

## **Eurocentric Interpretive Frames or Indigenous Political Ideas: Understanding the political in Western and Ancient Indian traditions**

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### **Abstract**

In each epoch of progress of civilization human beings have strived to define and crystalize the idea of the political. The idea of the private and the political even today remain at the core of our intellectual undertakings. What is the nature of the political? Do culturally different contexts look at the political differently? Can we or should we define the political in a uniform and universalizing manner? These are some of the core questions that set the starting point of this paper. The Greek and the Western contributions to the construction of the idea of the political is celebrated worldwide. Nonetheless in last few decades research interest in non-western epistemic contributions to socio-political ideas have gained momentum. This paper purports to study, explicate and examine comparatively the western as well as non-western traditions' contribution to theories, conceptualize and reflect on the idea of the political, the idea of rule and the idea of state. Methodologically the paper adopts a descriptive-analytical, historical, and comparative approach. The paper wishes to question and unsettle Eurocentric epistemic frames to examine and explicate the pre-modern/ancient Indian political ideas. This study carefully chooses to use indigenous (Indian) analytical categories and argues that ideas such as connectedness of human and non-human world, Dharma, Dand, Yogakshema and non-anthropocentrism emanate from unique cosmological, cultural, theological and historical trajectory of Indian society. The present paper takes a broad examination of the way in which political and social was conceptualized and was intertwined in ancient India while paying specific attention to Kautilya's Arthashastra in some detail. This paper uses Stuart Gray's Ideas of Stewardship and Rajanical thought to build the arguments. Such epistemic and intellectual exercises will liberate the unique political ideas of pre-modern India from oriental, colonial or Eurocentric intellectual hegemony and their reductive interpretations. The paper also consciously maintains a critical distance from hyper-national and ethnocentric conclusions about the ancient Indian concepts thus taking care not to contribute to any conservative, orthodox or exclusivist ideas for contemporary concept of state in India or elsewhere. Finally, the paper maintains that a close reading and re-examination of the idea of the political in the ancient India can fruitfully contribute to dealing with some of our contemporary political problems.

**Keyword: Western political thought, Ancient Indian political thought, Kautilya, Arthashastra**

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### **Introduction:**

In each epoch of progress of civilization human beings have strived to define and crystalize the idea of the political. The idea of political encompasses multifarious ideas ranging from the idea of rule, the concept of state and government, the idea of individual liberty so on and so forth. It has remained a matter of discussion to define what constitutes the political and what does not fall within the purview of the political. Without clear boundary setting of what constitutes the private and the political or whether they are embedded in each other or whether they overlap or enmesh with each other no society can function in a smooth fashion. Are human beings social animals or they are equally political in being? Do human beings define their ontology only through social or is it more political than social? How do we define the political? What is the nature of the political? Do culturally different contexts look at the political differently? Can we or should we define the political in a uniform and universalizing manner? If the answer is no then is it appropriate to use western interpretive frames to analyse the ideas of the political in the non-western world? Greek contribution to the construction of the idea of political is celebrated worldwide naturally because of western world's hegemonic control over knowledge construction. Nonetheless in last few decades research interests in non-western epistemic contribution to socio-political ideas have gained momentum. This paper latches on to this momentum to recognize the fact that non-western traditions also engaged in a serious intellectual churning to theories and reflect on the idea of the political, the idea of rule and the idea of state. The present paper comparatively examines the western modern and ancient Indian idea of the political and the idea of the rule, the idea of state. Finally, the paper also engages in explaining briefly the idea of political and the idea of the state as discussed in the Kautilya's Arthashastra.

### **Reading Indian ideas in the indigenous light:**

Methodologically the paper adopts a descriptive analytical, historical and comparative approach to explicate and reflect on the idea of the political. The author submits that it is important to understand political concepts, ideas and institutions in their historical and cultural context (Gray,

2016). A lot of ground preparing and path breaking work has been done on ancient Indian texts' contribution to the idea of political by renowned scholars such as K P Jayswal, Ram Sharan Sharma, A S Altekar, R P Kangle and John Spellman and many others. However, a common trait that is observed in their work is that their approach has more or less been to find similarities between Western and Indian political ideas. They have mostly attempted to use Western frames, concepts and ideas to analyse and explicate Indian indigenous concepts about the political. This paper proposes to look at pre-modern Indian ideas through a native and indigenous lens which is found in the works of some contemporary scholars like S N Balagangadhara, Stuart Gray, Jacob de Roover etc. S N Balagangadhara(2012) maintains that a colonial consciousness informs all understanding of Indian culture and ideas. It is premised on Western cultural experience of India. Travelling to the Subcontinent, Europeans with different backgrounds and origins observed all kinds of events, practices, things, and beings here. They used and described these phenomena using terms such as liberty, equality, secularism, democracy or even many theological ideas that were available to them (De Roover, 2019). The author proposes to draw attention of the reader to a very common attempt made by Indologist and scholars of ancient Indian political thought. This is with reference to Sabha and Samiti in the Vedas and other texts. Jaiswal, Altekar, R S Shama in their studies have concluded that Sabha, Samiti and other such ideas are reflective of the democratic spirit of ancient institutions like Sabha & Samiti. They also try to explain them in the light of political sovereignty, legitimacy, popular participation and idea of individual liberty in ancient India. However, Stuart Gray (2016) has objections to this claim and also has raised concern over the absence of exact textual evidences to prove this claim. He maintains that these scholars have taken interpretive and speculative liberties in concluding to find similarities with modern ideas of democracy, freedom, legitimacy with respect to ancient Indian ideas such as Sabha, Samiti or Vidatha. In fact, it is not necessary to search exact ideas of western origin in pre-modern Indian texts. This is recommended specially to avoid what Stuart Gray (2016) calls 'danger of domestication of differences. In an age where diversity, plurality and differences are now being celebrated it is important to recognize the cultural ethos and ambience of even political ideas. Akash Singh Rathore (2013) also makes a case for deconceptualization. He maintains that it is important to retrieve and uncover the indigenous conceptualizations, terms and categories of Indian political thought, to find and follow its own logics, and eventually apply it normatively to theorizations. Which means that probably the Indic view of the political was monarchical, based

on some sort of idea of a collective , probably was also hierarchical but there was also yearning for harmony between king and the people and also with the non-human world. This shall be discussed in details later in this paper.

The Western, Eurocentric, modernist and orientalist approach to the examination of non-western & pre-modern ideas are influenced by specific historiography hence can do more harm than good in understanding non-western/pre -modern political ideas, institutions and concepts. When modern, Western and European interpretive concepts, epistemic categories, explanatory ideas and historical assumptions are used to analyse pre-modern texts and ideas they may smack of distortions, judgements, false & unwieldy comparisons. It is pertinent to remember that even western/modern ideas carry baggage of their own history, historiography & context and therefore does not offer an innate cogency to interpret a completely different culture and its political ideas. The binary of premodern and modern also can latently produce problematic and oversimplified cross-cultural assumptions. A revisionist theory of modernity as explained by Sudipta Kaviraj (2005) maintains that a certain understanding of "premodernity" and a particular theory of modernization begins in Europe, and then it is imposed on other geographic and cultural spaces to define them. This all happens alongside a framework of predicated colonialist power relations. The paper wishes to question and unsettle modern epistemic frames to examine and explicate pre-modern Indian political ideas. Nonetheless the paper does not dismiss the idea that Western ideas and concepts should not be used at all to draw intelligible and organic comparisons and conclusions. It only argues that such super-imposition of ideas can lead to myopic and faulty understanding of culturally completely different political ideas and concepts. Having stated this as a background, the present paper attempts to examine the idea of the political/ rule and the state as discussed and defined in the Western and the ancient Indian political traditions. This study carefully chooses to use analytical categories such as the idea of connectedness of human and non-human world, Dharma and Dand which are mostly internal to the unique cosmological, cultural and historical trajectory of Indian society and also defines the way political and social was conceptualized and also intertwined in ancient India. The author declares her conscious choice to maintain a critical distance from ethno-centric and hyper-national views about the ancient Indian political thought. This critical distancing is required to not fall prey to any form of conservatism or exclusivist idea of state in contemporary times. At the same time it is equally important to not

dismiss altogether the contribution of pre-modern conceptualizations on state by only relying on conclusions of orientalist and colonialist scholarship. It should also be kept in mind that frames of references for state created by western scholarship can be reductive, homogenizing and hegemonic (Gray: 2019) . The author's engagement with pre-modern traditions on state is about re-examining these ideas in new light without fetishizing, eulogizing or accepting them uncritically. The pre-modern Indic reflections on state can be fruitful and productive in terms of expanding our understanding of the idea of rule, the idea of state and can also aid us in dealing with our contemporary socio- political problems.

### **The idea of the Self & the idea of the political: Western Perspectives**

Any discussion to define the social and the political cannot avoid the discussion on how we describe & define the concept of the self. It is also significant to know how we delineate the relationship between the Self and the Other. What is the nature of exchanges, what is the setting of these exchanges and what exchanges are taking place between the self and the other? The Western concept of the self has its origins in Greek thought, Roman thought and also in Christian theology. The western notion of the Self is quite atomistic, self-possessed and draws strict boundaries between the Self & the other. It was refined by renaissance, reformation and enlightenment. Multiple thinkers have contemplated on the idea of self, prominent among them being Rene Descartes, John Locke, Freud and many others. These ideas have enriched belief in the value of the individual and her rational powers, inalienable rights, trust in science and technology, production, and trade. The idea of self lay at the foundation of the overall notion of Western modernity. Max Striner (1844) in his book 'Ego and its own' states that , "Nothing is more to me than myself!" An overview of western ruminations on the idea of self-points out to the fact that western thinking has privileged the Self over the other thus making it hierarchically superior. This does not mean that an alternative view of the self has not been a matter of discussion in western traditions. But largely it has been an atomistic view of the Self in the dominant discourse. The idea of the self in western traditions also takes into the consideration only the human world and does not pay much attention to this human self's relationship with the non-human world. It focuses on individuality, happiness and utility (Steinvorth, 2009). The western traditions seem to also have placed the self-human world over the other-non human world. This binary and hierarchy is a characteristic feature of the western intellectual traditions. From this binary of the

self and other emerged a political idea called the idea of 'To rule'. Ruling is a capacity, a power that a self/individual enjoys to implicate and assert itself over others in a situation where interests of two parties are at stake. The ideas of rule has multiple paradigms such as Vertical Rule meaning ruling over. Horizontal rule which means to rule with. Finally, the idea of rule for which we take into consideration depth and breadth of the interests concerned. The concept of rule over is engaged with the question of who rules over whom/ what. It can mean one rules over many, few ruling over many, humans ruling over non-humans so on and so forth. On the contrary the concept of rule with is centered on the idea of with whom the rulers rule. It can mean ruler rules with nobody which results in monarchy or ruler rules with many which leads to a democratic rule. Finally, the idea of rule is intricately related to a question of for what and whose interests rulers rule? The answers to this basic question range from private interest to public interest to human interest to animal interest or some abstract idea of common welfare. The western traditions have privileged the rule of the humans over the non-human world. Within the human world the idea of rule is determined by the division between the private and the public. The popular belief says that intellectual and epistemic exercise to define the political began in ancient Greece. They reflected on the what constitutes the political, what is the nature of the political & the idea of rule and what are the functions of the state. They separated the Oikos (i.e. the private) and the Polis (i.e. the Political) to demarcate the boundaries of the private and the political. Aristotle who is considered as the father of political science separated The Oikos from the Polis. The Oikos comprised of the household which is the basic social unit. And the polis was composed of the public realm. The state was required to intervene and control the polis and intervene as little as possible in the Oikos. The Greek political traditions used a binary- hierarchical approach to view the world and also privileged the public over the private. Theorists of the western traditions have also maintained that rule means hierarchical domination of some by others. This implies at times a contrast between the idea of rule and politics as the latter idea conveys some sort of reciprocity and participation. So for Aristotle when a king governs in his own interest is a corrupt form of rule. On the contrary a truly political society, is reserved for a system wherein citizens experience rough equality and reciprocity by ruling and being ruled in turn. Aristotle is of the opinion that rule can be turned into politics when it is governed by a constitution. (Gray, 2017) The privileging of horizontal and participatory aspects of the idea of rule is a characteristic feature of democratic and republican traditions in which ruling is primarily focused on human interest. This is an anthropocentric and hierarchical

view about the idea of the rule and the political. Modern societies have largely ignored the questions of whether and to what extent (human–nonhuman) connectedness is intrinsic to the concept of rule, helping lead to the perilous environmental scenario in which we currently find ourselves. (Gray, 2017) Thus the questions around the idea of rule and the political have generally meant domination, mastery, command or obedience. It is largely understood as a vertical rule with ingredients of equality, liberty, reciprocity which has transformed the rule over to become the rule with idea. Nonetheless it has completely ignored the connectedness of the human world with the non-human environment. It has privileged the equality among humans, participation of humans over non-human world. This idea of rule was refined over a period of time to give birth to one of most celebrated ideas of modernity the idea of nation-state. The term state is a very complex, multi layered and a dynamic notion. In the most simplistic form it is defined as an institution that is required as a mediator to avoid a state of lawlessness, anarchy, disorder or to avoid situations of violent conflicts. The social contract tradition in western and also in non-western tradition view the state as a product of bargain between individuals for the preservation of individual liberty and maintenance of order. It is considered as a temporal reality required to ensure rule of law. Various thinkers, philosophers and theorists have attempted to define the term nonetheless there is skewed agreement about the need, rationale and purposes of the state. The state largely crafts and control the political today. The state is fixated with its own survival and strengthening. It is fixated with idea of enemy and use of force and violence for its own survival. Bureaucracy, instrumentality and rationality are some of the characteristic features of the state. The liberal democratic idea of rule, the political and state has become some sort of a normative standard today. It has lead to an atomistic conception of the self which champions the rights centric approach. This conceptualization of the political for the self, by the self and of the self has also eventually lead to political apathy and indifference to environmental concerns. The western and modern idea of rule, the political and the state have been criticized as well. Many European and other scholars have criticized the idea of state for its perverse and pathological forms. Rousseau maintained that State is the enemy of freedom and a profoundly dehumanizing institution. Karl Marx in his analysis of the state rebukes state as an institution of class oppression. State merely acts as an agent of the capitalist bourgeois of the society. The rise of totalitarian states with powerful bureaucracies resulted in some of the most brutal wars against humanity. The systematic and well-planned genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany is a classic example of horrific acts against humanity in the

name of upholding, protecting and securing a state. Hannah Arendt in her criticism opined that state destroyed political freedom and creativity. She was so very apt and vivid in capturing the pitfalls of the modern state. When a Nazi general in his defense for the horrific genocide of Jews said that he was just following orders, Arendt's critique and pitfalls of a rational bureaucratic state compel us to rethink about a modern institution like the state. It is hence necessary to point out that fundamental morality of mankind is endangered by state. A Communitarian thinker Michael Sandel captures this very well in his notion of unencumbered self which is too atomistic and individualistic. Post modernism has also rejected totalizing meta narrative of post- renaissance liberal nation state. It doesn't have space for diversity and different perspectives on state that come from the non-western world.

### **Indian Perspectives on the idea of the political, the idea of rule and the State:**

What is the nature and structure of the political? Do the conceptualization of the political differ in plural cultural contexts? The paper maintains that the Indian approach to define the political, to explain what is the meaning of rule and to construct the paradigm of state should be evaluated using indigenous epistemic interpretive frames and not the Western, modern and now normalized ideas such democracy, liberty, equality etc. These foreign ideas fail to recapitulate and understand the uniqueness of cultural and cosmological ambience of the epistemic contribution of ancient India to the idea of political. The Indian approach to define, theories and explain the idea of political stems from her unique theological, cultural and social milieu. The ancient Indian conceptualizations of the idea of political, the idea of rule and the idea of state are discussed in several primary texts such as Rigveda, Manu Smriti, Dharma Shastra, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Nitishatakam and Kautilya's Arthashastra. These texts are essentially socio-cultural texts within which we find the architecture, tools and techniques of the idea of the political.

### **Poly-centric Conception of the Self:**

How do pre-modern Indian texts conceptualize and explicate the idea of the Self? How do they define the content of the concept of the self and it's relationship with the idea of the other. A broad examination of the relationship between the self and the other in Indian traditions shows that it does not place the self at the center. In order to understand this different notion of the self we have



to take into consideration a very basic concept of “Rta”, enumerated at multiple places in the Vedas. It is a term used in Rigveda which broadly means truth and order. Barbara Holdrege(2004) maintains that ‘Rta’ means principle of cosmic order that upholds the integrated functioning of multiple entities such as nature, divine, human and sacrificial ritual (i.e. Yagna). The idea of ‘Rta’ entails that a human being is part of a larger interconnected cosmos. This helps us understand the place of the human/ individual as a self in ancient Indian concept of the cosmos, the social and also the political. The concept of the self is not atomistic but rather is conceived as a poly-centric self. The self is bound, interconnected and interdependent. Polycentric conception of the self-rejects a self-possessed individuality. It calls for a more porous conception of the self. A polycentric conception of the self is one in which the integral parts of a self are connected to multiple nodal points outside one’s individual person. Such a concept elucidates the idea that one is always entwined in a diverse and open, multi-nodal network that situates and provides a partial basis for a self. This further means human beings never find themselves in a static or atomistic location. This polycentric view of the ‘Self’ can be of immense help in addressing some contemporary debates in the political realm such as cross-generational justice, resource conservation, ecological disasters and issues of representation (Gray, 2017).

### **The Entwined nature of the Social & the political in ancient India:**

A close examination of ancient Indian texts point to another unique feature that is, the private and the public, the social and the political is not strictly separated from each other rather they are embedded and enmeshed with each other. To explicate this argument the author is using renowned Puruṣa-Sūkta, or hymn to Puruṣa from Rigveda. This hymn provides a cosmogonic narrative and explains each social group’s origins from the primordial “cosmic person,” i.e. Puruṣa. In this account, Puruṣa is sacrificed to create a manifest and differentiated reality, and from the different parts of its body the four social groups eventually emerge:

*When they [i.e., the devas and ṛṣis] divided Puruṣa, into how many parts did they apportion him? What was his mouth? What were his two arms, his two thighs and his two feet called? His mouth became the brahmin, his arms were made the rājanya, his thighs were made that which was the vaiśya, and from his two feet the śūdra was born. (RV 10.90.11–12) (Griffith,2013)*

This hymn from Book 10 of Rig Veda indicates that four separate social groups originated from the original cosmic creation. This hymn clearly also entails that the rulers (rājanya) are embedded in social fabric and are also a part of the cosmic framework. The rājanya (ruling social/ political group) emerges during the initial stages of creation and emanates from the body of the cosmic person, Puruṣa. A ruling group is thus built into the very fabric of the cosmos. Here one does not observe elections, deliberations, nor human or divine choice in the process of creation of a ruling group. This ruling group is simply part of a cosmic whole that the Rishis discern at the very beginning. This is a powerful and influential claim in ancient Indian socio-political thought. The hymn, in mentioning the four social groups together for the first time in Vedic literature, asserts the proper rule of one group of individuals as a cosmic reality anchored in a cosmogony. This hymn also hierarchically situates the rājanya vis-à-vis the other social groups: below the brahmin yet above the vaiśya and śūdra.

Therefore Gray (2017) points out that while conceptualizing about the political in the ancient Indian sense the idea of rule is more appropriate than the idea of the polis/political as understood in the western traditions. He maintains that ruling decisions according to ancient Indian texts are made in and for a cosmologically situated, human-nonhuman community extending beyond polis or state boundaries, and therefore, not merely polis-centered. These Indic perspectives on the idea of the rule and the idea of political are indicative of the fact that this does not establish a hierarchical nature between human and the non-human world. It rather sees the non-human world as equally connected and intrinsic part of the greater cosmology of which humans and non-humans are equal members. The questions of rule with and for whom rulers rule within both human and nonhuman contexts have found some peculiar answers in the Vedic texts. The human beings rule with and for a wide variety of non human beings and phenomena such as gods, animals, trees, and rivers. Each of these entities possesses a distinct identity and plays a significant role within a broader cosmological context, and is therefore granted dignity, looked upon with compassion, and treated with reverence. The political anthropology of ancient India thus sees the human and the non-human world as related, interconnected and interdependent.

### **Political Legitimacy situated in Dharma & Danda:**

The idea of rule and the idea of the state in pre-modern India has origins in the concept of Matsyanayay. The concept of Matsyanayay finds mentions in texts such as Manu Smriti, Mahabharata and Arthashastra (1.4.13). According to the principle of Matsyanayay the state came into existence to prevent the logic of fishes, meaning when the big fish starts eating the small fish it leading to anarchy, chaos, disorder and this is adharma. The monicker 'stronger swallows the weak' is not merely used in the context of human beings. It includes everyone and anyone visualized in the Vedic imagination of cosmology. When such a situation emerged in the ancient past, the people decided to accept the authority of the king/ Raja/ruler. In return the king promised people that he would protect their lives. Many a times the concept of Matsyanayay is equated with the western idea of state of nature. However, it is erroneous to draw such simplistic comparisons between two culturally two different political & social ideas. The concept of Law of nature talks about self-interested, egoistic man. It is a defining feature of the concept of social contract which concludes that the self-interested individuals agreed to surrender their limited rights in the hands of a ruler so that they can pursue their individual interests without chaos and anarchy. On the other hand Matsyanayay does not talk about surrendering rights of an individual rather underlines a fact that human beings do have the faculty to rise above their petty self-interest and act in a manner where the mighty does not exploit the meek. Human beings have a capacity to come together and to extend care for not only other human beings but also the non-human world. The purpose of situating political power in the hands of a king is not to safeguard self-interested egoistic individuals but to uphold and protect the Dharma (Slakter, 2011).

One of the most significant and foundational idea in the conceptualisation of the political and social in the Indic thinking is the idea of Dharma. This idea exudes multifarious ethical connotations. The word is many a times mistakenly translated into English as religion. It is necessary to acknowledge that certain culturally specific terms have no English or western equivalents. According to Spellman (1964) Dharma may mean virtue, right action, law of nature, accordance with what is proper, unchanging order, and a combination of all of the above. Dharma is to be treated as a moral or ethical yardstick against which everything else is to be adjudged. Dharma is derived from the root word Dhr meaning to uphold or to sustain (Dharyati Iti Dharma).

The Dharma upholds the world/cosmic order. In the same manner the king is expected to uphold the Dharma. (Spellman, 1964). The concept of Tao is quite similar to the Indian idea of Dharma. Man is ruled by the earth, the earth is ruled by the heaven, the heaven is ruled by Tao and Tao is ruled by itself. In Bhrihad Aranyaka Upanishad (Fourth Brahman, 14<sup>th</sup> Verse) there is mention of weak man ruling over the strong with the help of Dhrama which parallels with the concept of Tao. If the ruler/king can uphold Tao all things would be of their own accord and assume desired shape.

What is basically Dharma? This question does not have simple answers. Dharma guides and rides the social and political fabric in ancient India. But what are the key ideas that are part of the broad idea of the notion of Dharma. It includes ideas as such Varnaashram Dharma, Four Purusharthas, Rebirth and Karma and multiple other ideas. The Varna Dharma entails division of the social into four varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya & Shudra). It is supposedly a scheme of division of labour and responsibilities. The respective varnas are expected to follow the duties entrusted upon them. The author is conscious of the inegalitarian nature of the social stratification present in the Varna/Jati based division of the social and does not support any such segregation for the modern concept of the social or the political. However, a discussion about the ill effects of such an unequal and unjust social system is beyond the scope of this paper. Additionally, it is to be noted that the ideas such as equality and justice also have a peculiar theological, cultural and historical context. Therefore, before using these ideas to ruminate about an Indian idea of the social and political calls for caution and can create problems of cross-cultural epistemic intelligibility.

### **Is Dharma & the Idea of Natural Law same?**

Many a times scholars are also tempted to make comparisons between the western idea of natural law and Dharma. We must acknowledge the fact that the western idea of law is a product of human rationality and creativity and dismisses any divine or transcendental interventions. Therefore, these laws are also considered as democratic. On the other hand, idea of Dhrama is a product of Vedic teachings and is also considered as having divine origins therefore, may not be considered as democratic in the western sense. Nonetheless, any absence of references to ideas such democracy, liberty, equality fraternity in a pre-modern society like ancient India is not a reason to not consider them important or valuable.

**Dharma encompasses all aspects of Life:**

The personal life in Vedic imagination is governed by four ashrams (Brahmacharya Ashram, Grihastha Ashram, Vanprastha Ashram & Sanyasa Ashram). In each stage of personal life one is supposed to follow what is expected of him from that stage of life. For instance, during Brahmacharyashram one is expected to gain knowledge and focus on expanding his/her intellectual faculties. The four Purusharthas i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha also determine the role and remit of purposes and goals in individual life. In fact Dharma itself is one of the Purusharthas to be followed and achieved in one's life journey.

Another important culturally specific idea of from the ancient Indian text is the idea of Danda/ rod of punishment. This idea is deeply connected with the idea of Dharma. The primary task of a Rajanya or the Raja or the Nrip/the king is to ensure that each and every individual follows the Varnaashram Dharma. The Raja is expected to use the Danda wisely so as to uphold and protect the Dharma. The idea of the Danda also emanates from a unique cultural and theological context. The world is to be made righteous with the application of the Danda, the rod of punishment. Dandniti i.e. science of government pedals the four varnas to hold them responsible for following their own respective Dharmas. Dand is derived from the root word 'dam' meaning to restrain or to punish. It is represented by the staff or sceptre which is emblematic of the command or authority of the Raja. Kautilya in his Arthashastra recommends the Raja is supposed to use the Dand very wisely so as to not anger people unnecessarily (1.4.7). Nonetheless, the rod of punishment/ Danda in the hands of the Raja/ruling group does not make him/them supreme. He too is bound by the larger framework of the Dharma. As mentioned in the Shathapath Brahman, Ritual of Rajsooya Yagya and Ashwamedh Yagya when a Chakravarti Raja is consecrated, at that time he declares himself as the one who can not be tamed or punished. The phrase used in the ritual is, "Adandyosmi". However, upon this declaration the Rishi/Purohit who is performing the consecration ritual hits the Raja with a sceptre/Dharma Dand and pronounces that you are always below the Dhrama and you too can be punished by the Dharma. The phrase used for this ritual goes like this, "Dharma Dandyosi". This juxtaposition of Dharma and Dand in the Rajanical farmwork of the idea of rule conveys a significant fact about the idea of political legitimacy of the ruler/ the Raja. The ruler/ the raja looses his political legitimacy if he fails to abide by the Dharma. Dharma is above all and is the foundation of the political ecology in ancient Indian texts.

## **Rajanical Framework to understand idea of Rule in Indian context:**

Stuart Gray introduces a framework called Rajanical Thought to capture this distinctive political conceptualization in ancient India (Gray, 2016). The term "Rajanical" according to him invokes the Sanskrit verb raj- (to rule). This is a very particular Indian understanding of rule that involves a unique multi-dimensional cosmology, sense of stewardship, and broad application across a human nonhuman spectrum. It is Non- anthropocentric i.e. human interests are not at the center of defining the socio-political milieu. The non-human entities include not only the gods (devas) but also a wide array of other beings such as plants and animals, as well as natural phenomena and elements such as the seasons, sacrificial fires (Yagnya), winds etc. (Smith, 1994) There is belief in the deep interconnected nature of reality and well-being extending across various species and phenomenon. Therefore, the term Rajanical tradition better captures some of the Indian tradition's core concerns such as what is the meaning of rule, what is its relation to the concepts Yagnya, and the questions of with and for whom rulers rule within both human and nonhuman contexts. (Gray, 2016). Gray (2017) in his book titled, "A defense of Rule: Origins of Political Thought in Greece and India" argues that tradition of Greek thought and eventually western thought conceives a hierarchical and instrumental relationship between human and nonhuman nature. This instrumental position tends to predominate in the contemporary world, empowers the state phenomenally and views the nonhuman as a mere resource for enhancing human desires and comforts, thus privileging human interests at the expense of nonhuman interests and well-being. Such instrumental understandings of the nonhuman world have gotten us into serious trouble in the modern and contemporary period. One could cite numerous examples, including deforestation, global warming, rising sea levels, species loss, ecological disasters etc (Gray: 2017). An alternative to this overly hierarchical and instrumental conception of rule would be to conceive nonhuman nature as having interests that human beings have a responsibility or duty to account for in both their personal and political decisions. Gray calls this paradigm as stewardship. It is a product of Vedic cosmology, metaphysics and ontology. Because connections exist in all four orders of reality through bandhus, human beings are understood as fundamentally connected to each other, the earth and the entire cosmos. Kshatriyas serve as stewards to fulfil the responsibility of sustaining these fundamental connections. They are stewards insofar as they possess an ontological duty, as a specific type of human being, to protect the sacrificial rituals that create and maintain the entire

cosmos. He particularly draws attention to a hymn uttered at the consecration of the ruler from Atharvaveda to point out a completely different cosmology within which the idea of rule in ancient India operated. He points out that there is not single hymn in Vedas in which various devas/entities are not invoked.

*“ Ruling claims involving sabhäs, samitis, kings or rulers, and people (vis) never appear without the concomitant belief that human beings, at the most fundamental level, do not rule in any human-centric or selfishly individualistic sort of way. In this sense, ruling on the human plane takes place within a larger cosmological "flow," and human beings are not the meaning-giving center of the cosmos, especially with respect to rule (râj-). Rather, human beings are understood as ontologically open to and receiving meaning from within a broader network of entities and relationships. Because rule is built into the metaphysical structure of the cosmos, human beings take part in macro ruling processes yet they do not "freely" control its structure or meaning in any independent manner” (Gray,2016)*

In Vedic Ecology Prime (2020) argues that native Indian ideas of reverence, compassion, and devotion extended towards the nonhuman world which includes cows, forests, trees, plants and rivers can help us tremendously to deal with pressing ecological concerns. Modern conception of the state has paid little attention to this aspect and thus has resulted in perilous destruction of the environment. Vandana Shiva an acclaimed eco-feminist also entails that Vedic principles can serve as a guide for a healthier ecological ethic. These ancient Indian ideas have also captured the imagination of multiple social and political thinkers of Modern India such as Ghandhiji, Pandit Nehru, Dr. Ambedkar and Ravindranath Tagore . They have been inspired by ancient Indian texts and ideas to conceptualize the idea of the political, the idea of the self and the idea of the swaraj to fight against colonialism and the British empire (Vajpeyi, 2012).

### **Kautilya’s Arthashastra- a revised version and a continuation of the ancient Indian Idea of Political:**

The Arthashastra is an immaculate epistemological discussion on subjects like polity, state, statecraft, policy-making and governance. This text’s endogenous theoretical contribution to the project of non-western epistemic political ideas and the political theory is a less explored trajectory. It is

worth noting that the epistemology of Arthashastra is based on rational empiricism and historical methods. (Chausalkar, 1981) It is also interesting to analytically revisit concepts such as idea of rule, the nature of state, the model of government, the concept of power, legitimacy and human progress as discussed in this text. This paper's engagement with the questions of political theory in Arthashastra can definitely contribute to bridge the temporal and theoretical gap between India's past and the present, and the spatial distance - political and discursive - between the North and the South. This section of the paper revisits Arthashastra as a pre-modern endogenous text on political theory. How does Kautilya define State and Government? How does he visualize power and legitimacy? What is the role of political representatives/ Leaders/ Rulers or what Kautilya calls the Raja? The contemporary, still struggles to find clear answers to some long-standing questions such as violence, self-interest of nation-states, war and peace and humans progress and idea of good life. It is important to recognise that there are no transcendental answers to these normative questions. The Arthashastra can be a useful non-western text to answer some of these above mentioned questions in the scenario where political theory is to a great extent Eurocentric or western world centric. While a lot of research on Arthashastra has already taken place, most of it looks at Arthashastra as a text on Strategic Studies, International Relations Theory or Realism, Governance and administration. The attempt here is to bring focus to conversations around some key concepts in political theory such as idea of the political, the nature of the power and the state, the concept of legitimacy.

According to Drekeimer (1962), Arthashastra is an outstanding document written during Indian renaissance which explicates and reflects on the ideas as well as the ideals of the state. Sihag (2004) is of the opinion that Kautilya envisioned a grand empire that aimed for prosperity, security, stability and was based on fairness. Kautilya's Arthashastra engages with three foundational questions. Firstly, What telos the state has? Secondly, in what ways these telos can be achieved by the state and thirdly which actors play an important role in realizing these telos? The Arthashastra envisions the state as an agency/ as a tool required for human flourishing, order, peace, preservation of morality, upholding of the Dharma and to provide an environment so that certain transcendental objectives of human life can be achieved. Kautilya's state aims at human progress which is channeled through state but is not necessarily delineated by the state. The powers of the state are concentrated in the hands of the King/the Raja. The Raja is expected to perform



three most important functions of Rakshan, Palan and Yogakshema. Kautilya advises the king that, “In the happiness of the subjects lies the happiness of the king and in what is beneficial to the subjects his own benefit. What is dear to himself is not beneficial to the king, but what is dear to the subjects is beneficial (to him) (1.19.34)”. The idea of a care taker Raja resembles what Stuart Gray has explained in his Rajanical tradition to define the political and the idea of rule in ancient Indian context. The idea of Praja Sukh and Yoga Kshema (overall wellbeing of the subject) is not only normative foundation but also the *raison d'état* of the state for Kautilya. The concept of Yogakshema is a much broader idea than the Western idea of welfare state. Yogakshema is suppose to be the ultimate goal of the. The term Yogakshema comprises of two significant terms such as Yog and Kshema. The concept of Yog is elaborated as Apraptsya Prapnam nam yog. Thus Yog is about acquiring or gaining what we do not have. The Raja's primary duty is to acquire the Artha which is essential for the protection of Dharma (1.7.6). It is also stated in the Chanakya Sutrani, ‘Sookhasya moolam Dharma’, ‘Dharmasya Moolam Artha’. It means that the root of happiness lies in the Dharma and the root of Dharma lies in the Artha. On the other hand, the idea of Kshema is elaborated as Praptsya parirakshan nam kshem, meaning whatever that has been acquired has to be protected. So Yogakshema talks about a much more comprehensive idea of welfare which is about not only about the improvement in physical but also meta-physical aspects of human life and society. This idea therefore entails that the focus of the Raja is not only to improve quality of life of the people at the mundane level but also at the level of consciousness. Kautilya imagines a state by positioning the existence and legitimacy of the state and welfare of the people on the firm foundation of ‘Dharma based Duties’ (1.3.4 & 1.3.14). He presses on the fact that observance of one's duties lead an individual to heaven and its transgression leads to chaos and anarchy. And it is the duty of the King to make sure that each one adheres to his own Dharma (1.3.16) This duty-based narrative ensures that welfare state is not a privilege, not an entitlement that could be misused. Instead, the welfare state and good governance are made the prerogative of every citizen and the ruler's sole purpose is to serve his citizens, and he is bound by same obligations, same duties as his citizens. The only difference between a ruler and a citizen is that the magnitude and scope of those duties in case of the ruler is many times greater than in the case of citizens. This stress on personal duties in the Yogakshema model naturally translates into the emphasis on ethics and values in politics and governance. (Joshi, 2018)

Kautilya conceives of a very Strong but limited state concerned with internal security, infrastructure, municipal laws (Altekar, 2016). The state is expected to focus on pragmatic telos such building public infrastructure, capital formation and ensuring national security, The state also has to focus on effective policy formulation and implementation. Finally, the state is expected to provide a fair, caring and clean administration. His conception of state espouses the Centrality of the King/ Leader. In fact, the king is the embodiment of state. The powers of the state/King are exercised by a plurality of actors and institutions. The Saptang Theory of the state or the Seven Prakritis of the state is a conceptual breakthrough of Kautilya much before such conceptualization finds its crystallization in Hans Morgenthau's work. The roles and functions of a plethora of institutions are clearly delineated in Arthashastra with careful inclusion of a system of Checks & Balances (Kangle, 2014). The Saptang theory (Book 6.1.96.1) of the state talks about the seven constitutive elements of the power of the state. They are The Swami-or The King, the Amatya or The Minister, the Janapada or the People, The Durg or the Fortified City (it can be identified as the Infrastructure), the Kosha or The Treasury, The Danda- the rod of Punishment or the Law and the Mitra or The Ally. The imagination of state power is not merely enveloped by the idea of legitimate use of force or violence by the state. A very significant and many a times ignored aspect of Kautilya's imagination of the state power is absence of the idea of Shatru. The State's power is not revolving around elimination of enemy or fighting the enemy rather the focus is on building friendship with neighboring states. The author maintains that this idea has basis in the unique understanding of connectedness of the cosmos that has origins in the Vedic texts. The State power is also not fixated with military force/violence but rather revolves around aggregation of seven elements. Thus, it is a much more substantive model of the state power. The power of the State for Kautilya is the aggregation of the seven state factors beyond just the Danda which stands for legitimate use of force or violence by the state. Whether a state is powerful or not is determined by the given status and the developmental trend of all the seven prakṛti. This new understanding of state power is one of Kautilya's outstanding theoretical achievements. Kautilya's rumination on the use of the Danda here merit our attention. He entails that the rod of the punishments/The Danda should be used in a manner that it does not generate ill feelings among the public and does not lead to the king's own destruction (1.4.7, 8, 9, 10). Kautilya recommends self-discipline in the administration of the Rod/Danda (1.5. 1) This vigilant use of the Danda (1.4.11) by the king is also reflective of the fact that legitimacy of the ruler is a continuous exercise. It is not a permanent

feature but has to be earned and sustained with continuous efforts and demands wise use of the powers possessed by the king. (Gray, 2014).

### **Rajarshi & Vijigishu: The epitome of state power in Kautilian world**

The King or the Raja occupies a pivotal and central place in the imagination of the state power in Kautilya's Arthashastra. Nonetheless the powers of the state are not concentrated in the hands of the king but are exercised by a number of other actors. The metaphor of a Rajarshi (1.7.3.ii) is used for the King or the Raja. The king is expected to imbibe the qualities of a noble king as well as an accomplished sage or a seer. Kautilya discusses at length the qualities and values that a king is expected to bring in his character and maneuvering. The Arthashastra expects the king to be well versed with ancient Indian philosophical traditions such as Sankhya, Yog and Lokayata (Rangarajan,1992). Thus, the King is envisioned not just as a doer of things but also as a thinker and philosopher. Kautilya envisions a deep and continuous relationship between philosophy and politics. Philosophy is considered as lamp guiding sciences, as the means of all action and as the support of all laws and duties. (Chausalkar, 1981) The training in philosophy nurture discipline or Vinay in the king which aids him to attain balanced faculty of thinking in adversity and prosperity.

The King or the Raja or the Leader is visualized as a Rajarshi (Raja and Rishi), the one who has imbibed the qualities of a good king as well as an accomplished sage. Kautilya at length, discusses the qualities and values that are essential to become a good leader. He is supposed to be trained in Philosophy: Sankhya, Yog & Lokayat (this tradition rejects theory of karma & rebirth, divinity of the Vedas as it cannot stand the test of reason and sense experiences). He visualizes the King as not just a Doer but a Thinker. Kautilya envisions a deep and continuous relationship between philosophy and politics. Philosophy is considered as lamp guiding sciences, as the means of all action and as the support of all laws and duties. (Chausalkar, 1981) The training in philosophy nurture discipline or Vinay in the king which aids him to attain balanced faculty of thinking in adversity and prosperity. In a Kautilian State the King or the Raja is advised to take care of his subjects like a father. The idea of care as the basis of the state is also a unique contribution of Kautilya's concept of the state. Tongdong Bai (2019) in his book makes a compelling and a very fresh case against political equality which is based on Confucius ideas. He states , Confucianism

would give more political decision-making power to those with the moral, practical, and intellectual capabilities of caring for the people. (Bai, 2019). The idea of care for the people and the subject by the ruler, the king or the Raja emanates from the idea of stewardship discussed earlier in this paper. In book 1 chapter 5 verse 17 Kautilya states that a king who is trained in sciences, use discipline on subject wisely enjoys the earth without sharing it with anyone on this earth. Nonetheless, he is expected to be devoted to the welfare of all beings. Thus his imagination of the state includes the human as well as non-humans. The basic canon of morality, as defined by Kautilya, is: “abstaining from injury (to living creatures), truthfulness, uprightness, freedom from malice, compassionateness and forbearance.” (1. 3. 13) Kautilya’s conception of idea of power, the idea of rule and the idea of state are rooted in the Vedic ideas of Dharma, Danda and connectedness of human and non-human world. From this background emerges the idea of Rajarshi and Vijigishu King who is supposed to uphold the Dharma and secure the state as well as its people and their welfare. It is fueled by political rationality and normativity at the same time.

## **Conclusion:**

The Indic perspectives on the idea of the political, idea of rule and the concept of state are premised on unique ideas that emanate from a specific cosmology, history, culture and theology. It envisions the political which is non-anthropocentric, non-instrumental, is founded on the idea of connectedness of the human and the non-human world, The Raja is an integral part of the social and political fabric, the raja is bound by concept of Dharma & he is supposed to wisely use the Dand to uphold the Dharma. Western modern conception of the political has paid little attention to this connectedness of the human and non-human world which has resulted in perilous destruction of the environment and also has resulted in multiple other socio-political issues. It is time that we vow to free ancient Indian socio- political ideas from Eurocentric reductive and simplistic analysis. However, such an exercise should not be informed by any form of fetishization, eulogization or an uncritical inquiry of the past. Such an exercise should only avoid western, colonial and orientalist influences on the unique political ideas that got impregnated in ancient India.

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