



Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Ancient Indian Politics and Culture

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the importance of Sri Aurobindo's vision on ancient Indian polity and culture. Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest enlightened philosopher and spiritual thinker. His contribution on ancient Indian polity is quite extraordinary than other contemporary political thinkers of India. His perspective on ancient Indian polity was a different one and he is studying the ancient Indian in a dissimilar manner. He critically analyzes the prospect of the development of a democratic and political system from the ancient period. His opinion of Indian civilization and it's was one of the most profound aspects of Indian culture. As his vision modern society is founded on ideals. This ideal is governed the spirit and body and the society is based on basic stability. He opines that culture is an agent of life force. His vision is that Indian society is founded on free Aryan and sociopolitical organization. The ancient political reality, the ideal Indian state was the last word of sociopolitical progress and greatness. The Indian political system brings into been generally associated with the early political history of the Aryan people. According to him Dharma is the basic principle of society. This Dharma put forth for all aspects of religious, ethical, social, political juridical and customary law life of people. These principles originally govern the life of the masses. The life of the society is based on the physical life of an individual through the rule of cyclic law. The cyclic law gives the true picture of the life cycle of the human being. This cyclic law is the unaltered law of the nature. His writings are the Crystallization of a vibrant and rising soul of India, and have a spiritual message for mankind.

KEY WORDS

Spirit, Mind, Soul, Kula, Visah, Ancient Dharma, Brahmin theocracy, Acara, Manusmrithi, cyclic law, human cycle.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo was one of the great philosophers, a theorist and a political thinker. Through his authorship, he has given an expression of an indispensable element of ancient Indian culture and political philosophy. His writings disseminate the interesting concepts about Indian culture and political system which existed during the early periods. His perspective about the Indian political system and culture were always considered stimulating. In this article, an attempt has been made to examine Sri Aurobindo's view of development regarding a democratic and political system from the ancient period. Many western critics are of the view that during the colonial period, there was no political and cultural consciousness among Indians and this has led to the failure of Indians in the spheres of polity and culture. But this assumption about India is absolutely baseless. The Indian culture is the aggregate of human experience and it is conveyed from one generation to the other. The concept of Indian Culture itself refers to the different forms of thought and activities of the common masses.

The significance of Indian culture was one of the most profound aspects of Indian civilization and it is expressed through myriad forms like the mental, aesthetic, spiritual, religious, intellectual, and ethical. But the critics of Indian culture never accepted the antiquity of Indian civilization. They never took into account the greatness and intellectual depth revealed by this culture. Gradually India failed to acknowledge the greatness of its culture and lost its way unlike its European counterparts which were more successful or progressive. India turned away from its natural essence to asceticism and spiritual outlook, thus becoming inactive. As Sri Aurobindo observes, "Indian civilization has been the form and expression of a culture as great as any of the historic civilizations of mankind, great in religion, great in philosophy, great in science, great in thought of many kinds, great in literature, art and poetry, great in the organization of society and politics, great in craft and trade and commerce".¹

When we analyze the culture of India, we can understand that it reflects the effectiveness of outward existence and is based on mind and heart. The ancient world looks up to the highest level and sees it as the achievement of things in its mind, and its spirit is an undisputed authority and admiration. This is the true sense of progress and, as part of it, there must be a sound political, economic and social life, a power and efficiency that enables people to survive, grow and move safely towards collective perfection, and a vital elasticity and responsiveness that gives room for constant advancement in the outward expression of mind and spirit. These things accelerate the greatest possible contribution to human culture and progress. The current pattern of events is a great distortion and pointless, and delays humanity's spiritual evolution. This created and unbalanced substance formed by modern man and the heaviness of his balance for a complex life.²

The importance on the notion of 'internal man', spirit, mind, and soul, is what makes Indian culture unique and distinct from others. These concepts have given ample ideas of shaping a perfect man, defining both his external and outward existence. This has the power to create a rhythm of life which in turn can lead to higher ideals and perfect life. This true sense of progress can be seen in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of people of

ancient India. The people survive these things through power and efficiency which leads to a good life. This vital responsibility gives constant and continuous progress in the outward expression of his mind and spirit. If one of the cultures does not satisfy these ends, there is a defect either in its essential conceptions, and its application to take away from its claims to complete and essential value.³

One of the important peculiarities of modern society is that it is based on ideals. It has governed the spirit and body and the society is based on basic stability. These great and valuable things create a strong life order and extraordinary energy, richness and interest and Indian life is organized remarkably in its abundant variety in unity, beauty, productiveness and movement of Indian culture. So this culture is an agent of life power. India has shown a free and comprehensive political organization, and her economic system of the past is full of merit. But now she faces an inelastic and static order, power and failure, society followed a progressive system. The social division is based on the caste framework. It has taken a semi-barbaric abuse which has created serious dangers in our society. The system of this past was later replaced by freedom, soundness and perfection, along with the progressive possibility of European social order. In this juncture, Maharishi Aurobindo deeply expresses his opinion to reestablish the ancient fact, such as political, economic, and social aspects of Indian culture.⁴

The legend of Indian political history arose from a false view of historical development. One of the unconstructive aspects of Indian political system is the fabrication of knowledge and not sufficient knowledge about the past culture of our country. The Indian society was based on free Aryan or Vedic sociopolitical organization. The marking figure of the society was on the Brahmin theocracy. The system of politics was based on the absolute monarchy. This antiquity of Indian culture and history has been destroyed by a more careful and insightful scholarship. But the ancient political reality, the ideal Indian state was the last word of sociopolitical progress and greatness. In the ancient past, there was a great development in modern ideas, types of democracy and parliamentary system in ancient India.⁵

But these things were ignored by the western scholars. From ancient times there was a strong democratic element prevalent in India. Every social institution had a strong parliamentary structure. The basic principle for the formation of Indian democracy and parliamentary form is quite unique and unlike modern European Parliament and modern democracy. These things have the political capacity of the Indian people in their living adaptation, and they reflect the social mind and body of the nation.⁶

There was an evolution in the political system in ancient India. The Indian political system began generally associating with the early political history of the Aryan people. There are some common and general principles that belong to the earliest stage in the social development of human society. Based on this theory, followed a clan or tribal system. These clans were commonly known as 'Kula's. These founded and followed freedom and equality of all in the race. There was evidence that the land was known by the name of the people, the Kuru country, the Malwa country, and other clans. This clan was followed by a fixed settlement and definite boundary. This system was constrained by the clan. But we found that the basic unit of the village is a settled village community.⁷

The people met together and it was known as the 'Visah'. They assembled to think or discuss issues and solve carefully. These assemblies established a communal harmony and also initiated progress. The king acted as the representative, and he remained a powerful sign of the entire mass. He was an agent of the entire action of the active common life. But the king followed a hierarchy, with the complete consent of the people. The selection was based on formal election or conformation. The religious institutions were developed by a group of priests. They developed a system of sacrifice and rituals. The singers and inspired men were trained in the rituals. These were followed by a mystic knowledge and lay behind the symbols of sacrifice. These systems were a great origin and the seed of the Brahmanical tradition or institution. The rest of the people exercised other professions and belonged in their ordinary life to the general body of the people community. This seems to be the free and simple, natural constitution of the society. It gives a clear picture of the general outlook of the ancient Indian Aryan society.⁸

The evolutionary process and development out of primitive form can be seen in other communities also. But there was a striking peculiarity and unique mentality of a race fixed them. These are considered as the prominent features of the sociopolitical and economic factors of the Indian civilization. These hereditary principles emerged at an early stage and later it evolved as political power, and it spread everywhere on all its activities. The hereditary kingship was established later the powerful warrior class was established. The other rest of the people were categorized as artisans, traders, and agriculturalists and a subject of working-class added.⁹

The important aim of conquest was the necessity of economic benefits. In the mass population, the commons were servants and laborers. The predominance of early spiritual and religious ideas in the minds of the Indians has given rise to a new social system and order. This spiritual tendency led to the growth of the Brahmanical order, the priesthood and the repository of the sacred lore of the Vedas. This development has given an unequal permanence and definiteness of supreme importance. But the Brahmins finally became the predominant authority but they could not seize or hold the Indian political power. They remained as spiritual advisors of the monarch. The people exercised considerable influence in the political system. The real or active power remained with the king. It reflects the Kshatriyas' aristocracy of the commons.¹⁰

One of the noteworthy figures of the ancient period was the Rishi, a man's highest spiritual experience. He exercises the authority of spiritual personality at all. He was consulted by the king and sometimes acted as a religious teacher or tutor. He exercised new ideas and customs for the people's well-being. It is one of the remarkable features of the Indian spiritual system that gave a true meaning of religious sense and meaning to all. It played a key role in most outstanding external political and social circumstances of ancient Indian people's life to perform functions as an ideal. But he performed the utmost duty and spirit in actions. It gives a clear picture of the ancient Dharma. The prime duty of the Rishi was not only to perform or propagate spiritual ideas but to discover and interpret the ideal law, to put forth the life of the people into the well structured ideas and important forms of a culture based on spiritual and religious sense. Later these sacred rules and systems were copied by the Brahmins and followed the customs and the existing rules of ancient Rishis. In later days there was a change in the social-political

system. At this time the system was traditionalized and conventionalized and finally, all these practices became a free and living motive.¹¹

The evolutionary process of the ancient Indian political system differed from that of different parts of India. Basically, most of the countries followed a system of monarchy and there existed an increasing emphasis on the control of the king. He acted as the head of the state. This system had more complex admiration and followed a universal type of administration. But the power of the king was checked by the people's will. Basically the appearance was strong and enduring vitality of the states. These states acted as republics or a federation of republics. The kingship became hereditary and he was the head of the republic. Sometimes the administration was carried by a special officer for a brief or fixed period. Gradually this power system disappeared from the polity in the state. But in many cases, this system emerged from the natural evolution of the power of the assemblies. There was a revolution that occurred during the period between the Monarchs and the republican form of government finally, the evolution of a republican form asserted a strong and capable administration for long-lasting for many centuries.¹²

The most common features of the government were democratic assemblies. When we examine or analyze the details of the constitution, there is nothing enjoyed high excellence of the civil and formidable effectiveness of their military organization. The efficiency of these republics reflects their high reputation, and it enjoyed a free political system throughout India. These reputations reflect the efficiency of their civil and military organization. One of the interesting aspects of these republican institutions maintained their purity and vigor. We can see that a small state of this kind would remain invincible even in the arms of the powerful and ambitious dynasty. One of the republicans, Magadhan Monarchy is the best example of such a political system.¹³

Buddha voted for the early republics, as long as the republican institutions were able to maintain their purity and dynamism. Then he expresses that, a small state of this kind would remain impossible to defeat by the arms of the powerful and ambitious Magadhan dynasty. The political writers express their opinion about the Indian republics, the alliance of these political republics the most valuable political and military support of a king. Sri Aurobindo expresses another opinion and he says that in the Machiavellian period this system was implemented in Greece by Philip of Macedonia. The prince aimed for understanding their internal unity and efficiency of their constitution.¹⁴

These republican states were long-established and done with great force and energy during 6thc before Christ. But contemporary Greek states lasted a very short time and troubled Greek city commonwealth. But the Indian political republics had their own political liberty. When we are analyzing the two political systems, the Indian political system followed a republican and institutional organization. These systems followed a strict constitutional order. But the ancient Indian mind, less fertile and it's considered superior to Mediterranean people. Most of the states enjoyed a more and longer constitutional order. Some of these republican states enjoyed a long and tremendous law of administration. But these laws have done with great force and energy, and they enjoyed a

physical and mental strength. But these republicans in Rome continue to do something and to stop the power of mighty empires such as Chandragupta and Asoka. These rulers existed even during the early centuries of the Christian era.¹⁵

But one of the main features of the Roman Empire was their aggressive spirit and organizing capacity of the Roman Republic. But the Indian republicans tried to preserve their own inner life and independence. After the invasion of Alexander, there was an attempt to unify the entire republic, but they could do nothing India, particularly after Alexander's invasion, felt the need for a movement of unification and the republics were forces of division: powerful for themselves, they could do little for the organization of the peninsula, too large even for any form of confederation of small states to be possible and yet, in the ancient world, which has not succeeded anywhere, it always succeeded. But the Greek attempt proved to be a great failure.

These republics followed by a centralized administration. But with the prestige of the ancient Indian world seriously continuing, it could not be broken down. In India, it was a monarchical state that grew and developed and finally it was replaced by other forms of political organizations. But it is a fact that the republican form of Government disappeared from the history, and it is known only in coins, valuable and authentic references, evidence about Greek observers and contemporary political writers and political theorists. These shreds of evidence give us a new understanding and epics about the ancient monarchical state throughout in India.¹⁶

The Monarchical system was a well framed political system before the invasion of the Muslims. The Indian kings followed a certain quality of holiness of life and character. He acts as the true representative of the divine power and protector of Dharma. He followed his personal despotism and absolute autocracy. In this way, there is no resemblance to the ancient Greek monarchy or monarchies of western or Central Asia and there are no similarities between the ancient Indian republicans and Roman imperial Govt and later European autocracies. It is not the same as Pathans or Mughal emperors.¹⁷

The Indian kings developed a political skill for supreme administration and judicial power. They had full control over military forces than the Roman or Persian Empire kings. The king was advised by his council during peace and wartime. He had a general supervision and control over the good order and welfare of the life of the community. His power was not personal and provides protection or defense and safeguard against abuse and atrocities limited by the liberties and control the power off to her public authorities, and interests who were. He exercises absolute sovereignty and administrative legislation and control over his territory.¹⁸

He was, in fact, a limited or constitutional monarch, although the machinery by which the constitution was maintained and the limitation effected differed from that familiar in European history; and even the continuity of his rule was far more dependent on the continued will and consent of the people than that of the medieval kings of Europe. The continuance will be the assent of the people the great sovereign, the king fell out the basic ideology of Dharma. The Dharma was a greater sovereign than the King. This Dharma put forth for all aspects of religious, ethical, social, political juridical and customary law life of people. This system originally governs the life of the

people. This impersonal authority of the king was considered as divine and it lasted forever. He followed the same spirit and totality of the administrative system.

This administrative system has some characteristic change proceeding from natural feeling produced about in its natural form, and it creates a natural evolution in society. The evolution of a society in which national, family and other traditions are constantly integrated, creating a kind of attendant and subordinate body capable of reform only from within, and with the Dharma no secular authority had any right of autocratic intervention. But the society was incorporated in it. But the change was occurring in the family and regional base. So this system followed the principle of Dharma and no secular authority had any right of autocratic interference.¹⁹

The Brahmins themselves claim and act as the chief recorders and exponents of Dharma. They were no creators or authority, and they could not make any change to it. The authority systems did not have the capacity to change the principle of Dharma. So the king was the only guardian, executor, and servant of Dharma. He keenly examines and observes the day-to-day system and prevents criminal offences and unlawful actions and unethical actions. First, he acts as the true follower of Dharma, bound with Dharma and obeys it. He keenly observes the rigorous rule it laid on his own personal life and action. Then he implemented the provincial powers and duties of his authoritative authority and offices.²⁰

The sovereign power of Dharma was not an ideal theory. It is not in practice. The rule of the social-religious principle effect was seen in the whole life of the people. This leads to a living reality. But in the political field a very large practical consequence. In this, the First, the king was restricted by the common will. This power limitation was basically followed by the issue of administrative decrees. This decree was based on the religious, social, economic, political conditions of the community. This power was shared with him the right of promulgating and seeing to the execution of administrative decrees issued independently. The effective result of administering the expression or tactic will of the people.²¹

The religious liberties of the common people have not normally interfered with any secular authority, such as religious authority, shape its own way of life and institution, with this authority had its own general governing bodies and all actions basically in their proper way, and entire independence. In this society or state, there were no exclusive state religion and the king was not the religious head of the people. But there are exceptional rules like Asoka, who attempted and controlled at least on a minor scale. The edicts of Asoka recommended the important character of the king.

A sovereign had the right to change the religious beliefs or the ways of the institutions. It is based on the principle of communal freedom because it is morally correct. The consent of the recognized authorities was done in the religious councils. The example was quoted from the Buddhist council and arrangement for different religious discussions. The King influences his personal favorites for a particular religious sect or creed on the basis of active ideas or statements. But at the same time, he bounds to respect and support for public office of all the recognized religions of the people.

Subsequently the ruler extended his support to Buddhist or Brahmin emperors to both the rival religions. But in the south, there is pretty violent state persecutions, these outbreaks were the violations of Dharma-the soul principle of the society. So there was no place in the Indian political system for religious impression and intolerance. This system of state policy was truly an unthinkable system of governs.²²

The ordinary life of people is free of despotic interference. Examples of a particular type of legislation in these provinces were rare. When it occurred there was a consultation of the will of common people of those concerned. If occurred there in a rearrangement or their reconstitution of the existing system. During the Buddhist prominent time, the Sena king in Bengal reconstitutes the caste system in Bengal. So the change was an inevitable factor, it brought about not artificially. But automatically from within and gives a new way of freedom for all life. It was developed through the freedom was allowed to all families. It develops or changes automatically based on their own rule of life. Sri Aurobindo, express the freedom of own rule of life is known as “acara”. This is the rule of freedom and the rule of life.²³

On the influence of administration, the power of the king was based on the standing constitution of the Dharma. The taxation policy of the monarch was limited in the most important source of revenue. It was calculated on the fixed percentage as the maximum. But on the other side's the general, or popular bodies of various communities to a voice in this matter. His general rule was the right to govern to the satisfaction and goodwill of the people. This was deeply devoted or religious, and a belief of the Brahmin custodians of Dharma. The king acts as the highest court of justice and controls the execution of civil and criminal laws. But he was an executor too, he bound to an able administrator, the law faithfully through stood his judges. These judges were Brahmins; they had a deep knowledge of existing law systems that prevailed during that time.

The king had abundant powers, complete control over council, military administration, war, and peacetime and a great number of directive activities. He was an able person and make effective arrangements for all parts of the administration. He served as a guardian and promotes the welfare of the community. He promotes good order, public morals, and divine matters to best are observed and controlled by the sovereign authority. He patronages different aspects and given severe punishments within the law. He expected to exercise strict laws and general benevolence and promotion of the public welfare.²⁴

There was no evidence of autocratic rule or monarchical violence or oppression. The same was seen in some other countries outside. There was strict enforcement of the law based on Dharma. If a king disregards Dharma or misuses his power of the administrative system, there was a long and effective protest or revolt on the side of the people. There was a possibility of oppression, the sovereign laid down that obedience and followed a faithful execution of Dharma. The king was removed Based on the incompetence and violation of the obligation to rule for the dissatisfaction of the people. His general was to govern the satisfaction, and the popular will of the people. This, shall we see, not merely a religious wish or opinion of the Brahmin custodian of Dharma.²⁵

Manusmrithi gives information about the unjust and despotic king and such a king should be killed by his subjects like a mad dog. This gives a clear picture of the highest authority and justification of his right of the king, or unconditional rights was not part of the Indian political system. This right was actually exercised both from history and literature. If any rule acts as an over administrator, it was controlled by the council of ministers or public assemblies. So the king was acting as a moderate, efficient, and benevolent. He served the purposes assumed in it and secured an abiding hold on the affection of the people. The approved and efficient system of administration is an indispensable element of the Indian sociopolitical system and followed a real principle of the system. These are the essential characteristics of the Indian political system of the whole construction.²⁶

The true nature of the Indian political system can be realized, it is not a separate thing, but independent machinery of the life and mind of the people. This is a part of its relation to the instrumental totality of the people. A person can be defined as a great combined human being. It's to be true to the inner reality that it's being with the collective. Deeply express the common or communal soul, the mind and body of man. The life of society, in particular the physical life of the individual through the rule of cyclic law. This cyclical law gives a true picture of birth, development, youth, maturity and decline in the human cycle. The last stage goes through a great love of pleasure, money, and fame. So the age of old people and nations except India and china perished. But the collective being has a capacity of renewing itself and a process and returning a new stage and new cycle. For this, each person has followed a soul idea or life idea at work. This idea of the soul is less mortal than its body. So the body is extinguishable or destructive. So this gives a new impetus to people's life. The life idea is itself sufficient powerful, large and force giving energy. This creates people stronger, extremely important, and not realities in mind.²⁷

The useful attitude of bringing the individual characters into such a close relationship with the instance of a new application of the power of the idea of the soul or of the idea of life in its being. This soul or life idea passes through many such cycles before its final exhausting. So this idea leads to the principle of soul manifestation of a communal being. Each community is again a soul manifestation of a communal being. This creates a great external spirit itself in time to time on earth is seeking. The soul idea's fullness of humanity happens through a state of being changeable of the human cycle.

The real power of the soul or life that governs to change its development and this is the real thing behind psychology and user behavior of people. But soul and spirit not exhausted not end by disappearance or mingling into others. But give a new place for a new race or people. But this fusion of life many original small societies and achieved its maximum growth without death. It appears to be more absolute exhaustion and dissolution. It many recover by force of the spirit and begin to a more glorious cycle. So the history of Indian people's life has been such a life cycle.²⁸

The foremost ideology behind governed the life, culture, social life, the ideals of the Indian people, seeking his true spiritual life and the use of life. First, there was an evolutionary process on his vital, physical, and mental nature. From that discovery the man frame ideas and go upward from the ignorant natural to the great spiritual

existence, this powerful idea of India never quite under stress. Sri Aurobindo's vision taking place ancient values as well as Indian civilization has been the method and a manifestation of an Indian culture. For instance, it's pronounced as a few of the historic civilizations of mankind, not only in religion, but great in philosophy, great in science, great in thought of various kinds, great in literature, art and poetry, great in the organization of society and politics.

The truth behind the Indian culture, its most significance, it offers power and contributes a great possibility of the internal man, to re dynamisms the life-force, thoughts, and soul. According to him mostly all these ancient states follow a democratic system of administration and uphold the Dharma, the set of values, the each and every person should follow the individual Dharma and it is sake of the nation and quickness awake the development of each state. He deeply expresses the communal soul, the human mind and body. His vision about life is that, the life of the society is based on the rule of the cyclic law. It is the uninterrupted law of the nature. Not one can interrupt upon it. These are the visualizations about Sri Aurobindo's vision of politics and Indian culture.

End notes

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