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Good Governance In Ancient Indian Political Thought

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The term 'good governance' was introduced by the World Bank in 1989 while characterizing crisis in Sub-Saharan countries. The World Bank and other donor institutions underlined the importance of good governance for meeting the crisis due to the failure of economic policies in aid receiving developing countries. They focused on creation of minimum conditions for facilitating private sector growth, reduction of poverty, providing of institutional efficiency for service delivery and earning of peoples' trust. (World Bank Report 1998) So Concept of good governance has acquired increased importance since 1990s largely because international aid agencies began to recognized its absence as serious obstacle to economic development of developing countries, which have been their affirmed objectives. The concept of Good Governance has gained prominence around the world in recent times. However, the philosophy of good governance has its origin in the ancient period. The objective behind this paper is to analyze the different conceptions related to good governance which is found in the ancient Hindu political thought.

The human concern for good governance is as old as human civilization. It is evident in the writings of political thinkers and philosophers who had discussed and debated on social good and improvement of quality of lives. (Bagchi, 2009) Its basis can be found in the ideas of many political philosophers. Plato's *The Republic* aimed at providing an ideal framework for good governance through the concept of justice, rule of philosopher king etc. Plato advocated for highly trained administration and political class, dedicated to public service without consideration of personal happiness. Plato considered government as highest moral and practical task to which men of knowledge and virtue ought to devote themselves. (Chitlangi, 2007) Aristotle have clear focus on good governance where they emphasized that aim of government should be on good life of people not formation of good government only. Even in modern era idea of John Lock was mainly with self government and had assumption that good governance would emerge from a combination of public laissez-faire and private pursuit of individual advantage. Rousseau accentuated in *General Will* that realization of what is best for community is not

enough, it must also be willed by the community (Bagchi,2009). As a matter of fact, the basic objectives of all the political thinkers from Plato to Mill had been the pursuit of good governance.

The idea of Good Governance is as old as Indian civilization. Almost all ancient Indian Scriptures like Jataka tales, Shanti Parva-Anushasanparva of Mahabharat, Valmiki's Ramayana Shukracharyas' Nitisar, Panini's Ashtadhyayi, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, describe the concept of good governance in one way or the other. In all ancient writings *Raj Dharma* is given utmost importance. It found that rulers were bound by *dharma*, popularly called '*Raj Dharma*', which precisely meant for 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. *Raj Dharma* was the code of conduct or the rule of law that was superior to the will of the ruler and governed all his actions. The *Ramayana*, the saga of Rama life written by Balmiki is widely acclaimed as the greatest of all Indian epics. According to *Ramayana* a critical factor in good governance is the quality of ministers. Courageous, knowledgeable, strong-willed men with a high emotional quotient as ministers are key to effective governance. *Santi Parva* of *Mahabharat* has devoted considerable space to *Raj Dharma* which aims to establish good governance in the society. It stressed that, it is the duty of the king to seek and promote the welfare of its subject. The king must be compassionate to the people of all section of society and concentrate on the welfare of the people. This part of *Mahabharata* has emphatically stated that the king should involve all the population in their respective duties and instruct them to perform their assigned functions according to *dharma*. *Santi Parva* reveals that the king was powerful but not omnipotent (Nanda,2006). *Bhishma Pitama* in *Mahabharata* opines that the foundation for good governance is righteousness in public affairs. The king, his relatives and employees who have taken oath of their offices to take care of public needs must not act unjustly because if they do so they will not only destroy the moral basis of governance but will also turn the state into hell (Mukherjee,2010). The *Rig veda* also stressed upon public welfare of the society. The *Rig Veda* states "*Atmano mokshartham jagat hitayacha*" i.e., the dual purposes of our life are emancipation of the soul and welfare of the world. Thus, the public good should be the welfare of the society; or in other words, the private good or self-promotion should be subservient to the greatest good of all (Dwivedi & Mishra, 2007). *Manusmriti* is the most important and widely studied ancient legal text translated during the British rule of India. It comprises of discourses of Manu and Bhrgu on *Dharma* topics such as duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and others. It includes not only principles for the moral duties of all persons, but also special canons for the conduct of kings, officials and administration of justice. According to *Manusmriti* Brahma has created king to be protector of the *Verna* and public order(common good).The King in discharging his duties shall order all his officials to work for the good of his subjects. There are many other verses which talk about good governance (Mukherjee,2010). Apart from *Manusmriti* Brihadaranya Upanishad also acknowledged the proposition of good governance by explaining that king's major responsibility is to protect *dharma*, so that all citizens get equal opportunity and that the weak are not exploited and harassed by the strong.

Kautilya's (Prime minister of Chandergupta Maurya) *Arthashastra* in ancient Indian history is considered best treatise on good governance. It covers all aspects of governance and basic principles of statecraft. *Arthashastra* is not part of *Dharmashastras* (scriptures) but it is a treatise on rules of governance for the king. Some illustrations from *Arthashastra* are as follows:

“In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases him (personally) he shall not consider as good, but whatever makes his subjects happy, he shall consider good .” Kautilya has elaborated the traits of the king of a well governed. According to Kautilya, king is the servant of state and should not work for his own benefit. It is his responsibility to maintain law and order and take measures against corrupt officials. There are many other examples of Indian model of good governance in rules of Chandergupta Maurya, in the rule of Ashoka, Chandergupta Vikramaditya and so on,. Kautilya alone called the king a servant of the state who would harbor no personal likes, it would be rather the likes of the servants that would be followed by him. Major responsibility of the ruler is to do justice to all and thus practicing the principle of social welfare. Although ruler is not elected by the people yet he is accountable to the public. And if monarch does not follow the principle of justice state is bound to fail. Apart from this in some other ancient kingdoms like Guptas and Mauryas institutions of the governance machinery differed here and there but overall it was strongly believed that the rulers existed not for their own power and position but for discharging a debt to the people which they could do by providing good governance.

Thus principle of Raj Dharma of ancient times is converted into principle of good governance in modern times. So, principle of good governance has always remained the central point of the governance in ancient times. Medieval Period Indian governance was very different from ancient governance. Although it was of the dominating military and feudal character, totally different from the service oriented attitude of the ancient period yet Afghan ruler Sher Shah Suri and Mughal king Akbar revived healthy traditions of old Indian administrative system and created a number of new patterns for a solid system of governance to grow. So, when international community raised the issues of governance especially related with third world countries, it also became a major concern in India.

Thus it can be concluded that the concept of Good Governance has become the buzzword of the present day politics and administration. Although this concept has its deep roots in the past yet many ideals vary from the earlier approach to good governance. Traditional view point emphasizes more on rule of law, procedures and processes. While the present view point stresses more on citizen centric approach, transparency, accountability, equity, sustainable development and inclusiveness.

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