The Idea of Good Governance 
(With reference to Rajadharmanushasana Parva of Shanti Parva)

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Abstract
Governance is an integral part of all the societies and it has been beautifully explained in Shanti Parva of Mahabharata. The purpose of this paper is to trace the political ideas from Shanti Parva. There are three parts of Shantiparva and the importance of this parva can be understood by the fact that out of three parts, one complete part i.e. Rajadharmanushasana Parva is devoted to the art of governance. This parva deals with the duties of four varnas, the history of sovereignty, the superiority of truth to falsehood and the duties of the king. It has been exquisitely explained in this parva about the reasons which lead to the growth of state and further kinship. Morality has been given high esteem and the king has been considered as the guardian of morality and dharma. This paper is an attempt to reconcile the political philosophy and ideals which leads to good governance which is the required even today in this modern world.

Keywords: Governance, Rajadharma, Dandniti, Dharma, Government, King, Welfare State

The concept of governance started with the inception of civilization and converted into good governance with its development. The Greek philosopher Aristotle has rightly remarked that state came into existence for the sake of life and continued for the sake of good life. Good life here stands for that favourable atmosphere provided to all the individuals by the state in which one can develop his/her personality up to the best. With the development of civilization the idea of good governance gained its pace and can be traced in the writings of various western as well as Indian writings. A close study of ancient Indian texts like Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Bhagwad Gita and Shanti parva in Mahabharata is required to understand the very concept of welfare state.\(^1\) This paper is an attempt to trace the elements of good governance in Rajadharmanushasana Parva of Shanti Parva which is one of the most important parva of Mahabharata.

The Mahabharata is one of the most significant literary works ever written on various aspects of politics. It is important from politics point of view because it is a comprehensive account of ancient Indian political thought, describing every facet of politics in a very minute manner. The part of Mahabharata with the tile ‘Shantiparva’ i.e. the book of peace, is a volume related to various dimensions of politics like origin of state, dandniti, rajdharma, duties of the King and good governance.

Shantiparva is collection of political philosophy of Bhishma, Vyasa and various other sages of that time. This parva of Mahabharata incorporates major ideas of Bhishma on various dimensions of politics. After the Great War between Pandavas and Kaurvas, Yudhishthar asked Maharishi Vyas to explain about the state and its different dimensions. Maharishi advised him to meet Bhishma, who was lying on the death
bed. Same advice was given by Lord Krishna also. Yudhishtir approached Bhishma, who described in detail about the origin of state, politics and duties of the King. 

*Shantiparva* consists of 365 chapters and 13,716 numbers of Verses, which is further divided into three sub-parvas:

(i) *Rajadharmashasan Parva* (Chapters: 1 to 130 & 4716 Verses)

This parva describes the duties of king and his governance.

(ii) *Apaddharma Parva* (Chapters 131 to 173 & 1649 Verses)

This part describes the rules of conduct when one faces adversity.

(iii) *Mokshadharma Parva* (Chapters 174 to 365 & 7351 Verses)

This parva describes the behaviour and rules to achieve *moksha* i.e. emancipation.

This paper is an attempt to reconcile the ideas related to good governance in *Rajadharmashasan Parva* of *Shantiparva*. The *Rajadharmashasan Parva* is the most important for our purpose and it has many verses in common with the law-book of Manu, particularly in regard to the divinity of king, pretensions of the Brahmans and the importance of *danda*.

1. Origin of State

The *Shantiparva* clarifies that in the state of nature; the institutions of state did not existed. There was no office of the King and the people thereof had no sense of thine and mine. This implies that the absence of the King coincided with the absence of private property. When the individual was living an isolated life, he was dictated by the dictates of law of nature and everyone was living a very blissful life. The problem emerged with the advent of private property as an institution which in turn brought differences and lead to chaos in the pre state nature. Later on because of the demand of peace and security, the need of authority was felt and lead to establishment of office of the King. *Shantiparva* describes at one place that people went in search of a King in order to protect their property, family and varnas. The public was feeling so much insecure that they were also prepared to give him certain share of their property and others privileges. Under such circumstances Manu agreed to be the King and promised to protect their property, family and varnas as stated in verse 31-32 of chapter 67.

The 67th chapter of *Shantiparva* describe the second aspect regarding the origin of Kinship. It states that there was a contract of people to get rid of sinfulness. It states that the state emerged on the grounds that when sinfulness prevailed in the world, men cannot enjoy his own property and family. It states that in the absence of King, inter-mixture of castes may also take place. *Shantiparva* also described that because of absence of authority *Dharma* will be replaced by *Adharma* and it is the duty of the King to maintain *dharma* which signifies the defence of social order based of family, property and caste system. This can be summarized that in the state of nature, the necessity to uphold *dharma*, protection of property, family and varnas by the king lead to the creation of state. The essence of ruler ship lies in *dharma*, the king should realise that there is nothing higher than *dharma* and always abide by it.

2. Kinship

The genesis of the word ‘*Raja*’ relates with the origin of ‘*Rajya*’. To start with, Bhishma based the Kings authority in the first chapter of *Shantiparva* upon unbending interpretations of the King’s origin. In the second verse of chapter 67 Bhishma says that “the coronation of a King is the first duty of kingdom. A kingdom in which anarchy reigns becomes weak and is soon attacked by robbers.” He further stated in fourth verse that “the Shrutis say that in crowing a king, it is Indra that is crowned in the person of the king.” It was a state of confusion and anarchy. Being fed up of this chaos, people prayed to God for King. So the public approached Manu to be the king but he refused for the same, which is stated in twenty-first verse of chapter 67. The
reply of Manu has been stated in twenty-second verse of same chapter that “I fear all sinful deeds. To govern a kingdom is highly difficult, especially among men who are false and deceitful in their conduct”. The thirty-first and thirty second verse of chapter 67 describes the willingness of Manu to be the king and to control every one. Later on seeing the power of Manu, the inhabitants of the earth became stricken with fear and began to follow their respective duties. Manu then went round the world suppressing everywhere all acts of wickedness and compelling all men to follow their respective duties, like a cloud surcharged with rain. Another theory states that in the beginning everyone adhered to righteousness (dharma), but with the development of society, people left dharma. This lead to anarchy and Lord Vishnu designated one person to command all and so the Kinship came into existence. The origin of kinship is desired from the divine ordination. The 144th verse of chapter 59 states that “the learned have begun to say that there is no difference between a god and a king.”

3. Duties of the King

The main duty of the King, according to Bhishma was to uphold ‘dharma’ and ‘prajahit’ i.e. welfare of the public. The fifty-ninth verse of chapter 68 states that “The king is the heart of the people; he is their great refuge; he is their glory; and he is their greatest happiness.” According to fifty-fourth verse in the same chapter the king is the person who receives habitual obedience from all because the king is the “delighter of the people, bestower of happiness, possessor of prosperity, the best of all, healer of injuries, master of earth and protector of men.” But the most important thing is highlighted in fourth verse of chapter 69 that “the king should first conquer himself and then try to subdue his enemies.” In Shantiparva, while discussing the significance of king’s authority, Bhishma tells that the king must give up his likes and dislikes. The king should act fearlessly and perform acts based on dharma and should always behave in an impartial manner. The king should have good command over dandniti and he should give utmost importance to dandniti.

The most important aspect of this parva is concerned with the dandniti, dharma and the king. It is only through dand that the king can manage the affairs of the state in very smooth manner and can guide everyone to be on the path of dharma. In chapter 70 of Rajadharmanushasana Parva Bhishma has discussed about thirty six virtues which a king should practise. These are the virtues like, the king should follow his duties without malice, he should earn wealth without persecution and cruelty, he should seek pleasure without attachment, he should be liberal, he should be pure, and he should never strike in ignorance and so on. The fact is that all the thirty six virtues are such that will establish a rule based on dharma.

According to this great discourse, the king should be charitable and pure and should never relinquish the performance of his duties towards his subject. Another most significant duty of the king is protection of people from internal and external dangers. The king is the fountain head of the administration and he should always perform such activities which strengthens the feeling of dharma in the mind of common man.

At the time of emergency, the king should take some stringent steps to control the situation. During such times, the normal rules should be suspended and king should work in a very prudent manner. If the people are in distress, the king should always be prepared to help them by all means. In emergency, the king should take the public in his confidence and generate extra revenue by means of extra tax. For the sake of protection of the public and safety of their life, it is not unfair to sign a treaty with the enemy also. Those who make treaty with the enemies and oppose allies for the sake of treasure, they get good rewards.

Bhishma has beautifully explained the source of prosperity of the king in verse nineteen and twenty of 56th chapter. Verse nineteen states that “the king who is endued with all accomplishments and good conduct, who is self-controlled, humble and righteous, who has his passion under control, who is of a beautiful countenance and not too enquiring, never loses prosperity.”
Verse twenty describes that "by administering justice, by following these three expedients, viz., concealment of his shortcomings, ascertainment of the loop-holes of foes and keeping his own counsel close, as also by acting straight forwardly, the king acquires prosperity."  

4. Dand (Justice) and Dandniti

In the 59th chapter of *Rajadharmanushasana Parva* is described the 'history of sovereignty. Bhishma has dealt at length about the beginning of this civilization and how righteousness was lost. The seventy-eighth verse of chapter 59 describes *Dandniti* as the science of punishment. It is the science of governance and the modes operandi to control the behaviour of all and to guide everyone on the path of *dharma*. It is a mechanism to destroy evil as the sun destroys the darkness. According to Bhishma, if the dandniti is destroyed, the essence of the –Š‡‡‡†ƒ•ȋ‹‰Ǧ‡†ƒǡƒǦ‡†ƒƒ†ƒŒ—‡†ƒȌ will disappear and the social system based on four varnas will be disturbed. On the destruction of dandniti and instability in *Rajdharma*, all people will suffer from many evils. Therefore it is the basic requirement for a person to be the king that he should be well versed in dandniti or the art of administration. When all are asleep, it is the *dand* and the fear of *dand* (punishment) which is awake and ultimately it is the concept of *dand* which regulates the behaviour of all in the society. The *dand* is the synonym of *dharma*. On account of fear of dand (punishment), one never involves himself in the sinful activities. If dand is not observed everything will be eclipsed by darkness. People can live happily only if they live under the law and abide by the rules and regulations of the state.  

5. Government

In *Shantiparva*, *rajdharma* is a term which encompasses the duties and obligations relevant to political and administrative affairs. It is only through the government that the peace and security is maintained in the state. It is only through the government that the king looks after the welfare of all in the society and can manage situations in such a manner that everyone in the society lives a very prosperous life. To deliver justice to all without any discrimination and on the basis of *dharma* is the basic aim of government. In the state, the king is the apex of administration and he controls all the organs of the government. If everything is managed in a perfect manner and everyone in the state is happy, it means that it is not only governance rather it is good governance.

There are three organs of the government, namely, executive, legislature and judiciary. But the utmost importance has been given to executive that includes the king, ministers and other officials. Bhishma has given great importance to able and efficient ministers without whom the king cannot work in proper manner. The ministers are the backbone of the administration and king should always appoint those persons as ministers who are intelligent, dutiful, honest, of strong character and obedient in nature. The third verse of chapter 118 states that "an intelligent king should appoint servants, each fit for the office assigned to him, and exercise proper control over them, having first ascertained their qualifications of truthfulness, purity, sincerity, general disposition, knowledge of the scriptures, conduct, birth, self-control, mercy, strength, energy, dignity and forgiveness." The king gives due respect to the advice given by 'purohits' whose main duty was to bring king on right path by their good sentences and speeches. It has been stated in fifteenth verse of chapter 72 that “the well-born brahmana, wise and humble, guides the king in every matter by his own great intelligence.” These 'purohits' were intelligent, polite and the persons with the knowledge of Vedas and all other sacred texts. The *rajpurohits* were fearless, *dharma* follower and always guide the king. It was the moral and ethical duty of the government to take due care of all and to look after the development of all living in the society. The *Rajadharmanushasana Parva* of Shantiparva depicts the ancient Indian culture and tradition highlighting the duties to be performed by the king. The basic idea behind all the tales and stories included in the parva by Bhishma, Vyasa...
and Vidura is to prepare Yudhishthar with the art of governance. All the aspects of governance have been dealt in such a religious manner that if followed even today it will enhance the spirit of good governance in present democracies. As a treatise of statecraft, the Mahabharata attempts to show that even in changed times, the political theories of the epic are worth following for maintaining the territorial integrity of state and for promoting welfare of the people. To conclude, we can say that Shantiparva is a text which enhances the welfare of all living beings. It is not only a religious text but a text on politics, diplomacy, governance and philosophy fully embodied with the spirit of dharma ultimately heading towards the concept of good governance.

References
5. Shanti Parva, 67.31-32
6. Ibid, 67.2
7. Ibid, 67.21
8. Ibid, 67.22
9. Ibid, 59.144
10. Ibid, 68.59
11. Ibid, 68.54
12. Ibid, 69.4
13. Ibid, 56.19
14. Ibid, 56.20
15. Ibid, 78.28
16. Ibid, 118.3
17. Ibid, 72.14