**TOPIC – 3**

**Stages of State Formation in Ancient India**

**Six** main stages in the history of ancient Indian polity can be identified.

1. **The Earliest (First) Stage**: It was that of tribal military democracy in which tribal assemblies, which had some place for women were mainly pre-occupied with war. The age of ***Rig Veda***was primarily a period of assemblies.
2. **The** **Second Stage:** It saw the break-up of the tribal polity under the stress of constant conflicts between the ***rājanyakshatriya***and the ordinary businessman called the ***vis***. The chiefs were helped by the priesthood called the **brahmins.** This stage saw the beginning of taxes and classes or **varnas** which came to be firmly established in the third stage.
3. **The** **Third Stage:** It was marked by the formation of the full-fledged state. There arose large territorial monarchies of **Kosala** and **Magadha** and **tribal oligarchies** in North-Western India and at the foot of the Himalayas. For the first time we hear of large standing armies and organized machinery for the collection of land revenue.
4. **The Fourth Stage/ The Maurya phase**: It saw bureaucratic centralization based on the expanding economic activities of the state. The state with the help of its bureaucracy controlled various aspects of the life of its subjects.
5. **The Fifth Stage:** It was marked by the process of decentralized administration in which towns, feudatories and military elements came to the forefront in both the Deccan and North India. This was partly neutralized by the emphasis on the divinity of the king.
6. **The Last Stage:** It is identical with the Gupta period, may be called the period of proto-feudal polity. Land grants now played an important part in the formation of the political structure and those made by the Gupta feudatories conferred fiscal and administrative privileges on priestly beneficiaries.

**Kingship**

* The king was the most important figure in the *body politic.*
* In the *Saptānga* theory of the state, developed by Kautilya the king has been described as the head or the most important organ of the state.
* The king performed multi-dimensional functions. The king’s functions involved the protection not only of his kingdom against external aggression, but also of life, property and traditional custom against internal foes. He protected the purity of class and caste by ensuring that those who challenged the system were excommunicated.
* He protected the family system by punishing adultery and ensuring the fair inheritance of family property.
* He protected widows and orphans by making them his wards.
* He protected the rich against the poor by suppressing robbery, and he protected the poor against the rich by punishing extortion and oppression.
* Religion was protected by liberal grants to learned brahmins and temples and frequently to heterodox sects also.
* The ideal set before the king was one of energetic beneficence.
* Ashoka was not the only king of India to proclaim that all men were his children, or to take pride in his ceaseless activity for the welfare of his subjects.
* The *Arthashāstra,* despite its advocacy of every dishonest expedient for the acquisition and maintenance of power, puts forward the kingly duty in simple and forceful language, setting an ideal which few ancient civilizations can boast of. Comparing the king and the ascetic it says:

“In the happiness of his subjects lies the king’s happiness,

In the welfare of his subjects, his welfare.

The king’s good is not that which pleases him,

But that which pleases his subjects.”

* Elsewhere the *Arthashāstra* suggests a time-table for the king’s day, which allows him only four and a half hours sleep and three hours for eating and recreation, the rest of the day being spent in state affairs of one kind or another.
* No doubt such a program was rarely kept in practice, but it at least shows the ideal at which the king was expected to aim.
* In all sources the king is told that he must be prompt in the administration of justice and always accessible
* to his people.
* The swarms of guards, ushers, and other officials who surrounded the king’s person must often have demanded bribes, and otherwise have obstructed the access of the subject to his sovereign.
* But the best of Indian kings at all times have made the public audience, or *darbār,* an important instrument of government.
* The ideal before the king in ancient India was that of being a *chakravartī* meaning a king who ruled over the united vast territory of the Indian sub- continent extending from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.
* With the Mauryas this possibility was substantially realised, and was incorporated into the Buddhist tradition and blended with later Vedic imperialist ideas, then taken over by orthodox Hinduism.
* Just as Buddha appears from time to time in the cosmic cycle, heralded by auspicious omens and endowed with favorable signs, to lead all living beings along the road to enlightenment, so do universal emperors appear to conquer all *Jambūdiva* (India) and rule prosperously and righteously.
* The concept of the universal emperor was also known to the Jainas, and in the epics numerous kings of legend, such as Yudhisthira and Rama, are said to have been *digvijayins* or conquerors of all the four quarters.
* According to Altekar the position, powers and privileges of the king have varied from age to age.
* During the prehistoric period, the king was only the senior-most member in the council of peers, when he often owed his position to an election, either real or formal, when there was a popular council *(samiti)* to actively supervise his administration, his position was often insecure and powers were limited.
* After 500 B.C.E. the office of king was elevated to new heights. During this period the king became the effective head of the executive administration and there was no popular assembly like samiti to check him.
* He controlled both the treasury and the military forces, though commander-in-chief and treasurer were under him.
* Ministers were selected by the king and held office at his pleasure. The king presided over the council of ministers and its decisions had to receive royal assent.

**Council of Ministers**

* Ministers or council of advisors have been regarded by ancient Indian political thinkers as a very vital organ of the body politic.
* The *Mahābhārata* observes at one place that the king is as vitally dependent upon ministers as animals are upon clouds, brahmins on the Vedas and women upon their husbands.
* *Manusmriti* points out that even a simple thing appears as difficult if one is to do it single handed; why then attempt to run the complex machinery of the administration without the assistance of ministers.
* The size of this *mantriparishad* or council of ministers varied, and the authorities suggested figures ranging from seven to thirty-seven.
* It seems that the body was divided into two parts *mantrina* and *mantriparishad*.
* ***Mantriparishad***was the large body resembling a modern council of ministers. It consisted of all the ministers.
* ***Mantrina***was a smaller body or a core organisation within the *mantriparishad* largely resembling the

modern cabinet.

* It included the few most important ministers like the ***purohita***(priest), ***senāpati***(supreme commander of army) and *yuvarāja* (the crown prince).
* R.C. Majumdar has compared the Mauryan council of ministers with the Privy Council of Britain and viewed it as a political body which formulated the policies of government.
* In the words of R.C. Majumdar, “It is interesting to notice how the executive machinery in the Indian constitution develops on parallel lines with that of England. As the great National Council of the English gave rise to the Permanent Council which subsequently dwindled into the Privy Council out of which the king selected his confidential ministers and formed the cabinet,
* So the *samiti* of the Vedic period gave place to the *mantriparisad* out of which the king selected a few to form a close cabinet.”
* On the other hand A.L. Basham maintains that "the council was not a cabinet in the modern sense, but an advisory body, with few corporate functions.”
* The council's purpose was primarily to advise the king, and not to govern, but it was no mere rubber stamping body.
* For all authorities stress that councilors should speak freely and openly and that the king should give full consideration to their advice.
* In fact, the council often exerted great powers. It might transact business in the king's absence, and the Ashokan inscriptions show that it might take minor decisions without consulting him.

**Administration**

* Bureaucracy developed as a well organized, hierarchical, cadre-based administrative system.
* *Arthashāstra* of Kautilya the establishment of a large and complex bureaucracy was a remarkable feature of the Mauryan government.
* It mentions **18 *tirthas***who are probably called ***mahāmātras***or high functionaries.
* Although the term *mahāmātra* is used only on a few occasions in the *Arthashāstra,* its real counterpart being **A*mātya***it is familiar enough in Ashokan inscriptions.
* In addition to the 18 *trithas* Kautilya provides in some detail accounts of **27 superintendents** *(****adhyaksas****)* concerned mostly with economic functions and some military duties though social functions are not ignored.
* Although Megasthenes and Ashokan inscriptions have nothing to say on rules of recruitment, Kautilya lays down certain qualifications for the cadre of high officers known as Amātyas, the emphasis being on noble birth.
* The Mauryas developed a well organized bureaucracy. With the help of this centralized bureaucratic structure not only did the government regulate the economic life of the country, but it also took an important part in it.
* All mines including pearl beds, fisheries and salt pans, were owned by the state, and were either worked directly with the labour of criminals or serfs, or let out to entrepreneurs, from whom the king claimed a percentage of their output as royalty.

**Political Ideals in Ancient India**

* Political ideals like liberty, justice, fraternity and nationalism are a product of the modern age.
* If viewed strictly from the lens of the contemporary period, we can't find any systematic expression of these ideals, in ancient India. But seen from a different perspective, ancient Indians did have these ideals in a undeveloped form.
* Showing the importance of freedom the *Vedas* state that independence is necessary for mankind and those who are not independent are worse than dead.
* In ***varnāshrma***institution too, an independent living has been kept in mind.
* A man lived independently during ***Grihasthaāshrama***and when he was likely to be dependent on the offspring coming of age, there is the provision of the older people resorting to ***Vānprastha***and then to ***Sanyāsa****,* again living freely in the solitude of hills and dales rather than living as dependent on their children.
* For disposal of justice the Mauryan state had a system of judiciary.
* ***Dharmasthīya***was the civil court and ***kantakashodhana***was **organised** to deal with a large number of economic crimes.
* The ***Rāmāyana***extols this country as a ***karmabhūmi****,* the land of pious acts.
* This shows the belongingness of people to land and their fellow beings.
* The early seeds of nationalism can be traced in this instance.
* Similarly, the ideal of ancient Indian thinkers was ***vasudhaivakutumbakam***(treating the whole world like a family.) This was the concept of universal brotherhood or fraternity.

**Conclusion:** From the days of Plato and Aristotle, European thought has turned its attention to such questions as the origin of the state, the ideal form of government, and the basis of law, and the politics has long been looked on as a branch of philosophy. From the above discussion, it is clear that ancient India also thought about such questions, but she had no schools of political philosophy in the Western sense.

**Society in Ancient India**

* Society in ancient India had several distinguishing features.
* It was arranged in the form of four varnas.
* The life of individual was divided into four stages or *āshramas*.
* There were rules regarding marriage, family etc.
* The purpose of life was to attain four goals called *purusārthas*.

We will see all these aspects in short to understand the social condition of ancient India.

**Purusārtha**

* The concept of *purusārthas* is the fundamental principle of Indian social ethics.
* The word *purusārtha* means “attainments” or “life purposes”.
* The aim of every person is to attain the four noble ends or *purusārtha.*
* These four *purusārthas* are — *dharma, artha, kāma and moksha.*

1. ***Dharma***

* *Dharma* or the principle of righteousness is considered to be the supreme of the *purusārthas.*
* *Dharma* in Indian tradition is different from the Western concept of religion.
* The word religion has been derived from the latin root *religare* which means “to connect”.
* In this sense religion is a set of principles which connects human beings with God or which connects the this worldly and the that worldly.
* Therefore, religion essentially has some notion of God or some other supernatural entity.
* It is a particular way of worshipping.
* it is the essential foundation of something or of things in general, and thus signifies ‘truth’.
* it is that which is right, virtuous, meritorious, and accordingly

‘ethical’.

* It is that which is required, precepted, or permitted through religious authority, and thus legal.

**CONCLUSION:**

* Therefore, *dharma* in ancient India was a code of conduct for members of the society.
* In the words of Kane, “the word *dharma* passed through several transitions of meaning and ultimately its most prominent significance came to be the privileges, duties and obligations of man of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life”.
* We find various forms of *dharma* in the sense of duty in ancient India like-

1. ***Sāmānya Dharma***— Some general rules which are universal in nature like truth, non-violence and non-stealing.

2. ***Rāj Dharma***— Duties of the king.

3. ***Stree Dharma***— Duties of woman.

4. ***Dāmpatya Dharma***— Duties of husband and wife.

5. ***Varna Dharma***— Duties of varnas.

6. ***Āshrama Dharma***— Duties in the different stages of life.

7. ***Āpad Dharma***— Duties during the crisis period.

1. ***Artha***

* *Artha* is the second *purusārtha.*
* The term *artha* refers to worldly prosperity or wealth.
* It includes all the material means of life.
* Kautilya maintains that wealth is the basis of human requirements and that social well-being depends ultimately on material prosperity.
* Indian thinkers had recognised the pursuit of wealth as a legitimate human aspiration. But *artha* must be acquired by right means.

1. ***Kāma***

* *Kāma* means worldly pleasures or sensual pleasures.
* It refers to some of the innate desires and urges in human beings.
* In the narrow sense *kāma* means sexual pleasure but in the wider sense it involves sexual, emotional and aesthetic life all together.

1. ***Moksha***

* It is the ultimate *purusārtha.*
* *Moksha* means salvation or liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
* It is the summum bonum (Ultimate goal according to which values established in an ethical system ) of human Existence

**Varnāshrama System**

* Various texts talk of *varnāshrmadharma* or the d*harma* of different classes and *dharma* in the different stages of life.
* In ancient India there was a common *dharma* for all members of society which must be followed by all equally.
* But at the same time there were different codes of conduct for different classes or varnas called *varna-dharma*.
* Similarly, it was desired to follow different *dharma* at the different stages or *āshrama* of life called *āshrama-dharma*.

1. **Varnas**

* First reference of varna is seen in the Rig Veda. The tenth chapter of Rig-Veda called Purusasūkta mentions the organic theory of the origin of varnas according to which varnas originated from the different organs of the Prajāpati or the creator.
* Manu62 also mentions that God created various varnas from his various organs.
* He created Brahmins from his mouth, kshatriyas from his arms, vaishyas from his thighs and shudras from his legs.
* Though logically this explanation cannot be accepted but this clearly points out the varying significance of various varnas.
* A much significant feature of this varna system was that the top three varnas—brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas were described as dvija or twice born.
* Their first birth was natural birth. But they were considered to be born again at the time of the pious **yajñopavīta samskāra** when they were invested with the sacred thread and included into the Aryan society as its full fledged member.
* **Brahmins**
* Brahmins were at the top of varna hierarchy.
* They were believed to possess great spiritual powers. Thus they had a divine existence.
* In law, they claimed great privileges.
* Normally brahmins were exempt from execution, torture and corporal (physical) punishment.
* The main functions prescribed for brahmins were learning, teaching and priesthood.
* **Kshatriya**
* The second class was the ruling class described as kshatriya or rājanya.
* Kshatriyas represented heroism, courage and strength. They constituted the warrior class.
* The duty of kshatriyas was protection which had both internal and external aspects.
* External protection meant to protect the society from external invasion where as internal protection meant governance in peace and protection from anarchy.
* Kshatriyas had the right to possess arms.
* **Vaishyas**
* Vaishyas represented the trading and commercial class.
* Though they were entitled to the services of the priesthood and to the ceremony of yajñopavīta, they were third in the social hierarchy.
* According to Manu63 the main task of the vaishya was to keep and maintain cattle. But it seems that later on vaishyas became economically a very important class of society.
* The ideal vaishya possessed the expert knowledge of jewels, metals, cloth, threads, spices, perfumes etc.
* In this sense vaishyas were the ancient Indian businessmen.
* In Brahmanic literature, vaishyas are given few rights and humble status but Buddhist and Jaina literature mention many wealthy merchants living a luxurious life.
* **Shudras**
* Shudras were at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
* They pursued the task of serving the other three varnas. They were not twice born.
* They were deprived of various rights.
* They were in fact second class citizens, on the fringes of Aryan society.
* Shudras were of two types— ‘not excluded’ or anirvāsita and ‘excluded’ or nirvāsita.

The distinction was made on the basis of the customs of the shudra group and the profession followed by the members of the group. Anirvāsita shudras were the part of Indian varna system where as

nirvāsita shudras were quite outside the pale of Hindu society and virtually indistinguishable from the level of people known as untouchables.

* Manu65 prescribes the same punishment for killing a shudra by a brahmin as for killing a cat or dog.
* **Untouchables**
  + A large number of people were deprived of all human rights. Having any contact with them might lead to the fall from grace by a normal Hindu.
  + They were untouchables. Sometimes they are regarded as the excluded shudras whereas sometimes

they are called the **‘fifth class’** (**pancham varna**).

* + Probably, they were the initial tribes who were defeated by the Aryans.
  + Most important of these groups was the **Chāndāla**.
  + They were not allowed to live in the Aryan towns or villages.
  + Their chief means of livelihood were the carrying and cremation of corpses and execution of criminals who were awarded the death penalty.
  + According to the law books of ancient India, Chāndālas should be dressed in the garments of the corpses they cremated, should eat his food from broken vessels and should wear only those ornaments which were made of iron.
  + Later on the four varnas were divided into various subcategories called **Caste**.

1. **Ashrama or the Stages of Life**

* The **A*shrama* system** denotes the Hindu scheme of life according to which different stages in the life of an individual are well ordered.
* The average life span of an individual is considered to be **100 years** and it is divided into four stages each stage having a time span of **25 years**.

These four *āshramas* are:

1. ***Brahmacharyāshrama*** or the **Stage of Studentship** —

* This is the first stage of life.
* It is meant for acquiring knowledge, developing discipline and moulding character.
* This stage starts with the ceremony called ***upanayanama***or investiture with the sacred thread. Now the person became a ***brahmachārina***, leading a celibate (unmarried life) and strict life as a student at the home of his teacher.

1. ***Grihasthāshrama*** or **The Stage of Householder** —

* This stage starts at marriage when the student has completed his studentship and is ready to take up the duties and responsibilities of household life.
* In this stage the individual gets married, earns money and begets children. The individual pursues wealth (*artha)* and pleasure *(kāma)* within the limits of the moral law *(dharma).*

1. ***Vānaprasthāsharma*** or **The Stage of Retirement** from Active Life—

* After discharging all the duties and obligations as a householder, the individual enters into the *Vānaprastha* stage.
* It consists of the third quarter of person’s life.
* In this phase, after retiring from active life, the individual dedicates himself to a life of spiritual contemplation.
* He leaves his home and goes to the forest to become a hermit.

1. ***Sanyāsāshrama*** or **The Stage of Renunciation** or Wandering Mystic—

* This is the last stage of life.
* Now the individual leaves his hermitage and becomes a homeless wanderer *(sanyāsin*) with all his earthly ties broken.
* The ***sanyāsin***aspires and acts to attain liberation only.

**Marriage**

Marriage or ***vivāha***was a very important *samskāra* in ancient India. Marriage in ancient India had three main purposes:

1. Promotion of religion by performance of household sacrifices.

2. Progeny or the happy after life of father and his ancestors and continuation of family

line or *kula*.

3. *Rati* or sexual pleasure.

Manu66 and other law givers have mentioned about eight forms of marriage:

1. ***Brahma Vivāha:***

* This is considered to be the purest form of marriage.
* In this form of marriage the father of the bride offers his daughter to a man of character and learning.
* The daughter who is decked with ornaments and richly dressed is given as a gift to a man of good character and high learning.

1. ***Daiva Vivāha:***

* In the *daiva* form of marriage the father offers her daughter as a *dakshinā* (sacrificial fee) to a young priest who officiates the *yajña* which is arranged by him.

1. ***Ārsa Vivāha:***

* In *ārsa vivāha* father of the bride gives his daughter to the bridegroom after receiving a cow and a bull or two pairs of these animals from the bridegroom.

1. ***Prajāpatya Vivāha:***

* In this type of marriage, the father offers the girl to the bridegroom. But neither does he offer any dowry nor does he demand bride-price.

1. ***Asura Vivāha:***

This is a form of marriage by purchase in which the bridegroom has to give money to the father or kinsman of the bride.

1. ***Gandharva Vivāha:***

This was a marriage by consent of the boy and the girl. Mutual love and consent of the bride and bridegroom was the only condition required to bring about the union.

1. ***Rākshasa Vivāha:***

This was marriage by capture in which the girl was forcibly abducted from her home, crying and weeping and her kinsmen have been stained and their houses broken.

1. ***Paishācha Vivāha:***

*Paishācha* form of marriage is one in which the man seduces by force a girl who is sleeping or intoxicated or mentally disordered.

Out of these eight forms of marriage the first four have been described as *prashasta* or approved or desirable marriage whereas the rest of the four forms have been considered to be *aprashasta* or disapproved or undesirable marriages.

There were many conditions attached with marriage.

* One important condition was that the bride should be a virgin and the importance of this rule lies in the fact that it renders the remarriage of widows difficult.
* In the *Rig Veda* there is some indication that a woman might re-marry if her husband had disappeared and could not be found or heard of.
* *Atharva Veda* mentions that a woman married twice may be united in the next world with her second, not her first, husband. But generally it was not hailed.