
UNIT 9 *DĪGHA NIKĀYA* – THE IDEA OF CHAKRAVARTIN*

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarise you with the ideas of Śramanic tradition. After studying this unit, you should be able to understand:

- Scope of *Dīgha Nikāya*
- Origin of Kingship in *Dīgha Nikāya*
- Evolution of Political Ideas and Polity
- The Idea of *Chakravartin* in *Dīgha Nikāya*
- Correlation between State and Dhamma

9.1 SCOPE OF *DĪGHA NIKĀYA*

Dīgha Nikāya is a collection of the dialogues, mostly of *Buddha* himself, as they appear to his earliest disciples in a series of *one hundred and eighty six* discourses which, according to *Rhys Davids*, will occupy a place in the history of human thought similar to the Dialogues of Plato, the dialogues of Buddha, who is also the principal interlocutor, in conversation with his disciples are arranged according to their length. In the *Sutta Pitaka* or the Basket of discourses, there are four great *Nikāyas* or collections, out of which the *first two* form a single book and are collectively called *Dīgha Nikāya*, categorised in 34 long *Suttas*. Out of these, the twenty seventh *Agganna Sutta*, is known for the evolution of Buddhist thinking on the origin and the development of the state.

Buddhism is primarily understood as a religious and philosophical concept, but Buddhism is equally concerned with the mundane and transcendental world. Ideas of power and kingship seem out of context in early Buddhist philosophy. Scholars like S.J. Tambiah were convinced that the king enjoyed significant status in Buddhist philosophy, whereas others like Max Weber argued that it was apolitical. There are scattered references to power and kingship in Pali scriptures, but there is no direct theory supporting these references.

9.2 EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL IDEAS AND POLITY

B.G. Gokhale has outlined the evolution of Buddhist thinking on the nature and functions of the state in *three* distinct phases.

- The initial phase is contained in the theory on the origin of the state as it emerges from the *Mahāsammata* story.
- The second stage deals with the possibility of as all powerful monarchical despotism and a possible co-relationship between the two spheres of life, i.e. the *Dhamma* and the *ānā* (the regal). Here, the *ānā* provides protection and security to monasteries and *Dhamma* facilitated with *Vinaya* rules and mass acceptance for royalty and regalia.
- The third stage reflects emergence of *Dhamma* as a cosmic force and the state becoming an instrument of *Dhamma*, where the latter contains the power of the state, while regulating its behaviour; where the state draws its authority from the *Dhamma* and instructed by its depository, the *Samgha*; hence, subscribing to the idea of *Cakkavatti* or the ideal righteous ruler.

9.3 INITIAL PHASE: ORIGIN OF KINGSHIP AS QUASI CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENT

While referring to *Mandhata Jataka*, N.C. Bandyopadhyaya (317) and Law (94) have stated that the “chosen of all” have been considered the first king in the beginning of creation. V.P. Varma is of the considered view that the theory of the “Great Elect” was comprehensively discussed only in the *Dīgha Nikāya* [3-*Pathika Vagga*, 27(4) *Agganna Sutta*], which he has considered as the ‘most important book in the early Buddhist literature. The theory presents the cosmological speculation of the early Buddhists.

Explaining the evolution of mankind, Ernest Gellner, as referred by Collins, mentioned three historical stages of hunter-gatherers; agrarian society; and 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; and to the social distribution and varieties of cognition. During 5th – 4th Centuries B.C., in Indian society, Brahmanism was more strongly established in 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, gradually turning into monarchies.

9.3.1 Theory of ‘Great Elect’ (*Mahasammata*)

[As narrated by Buddha and referred to by V.P. Varma (186-87)]

- Description of primeval conditions:** When this world began to re-evolve after having passed away, it was inhabited by ‘being made of mind’, ‘feeding on rapture’ (i.e. bliss, enthusiasm, carried away in spirit), ‘self-luminous’ (or full of light) ‘traversing the air, continuing in glory.’ In this period, there was

no distinction of sex. Beings were reckoned as beings only. It denoted subtle body/mind and emancipating person. It was a state of soul and spirit.

- ii. **Introduction of element of water:** After some time, the earth with its savour was spread out in waters. Some beings of greedy disposition tasted it and then craving entered into them. When other beings began to feast on the earth, their self-luminance declined. When it was gone, there was the manifestation of the sun, the moon, followed by the appearance of stars, night, day, months, half months, the seasons, the years etc. The beings continued for a long, while feasting on the earth.
- iii. **Appearance of soil & rice:** Due to the appearance of evil and immoral customs, specially “pride in their beauty,” vanity and conceit, the savoury earth disappeared. After its disappearance outgrowths of the soil appeared, it was clothed with colour, odour and taste. The beings feasted on the outgrowths for a long. Being well nourished, the differences in their beauty, which became more manifest and as a result generated pride and conceit. Due to the growth of pride, the outgrowths disappeared. Then creepers appeared, the beings fed on them for a long. Later, they also vanished due to the same phenomena of vanity and conceit. Then rice appeared and also sex differences. People divided off rice fields and set the boundaries creating ‘private property’, which, in turn, caused the appearance of evil & immoral customs; one’s notion of one-self; and pride in beauty and conceit.
- iv. **Stealing appeared:** Some greedy person stole another’s plot and started using it. In spite of being rebuked, he continued to do so. Thus, emerged stealing, censure, lying and punishment for crime and defiance of rules.
- v. **People agitated due to evils:** The beings got perturbed with the presence of these evils. In *Dialogues of Budha* (88), it is stated that ‘...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.’ As *U.N. Ghoshal* states, people committed by saying, ‘(O king) thou who are a (mere) servant of the multitude and who receives the sixth part (of the produce) as thine wages.’ Thus, he consented to do so and was given a portion of their rice.

In other words, *Dīgha Nikāya* has projected that when greed, selfishness and theft appeared, in order to maintain the social order, people assembled and agreed to choose a chief to maintain the social order and judicially inflict punishment. In return, they committed to spare a part of their paddy. Thus, arose the institution of kingship where the king was chosen by the whole people.

9.3.2 Implications

Buddhist account of the origin of the universe and social organization reflects *significant Indian* contribution to *political thought*. Origin of State is shown 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. This initial view of kingship is not that of a ‘universal emperor’, the *Cakkavatti*, but is of the ‘Great Appointee’

9.3.3 Psychological Foundations for Political Speculation

Basis of kingship involved psychological factors rather than divine will. Buddha made a revolutionary change in the worldview of his contemporary society by initiating a new era in the realm of social investigations. The cosmology formulated by Buddha totally rejected any theological godhead of philosophical absolute.

The Buddhist narrative shows that initially, social stratification was absent, the state of existence was of great happiness and beings were ‘made of mind’. It reflects the influence of the traditional Hindu psychology about *Linga* or *Sukshma Sharira* or the subtle body. The subtle body was considered an individual’s real personality which accompanied the soul even during transmigrations. The corporal body was destroyed after death. Because of being transient and perishable, it was only an instrument for the action of the soul and the subtle body. The Buddhist supposition of existence of ‘being made of mind’ (with no solid corporeal bodies) seems strongly influenced by the Upanishadic and *Samkhya* psychology of the subtle body. (Keith, 535-551) However, V.P. Varma identifies a *profound difference* in the Upanishadic-Samkhya view and the Buddhist view. The former was concerned with a transcendent state of emancipation from the world, whereas Buddha secularized the whole thing when he applied the predications of the emancipated self to beings “coming to life as human”.

It is perceived that the beings in the original state were caught by greed. It was followed by the appearance of the sense of social and individual superiority on the basis of difference in physical beauty. Later appearance of sex differences paved the way for evils of lust, which in turn led to the institution of dwelling houses.

In addition to lust, the institution of private property disintegrated the state of resplendence. Beings divided off the rice fields and made boundaries around it. This division of property led to stealing. With the appearance of theft emerged the evils of censure, lying and punishment. Thus, the passion of lust and acquisitiveness destroyed the resplendent state and for suppressing the socially subversive elements, the necessity of the institution of the “Great Elect” was felt.

9.3.4 Nature of the *Great Elect*

- The *Dialogues of Buddha* does not specify in detail the nature of the *Mahāsammata*, the “Great Elect”. It could reflect either a king or a republican head. Buddha himself came from the *Shākya* clan, which had a republican polity. His father was at one time the head or one of the heads of this state. Hence, the political traditions of Buddha may denote a republican chief (V.P. Varma, 194)
- The “Great Elect” was also corroborated by the title *Rājā*. According to *Rhys Davids*, the term *Rājā* was also used for republican chiefs and leaders. Here,

Rājā did not mean king, but rather something like the Roman consul or the Greek archon. Even Kautilya's *Arthashāstra* refers to republics like Lichchavic, Vrajji, Mallak, Madrak, Kukur, Kuru and Pāñchāl which had *Rājā* only for name sake.

- According to the *Dialogues*, the "Great Elect" was instituted by the people to settle social conflicts, which had been generated by the psychological factors of greed, theft and desire.
- Since the "Great Elect" receives his authority from the people, there is an assumption that political authority originally lies in the people, who spare a portion of their produce for him.
- V.P. Varma *refuses* to accept "Great Elect" to mean that the Buddhist political authority was based on consent. However, some element of consensus cannot be ruled out in the Buddhist theory. Beginning of such a theory was indeed contained in it as it projected the election of the "Great Elect" by collective consensus.
- This tradition could be later seen in some idea of election or selection in spite of the acceptance of the divinity of the king. *U.N. Ghoshal* (209) has referred to a later Buddhist philosopher *Āryadeva*, "What superciliousness is *thine*, (O King!) *Thou* who are a (mere) servant of the multitude and who receives the sixth part (of the produce) as *thine* wages."
- Difference between King and subjects depicts divergence of physical beauty, attractiveness, capability, etc.
- The notion of *Mahāsammata* denotes the existence of common social ends and interests. It implies that society requires a common superior and eliminates the individual coercive power of punishing thieves and robbers.
- By making the "Great Elect" the repository of the power of censure and punishment, it paved the way for emergence of the concept of 'common good'.
- The "Great Elect" was expected to rule in accordance with *Dharma*. This reference to *Dharma* is significant. *Dharma* had a strong moral content in early Buddhism. By stating that the "Great Elect" would charm others by *Dharma*, it seems that Buddhism accepted that the existence of a political superior is associated with the emergence of the significance of *Dharma*. This aspect was later reflected from the concept of *Cakkavatti* and the political philosophy of Aśoka.
- V.P. Varma has asserted that the *Dialogues of Buddha* (p. I. 88-91) has articulated a *naturalistic* origin, not only of the "Great Elect", but also of the social order. He feels that the "Great Elect" was chosen from the social circle of nobles, called *Khattiya* or the lord of field. Buddha *denounced* a *theological* Godhead and offered an explanation of the origin of the four castes in terms of functional occupation, and thereby neutralized mythical and divine elements to any particular social caste and explained social stratification in terms of functions. Thus, the *Mahāsammata* had considerable *sociological* significance, though it did not initiate any large amount of further sociological and political investigation by later thinkers.

Political Concerns and Key Ideas

- 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.
- Hence, the Buddhist view of kingship, particularly the duties and responsibilities of a chosen ruler governed by the notion of the *social contract*, was projected long *before* Hobbes and other western expositions. The Buddhist idea of ‘social contract’ supported an evolutionary view of society, opposed to the Brahminical view of quasi-divine narrative of monarchy and society.

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. Analyze the origin of kingship as a quasi-contractual arrangement.

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9.4 SECOND PHASE: ALL POWERFUL MONARCHICAL STATE

9.4.1 Theories of Kingship

Necessity of the existence of the state was realized for orderly human society. Accordingly, the rights of private property and family can prevail only under the state’s regulatory and punitive authority. Buddha describes origin of 4 social classes; landed ruling class, priestly class, trading class and hunters.

9.4.2 Traces of Republican States

For the early Buddhists, the state generally meant the monarch, though the Buddha and many of his disciples came from oligarchic republics. (Gokhale) The terms commonly used for the state included *rattha* (country), *rajja* (kingdom) or *vijita* (subjugated territory).

- Republics were known for their regular assemblies within tribal groups, where government by discussion was the main feature. They collapsed after Buddha, middle of the 5th century.
- *Samghas* are an intermediate stage between the collectivism of popular tribal assembly and individualism of Monarchical state
- Monarchy flourished in 3 contexts – Individualism, urbanisation & density of population

The trend was to increase the size and power of monarchy at the cost of republics.

9.4.3 Notion and Symbols of Sovereignty

The state is projected as 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* (*Adhipatya*) signifies overlordship, the quality of imposing superiority over others. *Issariya* (*Ishwariya*), which is also called *vasa* (*Vasha*), is the quality of exercising overwhelming influence or control, the capacity to impose sovereignty. *Siri* (*Shri*) is splendour, 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.

9.4.4 Seven Symbols of Sovereignty

Buddhist political philosophy of kingship is associated with *seven* symbols of sovereignty called *sattaratana* or seven constituent elements of kingship namely: (i) *Cakkaratana* – wheel treasure (Dominion); (ii) *Hathiratna* – Elephant treasure (Control over Dominion); (iii) *Assaratna* – Horse treasure (Control over dominion); (iv) *Parināyakarātana* – Councillor treasure (Control over dominion); (v) *Itthiratna* – Woman treasure (Basis of control); (vi) *Maniratna* – Precious gems (Basis of control); and (vii) *Gahapatiratna* – people, taxation (Basis of control). The seven constituent units of king's sovereignty can be summed up in three basic ideas viz. (a) Territory of Dominion represented by the wheel; (b) Control over the dominion – elephants, horses and *parināyaka*; and (c) Bases of control - *itthiratana*, *maniratana* and *gahapatiratana*.

Cakkaratana or the wheel is the *most important* symbol of sovereignty. *Rhys Davids* states that wheel represents the solar disc of the sun and it is symbolic of heavenly treasure. It is mystical in nature as compared to other six treasures. Sun illumines and nurtures the earth. In *Mahasudassana Sutta*, there are anecdotes which explain the significance of the wheel. For instance, there is reference to

the sprinkling water on the wheel so that it can go forth in all four directions followed by the four-fold army. It, thus, represents king's authority over his dominion and territory.

The *Mahasudassana Sutta* mentions the elephant and the horse treasure as means of king's physical control over the state. Various adjectives describe the two treasures as powerful, wonderful, and prized possessions of the king. They are trained and controlled by the king and they are always standing in service to the king. Magical values are attributed to precious gems because they are considered to possess the power to safeguard against disease, hunger, demon etc. In *Mahasudassana Sutta*, there is a story about how the soldiers were asked to raise aloft a precious gem and with its light the villagers got up the middle of the night and started working assuming the day had dawned. *Maniratana*s are supposed to be splendid in their brightness and they symbolize full treasury of the king. *Itthiratana* or the women treasure refers to ideal queen and it also symbolizes householder king and family which ensures succession. The other opinion is that *Itthiratana* is a symbol of earth and its fertile productive aspects. There is yet another opinion that this treasure is perhaps influenced by *Rajasūya* ceremony in the *Brahmanic* tradition. *Gahapatiratana* represents people who inhabit the domain or the territory and it includes administration, system of taxation and production. *Parināyaka* in Pali language means guide, leader or advisor. In the later text, it also stands for General or a chief in charge of 84,000 *Khattiyas*. *Parināyaka* was expected to be wise, and learned who could execute military and civil power on behalf of the king. He, thus, symbolizes king's military strength.

9.4.5 Ten Royal Virtues (*dasa-rājadhamma*)

The compassionate ruler, the *Cakkavatti Sihananda* or the universal monarch was expected to possess ten royal virtues including (i) *Dāna* (liberality, generosity, charity, welfare, giving knowledge and serving public interest), (ii) *Śīla* (refrainment from exploitation, cheating, stealing, adultery, intoxicating drinks, having senses under control, high moral character, being good example for others), (iii) *Pariccāga* (sacrifice in the interest of people), (iv) *Ājjava* (straight forward in dealings, honesty, integrity, performing duties with loyalty, freedom from fear), (v) *Maddava* (gentleness, kindness, avoiding arrogance, amiable temperament), (vi) *Tapa* (austere life, able to suffer for the people's sake, self-control over passion), (vii) *Akkodha* (free from anger, hatred, ill-will, enmity and resentment, remaining calm), (viii) *Avihimsā* (abstention from violence, and destruction of life and peace, compassionate to all, not being vengeful, avoidance of war), (ix) *Khanti* (tolerant, forbearance, patience to serve public interest, understanding) and (x) *Avirodhana* (very approachable, avoidance of opposition to the will of the people and measures of public welfare, respecting opinion of others without prejudice).

That ruler was to conduct as an 'enlightened altruist', expected to act with moral righteousness and was considered as an ideal man of *Dhamma*, who would control falsehood, anger and scorn, is full of patience and forbearance, keeps

benevolent company and makes people happy with the display of the qualities of uniting the subjects.

9.4.6 Elements of Regalia

He was to be well-born, handsome in appearance, possess great wealth, a powerful army, a man of faith and charity, learned and wise. He was to present himself as a man of *Dhamma*. It was believed that *Dhamma* constitutes kings with charisma, which is mandatory to rule over subjects. It was believed that the charisma is conferred on king by his coronation and symbolized by several elements of his regalia in his possession such as the 'umbrella', 'slippers', 'sword', 'crown', 'throne', 'sceptres (ornamental wand)' and 'the flywhisk'. The quasi-divine qualities, along with regalia, create the charisma as the basis of loyalty of subjects towards the state.

9.4.7 Buddhist Ideas on the Constituents of the State

Though the Buddhist scriptures do *not* offer a systematized list of constituents of the State yet one finds mention of following seven constituents:

- (i) The King (*Mahāsammata, Rājā, khattiya*);
- (ii) The Territory (*rattha/Rashtra*), with sub-divisions of the territorial organizations such as villages (*gaama*), market towns (*nigama*), countryside (*janaopada*), city (*nagara*), the frontier (*paccanta*, existed only sometimes and its security was always a cause of concern),
- (iii) Ministers and bureaucracy (*Amacca/Amātya* and *pārisajja/Parishada*);
- (iv) The Armed Forces (*balam*): The early Buddhist recommended delicate balance of forces to deal with dangers from outside its frontiers and from within, through rebellion and banditry. War was considered within the jurisdiction of state (*attha* and *ānā*). All injunctions against violence were in general related to the level of individual and inter-group relations and the Buddhists reconciled their inability to influence the conduct of state beyond giving it ethical advice. Hence, while keeping the horrors of war within reasonable limits, wars were duly recognized and were *not* outlawed. There is 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, thieves and bandits threatening the life and property of people. 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 a waste of time.

- (v) The Treasury (*kosakotthagara*);
- (vi) Allies (*Anuyuttā, khattiya* and *kuddarājāno*; and
- (vii) The People (*Manussa/Manushya*); presumably had four different assemblies (*parisas/parishada*),- one each for *Khattiyas*, Brahmins, Householders (*Gahapati*) and Ascetics (*Samana/Śramana*).

9.4.8 Objectives of the State

The ideal kingdom was described as the territory without thorns (*Akantaka*) and untroubled (*Annuppīla*). The state was to ensure that “the people should be happy and contented, living in homes with open doors and playing peacefully with children in their laps”. The description of such a state is depiction of a perfect state of law and order. Where, 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. However, the king was expected to act with justice in giving punishments.

Gail Omvedt writes about the celestial wheel slipping a little indicating to the king that his time is up and now he should renounce his throne. The king’s eldest son inherits the throne and then the wheel disappears. Son seeks advice of a wise hermit who recommends to the king to set moral example, to perform his duties in earnestness and to protect his subjects’ In other words, the sage advises the king to perform good actions like, giving alms to the poor weak and destitute and abstaining from bad actions. The wheel returns and the king continues to rule but he fails to control poverty. Poverty becomes widespread and theft takes place. King attributes theft to poverty and he gives wealth to the thief hoping that he would stop the evil practice. The message spreads that theft is profitable and theft thrives. The king then decides to punish the thieves who take up arms and the result is violence, murder, disorder, adultery incest, evil speaking and immorality. Finer human relations vanish and wickedness spreads. Moral of the story is that the Buddhist state should ideally be a welfare state committed to protect the weak and the destitute. The wheel is not a paternal legacy, but it has to be won by every king through his good actions and deeds. A *parallel* can be drawn here between the *Brahmanical* notion of kingship which justifies *danda* or punishment to maintain *Vedic* social order and Buddhism which justifies punishment for establishing a just social order.

9.4.9 Possibility of Abuse of Power by the State

While aspiring for righteous Chakkavati king, Buddhists altogether realized the possibility of royal tyranny and the abuse of its power by the state. Buddhist literature has described kings as intolerant, arbitrary, autocratic, greedy and as an expropriator. The wrath of a king has been compared with that of thieves, fire, flood, evil spirits or wild animals.

In *Aggana Sutta*, there is acceptance by a society of a need to exercise legitimate power to maintain law and order. The king’s main responsibility was to protect these two areas and in return, he enjoyed the support from his subjects. In Buddhist text, the ruler and the robber are placed opposite to each other as the protector and the violator of family and the property. If the king was weak, the robbers prospered and vice-versa. The legitimate ruler also performed other functions like protecting the borders recruit strong army, perform judicial functions and provide patronage to diverse religious groups. He was expected to be vigilant and control his kingdom pragmatically. Pragmatic control of a

legitimate ruler and arbitrary exercise of power have borderline differences. Tribal kingship in a republican form of government was associated with popular control and participation which could not be easily replaced by alternative forms of control, institutional or otherwise. The Buddhist text refers to king's arbitrary exercise of power by citing examples of a king in alliance with robbers, depriving people of their wealth and becoming a violator of social norms. In the second instance, king does not apply law in any uniform manner and pursues his own interest. These two examples illustrate how a king when intoxicated with power exercises power in an arbitrary manner. The king accepts no limitations on his power and establishes complete control over people and the material resources of the kingdom. Kingship is now marked as *despotic* in nature because the king starts imposing his will on the people and exercises power in an arbitrary manner.

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. Analyze the features and evolution of the monarchical state in *Dīgha Nikāya*.

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9.5 THIRD PHASE: THE IDEA OF CAKKAVATTI AND THE STATE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DHAMMA

In their doctrine of *Dhamma* as the basis of the state, the early Buddhists found a recourse to escape from the powerful state and the danger of its abuse of powers. Initially they speculated about the large scale migration of the people as a remedy against an evil or despotic monarch. However, considering its impracticality under massive territorial empires, *Dhamma* was postulated as an all-powerful force to control an unrighteous king.

9.5.1 Dhamma and State

In the last or the final stage, the Buddhist notions of Ideal kingship emerges when the state becomes an instrument of *Dhamma*, which implies that *Dhamma* not only controls the challenges of state power, but it also regulates individual's conduct and behaviour. Ultimately, the state aims to establish a just social order based on *Dhamma* and that alone will impart ethical status to the state.

Buddhism correlated politics with *Dharma* (Dhamma), considered the former devoid of the latter as *Rativijja* (the science of pleasure/lust, which was considered the antithesis of all that is ethical), regarded *Śīla* (modesty) and *Sadāchāra* (good conduct) as the basis of politics and desired that the king, as the *Mahāsammata* (elected by the consent of all), should protect his subjects according to *Dhamma*. Buddhism emphasised the moral nature of *Dharma* and its concrete influence can be seen in the political philosophy of Aśoka.

9.5.2 The *Ānā* and Dhamma

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.

The kings (including Bimbisāra, Ajātasattu of Magadha; Pasendi of Kośala and the Maurya emperor Aśoka) built monasteries for the *Samgha* and amended many of their laws, which otherwise made the *Samgha*'s activities very difficult. The extraordinary impact of Buddha's personality on the kings cannot be denied. The relationship between the state and Buddhism could be realized through the fact that even though early Buddhism began in forests, outside the confines of organized society, yet the Buddha and his disciples were subjects of the state in the area they lived and worked. Hence, they could not for long remain outside its society and could ignore or defy the power of the state. Their supporters and followers could be found in the *state service*. They could not ignore felicitous relationship with the state and accordingly accommodated the demands of the state by modifying the *Vinaya* rules. For example, elephant being royal animal, monks were prohibited from eating elephant flesh. They were to refrain from eating meat on the days animal slaughter was prohibited. They used to postpone observing rain-retreat. Royal servants could not be admitted without proper permission. They could not contact in-service soldiers or thieves wanted by law. Absconders from justice or lawful royal service may not be given asylum in Buddhist order. In general, early Buddhism avoided confrontation with the state. The monks were prohibited to get involved in politics. Unhappy with any particular king either could leave the territory and reside elsewhere waiting for a change in his disposition or downfall. The other recourse was to make the state subordinate to *Dhamma*.

9.5.3 The *Ānā* and *Attha*

Early Buddhists considered temporal and spiritual as two distinct spheres of Human life. If *Dhamma* was the source of spiritual, *ānā*, the source of temporal, was responsible for the maintenance and conservation of *Attha* (*Artha*). Both the *attha* and *ānā* were intimately linked as neither could exist without the other. The term *Attha* encompassed interest, advantage, good, blessing, welfare, profit, prosperity, well-being, riches and wealth. It came closer to *Artha*, as was used by Kautilya, to describe *Vārtā* (economy) and *Dandaniti* (polity). Initially, *Attha* 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 in an organized

society. As a worldly good, it involves the right to enjoy private property and the prerogative to create a family without the fear of molestation and disruption. However, the worldly possessions including property and family could exist only under a set of laws, imposed by the *ānā*. In the absence of any such authority, *kāma* (passion or desire) and greed could create anarchy. To rule out such anarchy, the state arose as a punitive institution and imposed law and order. Both Buddhist rulers, Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu recognized the two spheres of human life, temporal and spiritual.

As the basis of Buddhist political theory, according to *Gokhale*, Ajātasattu coined the theory of **Two Wheels** including the ‘Wheel of Law’ (*Dhammacakka*) and the ‘Wheel of Command’ (*ānācakka*). 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 the support of *ānā* or the state.

9.5.4 State as an Ethical Instrument of the Dhamma

To avoid monarchical despotism, *ānā* was separated from *Dhamma* and autonomy of the *Samgha* was ensured. When the contractual obligation of the state creating state as a human organization and as a political institution was found inadequate and the state became powerful to control the whole range of human life; the supremacy of *Dhamma* over *ānā* was asserted. *Dhamma* was projected as a cosmic force capable of containing the power of the state and regulating its behaviour. Here, *Dhamma* was never projected as a metaphysical system or sectarian creed, instead it was depicted as a mystic force obeying its own laws equated with righteousness, propriety, norm, impartiality and justice. Accordingly, it was asserted that any neglect of *Dhamma* by the king could result in untimely rain or dangers of drought, famine, pestilence or war; while specific ceremonies suggested by *Dhamma*, including fasting, charity, vows of righteousness, meditation etc. could entail control over nature in the form of adequate rains. Kingship was also declared as a result of good deeds in a former life. (*Gokhale*)

9.5.5 The Idea of *Cakkavatti*

The culmination of this process resulted in the *Cakkavatti* or *Chakravarty* (universal monarch), who was declared the *Dhammiko Dhammarājā* (the righteous ruler), who was considered as a *counterpart* of *Bodhisattva* in the *temporal* world. The Buddhist *Dhammarājā* was the response to the despotic ruler who lived at the time of Buddha. It was an attempt to contain absolute power of the king by applying *dhamma* as the guiding principle to his power. *U.N. Ghoshal* has pointed out that the *most* important contribution of *early Buddhism* to *ancient* Indian political thought is the application of principles of righteousness to king’s internal and foreign administration.

The normative *Cakkavatti* king is the protector of his people, he possess as seven gems, conquers by righteousness and dhamma and above all, he is not only interested in territorial expansion or controlling the material and physical resources, but in establishing a just and moral social order as well. He also teaches moral precepts to laymen and newly subordinated kings. He ensures that people live in comfort and destitution is wiped out. Not only does he uphold the property and family rights of the people, but also provides for the basic needs of the people as a precondition to establish moral order.

Cakkavatti is a charismatic leader and he is popular amongst his subjects. He consults people and acts on the basis of consent. Hence, the people are loyal to him and confirm to his wishes. He patronizes the *brahmanas* and the *śramanas*. Under his leadership and guidance, the moral and just social order is established and the king is intrinsic in establishing the new moral order. Ultimately, the rule of *Dhammiko dhammarājā* is established, which is guided by the principle of Dhamma.

Such a ruler is presented as a *Mahāpurisa* (Great Man), gifted with all the signs of great men, who was believed to be in possession of *Iddhis* (*Siddhis* or super natural powers) and was unique in nature, as there could be no more than one *Cakkavatti* at a time in the world. Therefore, the Buddhist theory of kingship implied that state power would not only be used for punishing, taming or controlling society, but also more positively to create a new just moral social order. The powers of *Cakkavatti* may not be regarded as human or rational, much less contractual (Gokhale). As was, case of Bodhisattva, the places where the *Cakkavatti* was born, crowned, won most significant victory, where he passed away were declared to be memorable. *Stūpa* was to be raised over the relics of his body.

Dhamma was projected as the basis of loyalty to the state and also as an instrument for legitimization of political power and landing the control of the state in an agency higher than itself. Under such a state, the functions of the *Samgha* was consent and advise to the state, adopting the role of conscience-keeper of the state, imposing subtle as well powerful sanctions depending upon circumstances. In the process, as Gokhale has asserted, the state emerged as a mystic entity, obeying norms of continuance and dissolution beyond the reach of subjects. As most of the times, the *Samgha* became far more extensive and pervasive, its organization reached the smallest village through the monastery.

Kingship, according to *Jayasuria*, was limited by one's capacity to act within the guidelines of the teaching, the *Dhamma* or the principles of righteousness. Accordingly, the maintenance of the normative order – *Vinaya* or the code of righteousness – seen as a prime requirement of a good ruler.

On one hand, the welfare of the community of monks was dependent on the goodwill and patronage of the kings or the self-governing republics; and on the other, kings relied on monasteries for mass loyalty and following, there emerged a skilfully engineered reciprocity in the relationship between Buddhism and the

State. In principle, the *Samgha* did not formally relate to the state or the ruler, the monastic order could not survive without a minimum political support.

Dīgha Nikāya
The Idea of
Chakravartin
(*Cakkavatti*)

9.5.6 Normative Kingship and the Creation of Just Social Order

One finds a Buddhist testifying the ‘middle way’ as an approach to social well-being and spiritual progress. They provide guidelines for public policy of the ‘Universal Benevolent Monarch’, who is concerned “not only with the material welfare of his subject, but also their moral well-being”. (Jayasuria p. 61) The Aśokan welfare state was built on Buddhist humanism, where the human relationship were based on compassion, love, sympathy and care for other’s feelings. The king was advised to promote the collective interests or the ‘common weal’ ahead of himself with the motif of ‘people first’. The king of righteousness, called the *Cakkavattirājā*, exemplified in the Emperor Aśoka. *Omvedt* has argued that Aśoka’s welfare state policies and statecraft were *not* utopian or idealistic, as entrepreneurship and money making were endorsed as long as these were done by righteous means.

The normative code of the Aśokan ‘welfare state’ included the Buddhist ideals of a ‘just society’ based on equality, economic prosperity and the practice of good life. For ordinary persons, underlying the *raison d’être* of Buddhist social ethics, the Buddhist notion of welfare involved **seven virtues or skilful actions** expecting to refrain from taking life, stealing, confusing speech and uttering falsehoods, malicious speech, frivolous talk, harsh speech and vulgar sensibility. Buddhism was never limited to a private form of salvation or self-contained individual; instead it acknowledged the **interdependent relationship between the individual and society**.

9.5.7 Absence of State Religion

The secularization of religion or the separation between church and state and guarantee of religious freedom by the state was seen as a *post-Enlightenment* phenomenon in western society. The rationale of secularism was implicit in the Buddhist ideals of governance as revealed in Aśokan polity. The principles and values of the European Enlightenment, such as equality, tolerance of dissent, freedom and justice were consistent with the political philosophy of Emperor Aśoka. Buddhism was *never* declared a state religion. Acceptance of dissent, toleration of other faiths, provision for religious freedom, negotiating differences through participation and consensus building, commitment to freedom, equality and tolerance, were some of the noteworthy features of Aśokan statecraft. At the same time, the *Samgha* was readily available as the moral conscience of the community ensuring the accountability of the rulers.

From the time of the Buddha to Emperor Askoa, the emphasis on public morality and social welfare draws attention to the historical continuity of the **triangular relationship** between the king or ruler, the monastic order or the *Samgha* and the people.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

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. Analyze idea of *Chakravartin* (*Cakkavatti*) and the relationship of the state with *Dhamma*.

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9.6 LIMITATIONS OF ŚRAMANIC IDEA OF KINGSHIP

Metaphysics being the central concept of the *Brāhmanic* tradition, identification and acknowledgment of political thought pose some *serious* weaknesses.

By mid-fifth century within few years after Buddha's death, republics collapsed partly due to aggression of the monarchies, but largely due to internal disagreements amongst republican nobles and elders. Undisciplined individualism, moral indolence, individual pride and lack of discipline were the defining features of changing times.

- Equation of Buddha with unique powers and virtues may be compared with the Brahmanic belief in quasi-divine kingship.
- Projection of control of *Dhamma* over nature and emphasis on performance of fasting, charity, meditation etc. had similarity with Brahmanic ritualism.
- The places where Buddha was born, crowned, where he won his most significant victory / enlightenment and where he passed away, all were declared to be memorable.
- Origin of Monarchy in *Agganna Sutta*, refers to the myth when man deteriorates from the original state of nature of Rousseau to Hobbes, where a greedy, dishonest, quarrelsome and violent man emerges. People select the king to ensure common good and they agree to give a proportion of their rights and an anarchist and greedy man turns to be a disciplined citizen.
- In the absence of constitutional checks and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of power, public opinion alone was the only safeguard against a wicked ruler or tyrant. To escape such kings, people have fled to a territory outside their control.

The Buddhist Contribution to Political Theory

The Buddhist contribution to the totality of Indian political thought may be studied from two points of view: firstly, what was their contribution to the

theoretical aspect of the government; and secondly, whether and to what extent the greatest Buddhist Emperor followed the Buddhist principles as enunciated in the Buddhist texts

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

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. Highlight the major limitations of of *śramanic* idea of kingship.

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9.7 LET US SUM UP

Dīgha Nikayas are a collection of the dialogues, mostly of Buddha himself, as they appear to his earliest disciples. The Aggana Sutta of *Dīgha Nikāya* refers to the myth regarding the origin of the world and the evolution of mankind. In stages, it describes the gradual deterioration of man from a perfect stage or the original state to a stage where greed and passion erode the moral and physical qualities and man is transformed into an ordinary human existence. In the second stage, there is further progressive fall of mankind, social differences emerge. The new social order is based on the rise of family and private property.

The origin of the state is described as a social contract, which is an agreement between the king and the people. The king agrees to perform specific functions on behalf of the people and people are obliged to obey his commands. The focus is on two major areas and the state negotiates between *ānā*, that is, authority and *Dhamma*. In other words, there is an implicit acceptance in people’s mind that they have to respect each other’s family and property and they accept the authority of the king who would now regulate their relationships on this matter. In other words, there is an implicit acceptance in people’s mind that they have to respect each other’s family and property and they accept the authority of the king, who would now regulate their relationships on this matter.

Agganna Sutta challenges the *Vedic* ideas on divine creation of the social order, In *Agganna Sutta*, the division of people in society is based upon need and convenience rather than any hierarchical division. In other words, the division in the social order is based upon functional performance of activities by the groups and not determined by *varna* model. It follows that Brahmanical king ideally maintains the *varna* division in the social order; while in the Buddhist literature, king’s primary task was to maintain a social order in which the property and family of individuals are protected in accordance with *Dhamma*.

In Buddha's contemporary times, two forms of government existed in the Gangetic plains in Northern India, *Republican* and *monarchical* in competition with each other. The trend was to increase the size and power of monarchy at the cost of republics. Government by discussion was the keystone of a republican form of government. In tribal groups, the common life was regulated by discussion amongst the elders and noblemen of the tribe and these assemblies were called *Sanghas*. During this period, republics were known by the name of the *sanghas*. Members of the sangha were *not* elected, but they were the leading men of the tribe and most of them belonged to the Kshatriya clan. The form of government was *aristocratic* rather than democratic. However, the final authority in all matters lay with the sangha.

In the last or the final stage, the Buddhist notions of Ideal kingship emerges when the state becomes an instrument of *Dhamma*, which implies that *Dhamma* not only controls the challenges of state power, but also regulates individual's conduct and behaviour. Ultimately, the state aims to establish a just social order based on *Dhamma* and that alone will impart ethical status to the state.

The Buddhist believe that Buddha was *Cakkavatti* king in his earlier life. The normative *Chakkavati* king is the protector of his people, he possess seven gems, conquers by righteousness and *dhamma* and above all, he is not only interested in territorial expansion or controlling the material and physical resources, but in establishing a just and moral social order. He also teaches moral precepts to laymen and newly subordinated kings.

Cakkavati is a charismatic leader and he is popular amongst his subjects. He consults people and acts on the basis of consent. Hence, the people are loyal to him and confirm to his wishes. He patronizes the *brahmanas* and the *shrammanas*. Under his leadership and guidance, the moral and just social order is established and the king is intrinsic in establishing the new moral order. Ultimately, the rule of *Dhammiko dhammaraja* is established which is guided by the principle of *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* is *above* the king and the king revere and esteems *dhamma*. Therefore, the Buddhist theory of kingship implied that state power would not only be used for punishing, taming or controlling society, but also more positively to create a new just moral social order.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight following points
 - Theory of 'Great Elect' (Mahasammat)
 - Implications
 - Psychological Foundations for Political Speculation
 - Nature of the *Great Elect*

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight following points
 - Theories of Kingship
 - Traces of Republican States
 - Notion and Symbols of Sovereignty
 - Seven Symbols of Sovereignty
 - Ten Royal Virtues (*dasa-rājadhamma*)
 - Elements of Regalia
 - Buddhist Ideas on the Constituents of the State
 - Objectives of State
 - Possibility of Abuse of Power by the State

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight following points
 - *Dhamma* and State
 - The *ānā* and Dhamma
 - The *Ānā* and *Attha*
 - State as Ethical Instrument of the Dhamma
 - The Idea of *Cakkavatti*
 - Normative Kingship and creation of just social order
 - Absence of State Religion

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. Your answer should highlight following points
 - Equation of Buddha with unique powers
 - Traces of ritualism in Buddhist thought
 - Human greed and dishonesty in the roots of origin of kingship
 - Absence of constitutional checks and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of power
 - Control of *Dhamma* over state