

B.A. 5th Semester (Honours)

Paper: Indian Political Thought I

Paper Code: C-12

Unit V:

Q. Explain Buddhist Political Thought under the doctrine of Agganna-Sutta (Digha Nikaya).

Answer:

Locating Agganna Sutta in Buddhist Scriptures

Time of Buddha: 6th-5th Century

Belong to Shakya Republic, Kosala kingdom (now in Nepal), hence also called Shakyamuni Bimbisara and his son Ajatsatru, early kings of Magadh, of Haryanka dynasty, were his contemporary.

Tripitaka: 3 baskets of teachings

- 1) Vinaya pitaka (basket of discipline)
- 2) *Sutta pitaka (basket of discourse) which includes Digha Nikaya (long discourse). Digha Nikaya includes 34 discourses. Out of these 34 discourses, 27th discourse is known as 'agganna sutta' which talks about origin of family, life, society and state.*
- 3) Abhidhamma pitaka (basket of special discourse)

Agganna Sutta: Cosmic Theory of Origin of life

- Successive concentration and expansion of universe and evolution of life forms.
- Life existed before formation of Solar System (earth, sun moon).
- Floating Ethereal (delicate, body-less, other worldly) and self-luminescent beings lived in bliss.
- First fed only on water—then fed on the savory earth—then fungi—turnip—rice.
- Sex developed—living in secluded hut—private property—fallen virtues such as greed, theft, violence and murder—anarchy.
- Interpretations: eternal and pre existing life, human bodily attributes (sex, beauty, etc) as well as family, private property, crime, punishments, etc are fall from bliss, human life is natural creation as other beings, nothing divine about it.

Origin of Kingship/State:

- With private property and family, conceit, lust, greed, theft, desire, crime, punishment etc. made life miserable.

- Tired of anarchy, people chose amongst themselves the best and most able person to maintain order by punishing the wicked and protect the virtuous.
- In return for this service, people promised to give 1/6th of their 'rice' to the great 'elect'.
Mahasammata.
- State/kingship arose as a punitive institution having monopoly of concern to end anarchy, maintain peace and order.
- Semi-contractual Not Divine: State necessary human arrangement, nothing divine about it.
- Nature of the contract: Only between the people and Government/king, for limited purpose, reciprocal obligation-King to command and protect, maintain order, people to obey, pay tax.
- State of nature and social contract in line with Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau.

Growing Role/Functions of the State:

- From a limited role (maintain peace and order) state developed as an ethical institution drawing its authority from the Dhamma guiding all aspects of people's life- temporal and spiritual-compare Plato's Ideal State.
- **1st Phase: *Mahasammata*:** elected/appointed ruler for limited purpose- maintain peace and order.
- **2nd Phase:** *theory of two wheels/spheres of life- **Ana** (command) and **Dhamma** (righteousness)
*Now, the ruler called **Khattiya-overlord** (Ahdipati) of fields (**khetta**).
* This phase reconciled relation between Buddhist order (**sangha**) and rising monarchical states.
- **3rd Phase:** *state-an instrument of Dhamma, a cosmic force capable of regulating state power and behaviour.
*State becoming an ethical institution guiding people to live virtuous life and attain salvation (nibbana).
* king as protector and promoter of Dhamma.
- All these three phases denote evolution of Buddhist conception of state, how it adjusted itself with social order and real politic of those times.

Nature of the State:

- **Mostly monarchical**-king synonymous with state.
Although many republican states existed- Vajjin, Lichhavi, Shakya.
Buddha himself came from 'Shakya', an republican state.
'Sangha'-Buddhist monasteries were following republican ethos and governed on democratic principle.
- **State absolutely necessary** to maintain the institution of private property and family.

- The state is a sovereign entity. Sovereignty connotes total authority, an ability to reward and punish, capacity to give orders to all and receive orders from none.
- An Ideal State: is described as the territory which is without thorns (akantaka) and untroubled and in which people live in peace, happiness, harmony and without fear.
- Ideal state is rational, ensure social equality and social justice, balanced, progressive, altruistic, and moralistic.
