

REPUBLIC IN ANCIENT INDIA – NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

It is generally presumed that the commonly prevalent system of Government in ancient India was monarchy and instances of republic were either exceptions or aberrations. The paradigm of republic vs. monarchy stems from the history of Europe, where revolt against monarchy led to the rise of republics. The situation in ancient India was very different because no King had any legislative powers. Legislative activity or Law making was done only at the Centres of Learning, which can well be called the Universities of that time. The Kings were controlled by Universities. The paper proposes that Ancient Indian society was a *GANTANTRA* in the sense of GAN + TANTRA i.e. it was a society controlled by thinkers. The author proposes that *GANTANTRA* be recognized as a paradigm of political science different from the European concepts of monarchy and republic.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally presumed that the commonly prevalent system of Government in ancient India was monarchy and instances of republic were either exceptions or aberrations. The view is based on the apparent perception that since there were kings in ancient India, the system was that of monarchy. This paper aims to contest this apparent view and seeks to argue that the system in ancient India was closer to a republic than a monarchy, though it differed from both in many essential matters.

The discipline of Political Science as taught in schools and colleges is based on a paradigm where a state is either a republic or a monarchy. This paradigm is inherently weak in understanding the system which was prevalent in ancient India. This paper seeks to understand the concept of paradigm as developed by Thomas Kuhn¹ and subsequently seeks to show that political scientists have suffered from a paradigm induced blindness that forced them to treat Indian system of governance as a monarchy. An attempt has been made to analyze the system of governance that prevailed in ancient India. The system had

distinct features but was closer to a Republic than a Monarchy. The author has sought to label this system as *GANTANTRA* – distinct from Republic as well as from Monarchy.

Towards the end, author has made a very brief attempt to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of *GANTANTRA* of ancient India. The purpose is not to carry out a detailed and exhaustive study of merits and demerits but rather to arrive at a better understanding of the dynamics of the system as was prevalent then.

This paper is an attempt to build a new philosophical framework for understanding of ancient Indian society. The proposed framework or paradigm will, of course, need to be “refined, extended and articulated”¹ by future researchers.

2. *REPUBLIC vs. MONARCHY*

Oxford English Dictionary² defines *Republic* as follows:

a. A state in which the supreme power rests in the people and their elected representatives or officers, as opposed to one governed by a king or similar ruler; a commonwealth. Now also applied loosely to any state which claims this designation.²

On the other hand *Monarchy* is defined as follows:

2. A state having a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in a single person. Formerly, also, a nation or state having dominating power over all other states. **absolute or despotic m** absolute or despotic m., a government by the absolute will of the monarch. **constitutional m.** (see [constitutional](#) a. 4 b). **elective m.**, one in which the monarch is determined by election as opposed to heredity. **hereditary m.**, one in which the sovereign power descends by hereditary right. **limited m.** (see [limited](#) 2).²

A look at the above two definitions makes a few points very clear –

1. Republic is defined in contrast to monarchy.

2. Republic involves just one essential fundamental condition – the supreme power does not rest with any single individual.
3. Monarchy is based on the concept that the *Sovereign power of the Crown is supreme*. In a monarchy, the King's will is final and though the King may take advice from any person or body, the advice supports the King rather than act as a control or check on the King, who retains complete freedom to act as per his own will.

Variations of monarchy include constitutional monarchy and limited monarchy.

Limited Monarchy is defined as follows:

limited monarchy: one in which the functions of the monarch are exercised under conditions prescribed by the constitution;²

It is obvious that a limited monarchy involves giving up some of the essential characteristics of monarchy and moving towards becoming a republic. A limited monarchy seems to be somewhat midway between a monarchy and republic. Historically when revolt against monarchy became strong, the monarch gave up his powers but retained the perks of office leading to a limited or constitutional monarchy. Generally speaking, constitutional or limited monarchy is no different from a republic and should be classified as Republic and not as Monarchy.

Governance of a country involves three institutions – Legislature, Judiciary and Executive. In a Monarchy, the King is the head of all three institutions. The King is the law-maker as well as the ultimate judge and is responsible for executive functions. On the other hand, the distinction between the three institutions is an essential feature of republics. The supreme power which rests in the people and their elected representatives or officers in a republic is exercised through these institutions which are supposed to maintain an arm's length distance among themselves. In a monarchy, the Crown's will being Supreme, the distinction between the three institutions (if at all present) gets blurred since a single individual acts as the head of all three.

The two contrasting forms, Republic vs. Monarchy sum up the essentials of the present paradigm of political science.

3. NATURE OF PARADIGMS

The word “paradigm” acquired its present status after the pioneering work (first published in 1962) of Thomas S. Kuhn¹ who postulated that the growth of science is a non-cumulative process. The growth of any science can be divided into two parts (a) normal science and (b) scientific revolutions. Normal Science is the period when a paradigm has been accepted by a large body of practitioners of the science and they make efforts to refine, extend and articulate the paradigm. Scientific revolutions occur when the old paradigm gives way to a new one.

Kuhn defines paradigms as “ ... some accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include **law, theory, application and instrumentation** together – provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research. These are the traditions which the historian describes under such rubrics as ‘Ptolemaic astronomy’ (or ‘Copernican’), ‘Aristotelian dynamics’ (or ‘Newtonian’), ‘corpuscular optics’ (or ‘wave optics’), and so on. The study of paradigms, including many that are far more specialized than those named illustratively above, is what prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice. Because he there joins men who learned the basics of their field from the same concrete models, his subsequent practice will seldom evoke overt disagreement over fundamentals. **Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.**”³ (emphasis added by author).

“A paradigm is what the members of a particular community share, *and*, conversely a scientific community consists of men who share a paradigm”⁴ A paradigm provides a “ ... ‘disciplinary matrix’: ‘disciplinary’ because it refers to the common possession of the practitioners of a particular discipline; ‘matrix’ because it is composed of ordered elements of various sorts, each requiring

further specification.”⁵ Constituents of the matrix include “symbolic generalizations”, “shared commitments to beliefs”, “values”, “tacit knowledge” and “exemplars”⁶.

“Paradigms gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute. To be more successful is not, however, to be either completely successful with a single problem or notably successful with any large number. The success of a paradigm – whether Aristotle’s analysis of motion, Ptolemy’s computations of planetary position, Lavoisier’s application of the balance, or Maxwell’s mathematization of the electromagnetic field – is at the start largely a promise of success discoverable in selected and still incomplete examples. Normal science consists in the actualization of that promise, an actualization achieved by extending the knowledge of those facts that the paradigm displays as particularly revealing, by increasing the extent of the match between those facts and the paradigm’s predictions, and by further articulation of the paradigm itself.

Few people who are not actually practitioners of a mature science realize how much mop-up work of this sort a paradigm leaves to be done or quite how fascinating such work can prove in the execution. And these points need to be understood. Mopping-up operations are what engage most scientists throughout their careers. They constitute what I am here calling normal science. Closely examined, whether historically or in the contemporary laboratory, that enterprise seems an **attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies**. No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed **those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all**. Nor do scientists normally aim to invent new theories, and they are often **intolerant** of those invented by others.⁷ Instead, normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies.”⁸ (Emphasis added by author)

4. PARADIGMS IN SOCIAL & POLITICAL FIELDS

The above discussion of the nature of science applies to all sciences including physical and biological sciences. In fact Kuhn makes use of examples only from physical sciences. It is indeed strange that in physical sciences, where there are no political or racial considerations or biases, all scientific research is “a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education.”⁹ One can well imagine the situation in social sciences where notions of racial supremacy and attempts at cultural imperialism combine with the traditional intolerance and arrogance of scientists. It should come as no surprise that in social sciences, “tacit knowledge” which forms part of the “disciplinary matrix” includes a tacit agreement over political and cultural issues and this has effectively stopped European Whites (and British & American Whites) to even see unique social structures of India and other developed cultures of the world except in terms of their own social paradigm. Indian social scientists have inherited the paradigms from their colonial masters and have hence turned blind to their own historical realities.

The paradigm of republic vs. monarchy stems from the history of Europe. Rise of republics after the revolts against monarchs was a reaction to the earlier theory of monarch having divine power. For centuries kings and nobles in Europe treated themselves as blue-blooded and considered the rest of the population to be sub-human. Roman Catholic Church supported this world view of the nobles for centuries. Revolt against this world view and acceptance of every human being as intrinsically valuable was a major revolution in European thought. However, this revolution created a paradigm which had a place for just two opposite systems of governance and nothing else. All systems of governance had to be now fitted to one of the two inflexible boxes. White man could not even see any other system.

To understand the devastating effects of this paradigm induced blindness, it will be worthwhile to take a small digression and look at the developments in American continents when the white man landed there. American aborigines had at that time a very well developed culture and a system of community living. They believed that all land belongs to the Spirit (a synonym for Almighty or God) and ownership of land was a sin.

They considered land as one's mother from whose lap one takes as much as one needs. They could not sell or buy land since it was just unimaginable for them and was tantamount to selling one's mother. When whites landed in America, they wanted the aborigines to sell land to the whites. This was a typical clash of the paradigms. Whites were unable to even see the cultural paradigm of aborigines. The whites' cultural paradigm treated individual ownership of land and assets as the ultimate value of life (notwithstanding all that Lord Jesus Christ might have said). And here was a culture where the cultural paradigm did not even have a concept of private ownership of land and all land was community property. This clash of paradigms was not even seen by whites who in their arrogance (and greed) declared themselves to be the owners of the land that in their view did not belong to anyone. The corollary of this declaration was that the aborigine became an encroacher on his own land and, of course, it was perfectly legal and moral to kill all encroachers and trespassers. The genocide that this led to is history. A similar story was enacted in the forest areas of India where the tribals had an identical system of community ownership of forest land and the Britishers declared all forest land to be Government property. The declaration overnight transformed a rich community to a poor community struggling for survival.

The above example illustrates the devastating effects of paradigm-induced blindness in the fields of social sciences.

5. ANCIENT INDIAN SYSTEM - GENERAL

Before we take up an analysis of the Ancient Indian system, it may be worthwhile to specify the time period of ancient India. Some of the key dates are as follows:¹⁰

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| 2700 BC | Harappa Civilization |
| 900 BC | Mahabharata War |
| 550 BC | Composition of the Upanishads |
| 544 BC | Nirvana of Buddha |

| | |
|---------|---|
| 327 BC | Alexander's Invasion |
| 322 BC | Rise of the Mauryas |
| 272 BC | Ashoka begins reign |
| 145 BC | Chola King Erata conquers Ceylon |
| 320 AD | Chandragupta I establishes Gupta dynasty |
| 405 AD | Chinese traveller Fa-hein travels through India |
| 711 AD | Invasion of Sind by Muhammad Bin Qasim |
| 1001 AD | Defeat of Jaipal by Sultan Mahmud |

There may be some disputes about the above dates but such controversies will not affect our arguments. It is obvious that the ancient India spans a time period of about 3700 years starting from Harappa civilization and ending with defeat of Jaipal by Sultan Mahmud in 1001 AD. There is no other country that has such a long period of continuous civilizational history. One of the key characteristics of ancient India was that though there was never one ruler who ruled the complete area which was known by the name of BHARATVARSHA or ARYAVARTA, the area had an identical system of governance that remained by and large unchanged throughout the period.

6. LAWS & LEGISLATURE IN ANCIENT INDIA

To understand the systems prevalent at that time, it is interesting to look at the nature and origin of Hindu Law about which John Mayne said in July, 1878 “Hindu Law has the oldest pedigree of any known system of jurisprudence, and even now it shows no signs of decrepitude. At this day it governs races of men, extending from Cashmere to Cape Comorin, who agree in nothing else except their submission to it.”¹¹ It should be noted that the British who have always (erroneously) prided themselves on uniting India were forced to admit that even after almost eight

centuries of foreign rule, the country “*from Cashmere to Cape Comorin*” was governed by a common set of laws and this was when the country was said to have been divided into hundreds of small kingdoms. Contrast this with Europe where there have never been more than a handful of countries (say maximum fifty countries) and yet there has never been a common set of laws. Each European King made his own laws and his freedom in this respect was said to be the concept of ‘sovereignty’.

The situation in India was very different because no King had any legislative powers in ancient India. Legislative activity or Law making was done only at the Centres of Learning which can well be called the Universities of that time. Varanasi, Ujjain, Nalanda, Rameshwaram and almost all major temple towns were such centres of learning. The word *Rishi* used in Indian texts has often been translated as ascetic or sage but this creates a confusion and lends to the term a super-human aura, a sort of mysticism. An impression has often been created in public mind that the *Rishis* who framed laws did nothing else but sit meditating under a tree or in some cave in Himalayas. Nothing can be more removed from truth. Almost all rishis were married and lived a healthy family life. The best comparison of a *rishi* can be to the modern day university professor who lives in his university campus far removed from the din of the city and devotes himself to intellectual pursuits.

“The Smriti of Yajnavalkya gives a list of twenty sages as lawgivers, ‘Manu, Atri, Vishnu, Harita, Yajnavalkya, Usanas, Angiras, Yama, Apastamba, Samvarta, Katyayana, Brihaspati, Parasara, Vyasa, Sankha, Likhita, Daksha, Gautama, Satatapa and Vashishtha, these are the propounders of the Dharmashastras’. The Baudhayana and others are not excluded. Little is known about the authors and it is impossible to ascertain when they lived.”¹² It is likely that the names of authors represent schools rather than individuals. Formation of new smritis as well as making necessary modifications in the Smritis was carried out for centuries in the name of the founder of the school or in the name of the most illustrious member of the school.

Laws in ancient India were codified in Smritis. It is interesting to look at Mayne’s view in regard to Hindu law – “According to Hindu conception, law in the modern sense

was only a branch of Dharma, a word of the widest import and not easily rendered into English. Dharma includes religious, moral, social and legal duties and can only be defined by its contents. The Mitakshara mentions the six divisions of Dharma in general with which the Smritis deal; and the divisions relate to the duties of the castes, the duties of orders of ASRAMAS, the duties of orders of particular castes, the special **duties of kings** and others, the secondary duties which are enjoined for transgression of prescribed duties; and the common duties of all men. [Mitakshara on Yajn. I, 1(Setlur's Edn., p4); Varnadharmā, asramadharmā, varnasramadharmā, gunadharmā, nimittheadharmā and sadharanadharmā. ...]"¹³ (emphasis added by author) The interesting feature that is central to our discussion is that the Smritis inter alia provided for the duties of Kings. This obviously implies that any king was governed by the Smritis that were drafted not by himself or by his predecessors but by bodies of intellectuals.

A king was prohibited from becoming a law-maker or even interpreting the law. However after the 10th century, when the invasion of Islam led to a destruction of the famous Universities of India, some kings, as an attempt to safeguard knowledge, either took upon themselves or encouraged their ministers to take up the task of writing Commentaries and Digests of the Smritis. "A commentary on the Code of Manu was written in the 11th century by Dhareshwava or King Bhoja or Dhara in Malwa. A little later, Vijnanesvara wrote his famous Mitakshara on the Smriti of Yajnavalkya under the auspices of King Vikramarka or Vikramaditya of Kalyan in Hyderabad. King Apararka of Konkan, wrote his commentary on the Yajnavalkya Smriti in the 12th century. Jimutavahana, the author of the Dayabhaga, which is as well-known as the Mitakshara, was, according to tradition, either a very influential minister or a great judge in the court of one of the Bengal Kings. Chandesvara, the author of the Vivada Ratnakara, was the Chief Minister of a King of Mithila in the 14th century. Madhavacharya, the great Prime Minister of the Vizianagar Kings, wrote his Parasara Madhaviyam in the same century. About the same time, Vivesvarabhata wrote his Subodhini, a commentary on the Mitakshara and a treatise named Madana Parijata under the order of King Madanapala of Kashtra in Northern India who was also responsible for the recovery of the commentary of Medhatithi on Manu. Lakshmi Devi, a Queen of

Mithila, caused Mitramisra to compose his Vivadachandra just about the period. In the 15th century, Vachaspatimisra, who was himself a descendant of King Harasinha Deva of Mithila, wrote the Vivadachintamani under the auspices of King Bhairavendra, a ruler of Mithila. King Pratapa Rudra Deva of Orissa wrote the Sarasvati Vilasa. Nandapandita, the author of the Dattaka Mimamsa, wrote a commentary on the Vishnu Smriti, called the Vaijayanti under the auspices of an influential chief, Kesavanayaka alias Tammasansyaka. Nilakantha, the author of the Vyavyahara Mayukha, composed it under the orders of Bhagavanta Deva, a Bundella chieftain who ruled at Bhareha, near the Jumna. Mitramisra composed his Viramitrodaya by the command of Virasinha, the ruler of Orchcha and Datia.”¹⁴

The key points that emerge from the above account are as follows:

- a) As late as 15th century, no Hindu King or his minister(s) in India would dare to make any laws.
- b) There is no commentary or Digest that is dated before 1000 AD. Apparently when the schools were still functioning and acting as constant reference points for interpretation of the Law, it was not felt necessary to write a commentary.
- c) During the period that is classified as ancient in Indian history i.e. upto 1000AD Kings and their ministers had neither the power to make any Laws nor the power to interpret Laws.

Surprisingly this tradition continued into the Islamic period. Islamic rulers were apparently happy to let things continue smoothly as they were going, although they destroyed the schools of learning in the name of religion. To once again quote from Mayne’s “Even after the establishment of the Mohammadan rule in the country, the Smriti law continued to be fully recognized and enforced. Two instances will serve. In the 16th century, Dalapati wrote an encyclopaedic work on Dharmasastra called the Nrisimha-prasada. He was a minister of the Nizamshah Dynasty of Ahmednagar which ruled at Devagiri (Dowlatabad) and wrote his work, no doubt, under the auspices of the Mohammadan ruler, who is extolled in

several stanzas. Todarmalla, the famous finance minister of the Moghul Emperor Akbar, compiled a very comprehensive work on civil and religious law known as Todarananda.”¹⁴

7. JUDICIARY IN ANCIENT INDIA

“Both the Arthashastra and the Dharmasastras establish the fact that the King was the fountain of justice. In addition to the King himself as a court of ultimate resort, there were four classes of courts. **The King’s court was presided over by the Chief Judge**, with the help of counsellors and assessors. There were three other courts of a popular character called **PUGA**, **SRENI** and **KULA**. These were not constituted by the King. They were not, however, private or arbitration courts but **people’s tribunals** which were part of the regular administration of justice and their authority was fully recognized. PUGA was the court of fellow-townsmen or fellow-villagers, situated in the same locality, town or village, but of different castes and callings. SRENI was a court of judicial assembly consisting of the members of the same trade or calling, whether they belonged to the different castes or not. KULA was the judicial assembly of relations by blood or marriage. Kula, Sreni, Puga and the court presided over by the Chief Judge (PRADVIVAKA) were courts to which persons could resort for the settlement of their cases and where a cause was previously tried, he might appeal in succession in that order to the higher courts. As the Mitakshara puts it, ‘In a cause decided by the King’s officers although the defeated party is dissatisfied and thinks the decision to be based on misappreciation the case cannot be carried again to a Puga or the other tribunals. Similarly in a cause decided by a Puga, there is no resort to Sreni or Kula. In the same way in a cause decided by a Sreni, no recourse is possible to a Kula. On the other hand, in a cause decided by Kula, Sreni and other tribunals can be resorted to. In a cause decided by Sreni, Puga and the other tribunal can be resorted to. And in a cause decided by a Puga the Royal Court can be resorted to’. These inferior courts had apparently jurisdiction to decide all law suits among men, excepting violent crimes.”¹⁵

From the above account of the judicial system in ancient India, the following points may be noted:

- a) King was supposed to be a fountain of justice in a figurative manner. The actual dispensation of justice was done by a complex system consisting of a hierarchy of people's tribunals and the Royal Court headed by the Chief Judge.
- b) People at large participated in the dispensation of justice through Kula, Puga and Sreni.
- c) There was more than an arm's length distance between the persons exercising the legislative function (the universities as discussed above) and the judicial system.
- d) King's will had no role to play in the dispensation of justice and it was neither possible for him to show any favours or disfavours in matters involving justice. We have seen earlier that King's will had no role in the legislative function also.

8. *ROLE OF KINGS IN ANCIENT INDIA*

From the above discussion as well as from other historical data, the following observations can be made about the role of Kings in ancient India.

- a) A King was supposed to be responsible for execution of the legislative will and administration in his kingdom.
- b) A King had no direct or indirect legislative powers.
- c) A King was supposed to be the "fountain of justice" but he had no direct role in the judicial process where an elaborate system of judiciary consisting of royal courts and people's tribunals was operational.
- d) In ancient India, a King and his ministers could not even act as interpreters of law. However this changed in medieval times when Kings started patronizing the writing of commentaries and digests.

- e) King was responsible for defence of his kingdom from external aggression.
- f) Providing of public services like education, healthcare etc. was not a duty of King's employees but was done by persons who considered it their vocation or calling. Payment of charges for these services was a cess on agricultural and other produce directly from the farmers & producers to the service-providers. The rate of this cess was not decided by the King but was decided by the Smritis.
- g) Rate of taxes (payable to King) was also not decided by the King but was fixed by Smritis. The royal machinery was responsible for collection of taxes.
- h) A King was supposed to use the taxes in a manner provided by the Smritis but it is likely that the Smritis provided some freedom to the King in this.

The picture that emerges from the above observations is very different from the image of a King in Europe, where based on the theory of divine power of the King, '*Sovereignty of the Crown is supreme*' and '*A King is always right*' were the well-accepted rules. A ritual that was carried out at the time of coronation of any Hindu King (until very recently) illustrates the position of the King in ancient India. After the coronation, the crowned King declares that he is all powerful. As soon as he declares his acquired power, the *Rajguru* (the chief representative of the University) hits him with a *Dand* (a wooden rod) and tells him that Dharma and not he is the most powerful. The act of hitting him with a *Dand* is a symbolic punishment to remind him of his subordination to the Law as decided by the intellectual class. This is unimaginable in the coronation of a European King.

9. ANCIENT SYSTEM & THE PRESENT PARADIGM

The system prevalent in ancient India may well be classified as a Limited Monarchy but it is obviously inappropriate to classify the system as Monarchy, since it lacked all the essential characteristics of a monarchy. On the other hand, it may be appropriate to classify the system as Republic since it had the following characteristics of a Republic:

- a) Sovereign power of the Crown was not supreme.

- b) The King's will was not final.
- c) There existed a system of checks and balances to control the King, who retained a very limited freedom to act as per his own will.
- d) An independent legislature
- e) An independent judiciary
- f) Clear distinction between the Legislature, Judiciary and Executive with more than an arm's length distance between them.

While classifying the system as republic, we must keep in mind that a republic need not always be democratic. Fascist and autocratic regimes have also been classified as republics. **Compared to many of the modern day republics, the ancient Indian system was a true republic and classifying it as monarchy is a mistake that social and political scientists must correct without any delay.**

On the other hand, there is an argument that the mere existence of a hereditary system of Kings means that the system cannot be classified as republic. The proponents of this argument are likely to be willing to classify the system as Constitutional Monarchy but will not like to accord it the status of Republic.

It may also be argued that since there was no constitution which ruled the conduct of Kings but an ever-changing body of Smritis, it is not appropriate to call the system as Constitutional. The fact is that the Kings were controlled by Universities and a structure consisting of Brahmins that reported to the Universities and not to the Kings.

It is difficult and may be impossible to force historical realities "into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm"⁸ of republic vs. monarchy supplies. The traditional response of the academic world has been to refuse to look at the anomalies and to blindly classify the ancient Indian system as Monarchy just because there were Kings. The distortions that this paradigm-induced blindness has caused are too numerous to report. This is a classic situation that calls for development of a new paradigm in the field of political science.

10. *ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES*

Before discussing about the new paradigm that is better suited to the ancient Indian system, it will be worthwhile to digress and have a peep at the history of development of democracy in modern world.

The advent of democracy in modern world is often traced to French Revolution of 1789. Justice, Liberty, Equality & Fraternity – the values declared by the assembly constituted after the French Revolution – have inspired generations of modern political activists across the world. Yet, the revolution failed to secure for its people the values that it propounded. The leadership that the revolution produced led to devastation of Europe under Napoleonic ambitions. Its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were quickly trampled upon. **The evolution of a truly “liberal” democracy after the French Revolution involved a role of universities in governance.**

Wilhelm Humboldt, who is considered as father of Classical Liberalism and who influenced thinkers like John Stuart Mill, founded the University of Berlin in 1810. The ideas expressed in his book “The Limits of State Action” and his ideas about higher education became the turning point of the evolution of the concept of democracy as liberal democracy by providing for a role to universities in governance. It was virtually Humboldt revolution. In all western democracies today, renowned universities – the seats of learning or “think tanks”, to use a fashionable modern day term – play a key (though at times limited) role in various matters pertaining to state policies.

The development of the role of universities in governance is less than two centuries old in Western world. However, this role was well developed and institutionalized in ancient India. Humboldt revolution produced (or at least intended to produce) a system where the key decisions of governance are taken at universities while the political class is responsible for implementation of the decisions. In other words, this means that the legislative and judicial functions are taken away from the political class. This is identical to the system of ancient India with just one difference that in the present western democracies, the persons who control the administrators are elected while in ancient India such persons acquired their positions either by hereditary or were selected by some

process or in some rare cases elected. The difference between the Humboldt system and the ancient Indian system is minor while the common ground (role of universities) is crucial and can be the defining basis for our new paradigm.

11. THE NEW PARADIGM

Republic is defined as “A state in which the *supreme power rests in the people* and their elected representatives or officers” and Monarchy is defined as “A state having a form of government in which the *supreme power is vested in a single person*”. A new paradigm of governance will necessarily involve a system where the power neither rests with the people nor with a single person. The system that will sum up the Humboldt system as well as the ancient Indian system can well be defined as “*A state in which law making and interpretation is influenced or controlled by independent institutions (and persons) of learning*”.

There can be various possible names for such a state where institutions of learning have an important and vital role in the public life. The author’s suggestion is to use the word “**GANTANTRA**” for the system defined above. **GANTANTRA** has been used as Hindi translation of the word ‘Republic’ in independent India without any etymological studies being carried out about the word.

GANTANTRA is composed of two words **GAN** and **TANTRA**. Sanskrit Dictionary¹⁶ defines two different word **GAN** and **GANAH**. For the readers conversant with Devanagari script – **GAN** has a *halant* at the end which means that the last letter is devoid of a vowel while **GANAH** has the vowel ‘:’ at the end. Both words are distinct and should not be taken as synonyms. **GAN** means to count, to think, to put in categories, to pay attention, to apply mind, to estimate and to add. The word for mathematics in Sanskrit is **GANIT** which is derived from **GAN**. **GANESH** is also derived from **GAN** and it is well known that **GANESH** is the *devata* (Lord) of *budhi* (wisdom). On the other hand, **GANAH** means collection, group, followers, a community formed for a common purpose and a division of the army consisting of 27 elephants, 27 chariots, 81 horses and 135 soldiers on foot. **GANAH** has also been used for the servants of *Shiva* who are under the

supervision of Ganesh. It is beyond the scope of this paper to carry out an etymological analysis of the connection between the two words GAN and GANAH. Yet, it is obvious that the two words have entirely different meanings and must not be confused with each other.

When the word *GANTANTRA* is used as a translation of Republic, the *sandhi-vichhed* (splitting of a word) of *GANTANTRA* is done as GANAH + TANTRA. This is obviously wrong and violates all rules of grammar of Sanskrit. The correct grammatical *sandhi-vichhed* (splitting of a word) of *GANTANTRA* is GAN + TANTRA. In the former case, *GANTANTRA* means collective rule of the group while in the latter case, it means a system where thinking and application of mind are the central theme of the society. The ancient Indian society was a *GANTANTRA* in the latter sense of the term i.e. it was a society controlled by thinkers and not by hereditary monarchs.

Adoption of the word *GANTANTRA* (in the sense of GAN + TANTRA) for the new paradigm will not only help us understand ancient India but will also give a new direction to political science in the modern world – a direction that was just hinted at by Humboldt and in which the major democracies of the world have moved during the past two centuries.

12. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

It is not the subject of this paper to discuss in any detail the strengths and weaknesses of *GANTANTRA*. Yet, some brief observations about *GANTANTRA* in ancient India will help put the issues in perspective.

- a) The system remained in active operation for more than 3000 years upto the invasion and conquest by West Asian invaders who destroyed the institutions of learning and therefore destroyed the foundations of the system. Surprisingly, even after the foundation had been destroyed, the system continued to have a strong influence upto the beginning of British rule. In 1878, Mayne wrote, “The Kings and subordinate rulers of the country, ***whatever their caste, race or religion***, found it politic to enforce the law of the Smritis ...”¹⁴ (emphasis

added by author). **There can be no stronger proof of the strength of the system that for centuries even Muslim Kings found it expedient to continue the traditions of the system.**

- b) The system of *GANTANTRA* was a **flexible system which allowed territorial expansion**. Any King could accept to be a part of the *GANTANTRA* without giving up his status as a King. *BHARATVARSH* was the name given to that territory which accepted the authority of the GAN or the directions from the centres of learning. India as a country was not united by the British but by the common Law of Smritis since ancient times.
- c) The flexibility of the system allowed **regional and community variations** of laws while prescribing some common laws. This can be seen by co-existence of city based communities, villages as well as forest dwellers – each following a different set of social practices.
- d) The system must have been **immensely popular** and would have led to **all-round prosperity**. There can be no other explanation for the comment by Mayne “At this day it governs races of men, extending from Cashmere to Cape Comorin, who agree in nothing else except their submission to it.”¹¹ The prosperity that the system generated was responsible for attracting hordes of invaders initially from West Asia and later from Europe.
- e) *GANTANTRA* created the world’s first and possibly the **largest common market of ancient world** where goods, services and men could move freely. The prosperity that this would have led to can well be imagined.
- f) *GANTANTRA* in India created a system which needed **minimum centralized bureaucratic intervention**. The system was **highly efficient** in terms of collecting and utilization of revenue for public services since the services were not provided by State but instead there was a direct relationship between the provider and users of services. This led to a low rate of taxes which spurred growth and prosperity.

- g) By reducing the role of Kings, a system was created where **the person on the throne made little or no difference to the common man**. Life continued unaffected even though there was change at the top. Wars were small affairs that affected the royal families but did not adversely affect the common man. This was a great advantage since this led to the country's resources being used for productive purposes. However, this strength of the system proved to be its biggest weakness.
- h) Peace has a tendency to make people complacent. Absence of major wars led the Kings to ignore defence and development of **defence related technology**. Moreover, the centralization at the level of laws **did not produce a unified army**. This led to a weak defense against external aggression. Moreover, there was also a case of paradigm-induced blindness. The common man took wars to be small games that were played by Kings and royals, which did not make any difference to his life. A war would generally lead to the person on the throne changing but would not mean any other change. This led the common man (and possibly the intellectual class) to **erroneously presume that even if an external invader conquered, it will not matter much**. He failed to realize that the external invader was unlike anyone from the system. The inability to even see a different paradigm meant that the country was ill prepared to face it. These factors combined together to cause the country to lose its independence.

The above observations are given without any historical data and references since the above are not central to the theme of this paper but are only intended to put the paradigm of *GANTANTRA* in a perspective.

13. CONCLUSION

Republic of India was not founded on 26th January, 1950 and the British did not unite India. **India has been a republic since times immemorial** and if the academic world has failed to see the country as a republic it is because of the weakness of the paradigm of present day political science.

It is necessary to define a new paradigm of state different from republic as well as monarchy. *GANTANTRA* has been proposed as the new paradigm of state where law making and interpretation is influenced or controlled by independent institutions (and persons) of learning. **Ancient India was a *GANTANTRA* in true sense of the word.**

14. FURTHER WORK

“A paradigm is rarely an object for replication. Instead, like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions. To see how this can be so, we must recognize how very *limited in both scope and precision* a paradigm can be at the time of its first appearance.”⁸ (emphasis added by author). No one other than the author can be more acutely aware of the limitations in scope as well as in precision of the paradigm proposed in this paper. It will need substantial work by a large number (possibly generations) of scientists and historians to substantiate the paradigm. The work will have to concentrate on “three classes of problems – determination of significant fact, matching of facts with theory, and articulation of theory”¹⁷.

The author is neither a historian nor a political scientist. As a person who considers philosophy as his vocation (calling), the author has taken a philosopher’s perspective. Science and history have to take over from philosophy and continue this exercise of building a new political paradigm.

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