Main Features of the Indian Political Thinking

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Abstract:

Indian Political thinking is one of the most developed political thinking in the history of political thought.

The impulse for philosophy in general and political philosophy in particular may originate in curiosity or in doubt or in faith. According to the Greeks knowledge arises from curiosity. "You Greeks are always boys; there is not an old man among you; you are young in your souls," said the Egyptian priest in Plato's Timaeus. He was right. They were a race of seekers after unknown truth. "All men want to know" said Aristotle and he added "the feeling of wonder makes the true Philosopher, for this is the only source of Philosophy." It is because of this curiosity that Greece is one of the mainsprings of civilization.

In contrast, European Political thinking arose from doubt.

According to the tradition of Indian thinkers' source of knowledge is faith or reverence. The Bhagwad Gita makes it quite clear that knowledge can be attained only through reverence and the skeptics are bound to be ruined.

Keywords: impulse, philosopher, faith, reverence, curiosity.

Introduction

Indian Political thinking, one of the most developed political thoughts, represents the East in the history of political thought. A study of Indian political thought is very much necessary to understand Indian Political Problems. The Western concepts are not relevant in the analysis of the problems of Indian Political System. We cannot, for example, understand Indian political philosopher by comparing Machiavelli to Chanakya. Indian political thinkers, ancient, modern and contemporary, have developed some indigenous tools and concepts which are very much necessary to understand Indian society and social institutions.

The Vedas, the Upnishads, the Bhagwad Gita etc. represents significantly the ancient Indian Political Thinking. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Manusmriti along with other Smiritis dealt with entire panorama of human life. Political Thought, for most of its part has been dominated by Western Political Thought. Looking through the spectacles of the Western Political Thought, have generally missed the real spirit of Indian Political Concepts. Moreover, the Western Political thinking have failed to provide solutions to the global problems of human civilization. Time has, therefore, come to take note of the global failure of the Western Political thinking.

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The tradition of Indian political thinking is the story of great minds that evolved political institutions and guided Hindu society for three millennium, A thorough understanding of the political concepts of the prominent political thinkers is absolutely necessary for a proper analysis of the political senses of today. An understanding of the manner in which the Indian political ideas were adopted from time to time by the different political thinkers and their impact on the political action of the people will always be the guiding principles for the people of the world in general and people of India in particular for all ages, past, present and future.

Now time has come to look into the possibilities of relevance of these concepts on models of Indian Political Thinkers at global level as an alternative. India, like ancient Greece developed a political thought in ancient times. Indian Political thought is one of the most developed political thoughts in the East for the World. An understanding of the political problems of India can be possible only by the study of Indian Political Thought. In other words, the prevalent political concepts of the world cannot be relevant for analyzing political problems of Indian polity.

Evolution of the Tradition of Indian Political Thinking

The Western Scholars, sometimes, are of the opinion that ancient India political thought made no contribution in the Tradition of Indian Political Thinking. "A German scholar pointed out "the only sphere where the Indian mind found itself at liberty to out, to create and to worship was the sphere of religion and philosophy."

But according to B. R. Bhandarkar "it is absurd to affirm that Indian had subordinated the study of politics to that of theology and philosophy and had never developed it as an independent knowledge.[1]" Similarly D Mackenzie Brown, a Western Scholar, in his book, *"The White Umbrella"* paid glorious tribute to the Realm of Political thought beginning from the East and not from the West and Political Science beginning from India and not from Greece?[2]

Has Indian Tradition of Political Thinking anything to contribute?

Main Features of the Indian Political thinking, can not be discussed either only on the basis of traditional Indian political thought or on the basis of modern Indian political thought. It can be discussed only on the basis of the whole tradition of Indian Political thought because Indian tradition of political thought has an essential continuity with its own past. The continuity is clearly seen in the contributions of Dayananda Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekanand, Aurobindo and Gandhi. Mahatma acknowledged that his political experiments were meant "to throw new light on many an old truth." What he has done, he said, was "to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the Gita and the spirit of Humanism.[3]"

The Features of the tradition of Indian political thinking cannot even be analysed solely in terms of the contributions of various thinkers and their impact on various movements. It can be done only in terms of their relevance to such global and perennial issues as war, nuclear threat, human rights, poverty and so on. This paper will not summarise the ideas of individual political thinkers but only explore the basic framework within which they thought about politics.

India was subjected to several foreign invasions and experienced several social and economic changes from the very beginning to the British period. In response to these, Indian political thinkers of different periods had to deal with different problems and approach familiar problems from different angles. Despite these, however their basic framework of thought that is their basic concept, concerns and problems retained a remarkable continuity. It is in this sense that one can legitimately talk about the Indian

Tradition of political thinking.

This paper will outline only important features of Indian political thinking, a tradition that has developed over several centuries is too rich and complex to permit an easy summary of the features. The main features of the Indian political thinking is bound to involve distortions and omissions.

The question this paper is attempting to answer is: Has India tradition of political thought anything to offer to enrich the sum total of political thought?

The answer to these questions would depend on how far Indian thinkers reflected original Indian values and experience in politics.

There may be three answers to this question. One is that the Indian tradition of political thought has nothing to contribute because it is inegalitarian, uncritical apologetic to the established social order, hostile to change and largely didactic and practical.

The second answer is that the Indian thinker haves nothing original to contribute because they attempted to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the West.[4]

The third answer is that the modern Indian political thinking is a blend of Indian tradition and experience and Western political experience and thought. This appears to be a more balanced view. It is significant that modern Indian Political Thinkers, many of whom were active participants in the struggle against colonialism, revealed a rare understanding of global issues and among thinker like Gandhi we find a proper blending of precept and practice. It is this combination of theorist and activist roles that makes the Indian Political thinker worthy of interest and relevance to the entire world.

Main features of the Indian Political Thinking

Main Features of the tradition of Indian Political thinking are as follows:

First, ancient Indian Political thinking is known as Rajya Shastra, Rajadharma, Dandaniti, Nitishastra etc. Its significance lies in the fact that it deals with a vast country which has had a civilization that goes back to at least 5000 years from now and which witnessed the rise and fall of many kingdoms and empires in the course of its long history.

Second, according to Greek thinkers' knowledge arises from curiosity. "It is the feeling of wonder that makes the true philosopher," said Aristotle. According to Hobbes knowledge arises from doubt. But according to age old Indian thinking source of knowledge is faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

"J)kokWYyHkrs Kkua] la'k;kRek fou';fUr " says the Bhagwad Gita.

Third, they conceptualized political life in terms of Danda and Dharma. For them political life consisted in using Danda to maintain Dharma. The term Danda means discipline, force, restraints or punishments. Ancient Indian political thinkers generally used it to refer to the punitive use of coercive power of Government. Dharma is that which holds society together. Since society is held together by each individual and group during his or its specific duties, they used the term Dharma to mean duties.

They wrote the Dharmasastra to prescribe Dharma and the Arthasastra to inflict danda. The two approaches differed from each other in more ways than one. (i) The Dharmasastra writers concentrated on exploring the dharma of individual and groups including government. The Arthasastra writers were interested in organizational mechanics of Danda that is the way the government could be most effectively organized. (ii) The authors of Dharmasastra are moralistic, those of Arthasastra

realistic. (iii) The former explored Political life from the standpoint of Dharma, the latter from that of Danda (iv) Since the Dharmasastras were concerned to lay down Dharma, they were legalistic and religious in orientation, whereas the Arthasastra concentrated on institutions and policies and were secular in orientation.

(v) Finally, while the principles and rules of the Dharmasastra were authoritative, didactic, prescriptive and binding in nature, those of the Arthasastra were largely analytical, elucidatory and recommendatory.

Thus the ancient political thinkers were convinced that political authority could not be based on Dharma alone, for people's sense of Dharma is generally weak and ambitious and powerful men would want to plot against the ruler. Nor could it be based on Danda alone for fear cannot hold society long. Accordingly they insisted that political authority vested on the twin foundations of Dharma and Danda.

Fourth, One of the most important philosophical features, which was the highest flight of Rg vedic thought, is the concept of Rta or cosmic order. The world takes its regular course, day follows night and season succeeds seasons, because of Rta. Man must live according to Rta. Rta depended on Varuna, who was sometimes looked on as its creator.[5] The vedic seers regarded Rta as the real governing force of the universe. It controlled all natural phenomena. It was the expression of truth Rta was not merely a cosmic principle governing natural objects, it was also the regulating principle of socio-political functioning. Thus Rta combined both the positive, cosmic, natural laws as well as the normative principle of moral values. Such close connection between morality and sociality, ethics and politics, is a very distinctive philosophical foundation of Indian culture.

Most of the ancient Indian political thinkers regarded the universe as an ordered whole governed by cosmic laws Rta society replicates the order of universe and becomes an ordered whole when held together by Dharma.[6] According to the ancient Indian thinker society is not a collection of individuals but a community of communities. Their concept of society is pluralistic. It consists of four Varnas – Brahmana (Priest), Kshatriya (Warrior), Vaisya (peasant)_ and Sudra (Serf) each of which is engaged in the performance of certain common functions and related to the other in a hierarchical manner. An individual's Dharma is derived from the caste of his birth. According to the ancient Hindu thought, an individual's birth into a particular caste is not accidental but a result of his Karma in his previous life. In addition to caste, the ancient thinkers divided man's life into four distinct chronological states or |Ashrams – Brahmchary, Grahastha, Vanaprasth and Sannyas – and each state was again characterized by a specific Dharma.

Fifth, for the ancient Indian thinkers, Dharma is the basis of personal and social life. It alone holds society together. Its violation shakes the society to its very foundations and constitutes a moral threat to its existence. The Gita observes that swadharma devoid of virtue is better than following the dharma of others and it is better to die doing one's Dharma than to attempt to perform someone else's.[7]" The violation of Dharma results in Varnasankar (confusion of castes, Arajakata (Lawlessness) and Mastyanyaya (Law of the fish) according to which big fish devours small one.[8]

Sixth, almost all the ancient Indian thinkers had expressed their view on such perennial problems as conception of man, the vision of good life, the activity of man, the destiny of mankind, theology or cosmology or metaphysics, the realities of the World and the vision of another World and the coherence of two Worlds together. Their endeavor to explore these perennial questions are reflected in the mirror of Political Philosophy of the Vedas, the Upanisads, the puranas, the Ramayan, the Mahabharata and the Gita. Some examples may be cited here for the sake of clarity. There is a fire ethical passage

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in the form of legend in the Brihadaranyaka Upnisada The parable of the three Da's throws a clear light on the origins of violence in man. This short parable ends by the Upanishad saying the ultimate instruction to man – DA, DA, DA – Could be heard in the thunder of the sky. To the Gods, given to pleasure, DA means, Dama or self-control; to man, give to acquisitiveness, it means Dana or charity and sharing; to demon, given to cruelty and violence, it means Daya or compassion and mercy. There are no Gods, nor are there demons, man carried within himself both. In his pursuit of pleasure, he is godlike; in his quest for power over others, if they are not bound by discipline of self-control (dana), charity(dana) and compassion(daya), must produce the violence of greed and arrogance.[9] The identity of the individual and the Universe is reiterated throughout the Upanisadic Literature and is also clear form the famous maxim: "Tat Tvam Asi" "Thou art that"

Seventh, the ancient Indian political thinkers distinguishes between authority and power. Authority implied Adhikara or deserved right. A ruler acquired Adhikara to power when he was judged to possess appropriate intellectual and moral qualifications and was duly crowned by the Brahmins in a ceremony as Abhishek.

Eight, the main stream of classical Indian thinking subscribed to a non-dialectical or non-dualistic epistemology and metaphysics in contrast to the dualistic metaphysics and epistemology that have dominated the Western mode of thought. As A. R. Mehta has noted "While Western thought works in terms of antagonism, dichotomies and antinomies between spirit and matter, individual and society, bread and culture, necessity and freedom, Indian thought has always considered such dichotomies as artificial and unreal. Western philosophy serves to legitimize atomistic individualism, irreconcilable contradictions, mindless competition, a moral power politics, and the dichotomization of ends and means, elite and mass, the chosen and the damned, heaven and hell. A non-dualistic metaphysics and epistemology, by contrast, tends to foster and sustain community, cooperation, world unity, humanism, and the returning of the dichotomies between elite and mass, subject and object, friend and enemy, ends and means, such a philosophy sustains a conception of the state not as a leviathan but as a means to the attainment of self-realization by man.[10]

The authoress of the present paper is not inclined to believe that the Indian tradition of political thinking has been unblemished or what the world needs today is a simple refashioning of its social and political practices in accordance with ancient Indian wisdom. Far from subscribing to "holier than thou" Standpoint, this paper only makes a modest attempt to suggest that in trying to overcome the limitations of the modern scientific positivist paradigm of governance, we are likely to find philosophical or epistemological help from the creative strand of Indian thought. As noted by palmer,

"From India may come influence which will widen the horizons of Western political thinkers and which will give political ideas a sounder foundation of philosophical and metaphysical speculation.[11]"

Ninth, several modern Indian political thinkers had the whole of humanity as their audience. They offered theories not merely of some exclusively Indian problems, but of world problems. Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru expressed their deep concern with civilizational predicaments of our times.

Tenth, almost all the ancient thinker had expressed their views on such perennial problems as conception of man, the vision of good desires. Again both the Janaka and Yajnabalky had said that it was function of the leaders to make people, fearless.[12]

Eleventh, One of the main features of the Indian Political Thinking is that politics and power do not express the soul of nation, that politics is a second rate activity which corrupts the soul; that a nation can become great not by good laws, but by good men,

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that the ideal society postulates not a good government, but no government; that what is the need of today is not only the national unity but also human-unity and that Salvation lies not in material advancement but moral regeneration and spiritual liberation.

Twelfth, tradition of Indian Political Thinking is the reflection about Political Life It is the consideration of the relation between politics and eternity. The end in politics is conceived to be the deliverance of man observed to stand in need of deliverance. The human life appears generally not as a feast or even as a journey, but as a predicament and the link between politics and eternity is the contribution as making of the order is conceived as making to the deliverance of mankind.

Man is the dupe of error, the slave of sin, of passion, of fear, of care, the enemy of himself or of others or of both and the political order appears as the Whole or a part of the Scheme of Salvation. The precise manner in which the predicament is conceived, the qualities of mind and imagination and the Kind of acuity man can bring to the achievements to his own salvation, the exact nature and power of political arrangements and institutions, the urgency, the method and the comprehensiveness of the deliverance --- these are the singularities of each political philosophy Every masterpiece of political philosophy springs form a new vision of predicament; each is the glimpse of deliverance or the suggestion of a remedy. For instance, the Vedas' thought is animated by the security of man's life which is threatened by the fear, wind, rain and thunder lightening, sun and sky full of terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial terror,[13] the Mahabharata's by the vanity of ambition; the Bhagavad Gita's by the impregnating death; Buddha's by sorrow and suffering; and kautilya's by grief for the calamity of the country torn by disunity and prospect of anarchy. Thus tradition of Indian Political thinking is the revelation of the universal predicament in the Local and transitory mischief,

Though the end of political philosophy is the deliverance of man according to the ancient Indian Political thinkers the value of Political Philosophy is something less than deliverance itself At best, politics may protect men's life and property by maintaining law and order with the help of danda, but this is not itself more than a secondary deliverance in the eternal life of the soul. At worst, the enjoyment life of the soul. At worst, the enjoyment of political power is an illusion like a mirage[14] which distracts the attention of man from self-realization[15] Hence the best souls of ancient India's such as Yati, the eldest son of Nahush; Devapi; the eldest brother of Shantanu, and Utkal, the eldest son of Dhruva; to name a few, turned down offer to become the king. For the ancient Indian thinkers Political Power has a corrupting influence and it corrupts even the incorruptible. It makes man egoistic, jealous, cruel and mad.[16] Several Gods, demons and Kings such as Haihaya, Nahush, Vane, Ravana and Narkasura had fallen from their positions because of the corruptible effect of political power.[17] In fact there in name who does not intoxicated by drinking of the vanity of office.

Finally, the life force of India is neither politics, nor military power, nor economic positions, nor even mechanical or technological strength. It's backbone is religion While the British see religion from the viewport of politics, The Americans find religion in social service, the Indian treat politics, economics etc from religious way. We Indians perform all our Works in religious way.[18] We eat in religious way, sleep in religious way, wake in religious way, build our houses in religious way and ever die in religious way.[21] But the essence of religion is to be good and do good to others. Vivekanand advocated the religious theory of nationalism and stated that religion must be made the backbone of national life.

Conclusion:

Thus according to the Indian Political thinkers Political activity is not man's highest activity and What is achieved in it must always fall short of the best life which is marked by devotion, intellectual contemplation and renunciation of desires. The contribution of politics to the achievement of this end is the organization of human affairs in such a way, as no one who is able may be prevented from enjoying it. The gift of politics to mankind is not directly the gift of salvation itself. Rather it is something less.

These are some of the salient features of the ancient Indian political philosophy Finally the authoress whishes to make it clear that this paper in intended to suggestive rather than exhaustive and conclusive.

Notes And References

1. Dr. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity*, Banaras 1929

2. D. Mackenzie Brown, *The White Umbrella*, 1980

3. M. K. Gandhi, Hindu Dharma, Ahmedabad, Navajivan 1850, p-157

4. A. Perumal and V. Venkatisan "Quest for order in modern India political thought" *The Indian Journal Of Political Science*, vol- 47, No-2 April-June 1956, pp-279-88

5. Bhikhu Parekh "Some Reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought" in Thomes Pantham and Kenneth L Deutsch (eds) Political Thought in Modern India (New Delhi: Sage Publications 1986), pp-17-31

6. Of all Aryan Gods, Varana war ethically the highest. He was always aware of the deeds of men and war omnipresent. Two men, even in the most secret of places or at the end of the earth, cannot make plans alone – a third person, Varuna is always there. He abhorred sin, or that which was not comfortable to Rta. Not only did Varuna punish the sins of individual, he visited the sins of his ancestors upon his, and his ubiquity ensured that there was no escape for the sinner. See A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (New Delhi: Rupa and co 1992), Paperback edition 18th impression, pp-238-39.

7. It is interesting to note that the two concepts – Rta and Dharma were different at one time, gradually became one. This fusion of Rta (that which is right and true) with Dharma (that which is moral) was highly significant as it lent to Dharma some moral content and meaning supporting the connection between Rta and Dharma Brihadaranyak Upnisad 1; 4, 14 states; "Brahaman was not strong enough. Hence he created still further that excellent form righteousness. This righteousness is the controller of Ksatriya. Therefore, There is nothing higher than that. So even a weak man hopes to defeat a stronger man through righteousness, as one contenting with the king. That righteousness is verily truth. Hence if a man speaks truth they say he speaks the Dharma, they say he speaks the truth."

8. "Js;kULo/keksZ foxq.k% ij/kkHkkZRLouqf"Bkrkr A Lo/kesZ fu/kua Ja;% ij/keksZ Hk;kog%AA Gita 3-35

9. In Shantiparva of the Mahabharat, Arjun says that if there is no scepter in the world, people would punish and the stronger would the weaker just as fishes do in water. In the words of the Ramayana: "Where the land is kingless, the son does not honour his father, nor the wife her husband." Kautilya also says, "It is Danda alone that exercised by an impartial king in proportion to the guilt of the of the offender either over his or on his enemy, can maintain both this world and the next," Kautilya, Arthasastra, iii.i 150

10. A. R. Mehta, *Ideology, Moderation and Politics in India* (New Delhi:Manohar 1983), p-74

11. Norman D. Palmer, "Indian and Western Political Thought: Coalescence or Clash". *American Political Science Review*, Vol, 59, no 3, September 1955, p.761

12. See Jawahar Lal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin books, 2004 edn), p-284

13. See Vishwanath Pd. Varma, "Religion and Politics in the Vedas, Review of Politics Vol Xii, no-1-2, Jan-June and July-Dec, 2004, pp.7-24

14. "vFkks u jkT;a e`xr`".kk:fira"" The Bhagavata 10.37.14

15. "jkT;a uSPNn~ ;fr% fi=k nIra rRifj.kkefor A ;= izfo"V% iq:"k vkReua ukcq/;rsA " Ibid,10.37.10

16. Ibid,10.37.12

17. Ibid, 10.37.20

18. Vivekanand Works, Vol-5, p-35