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Vision of governance: Rajdharmā in Indian epics

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Abstract

There is an outstanding contribution of the Indian epics in heralding the importance of good and just governance. This paper analyses the concept of Rajdharmā as projected in the Indian epics. Rajdharmā constitutes the tenets of the King and kingship. Its basic concern is the manifestation of the best in the king to bring about the welfare of the people. Study of the classical epics reveal a continuity of Indian culture and traditions. There are certain values that our scriptures and literature uphold and propagate. This value system is based on impartiality, ethical conduct and a nationalist philosophy. The Vedas, Puranas, Smritis, Upanishads, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata Are repeat with examples of the ideal policies of the state, inner perfection and the triumph of moral values. Devotion and dedication of the king towards his subjects while following the principle of simple living himself has been advocated for the welfare of all in all the epics. This paper undertakes an in-depth study of the profound ideas in these texts.

Keywords: Good governance, nationalist philosophy, ethical conduct

Introduction

Indian epics are sociological treatises incomparably offer valuable information about the social and administrative mores of the times which our equally valid and relevant in the present times. The study of the epics acquired a prominent place in all walks of life particularly on the elimination of sins and sufferings of the present century. A proper insight into right ways of administration can be had by pondering over these epics and the socio-religious or political as well as spiritual condition of the nation can be improved by their proper understanding. They can very well be viewed with contemporary as well as a reformist perspective, to show the people with an authority the right path. A study of these epics makes us feel proud of our own rich cultural heritage and brighten in the future of humanity as a whole. The very fact that these epics has lived beyond the times when they were written prove that their applicability is not limited to a specific time, place or person.

The future of a country cannot be bright until and unless kinship is welfare oriented. In ancient Indian classics the spirit of Rajdharmā was based on ensuring prosperity, peace and justice to all. The centre of all administrative endeavours must not be any personal gains but to ensure the benefit of the community. The epics occupy a prominent place in today's society for the regeneration of the world and to help the young generation to do things in a better way. The noble kings in the ancient times were trained and motivated by their gurus as well as their elders to think and act rightly and efficiently. They were encouraged to inculcate positive ideas as negative ideas would weaken them and their subjects. Getting education in the Gurukuls was a form of worship of the divinity in the person.

In The Ramayana great impetus has been laid on selfless qualities and aptitude of a king. Its adroit writer, Valmiki has laid stress on moral values in the whole epic. Ramrajya of those times is equal to a well administered and ethically governed society of today where everything is in order and the scope of happiness and well-being are limitless. The reign of Ram does not denote any religious narrow-mindedness or intolerance but what is projected is harmony and understanding between the different spheres of society. The persons belonging to different Ashramas or phases of life has been referred to and their duties have been explained in detail. According to Ramayana, every individual is divine in nature, what is important is that the king provides democratic conditions where every individual can discover new avenues of internal as well as external progress.

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True kingship can be achieved not by mean servitude of others but by the principles of justice and peace to all. Even Gandhiji advocated a detailed reading of Ramayana as it is associated with happiness and domestic and social sphere. Its guiding principles are similar to what was upheld by our father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, that is, self governance and self sacrifice. A noble king is one who is loved by his subjects without any apprehensions and fear of undue punishments. Virtuosity can transform the evil doer and can help to build a well ordered society. A king has been considered equivalent to God. A king should be considerate, generous and well planned. The most important quality of a good king is that he should be foresighted as said by Valmiki:

कृतज्ञः सत्यवादी च राजा लोके महीयते ।
चारेण तस्मादुच्यन्ते राजा दीर्घचक्षुषः ॥

Whatever work is to be done should be at the right time if success has to be achieved. Tasks which are initiated or completed after the stipulated time are useless.

यःपश्चात् पूर्वकार्याणि कुर्यादैश्वर्यमास्थित ।
पूर्वं चोत्तरकार्याणि न स वेद नयनायज्ञं

Truth, patience, spirituality, generosity and courage are the qualities which a king should always cherish. Ram was a person who not only preached nobility but practiced the ideals of a dutiful king and strength of character.

A king should have a strong character, strength of mind and an ever expanding intellect. He should not be proud of his abilities. It is his bold thinking and fearless enterprise which can galvanise the whole society and make everyone happy and content. A ruler, who is immersed in self pride dies at the hands of his own loved ones as is exhibited by the example of king Ravana:

अतिमनिनामग्राह्यमात्मसंभावितं नरः ।
क्रोधनं व्यसनेहन्तिस्वजनोपि नराधिप ॥

Not only is the king but his whole family is bound to work for the betterment of their subjects. A king should do his best to negate his weaknesses and negative aspects of his personality by keeping control on his five senses. To bring about the economic progress of the subjects and the kingdom is also an expression of good governance.

Time to time consultation with the ministers has also been recommended strongly in the epic. Rama's devotee Hanuman suggests him to act keeping in mind the reaction of his subjects. He advises him to act according to his ethics and spirituality. One's deeds are reflected in one's personality and so right thought is equally important as right action. The personalities of King Dashrath, Bharat, Laxman besides that of Ram are exemplary in the epic. They are apostles of righteousness and morality. They are all curious for social welfare and this is the reason that they occupy an important place in history.

Like The Ramayana, The Mahabharat also has had a perennial influence on the minds of humanity down the centuries. The driving principle of The Mahabharat is also moral and just governance. It reflects the true value system of India which has been appreciated by the whole world. The Mahabharat is a spiritual saga which projects the obligations of a noble king in the pursuit of salvation. It deals with the fundamental questions about life, living and soul. It has been stated

repeatedly in the epic that the most important duty of a king is protection and progress of its people. The greatness of a king lies in kindness and love towards his subjects. Bhishma said to Yudhisthir in Shantiparva that A king's governance can be considered to be appreciable if people live fearlessly under his domination as they live in the protection of their father. Only in that condition can happiness flourish in an empire.

It is also noteworthy that in The Mahabharat, fear of punishment to the wrong doer has been given importance for maintenance of peace and harmony in the state. As in other Indian classics, in Shantiparva, punishment has been considered as a means to ensure general public's security and faith in the competence of the ruler. Certain offences were considered punishable, for example, disrespect of women, unacceptable behaviour towards the poor and unlawful acts like stealing, violence and others. The criminals ought to have fear of the King and his authority. The text quotes:

दण्डः शास्ति प्रजाः सर्वा दण्ड एवाभिरक्षति ।
दण्डः सुप्तेषु जागर्ति दण्डं धर्मं विदुर्बुधाः ॥

Yudhisthir himself was the epitome of truthfulness and good conduct. It has also been portrayed that procrastination is a king's weakness and should be avoided in every condition. A king should equip himself with bravery, morality, spirit to fight for his rights and for his subjects. Belief in oneself and his worth forms the foundation of good governance. There are innumerable references in the epic which state that Dharma should be the means for the king to obtain power and authority. A king who focuses on Dharma continues to rule without failing. Dharma is over and above any particular individual. The reason of downfall of the Kauravas was their lack of morality. Krishna motivated and supported the Pandavas to establish a kingdom where happiness of all would prevail. There would be no distinction between high and low and everyone would enjoy appropriate freedom and respect.

In the epic Bhishma elaborately discusses the different types of state such as Ganarajya, samgha, monarchy and anarchy and speaks about the various divisions of administration like military administration, justice and civil administration. The various divisions of the state together constitute an organic unity and form the state. It is the responsibility of a king to unify the different agencies of a state and protect his subjects. He should not give in to the domination of the evil doers. The strength of the state lies in the strength and spirit of the king and vice versa. A king should also respect his family and his teachers and should not use knowledge in the wrong way as It would move detrimental both personally for him as well as for his state. It is also essential for the king to take the advice of the wise and the learned. Such people should be given posts who are perfect in Purusarthas and have self-restraint. Politics and morality are interrelated and both are essential for the prosperity of a ruler as well as the kingdom.

Both, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata have been recognised as store houses of knowledge and wisdom. The epics constitute a variety of legends and fables and through theme yeah the importance of good governance has been acknowledged. They highlight the gentleness and the righteousness of Ram and Yudhisthir. It has been established by these epics that a king should have certain extra-ordinary qualities for the welfare of the state. The knowledge of 'polity' or the science of public administration as narrated and described in the epics are relevant even in the contemporary times of disturbance and corruption and must be imbibed in

its complete sense.

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