
UNIT 5 VEDA VYASA RAJDHARAMA (SHANTIPARVA)*

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

The epic *Mahabharata* is full of political advice that a person requires in his life. It supports real-world approach. People commonly figure out this epic to say that pure idealism does not work in real life. Even if somebody look at real political advice, *The Mahabharata* is not very far from realist thinkers like Sun Tzu and Machiavelli. It has real-world strategies. It emphasizes on political power and military conquest. Lord Krishna essentially justifies use of plans in national interest and inevitability of war in times of crises. A number of political strategies, policies and approaches emerge from *The Mahabharata*. Our politicians, leaders, ministers, officers, policy makers and Indians at large can remain Indian in spirit and succeed at diplomacy and other fronts of authority. The question is from where we draw our inspiration. A simple reference makes us at comfort and confident.

- To understand the relevance of Mahabharata in Historical, Political and Cultural Aspect.
- To identify the political thought in Mahabharata and comparison with the modern political theories.

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- Mahabharata represented as cultural education transmitting knowledge from one generation to other generation.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

There is always a question comes to our mind that our great epics are having any relevance in political thought? The answer is certainly yes. Mahabharata is a great epic, which is not only a historical text but also it, is a text for educators. Researchers have an opinion that Mahabharata has been used to educate by one generation to other generation as a knowledge system. It is a philosophical text, which shows the multiple viewpoints about the society, human relations, and politics. It treats human beings as a multilayered being.

The *Shantiparva* of *Mahabharata*, a discourse on statecraft conveyed by Bhishma to Yudhishtira, largely describes the functions, duties of a good king, both during normal times and a during period of emergency, finally signifying the importance of a welfare state. In the ancient time when "law was the command of the sovereign" and citizens had to obey the orders of the king. Does the *Shantiparva* contain principles on the lines of sarvajana sukhino bhavantu? Kingship in ancient India characterized as 'benevolent, patriarchal autocracy bound down by many instructions of service to the people. The duties of King considered a servant of the people. It expected that the king devote his life to the service and welfare of the people of his state. He was expected to assume different roles in accordance with the situations, such as abolishing the enemies, imposing punishments upon the wicked, giving rewards upon the good, sacking offenders etc. All duties of the king should be performed according to the provisions of dharma, which are to be respected in every possibility, not by the king but also by his public. The *Shantiparva* definitely maintains, "The king should involve all the public in their respective duties and instruct them to perform their allocated functions according to dharma". The *Mahabharata*, like Kautilya's *Saptanga* theory believes in the seven elements of the state-Raja, Mantri, Kosa(Treasury), Danda(Military), Mitra(Friend), Rashtra and Nagar. The head of the state, council of ministers, treasury, punishment, allies etc were as important in ancient times as today.

5.2 VYAS AND MAHABHARATA

The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Smirities represent ancient Indian Political Thought. The political ideas found in the great epics *Mahabharata* is very complex and comprehensive. Vyasa, the author is a mythical figure of uncertain identity. Vyasa means arranger or compiler. Though various authors of ancient time are so designated, the term is used especially as a title of the compiler of Vedas, who has also been the author of *Mahabharata*. Just as we find the series of fourteen different Manus, so the Puranas tell of twenty-eight Vyasas who compiled wisdom in different periods. The arranger of *Mahabharata* is *Krishna Dwapayan Vyasa* and it is between the decedents of his two sons Dhritrastra and Pandu, that the Mahabharata was contested.

Mahabharata is a historical Text, some of the noted historians as DD Koshambi consider *Mahabharata* to be a historical text. It is a longest epic that has also been used for educating the general public for their day to day life. It is a compilation of existing knowledge that was available at that period of time.

Mahabharata is important in the point of view of politics, because it discuss broadly in ancient Indian Political thought. The *Shantiparva* and the *Rajdharmanusasana* chapters which present a man-made and systematic view of the political thought of ancient India. In the *Shantiparva* of *Mahabharta Dandniti*, Rajdharma, Shasanpadhiti, Mantri Parishada and Kar-Vyavstha is discussing more about Duties of king and government system, different organs of the government and so on. *Shantiparva* establishes the principles of origin of monarchy-Rajtantra, and it is in the *Shantiparva* of *Mahabharata* that we come across the political thought of Bhishma, which forms the subject-matter of this chapter. Bhishma's discourses in the *Shantiparva* as his most convincing description of Rajdharma. Yudhishtira at the end of the Great War asked Vyasa about the duties of kings as well as those of the four varna's. The sage referred him to the well-informed and great intellectual Bhismhma, who was well versed in all the duties. *Rajdharma*, as given by Yudhishtira interpreting the basic ideas of Bhishma. Just as the rising sun scatters unholy darkness, so does the Rajdharma destroy all evil significances in this world. *Shantiparva* consists of 365 chapters and 13,716 numbers of Verses, and it further divided into three sub-parvas:

- (i) *Rajadharmanushasana Parva*: This part describes the duties of the king and his governance.
- (ii) *Apaddharmaanushasana Parva*: This part describes the rules of conduct when one faces emergency.
- (iii) *Mokshadharma Parva*: This Parva describes the behavior and rules to achieve moksha or salvation.

5.3 THE ORIGIN OF STATE

The origin of state, which is a major aspect of politics, has been defined in the Vana parva in *Mahabharata*. The *Shantiparva* clarifies that in the state of nature, the institution of state did not exist. There was no kingly office and the people there had sense of thine and mine. The point towards the fact that the absence of the ruler coincided with the absence of private property. Nearly all classical works and anthropological evidence make us determine that there was a golden age of harmony and happiness when people led happy and peaceful lives. This harmonious and happy life was destroyed by the discovery of the art of agriculture, which empowered people to produce more than they could consume. For the first time, they established houses, stored rice, and divided the fields with boundaries naming them as individual properties, but people began to snatch away the rice of others without their consent. This led to a search for some authority to protect their fields and properties.

Shantiparva speculates at one place that people went in search of a king in order to protect their property, family and Varna's. They were also prepared to give him a certain share of their own property. Under such circumstances, Manu, finally accepted kinship to protect property, family and Varnas. From the 67th chapter of *Shantiparva*, we come to know that there was a contract of people to get rid of sinfulness. *Shantiparva* also explores the origin of the state on the grounds that when sinfulness prevails in the world, men cannot own and enjoy their own wives, animals, fields and houses. *Shantiparva* states that in the absence of the king, inter-mixture of castes would take place. Further, *Shantiparva* also stated that Dharma is meant to aid the acquisition and preservation of wealth - if Adharma increases, it causes confusion among the varnas. Therefore, it is believed that the king's preservation of Dharma signified nothing but the defense of the social order based on family, property and the caste system. We can see the conditions existing in the state of nature, the necessity to uphold Dharma, protection of property, family and Varna system by the King.

This might have resulted in the creation of the state. From the above there are two points that come out clearly – (i) First, in the *Shantiparva*, we find the origin of the state or kinship, (ii) second, two theories of origin of state have been given - (i) the divine origin theory and (ii) the social contract theory. When Manu became the king with a large army, he set out to make conquest. People began to fear King and observe Dharma. This theory contains three elements - (1) the people lived under the law of jungle. (2) with the object of improving the situation, Brahma created the King, who was chosen by the people, (3) a contract was made between the King and the people.

Society and state are institutions which are very closely inter related. Ancient Indian political thinkers while dealing with the subject took recourse to legends and mythology and regarded the state as a divine institution which was created by god to ensure security and justice for mankind against the law of the jungle, which had somehow set in among them at the end of the golden age. The theory of divine origin speculates that the state is the creation of God, and the king rules in his name. The origins of this theory found in the *Rigveda*, which mentions that Brahma created the Kshatriyas or protectors. The *Mahabharata* also refers to it many times. The divine origin of state is further elaborated through the story of Prthu Vainya. His supernatural appearance, coronation by the Gods, and the entrance of Vishnu into his body, clearly indicate the divine origin of Kingship.

Matsyanyaya is known as the theory of force, and it pre-supposes an inherent propensity of man to encroach upon his weaker neighbor, and to be prone to commit acts of disorder and aggression. The *Shantiparva* refers to the seven elements of state, but it does not enumerate them in the same order as mentioned in other works like those of the Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the *Manusmṛti*.

All the experts admit that the Atman (king) is an important element of the state. The king is the head of the state; He is the fountain of justice. He has to deal with

judicial, taxation, religious and cultural problems. He has to protect and regulate the Varna organization and Ashram system.

Amatya (minister and officials) is the second constituent of the state. In the *Shantiparva*, a sachiva is king's helper and Amatya is regarded as his private secretary. The Amatya is an important element of formation of state in ancient India.

Treasury (Kosa) is another constituent of the state. The co-relation of king and his treasury is emphasized. The king should take care of seven limbs and Kosa is one of them. The rich treasury depends up on the righteous king.

Durg was considered the strength of the sovereign. It was believed that with a well-equipped fort, a king could defend his country against stronger enemy.

The next element Mitra (ally, Friend) is an important principal of state. Ally refers to different kinds of friends. Bhishma in the 80th chapter of the *Santiparva* says that there are four kinds of friends or allies-(1) *Sahartha* are those who are hereditary friends (2) *Bhajamana* (3) *Sahaja* are the kin-related ones and (4) *Kritrima* are the ones who had been turned into friends by gifts etc. In the 69th chapter of *Shantiparva*, it is said that when a king is attacked, then for his defence against the aggressors, he should see that the bridges over rivers are destroyed and water from ponds is not taken out.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the three sub-parvas in *Shantiparva*.

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5.4 KINSHIP

As *R.S. Sharma* says that "the cardinal supposition of *Shantiparva* in Chapter 67 is the appropriate theory of the origin of state. It is scientific because it involves the King and people. The people's obligation to pay taxes and render military services to the King clearly implies the presence of the elements of *Kosha* and *Danda*. Thus, four important elements of the state out of seven can be clearly distinguished in the statement of the contract theory of the origin of the state." *Altekar* observes that "the state was regarded as a divine institution; the King's right to govern was partly due to his divine creation and partly due to the

agreement of the subjects to be governed by him, in order to eliminate anarchy. " The aims of the state in *Mahabharata* was to safeguard property, to maintain law and order in society. The main aim of man's life was fourfold as *Dharma, Artha, Kama & Moksha*. Therefore, state's main aim is to give help to people to attain all these aims. The 59th chapter of *Shantiparva* deals with danda and dandniti. It states that God helped humanity to escape from the law of the jungle by giving it a King. The King became a tyrant and the enraged sages destroyed him with their supernatural powers and asked Prathu (after him the whole world was named Prithvi) and swear to rule according to the principles of Dandniti. The sages asked Prathu, particularly, to consider the Brahmins above punishment and save the world from inter-mixture of castes. The duty of the King was to uphold Dharma and Varna Vyavastha.

According to *Mahabharata* the creation of the word, 'Raja' refers to the origin of 'Rajya'. To begin with, Bhishma bases the Kings authority in the first chapter of *Shantiparva* upon a rigid understanding of the King's origin. The *Shantiparva* contains a list of five spheres of activity - orientations for a very good King - (1) defense (2) War (3) administration according to the Dharma (4) formulation of policies (5) the promotion of the happiness of the people. A King should be generous, modest and pure and should never refuse the performance of his duties towards his subjects. The protection of the people from outside ecological threats and internal enemies is the pre-eminent duty of the power in the political system.

5.5 GOVERNMENT

The king was the real executive. He has to perform the executive functions as established by dharma. The king was both an appointing and a removal authority. The *Shantiparva* suggests to the appointment of the ministers by the king. He has to keep in view one's long administrative experiences and code of conduct. In inter-state relations, it was the duty of the king to appoint the spies and ambassadors. It was his duty to get information about the defense of state. The king had to perform some financial duties. He must realize one-sixth tax from the subjects in lieu of giving protection. On this ground, king has been treated as the servant of the people. Personal safety is an important duty of the king. He must be safe from external threats. The protection of all the Varna's was one of the important duties of the king. There are some welfare duties of the king. The occupation of Trade and commerce also contribute to the economic prosperity of state, so the king have to treat the merchants harmoniously. For the defense of country and promotion of trade and commerce, the easy means of communications are essential, so the king has to build roads throughout his empire. It is the king's duty to help the subjects with financial assistance during draught, flood and famine, as during such periods, they suffer more. The Vedas are the supreme source of dharma, so, their preservation is essential. Preservation of Vedas may be done by punishing those who create difficulties in the way of Vedic studies.

In *Shantiparva*, Rajdharma is understood as the duties and obligations relevant to political and administrative activities. Through government, peace, law and order

essential to maintain in the state. The main work of government is the happiness of the people, ensuring to provide justice is the other aim of the government. In the state, the King is the head of the government. In good governments, administration people sleep carefully, fearlessly. Executive was made of the combination of King, ministers and other officials. Besides executive, legislature and judiciary were two other organs of government. However, importance given to the executive mainly. In *Shantiparva*, there was a great emphasis on the above ministers. In the absence of the dutiful and able ministers, King cannot run government properly.

In *Shantiparva*, King advised to keep the intelligent, dutiful ministers. Bhishma's general attitude towards the standard of the King government. In *Sabha Parva*, there is description about purohits. The duty of these Purohits was to bring King on 'Sanmarg' by these good sentences and speeches. These Purohits were intelligent, polite and belonged to high families. The Rajpurohits were fearless, Dharma followers and guided the King on various occasions. Therefore, protection of the people, in a wide sense, material and moral alike, was the chief function of the government.

5.6 JUSTICE AND DANDNITI

Dandniti, the term used in Mahabharata means the science of coercion. Viewed in the context as a whole, it is best rendered as the science of governance. As the reins check the steed or as an iron hook controls an elephant, so dandniti keeps the world under restraints. It destroys every evil as the sun destroys the darkness. About the importance of dandniti, Bhishma says, that if dandniti is destroyed, the three Vedas will disappear and the duties of the four varnas will mix up. On the destruction of dandniti and instability of Rajadharma, all people suffer from many evils. It is the prime duty of the king to be fully versed in dandniti. Danda protects the people and it awakes those who sleep; hence, Dand is called as Dharma. Because of the fear of danda (punishment), the sinners do not indulge in sin, people do not kill others. If danda is not observed, everything will be enveloped by darkness. There are four ends of life-Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha. Dharma is regarded as human justice and the set of duties. The concept of Dharma is the truth; it is the morality in true sense. All religious exercise is Dharma and it is the law. Artha includes all the means necessary for acquiring worldly prosperity. Artha refers to one of the ends of life on one hand, and on the other to one of the purusharthas that satisfies human desires. Kama refers to the desires in man including the sexual urge. Moksha in the fourth and the highest end of life. It paves the path for the progress of soul. Bhishma explains the fundamental importance of the king's office for justice and dandaniti. According to Bhishma, people can live happily only if they live under the law. He also describes the four sources of law- *Devasammat*, *Arsha Srota*, *Lok Sammat* and *Sanstha-Sammat*. In the time of emergency, the ordinary rules must be suspended. If the people are in distress, the king must come to their aid with his treasure. If government face a crisis, as on the outbreak of war, it is justified adopting financial measures. In emergency, king should take his subjects into

confidence. He should explain the whole situation to them and then impose extra tax. For the sake of saving life, it is right to make a treaty with an enemy. The treasure and the army are the sole root of the government. *Shantiparva* is one extended argument for the assigned interest of the community in the welfare of the king and government.

5.7 INTER-STATE RELATIONS

It is an important division of the polity of inter-state relations that discussed by Bhishma. The king should breakup the enemy's ranks by straightforward as well as cunning and diplomatic means. The powerful king must not neglect even his weak enemy, for even a small spark causes a flame and even a slight poison causes death, while the enemy taking refuge in a fort even if he is equipped with a single horse troubles the kingdom even of a prosperous king. Even after making a treaty with the enemy, he should not trust him. In the 95th chapter of *Shanti Parva*, it is said that Svayambhu Manu has included the practice of *Dharma Vijaya*. If a king obtains victory through recourse to Adharma, then only he prepares the ground for his own eventual destruction. Virtuous people, by taking choice to Dharma, can certainly defeat the evil-doers.

In Inter-State relations, spy system and ambassadors are a must. In the *Santi Parva* of Mahabharata, we see the Indian soul and culture. Various political ideas discussed very well through the epic. Duties of kings, citizens, ministers and rights of them discussed equally in *Santi Parva*. Origin of state, foreign policy, inter-state relations discussed well in *Shanti Parva*. To conclude, we say that *Shanti Parva* in Mahabharata is considered an unperishable treasury of history, religion, diplomacy, polity, philosophy & thought not only for us, but for the whole humanity.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What do you understand by Dandniti?

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5.8 LET US SUM UP

Ved Vyasa
Rajdharmā
(Shantiparva)

Bhishma's theories of Rajdharmā and Dandniti in the context of his remarkable development of the old Smṛiti concept of the whole duty of the King are notable. Rajdharmā is used in Mahābhārata in two meanings, the royal duties and the political (dandniti). Its later sense is confirmed by the fact that one whole section of the *Shantiparva*, dealing with the rules, relating specifically to the art of government, is known as the *Rajdharmanushasana Parva*. Therein, it has been regarded as the most important science and as the refuge of all other branches of knowledge. Dandniti's full knowledge is indispensable for a ruler. If strictly followed by the rulers, it leads to prosperity and wellbeing of the rules. So Rajdharmā is not only related to dandniti, but the performance of the former is wholly dependant upon the latter. Among his most notable and original contributions are his theories of Rajdharmā and Dandniti, his theory of the king's authority, his theory of public rights of the social classes and the community, his view of the principles of government, his discussion of the moral standards of the king's policy in exceptional circumstances. The functional importance of Rajdharmā is supported by its ethical significance. Rajdharmā that is the Kshatriya's dharmā is the foremost of all dharmas and that without it, people would be ruined.

Indian political thought is recognizing the *Shantiparva*, which dealt with every aspect of human life. It deals with political institutions and entire panorama of human life it deals with the concept of state and the concept of Dharmā. *Both* these terms are the backbone of Indian political thought and these concepts were supported by Indian philosophy. Therefore, contemporary Indian political thinkers have unanimously accepted raj dharmā as the basis of Indian polity. It provides multiple viewpoints about governance. It leaves the conclusions to the reader to accept any of the viewpoint. It is a dialogical text. Shantiparva is capable of addressing the issues of governance even today.

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5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight following points

Rajadharmanushasana Parva: describes the duties of king and governance

Apaddharmaanushasana Parva: describes the rules of conduct in an emergency

Mokshadharma Parva: describes the behaviour and rules to achieve *moksha* or salvation

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

2. Your answer should highlight following points

- *Dandniti*, is the term used in Mahabharata means the science of coercion
- It is the best rendered as the science of governance
- As the reins check the steed or as an iron hook controls an elephant, similarly dandniti keeps the world under restraints
- It destroys every evil as the sun destroys the darkness
- *Danda* protects the people and it awakes those who sleep