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Constitutional Features Of Republic In Ancient India

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Abstract

This paper talks about the growth of the style of government in various sections of India. More focus was given to the kind of government where king was the main person in terms of making all the rules and regulations and was epicenter off all, thus causing unison in all facets. This arrangement was not taken over for a long period of time. So the opposition party adopted the policy of employing equality among all people in the form of “gana”. It was called a republican form of government, where a person was voted and was made the chief of all for a limited period of time. The politics of that time had made many variations that were caused due to developing republicans for some cases; on the other hand some happened due to upheavals. In India’s sub-parts the growth in politics and society was not homogenous. The republican form of government that developed in the eastern and central regions territories continued for many years because of being influenced by the peoples of north- western regions and had a powerful corporation. The government of Greek city was marked as the yardstick by the other governments for having a strong, resolute and organized federation. But it did not have longevity compared to its complement party. Thus the republics of India were not only just working but working energetically in the 6th century BC, which shows that the political area of the ancient India was no less than the others and the present one. These self- governed republics were so strong, knowledged and well equipped with their style of functioning that they happily accepted the contribution of people belonging from different classes of the society at the meetings.

Keywords:

republics, monarchs, ancient India, Buddha, Mahavira, Mahabharata, Gana, assemblies, unity, equality, self- governing, liberty, Lichchavi, Sangha, Samiti, Vajji, RigVeda, Indo- Aryan

Introduction

Jayaswal, K.P. (2005) says that earlier, in India, the non- sovereign style of government was known as “Sangha” and “Gana” However, different scholars interpreted it differently some said that it means a kingdom of all people, some said that it is an association of self- governing merchants, some as a gathering, or an association of families. There are scholars who call it as a self- ruling tribe but in literal terms by “gana” it does not mean so. “Gana” is a false, pretended tribe who belong from different tribes. It is recognized as tribe because in “Sanskrit” and “Sangam” literature, “gana” meant tribe or an ethnic group. It was also interpreted as numbers.

Hence, the rule of “Ganas” means the ministry of many people. Taking into consideration the number associates available in this it is called a congregation. Since this assembly was an association of self- governing people it came to be known as a republic.

Even if kingdom was the leading house of the government the origin of the non- sovereign kind of government came from the Ayan’s ancient fictional sources. Through the books of hymns and prayers, the ancient political ideologies were found, thus a marking of history by the Indo- Aryans i.e. the “Rigveda Samhita”.

Thus, it implies that the ancient India mingled the Hindu political ideas with different theories. According to the “Rigveda” it was seen that the “Indo- Aryans” went through a phase of transformation, i.e. the different individual tribes conglomerated to form one single tribe. The term “Gana” has been used numerous times in different Vedas. The “Maruts” were known as “Ganas” because in the “Rigveda” and the “Atharvaveda”, the “Ganas” belonging from “Maruts” are talked about several times in terms of military and soldiers within the order of “Surya” and “Indra”. The armed forces of “Marut” are summoned for the liberation of Manu. The “Ganas” are furnished with swifthorses and armaments for instancelongbow, shafts etc. The deity, “Pushan” was called to guide the “Gana” people who desire for cows as a reward for the win against the battle (Ibid).

Altekar, A.S. (2009) and Basham, A.L. (2004) says that according to the literature of the Vedas it has been noted that the kings gathered together in an assembly. If other kings vote a person for the position of a king, then the person will become a king. This states that there was a practice of oligarchy which means that there were powerful people who were differentiated in terms of their status of wealth, class, education, troop etc. who are generally taken care by families. These families then pass on their power but not necessarily through inheritance. It can be so that there were no heads of these groups so they were administered by the council of the tribe. Some powerful oligarchic members of the tribes themselves took the name of raja who administered it by debatable people.

Majumdar, R.C. (2010) found that in a republican arrangement, the monarchical force is either owned by only a few people or by the entire clan. People generally pass on their power to an individual who they think is capable or to a tribe with selected number of members. However in both the cases it is seen that the power transferred to others should be only men by implementing control in self- discipline. Looking back at the Vedic texts, similar concerns were mentioned. There were two important groups called the “Sabha” and “Samiti” which played an essential role, in the government. The authority and role of the two mentioned groups have not been known clearly but there are number of evidences that prove they have a lot of power and specially

employed it on the powers of the king to keep an eye on them.

Sinha, H.N. (1938) ponders that it might be that the “Vedic Aryans” were aware about the well structured group of people i.e. the “Gana” who were ruled by numerous rulers and kings like the “Rajana” out of which was the superior king known as the “jyeshtha” raja. The villages at around that time desired for a corporate lifestyle but that should be self-governed. Hence, it is thought that by this time the “Gana” had sprung at this point of time as a corporate group. Since there were two important tribal groups “Sabha” and “Samiti”, the committee of seniors and influential men who voted the king would also assist him at the time of his requirements.

The time when the Aryans took refuge in India, they were separated into various “Ganas” with respect to the Roman Gens, Greek “Genos” and the “Gentes”. These Gens were monarchical and equal with no representatives as kings but few of the “Ganas” at the time of the Vedic and “Brahmanic” age opted for the system of elective governments while few remained with their old system of government.

Literature Review

The function of sovereign governments after the end of Vedic period has been evident from numerous statements. This democratic style of government talks a lot about the progress of the political life among the citizens. This represents that the citizens dwelling within that state performed different political ideas with different political associations within their community. The most interesting thing about this ideology was that people were performing liberally, equally and with self-esteem. But the great ancient scholar, Panini made scientific analogy of the different states and the humans whom he came to know while travelling. These are considered genuine as these were his individual experiences. Hence, he found that the entire nation is separated into “Janpadas” which consisted of towns and villages. These “Janpadas” were therefore also having geographical, political and traditional parts. The political part was further categorized into monarchical and republican system of government which is known as “Ekraja” and “Sangha” respectively.

Bhandarkar, D.R. (1919) talks about the term “Sangha” is derived from „Sam“ and „han“ which means to bring together. There are different variations of forms to this word, one is „Samgha“ which means to draw together but on the other hand there is another form which means “Sangha” itself visually. Henceforth, Panini is forced to create a strong impact or make itself recognizable among the native language and to inform that “Sangha” does not just mean collection. Thus, “Sangha” or “Gana” is not an assemblage but an amalgamation of individuals for specific things which can also be termed as a corporate body.

Agarwala, V.S. (1953) details about that family was a component of the whole “Gana” political body. Individuals were prioritized as a secondary option. The “Kshatriyas” belonging from the “Gana” carried the tag of “Raja” which was further implemented to the head of every family and was also the one who was a representative of his tribe or kula in the “Sangha” group. Thus Panini mentions the word “Ganarajkula” which is related to the “Sanghas” of the “Vrijjis” displaying that the “Sangha” also known as “Gana” consisted of several “rajkulas” i.e. the aristocratic families and the chief of these rajkulas comprised of the ruling bodies of that particular “Gana”.

The various republic states that prospered during the sixth century BC were explained in the

literary texts of the Buddhists. Buddha was born and brought up within the environment of one of these states. His upbringing went on from the “Sakyas” to the “Sudhodhana” clans who were represented as the President of the “Sakyas”. Not only in these clans but his upbringing took up also among the “Lichchavis”, “Vajjis” and “Mallas”. “Mahavira” was brought up in the clan of “Jnatrikas” which is an amalgamation of the “Vajji Sangha”. Similar to Buddha, “Mahavira” to lingered most of his life among the republicans. Seeing the liberty in the republican and monarchical form of government, people living within the royal power of the Brahmins in the community wanted to set themselves free from the power. By doing this there were creating milestones in the field of politics in terms of liberty, equality and fraternity. The republic form of government yearned for the organization of various factors to spread synchronization, contentment and goodness among those people who had devoted themselves for the betterment of the society and acted as undividable from it.

Law, B.C. (2002) asserts that the profound “Vajji Sangha” consists of a very significant associate kin, the “Lichchavis” republic. “Mahavira”, the Jin, the well-known spiritual head was provided to India by the “Lichchavis”. “Mahavira” was brought up in an aristocratic background and was influenced by a person belonging from the republics. His relatives from his mother’s side were all rulers and on the other hand his father Siddhartha was a chief of the republics. Mahavira’s maternal uncle was a defensive leader working under the republic confederacy, known as the “Vajjian” clan. There were other republics too like the “Jnatrikas” and “Videhas”, but the “Lichchavis” were known as the most vital groups out of all. According to the language of the Chinese, the word “Lichchavi” means skin.

Davids, T.W. (1911) asserts that the “lichchavis” are one of the republics whose administrative centre was at “Vaisali”, now known as “Basadh”, situated within the district of “Muzzafarpur”. There was a confederacy formed known as the “Vaijjan” confederacy which was made with the mixture of seven other republics. As said that the administrative head of the “Lichchavis” was at “Vaisali”, headquarters of the “Vaijjan” confederacy was also at “Vaisali”. During the sixth century B.C., due to all the social and political aspects, “Vaisali” played a very essential role in all the terrains of the tribes.

Cowell, E.B. (1895) says that there are different types of “Jataka” in the “Jataka” tales: “Ekpanna Jataka” and the “Cullacalinga Jataka”, each telling stories related to the ancient India and its republics. In the “Ekpanna Jataka” it talks about the times of “Vaisali” when it had taken pleasure in its grandeur and riches. “Vaisali” had a feature of maintaining similar numbers in terms of its armaments, architecture and other political and architectural aspect. Hence, city had always maintained the system of having seven thousand seven hundred and seven kings to administer its empire and also had similar number of army men and riches. In the “Cullacalinga Jataka”, it says that the “Licchavis” belonging from the governing family from those seven thousand seven hundred and seven dwelled in the city of “Vaisali” and these people were set for fights and quarrels.

Prasad, B. (1953) say that the army of seven thousand seven hundred seven agenda is perceived differently by different scholars. Some says that this huge number of group does not affect the governing system and it functions same as that of the real state affairs. Though this thought of having a troupe of seven thousand seven hundred seven is a traditional concept but this grand troupe remained a very renowned one which consisted of “Rajano”, “Uprajano”, “Senapatino”

i.e. Presidents, Vice- Presidents, Commanders in Chief respectively and also the chancellors. Different scholars may get into different conclusions considering the number of members of the “Lichchavis” but it was looked upon as the most renowned republic.

Mookerji, R.K. (1919) says that as obvious, the chief of the state was the President of the “Lichchavi”. His job was to organize conferences of the assemblage when in it active and make sure that events followed after the meeting followed the regulations made by him. The “Uparajas”, “Senapatis”, “Bhandagarikas” i.e. the Chiefs, Generals, Treasurers respectively are the key associates of the legislative body. There were also executives with a member of eight or nine, both representing different tasks. The body of eight was supposed to look after the justice affairs and the body of nine was supposed to look after the foreign affairs.

Mukerjee, S. (2008) conveys that the community centre where the meetings were held by the “Lichchavi” tribe was called the “Santhagara” which used to take place often and talked about religious conviction and political affairs. To get into a conclusion, there was a process that was maintained. The process was inspired from the process installation at the “Sangha” of the Buddhist Bhikshs which was then followed by the board members of the “Lichchavi Sangha”. Buddha was very impressed by this “Sangha”. Since meetings are held often and almost with full attendance, there are no chances of this “Vajjians” to get dissolved but they will likely flourish. In the texts of the Buddhists the house of assembly is called the House of Law. This house started with the President in function and other associates of the house, especially the “Mahatakkā” who was supposed to convey notices as a representative of the “Lichchavis” and work sternly according to wishes of the people.

The “Kshatriya” successor of a Raja was called as “Rajanva” and on the other hand, the others were called “Rajan”. The successors of the “Svapalaka”, “Chaitraka” and “Vasudev” from the “AndhakVrishni League” were also known as “Rajanva”. This implies that not all people belonging from the clan were given the political authority, but only the ruling group was given this license. Hence majority of the republicans made themselves a member of the clan and the fortunate one belonging from the upper class of the society thought themselves to be the member or an heir of the present one. It was as if they were given license by the legislative body. Nevertheless, all the chief clans functioned properly in all political fields within the rural and urban meetings.

According to the numerous incidents noted, it is visible that the government of the “Sakyas” was a self- governing body. There was an argument caused due to the “Rohini” River, between the “Sakyas” and “Koliyas”. The argument was about the usage of water from the river which they took to their state officers. This matter was further dealt with their respective Rajas. Keeping in mind the aftermath of the poor people living on the streets, the upper class men of the “Sakyas” and the “Koliyas” refused to acknowledge the matter of peace and war.

Rockhill, W.W. (1884) says that the capital of “Sakyas” was hit violently by the “King of Kosala” which shook them to the nerve. They were so frightened that they decided to give up but could not make this a final decision. Hence, the “King of Kosala” sends an informer saying that he neither likes nor dislikes the clan but he asks them to unfasten their doors swiftly. To which the “Sakyas” said that they would discuss on the matter. After assembling, it was observed that some

wanted to open, some refused to unfasten the door and some asked to go with the majority. Therefore, they all started to vote accordingly to get into a conclusion.

Law, N.N. (1921) says that gradually people became very engrossed in economy which led to the development of federations and organizations at a very later age of the period. These organizations were self governed keeping in mind the rule made by the king, but later on the king was not allowed to make any laws that opposed their early rules. The chief of these organizations are given equal importance to that of the priests in terms of political concerns. In the later pages of Mahabharata, these federations are given much fame. These organizations are classified under a "Gana" and the king of each is asked to be cautious of its enemies as they may hire by corrupting them. This is so because they were feared conflicts. The "Yaudheyas" and the "Malayas" issued coins under the power of "Gana", which represented their aristocracy. The "Gana" as described in the texts of Mahabharata represents their level of freedom, which cannot be inferred from the word tribe. To meet the criteria of a tribe and pass it as a tribe, the term "autonomous tribe" came into existence so as to work as a sovereign tribe than be restricted within the power of a group or a tribe.

Conclusion

The ideology of republic government started much before the age of sixth century B.C. which can be traced from the age of Vedic, having "Sabhas" and "Samitis", when the westerns did not have any knowledge about a well structured political organization. Nevertheless, they came into being productively from the age of Buddha. The Indian republic governments were so well- structured that any person could get involved with the society's betterment in terms of politics and yet not lose their personal existence. They were so flexible and communicable as the common public, even the poor people could voice out their opinions and contribute in the political agendas of their state. Seeing their capability to form a well- structured government and have a planned legitimate government, few of the republics ignored their Greek oppositional associates, which led to a long existence of this kind of ruling. This made them so capable that they overcame all the attacks done by the Greeks and different political strategies of the "Mauryan" kingdom. These attacks continued till the Christian age. Inspired from one of the republics i.e. the "Vajji" confederacy, Gautam Buddha adopted numerous ideologies of the "Vajjis" to implement it in his own "Sangha". Hence, by this a strong and a firm corporation was maintained by them which resembles their political capability.

Basic ethics, a sense of responsibility along with maintenance of proper order were some visible features of the republics. It is considered that the "Gana" tribe flourished because they are always respectable to their leaders, upper authorities and always having an unrelenting attitude towards their responsibilities. In Mahabharata, "Bhishma" is found to say that a worth "Gana" always authorize their male children and male family members and then will acknowledge only the one who is well taught. Most of the people subjugated themselves under the power of the deliberative unit of the republic as he had a firm belief on the council's ability to make the right decision

which would be taken in favor of the state. This implies that they all were supportive, responsible, in unity with respect to the decisions taken by the authorities.

There was great amount of equality among the republics and especially the “Buddhist Sangha” where any public was accepted as a member without any differences based on their religion, doctrine or territory. Not only in the political area but also in the economic life, everyone had the right to choose their occupation according to their wish and also in front of legal rules and regulations.

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