

# THE ART OF ADMINISTRATION IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF MODERN TIME

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The *Rāmāyaṇa*, composed by the sage Vālmīki is the oldest testimonial of ornate poetry in Sanskrit literature. Apart from the delineation of the story of the life of Rāma the *Rāmāyaṇa* also presents a clear picture on the administrative system of that time. The most common form of government recognised in ancient India was monarchy to which the *Rāmāyaṇa* was not an exception.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* furnishes the lessons on the art of administration. On different occasions of the epic, a wholesome guideline on the statecraft has been offered by the sage. The policies of statecraft as discovered in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are very pertinent and those can be regarded as applicable to all time. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* the art of statecraft is well delineated by the king Daśaratha to his son Rāma. Daśaratha delivered a speech on the statecraft to Rāma, on the day before the latter's coronation. Certain guidelines on administration are delineated by Rāma also, while he was in the Citrakūṭa forest, to his brother Bharata. Apart from these, Śūrpanakhā the sister of Rāvaṇa also is found putting some political instructions to Rāvaṇa. In this way, with the story of Rāma's life the *Rāmāyaṇa* is also a record of lessons on politics.

In ancient India, as there was the prevalence of monarchy, the king was the supreme head of the State. The king performed his duties with the assistance of the ministers. So, in the administrative function of the state, the role of the ministers was very significant. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* when Rāma is found instructing Bharata he states that the ministers should be virtuous as well as very efficient in their duties. It was necessary for the ministers to possess certain specific qualities so that the administration of the state could run in a smooth manner. The

ministers according to this epic should be valiant, wise, expert in understanding the inner motif by outward postures and so on.<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays, democratic form of government prevails in India. The persons who are in power are the representatives of the people. The constitution of India directs certain qualifications to be possessed by these representatives of the people of the country. The whole function of the state depends upon these people who are having the Executive power. Article 84 of the Constitution declares certain qualifications for the members of the Parliament.<sup>2</sup> When a person possesses these qualities only then, he has the capacity to hold the office. However, the Constitution has not laid emphasis on the efficiency of these people which was important in the days of *Rāmāyaṇa*. So, following the path of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the modern lawmakers should incorporate certain other criteria which can improve the efficiency of the ministers, which will be beneficial for the smooth functioning of the state.

To maintain secrecy is very important for the welfare of a state. The security of a state on the whole depends upon the maintenance of secrecy. In ancient time also the lawgivers were quite conscious and provided instructions on the maintenance of secrecy in their law treatises. In this regard, Kauṭilya in his *Arthaśāstra* is of the opinion that the hall where act of deliberation is done should have proper enclosure. No people should get the opportunity to overhear the deliberation. It is also to be taken into account that birds and dogs would not get an access to see or hear. Only after ensuring that due care for the maintenance of secrecy has been taken, one should have the entry inside the counselling chamber.<sup>3</sup> In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma wanted to know from Bharata whether he kept the laws secret. According to him, for the success of the king, policies must be perfect and to have the desired result, to maintain the secrecy was equally very important. He advised Bharata that the ministers should not be negligent in maintaining the secrecy. If it was not done then there would have the chance of serious harm.<sup>4</sup> In modern time there is the Official Secrets Act, which was enacted in 1923. It is the anti espionage Act of India. This Act states that if any person approaches, inspects or even passes over a prohibited place, government site or area and discloses any matter which is likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state or friendly relations with foreign states, then he is

punishable with imprisonment for a term which may be extended to fourteen years.<sup>5</sup> Thus, emphasis is laid on the maintenance of secrecy in modern time, which was a matter of great concern in the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also.

In determining the policies of a state and also in taking decisions in other important matters the king had to take the assistance of his ministers. The number of ministers to be involved in this act is found to be specified by the ancient lawgivers. In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya is of the opinion that the number of ministers with whom a king should hold the act of counselling, should neither be too less nor too many. According to him, counselling with a single minister is not enough because in matters of ambiguity it is quite impossible to have a definite opinion. He has suggested consultation with three or four ministers for a proper decision.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Manu is also of the opinion that the king should consult with all the counsellors separately at first. But regarding the six fold policies of the state, consultation should be done by the king only with the brāhmaṇa sacivas.<sup>7</sup> It is rightly stated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* also that the decisions in the matters of the state administration should not be taken neither unilaterally by the king alone nor with many members of his court.<sup>8</sup> So, as instructed by the ancient lawgivers the *Rāmāyaṇa* was also in support of lesser members to be engaged in making the decisions of serious matters.

In modern India, the council of ministers consists of three types of ministers viz. Cabinet ministers, ministers of state and deputy ministers. Cabinet is a small body within the council of ministers. Important political decisions of the government are taken by the cabinet. The ministers of state and deputy ministers cannot attend the meetings of the cabinet unless they are specially invited to attend.<sup>9</sup> So, similar maxim is applied in case of the number of ministers in regard to decision making in ancient as well as in modern time.

Punishment plays a very important role in the administration of justice in a state. It is very necessary to inflict punishment upon a wrong doer. At the same time it is also to be seen whether proper punishment is inflicted or not, so that justice can prevail in a society. Earlier, in the days of *Rāmāyaṇa* a person was to be punished according to the seriousness of the crime. So, in a minor

crime grave punishment was not welcomed. So, it is the instruction of the *Rāmāyana* that the punishment was to be inflicted according to the gravity of the crime. The subjects were not expected to criticise the ministers being vexed by strict punishment.<sup>10</sup> In modern time, there are different forms of punishment which are directed under the Indian Penal Code. This Code declares five forms of punishments viz. Death; imprisonment for life; imprisonment which may be rigorous, simple or solitary; forfeiture of property; and fine. Under what circumstances these five types of punishments are to be inflicted are stated specifically in this Code.<sup>11</sup> In this way on the basis of the gravity of the crime the modern law makers have provided punishments which has been seen to be existed in the days of the *Rāmāyana* also.

The *Rāmāyana* is also of the opinion that a king should not go against law while inflicting punishment. He could not punish anybody in what way he liked. Only according to instructions provided by the lawgivers in the legal texts, punishment could be inflicted.<sup>12</sup> In the modern age, the rule of law is established by the constitution of India.<sup>13</sup> So, those who are in power cannot do things as they like. The Constitution of India has guaranteed the right to equality as fundamental right. In Article 14 of the Constitution, it has been stated that the state shall not deny to any person equality before law and the equal protection of law.<sup>13</sup> Thus, as it was in the age of the *Rāmāyana*, in modern time also, no one, even the supreme head of the state is above the law.

During the time of war certain special kinds of rules were directed to be followed by the parties of the war since the ancient time. In the *Rāmāyana* laws relating to war are well prescribed by the sage. It is declared there that if after the defeat an army was sent away and afterwards he again came back then such enemy should not be treated poorly considering him weak. He should not be treated with negligence.<sup>14</sup> So, enemies after their defeat should be treated humanely. In the modern era, the international humanitarian law promotes humanity in times of war. The Geneva conventions relate to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts and non international armed conflicts. <sup>15</sup> So, from the abuse of war human rights are safeguarded in both ancient and modern time.

In regard to the legal proceedings it is the dictum found in ancient as well as in modern time that justice should be established by all means. So, out of greediness one should not go against the law. It is stated in the *Rāmāyana* that no one should take bribe and make a guilty free. When a thief was caught for the act of stealing and his crime was proved then it was not proper according to the instruction of the epic to let him liberated with the greed of bribe.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays, also, under the Indian Penal Code, to take bribe is a crime. The code declares that if a public servant accepts or obtains or agrees to obtain from any person any illegal gratification for himself or for any other person then he is considered guilty and liable to imprisonment.<sup>17</sup> So, as in the time of the Ramayana, the modern legislators also are concerned regarding the establishment of justice by not letting the wrongdoer free.

Apart from the knowledge of state craft, it is also necessary that certain moral values should be possessed by the persons administering the state. Certain such values are very well prescribed by the *Rāmāyana*. Daśaratha, in the *Ayodhyakāṇḍa* while giving advice to Rama, said about certain qualities to be possessed by a king. According to him a king should take resort of humility and always should be self controlled.<sup>18</sup> One should avoid the sins which are produced from desire and anger. A king should make the office of ministers satisfied.<sup>19</sup> In the *Aranyakāṇḍa* also Śurpanakhā, the sister of Rāvaṇa is found giving instruction to Rāvaṇa on the administration of the state. According to her a king should not act anything according to his sweet will. Otherwise his subjects avoid him like the cremation fire.<sup>20</sup> The king should perform his duties well. He who fails to do his duties properly must have to experience downfall.<sup>21</sup> A king should not be stingy, proud and arrogant. Such a king could not expect that in his time of crisis the subjects would rescue him.<sup>22</sup> Only the king who was erudite, self controlled and followed the divine laws could be successful in ruling the kingdom well. That king who did not punish or reward indiscriminately could earn respect from his subjects. The king should have the power to discriminate the good from the bad. Otherwise he must have to perish.<sup>23</sup> These are certain qualities which a king had to possess. It is revealed from this that apart from having good knowledge of administration, a king

should also be a perfect human being. Only then he could become successful in the true sense. These instructions prescribed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are quite relevant for modern day circumstances also. If persons in power in the present society possess purity in their thoughts and words and perform their duties properly, then only, peace can be expected in the society.

In the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the administrative set-up was designed for bringing peace and happiness in their fullest extent. In the present society also though much effort has been taken by the constitution of India in the national level and by the United Nations in the international level, yet the society is suffering from tension, strife and misery. It is very well observed that the guidelines on statecraft presented in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are perfectly framed for good governance. So it is the need of the hour now to bring out the political as well as ethical doctrines present in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, by making use of which a society full of happiness and peace can be established.

### References :

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2. Article 84, Constitution of India.
3. *Arthaśāstra, 1.15.11*
4. *Ayodhyākāṇḍā, 100.17*
5. Section 3, the Official Secrets Act, 1923
6. *Arthaśāstra, 1.15.133*
7. *Manusmṛti, 7.57-59*
8. *kaccinmantrayase naikah kaccinna bahubhih saha.*  
*Kaccit te mantrito mantrō rāstraṁ na paridhāvati. Ayodhyākāṇḍā, 100.18*
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11. Section 53, the Indian Penal Code.
12. *rakṣyā hi rājñā dharmēṇa sarvō viṣayavāsinah.. Ayodhyākāṇḍā, 100.48*
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18. *Bhūyo vinayamāsthāya bhava nityam jitendriyah. Ayodhyākāṇḍa 3.42*
19. *Ibid., 3.43-44*
20. *Aranyakāṇḍa, 33.3*
21. *Ibid., 33.4*
22. *Ibid., 33.16*
23. *Ibid., 33.20-23*

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