



Ethics, Duty, and Statecraft in Classical Indian Texts: A Holistic Framework for Ethical Governance

Sarveen Kaur Sachdeva^{1*}, Krati Sharma², Kuldip Sharma³,
Manoj Kumar ⁴

¹Poornima University, Jaipur, India

² Poornima Institute of Engineering and Technology, Jaipur, India

³Poornima University, Jaipur, India

⁴ Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur, India

Corresponding author: sarveen.sachdeva@gmail.com

Abstract

The classical Indian political thought is an extremely integrated and holistic vision of governance where ethics (niti), duty (dharma), and statecraft (rajya-niti) exist not as distinct and competing entities but as supportive and indivisible principles. According to this tradition, political power is never morally indifferent in nature; instead, its legitimacy is firmly grounded in the observance of ethical behavior, social responsibility, and an unwavering dedication to the general good of society. In contrast to many political traditions in the modern world, particularly those shaped by realist or utilitarian influences that often enforce a rigid separation between morality and the exercise of power, ancient Indian political philosophy consistently places ethical legitimacy at the core center of sovereign authority. From this perspective, power is justified only when it is exercised in accordance with moral law and social duty, ensuring harmony between authority and responsibility. To construct an analysis of how classical sources such as the Arthashastra, the epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the juridical text Manusmriti, and Buddhist and Jain canonical literature made unique yet convergent contributions to theories of ethical governance, this paper critically examines these texts. All these writings expound ideas of leadership responsibility, selfless administration, fairness, prudence in the exercise of power, and diplomacy rooted in moral considerations. Although they differ in narrative form and philosophical emphasis, they share a fundamental belief that rulers, as moral agents, are bound by dharma and

© The Author(s) 2026

B. Choudhary and V. V. Singh (eds.), *Proceedings of the Anubhuti 4.0: Discourses in Indian Knowledge Systems – Pathways of Culture, Inclusion, and Sustainability (ICIKS 2026)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1030,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-615-4_4

accountable both to society and to a higher ethical order. Based on close textual analysis, the study demonstrates that classical Indian political philosophy offers a sophisticated framework capable of balancing pragmatic realism with moral responsibility. The paper further examines the relevance of these classical principles in contemporary society, arguing that they provide valuable normative guidance for public administration, leadership ethics, and policy-making, especially amid crises of legitimacy, corruption, and declining public trust.

Keywords: Dharma, Nīti, Rajya-nīti, Ethical Governance, Indian Knowledge Systems, Statecraft

Background

The objective of this study is to critically assess the connection between the ethics, duty and statecraft in classical Indian political thought and the implications of this relationship in today's context of governance crisis like corruption, loss of institutional confidence and ethical lapses in governance. The study is qualitative and interpretative with the help of textual analysis of classical Indian texts like Arthashastra, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Manusmriti, Buddhist and Jain canonical texts. The secondary literature on political ethics, governance and Indian philosophy has also been critically examined. The paper does not seek to construct a theological understanding of these traditions and only addresses the ethical and political aspects of governance.

1. How do the classical Indian works treat the connection between morality, obligation and political power?
2. How do these texts discuss issues of governance crisis like corruption, abuse of power and moral decay?
3. How can classical Indian political philosophy be a part of current models of ethical governance?

1. Introduction

The relations between the issues of ethics and political power have always been a major perplexing aspect of political philosophy in the world. The debate about power and morality without obligation has been going on since ancient times and has been present in the thinking of philosophers since King and consideration of justice. Unlike the writings of Machiavelli and Max Weber, most of the modern political theories have been more likely to think of the art of government as an efficient and ethically neutral business, and focus more on power, efficiency and institutional survival rather than ethical issues. In such a system morality is always a secondary consideration. In contrast to the classical Indian political thought, which offers a holistic perspective on the political system which does not wish to distinguish between morality and power. The ancient Indian literature always regards the business of governance as an ethical business, in which the rulers are not only subjected to the laws and institutions, but also to the ethical values and a higher cosmic order (rta). Political power is considered just when based on following dharma and moral obligation is the main concept of justice, social responsibility and harmony [9]. Governance is therefore considered as a moral trust and not a contractual or coercive accord. Under the influence of the concept of civilizational order, the individual morality and social welfare were to be irreplaceable, and this was a part of the Indian political philosophy. The writings like the Arthashastra [7] develop a fine model of governance which is pragmatic and ethical. Kautilya insists that the good of the subjects is the good of the ruler and thus he positions the good of the people at the core of the political power. On the same note, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata epics depict virtues of a just ruler and caution about the social repercussions of governing people without a sense of moral control. This ethical basis is strengthened by juridical and religious traditions. The Manusmriti sets out the moral and judicial duties of the ruler and incorporates the unbiased justice and protection of the weak. The ideals of compassion, non-violence, restraint and self-discipline are related to

this vision in the Buddhist and Jain canon literature, which are depicted in the concept of Dasa Raja Dharma and aparigraha. The Indian governance in classical was not bound to the territorial control or economic extraction but strived after justice, stability, prosperity and moral order and was a compromise between artha and dharma. This tradition is more of an alternative vision of Idealism-Realism by intertwining the ethics, duty and authority with a more practical application of the issues on the subject of ethical leadership and humane governance in today's age and times.

2. Conceptual Framework: Niti, Dharma and Rajya- niti

The classical Indian political philosophy is presented as an intricate three-part system comprising of niti (ethics), dharma (duty), and rajya-niti (statecraft). These are not distinct categories but rather complementary facets of governance, each of which represents a moral, social and administrative basis for political governance. Classical Indian writings call for the unification and reinforcement of ethical values and political practice in opposition to modern political theories that tend to separate and isolate political practice.

2.1 Niti (Ethics)

Niti is an ethical code, moral behaviour and rules of behaviour that are supposed to guide and regulate the behaviour of those at the helm, the administrators and those in government. Classical Indian philosophy does not have the concept of niti within the scope of individual morality, but in the scope of national morality, and it is the virtues that are required to make the society rightful. The textual traditions state that some of the qualities that cannot be done without in good leadership are honesty (satya), self-restraint (dama), compassion (daya), impartiality and accountability [9]. Political legitimacy was thought of as depending on the moral character of the ruler. It was thought that the king without moral discipline was not only threatening the stability of his power, but the stability of the society. This is what is expressed in the Arthashastra,

that the ruler should control his senses, and should be careful not to be ruled by uncontrolled desire, greed and anger; if the ruler is ruled by these, then he will certainly experience administrative corruption and revolt. [7] Ethical vigilance is therefore introduced as a condition to political effectiveness. Similarly, the epics demonstrate by example how to do *niti*. Rama is recognized as the ideal ruler whose power is not based on his strength but is derived out of ethical uprightness [15]. The crucial lesson Rama had learnt is that the truth and self-restraint that he had displayed, even at the cost of his life, is the perfect rule for him to follow in the Ramayana. On the other hand, in the Mahabharata, those kings who forego ethical standards (like Duryodhana) are represented as the cause of political destruction and ethical anarchy [16]. All these stories have been used to emphasize the essentialness of the good conduct that is essential for a viable government, and not superficial idealism.

2.2 Dharma (Duty)

Dharma is a universal block of social, ethical and cosmic responsibilities, which sustain the harmony in the universe and social life, *rita*. Dharma in a political way can be used as a norm for kingship and the duty of rulers to ruled people and morals for the rulers themselves. It encompasses justice, welfare, social order and accountability to all beings [9]. Among kings, the concept of *raja-dharma* included protecting the subjects from internal and external attacks, just and liberal governance, maintaining the welfare of the economy and social peace. According to the classical texts of law like the Manusmriti it is made clear that a ruler who does not defend his subjects or does not administer justice as per the dharma system loses its right [10]. Power misapplied or misused is then seen as unfair and therefore destructive, leading to social chaos and moral decay. The epics also exaggerate the results of following or not following dharma. In Ramayana, Rama-rajya is an ideal polity that has been sustained on the principles of dharma, *karuṇa* and moral discipline and in

Mahabharata, the epitome of adharma is depicted as fratricidal war and destruction of the society. This vision is underpinned by the concepts of Buddhism and Jain traditions which support compassion, non-violence (ahimsa) and restraint as part of the dharma of rulers, and which enhance dharma beyond legalism to moral self-control and a sense of compassion towards all life – animal or plant [4,5].

2.3 Rajya-niti (Statecraft)

Rajya-niti refers to the practicalities of governance like administration, diplomacy, tax, police, espionage, military policy and strategy. The classical Indian political thought is not against this requirement of the pragmatic governance, but lays out the ethical boundaries in which the scope of political realism must not exceed. Statecraft which is amoral is always depicted as volatile and self-destructive. The Arthashastra is the most systematic description of rajya-niti, and complicated administrative structure, tax collection and diplomatic policy and intelligence services. Yet Kautilya definitely places these mechanisms on the side of moral duty and the common good and asserts that the main duty of a ruler is to provide the welfare and security of the populace [7]. War and espionage are even moralized in the sense of the concern with saving non-combatants and resorting to diplomacy whenever possible. He is a moralist between classical Indian realism and naked amoral realpolitik. Although classical texts appreciate the presence of conflict, power struggle and the need to be strategic, restraint, responsibility and long term stability always appear more pronounced as opposed to short term dominance. It is due to the combination of rajayaniti with niti and dharma that a balanced political philosophy is achieved that does not create a need to abandon moral responsibility following an appropriate governance approach.

Synthesis

These three (niti, dharma and rajya-niti) are a cohesive set of work whereby ethical self-discipline, social duty as well as practical

governance are harmonized. Classical political notions of the Indian tradition do not idolize power nor demonize pragmatism; they have a picture of a government in which efficiency along with righteousness is present.

3. Ethics and the Realism of Administration (Arthashastra)

One of the earliest and most systematic pieces of world history on the subject of governance, administration and political strategy, the Arthashastra was written by Kautilya (c. 4th century BCE). The Arthashastra has been called a realist treatise because of its thorough treatment of the subject of power politics, state security, spy networks, diplomacy, economic controls, and military organization. However, this division of things is not quite right, since the text does not preach an amoral concept of a 'statecraft'. Instead it is a special manifestation of ethical realism, in which an action of the government is always purely pragmatic and its accountability is always moral, social and administrative. Kautilya is not an idealist about politics and he does not ignore the fact of competition, corruption, conflict and war. Rather, he values them as a part of the political process, and seeks to manage them through well-defined institutions, justice structures, and moral rules. The importance of the rule of law, fair justice, administration of bureaucracy and measures to prevent misuse of authority like harsh punishment of incompetent officials are emphasized by the Arthashastra. This is not a rule of arbitrary power, but a carefully monitored trust of morality exercised by government. In the King, self-control, rational judgment and ethical restraint are expected to be the primary characteristics, since his personal behaviour is directly linked with the stability and prosperity of the State. The central principle of Kautilya's political philosophy is that a political power is legitimate if its action is in line with the ethical principles of dharma and acts for the benefit of all. He says quite otherwise, happiness of the ruler is happiness of the subjects, therefore he emphasizes on the welfare of the populace, rather than on oneself and his dynasty. Economic prosperity,

domestic security and territorial protection is appreciated only to the extent that it leads to social stability and the overall welfare. So, there is no way to portray ethical governance without efficient administration and wise politics. This reading highlights the fact that the contemporary belief that realism in politics needs to be moral impoverished is a fallacy. The practical and ethical political administration, as Roger Boesche claims, is not incompatible with one another: see *Arthashastra*. Instead it provides a refined vision whereby ethical control strengthens and not undermines good governance, and has provided a long-lasting perspective on the modern arguments about ethical leadership and responsible statecraft.

3.1 Welfare-Oriented Governance

Arthashastra, perhaps more than any other work of its kind, is a clear expression of its welfare agenda. Kautilya says: "The pleasure of the subjects is the pleasure of the king; and the welfare of the subjects is the welfare of the king [7]. This is a public welfare statement which puts public welfare as the major driver of political legitimacy and turns kingship and service-based institution into an instrument of public welfare rather than individual power or royal ambition. A wide range of state functions are discussed in the context of economic justice and social stability. They include agricultural support such as supplying seeds and providing irrigation facilities, regulating trade and markets, road and rest house maintenance and emergency granaries to mitigate the effects of famine and natural disasters [7]. Taxation could be considered a non-extractive process but a precautionary and humane one, a bee that collects honey without harming the flower – implying sustainability and not exploitation. Another important aspect of the ethics of welfare that Kautilya gives is protection of the vulnerable groups. The state has the obligation to take care of widows, orphans, the elderly as well as the persons with disability whereby it takes care of them financially and against exploitation by the law [9]. These are the elements that can be regarded as an early manifestation of social

security and the administration duty and that contradict the notion that the administration of welfare is a totally contemporary process. In general terms these policies present the Arthashastra as a proto-welfare state scheme, a moral and pragmatic one. The neglect of social welfare and economic injustice can only lead to chaos and dissent, Kautilya realizes, so he is connecting welfare to direct links to political stability and the survival of the state.

3.2 Administrative Accountability and Anti-Corruption

Another important aspect of it is that Kautilya has a very strict and rigid attitude towards corruption and misconduct of the administration. He observed that it was difficult to determine whether a fish in water is drinking it and was also troubled to know whether the government officials were stealing the resources or not [7]. This metaphor is a realistic evaluation of human behaviour in power structures by Kautilya. Rather than considering this an exceptional and singular case, he believes that corruption is a risk inherent in governance and recommends robust institutional protection to minimize the risk of corruption. In Arthashastra, the use of a complex financial audit, periodic verification, cross-verification of accounts and multi-layered supervision is recommended to ensure accountability and transparency. There is an intensive surveillance of officials not only by using the formal bureaucratic means but by an elaborate intelligence machinery. There will also be several spies who will check the same information independently to prevent information falsification, collusion or record manipulation [7]. The signs of affluence, bad or unpredictable administrative action will immediately lead to suspicion and therefore to a culture of care and responsibility in the state machinery. Corruption punishment is purposefully severe and purposefully disproportionate to the material benefits of commission of the offence. The officials who are responsible for returning them are supposed to be punished many times, typically by fines, loss of office, and seizure of property, or social embarrassment, which is related to the extent of their wrongdoing

in the form of bribes, embezzlement, and extortion [2]. This level of severity is an example of what can be called a more stringent deterrence argument: the risks of corruption must outweigh the possible benefits. All these measures, however, are moral and not just legal, or economic. Kautilya considers corruption to be a moral failing which impacts on the level of trust that people have and on the moral standing of the state itself. The Arthashastra foreshadows the principles of good governance and institutional accountability that it has taken as a given. The Arthashastra takes as given the principles of good governance and institutional accountability, both of which are focused on accountability and transparency and moral standards. Kautilya gives us a timeless model of integrating the moral duty into administration practice, in which the successful governance is founded on moral restraints and the trust of the populace.

Synthesis

The Arthashastra demonstrates that ethics are not incompatible with realism in its policies of welfare and highly effective measures of accountability. The concept of governance that Kautilya has proposed is a mixture of strategic pragmatism, moral discipline and he has said that moral governance is as important as military or diplomatic prowess for a stable and happy state.

4. Ramayana: Idealism and Ethics of the moral power

The idealistic prototype of the political leadership derived from the non-compromising enforcement of dharma is a sophisticated and extremely potent Ramayana. The Ramayana is a highly developed idealistic model for the political leadership, following the ideals of the non-compromising enforcement of the dharma. Although the calculated strategy and prudence remains a key element of political life in both the Ramayana and realist political treatises, moral virtue is far more important as the real basis of political power in the epic. The governance in the Ramayana is never thought of as being forced, but

rather it is thought of as being a moral guardian through service, compassion and ethical control of the society. This is why political power is not justified by fear or coercion, it is the good example set by the ruler and his devotion to justice that will justify the political power. Rama was described as the ideal Rajarsi as he is a king who possesses the kingly power but is also an ascetic, whose moral power is more than brute force [15]. He sacrifices his own comfort, privilege as a royal man, and even his political ambition to convince people of dharma, which is why it supports the main thesis of the epic according to which, ethical integrity is the greatest leadership quality. The Ramayana always emphasizes that the spiritual qualities of the ruler are the immediate causes of the health of the kingdom, peace and prosperity. A leader who is guided by dharma instils in people voluntary devotion, social unity and perpetual devotion to the leader, but power gained or used without adherence to moral guidelines is sure to bring chaos, injustice and suffering to the people. Ramayana is a normative political philosophy which exemplifies ethical pre-eminence of politics and character pre-eminence of authority in its story pattern. The moral failure is not just 'his' fault, it is a political disaster of very wide and wide scale repercussions on the society. The epic is transmitting the idea that sustainable leadership is based on moral virtue and not strategic superiority through the representation of the virtues of righteous leadership, moral accountability and selflessness leadership. It is in this way that through the Ramayana, we have a permanent conception of political leadership in which moral superiority is the source, and the defence of legitimate authority.

4.1 The fourth principle is Leadership as Ethical Sacrifice

As demonstrated in the Ramayana, leadership is more of sacrifice, self-restraint and moral courage and not power or authority. Fourteen years of exile, at Rama's will, to fulfil a promise of his father Dasharatha, connects the epic to the most remarkable ethical statements of classical Indian thought. Though Rama is the rightful successor to Ayodhya

chairmanship, he voluntarily renounces all the four worlds of comfort, political power, comfort and political power and gives preference to filial responsibility and dharma over interest (Ayodhya Kanda, Ramayana). This action brings out the fact that the real leadership is not gauged on how well one can command people but rather in how one can discipline himself. The choice made by Rama highlights one of the main postulates of the classical Indian political philosophy: political power can be just and justified only in case it is based on moral discipline and ethical self-sacrifice. Leadership in this case is a consciously taken responsibility in the interest of the society, and not an opportunity to be taken advantage of. Rama, however, chose to be a poor man rather than having an illegitimate grip on kingship. Rama, instead, made kingship a moral obligation, rather than an unlawful acquisition of power. That his suffering preserves society's trust and cosmos reveals the need of leaders to be willing to give up their lives for the cause of a just society. The story, in other words, is a political-politicks reflection on the power of leadership, and a new model of leadership that is based on renunciation, duty and ethical integrity, is critically observed by Sheldon Pollock [11].

4.2 Models of ethical conduct

With the purpose of justifying its moralised account of governance, the Ramayana introduces some characters worthy of exemplary manners and morals, both of character and duty. Bharata is there to become an influential political icon of legitimate authority (rights that are not inherited, but earned). Bharata is admonished when he hears of the exile of Rama, and refuses to be king for the immoral kingship he acquired by using immoral means of his mother Kaikeyi. Rather he puts the sandals (padukas) of Rama on the throne and rules as a regent, openly admitting Rama as his rightful heir (Valmiki). This action re-conceptualizes the sovereignty as the moral trust and not the hereditary or the coercive right. The manners of Bharata have a very important political philosophy – legitimacy should be acquired in a manner that

isn't through manipulation, force and opportunism, but through dharma. His humility, moral purity and willingness to submit to moral authority, which is part of his character, defy the politics of power and sets the standard of governance by conscience. Lakshmana is the ideal administrator and civil servant along with this model. He leaves with Rama and Sita is a sign of nishkama karma—selfless action—the one with no expectation of any reward. The alertness, loyalty and unswerving service of Lakshmana demonstrates the significance of ethically committed counsellors and administrators to uphold fair rule. As stressed out by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, moral leadership is not solely practiced by rulers but it is maintained by a set of ethical duty in the polity.

4.3 Diplomacy before War

Dealing in diplomacy, withholding force, and considering moral issues before resorting to aggressive action is another crucial part of the Ramayana's politics philosophy. Rama is always striving to seek out a solution to the problems of dialogue and negotiation before he finally resorts to war against Ravana. Angada was sent on a diplomatic mission, to Lanka, which demonstrates the importance of diplomacy over war. Angada offers Ravana a noble opportunity to re-establish dharma by restoring Sita and forgoing bloodshed and by clearly stating that force is the last resort (Valmiki, Yuddha Kanda). Ravana's pride and stubbornness in rejection of moral guidance reach their peak in his death, and that is another element of the epics' moral teachings: hubris is a bad quality in leadership. The war in the Ramayana is not depicted as a means to conquest or as a means to political expansion, but as a tragedy nonetheless, a necessary step for the restoration of moral order. Even during war, Rama adheres to strict codes of behavior, ignoring the principles of combat, moderation, and compassion to the enemy, and his allies. This was an orderly way of war and a way of showing that violence is inevitable but should be embraced within the confines of an ethical boundary. The epic demonstrates, according to Pollock, a high

level of political ethics that power exists only in the context of good morals, diplomacy is required before aggression, and justice is the ultimate goal of action by the state [11].

Synthesis

In its description of Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana, and the overall narrative of the Ramayana, Bharata provides a statement of the way the world should be governed based on ethical idealism and moralizing power. Leadership is not about dominating but sacrifice and devotion to humility and dharma. The epic, therefore, provides the eternal political philosophy where morally upright action is the ultimate source of legitimacy, stability and diversity of trust by people. As power politics still prevails, the theme of moral leadership in the Ramayana still holds a significant contribution to the current debate about moral leadership and responsible power.

5. Mahabharata: Multifacetedness and Competing Obligations

The Ramayana is characterized by its moral clarity and idealism, whereas the Mahabharata is extremely complex and realistic, with a web of moral related choices and the juxtaposition of moral absolutes in the realm of politics. Whereas in the epic there is no single model of the good rule, there are examples of bad scenarios of conflicting obligation to others (dharma) which the reader is challenged to think about. Governance is therefore presented as a field of moral ambiguity, where the rulers have to operate in an incomplete knowledge, emotional involvement, social influences, and inescapable outcomes. Alf Hiltebeitel [6] explains that the Mahabharata itself was itself opposed to easy moralists of good and bad. The moral sense of the epic is local, situational and socially and politically entrenched. Political authority is not evaluated by a ruler's goodwill or loyalty to a predetermined set of moral values, it is determined by his determination to maintain the world in accord with dharma in the face of struggle, strife, ambition and human weakness. It is an outlook of a mature political philosophy,

accepting of the boundaries of moral certitude, one that does not believe that governance is a tragic but essential business with less than perfect circumstances. Leadership is not what concerns moral purity, though, but how to negotiate ethical conflicts in a responsible and cost-conscious manner.

5.1: Conflicting Dharmas

The moral conundrum of the Mahabharata can be best tested in this eldest of Pandavas, the son of Dharma himself, Yudhishtira. He is known to be undaunted by the adherence to truth (satya) and righteousness, and is placed in situation after situation in which either one or the other must be followed or the other one violated. His moral anguish shows that the best ruler cannot help but tragically compromise in moral aspects. The most common instance quoted is when the Kurukshetra war was going on, when Yudhishtira says that Ashwatthama is dead, which is true in the context of an elephant, but not in the meaning, and thus, results in the demise of Drona (Mahabharata). This scene adds to the tragic scenario of truth vs justice vs political necessity. It is not an ethical victory that the epic celebrates, however, but an ethical price that is paid for the greater good, the cosmic and social order. These kind of episodes constitute not a code of conduct or moral principles to be observed, but a situational value that requires judgment, responsibility and tolerance of moral costs as embodied in the Mahabharata. It is a form of moral governance as per Arvind Sharma where the decision is ethically dissatisfying but, morally, imperative in the epic. The quality of a leader is not to be morally perfect but to have the courage to carry the responsibility of making immoral judgements and to take responsibility for the consequences of those immoral judgements.

5.2 Nishkama Karma

That's what the philosophical solution to the general moral chaos is, as given in the Bhagavad Gita, one of the Mahabharata's books. The moral

dilemma of Arjuna, his ethical dilemma, is being trapped in the middle of his moral despair, between his duty as a Kshatriya and the stark terror of having to kill his own brother at the battlefield of Kurukshetra. To this, Krishna offers the idea of nishkama karma – deed that is done without attachment to self-interest or fear of loss [1]. The teaching redefines ethical action as not being at moral risk, but as a disciplined work of duty, which is selfless and detached. This philosophy expects leaders to make decisive action, but not over results for their own selfish reasons. Ethical accountability is deliberate, conscious and controlled hard work, and not in the deception of ensuring ethically perfect outcomes. The concept of nishkama karma as understood by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, turns ethics into an internal discipline that will allow us to take action when we are uncertain and not to freeze when we are faced with complexity. This doctrine offers a useful and solid moral basis for government. It recognizes that rulers work in unsteady and ethically mixed circumstances, in which all decisions can involve violence. But it also demands that action should not be of an obnoxious ambition, vengeance, and personal aspiration. Ethical leadership, thus, is an inner art of leadership or discipline of self-control, a subject in which one can make decisions without moral arrogance. In doing so, the Mahabharata does not provide an easy-to-follow moral guideline for leadership, but rather a very human and philosophically savvy guide to leadership in an ethical mess.

Synthesis

One of the most evolved ethical systems in the political philosophy is furnished in the Mahabharata, which speaks of the two dharmas that conflict with one another and explains nishkama karma. Does not worship at the foot of power or exalt moral purity. Instead it raises the concept of governance as a tragic and at the same time an unavoidable engagement with moral ambiguity in which leaders must make decisions that are ethically responsible, but in which they have no complete moral clarity.

6. Buddhist and Jain Installations with regards to Ethical Rule

The Buddhist and Jain philosophies provide unique systems of governance based on compassion, restraint and moral discipline by intensifying and extending the moralistic inclination towards ethical impulses that already exist in the classical Indian political thinking. Ethics and duty and statecraft intermingle in Brahmanical and epic traditions, but moral responsibility, not duty, is brought to the fore of political legitimacy in Buddhism and Jainism. Power in these traditions is not the result of veneration, family allegiance or force but rather because the ruler can regulate himself/herself ethically and cares for the well-being of all that lives. In doing this, they challenge the expansionist and violent philosophies of rule, and propose alternative philosophies based on non-violence, social harmony and restraint. The government is now seen as a moral profession rather than a system of control.

6.1 Buddhist Politics

Buddhist political philosophy is a logical system of moral government in the light of moral law (dhamma), compassion (karuṇā) and benefit for all. The Dasa Raja Dharma, the Ten Duties of a Righteous King, is at the core of this vision as illustrated in the Buddhist canonical texts, such as the Digha Nikaya and the Jataka tales. According to Richard Gombrich [5] they consist of generosity (dana), moral uprightness (sīlī), self-sacrifice, honesty, gentleness, self-restraint, non-violence (ahimsa), patience, forgiveness and non-oppression which make kingship an administrative of morals rather than a repressive leadership. The social order in this instance is the consequence of the ethical discipline of the ruler. A king who rules as a dharma follower will be trusted, willingly obeyed and will have harmony in the nation, but a king who rules by fear and violence will be inviting trouble and opposition. Steven Collins restates the very clear message that spiritual accountability and political power are inseparable, and that to govern is not about coercion and control, but about the personal development of the individual from an

ethical standpoint. The greatest historical example of the Buddhist political ethics is Ashoka (r. c. 268-232 BCE). Following the destruction of Kalinga War, Ashoka abandoned war by blood and turned himself to the dhamma governance. His edicts of rock and pillar are the policies of non-violence, the policy of welfare administration, the policy of religious tolerance and the policy of moral persuasion (rather than force). The initiatives of Ashoka as analyzed by Romila Thapar [14]; hospitals, rest houses, wells, animal protection, judicial moderation and inter-sectarian harmony are an emphatic change in morality in political realms. The reign shows how the imperial authority can be upheld as an ethical and social good, and a model of the pluralistic, caring rule.

6.2 Jain Ahimsa Principles

Jain political philosophy promotes one of the strictest ethical objections of violence, amassing, and coercion in the ruling. Jain ethics is based on the principle of ahimsa (non-violence), aparigraha (non-possessiveness) and anekantavada (pluralism of viewpoints) that does not restrict moral duty of the political power to human issues. As Paul Dundas [4] can state, in Jain belief, ahimsa is not a matter of physical violence, but economic exploitation, environmental devastation and psychological coercion. Aparigraha is a principle which condemns materialistic collections and affluence which makes rulers to minimize inequality, exploitation and environmental degradation. This way, the Jain political philosophy contains the problems of environmental ethics and responsible consumption that are of current interest. The doctrine of multiple perspective, known as anekantavada also leads to tolerance, dialogue, and intellectual humility in government, denouncing dogmatism and sectarian oppression. In the past, Jain moral was observed in the rulers such as Kharravela who ruled by concentrating on welfare of the people, tolerating all religions and limiting military interference. The Jain literature invariably encourages the use of reconciliation, rather than retribution and moral persuasion, rather than punishment and teach that moral power based on ethical restraint is

more lasting than physical power based on force. The Jain philosophy offers a viable alternative to traditional political models, which are based on the idea of conquering others, through self-control, humility and compassion. The concept of governance is not to rule other people, but it is the art of ruling oneself and the ruler has to be a moral guide to the society. The Buddhist tradition and the Jain tradition combine to add a lot of value to the classical Indian political thought since both of them prove that ethical legitimacy, rather than coercive power, is the most stable source of political power.

Synthesis

Buddhism and Jain input together add greatly to the classical Indian understanding of politics, by foreshadowing compassion, non-violence and restraint of speech and action as fundamental tenets of justifiable governance.

7. Contemporary Relevance

The classical Indian political thinking holds wide interesting lessons for contemporary politics, particularly in the context of legitimacy crisis, absence of moral framework in political leadership and waning popularity of political system among the people. Systemic approach of *niti* (ethics) and *dharma* (duty) and *rajya-niti* (statecraft) is a systemic normative system, which is not bound in time and applicable in the contemporary administrative theory, leadership studies, public policy and international relations. These principles are not mere historical and philosophical abstractions but they are practical models of what ethical and sustainable governance entails in the multifaceted contemporary societies.

7.1 Public Administration

Passing over to the sphere of public administration, classical Indian political thought is focused on transparency, accountability, and welfare orientation as the main principles of the governance. The demand for

audits, the check of officials and the severe punishments for corruption mentioned in the Arthashastra by Kautilya are quite similar to the modern administration system such as performance audit, vigilance commission and anti-corruption commission [2]. Equally, the value of putting the populace first- especially vulnerable groups is an anticipation of current democratic demands to serve the people. The moral imperative of rulers to serve the people instead of serving themselves is a call to modern democratic principles of service to the people. The modern organizations or institutions in the field of administrative ethics, citizen based governance and accountability are similar to the classical statement that service and moral responsibility generates legitimacy and not authority alone [9].

7.2 Leadership Studies

The classical Indian literature is a resource with an interesting alternative to power-based and coercively driven leadership studies. Rama, Yudhishtira and Ashoka prove that moral authority is more effective in improving trust, loyalty and long-term stability rather than through fear or the use of force. Voluntary compliance and long term legitimacy results from ethical leadership that is characterized by integrity, self-restraint and sacrifice [12]. Values oriented leadership, emotional intelligence and ethical decision making, which are part and parcel of classical Indian thought, are also increasingly gaining importance in modern leadership theories. Another concept is that of moral exemplar: Ethical leadership, in addition to being instrumental, is also transformative—that is, it reshapes the culture of an institution and how people behave.

7.3 Policy-Making

Ethical principles from classical Indian traditions of understanding can also be helpful in advising modern policymaking. Dharmic policies are grounded on justice, fairness, sustainability and social peace in the long term as opposed to political interests in the short term. The emphasis of proportional taxes, disaster relief and agricultural support, as pointed

out by the Arthashastra, is also in line with the contemporary welfare economic principles and sustainable development, as well as with the ethical principles of Buddhism and Jainism [13]. Similarly, the concept of compassion, non-violence and restraint is also a normative concept of Arthashastra which has been used in the context of poverty alleviation, protection of environment and inclusion policies. The tradition influences policy makers to take the success of the process into consideration both from an economic value and from a human well-being and ethical influence.

7.4 International Relations

Classical Indian political thought offers ancient and advanced insights into geopolitics and diplomacy in the discipline of international relations. The idea of Mandala theory of Kautilya portrays the interstate relations as the constant shift of alliances, rivalries and strategic partnerships based on the relative power and proximity. This was based on the theories of balance of power and making alliances, which were current at the time and on the relevance of the Indian realism of the classical era to modern international politics [2]. At the same time, the classical literature's limitations on warfare and diplomacy are moralized, and thus there is a questioning of the amoral realpolitik. The promotion of diplomacy over war, limited application of force and permanence can be compared to the contemporary standards of international behavior, such as just war and multilateral interaction.

The local government is a key component of decentralized government and local government.

The models of decentralized governance such as Panchayati Raj show a great continuity of the ancient Indian tradition of dharma-based local self-governance. Consensus and local accountability, along with social welfare, were the emphasis of the classical India village councils (sabhas) and community-based decision making. The ongoing models of Panchayati Raj also emphasise on the empowerment of the people of

the locality, participatory democracy and responsive governance [8]. This uniformity is what makes classical political values in democratic systems flexible, and, in the contemporary era of governance and inclusion, as well as of grass root involvement, antique political values can be re-articulated.

Synthesis

The blend of such applications reveals that the classical Indian thought on politics is not only of historical importance, but is also a critical intellectual source of governance in the modern times.

Classical Indian ethical governance principles are visible in the modern-day administrative reforms and public leadership system. Examples of anti-corruption efforts and mechanisms for transparency in India, such as public accountability and digital governance, align with Kautilya's principles of administrative oversight and institutional accountability.

Likewise, concepts of compassionate governance in times of public health crisis and the concept of sustainability in development and environmental protection have been strongly aligned with the Buddhist and Jain ideals of non-violence, welfare orientation and ethical restraint. The classical Indian political ethics are seen to be relevant in the present governance context through policies that foster inclusive welfare, environmental responsibility, and humanitarian governance.

7.5 Contemporary Case Illustrations

India requires a digital transformation for its anti-corruption efforts to address the problem of corruption in the country.

Case Study 1: Digital Governance and Anti-Corruption Reforms in India

The models of decentralized governance like Panchayati Raj indicate a notable continuity of the ancient Indian tradition of local self-

governance that is based on dharma. Classical India emphasized consensus and local accountability, and social welfare, in the village councils (sabhas) and community-based decision-making systems. The current Panchayati Raj models also focus on the empowerments of local people, the development of participatory democracy, and the responsive governance [8]. In this uniformity, the flexibility of classical Indian political values within democracy is seen, and it is found that old spiritual values can be re-expressed in the modern framework of governance and inclusion—where the inclusion of the grassroots is considered—and in the engagement of the grassroots within a democratic context.

Case Study 2: Ethical Governance during Public Health and Environmental Crises

The implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), linking welfare delivery with Aadhaar, and online public grievance systems in recent years are testament to the enduring applicability of Kautilya's concepts of accountability and transparency in governance. The reforms are designed to lessen the incidence of corruption, to avoid leakages in welfare payments and to build and reinforce trust in institutions by monitoring and verifying. As the Arthashastra focused on monitoring officials and holding them accountable for their actions, today's digital governance aims to make public funds more efficient and ethical to citizens.

Synthesis

These applications reflect the classical Indian perspective of politics not only being of historical importance but also being an important source of governance in the modern times.

8. Conclusion

In classical Indian texts, the idea of governance is an enduring one that has been fully integrated and seen as the three fold one of ethics (niti), duty (dharma) and statecraft (rajya-niti). Instead these traditions, precisely the opposite, make the moral responsibility a part of the political authority itself, since morality is now being felt as coming outside the political action. Amongst the texts, the Arthashastra, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and Buddhist canonical literature and Jain canonical literature reject the false dichotomy between moral idealism and political realism. They propose instead a more nuanced type of government, one in which state politics is pragmatic, led, controlled and morally justified [2, 9]. In all these traditions, political power is still somehow referred as a moral trust but not as a tool of domination. One common thread among the governments of Kautilya, the welfare based government; Rama the moral leader through self-sacrifice; Yudhishtira the decision maker by moral means; and the government of Ashoka the dharma based king is the idea that moral authority is maintained by moral authority, self-discipline and responsibility to others. Ethical responsibility in authority is described as natural state, which never has a stability, and can be a source of social chaos, opposition and final failure [15, 16]. Furthermore, the classical Indian political thought underlines that the good governing can be achieved only when it is devoted to the common good. Safety of the vulnerable groups, fair economic governance, moral limits in application of force and diplomacy as an alternative to violence are some of the common themes in textual traditions. This ethical disposition is further expanded by Buddhist and Jain ideas of foregrounding compassion, non-violence, restraint as the key virtues of leaders and broadening the scope of morality to governance beyond jurisprudence and ethics to empathy and moral self-control [4, 5]. The governance challenges of the 21st century—including policy ethics and administrative accountability, international conflict, and environmental sustainability – demand a mix of normative principles and values between effectiveness and moral responsibility. It is in this kind of framework offered by classical Indian political thought that power is not romanticized but yet has a lasting

philosophical contribution to the re-definition of effective, responsible and humane political power in the modern world. The classical Indian political philosophy offers a new insight into the moral foundations of power and a new notion of governance as a service, one that serves the common good and human wellbeing for the people.

References

1. Bhagavad Gita: *Bhagavad Gita*. Translated by S. Radhakrishnan. HarperCollins (2010)
2. Boesche, R.: *The first great political realist: Kautilya and his Arthashastra*. Lexington Books (2002)
3. Collins, S.: *Nirvana and other Buddhist felicities: Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*. Cambridge University Press (1998)
4. Dundas, P.: *The Jains*. 2nd edn. Routledge (2002)
5. Gombrich, R.: *Theravada Buddhism: A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo*. Routledge (2006)
6. Hiltebeitel, A.: *Rethinking the Mahabharata: A reader's guide to the education of the Dharma King*. University of Chicago Press (2001)
7. Kautilya: *Arthashastra*. Translated by R. Shamasastri. Penguin Classics (2016)
8. Mathew, G.: *Status of Panchayati Raj in the states of India*. Institute of Social Sciences (2000)
9. Olivelle, P.: *Ancient Indian political thought and the Arthashastra*. Oxford University Press (2013)
10. Olivelle, P.: *Manu's code of law: A critical edition and translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. Oxford University Press (2005)
11. Pollock, S.: *Ramayana and political imagination in India*. Oxford University Press (1993)
12. Radhakrishnan, S.: *Indian philosophy*, Vol. 1, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press (1951)
13. Sen, A.: *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press (1999)
14. Thapar, R.: *Ashoka and the decline of the Mauryas*. Rev. edn. Oxford University Press (2012)
15. Valmiki: *The Ramayana*. Translated by R.K. Narayan. Penguin Classics (2006)
16. Vyasa: *The Mahabharata*. Translated by B. Debroy. Penguin Classics (2015)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

