) was instituted for the protection of the subjects.

The necessity of scrupulous practice of *dharam* is forcefully expressed by **Manu**. According to ***Manusmriti***, $/kel , oa grks gflrA /kel j \{fr j \{kr\}A$ Means *Dharam* protects those who protect it, those who destroy dharam get destroyed, and therefore dharam should not be destroyed so that we may not be destroyed as consequence thereof. (VIII-5)

In this saying the rule of law is incorporated, the meaning it conveys is that when an orderly society would be inexistence, the rights of the individuals will be protected. It further says (7.43) that the ruler himself should be well learned in Vedas and other spiritual scriptures apart from learning about governance etc. that is necessary to rule.

Next, ***Atri Smriti*** (verse 28) says that punishing the wicked, honoring the good, enriching the exchequer by just methods ,being impartial toward the litigants, and protecting the kingdom are the five yajans i.e. selfless duties to be performed by the ruler.

The golden lesson from ancient Indian wisdom as enshrined in ***Mundaka Upanishad*** that said ***Satyamev Jayate*** needs to be remembered. The English meaning of *Satyamev Jayate* is that Truth alone triumphs and this is the basic part of good governance.

Now we come to the holy **Ramayana**. The Ramayana very succinctly talks about *Ram-Rajya or ideal governance* and offers essentials of the crucial art of leadership, for instance the second chapter, the **Ayodhya Kanda**. It is a real treatise on the issues related to good governance. If one goes through the dialogue between Lord Ram and his younger brother Bharat, the kind of advice that the Lord has given to his brother on how to manage the kingdom it will appear to be a great lesson on effective management practices. While giving tips on good governance to Bharat, Rama dwells upon several subtle aspects of administration. The critical factor in good governance is the quality of ministers. According to Lord Rama, the king must ensure that he appoints courageous, knowledgeable and strong-willed men with high emotional quotient because the quality of advice is a critical determinant of quality of governance. The king must appoint right men and not yes men. Lessons on decision-making are also there. Lord Rama advises his brother Bharat on how to take effective decisions. It should neither be taken unilaterally nor is consultation with too many people. There should be a core group of right people with right intentions to advice. Rama has advised Bharata on all facets of governance. From quality of ministers and the importance of strategy sessions, to temperance in administration to justice, Rama expounds on all the subtleties of statecraft in a lucid manner. While inquiring Bharata of his well-being, Rama offers lessons on effective governance in a powerful manner. The emphasis is on competence and confidentiality. Appointing tested men of noble lineage and integrity for strategic positions is the key to successful government. Moderate taxes should be levied on the people, lest they revolt. According to Rama, Soldiers should be treated fairly and a ruler should pay their legitimate wages on time. Delays in payment of wages and other allowances can lead to dangerous consequences.

Shanti Parva is a collection of political philosophy of Bhishma, Vyasa and various other sages of that time. Bhishma, when he was steadily dying on the bed of arrows - *sharshaiyya* - sermonises Yudhishthir about the governance as is narrated in *Shanti / Anushasan Parva* of the great epic. It is a volume related to various dimensions of politics like origin of state, dandniti, rajdharma, duties of the King and good governance. *Shantiparva* consists of 365 chapters and 13,716 numbers of Verses, which is further divided into three sub-parvas:

- (i) **Rajadharmanushasana Parva** (Chapters: 1 to 130 & 4716 Verses) This *Parva* describes the duties of king and his governance.
- (ii) **Apaddharmanushasana Parva** (Chapters 131 to 173 & 1649 Verses) this part describes the rules of conduct when one faces adversity.
- (iii) **Mokshadharma Parva** (Chapters 174 to 365 & 7351 Verses. This *Parva* describes the behaviour and rules to achieve moksha i.e. emancipation.

The first, *Rajadharmanushasana Parva* is most important because it is totally devoted to the art of governance. This *Parva* deals with the duties of four *varnas*, the history of sovereignty, the superiority of truth to falsehood and the duties of the king. It has been exquisitely explained in this *parva* about the reasons which lead to the growth of state and further kinship. According to this *parva*, in the very beginning the institutions of state did not exist. Later on people went in search of a king in order to protect their property, family and *varnas*. In the 58th chapter of *Shanti parva* suggests that the duty of a king and his ministers is to make people happy, pursue truth and act sincerely. In the 67th chapter, it describes the second aspect i.e. origin of kinship. Next, Chapter 88th recommends that the king to tax without injuring the ability or capacity of those who create wealth. Those who cannot bear the burden of taxes should not be taxed. Chapter 267 suggests the judicial staff to reflect before sentencing, only sentence punishment that is proportionate to the crime, avoid harsh and capital punishments, and never punish the innocent relatives of a criminal for the crime. The *parva* says that the proper function of a ruler is to rule according to *dharma*. For a proper ruling this *parva* tell us about thirty six virtues which a king should practice. He should lead a simple life and he should not use his power to enjoy the luxuries of life. Raj dharma is a term which encompasses the duties and obligations relevant to political and administrative affairs in *Shantiparva*. Peace and security is maintained in the state only by the government. The king looks after the welfare of all in the society and can manage situations in such a manner that everyone in his state lives a very prosper life with the help of his government. To deliver justice to all without any discrimination and on the basis of *dharma* was the basic aim of government. In the state, the king

is the apex of administration and he controls all the organs of the government. If everything is managed in a perfect manner and everyone in the state is happy, it means that it is not only governance rather it is good governance. Thus *Shantiparva* defines *dharma* not in terms of rituals or any religious precepts, but in terms of that which increases *Satya* (truth), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Asteya* (non-stealing of property created by another), *Shoucham* (purity), and *Dama* (restraint). So, the enhancement of the welfare of all living beings, without injuring any specific group is the best law which the *Shantiparva* claims.

Kautilaya's Arthashastra in its very nature is a treatise on the policy of state administration rather than on the theories of origin and function of the state to the extent that it concerns itself with matters of good administration and how it should be run in the best interest of the people. *Arthashastra* is, for that very reason, among other things, concerned with matter of governance. Although it may be said that Kautilaya's *Arthashastra* is the first comprehensive treatise on politics in ancient India, but Kautilaya had himself proclaimed in the beginning of his *Arthashastra* that his treatise on the rules of governance for the king had been prepared after systematic comprehension of all the available academic literature on the subject and procurement of empirical evidence on the prevailing theoretical frameworks of political functioning of the governments.

Kautilaya views on government can be grouped under three heads, viz. the ruler (king), the officials and the mechanism of administration. The first duty of king is to ensure the protection of the people, *rakshna*(r) and *palana* (p) means primarily the protection of the person and property of the people. The ruler must maintain order.

fo|kfouhrks jktk fgA iztkuka fou; s jr%AA
vuU; ka i ffkoha HkM-d-rA l oHkirfgrsjr%AA

Means, Good ruler must be well-educated and disciplined in sciences, devoted to good governance of the people and bent on doing good to all people (Chap V of book 1). These principles propounded by Kautilaya stand the tests even today and are a primary prerequisite for good governance.

He says if the ruler is strong and full of energy, the people will be equally so. Ruler must be wide-awake and alert and keep examining watch over the character and conduct of his ministers in charge of different departments of government with the help of the Prime Minister (Chap X and XIX, book 1). Before decision of the state are made or any important administrative measures taken, these should be discussed in well-council of ministers and this council of ministers may consist of as many ministers as may be deemed necessary or affordable(yathasamartham)(Chap XV, book I)

According to him, the ruler must follow the views and wishes of the friends and leaders of the people. The ruler must find his own priority to proving them security and well-being. He should help the miserable, helpless and diseased persons (chap v, book xiii).

Kautilaya says that the ruler has to devote 1/8 of his time each day to attending to the problems and concerns of the common people i.e. proper hearing should be given priority in his state. In the most categorical pronouncement of the principles of good governance (book1, chap xix) he says,

iztkl q[ks l q[ka jkk% iztkuk p fgrs fgreA
ukRefiz; afgre jkk% iztkuk r q fi z; afgreAA

which means, "In the happiness of his people lies king's happiness, in their welfare his welfare, whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his people he shall consider as good."

Arthashastra lays down strict norms of conduct and control of officers of the government. It says that if the officer fails in the discharge of his responsibilities any day, he would be fined twice the amount of his pay. With a view to maintain probity in public service and to obviate chances of corruption among officers, Kautilaya prescribes confiscation of their ill-gotten wealth, and transfer to another job so that they cannot either misappropriate government money or vomit what they have eaten up.(Chap ix, book ii).

Kautilaya is very progressive in his conception of marriage, divorce, remarriage, inheritance and family laws. He provides for the rights of women, welfare of prisoners, duties of the citizens, consumer interest protection, fair dealings by merchants and artisans and other very modern concerns like forestry, environmental protection, water resource management, rights of the landless labourers and wage earners and punishment to the doctor for negligence in treating a patient, Discoverers of mines, precious stones, treasures-troves. (Book IV, Chap i and ii)

Kautilaya adopted a well settled seven elements of the state: *Swamin* the ruler, *Amatya* the minister, *Janapada* the territory with people settled on it, *Durga* the fortified capital, *Kosa* the treasury, *Danda* the army and *Mitra* the ally. It also suggests the mutual interdependence of the elements of the state and the need for decentralization of governance and devolution of power to the grassroots level of janapada.

According to **Kautilaya**, *danda* that literally means the policy of the stick should not be discriminated. He lies down under which and how *danda* should be applied. He says, unjust or indiscriminate use of *danda* may lead to revolt of the people against the ruler and the people may overthrow him. It is the duty of the state to provide the 'common good'. The term is the symbol for the total governmental actions. In ancient India, king became an embodiment of the common good for his people. King is an instrument to achieve ends related to promoting general human well being, such as peace, order, prosperity, justice and human dignity. A king is bound to ensure that the common good (*dharma*) is preserved.

Thus Kautilaya is for a welfare state where the welfare and prosperity of the people (*Yogakashema*) are the supreme concerns of the ruler. The ruler is for the service of the people. He can have no likes or interest of his own. *Arthashastra* gives to the welfare of the citizens, the first place in all considerations of policy; the common good of the people and their sustained happiness are considered as main ends for the service of which Kautilaya called out an elaborate administrative system.

'*Sarva Kalyankari Karma*' '*Sarva Loka Sangraha*' and '*Sarva Hitey Ratah*' are the three most important principles in *Arthashastra* which supports the contention that governance is a moral endeavor that should aim at common good of the people in general. From a closer study of Kautilaya *Arthashastra*, we found that modern concept of good governance can be distilled from its *slokas* and *passages*. It covers many aspects and propounds principles of such universal applicability the use of which will undoubtedly enhance our present-day efforts towards fulfilling the national agenda for good governance.

II. Conclusion

Findings based upon these Indian scriptures, we can say that Good Governance module is not new to our country. In our ancient literature like *Vedas*, *Upnishad* to *Arthashastra*, Good Governance is called *Raj Dharma*, i.e., righteous duty of the king. It means those who are involved in governance must adhere to righteousness and do justice to the public. It has inseparable link to social welfare and inclusive development. Absence of good governance has been identified as the root cause of many of the deficiencies in society. It robs the citizenry of their social and all the aspects of governance have been dealt in such a religious manner that if followed even today it will enhance the spirit of good governance in present democracies. Aruna Goel in his book *Good Governance and Ancient Sanskrit Literature* find out some contents of good administration based upon these ancient Indian writings i.e.,

1. Openness in the sense of having wide contact with the people administered.
2. A sense of justice, fair play and impartiality in dealing with men and matters.
3. Sensitivity and responsiveness to the urges, feelings and the aspirations of the common people.
4. Securing the honor and dignity of the human being, however humble he or she might be.

5. Humility and simplicity in the persons manning the administrative machinery and their easy accessibility.
6. Creating and sustaining an atmosphere conducive to development, growth and social change.
7. Honesty and integrity in thought and action.

Similarly, we find that the most of the basic features of modern day concept of good governance i.e., responsiveness of the government, efficiency of administration, well being and prosperity of the people, overall development of the political community, good quality of life, ethical upwardness and economic affluence – have got prominent place in the thought process and administrative structures postulated by Indian scriptures. The primary objective of the authority has been described as the happiness of the people. All other goals are complimentary and secondary. Even though some of the areas which were suitable during those days like caste and class system are not relevant today, But with some modification according to present day requirement we can definitely make use of what is said in our ancient text and can apply those things in the governance module. The involvement of civil society in governance has become crucial to ensure transparent and efficient administration. So, there is a serious need to build **SMART** (simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent) administration to achieve the objective of good governance as is explicitly mentioned in the ancient scripture *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad* 1.4.14, says that:-

**“Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Nir-Aamayaah |
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu
Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet |
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||”**

May All Be Happy!
May All Be Free From Disease!
May All Realize What Is Good!
May None Be Subject To Misery!
Om Peace, Peace, Peace

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