Exploring Ancient Indian Political Philosophy: Concepts and Contributions"

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Abstract

In the context of past philosophy, the most advanced political thought is that of India, which symbolises the East. Understanding Indian political issues requires a thorough understanding of Indian political ideology. The genuine spirit of Indian political conceptions have often been overlooked by Western political thinking, as represented by academics from the West and Indian scholars who see the world through Western political theory's glasses. In analysing the issues with the Indian political system, the conceptions of the West are not applicable. By contrasting Machiavelli with Chanakya, for instance, we are unable to comprehend Indian political philosophy. Ancient, classic, and contemporary political intellectuals in India have created several indigenous notions and methods that are crucial for comprehending Indian culture and social structures. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagwad Gita, and other ancient Indian political texts are important examples. Along with other smritis, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Manusmriti covered the whole of human existence both vertically and horizontally. The notion of the State originated as a consequence of the vertical viewpoint. The idea of Dharma originated from the horizontal viewpoint. The foundation of Indian political thinking is made up of the principles of State and Dharma. This essay will attempt to concentrate on the political philosophies of the Bhagwat Gita, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Manusmriti, the Arthashastra, and the progression from the Puranas to the Nitishastras. This essay will investigate the significance and development of ancient political thought. Additionally, knowing ancient political thought is essential for delving into issues facing Indian society in particular and the world at large.

Keywords: Ancient political thinking, Bhagbatgita, Mahabharat, Ramayana, Arthasashtra

Introduction

Since the days of my graduation, political thought, whether Eastern or Western, has been a topic of enormous importance. This is because the only paper that the students find really difficult to understand is Political Thought. I find political science to be both intriguing and hard, having studied it in college and then taught it for many years. For the most part, Western political theory has dominated political thought. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and J.J. Rousseau, contemporary philosopher Nicollo Machiavelli, altruistic philosopher Jeremy Bentham, spokesperson philosopher John Stuart Mill, idealistic philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, and communist philosophers such as Karl Marx and Lenin continue to

dominate the political science curriculum and students' and teachers' minds. Political philosophers from the West and Indian scholars serve as a representative sample of Western political theory. Most people have lost the true essence of Indian political notions by seeing them through the lenses of Western political thought. Additionally, the difficulties facing human civilization at large have not been addressed by western political thought. The time has thus arrived to recognise the widespread failure of Western political thought.

On the other hand, Indian political thought is among the most advanced political thought in the history of political thought. Ancient, contemporaneous, or modern, Indian political thought has produced several unique tools and ideas that are crucial to comprehending Indian social structures and political ideas. For a fair study of the political scenes of today, a full comprehension of the political ideas of the leading political philosophers is required. The guiding principles for the people of the world in general and the people of India in particular for all ages, past, present, and future will always be an acceptance of how the Indian political ideas were occasionally adopted by the different political thinkers and their impact on the political action of the people. It is now necessary to investigate the potential worldwide applicability of these ideas or models of Indian political philosophers. Similar to ancient Greece, ancient India too evolved a political theory. One of the most advanced political ideologies in the East of the whole world is found in India. Only through the study of Indian Political Thought is it possible to comprehend India's political issues. In other words, it is impossible to analyse Indian political issues using current political theories from across the globe. We cannot fully comprehend Indian political philosophy, for instance, by equating Gandhi with Marx or Chanakya with Machiavelli.

Political thinking in ancient India developed throughout time

Max Muller and Professor Bloomfield are worth noting in this context as two Western scholars who have sometimes held the belief that the ancient Indian political thinking had nothing to contribute. The only area in which the Indian intellect was free to act, create, and adore was the realm of religion and philosophy, according to German scholar Max Muller. Nowhere have theological and philosophical beliefs taken root as deeply in a nation's thinking as in India, he said. The Hindus were a philosophical people. If history is to be seen as a whole, there is no other case where the inner life of individuals has totally consumed all the practical abilities of an entire people and, in fact, has all but obliterated those traits that give a country its position in history. The character and development of its people have been heavily influenced by religious organisations from India's beginnings, to a degree unheard of anywhere, according to Bloomfield. Such a plan makes no provisions for the advancement of the race or the interests of the state. Even the Western scholar Dunning once said that the Oriented Aryans never liberated their political system from the religious context in which it is still rooted today. He was so forced to confine his research to the philosophy of the European People.

On the other side, Indian scholars with opposing viewpoints included Dr. B.R. Bhandarkar and Dr. Beni Prasad. This group may also include notable Western scholars like D. Mackenzie Brown, Prof. U.N. Ghosal, N.D. Palmer, and others.

It is ludicrous to claim that India had never created political science as an autonomous field of study and had instead subjected it to the study of theology and philosophy, according to Dr. B.R. Bhandarkar. He believes that throughout the period of Kautilya, the Hindu mentality gave equal consideration to the advancement of knowledge, material growth, and spiritual culture. According to Prof. K.N. Ghosal, Hindus fall within the group of people who have made their mark on history as the creators of unique systems of political thinking.

"Ancient Indian political thinking deals with many issues that have dominated major portions of political theory in the western world," claims N.D. Palmer. These include the nature and origin of the state, various statuses, the relationship between the state and society, the forms of government, the origin of kingship, the duties of kingship, the limitations of royal authority, power politics, diplomacy, and administration, the state of nature, the social contact, and sovereignty potentially even at the international level. Conflicting theories of international relations can be found in both ancient Indian thought and modern political theory. As an example, the "Mandela group of states" ideology was similar to the Hindu notion of power balance. Additionally, the theory of "Sarvahapaurma" is comparable to contemporary notions of a world state or federation. It is noteworthy that D. Mackenzie Brown, a Western scholar, gave a dazzling homage to the field of political thinking starting from the East and not the West and political science beginning from India and not from Greece in his work "The White Umbrella."

The study of ancient Indian political thinking is made more complex and intriguing by all these assertions and denials.

Features

The key characteristics of ancient Indian political thought are listed below.

- The continuity of political thinking among older authors by the late political philosophers, according to B.A. Saletore, is one of the key characteristics of ancient political philosophy. This gives the topic of ancient Indian political thought a sense of fullness and continuity.

- Northern India, which is where Indo-Aryan culture originated, is where the old Indian political thought originated. It should be noted that the Dravidian races of the South did not significantly influence the political thought of ancient India.

- The core of prehistoric political thought is comprised of religion, ethics, and moral principles. The monarch and the priest collaborated on projects and maintained cordial connections.

- The fact that ancient Indian political thought was by nature realistic and pragmatic was another crucial aspect. It was made up of political theories that were grounded on historical knowledge and were global in scope. They established such rules that the rulers could really follow.

- The monarchical kingdoms of Northern India had a significant impact on the political theories of the ancient Indian intellectuals.

- The political philosophy of the ancient Indians was conservative and unchanging. This characteristic may be traced back to the political justification of caste systems and even the lower status of the sudras in their political philosophy.

- According to early political theories, politics was intimately related to other spheres of human endeavour.

- Politics was not seen as a stand-alone or unique field of study.

- According to early Indian political philosophers, the ruling classes and priests were at the top of the social scale. They had a number of benefits. For instance, the priests' lives and possessions were to be safeguarded and immune from taxes and the death penalty. However, later on, the privileges of the priestly elite were taken away. They were left out of Kautilya's enumeration of the constituent components (Angas) of government when he wrote Arthasasthtra (rajyam).

Development

The Rigveda Samhita is where ancient Indian political philosophy first emerged. It indicates the presence of a tribal culture in which the king had power over each tribal unit (Rajan). Tribal councils like the sabha and samiti kept the rajan in check. The status of the Vedic King, who had constrained authority, is also described in the Vedic Samhitas or by Brahmans.

In addition, the Vedic Literature includes the germs of the conception of the social compact as it relates to the birth of the state. The beginnings of the four classes are also discussed in the Brahmans and Vedic Samhitas. Law was also explained in the Vedic texts (Dharma).

In addition to the Vedic literature, other academics contributed to the development of ancient Indian political thinking. Unfortunately, most of these writings have vanished. However, Arthasashtra and the subsequent Brahminical Canon include some allusions to their viewpoints. In his writing, Kautilya mentions four separate schools and thirteen writers. Kautilya did not provide all of the additions made by Kamandakal. All of them provide as evidence that, even before Kautilya, there was literature on ancient Indian political thought. However, it is true that Kautilya was the first to carefully study ancient Indian political systems and thought. Manu did, however, make some significant contributions to the development of traditional Indian political thinking.

Sources of traditional Indian political philosophy

A single source or publication cannot include all of the information about ancient Indian political thought. In other words, they are dispersed over a variety of sectors, including the social, religious, and others. However, the following are the primary sources of ancient Indian political thought:

- Vedas

- The Mahabharata

- The Smritis

- Nitisara Kumandakiya

- Collections compiled by Hindu lawyers.

The aforementioned sources of traditional Indian political thought may be briefly examined.

Bhagwat gita's political philosophy

The Bhagwad Gita is regarded as the substance of the Upanishads in its most accessible form. In the Gita's eighteen chapters, Sri Krishna used a variety of justifications to persuade Arjuna of his obligations and the need of doing them, regardless of the outcome. The Upanishads' spiritualism is based on a thorough investigation of man, nature, and God by Lord Krishna. The Bhagwad Gita states that the realisation of God or the consolidation of society is the most essential goal for humans.

For humans, a consolidated community is optimal. It is evident that it has been given the utmost value by being linked to the realisation of God. Through education, commitment, or action, this objective may be realised. The three facets of human personality—cognitive, conative, or affective—are tied to these three identical routes. The Bhagwad Gita refers to a perfect person as "Sthetapragya." The Bhagwad Gita includes three components, namely philosophical, sociological, and psychological, and offers a harmonic synthesis of individual freedom and societal peace.

Vedas

The Vedas, a religious and philosophical literature, is a good resource for details on governmental structures. It offers details on the many Kingdoms and how they are organised, the responsibilities of Kings toward their citizens, and allusions to political figures like the Sabha and Samiti

- References to political bodies like the Samiti and Sabha.

- Concept of the monarchical system as a type of government.

- The notion that the foundation of political institutions should be people's moral development.

Mahabharat

Vyasa is a legendary character. He is well known for compiling and organising the renowned epic Mahabharat. While compiling the Mahabharat, Vyasa discussed a number of politic principles including Rajadharma, Dandaniti (criminal justice), the origin of the State, Kingship, the authority and responsibility of the rulers, principles and policies of government, judicial administration, ministers, the treasury, defence, etc.

Another crucial text for understanding ancient Indian political thought is the Mahabharata. It provides the following details regarding Indian politics.

- A discussion of the numerous hypotheses on the genesis of the state and kingship.

- A discussion on the king's responsibilities.

- A discussion of the ministers' obligations.

- Details about the tactics and regulations used in fighting.

- Knowledge of the political theories of the forerunners.

Smritis

One of the greatest political philosophers of ancient India was Manu. He is well-known for the enormous piece "Manusmriti." He is recognised as one of the original and prominent intellectuals who contributed thoughts concerning the societal, religious, and political systems, norms, standards, and values. His political views are still applicable in the contemporary society. He established the social and political institutions that made up ancient Indian Civilization. Manu's political theories may be found in the areas of the Origin of State, the function and characteristics of Kingship, Dandaniti, diplomacy, and other parts of administration. Ancient Indian political thought may also be found in smrities (holy traditions), from which we can learn about the shifting role of the king and the moral foundation of the state.

Arthasashtra

As Chanakya or Vishnugupta, Kautilya was one of the most practical political strategists in ancient India. His greatest work, "Arthasashtra," served as the foundation for his practical political philosophy. There are fifteen volumes, or Adhikaranas, in Kautilya's Arthashastra. The first volume examines monarchy, including the King and his responsibilities, as well as ministers and priests. The second volume discusses bureaucracy, its organisation, and the administration of several departments. The third volume covers civil laws such as those governing marriage, inheritance, sales and purchases, etc. Criminal Law and Punishment is the subject of the fourth book. The fifth volume covers topics including courtiers' behaviour, government employees' sustenance, and treasury organisation. The sixth book discusses aspects of the monarchy, including internal peace, the King's characteristics, and ministers and courtiers. The seventh volume discusses forts, neutrality, treaties, war, peace, neutrality, and other topics. The eighth volume covers topics pertaining to the King and his people, natural disasters, the army, and friendly states. The ninth book discusses opponents, traitors, internal and external risks, strengths and weaknesses, etc. The eleventh volume covers topics such as war, infantry, cavalry, and elephants. Punishment, causes of contention, hidden punishment, and other related subjects are covered in the eleventh book. The war of intrigue, messenger responsibilities, destruction of stocks and granaries, and other topics are covered in the twelfth book. The thirteenth volume covers topics like maintaining peace in conquered regions and using spies to sow divisions in the enemy's army. The fourteenth volume discusses how to hurt the army, how to treat wounded, and other topics. The design of the treatise's logical layout is covered in the fifteenth volume. The most reliable source for ancient Indian political thought is Arthasashtra.

The contributions of Arthasashtra are listed below.

Exploring Ancient Indian Political Philosophy: Concepts and Contributions

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Saini

109.6

- The King's obligations and duties.

- The Foreign Policy Principles

- The nature of the army

- The types of taxes the state collects and how they are collected.

The status of Arthasashtra in the field of political literature is comparable to that of Panini's Ashadhyayi in the area of grammar, according to Prof. Altekar.

As a result, Arthasashtra is one of the government's most comprehensive treaties.

Nitisara Kumundakiya

Kautilya's Artasashtra is principally summarised in the 500 A.D. book Kumundakiya Nitisara. But it also offers details about the King and his household.

Collections of Hindu attorneys

Between the 14th and the 18th centuries, a number of Hindu lawyers wrote several treatises that are distributed across various sources. Among the most significant authors to create such works are Nibandhakaras Chandesvara Mitra Mishra and Nilakantha. These works' importance comes from the fact that they include quotations from unidentified sources.

The political doctrine of the Bhagwad gita

The Gita's most significant lesson is to be dedicated to one's own social obligations and volunteer work.

Mahabharata's political philosophy The renowned epic Mahabharata may also be regarded as ancient Indian political literature. From a political perspective, the Shantiparva, in which a theory of punishment is advocated as a political theory or in the service of government, is the most significant section of the Mahabharata. The ability to punish (Danda) has been seen by Indian philosophers as the primary attribute of the State. The Shantiparba in the Mahabharata states that Vishnu first produced a significant work on life and adman before establishing a king, government, and state.

The Mahabharata mentions a political science treatise written by Vishnu that details the laws controlling state government and the laws governing interactions between states. We discover the following political ideologies in the Mahabharata.

- They are where the state first began.

- State-side patriotism among the populace

- The Mahabharata repeatedly favours a decentralised government.

- The Mahabharata is an advocate of democracy in action.

Exploring Ancient Indian Political Philosophy: Concepts and Contributions

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Saini

Ramayan's political ideology

Additionally, the Ramayan offers crucial insights on traditional Indian political philosophy. From ancient times till the present, the Ramayan's depiction of an ideal state has been a significant part of Indian political thought. From the time of the Ramayan until the present, the ideal notion of Ram Rajya has been a continuing source of inspiration for Indian political philosophy.

The Manusmriti's political philosophy

The Smritis era came after the epic period. The Manusmriti's Smrities are the most significant. The Manusmriti offers useful political science themes like justice, law, and education. The most significant chapters of Manusmiriti are chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. In the seventh chapter, Manu engaged in an appropriate study of the state's numerous facets. The responsibilities of the King are first thoroughly covered. Ministers, ambassadors, village leaders, and other official organs have all been carefully taken into consideration. Manu has painted a very thorough picture of the many facets of a King's life and responsibilities. The eight chapters of Manusmriti provide a thorough examination of the justice system.

Arthashastra's politico-philosophical system

The most significant work on ancient Indian political thought is Kautilya's Arthashastra. It offers a thorough study of all facets of a welfare state. Dharma is seen by Arthasashtra as the cornerstone of both intra- and inter-state relationships. The idea that the state has a divine beginning has the endorsement of Kautilya.

Puranas to Niti-shastras: An Evolution

Between 5 and 10 A.D., the 18 Puranas include political concepts. These Puranas include the Agni Purana, the Vayu Purana, the Markendiya Purana, the Mastsya Purana, the Vrahnardiya Purana, the Padma Purana, the Varaha Purana, the Narasingha Purana, the Koorma Purana, and the Srimad Bhagvada.

Jain and Buddhist scriptures

Buddhism and Jainism both reflect prominent characteristics of Indian political thought. The equality of man in human society was proclaimed by Buddhist and Jain academics. Sutralankara, a Buddhist scripture, gives a thorough description of the abilities that a ruler must unavoidably possess. Buddhist and Jain intellectuals rebelled against prejudice and advocated the ideal of human equality.

NITI STRATES

Texts referred to as Niti Shastras include political views.The Niti Shastra of Kumandaka and "Shukranti," among others, are the most significant.

Political philosophy from ancient India has certain flaws.

A few of the more significant of the many flaws in ancient Indian political theory are listed here.

Exploring Ancient Indian Political Philosophy: Concepts and Contributions

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Saini

- The schools and systems had a big impact on the ancient Indian political writers. The academics of ancient Indian political philosophy were greatly influenced by the schools of the Vedic theology, the schools of the holy Tradition (Smriti), the schools of the Buddhist Canons, the schools of Arthasashtra, etc. As a consequence, writers struggled to come up with new ideas. What is troubling is that sometimes their thoughts are even clouded with uncertainty.

- Chronology, or the lack thereof, is a difficulty with ancient political ideas as well. Regarding the dates of certain texts, there are several points of view. There are three dates, for instance, ranging from the third to the seventh centuries AD. relating to Kamandaka's political pacts. Therefore, it is difficult to apply the concepts of ancient Indian political thought to the passage of time.

- Another issue with ancient Indian political thinking is the lack of agreement on the definitions of various terminology and the functions of various political organisations. As an instance, many academics have given various terms—such as Dandaniti, Dharmaniti, Dharma, Rajniti, Samiti, Sabha, etc.—different interpretations. The normal pupil would have a very tough time comprehending these phrases. Even though contemporary researchers have not yet been able to solve the issue, it still exists.

Conclusion

One of the most advanced political ideologies in the world, not only in India, is the ancient Indian political theory. Sadly, this truth has not received much attention. This is due to a number of factors. First, there is a lack of well defined ancient Indian political thought. A meaningful effort has not been made to identify and define the field of research for ancient Indian political thought. It is imperative that the political theories of classical political thinkers be adequately analysed and their significance for Indian politics be underlined. Additionally, their perspective may be used to finding solutions for global issues. In order for the old Indian Political Thought and its thinkers to reclaim their proper position in the history of Political thought, they must be reintroduced to all of Political thought.

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