A Study of State and Society in Ancient India the Views of V.S. Smith

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Abstract – John Smith was an English explorer, soldier and writer best known for his role in establishing the first permanent English colony in the New World at Jamestown, Virginia. Smith's legend has grown over the centuries, in particular due to the popular story of his involvement with Pocahontas, a Native American princess. However, Smith was a notorious self-promoter, and the truth of that tale may never be known. Much of what is known about Smith comes from his own writings, which include multiple versions of events and enhance Smith's role. George Percy, a fellow Jamestown leader and eventual governor of Virginia, described Smith as —an Ambityous unworthy and vayneglorious fellowe. Smith's self-aggrandizing personality has cast doubt on his claims since the 1600s, and his legacy remains controversial today.

Keywords: State, Society, India, V.S. Smith, English, Soldier, Writer.

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INTRODUCTION

There are different, or we can say divergent views regarding the history of state and political ideas in ancient India. Different schools of thought have interpreted it differently. The first historians to write the political and social history of ancient India were imperialist administrators like James Mill and V.A. Smith. They wrote the history of India to serve the interest of British imperialism. James Mill divided Indian history into three periods— The Hindu Period, Muslim Period and British Period. Mill postulated that contemporary as well as ancient India was barbarous and anti-rational. Indian civilization according to him showed no concern for political values and India had been ruled by a series of despots. Stagnant since its inception, Indian society was inimical to progress. Mill's *History of India* was one of the prescribed texts at the institutions like Hailey bury College where English officers received their training before coming to India. Smith believed that India had a long tradition of oppressive despots— a tradition which ended only with the advent of the British. The clear implication of such a viewpoint was that Indians were not fit to rule themselves. The British wrote on early Indian history with a view to providing historical justification for the Raj and its exploitation of Indian resources. This quite often led to gross distortion of historical evidence [1]. Evangelists like Shore and Grant backed by the missionaries attempted to justify British rule in India on the ground that it was divinely conceived. They provided the ideological base for the —white man's burden‖

theory. B.G. Tilak, Dayanand Saraswati, V.D. Savarkar and K.P. Jayasawal assumed the superiority of Hindus over Western culture. The Vedas were regarded as the repository of all knowledge and rational thought. Indian scholars now regarded the Indo-Aryans as the originators of human civilization with India as its cradle. Tilak tried to prove that the *Rig Veda* was composed as early as 4000 B.C.E. K.P. Jayasawal thought that long before Europeans built up democratic and self-governing institutions, India had known them and had practised them. India's struggle against Britain for self-rule was justified. Thus extremist 'historians provided an ideological weapon to the freedom movement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The other response from the Indian side was from the ‗rationalist school' of Rajendralal Mitra, R.C Dutt, R.G. Bhandarkar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and those who were not intoxicated by national sentiments, but viewed events more objectively in order to rectify the errors committed by Europeans in respect of Indian history. Mitra published a tract to show irrefutably that in ancient times beef eating was not a taboo. Bhandarkar, being a social reformer, supported widow remarriage and castigated the evils of the caste system and child marriage on the basis of his study of the ancient Indian texts (Basham, 1999).

The Marxist School started with D.D. Kosambi. In Kosambi's view the history of society, economy and culture was an integral part of the development of the forces and relations of production which can provide a rational basis for periodization. Later on this tradition was enriched by historians like Romila Thapar, Ram Sharan Sharma, D.N. Jha and others.

Political Ideas in Ancient India: Though India had no formal political philosophy, the science of statecraft was much cultivated and a number of important textbooks on this topic have survived. *nd n i*, the administration of force, or *j n i*, the conduct of kings, was a severely practical science, and the texts curiously dismiss the more philosophical aspect of politics, but give comparatively detailed advice on the organization of the state and the conduct of governmental affairs (Bhoomika, 1984). The earliest and most important textbook specifically devoted to statecraft is the *h h* which is attributed to Kautilya or Chanakya, the famous minister of Chandragupta Maurya. The *h h* gives very detailed instructions on various issues like the management of the state, the organization of the national economy and the conduct of war and it is the most precious source- book for many aspects of ancient Indian life. The other important sources, in chronological order, are the great epics, the *M h h* and the *R m y n*. The great body of literature generally called *smriti*, giving instruction in the sacred law, is very important in this connection. From the Gupta period and the Middle Ages a number of political texts survive, the most important of which are the *I* (Essence of Politics) of Kamandaka which was written during the Gupta period, the *iv ky m* (Nectar of Aphorisms of Politics) of Somadeva Suri, a Jaina writer of tenth century, and the *I* (Treatise on Politics) attributed to the ancient sage Shukra, but evidently of later medieval origin (Dasgupta and Rama Prasad, 1939). Besides these sources, there is a tremendous amount of Brahmin, Jaina and Buddhist literature which deals on occasions with the politics of the time.

States in Ancient India: State has been the key concept in political science since the period of grand thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. To look into the origin and evolution of the state has been one of the greatest issues in Political Science. In ancient India also thinkers like Bhisma, Narada, Brihaspati, Kautilya, Kamandaka have looked at the problem. On the basis of the writings of these thinkers we can detect four important theories regarding the origin of the state in ancient India, namely—Evolutionary Theory Force Theory Mystical Theory Contract Theory Out of these four theories the theory of mystical origin and the theory of contractual origin are more prevalent (Altekar, 1949). We will look at these theories one by one.

Theory of Evolutionary Origin: This is the oldest theory of the origin of the state in India and has been mentioned in the *Atharva Veda.* According to this theory the state is the result of evolutionary progress and it didn't originate at a fixed time. The tenth hymn of the eighth chapter of the *Atharva Veda* gives a picture of the evolutionary origin of the state.2On the basis of *Atharva Veda* several stages of the evolution of the state can be traced (Shamasastry, 1920). The hymns of the *Atharva Veda* state that the earliest phase of human life was the stage of *v i jy* or stateless state. It was a state of complete anarchy. But subsequently, with the emergence of agriculture, stable life became possible. To fulfil the needs of agricultural society the family emerged and the head of the family became the first wielder of authority. Further, the need of co-operation in the different realms of society led to the emergence of *h* and *mi i h* was the organization of elderly people and *samiti* was the general assembly of common people. With the emergence of *h* and *samiti* organised political life began which finally culminated in the emergence of the state (Sharma, 1996).

A.S. Altekar, N.N. Law and H.C. Raychaudhuri somehow favour the theory of evolutionary origin. Altekar opines that as with other Indo- Aryan communities, the state also evolved in India in pre-historic times out of the institution of the joint family. R. Shamasastry also favours the evolutionary theory but in his opinion the earliest form of family in ancient India was matriarchal which after the invasion of Aryans became patriarchal.

Among contemporary historians, Ram Sharan Sharma focuses on the role of family, varna and property in the evolution of the state, citing examples from *h n l v gh ik y* and *yodhy nd of R m y n* According to Sharma, there was a vital connection between the existence of these institutions and the rise of the state. The basis of political obligation and the functions of state show the role of these institutions. What would happen if the state did not exist? The one recurrent theme in the *h n i v* the *yodhy nd* and the *i hn h mo n* which contain the long description of *j k* (kingless) state is that family and property would not be safe in such a state.

Bhandarkar has quoted five passages from *h n i Parva* which suggest that the kingly office arose to protect the weak against the strong. Sharma opines that possibly it may not be correct to interpret the weak as poor and strong as rich but there are certain references which give the impression that the kingly office was meant to support the haves against the combined attacks of have-nots. The chief functions of the king also throw light on the purpose for which his office was created. One of the main duties of the king was the protection of private property by punishing the thief and that of the family by punishing the adulterers. So great was the responsibility for protecting property that it was incumbent on the king to restore to a subject the stolen wealth at any cost. Preservation of the varna (caste system) was another great responsibility of the king. Generally the maintenance of the caste system was considered an indispensable

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element of *dharma,* for according to Kamandaka if *dharma* is violated by the members of the state, there is bound to be *pralaya* or dissolution of the whole social order.

The dominant ideal that moved the king in ancient India was the attainment of *dharma, artha* and *k m* If the *artha* is taken in the sense of enjoyment of property, the *k m* in the sense of enjoyment of family life and *dharma* in the sense of maintenance of the legal system, it would be clear that in the *trivarga* ideal also, principles of property, family and caste dominated.

Theory of Mystical Origin: This was the most popular theory of origin of the state in ancient India. Kingship was given divine sanction and the king was considered not to be the representative of God but himself a God who contained the powers of important Gods like *Indra, Varuna* and *Agni.* According to A.L. Basham the doctrine of royal divinity was explicitly proclaimed. It appears first in the epics and the law books of Manu. The latter declares in dignified language: —When the world was without a king And dispersed in fear in all directions, The lord created a king For protection of all.‖ —He made him of eternal particles Of *Indra* and the wind, *Yama,* the Sun and fire, *Varuna,* the moon and the lord of wealth.‖ Even before the days of Buddha, the king was exalted far above ordinary mortals, through the magical powers of the great royal sacrifices. The royal consecration (*R j y* which in its full form comprised a series of sacrifices lasting for over a year imbued the king with divine power. In the course of the ceremonies he was identified with *Indra* —because he is a kshatriya and because he is a sacrificer‖ and even with the high God *j p i* himself. He took three steps on a tiger skin and was thus magically identified with the God *Vishnu* whose three paces covered earth and heaven. The king was evidently the fellow of the God. The magical power which pervaded the king at his consecration was restored and strengthened in the course of his reign by further rites, such as the ceremonial rejuvenation of the *j pey* and the horse-sacrifice *(Asvamedha)* which not only ministered to his ambition and arrogance but also ensured the prosperity and fertility of the kingdom. The brahmanic rituals such as horse- sacrifice fell into desuetude under the Mauryas, but was revived by the Sungas and was performed by many later kings both in North and South. After the period of the Guptas these sacrifices became rare, however, the last we have been able to trace took place in the Chola Empire in the eleventh century. But the tradition of royal divinity continued. Kings referred to their divine status in their titles and panegyrics, and they were regularly addressed by their courtiers as *deva*, or God. The Chola kings and some others were even worshipped as God in the temples.

Regarding divine origin of kingship, a story repeatedly appears in the *M h h* and other texts. This is the very ancient story of the first man, Manu, who combined the characteristics of Adam and Noah in the Hebrew tradition. The story tells that at the beginning of this period of cosmic time, when greed and wrath had disturbed human relations, men inflicted untold misery upon one another. As in the Buddhist legend, they agreed to respect each other's life and property, but they had no confidence in their contracts, and so they approached the high God, *hm* to help them, He nominated Manu, here thought of not as a man, but as a God, to be their first king. Variants of this story occur in other parts of the *M h h* and elsewhere, some making the first king *i j* the son of the God *Vishnu*. All adopt the earlier legends to stress the divine status of the king, and his divine appointment to the kingly office. With the exception of a few Rajput families who claimed descent from the fire-God *Agni,* nearly all medieval Indian kings traced their genealogies back to Manu; either through his son *k v k* or his daughter *l* Descendants of *k v k* are referred to as of the solar and those of *l* as of the lunar line.

In thought, if not in practice, it was the mystical theory of kingship which carried most weight with succeeding generations. The author of the *h h* had no illusions about the king's human nature, and seems to have had little time for mysticism, but he recognized that legends about the origin of kingship had propaganda value. In the *h h* he states that the people should be told that, the king fulfils the functions of the God *Indra* (the king of Gods) and *Yama* (the God of death) upon earth, all who slight him will be punished not only by the secular arm, but also by heaven. Ashoka and other Mauryan kings took the title — Beloved of the Gods‖ *devnmpiy* and, though they seem not to have claimed wholly divine status, they were no doubt looked upon as superior semi-divine beings.

John Spellman also favors the view that the theory of divine origin was the dominant and popularly accepted theory regarding the origin of the state in ancient India. According to Spellman — The king was appointed by the God and ruled through divine grace.‖ Spellman put forward two arguments in favors of his dictum. Firstly, in case of a Hindu ruler ruling arbitrarily and tyrannically there was no provision for secular punishment. The king would be punished only by divine powers. Secondly, the king was supposed to follow the divine laws and not man-made laws. So Spellman concludes that in ancient India, the basic notion of the origin of the state was based on divine creation.

The viewpoint which supports the theory of divine origin of state in ancient India has been widely criticized by Western as well as Indian scholars. According to Charles Drekmeier the notion of divinity was used as a metaphor in ancient India. Only those

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kings could claim a divine status who fulfilled the aspirations of their subjects. Basham maintains —the Buddhists and Jainas explicitly denied the king's Godhood, and one court poet at least, Bana, who was patronised by the great Harsha, has the temerity to reject the whole rigmarole of royal divinity as the work of sycophants who befuddled the minds of weak and stupid monarchs, but did not fool the strong and the wisell. R. Shamasastry also denies in emphatic terms the notion of royal divinity in the Vedic age and in the age of Kautilya.

Contract Theory in the Western Political Tradition: In Western political tradition three philosophers Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau who are jointly known as contractualists formulated the social contract theory regarding the origin of the state. All of them claimed that the state is not a natural institution but is created by a contract which suggests that the political authority is the result of mutual consent among individuals. But the three contractualist philosophers differ in their description of contract and various issues related to it. Contractualist philosophers start their description with the depiction of human nature. Based on this human nature they make a description of the state of nature which is a stage prior to the creation of the state.

Stages of State Formation in Ancient India: Six main stages in the history of ancient Indian polity can be identified. The earliest stage was that of tribal military democracy in which tribal assemblies, which had some place for women were mainly pre-occupied with war. The age of *Rig Veda* was primarily a period of assemblies. The second stage saw the break-up of the tribal polity under the stress of constant conflicts between the *jnykhiy* and the ordinary businessman called the *vis*. The chiefs were helped by the priesthood called the Brahmins. This stage saw the beginning of taxes and classes or varnas which came to be firmly established in the third stage. The third stage was marked by the formation of the full-fledged state. There arose large territorial monarchies of Kosala and Magadha and tribal oligarchies in North-Western India and at the foot of the Himalayas. For the first time we hear of large standing armies and organized machinery for the collection of land revenue. The fourth or the Maurya phase saw bureaucratic centralization based on the expanding economic activities of the state. The state with the help of its bureaucracy controlled various aspects of the life of its subjects.

The fifth stage was marked by the process of decentralized administration in which towns, feudatories and military elements came to the forefront in both the Deccan and North India. This was partly neutralized by the emphasis on the divinity of the king. The last stage, identical with the Gupta period, may be called the period of proto-feudal polity. Land grants now played an important part in the formation of the political structure and those made by the Gupta feudatories conferred fiscal and administrative privileges on priestly beneficiaries.

Kingship: The king was the most important figure in the *body politic.* In the *p ng* theory of the state, developed by Kautilya the king has been described as the head or the most important organ of the state. The king performed multi-dimensional functions. The king's functions involved the protection not only of his kingdom against external aggression, but also of life, property and traditional custom against internal foes. He protected the purity of class and caste by ensuring that those who challenged the system were excommunicated. He protected the family system by punishing adultery and ensuring the fair inheritance of family property. He protected widows and orphans by making them his wards. He protected the rich against the poor by suppressing robbery, and he protected the poor against the rich by punishing extortion and oppression. Religion was protected by liberal grants to learned Brahmins and temples and frequently to heterodox sects also.

The ideal set before the king was one of energetic beneficence. Ashoka was not the only king of India to proclaim that all men were his children, or to take pride in his ceaseless activity for the welfare of his subjects. The *h h* despite its advocacy of every dishonest expedient for the acquisition and maintenance of power, puts forward the kingly duty in simple and forceful language, setting an ideal which few ancient civilizations can boast of. Comparing the king and the ascetic it says: —In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness, In the welfare of his subjects, his welfare. The king's good is not that which pleases him, But that which pleases his subjects.ll Elsewhere the

h h suggests a time-table for the king's day, which allows him only four and a half hours sleep and three hours for eating and recreation, the rest of the day being spent in state affairs of one kind or another. No doubt such a programme was rarely kept in practice, but it at least shows the ideal at which the king was expected to aim. In all sources the king is told that he must be prompt in the administration of justice and always accessible to his people. The swarms of guards, ushers, and other officials who surrounded the king's person must often have demanded bribes, and otherwise have obstructed the access of the subject to his sovereign. But the best of Indian kings at all times have made the public audience or *d* an important instrument of government.

Political Ideals in Ancient India: Political ideals like liberty, justice, fraternity and nationalism are a product of the modern age. If viewed strictly from the lens of the contemporary period, we can't find any systematic expression of these ideals, in ancient India. But seen from a different perspective, ancient Indians did have these ideals in a rudimentary form. Showing the importance of freedom the *Vedas* state that independence is necessary for mankind and those

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who are not independent are worse than dead.59In *v n h m* institution too, an independent living has been kept in mind. A man lived independently during *ih h h m* and when he was likely to be dependent on the offspring coming of age, there is the provision of the older people resorting to *np h* and then to *ny* again living freely in the solitude of hills and dales rather than living as dependent on their children. For disposal of justice the Mauryan state had a system of judiciary. *h m h y* was the civil court and *kantakashodhana* was organised to deal with a large number of economic crimes. The *R m y n* extols this country as a *k m h mi* the land of pious acts. This shows the belongingness of people to land and their fellow beings. The early seeds of nationalism can be traced in this instance.

Similarly, the ideal of ancient Indian thinkers was *vasudhaivakutumbakam* (treating the whole world like a family.) This was the concept of universal brotherhood or fraternity. From the days of Plato and Aristotle, European thought has turned its attention to such questions as the origin of the state, the ideal form of government, and the basis of law, and the politics has long been looked on as a branch of philosophy. From the above discussion, it is clear that ancient India also thought about such questions, but she had no schools of political philosophy in the Western sense.

CONCLUSION:

The history of India includes the prehistoric settlements and societies in the Indian subcontinent; the blending of the Indus Valley Civilization and Indo-Aryan culture into the Vedic Civilization‖ the development of Hinduism as a synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions; the rise of the Śramaṇa movement; the decline of Śrauta sacrifices and the birth of the initiatory traditions ofJainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism; the onset of a succession of powerful dynasties and empires for more than two millennia throughout various geographic areas of the subcontinent, including the growth of Muslim dynasties during the Medieval period intertwined with Hindu powers; the advent of European traders resulting in the establishment of the British rule; and the subsequent independence movement that led to the Partition of India and the creation of the Republic of India.

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Fore labor ate explanation see वेदवाचस्पति, प्रियव्रत, वैदिक राजनीति में राज्य की शरण, परमात्म, प्राचीन भारत में राजनितिक विचार एवंसंस्थाएँ, मरेठ, मीनाक्षी

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