

Study Material: Short Summary

B.A. Political Science (Honours) SEMESTER-III

POL-H-CC-T-5: Indian Political Thought (Ancient and Medieval)

Core Course; Credit-6. Full Marks-75

Course Objectives:

After completion of the course, the learners will be able to:

- **Understand the key concepts of ancient Indian political thought.**
- **Identify the key concerns of medieval Indian political thinkers**

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1. Ancient Indian Political Ideas: overview, Ideas on Brahmanic and Shramanic traditions.

Ancient India has a rich history of political thought and philosophy, with diverse ideas emerging from both Brahmanic (orthodox Vedic) and Shramanic (heterodox, non-Vedic) traditions. These ideas have had a profound influence on the development of Indian political philosophy and continue to shape contemporary thought. Here's an overview of some key concepts and ideas from these traditions:

Brahmanic Traditions:

- a. **Dharma:** Dharma is a central concept in Brahmanic thought, including Hinduism. It refers to the moral and ethical duties and responsibilities that individuals must uphold in society. Dharma is often associated with one's caste,

age, and social position and is considered a key principle for maintaining social order.

b. Rajadharma: Rajadharma is the concept of duty and morality for rulers. It emphasizes that kings and rulers must govern justly, following dharma, and ensuring the welfare of their subjects. It's closely related to the idea of the "divine right of kings."

c. Arthashastra: The Arthashastra is an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy, attributed to the ancient scholar Kautilya (or Chanakya). It provides insights into governance, diplomacy, taxation, and espionage.

d. Monarchy: Many ancient Indian states were ruled by monarchs, and the concept of kingship was closely associated with divine authority. The king was often seen as a representative of the gods on Earth.

Shramanic Traditions:

a. Ahimsa: Ahimsa, or non-violence, is a central idea in Shramanic traditions like Jainism and Buddhism. It advocates for non-violence in thought, speech, and action, promoting peaceful coexistence and compassion.

b. Anitya (Impermanence): Shramanic philosophies emphasize the impermanence of all things. This idea has political implications, suggesting that rulers and societies should not become attached to power or material possessions.

c. Distributed Governance: Some Shramanic traditions advocated for more decentralized and participatory forms of governance, challenging the hierarchical structures of the Brahmanic order. Buddhism, for example, encouraged the Sangha, or monastic community, to make decisions collectively.

d. Social Equality: Shramanic traditions often challenged the caste system and emphasized the importance of social equality. Both Jainism and Buddhism

rejected caste-based discrimination and promoted the idea that anyone could achieve spiritual liberation.

e. Secularism: Shramanic traditions tended to be more secular in nature, focusing on individual salvation and ethics rather than divine authority and rituals.

It's important to note that these ideas were not static, and there was significant interaction and cross-pollination between Brahmanic and Shramanic traditions. Over time, they influenced and shaped each other, resulting in a complex and diverse landscape of political thought in ancient India.

These ancient Indian political ideas continue to be relevant and have contributed to the development of modern Indian political thought and the country's diverse political and philosophical traditions.

2. Shanti Parva with special reference to Rajdharma.

The "Shantiparva" is a significant section of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, and it contains a wealth of teachings on various aspects of life, ethics, and governance. Within the "Shantiparva," there are several chapters that specifically focus on the concept of "Rajdharma," which refers to the duties and responsibilities of a king or ruler. These chapters provide valuable insights into the principles of governance, ethics, and leadership.

Here are some key teachings related to Rajdharma from the "Shantiparva" of the Mahabharata:

1. **Duties of a King (Raja Dharma):** The "Shantiparva" elaborates on the multifaceted duties of a king, emphasizing that a ruler's foremost responsibility is to ensure the welfare and happiness of his subjects. This involves maintaining law and order, upholding justice, and protecting the weak and vulnerable.
2. **Justice and Fairness:** The text stresses the importance of justice and fairness in ruling a kingdom. A king is expected to dispense justice without bias, treating all subjects equally, regardless of their social status.

3. **Non-Aggression:** The "Shantiparva" promotes the idea of avoiding wars and conflicts whenever possible. It suggests that a king should seek peaceful resolutions to disputes and resort to military action only when all other means have been exhausted.
4. **Alliance and Diplomacy:** The text advises rulers to establish alliances and engage in diplomacy as means of strengthening their kingdoms and maintaining peace.
5. **Counsel from Wise Ministers:** A king is encouraged to surround himself with wise ministers and advisors who can provide counsel and guide him in making just and sound decisions.
6. **Upholding Dharma:** The concept of dharma is central to Rajdharma. A king is expected to uphold dharma and act in accordance with righteous principles. This includes respecting the dharma of various individuals and communities within the kingdom.
7. **Economic and Social Welfare:** The welfare of the citizens is a key responsibility of a king. This involves ensuring economic stability and the well-being of the people. The text encourages the establishment of institutions that promote economic prosperity and social harmony.
8. **Protection of the Environment:** The "Shantiparva" acknowledges the importance of preserving the environment and natural resources for the well-being of future generations. A king is advised to protect forests, wildlife, and the environment.
9. **Ethical Conduct:** The text emphasizes the need for ethical conduct and self-control on the part of the ruler. A king should be a role model for his subjects in terms of ethical behavior.

These teachings from the "Shantiparva" of the Mahabharata provide a comprehensive guide to the principles of Rajdharma, emphasizing the ethical and moral responsibilities of a king or ruler. They reflect the broader Indian philosophical and ethical traditions that have influenced governance and leadership throughout history.

3. Buddhist political thought: Kingship and the relations between politics and Ethics.

Buddhist political thought, particularly as articulated in various Buddhist texts and teachings, offers a distinctive perspective on kingship and the relationship between politics and ethics. Here are some key aspects of Buddhist political thought regarding kingship and ethics:

1. Righteous Kingship (Dhammaraja): Buddhist political thought envisions a concept of righteous kingship, where a ruler is expected to govern with compassion, wisdom, and adherence to ethical principles. Such a king is often referred to as a "Dhammaraja." The Dhammaraja is not merely a political leader but a moral exemplar who upholds dharma (righteousness) and fosters the well-being of the people.

2. Ethical Conduct of the King: Buddhist texts, such as the "Jataka Tales" and the "Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta," provide guidelines for the ethical conduct of a king. These include the Five Precepts, which form the foundation of Buddhist ethics: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants. A king is expected to set an example by adhering to these precepts and promoting moral conduct within the kingdom.

3. The Just Rule (Dhamma): The concept of "Dhamma" in Buddhist political thought refers to the principles of justice, righteousness, and moral law. A ruler's primary duty is to uphold the Dhamma, which involves ensuring justice, fairness, and the welfare of all subjects. This concept is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, who stressed the importance of compassion and non-harming.

4. Relationship with Advisors: Buddhist political thought emphasizes the role of wise ministers and advisors who counsel the king in matters of state. The king is encouraged to seek advice from those who possess wisdom and ethical discernment.

5. Avoidance of Conflict: Buddhism encourages the avoidance of violence and conflict. A king should explore peaceful means of resolving disputes and conflicts. Military action is considered a last resort, and even then, it should be undertaken with compassion and a commitment to minimize harm.

6. Non-Attachment: Buddhism teaches the principle of non-attachment, which is relevant to a ruler's relationship with power. Kings are advised to avoid becoming overly attached to their authority and possessions, as an attachment can lead to corruption and unethical behavior.

7. Benevolence and Welfare: A king's role extends beyond maintaining law and order; it includes promoting the welfare of the people. This may involve constructing public works, supporting education, and providing for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.

8. Universal Compassion: Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of universal compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta). A ruler should extend these qualities to all subjects, regardless of their social or economic status.

Buddhist political thought places a strong emphasis on the moral and ethical dimensions of governance. It envisions a ruler who is not just a political leader but a moral guide and protector of the dharma. The relationship between politics and ethics in Buddhism is intertwined, with the ethical conduct of rulers considered essential for the well-being and harmony of the kingdom.

4. Kautilya's Political Thought: Saptanga Theory of State – Mandala Theory and Diplomacy.

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya, was an ancient Indian scholar, teacher, and advisor to the Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. He is best known for his work, the "Arthashastra," an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economics, and political science. Kautilya's political thought is multifaceted, and it includes several key concepts, such as the Saptanga Theory of State, the Mandala Theory, and Diplomacy. Here's an overview of these concepts:

1. Saptanga Theory of State: The Saptanga Theory of State, also known as the Seven Limbs of the State, is a foundational concept in Kautilya's political thought. It outlines the various components or aspects that together constitute the functioning of a state. The seven limbs are:

a. Swami (King): The king is the central authority in the state. Kautilya believed that the king's primary duty is to protect the kingdom and ensure the well-being of his subjects. He should rule with wisdom and righteousness.

b. Amatya (Ministers): The ministers advise the king and assist in the administration of the state. They are expected to be wise, loyal, and well-versed in statecraft.

c. Janapada (Territory): The territory, comprising the land and the people, is the foundation of the state's strength. It is the source of revenue and resources.

d. Durga (Fortification): Kautilya emphasized the importance of fortifications and military strength for the defense of the state. He believed that a well-defended kingdom is less vulnerable to external threats.

e. Kosha (Treasury): The treasury is crucial for financing the administration, defense, and public welfare. Kautilya provided detailed instructions on economic management and resource allocation.

f. Danda (Military): The military is essential for protecting the state and maintaining order. Kautilya stressed the need for a well-trained and disciplined army.

g. Mitra (Alliances): Building alliances with neighboring states is a strategic imperative. Kautilya advocated diplomatic efforts to create alliances that would enhance the security and interests of the state.

2. Mandala Theory: The Mandala Theory is a concept within Kautilya's political thought that pertains to foreign policy and diplomacy. According to this theory, a state's neighbors can be categorized into concentric circles, or mandalas, based on their proximity to the state. The nature of relations with neighboring states depends on their position within these mandalas:

- **Inner Circle:** States in close proximity are often considered potential threats and, therefore, require a more cautious and assertive approach.
- **Middle Circle:** States in the intermediate ring may be potential allies or neutral parties with whom diplomatic relations can be fostered.

- **Outer Circle:** States in the outermost ring are typically distant and have less immediate impact. They may be potential trading partners.

The Mandala Theory guides a state in assessing its relationships with neighboring states and formulating diplomatic and strategic policies accordingly.

3. Diplomacy: Kautilya's "Arthashastra" provides extensive guidance on diplomacy, including negotiations, treaties, espionage, and statecraft. He recognized the importance of diplomacy in maintaining the interests and security of a state. Kautilya considered diplomacy a vital tool for advancing a state's objectives, both domestically and internationally.

In summary, Kautilya's political thought is characterized by the Saptanga Theory of State, which outlines the key components of state governance, the Mandala Theory for foreign policy, and an emphasis on diplomacy as an essential instrument of statecraft. His teachings have had a profound influence on the development of political thought and governance in ancient India.

5. Medieval Political Thought in India: A broad outline- Zia Barani: Good Sultan and Ideal Polity. Principle of Syncretism.

Medieval political thought in India was marked by a diverse array of ideas and philosophies, influenced by various rulers, thinkers, and religious traditions. One prominent figure from this period is Ziauddin Barani, a 14th-century historian, scholar, and political thinker. Barani's ideas revolved around the concept of a "Good Sultan" and the notion of an "Ideal Polity," as well as the principle of syncretism. Here is a broad outline of these concepts:

1. Good Sultan (Sultan-i-Kamil): Ziauddin Barani emphasized the importance of having a just and virtuous ruler, whom he referred to as the "Good Sultan" or "Sultan-i-Kamil." According to his political thought, the attributes and qualities of a Good Sultan included:

- **Justice:** The Good Sultan was expected to uphold justice and fairness in his rule. He should ensure that the law is applied impartially and protect the rights of his subjects.

- **Welfare:** The welfare of the people was a fundamental duty of the Good Sultan. He should work for the betterment of his subjects, providing for their needs and ensuring their prosperity.
- **Islamic Piety:** Barani's ideal ruler should be a devout Muslim who promotes Islamic values and follows the principles of Islamic law.
- **Effective Administration:** The Good Sultan needed to establish a well-organized and efficient administrative system to maintain law and order.
- **Stability and Security:** It was essential for the ruler to safeguard the kingdom from internal and external threats, providing stability and security to the state and its subjects.

2. Ideal Polity: Barani's concept of the "Ideal Polity" was closely related to the idea of a Good Sultan. He believed that an ideal polity could be achieved when the ruler governed in a manner that aligned with Islamic principles and moral values. The ideal polity would be characterized by justice, well-being, and the general welfare of the people.

3. Principle of Syncretism: One of the notable aspects of Ziauddin Barani's thought was his promotion of syncretism, which referred to the blending or synthesis of various cultural, religious, and political influences. Barani believed that a successful ruler should be open to a variety of influences, including both indigenous Hindu traditions and Islamic principles. This syncretic approach aimed at promoting tolerance and unity among diverse religious and cultural communities within the kingdom.

Barani's ideas had a significant impact on medieval political thought in India and reflected the complexities of the time. His emphasis on the role of the ruler in creating an ideal polity, his promotion of the Good Sultan concept, and his advocacy for syncretism demonstrated his engagement with the sociopolitical issues of the period. These ideas also highlight the interplay between Islamic and indigenous Indian thought in the medieval context.

6. Abul Fazl: Governance and Administration, Kabir: Syncretism.

Abul Fazl: Governance and Administration: Abul Fazl was a prominent Mughal historian, scholar, and one of the "Navaratnas" (Nine Jewels) in the court of Emperor Akbar, the third ruler of the Mughal Empire. His most famous work is the "Akbarname," which is part of the larger work known as the "Ain-i-Akbari." Abul Fazl's contributions to Mughal governance and administration were significant. Here are some key aspects of his ideas:

1. **Centralized Administration:** Abul Fazl was a proponent of a centralized administrative system. He believed in the importance of a strong, centralized government led by the emperor. This system allowed for better control and coordination of various regions and reduced the power of local nobles.
2. **Religious Tolerance:** One of Abul Fazl's most enduring contributions was his advocacy for religious tolerance and a policy of Sulh-i-kul, meaning "peace for all." He encouraged Akbar to adopt a policy of religious pluralism, which aimed to promote harmony and cooperation among people of different religions. This approach was in contrast to the religious intolerance of the time.
3. **Rational and Just Governance:** Abul Fazl emphasized the importance of rational decision-making and just governance. He believed that rulers should act with wisdom, reason, and fairness, considering the well-being of their subjects.
4. **Land Revenue System:** Abul Fazl was instrumental in the development of the "Zabt" system, a land revenue system that aimed to provide a more equitable and efficient method of revenue collection.
5. **Cultural Promotion:** He was a patron of the arts and encouraged the promotion of Persian literature and culture in the Mughal court. He played a key role in the development of the "Ain-i-Akbari," a comprehensive account of Akbar's administration.

Kabir: Syncretism: Kabir was a renowned Indian mystic poet and saint who lived during the 15th century. He is revered in both Hindu and Sufi traditions and is known for his spiritual teachings that emphasized a synthesis of different religious beliefs and practices. Here are some key elements of Kabir's philosophy of syncretism:

1. **Unity of God:** Kabir emphasized the monotheistic belief in a single, formless God who transcended religious boundaries. He believed that God could be worshiped and understood in various ways and by people of different faiths.
2. **Rejection of Rituals:** Kabir was critical of rituals, dogmas, and religious formalities that divided people. He advocated a simple and direct path to spiritual realization that transcended the rituals of both Hinduism and Islam.
3. **Universal Brotherhood:** Kabir's teachings promoted the idea of universal brotherhood and equality. He rejected distinctions based on caste, creed, or religious affiliation and encouraged people to see the divine in all living beings.
4. **Language of Synthesis:** Kabir often used a language that combined elements of both Hindu and Islamic traditions. His verses contain references to Hindu deities, Islamic terminology, and metaphors that transcend religious boundaries.
5. **Spiritual Realization:** Kabir believed that true spiritual realization required a direct, personal experience of God's presence, rather than relying solely on religious texts or rituals.

Kabir's syncretic philosophy had a profound impact on Indian spirituality and inspired the Bhakti and Sufi movements, which emphasized a direct and personal connection with the divine. His teachings continue to be influential and are celebrated in the form of devotional songs and poetry in India.