SURAJYA
CONCEPT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ANCIENT INDIA:
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

    Governance of a State is an important aspect under Public Administration which 'encompasses the system by which an organisation is controlled and operated.' It is a mechanism by which the government and its people are regulated and made accountable.

    Ethics, Risk Management, Compliance and administration accordingly are the important components of good governance. It is a 'process of interactions through the laws, norms, power or language of an organised society over a social system.' Governance is the way in which a set of rules, norms and actions are structured, sustained, regulated and held accountable.'

KEYWORDS: *controlled and operated , Risk Management , Public Administration.*

INTRODUCTION

    Political thinkers have listed the important components of good governance. It needs to be, 'participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient and inclusive.' It should also follow the rule of the law.

    The history of the concept of Good Governance can be traced back to age-old days in India. According to R.K.Mookerji 'one of the characteristic features of ancient Indian civilization was the marked development of associated life and this development was achieved in varying degrees in different spheres of life like religion, learning, politics, civics and economics. In all these spheres organisations grew up on what may be regarded as a democratic or popular basis to fulfil the ends of national life. A proper presentation of Hindu culture in all its aspects and phases should take into account these diverse developments of the associated life, the manifestations of the democratic principle which that culture represents.'

    He further adds , 'India presented a rare and remarkable phenomenon of the State and Society co-existing apart from, and in some degree of independence of, each other, as distinct and separate units or entities, as independent centres of national, popular and collective life and activity. Both of them were independent organisms with distinct and well-defined structures and functions of their own

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and laws of growth and evolution. A policy of non-interference was recognised as the ideal policy of the State, the functions of which were ordinarily restricted to the protection of life and property and realisation of the revenue for the proper execution of that duty. There was a well-understood delimitation of the respective boundaries of the political and the social organisation, both of which were co-operating agencies for the promotion of the common wealth.'

EVOLUTION OF GOOD GOVERNANCE:

The elements of good governance advocated by modern political thinkers are very much ingrained in the ancient texts on *Rajaniti* and works on *Dharmasastra*. The *Rajadharma*, i.e., duties and responsibilities of a king in the ancient times were very much based on *Dharmasastra*, the code of law. The *Santiparva* of the *Mahabharata* narrates the need for the existence of good governance in the State under the leadership of a dynamic king. The absence of a good leader was felt in the initial years when the law of the jungle began to prevail in the state (*Matsyanyaya*). Hence, the work considered the State as a 'divine institution' and its king as 'divine creation' in order to terminate the anarchy in the State. The State was always 'an unwelcome institution for the evil-doers' because all the time they tried to disorganise and destroy this great institution. The *Danda* in the hands of an administrator was judiciously used to protect the good and to punish the wicked. Hence, the divine code of the State was abiding on both the ruler and the ruled.

The Vedic literature expected the king to be like the God Varuna and be the upholder of the law and order (*Dhritavrata*). He was expected to punish the wicked and protect the virtuous. Religion was to be promoted, morality to be encouraged and education to be patronised. The State was expected to secure both moral and material well-being of the people by protecting them from external aggression. Further, it maintained internal order in the State by enforcing respect for the existing traditional law. The Vedic king known as *Dharmapati* was the protector and enforcer of law, morality and *Dharma*. Hence, the *Atharvaveda* eulogised the example of King Parikshita. The Vedic and the Upanishadic ages clearly regarded the all round welfare of the public as the chief aim of the State.

c. 4th B.C onwards Ancient India started witnessing the evolution of good governance distinctly from which onwards we get the works like Kautilya's *Arthasastra*. The *Saptanga* theory advocated by the ancient political thinkers further systematised the system of governance in ancient India on firm foundation.

State in ancient India was the centre of society and played an instrumental role in the welfare of the people. It covered all aspects of human life like social, economic and religious. Hence, we come across well-organised governments in ancient India.

Some prominent ancient texts on *Rajaniti* like Kautilya's '*Arthasastra*', '*Yajnavalkya Smriti*,' '*Mitaksara*' of Vijnanesvara, '*Manu Smriti*' and some encyclopaedic works like '*Manasollasa*' of Somesvara III, '*Shivatatva Ratnakara*' of Basava Bhoopala are the important sources to get a glimpse of the good governance which existed in the past.

The *Rajaniti Sastra* served as a written constitution to the administrators and the rulers. It advocated a code of conduct which was voluntarily accepted by everyone. *Raja Dharma* based *Dharma Marga* was a 'code of conduct' which was applicable to both rulers and the ruled. Without the following by the top in the social hierarchy, common people cannot be asked to be virtuous and law-abiding. Hence, *Santi Parva* in the *Mahabharata* said, '*Raja kalasya karanam*' i.e. the king is the maker of the age. The aim of a ruler was to have a '*Rama Rajya'* based on the principles incorporated on the works of *Dharmasastra*. The concept of '*Ramarajya*' is a well-known phrase for indicating the system of a welfare state. Many rulers of ancient India aspired to have this tag to the states ruled by them. This ideal state indicated of fulfilling the needs of the commonest of the common people. The ideal state became a reality through this equation:

Sujana ---Swarajya--- Surajya--- Subhiksha--- Ramarajya

The concept of a welfare state was also possible with the existence of another equation:

Dharma (Ethical values) --- Education (value-based education) ---Values in the society ----Value-based life---- *Sukhi Samaja* (Welfare State).

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CONCEPT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ANCIENT INDIA:

In ancient times the good governance to a great extent relied on the ability of an individual king. Hence, the ancient texts talk much about the need for the existence of a good king in a state. Manu said, 'when the world was in disorder owing to the absence of the king and all were frightened being afraid of lawless society, then the creator created the king to protect all of them.' This observation of Manu highlights the need for a good leader in the State for the success of good governance. The absence of a good king or a leader in the State will create the status of *Matsanyaya* or *Atavikanyaya* which will result in disorder in the society. Manu further insists that the king thus selected should possess the qualities of divine beings which will make him a noble administrator.

Further, Kautilya in his *Arthasastra* at length, discusses the need and character of the king who gave required good governance to his people. He further classifies the characteristic features of a king into two categories, viz., *Swami- Sampat*, the king or the leader who inherited the qualities and *Atma-Sampat*, the one who acquired these qualities through one's own efforts.

He further adds that a person should attain the position of a king not only by heredity, but also by his own efforts and intelligence. He cites the example of Chandragupta Maurya who rose to the position of an emperor by dint of his hard work. A person endowed with the following qualities is called as a noble administrator by Kautilya: eloquent, self confident, bold, good memory, mighty, exalted (*Udagra*), self-control (*Sanyama*) and capable of controlling the subordinates and skilled in arts.

The necessity for the good governance was always felt in ancient India as 'it was not a land of jungles and wastes, but a land of abundant agriculture, brisk trade, numerous arts and crafts, convenient roads and trade-routes with wells and rest-houses.' The Greek writers on Alexander's campaign mention of 2,000 regular towns in the Punjab region.

The innovative practices of the leaders in the past helped them to overcome the environmental challenges which they encountered from time to time. The Mauryan administration coupled with statesmanship of its leaders evolved a system of administration with much decentralization and the existence of local government known for their much autonomy. These autonomous administrative units were able to fulfil the administrative requirements of a vast and extensive Mauryan territory.

The Mauryan rulers found administrative machinery which was 'fairly adequate to its purposes, already in existence and operation that had stood the test of centuries, the strain of political revolutions. The most brilliant of the Indian emperors can be credited with but few administrative innovations.'

The rulers also did not cherish the idea of setting up of a centralised government and controlling every part of the whole empire, but adopted an elastic system of federalism in which along with the central government at the metropolis there existed indigenous local administration. They continued the local autonomy of the local bodies.

The *Dharmasutra* writers like Gautama after empowering the king with all powers remind him of his duties and responsibilities. Gautama said, 'He shall protect the castes and orders in accordance with justice and those who leave the path of duty, he shall lead back to it. His administration of justice shall be regulated by the *Veda*, the Institutes of the Sacred Law, the *Angas* and the *Puranas*.' Vasistha also endorses the view of Gautama. But, king was never considered above the law or *Dharma*.

The principles of governance in ancient India were based on *Nitisastra*. *Niti* means the proper guidance or direction or to lead. It also refers to the science of ethics and science of wisdom. Hence, Bhartrihari called his book as *Nitisataka*. Much wisdom was needed in formulating the internal and foreign policy of the State. From about the 5th century onwards the works on *Nitisastra* also came to be considered as the 'science of government.' The works stipulated that the 'aim of the government was to secure all round progress and prosperity of the society.'

The great Indian epic the *Mahabharata* is an important source to know much about ancient Indian polity. The *Santiparva* extensively deals with *Rajadharma*, the duties and responsibilities of a king and the government. Similarly, *Sabhaparva* deals with the concept of an ideal administration.

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The *Arthasastra* of Kautilya is more like a manual for an administrator than a theoretical work. It is a practical manual which deals with the problems of the government. It suggests solutions for the both- at the times of war and peace.

Another important work on ancient Indian polity is *Sukraniti*. The work gives more detailed and comprehensive picture of the administrative system post-Kautilyan period. Apart from discussing the duties of king and his ministers, the work elaborates the features of civil and military administration along with the problems of foreign policy and the methods of warfare. Sukra argued that the State should be organised for the welfare of the people. More than suppressing the crime in the society, he argues for controlling the bad habits of the people. The work argues for the increasing the revenue of the State by promoting many economic activities. He further gives the details of the percentage of the state income to be spent on different items.

The *Dharmasutras* and *Smritis* also deal with the duties of kings and the administration of the past with a religious point of view. The *Puranas* and some ancient works like the *Panchatantra*, the *Harsacharita* of Bana, the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana and many more such works written in the past make references relating to the model administration envisioned by the rulers. One has to systematically study and collect information from these sources and further interpret their relevance in the contemporary world.

Ancient political writers fully recognised the ideal of perfect development of an individual to the full development of the State. Hence, they expected much from the authorities in the promotion of *Purusharthas* in the respective kingdoms or political territories.

Stone and copper-plate inscriptions of the ancient India are another important source material to know about the administration of the past. The epigraphs are the authentic sources which give details about the noble missions of the rulers like construction of lakes and donations to religious and academic institutions, their administrative reforms, taxation, land management, legal system and other important aspects relating to the administration. Similarly, the foreign accounts like that of the Greeks speak highly of the polity of ancient India. The Greek ambassador to the Chandragupta Maurya's court Megasthenese in his work *Indica* gives valuable information about the Mauryan administration.

Ancient jurists did not make any distinction between the natives and the foreigners. Ability to serve the State with distinction was the main criterion in the selection of the officers. Under Mauryan king Asoka a Greek was serving as Viceroy of an important frontier province. The Saka king Rudradaman I (c.135 A.D.) had a Parthian as his governor. King Yasovarman (c.725 A.D.) had a Huna officer.

Relevance of Good Governance in Ancient India in modern times:

The examples of good governance from the pages of history discussed above hold relevance even in modern times. Concern for the subjects is the focal point in a democratic set-up. The values serve as the foundation principles in an administrative set-up. Starting from the Vedic times the Indian administrators upheld the values and worked for its presence in the society. The concept of *Dharma* was held above all in the State.

The examples from the pages of history of ancient India can be taken as the case studies while discussing different political theories by the modern political science teachers. The examples of the past are the time-tested ones and they have witnessed the test of the time to survive to this day. Under Indian Knowledge System (IKS), much can be done by incorporating the wisdom of the *Dharmasastras* and many other works. A specialised approach is needed by the scholars to collect and interpret the information relating to the past.

Present does not exist without connecting itself with the past. Further, a sound present will lay a strong foundation for the future. Thus, the story of the human civilization continues.

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