

Indian Knowledge System: Fostering Balance and Well-being in the Law of Governance

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Abstract

Rendering judgment is nothing but a challenging task. The internal and external ethics are amalgamated under sensory and intellectual discourse. So, to accomplish such a task absolute discipline is required. This research paper explores the hermeneutical approach that influences the higher authority in decision-making. The decision-making mechanism must be well-rehearsed, meditative, and visionary like the legendary figures, King Harishchandra, Dadhichi, Bhishma Pitamah, Yudhishthara etc. Materialistic illusions can cloud the judgment of both ordinary people and judges alike. This paper explores the Indian knowledge system in connection of Mahabharat, and Dandniti (the science of governance). Furthermore, this paper seeks to explore how to maintain and balance wisdom through the principles of the *Yog Sutras* which emphasizes *Chitvritti Nirodha*. If there is a conflict between the mind, body, and senses, true judgment is unattainable. Judgments also serve as instruments of social welfare, enriching society through a healthy and just legal system.

Keywords: *Chitvritti Nirodha*, *Astang marga*, Retributive (*Pratikaratmak*), Deterrent (*Avrodhak*), Preventive (*Nirodhak*), Reformative (*Sudharatmak*)

Introduction

There is a comprehensive space of *Dandniti* in the Indian Knowledge System, and there is divine intervention in procuring the judgment. According to Rajdharm in the *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that Lord Brahma composed the first *Dandaniti*, consisting of one lac chapters. Lord Shiva later reduced this work to ten thousand chapters, calling it *Vaisataksa*. Indra then condensed *Vaisataksa* to five thousand chapters, naming it *Bahudandaka*. Brhaspati further reduced it to around 3,000 chapters, known as *Brhaspatya*. Finally, Usanas abridged the *Brhaspatya* to approximately 1,000 chapters, known as *Nitisara*. Although the original *Nitisara* is said to have had 1,000 chapters, no such text is available today. It is likely that the *Sukraniti*, containing about 2,200 verses, is either a condensed version of *Usanas' Nitisara* or a work expanded by Shukracharya.¹

The study of *Nitisastra* (Law of Governance) began after the end of the Vedic era. Out of four disciplines (*Anvikshiki*, philosophy and logic; *Trayi*, the *Vedas*; *Varta*, economics; and *Dandaniti* (political science and governance), *Dandaniti* was considered the discipline that established the first three and was regarded as crucial for the proper administration of human life and the holistic development of humanity as mentioned in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Over time, *Dandaniti* came to be known as *Rajdharm* or *Rajashastra* (political science). The

genesis of Dandaniti can be found in various ancient texts like the *Puranas*, historical scriptures, *Dharmashastra*, *Arthashastra*, and *Niti Shastra*. However, the most detailed account of *Dandaniti* is found in the *Arthashastra*.

Kautilya also refers to the ancient Vedic sage Ushana, who believed that *Dandaniti* was the only true discipline, and according to him, the proper execution of the **Trivarga** (Dharma, Artha, and Kama) was possible only through *Dandaniti*, which ensures the proper order of religion, economy, and desire in human life. To get rid of the different types of crimes four form of punishment were recognized:

1. **Retributive (Pratikaratmak)**
2. **Deterrent (Avrodhak)**
3. **Preventive (Nirodhak)**
4. **Reformative (Sudharatmak)**

The first, Retributive Punishment was based on the principle of revenge and tit for tat. For example, "an eye for an eye, a hand for a hand," meaning the criminal was given a punishment proportionate to their crime. This concept is captured in the phrase "*Aptadosham Karmakarayet*"³ rupesh sir (one should impose an action or punishment according to the proven fault or crime). The purpose of the Deterrent punishment was to control crime. Under this system, an example like burning someone alive, or cutting off the tongue, used to be set up to create fear. Preventive punishment aims to prevent or curb such actions in the future. According to this principle, suppressive measures are implemented or to give a harsh punishment in front of society to set an example, ensuring that no one else dares to disregard that law. However, Kautilya emphasized that these punitive measures should not be based on the king's wishes but should align with the principles of Dharma and the scriptures. Thus, preventive punishment serves as a bridge between deterrent and reformative punishment, helping to eliminate the harmful elements of crime from society.

Reformative Punishment focuses on the rights of both the victim and the offender for the welfare of society. Punishment aims promote social welfare, which cannot always be achieved through physical punishment alone. Instead, the offender's mental state is assessed, and efforts are made to guide them away from crime and towards the right path. The *Mahabharata* has advocated, "□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□/□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□"⁴ (Root culprit should not be destroyed by sentencing the death penalty. Eliminating someone completely is not in accordance of Sanatan dharma.) A punishment proportionate to the crime should be given, as that suffices for the atonement of the offender's companions. Crime is like a contagious disease; if treated, it can be prevented from spreading in society. For this reason, Bhishma Pitamah also recommended that first-time offenders should receive relatively milder punishments compared to those given for repeated offences.

The king who used to be the absolute of the kingdom had the responsibility to maintain *trivarga* as mentioned above. In the *Santi Parva*, the great sire of the Kuru dynasty has especially focused the dhrama (duty) of a king. Dharma has been not been defined in terms of religion but in terms of "Satya (truth), Ahimsa (non-violance) and Asteya (non-stealing of property created by another), Shoucham (purity), and Dama (restraint)."⁵ which come under the Astanga yoga of Patanjali. Dharma can be achieved by Self-controlled person not controlled by of his senses. To quote from the Santi parva, "If the king is not wrathful, if he is not addicted to evil practices and not severe in his punishments if he succeeds in keeping his passions under control, he then becomes an object of confidence unto all like the Himavat mountains (unto all creatures)."⁶ The decision taken by the king should be unbiased. To quote, "the king should first restrain his self if he desires to restrain others that offend. He should

goes beyond mere austerity. It encompasses the idea of focused, disciplined effort and self-sacrifice for a greater good—whether spiritual enlightenment, personal growth, or societal welfare. The word resonates with the values of resilience, commitment, and inner strength that transcend time and culture.

The next component ***Svadhya* (Self-study)**, is very very relevant in the case of intellectual and spiritual aspirants both. Where one studies for the expansion of intellectuality, the other for the realization of truth. This is the practice of self-reflection, and introspection through the meditation over the texts. Self-Reflection and Introspection emphasizes looking inward to observe and understand one's thoughts, emotions, behavior, and patterns. This introspection leads to greater self-awareness. Through continuous self-inquiry, one uncovers layers of conditioning, ego, and misconceptions, allowing for self-improvement and alignment with one's true nature. Spiritually, *Svadhya* fosters a deeper connection with one's higher self or divine essence. It's a way of peeling away the layers of ignorance and ego to reveal the pure consciousness within. Regular self-study helps the practitioner stay aligned with their spiritual goals, bringing clarity, focus, and purpose to life.

Practically, in daily practice, *Svadhya* can take the form of reading scriptures or inspirational books, chanting mantras, engaging in self-reflection, journaling, or meditation. For a judge by reading different types of law books get alerts to the current law of governance. It also involves being aware of one's thoughts, actions, and motivations, and using this awareness to make conscious choices that lead to growth and alignment with one's values. In a few words, we can say in Patanjali's framework, *Svadhya* is a powerful tool for self-transformation. It encourages both intellectual engagement with sacred wisdom and introspective reflection on one's thoughts, habits, and experiences. Through *Svadhya*, practitioners are guided on a journey of self-discovery that brings them closer to understanding their true nature, fostering spiritual growth and leading toward liberation (Moksha).

The last ***Ishvara Pranidhana* (Surrender to God)**, involves surrendering the ego and personal desires to a higher consciousness, trusting in the divine will, and dedicating one's actions to this higher force. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Ishvara* is described as a special being who is unaffected by the afflictions of the mind, actions, or karma. *Ishvara* is often equated with the concept of a personal God or a universal consciousness that is the source of all creation. Patanjali describes *Ishvara* as a self-realized, perfect being whose guidance can lead practitioners towards liberation. This higher power is often considered a source of wisdom, strength, and guidance. Surrendering to a higher power helps release personal anxieties and stress. It promotes inner peace by alleviating the burden of self-centeredness and control. By dedicating actions to a higher power, practitioners align themselves with a greater purpose and spiritual guidance. This alignment fosters a sense of meaning and direction in life. The practice of *Ishvara Pranidhana* supports spiritual development by helping to transcend ego-based limitations and fostering humility, faith, and devotion.

Overall, *Ishvara Pranidhana* in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* emphasizes the practice of devotion and surrender to a higher power. It involves letting go of ego-driven desires and dedicating one's actions and life to divine will. This practice fosters inner peace, spiritual growth, and alignment with a higher purpose, and is integral to the overall journey of yoga as outlined by Patanjali. Through *Ishvara Pranidhana*, practitioners cultivate humility, trust, and devotion, essential for achieving deeper spiritual insight and liberation.

When justice is guided by *Yama* and *Niyama*, it results in true and fair justice, which aligns with the principles of Karma Yoga. The third component of *Ashtanga Yoga* is *Asana* (physical exercise), essential for maintaining a healthy body. A strong body is necessary to perform one's duties effectively. As the saying goes, "health is wealth"; a healthy body nurtures a healthy mind, which is crucial for delivering fair judgments. Therefore,

practicing *Asana* is important to maintain physical fitness and ensure clarity in decision-making. Next, to elevate the mental state, *Pranayama* (breath control) is essential. This practice enhances concentration and sharpens the intellect, allowing the mind to focus without distraction. A concentrated mind is less prone to errors. In the pursuit of justice, *Pratyahara*—the withdrawal of the mind from external distractions—is also necessary. It helps the mind remain focused on the core objective, leading to unbiased and impartial decisions. A judge must also control the senses, as they can be easily swayed by external stimuli. The eyes may be drawn to beauty, the ears to pleasant sounds, and the other senses to various temptations. A judge needs to master these distractions to deliver justice based solely on truth. A judge is considered as a *parampita* (God) whose tongue is controlled by the goddess Saraswati. This level of discipline culminates in *Samadhi* (deep concentration), the final stage of yoga, where one is fully immersed in their duty. This is the essence of true Karma Yoga, where work becomes a form of meditation aimed at social welfare.

Buddhism also emphasizes similar principles through its Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration⁹. All of these align with the values of Karma Yoga and are rooted in benevolence and social welfare. Determining the nature of good and bad deeds is not difficult, as one's conscience naturally discerns right from wrong. However, implementing this discernment requires self-reflection. Through self-contemplation, one transcends worldly desires and focuses on the greater good. This process helps individuals rise above selfishness and understand that the pursuit of social welfare leads to true fulfilment.

According to *Vedanta* philosophy, everything—whether animate or inanimate—are manifestation of God. The principle "*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*" (All is Brahman) emphasizes that everything is divine. While *Vedanta* also asserts "*Brahma Satyam, Jagat Mithya*" ("Brahman is real, the world is an illusion"), this does not contradict the idea of pantheism. It suggests that while the visible world constantly changes, the underlying essence remains eternal and divine. P.B Shelly, a British Romantic poet has written in stanza LII of "Adonis", "One remains many change and pass, Heaven Light forever shines, Earth shadow flies."¹⁰ In this context, the physical world represents the transient, ever-changing nature of existence, while the unchanging essence is God. This understanding leads to the realization that everything is worthy of respect, and hating anything equates to hating God. True love for all beings is the foundation of social harmony, as reflected in the teachings of various spiritual leaders like Jesus, who said, "Love is God." This principle aligns with the essence of *Vedanta*.

In Sanskrit literature, material objects are referred to as "*Vastu*." The term "*Vas*" means "to dwell" or "to live," implying permanence rather than destruction. According to this philosophy, nothing truly perishes; it merely changes its form. For instance, if you throw a chili into a fire, its essence remains. What is indestructible is considered divine, while what changes is part of the material world. Human beings, too, do not die; they simply change form, as their five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and space—return to their sources. These eternal elements are considered manifestations of God. The Vaisheshika school of thought calls this fundamental principle "*Vishesh*." Similarly, the Sankhya philosophy identifies three essential qualities in nature: Sattva (purity), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia). In modern scientific terms, these can be likened to the proton (positive charge), electron (negative charge), and neutron (neutral charge). The Rajas quality, associated with desire and activity, is said to drive human behavior, a concept also echoed in Sankhya.

Today, scientists are searching for the "God particle," which is considered the essential building block of the universe. According to Vaisheshika philosophy, this "*Vishesh*" is akin to the God particle. *Vedanta* takes this

further by teaching that everything is a manifestation of God, meaning all things should be treated with respect. The core principle is that everything is a form of the divine, deserving reverence.

Thus, upon deeper reflection, we find that all philosophies, religions, and ideologies converge on the common goal of social welfare and universal love. Therefore, every action should contribute to social harmony and well-being. This is the path to true salvation. Many great figures—sages, kings, leaders, and thinkers—have come and gone, but their legacy lives on through their deeds. Immortality lies not in physical existence but in the impact, one leaves behind. The teachings and actions of individuals like Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Guru Nanak, and others continue to influence society because their spirits live on in the hearts of people. This is true immortality—the immortality of one’s name and contributions.

In summary, achieving greatness requires commitment, perseverance, and skill. Once a task is undertaken, it should be completed with sincerity and diligence. To abandon a task due to fear or difficulty is cowardice. Lord Rama is in the heart of everyone due to his *purushartha*, he performed his duties as a karma yogi. Karma Yoga lies as the essence of the Mahabharata, he delivered the philosophy of karma in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, chapter 2 verse 50

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योग कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥
Buddhiyukto-Jahatih ubhe sukritdushkrite.

Tasmadyogay yujyaswa yogah karmasu kaushalam.

(One who is endowed with the wisdom of equanimity discards both good and evil deeds. Therefore, strive for yoga, is excellence in action.)¹¹ People chant the scripture of Gita but fail to apply its teachings. For example, taking an oath on the *Gita* or *Quran* in court is intended to ensure truthfulness, yet it often becomes a mere formality. Judges and others in positions of authority may recite scriptures daily but fail to apply their teachings in their work. The decision under the impression of greed, lust, anger, or ego can lead to the total collapse of the social structure.

For instance, if a judge wrongfully acquits a criminal and punish an innocent person, in both cases this can lead to more crimes. In this way, a judge is more hazardous than a criminal because his judgment originates a series of crimes. Similarly, if engineers fail to perform their duties with skill and integrity, resulting in a faulty bridge, they are responsible for any harm caused. Thus, people in positions of responsibility must carry out their duties honestly and excellently. Ultimately, misusing one’s position for personal gain goes against the principles of true religion and social welfare. One is a theist or an atheist there is an Absolute who monitors everyone’s action. True worship lies not in rituals but in serving humanity and contributing to social welfare. This is the essence of religion. As the scriptures say, “*Dharti Lokanati Dharma: Dharmo Dharayati Prajah* Dharma is that which upholds society.” For a king, citizens are like his own children. Therefore, the highest form of worship is to act for the good of others and maintain social harmony.

To conclude, wisdom is a paramount goal of humans to discern wholesome from unwholesome. So far there is concern of those people who occupy the higher authority each word they speak carries the weight of divine responsibility. For good governance there is a need of self-controlled wisdom like king Harishchandra as he was a luminous spirit of justice and truth. It was so easy to provide good governance in *Satyayuga* since everybody was under the umbrella of Truth. However, with the advent of Kaliyuga, making impartial judgments has become

increasingly challenging. This highlights the need to revisit Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* to cultivate control over the mind, body, and soul. Without mastery over one's senses, a judge cannot deliver unbiased and fair decisions.

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