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POLITICAL ELEMENTS IN TANTRA

Dr. Parimal Kumar Datta

"The erring race of human beings dreams of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society, but it is by the perfection of soul within that the outer environment can be perfected."

Sri Aurobinda, *Thought and Aphorisms*, p. 55

Introduction

Tantra is an encyclopaedic literature. It has contributed towards Architecture, Astrology, Astronomy, Ayurveda (Medical Science), Bio-Science, Chemistry, (Alchemy), Environmental Science, Geography, Mathematics & Geometry, Physics, Physiology, Anatomy, Embryology, Psychology, Symbolic Science, Yoga, Economics, Education, Ethics, History, Political Science, Sociology, Art, Sculpture, Iconography Music, Dance, Literature, Law, Philosophy, Religion & Sacraments. (*Tantra its relevance modern times*, Parimal Kumar Datta, 8th Chapter)

Out of all these subjects, we have chosen Political Science in order to know and show what the Tantra Sādhakas felt about the political system.

What is Political Science?

Political Science mainly deals with the state. A state is a politically organised society in a certain territory. A State has four basic elements, Population, Definite territory, Government, Sovereignty.

What is a Government?

The people of a country require a political organisation through which their collective will can be formulated and expressed. This political organisation is called the Government.

Branches of Government

The traditional classification of government powers by function is threefold - a) Legislative - the enactment or marketing laws. b) Executive- 'the application or execution of law. c) Judicial - the enforcement of laws through legal or court process. In most of the government these three branches are called the Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches.

Forms of Government

Ancient and modern writers classify forms of government. These are Monarchy, Aristocracy, Unitary, Federal, Parliamentary, Presidential.

Monarchical Form of Government

Monarchy represents that form of Government where the source of all political authority is to be found in a supreme ruler. The monarch enjoys a life-long tenure and the office passes to his heirs according to the law of primogeniture. In Absolute Monarchy the king is the bearer of sovereign authority and his will is supreme. In a Limited Monarchy, the authority of a king is limited either by of a written constitution or by certain fundamental conventions.¹

Date of Tantric Literature

Tantra as a cult is very old.² No perfect historical evidence can be produced to ascertain the exact time of the inception of the Tantric cult.³ It is also difficult to determine the exact time when the word Tantra came to be employed in the sense of Tantra Literature.⁴ Hundreds of Tantra texts are mentioned in different lists. Many of those Tantras are lost forever. A large number of Tantra texts still survive. Regarding the emergence of Tantra literature the view of a renowned scholar is worth mentioning.

"In the matter of the origin of this class literature we must guard against the two extremes (pre Vedic vs. Post Vedic) of too high antiquity and too late a period. May be that Tantric ideas were current in hoary antiquity but systematic works did not perhaps originate earlier than the fifth century A.D."

Scholars divided the history of the religion philosophic culture of India into six well defined chronological period.⁶ These are –

1. Pre Aryan period⁷ C. 3000 B.C - 2000 B.C.
2. The Vedic Period⁸ C. 2000 B.C - 600 B.C.
3. The Age of Revolt⁹ C. 600 B.C. - 300 A.D
4. The Puranic Preiod¹⁰ C. 300 A.D - 1200 A.D
5. The Muslim Period¹¹ C. 1000 A.D - 1757 A.D
6. The Modern Age¹² C. 1757 A.D. - 1947 A.D. and also to date.

We may roughly call the entire period from the 5th century A.D. to the 14th century A.D.¹⁴ Tantric Period and it may, according to some scholars, be extended up to the 18th or 19th century A.D.

Monarchical Government existed in India during the Tantric Period save British Period and the modern period. Tantric literature does not discuss the forms of Government in a systematic way and scientific methods. It does not describe the Monarchical form of Government in full. It only touches some elements of the Monarchical form of Government in course of the description of Tantric rituals. Political elements in Tantra are found in scattered forms. Our attempt is to sort out those elements and place before the scholars.

The King was the head of state and the Government. So it is necessary to know the qualifications of a king.

Qualifications of a king

The existence of state depends upon qualifications of a king if there exist Absolute Monarchy. During the Tantric period, Absolute Monarchy was prevalent. So Tantra gave much stress on the qualifications of a king. According to Mahānirvāṇa Tantra¹³, the King should be very leaned yet not garrulous; full of knowledge, yet anxious to learn; full of honours, yet without arrogance. In awarding both reward and punishment the king should be calm and discriminating. The King should be of calm position, judicious of action in time of trouble, of good conduct and reasonable in his expenditure.

The king should be expert in the maintenance of his facts, well trained in the use of arms. He should even ascertain the disposition of his army and teach his soldiers military tactics.¹⁵

Kālikāpurāṇa¹⁶ also gives a list of the qualifications and disqualifications of a king.

Duties and Functions of a king

Tantra also discusses the duties and functions of a king. Mahānirvāṇatantra suggests the king to avoid war if peace prevails. Moreover, a king should agree to any treaty if it happens honourably. To a King either victory or death is preferable.

The same Tantra warns a King not to covet the wealth of his subjects or levy excessive taxes. He should protect his subjects as though they were his own children.

Mahānirvāṇatantra¹⁷ also advises the king to take counsel of ministers. It says that the king should take the advice of his ministers in administration, war, treaty and other affairs of the state.

War should be carried on in accordance with Dharma. Rewards and punishments should be awarded justly and in accordance with the 'śāstras'.¹⁸ The best treaty should be concluded which his power allows. By stratagem wars should be conducted and treaties concluded. Victory, peace and prosperity follow stratagem.¹⁹

In the battle, the king should not kill one who is stunned, who has surrendered his arms or is a fugitive, nor those of his enemies whom he has captured nor their wives or children.²⁰

The king should not put his trust in any single person nor place one man in charge of the administration, nor treat his inferiors as equals, nor be familiar with them.²¹

The King should protect soldiers, commanders, wife, children, servitors, the insane, the helpless, orphans and those who are old and infirm.²²

In the administration of justice, servants, sons, strangers, friends and foes should all be treated alike.²³

Śāradatilaka Tantra²⁴ says that defeating the enemies, the victorious king should satisfy the ministers by the ministers by giving them villages, land, wealth etc. If the ministers are not satisfied, the king will suffer much.

Sāmrajya Lakṣmī Pithikā²⁵ says the primary duty of a king rests in his acting as head of the judiciary, in resolving duties. In such occasion he is advised first to listen patiently to all persons separately who intend speaking on the matter, brood over and give his verdict betraying ignorance about one another's view. He is also advised to take away everything of the enemy by following the dictates of science of polity on the matter. While keeping his movements secret and still resorting to some other pretext. Moreover, the King should protect and honour ascetics, guests, physicians, poets, Tantra Sadhakas, fire-priests, singers, actors, musicians, archers, warrior class, traders, sudras, antyas, yogins and learned ones.

Sāmrajya Pithikā²⁶ gives a list of seventy two officers appointed by the king.

Duties of Subject

Tantra describes the duties of the kings. Tantra also reminds the subjects of the country of their duties. According to Mahānirvāṇatantra²⁷ the subjects should actively protect the kingdom, property and life of the just king otherwise they will go upon the downward path.

Foreign Policy

Now-a days every country strives for friends as an unavoidable course. It is therefore, quite natural on the part of any country that it has to establish sound and friendly relations with other nations to counter weight the enemy nations. These friendly or hostile relations are termed as International Relations and the policy adopted for the establishment of such political relations is called the International Politics.²⁸ Foreign policy is an integrated element of International Politics.

The vision of Tantric Sadhakas also reaches this important element of Political Science. Tantra formulates sixfold foreign policy.²⁹

1. Saṁdhi - Peace or alliance.
2. Vighraha - Conflict
3. Yāna - Military expedition against enemy.
4. Asana -- Waiting in preparedness for repelling a charge.
5. Saṁśraya - Seeking shelter with another mighty king.
6. Dvidhākaraṇa - Playing duplicity with the enemy or effecting rebellion in the ranks of enemy.

All these six foreign policies are policies adopted by a king in relation to alien ruler, more specifically, an enemy. A king while dealing with an enemy should apply his discretion, power and judgement quite judiciously and take recourse to one or more policies, as and when suitable for him.

Conclusion

Now-a-days party politics, nepotism, corruption and criminalisation of politics have poisoned the air, polluted the tradition and culture and swallowed the glory of India. Tantra advocates Monarchy which is based on the principle of heredity and the Theory of Divine Origin Honesty is not an essential qualification for ministers in India, but it was one of the most essential qualifications of the ministers and officers according to Tantra. Now proper time has come for the rulers of India to review their policies. to and amend to the constitution of India in order to seal all the channels of corruption and to up root some evils of society.

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