



Kingship According to Manusmṛti

Dr.Pankaj Kumar Mahana

Assistant Professor (Guest) in Sanskrit, P.G. Dept. of Sanskrit, Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar, Odisha, India.

Abstract – The Manusmṛti Mānava–Dharmaśāstra believes in an important place in the collection of ancient Indian legal and political texts. The doctrine of kingship, rājadharmā, is one of its most important ideas and is the basis of its political philosophy. Manusmṛti views the kingship as a sacred moral institution, grounded in dharma and upheld by ethical discipline, in contrast to contemporary secular ideas of statecraft. The monarch is not simply a ruler; he is also the living embodiment of justice. He is responsible for keeping societal order, protecting the weak, and preserving cosmic order (ṛta). This dissertation conducts a comprehensive examination of kingship as delineated in Manusmṛti, scrutinizing its theological underpinnings, ethical constructs, administrative principles, and judicial duties. Manu asserts that the king's authority is derived from divine sanction, yet he remains unequivocally answerable to dharma. His authority is not absolute but contingent upon virtuous behavior. The well-known idea of daṇḍa punishment is not considered a way to force people to do things but as a moral tool that is needed to keep society in order. The study also examines the dual character of kingship in Manusmṛti: on one hand, the king is exalted to a semi-divine status, endowed with the powers of major deities; on the other, he is constrained by rigorous moral obligations and subject to rejection if he strays from righteousness. This contradictory but deep idea shows how ancient Indians tried to balance power with responsibility. The study closely examines certain passages from the seventh and eighth chapters of Manusmṛti, utilizing diacritical transliteration and textual references to illustrate the conception of the ideal king as a moral exemplar, a guardian of social classes, and a steward of the law. The Paper also places Manusmṛti's political philosophy within a comparative context, emphasizing its impact on subsequent Hindu political thinking and its significance in contemporary discussions over ethical governance. Finally, the study says that even though the book shows historical constraints and social hierarchies, Manusmṛti gives us a timeless idea of leadership based on duty, fairness, and compassion. Its notion of kingship continues to be a significant intellectual resource for comprehending the moral underpinnings of political authority within the Indian tradition.

Keywords: Manusmṛti, Kingship, Rājadharmā, Daṇḍa, Dharmaśāstra, Ancient Indian Political Thought, Ethical Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kingship has been one of the longest-lasting systems in human history. From a heavenly rule in Mesopotamia to republican ventures in Greco–Roman times, civilizations have tried to make political power seem legitimate in diverse ways. In ancient India, political philosophy developed inside a religious and moral framework, with dharma as the highest standard. The Manusmṛti, written between 200 BCE and 200 CE, is one of the first planned works on social law, morality, and the government.

Manusmṛti combines politics with metaphysics and ethics, which is different from writings that are only practical, such as Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. Being a king is not just a job; it is a holy calling. People think of the king as the center of moral and social order.



2. DIVINE ORIGIN OF KINGSHIP

Manu starts his explanation of kingship by saying that it comes from God. God makes the king by combining several supreme powers. Manu says—

***Indrānilayamāyuktaṃ yamāgnivaruṇais tathā |
Candrārkayoś ca saṃyuktaṃ tejasā jagṛhe nṛpam ||1***

The Meaning of this Verse: God made the king by putting together the powers of Indra, Vāyu, Yama, Agni, Varuṇa, the Moon, and the Sun so that he might reign with divine authority. This verse establishes kingship as a divinely sanctioned institution, ensuring obedience and reverence among subjects.

3. THE KING AS GUARDIAN OF DHARMA

The central responsibility of the king is to uphold dharma:

***Dharmeṇa rakṣito rājā dharmam rakṣati rakṣitaḥ.
Dharmo hi hato hanti dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ ||2***

This well-known saying says that dharma is a two-way street: it protects those who follow it and punishes those who break it. So, kingship is based on moral trust, not power.

4. THE MORAL QUALITIES OF A ROYAL KING

Manu established powerful moral rules for leaders:

***Na tasya kāryam nṛpateḥ svārthe cintitum arhati.
prajānām tu hitam cintyam sarveṣām dharmam āsthitaḥ ||3***

The king must stop being selfish and just fight for the good of the people.

Main qualities:

1. Satya honesty
2. Dama self-control
3. Dayā kindness
4. Viveka discrimination and Nyāya justice

5. DAṆḌA: THE PHILOSOPHY OF PUNISHMENT

The concepts of daṇḍa are one of Manusmṛti's most original contributions to political theory. Manu says—

***Daṇḍaḥ śāsti prajāḥ sarvā daṇḍa evābhirakṣati.
Daṇḍaḥ supteṣu jāgarti daṇḍam dharmam vidur budhāḥ ||4***

Punishment is shown as the watchful protector of society. It is not tyranny; it is organized justice.

6. KINGSHIP AND SOCIAL ORDER

The king is responsible for the safety of all varṇas.

In ancient Indian political thinking, kingship was closely linked to keeping the peace in society. People thought of the ruler as the protector of the whole social structure, especially the four varṇas: Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. Each of these groups was very important to keeping society going. His most important job was to make sure that each group could do its job without fear, unfairness, or being taken advantage of.



The ruler was supposed to keep the peace and protect the Brāhmaṇas so they could study and get spiritual guidance, the Kṣatriyas so they could protect the kingdom, the Vaiśyas so they could farm and trade, and the Śūdras so they could work and make things for society. The sovereign kept the balance of societal functions by protecting each varṇa, which was thought to be necessary for peace and wealth.

This obligation did not mean blindly upholding hierarchy; instead, it meant fairly protecting rights and responsibilities. A fair ruler made sure that no varṇa abused another and that the strong didn't abuse their power over the weak. Ancient texts say that when the king doesn't defend any group, social chaos happens, which leads to strife, injustice, and a deterioration in morality.

In addition to keeping people safe, the king also had to defend their morals. He was supposed to follow dharma, fix social problems, and encourage all classes to act morally. By doing this, he became the glue that held society together, making sure that different jobs didn't cause problems.

So, being a king was not just a job; it was a duty to the people. The king's promise to safeguard all varṇas kept society stable, cooperative, and respectful of each **h other**. This made him the basis of social order and the health of the whole community.

The king is in charge of keeping all varṇas safe:

**Brāhmaṇānām hitam kuryāt kṣatriyānām tathaiva ca.
Vaiśyānām śūdra-vargasya rakṣām kuryāt sadā nr̥paḥ || 5**

Manusmṛti establishes a social hierarchy, positioning the king above sectional interests, so designating him as the universal protector.

7. THE KING AND HIS MINISTERS

Manu emphasizes consultative governance:

**Naikaḥ kuryād yathā-kāmaṁ kāryam rājyasya paṇḍitaḥ |
Mantribhiḥ saha kartavyam dharmārtha-sahitam sadā ||6**

This anticipates the modern principle of cabinet responsibility.

8. THE KING'S JUDICIAL DUTIES

In ancient political and moral thinking, the monarch was not only a ruler but also the highest protector of justice. His main job was to make sure that dharma (law and righteousness) was followed in society. The king's job as a judge was the most important part of good government, because only justice could keep the peace, protect the poor, and keep the strong in check.

People thought of the king as the kingdom's main judge. Even though courts and ministers helped him, he was the one who had the last say on justice. The Manusmṛti, Arthaśāstra, and Mahābhārata are old books that say the ruler must hear matters fairly, without anger, greed, fear, or bias. People thought that a monarch who didn't do justice was inviting moral deterioration and God's anger. On the other hand, a just king gained the devotion of his people and God's blessings.

One of the king's main jobs as a judge was to defend the innocent and punish the guilty. Justice was not designed to be cruel and severe; it was meant to be a fair institution that kept society in order. Punishment (daṇḍa) was seen as essential; however, it was required to be just and compassionate. Before making a



decision, the monarch was told to look into matters thoroughly, ask knowledgeable judges for their opinions, and observe the law. People were told not to make rash decisions since they could hurt trust in the government.

Another important job was to make sure that everyone was treated equally under the law. In a perfect world, the king didn't care if someone was rich or poor, noble or common. The law applied to everyone, even members of the royal family. This approach made the ruler's moral authority stronger and made it clear that the law was more important than the monarch himself.

The king also had to follow religious and customary regulations. The monarch had to keep traditions, texts, and moral standards in mind while making sure that justice was fair in all situations. So, the job of a judge was not just to follow the laws but to use the law in a way that was fair and wise.

The king also had to make sure that people could get justice. People thought that courts should be open and easy to get to so that even the poorest person could get help. People thought that justice was denied when it was delayed; thus, the monarch was told to stop corruption, bribery, and excessive delays in court cases.

In the end, the king's job as a judge was a symbol of his function as the state's moral core. A fair monarch turned his country into a peaceful and prosperous nation, whereas an unfair one spread terror, rebellion, and chaos. So, justice wasn't just a job; it was a holy duty. People didn't judge a king's greatness by how much money or military might he had. Instead, they judged him by how much he cared about fairness, truth, and the law. Justice is a sacred work:

Nāsabhāṃ pravīśed rājā na dharmam na vicārayet.

dharmeṇa nyāyam kurvīta rājā tu bhavati priyaḥ || 7

When a king treats everyone fairly, his people love him.

9. THE KING'S MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Manu boldly asserts that a tyrannical king may be abandoned:

Rājānam yadi pāpiṣṭham dharmā-bhraṣṭam ca jantavaḥ |

tyajeyuḥ sarvadā tasya na sa doṣāya jāyate || 8

This verse introduces an early notion of conditional legitimacy.

10. KINGSHIP AND DAILY DISCIPLINE

The king's life is regulated by strict routine:

Brāhme muhūrte uttiṣṭhet dharmam cintayitum nṛpaḥ | 9

Self-discipline is the foundation of good governance.

11. A COMPARATIVE VIEW

Manusmṛti is less practical and more moralistic than Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. Kauṭilya supports expediency, whereas Manu emphasizes righteousness. But they both think that there needs to be strong but fair authority.

12. CONCLUSION



The idea of kingship in Manusmṛti is one of the oldest and most important ideas on how to run a government ethically in world political theory. People don't see the king as a tyrant. Instead, they see him as a servant of dharma, bound by moral law and accountable for the well-being of his people. His power comes from doing the right thing, and his collapse comes from doing the wrong thing.

Manusmṛti is a law of history, but it nonetheless gives us a timeless idea of leadership in which duty comes before power and politics and ethics are in harmony. In a time when people are more concerned about responsible government, the old idea of the dharmic king still makes people think about the moral basis of authority.

धर्मेण राज्यं स्थिरं भवति।

Dharmaṇa rājyaṃ sthiraṃ bhavati | "

A state stands firm only through dharma."

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