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Dr. Victor Babu Koppula

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Department of Philosophy

Andhra University – Visakhapatnam -530 003

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*Sucharitha : A JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION*



◇ Editorial		
◇ Ethics in Teacher's Education: A Philosophical Analysis <b>Naznin and A K Behura</b>	1	
◇ The Philosopher King : An Indian Point of View <b>Desh Raj Sirswal</b>	12	
◇ Who is that God Saturn Found in the Works of Sri Sri? A Post Modern Perspective <b>Capt. Ch. Naveen Kumar and A. Bala Sowri</b>	20	
◇ Corruption : Causes and Impact <b>S.K. Singh</b>	26	
◇ Nature of Axioms <b>Aamir Riyaz</b>	34	
◇ Ecocentrism: An Environmental Solution <b>Pankojini Mulia, A K Behura and Sarita Kar</b>	47	
◇ World Crisis and The Law of Service: Gandhian Vision <b>Poulami Chakraborty</b>	58	
◇ Stress among the Teachers in the Development of Quality Teaching <b>Sreenivasa Rao Borra</b>	65	
◇ Making Childrens in Sound Through Mid-Day Meal Program in Andhra Pradesh <b>Kalla Rambabu</b>	76	
◇ An Exploratory Study on Selected of Work Ethic in The Contemporary Society <b>Bandi Vijaya Kumar</b>	89	
◇ Education Institutions as Centers to Produce Qualitative Leaders <b>Kothapalli Madhava Kumar</b>	92	
◇ Dwipadha Kavitha Pithamahuni Rachanalu- Janajeevana Veedhanam <b>P.Chinnarao</b>	102	

**CONTENTS**

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## THE PHILOSOPHER KING : AN INDIAN POINT OF VIEW

**Dr. Desh Raj Sirswal**

Assistant Professor (Philosophy)

P.G.Govt. College for Girls, Sector-11, Chandigarh

The celebrated Greek philosopher Plato had dreamed of a philosopher-king to rule his ideal state. Keeping in socratarian tradition Aristotle said in similar way "it is better for a city to be governed by a good man than even by good laws ". According to Plato, "The philosopher is he who has in his mind the perfect pattern of justice, beauty, truth; he has the knowledge of the eternal; he contemplates all time and all existence; no praises are too high for him."<sup>1</sup> Presently the world is facing leadership crisis. We do not find a humanitarian global mindset of leaders in present times and that is the reason that this world despite of so many material developments is facing the crises of ethics, values and humanity. In the light of these insightful quotes of Greek thinkers. Here I am going to discuss about the idea of the

philosopher king or *Rajrishi* in Indian context. *Rajarshi* is an ancient Indian concept of ideal leadership is offered as a solution for the modern world.

### The Philosophic State by Plato

Before going to Indian context we should know the interpretation and ideas of Plato regarding the philosopher king and his ideas of the ideal state. The myth of the Cave found in Plato's dialogue the *Republic*. In this dialogue Plato also presents a picture of the "ideal state", that is to say an imaginary, ideal, or what we would call a Utopian, state. Briefly, we could say that Plato believed the state should be governed by philosophers. He bases his explanation of this on the construction of the human body. The following is a beautiful





interpretation of his ideas by a novelist:<sup>2</sup>

### Parts of Human Body

According to Plato, the human body is composed of three parts; the head, the chest, and the abdomen. For each of these three parts there is a corresponding faculty of the soul. Reason belongs to the head, will belongs to the chest, and appetite belongs to the abdomen. Each of these faculties also has an ideal, or 'virtue'. Reason aspires to wisdom, Will aspires to courage, and Appetite must be curbed so that temperance can be exercised. Only when the three parts of the body function together as a unity do we get a harmonious or "virtuous" individual. At school, a child must first learn to curb its appetites, then it must develop courage, and finally reason leads to wisdom.

### The Conception of Ideal State

Now, Plato imagines a state built up exactly like the tripartite human body. Where the body has chest, and abdomen, the State has rulers, auxiliaries, and laborers

(farmers, for example). Here Plato clearly uses Greek medical science his in model. Just as a healthy and harmonious man exercises balance and temperance, so a "virtuous" state is characterized by the everyone knowing their place in the overall picture. Like every aspect of Plato's philosophy, his political philosophy is characterized by rationalism. The creation of good state depends on its being governed with reason. Just as the head governs the body, so philosophers must rule society.

Let us attempt a simple illustration of the relationship between the three parts of man and the state in the following manner:

BODY	SOU L	VIRTU E	STATE
Head	Reason	Wisdom	Rulers
Chest	Will	Courage	Auxilia ries
Abdom en	Appet ite	Tempera nce	laborer s





## Comparisons of Plato and Hindu Caste-System

Plato's ideal state is not unlike the old Hindu caste system, in which each and every person has his or her particular function for the good of the whole. Even before Plato's time the Hindu caste system had the same tripartite division between the auxiliary caste (or priest caste), the warrior caste, and the laborer caste. Nowadays we would perhaps call Plato's state totalitarian. But it has worth nothing that he believed women could govern just as effectively as men for the simple reason that the rulers govern by virtue of their reason.

After visited the comparison we found something interesting in Plato's philosophy. He asserted, that women have exactly the same powers of reasoning as men, provided they get the same training and is exempt from child rearing and housekeeping. In Plato's ideal state, rulers and warriors are not allowed family life or private property. The rearing of the children is

considered too important to be left the individual and should be the responsibility of the state. Here it is also implying that Plato was the first philosopher to advocate state-organised nursery schools and full-time education.

## Indian Culture

Indian ethos has a very rich and old tradition which is more than 3500 years old. Much of these ethos are derived from the ancient Indian scriptures like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Manusmriti*, *Arthashastra*, etc.<sup>3</sup> In these scriptures we can find ideas related to society, ideals of a state, qualities of a good ruler etc. According to Kautilaya there are seven pillars for an Organization:

1. The King (The leader)
2. The Minister (The manager)
3. The Country (Your market)
4. The Fortifid City (Head office)
5. The Treasury
6. The Army (Your team)
7. The Ally (friend / consultant)<sup>4</sup>





### Rajarshi Leadership<sup>5</sup>

The Indian concept of leadership is based on the 'Rajarshi' model which is a combination of "Raja" and "Rishi". Rishi (seer, visionary) is the base and Raja (who ensures the happiness of the people) is the superstructure.

#### Characteristics of a Rishi:

- a) Gives priority to 'ROLE' over 'SELF' (e.g. role of Raja in Sri Ram in the Ramayana while banishing Sita).
- b) Translates cosmic order into social order. Cosmic order has four components: wisdom, power, protection and work. These were translated into - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.
- c) The King has solitude, silence and sincerity in his character. Silence+solitude has produced wisdom leaders who are called *Rajarshi* in Indian tradition.

Ideal king is one who behaves like a sage monarch (Rajrishi). Ideal king is one who is ever active in promoting the yogakshema of the people and who endears himself to

the people by enriching them and doing good to them. The word yogakshema, according to Hindu belief, is a combination of yoga (successful accomplishment of an objective) and kshema (peaceful enjoyment of prosperity). An effective leader brings to him and his subjects material gain, spiritual good and pleasures.<sup>6</sup>

The qualities a leader must possess was well laid down by *Chanakya*, the revered scholar in political science who gave this world, the first management text in the form of "*Arthashastra*" which was written around 4th century B.C. According to Chanakya, a King (a leader) should be a "*Rajarishi*" which means a king (a leader) who is wise like a sage. A leader must have self-control having conquered his senses and at the same time should be well-educated in the various branches of knowledge. He should cultivate his intellect by associations with elders and keep his eyes open through spies. He should ensure the observance of *dharma*





(*righteousness*) by the people by authority and should avoid associations with harmful persons and indulging in harmful activities.<sup>7</sup>

Successful and reputed organizations with revered corporate leaders can follow this wisdom of *Arthashastra*, as this *Rajarshi* paradigm clearly advocates a leadership which is both responsible and ethical. It not just advocates self-abnegation of senses but also instructs the leader to nurture his intellect. Finally, the qualities of a great leader along the path of Knowledge can be well laid-down through the eightfold path of Gautama Buddha and also classified in three titles:

### **Wisdom**

1. Right View
2. Right Intention

### **Ethical Conduct**

3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood

### **Mental Development**

6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration<sup>8</sup>

So, wisdom, ethical conduct and mental development are the broad themes on which any leader should work upon. Kautilya's concept of an ideal leader is value based. This makes his approach holistic. He talks of the importance of learning and acquiring the right skill, sets to be an effective leader. Kautilya listed the values which a leader should possess - piety, truthfulness, reliability, gratefulness, liberality, promptness, freedom from vices, long-term vision and conduct in conformity with advice of elders. The essence of leadership, according to Kautilya, lies in its ethical foundations. Since autocratic behavior of the leader is not acceptable to the people, the king (*swami*) should always adhere to the two pillars of the art of governance: justice (*nyaya*) and ethics (*dharma*). For this, he chalks out a detailed plan of daily





activities to be adhered to by the leader:<sup>9</sup>

Kautilya puts down in great details the duties of the king and the manner of governance for the effective, efficient and honest running of the State machinery. Throughout the Arthashastra, Kautilya has emphasized the importance of focusing on the interest of the general public. He was of the opinion that a king shall never act in a manner leading to impoverishment. When people are impoverished, they become greedy and disaffected. Then they either go over to the enemy or kill their ruler. The king needs to be empathic and understand the needs of his subjects and take remedial measures if he feels they are uncomfortable.<sup>10</sup>

Kautilya reminds the king that understanding the complexity of human nature is essential to be an effective leader. Human aspect of leadership requires a balance between reason and emotion. An effective leader needs to accept that people are both good and evil,

with virtues and vices, divine attributes and demonic tendencies. The effective leader needs to develop subordinates in a manner such that the virtues blossom and vices are pushed aside.<sup>11</sup>

In words of Bhagavan Das, "The ancient tradition, the genius, too, of the country, insists on the separation of the two functions. "The man of thought," the wise and ascetic man, the sage and saint, the priest-scientist, should legislate but exercise no executive power. "The man of action," the king, the soldier, the policeman, should execute the law, but exercise no legislative power. When the two functions are combined, selfish ambition becomes rampant, and benevolent wisdom national identity has no chance. When the two are separate, each helps to check any tendency to error or excess in the other. The same man prince of church and prince of land at the same time, has generally proved to be a prince of darkness."<sup>12</sup>





We can consider Rabindranath Tagore's words to draw a sketch of ideal human being in these words, "Each individual has his self-love. Therefore his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another must perish or live in a state of degradation. Only those people have survived and achieved civilization that has this spirit of strong co-operation in them. So we find that from the beginning of history men had to choose between fighting with one another and combining, between serving their own interest or the common interest of all."<sup>13</sup> In conclusion we can say that the conception of *Rajarshi* is a relevant model of leadership in present time and it defined by Indian sages in different manners.<sup>14</sup>

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**Dr. VICTOR BABU KOPPULA**

Editor-in-Chief

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Saraswathi Nivas, D.No: 8-21-4, Chinna Waltair

Visakhapatnam – 530 017, Andhra Pradesh – India

Email : victorphilosophy@gmail.com

**Mobile : 09247782851**