**BUDDHIST THEORY OF KINGSHIP**

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**Introduction to Buddhist Political theories**
- Digha Nikaya is a collection of dialogues of mostly of Gautama himself. There are 180 controversial dialogues –
- First dialogue is Brahmajala – the perfect net
- 62 hypothesis and 4 great nikayas or collections. First 2 nikayas are Digha and Majjhima, longer and shorter.
- Buddha is himself principle interlocutor in conversation with his principle disciples.
- Agganna Sutta is number 27 of Dighanikaya.

**Philosophical concepts of Buddhism**
- There are 3 great traditions of Buddhist thought –
  1. Thervada - oldest early Buddhism – Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand & Cambodia (meditation)
  2. Mahayana – Eastern originates in India and spreads to China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan (Lotus sutra)
  3. Vajrayana – Believes in esoteric healing and social transformation, found in Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal and Bhutan
- 3 fundamental principles of phenomenal world
  1. Annica – impermanence
  2. Annata – NO self
  3. Dukha - Suffering
- There are 3 great traditions of Buddhist thought –
  1. Existential fact of suffering
  2. Its cause
  3. Its cessation
  4. Path leading to its cessation

**Context**
- Scattered references in Pali scriptures about theory of Kingship
- Gokhale outlines evolution of Buddhist theory in terms of
  1. Quasi contractual arrangement
  2. Relationship between Buddhism and Monarchical despotism
  3. State becomes ethical instrument of Dhamma.
**Origin of Kingship**

Ernest Gellner mentioned three min historical stages of evolution of mankind:

i. Hunter-gatherers
ii. Agrarian Society
iii. Industrial Society

These stages are defined in relation to

- The means or their absence of producing, accumulating and storing food and wealth;
- The forms of coercion and legitimation which accompany them;
- (in the second and third stage) to the social distribution and varieties of cognition

Indian society during 5th – 4th Centuries B.C.:

- Brahmanism was more strongly established the countryside than in the rising urban centres, where a competing plurality of ideologies were emerging;
- These urban centres, which arose from and encouraged a food surplus, were the market, military and administrative centres of small scale politics and not the metropolitan capitals of large empires;
- These polities were ruled by oligarchies and gradually turned to monarchies.

**Theory of ‘Great Elect’ (Mahasammat)**

i. **Description of primeval conditions**: inhabited by ‘being made of mind’, feeding on rapture (bliss, enthusiasm, carried away in spirit), self-luminous (full of light) traversing the air, continuing in glory; only subtle body/mind; emancipating person; no distinction of sex; => **state of soul and spirit**

ii. **Introduction of element of water**: greedy disposition; decline of self-luminance; manifestation of the sun, the moon, appearance of stars, night, day, months, seasons, years etc.

iii. **Appearance of soil & rice**: set boundaries (Private Property); appearance of evil & immoral customs; one’s notion of one-self; pride in beauty and conceit; Sex differences; people divided on rice-fields;

iv. **Stealing appeared**: punishment for crime and defiance of rules

v. **People agitated due to evils**: ‘Those beings went to the being among them who was the handsomest, the best favoured, the most attractive, the most capable and said to him: come now, good being, be indignant, censure that which should rightly be
censured, banish him who deserves to be banished. And we will contribute to thee a proportion of our rice.’ (Dialogues of Buddha 88)

‘(O king) thou who are a (mere) servant of the multitude and who receives the sixth part (of the produce) as thine wages.’ (U.N. Ghoshal)

He consented to do so and was given a portion of rice.

- He was called **Mahasammata**, because he was chosen by the whole people.
- He was named **Khattiya** because of being overlord (ahdipati) of fields (khetta). By making the king master of the farms, there is implicit acceptance of the state’s control, if not ownership of all forms of property within the realm though this right is inexorably linked with dhamma (righteousness), conceivably an antidote against any expropriatory inherent in the state.
- He was also called **Raja** as he charmed others by nor m or pleases the people with dhamma. Dhamma is now introduced as a basic constituent of the state.

**Implications**

**Origin of State** as a quasi-contractual Arrangement under which the king agrees to perform specific functions on behalf of the people in return for certain rights conferred on him, including taxation;

- The view of kingship is not that of a ‘universal emperor’, the cakkavatti but is of the ‘Great Appointee’
- Basis of kingship involve psychological factors rather than divine will.
- Shows new realm of social investigation, reflecting that when social stratifications were absent, the state of existence was of great happiness
- The first stage, when being were ‘made of mind’ depicts the influence of traditional Hindu psychology. Linga / Sukshma Sarira/ Subtle body is individual’s real personality and accompanies soul in its transmigration. Corporal body destroyed instrument for the action of soul and subtle body. It denotes emancipation of Upanishadic ‘Self’ and Purusha of Samkhya view.
- Denotes the whole chain of causation: Ignorance => Samskara (conformation) => Consciousness => Name and Form => 6 Provinces (senses) eye, ear, nose, tongue, body/touch, mind => Contact => Sensation => thirst/desire => attachment => becoming => birth => Old age/Death/Grief/Lamentation/Suffering/Depression/Despair => Whole mass of suffering
- Once ignorance dispelled, individual was able to see things as they really are
- Dialogue do not specify details of Mahasammata / Great Elect could be king or a republican head.
Buddha himself was from Sakiya clan with republican polity

Ecclesiastical organization founded by Buddha was based on model of republican polity, where members were encouraged to express their views freely.

Decision making involved some consensus.

Difference between King and subjects depicts divergence of physical beauty, attractiveness, capability, etc.

Emergence of private property as a cause of emergence of state on of food surplus were connected processes (Steven Collins, *Agganna Sutta: The Discourse on What is Primary*). There were many factors behind the increase in food production: earlier dominant barley was substituted with higher-yield crop of rice; the technique of transplanting rice in wet-land cultivation;

The rise of urban centres and the product

Passions of vanity (empty pride), conceit, lust, greed, theft, desire necessitate coercive authority of state

‘Great Elect’ was instituted by people to settle social conflicts

Political authority lies in people who fix for the King (Great Elect) a portion of their produce

The contract is a basic condition of organized human society for in the absence of such a contract before the birth of the state, anarchy prevailed. It is, therefore, existential and neither the subjects nor the state have any choice outside it.

The state arises as a punitive institution charged with the responsibility of imposing law and order without which human beings cannot survive as an orderly society. The state becomes an agreement between the government and the ruled, wherein the ruled transfer a part of their sovereignty to state for a specific purpose.

The relationship between the state and the subject is a contractual obligation in which one commands and the other obeys. The obligation is mutual and if one party violates it unilaterally, the other is no longer obligated by the terms of that contract.

The contract is symbolized by the institution of taxation, which is a payment for specific work.

- At the time of Gautama, 2 types of government – Republican and Monarchical – constant competition with each other.
- Regular assemblies within tribal groups known as sanghas, that is government by discussion, main feature of republican government – They collapsed after Buddha’s, middle of 5th century
• Sanghas are intermediate stage between collectivism of popular tribal assembly and individualism of Monarchical state
• Monarchy flourished in 3 contexts – Individualism, urbanisation & density of population

Theories of Kingship
Necessity of the existence of the state for orderly human society
The rights of private property and family can prevail only under the state’s regulatory and punitive authority
• Origin of Monarchy in Agganna Sutta, refers to myth when man deteriorates from original state of nature of Rousseau to Hobbes
• Greed, dishonest, quarrelsome and violent man emerges. People select the king to ensure common good and they agree to give a proportion of his rights
• Origin of Kingship in a social contract.
• Buddha describes origin of 4 social classes –
  1. Landed ruling class
  2. Priestly class
  3. Trading class
  4. Hunters
• Monarchy preferable to anarchy – 1 individual could control aggressive, violent and self-assertive individual
• Agganna Sutta challenges Vedic ideas of maintaining social order based on Varna Ashrama Dharma.
• The context in which monarchy flourished
  1. Private property (theft)
  2. Family (Dhamma)
For the early Buddhists, the state generally means the monarch, though the Buddha and many of his disciples came from oligarchic republics. (Gokhale) The terms commonly used for the state are rattha (country), rajja (kingdom) or vṛjita (subjugated territory).

Notion of Sovereignty
The state is a sovereign entity and its sovereignty is expressed by a variety of terms such as ānā, ādhipacca, issariya, vasa and siri. Ānā means order or command and implies ability to give orders to all. Ādhipacca signifies overlordship, the quality of imposing superiority over others. Issariya, which is also called vasa, is the quality of exercising overwhelming influence or control, the capacity to impose sovereignty. Siri is splendor, beauty, glory, majesty and prosperity and is based on
material possessions. Sovereignty connotes total authority, an ability to reward and punish, capacity to give orders to all and receive orders from none.

Seven symbols of Sovereignty
- Unique to Buddhism Sattharatana or 7 constituent elements of kingship are –
  1. Cakkaratana – wheel treasure (Dominion)
  2. Hathiratna – Elephant treasure (Control over Dominion)
  3. Assaratna – Horse treasure (Control over dominion)
  4. Parinayakaratna – Councilor treasure (Control over dominion)
  5. Itthiratna – Woman treasure (Basis of control)
  6. Maniratna – Precious gems (Basis of control)
  7. Gahapatiratna – people, taxation (Basis of control)
- Features of Buddhist polity –
  1. Secular orientation
  2. Continuity with Vedic ideas (7 ratnas + Raja)
  3. Dichotomy between ideas of actual kingship & normative kingship

Buddhist Ideas on the Constituents of the State (Gokhale)
(Do not offer systematized list of constituents of State)
  i. The King
  ii. The Territory (rattha); Territorial organizations have sub-divisions:
     (a) Villages (gaama)
     (b) Market towns (nigama)
     (c) Countryside (janaopada)
     (d) City (naga ra)
     (e) The Frontier (paccanta) (existed only some times)
  iii. Ministers and bureaucracy (Amacca and paarisajja)
  iv. The Armed Forces (balam) (recommended delicate balance of forces to deal with dangers from outside its frontiers and from within, through rebellion and banditry. The early Buddhists regarded the institution of war as strictly within the jurisdiction of state (attha and ānā). Buddhist injunctions against violence were more often related to the level of individual and inter-group relations. The horrors of war were duly recognized, however, war was not outlawed. (Gokhale) Perhaps, the Buddhists reconciled their inability to influence the conduct of state beyond giving it ethical advice. Hence, wanted to keep the horrors of war within reasonable limits. No evidence to assume that the Buddha ever advised his contemporary kings to disband their armies or to dismantle their swords. Even the Buddhist emperor Ashoka is not known to have disbanded his army after Kalinga.
The most frequent challenge came from within: Conspiracy against the throne and life of the king, robbers and thieves threatening the life and property of people; etc.
For all practical purposes, *Samgha* withdrew itself from consideration of war; admission of soldiers was forbidden; talks and stories of war were denounced; witnessing army parades was treated as waste of time.

v. The Treasury (*kosakotthagara*)
vi. Allies (*Anuyutta khattiya* and *kuddarajano*)

vii. The People (*manussa*); to have four different assemblies (*parisas*),- one each for
   (a) *Khattiyas*
   (b) *Brahmans*
   (c) *Householders* (*gahapati*)
   (d) *Ascetics* (*samana*)

(Forte / Durga not included in the list, as was done by Kautilya)

**Ideal Kingdom**

- The territory, which is without thorns (*Akantaka*) and untroubled (*Annuppīla*)
- Men are happy and joyous, living in homes with open doors and playing peacefully with children in their laps;
- Wicked are punished; punishment is to be used to deter the potential offenders; king to have absolute powers to banish culprits from his kingdom and also to execute the convicted criminals;

**Abuse of power by the State**
Recognized the constant possibility of power by the state;
Kings described as tyrant, intolerant, arbitrary, autocratic, greedy, expropriatory
The destruction caused by the wrath of a king is compared to that by thieves, fire, flood, evil spirits or wild animals

**Conclusion**
- King
  - Despotic
    - Arbitrary power
    - Alternative Righteous king
  - Normative
    - Legitimate power & Dhamma
Early Buddhist View of State: Dhamma and State

Relationship between Buddhism and a well-entrenched and all powerful monarchical despotism; and the solution is proposed in the theory of two equal spheres of life:

i. **The Dhamma**

(a) Kings built monasteries for the *Samgha* and amended many of their laws, which otherwise made the *Samgha’s* activities very difficult. The relationship between the state and Buddhism could be realized through the fact that Buddhism could not for long remain outside its society. The Buddha and his disciples were subjects of the state in the area they lived and worked, and accordingly accommodated the demands of the state by modifying the *Vinaya* rules.

(b) Human life comprised of two distinct spheres: the temporal and the spiritual. The Human life was also explained by two other terms: *Atta* and *Dhamma*.

a. Atta is translated as interest advantage, good, blessing, welfare, profit, prosperity, well-being, riches and wealth. Initially, it was used to mean something that is vital and desirable both in this world and the next. Later, it was used to denote affairs of this world, especially of organized society. As worldly good, it involves the right to enjoy private property and the prerogative to found a family without the fear of molestation and disruption. However, property and family can exist only under a set of laws, which ānā can impose on all.

It came closer to *Artha*, as was used by Kautilya, to describe Vārtā (economy) and Dandaniti (polity). Both Buddhist rulers, Bimbisara and Ajatasattu recognized the two spheres of human life, temporal and spiritual.

As the basis of Buddhist political theory, Ajatasattu coined the theory of **Two Wheels** including the ‘Wheel of Law’ (*Dhammacakka*) and the ‘Wheel of Command’ (*ānācakka*). (Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, *The Early Buddhist View of State*) It was asserted that the affairs of this world and those of next are like two wheels. Each has its own distinctive identity, but they are also like the wheels of the chariot, the axle on which they revolve. Here, they reflect the human society, its desires, aspirations and destiny.
This altogether indicates that *dhamma* cannot operate in this world by itself, as it needs the assent of the state, if not support of *ānā* or the state.

**b. The ānā**

**State finally became an instrument of the Dhamma:**

i. Dhamma as a cosmic force capable of containing the power of state and regulating its behaviour

ii. The state becomes an ethical institution drawing its authority from Dhamma and guided by its repository, the *Samgha*.

**Suggested Readings**


