INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

(For BA/MA syllabus under NEP 2020, UGC NET/JRF, PhD entrance examinations, CUET PG, PGT-Civics, Higher Education Examinations, etc.)

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Dr. Namo Narayan
Satyendra Gupta

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INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Prof. Shantesh Kumar Singh
CIPOD, SIS, JNU
New Delhi (India)



Foreword

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the significance of education in cultivating character, fostering ethical awareness, and nurturing creative and engaged citizens. In alignment with this vision, the present book on Indian Political Thought seeks to transcend the conventional boundaries of learning by fostering a culture of critical inquiry, ethical reflection, and civic engagement.

This comprehensive text embarks on an intellectual journey through the annals of Indian political thought, tracing the evolution of ideas from ancient times to the present day. It introduces readers to a diverse array of thinkers, philosophers, and reformers who have profoundly shaped India's socio-political landscape. Through an in-depth exploration of their ideas, this book provides a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, continuity and change, and the quest for a just and equitable society.

A distinctive feature of this book is its innovative pedagogical approach, which encourages students to engage with complex ideas, challenge prevailing assumptions, and develop informed perspectives. By contextualizing Indian political thought within contemporary realities, it aims to empower learners to become thoughtful, empathetic, and responsible citizens. The inclusion of critical thinking prompts, classroom simulations, debates, case studies, and discussion questions fosters a dynamic learning environment that promotes active participation, collaboration, and experiential learning.

This book is designed to cater to the needs of undergraduate students, civil service aspirants, and anyone interested in understanding the philosophical underpinnings of Indian politics and society. By revisiting India's rich intellectual heritage, it seeks to inspire a new generation of thinkers, policymakers, and citizens who can engage with the complexities of the contemporary world with insight, wisdom, and vision.

08/07/2025

Prof. Shantesh Kumar Singh
Centre for International Politics,
Organisation & Disarmament (CIPOD),
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Note to Educators

This book is designed not only as a syllabus-aligned resource, but as a pedagogical companion for educators committed to nurturing critical, ethical, and civic thinking in their classrooms.

Each chapter offers more than content; it provides a scaffold for inquiry. The thinkers presented here, from Manu to Coomaraswamy, are not merely historical figures to be studied, but intellectual provocateurs whose ideas invite debate, reflection, and reinterpretation. As educators, your role is not just to transmit these ideas, but to animate them, through dialogue, dissent, and discovery.

To support this, the book includes:

Classroom activities that simulate real-world dilemmas and political decision-making

Debate prompts and case studies to foster ethical reasoning and pluralistic dialogue

Critical thinking questions that encourage students to connect theory with lived experience

Glossary cards and reflection worksheets to aid comprehension and personal engagement

We encourage you to treat each unit as a space for exploration. Invite students to compare traditions, challenge assumptions, and relate ancient categories like dharma, rajdharma, and purushartha to contemporary civic life. Use the voices of Gandhi, Ambedkar, Phule, and Ramabai not only to teach history, but to inspire agency.

This book is especially suited for interdisciplinary classrooms, civic education modules, and exam preparation settings. Whether you're guiding IAS aspirants, mentoring young researchers, or facilitating undergraduate seminars, the tools within these pages are meant to be adapted, expanded, and localized.

Above all, let this book be a catalyst, for democratic pedagogy, ethical imagination and transformative learning.

— Authors

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A Letter to Students

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this journey through "Indian Political Thought". Whether you are an undergraduate student, a civil service aspirant, a young researcher, or simply someone curious about the philosophical foundations of Indian public life, this book is written with you in mind.

You are not here to memorize facts. You are here to think.

Indian political thought is not a museum of ideas, it is a living tradition. It speaks through the wisdom of Manu and Kautilya, the dissent of Kabir and Tarabai Shinde, the reformist zeal of Rammohan Roy and Pandita Ramabai, the constitutional courage of Ambedkar, and the civilizational imagination of Tagore and Coomaraswamy. These thinkers did not merely write, they acted, questioned, resisted, and reimagined the world around them.

This book invites you to do the same.

Each chapter is designed to help you think critically like a political philosopher and engage ethically like an active Indian scholar. You will encounter classroom simulations, reflective prompts, debate activities, and case studies that push you to connect theory with lived experience. You will be asked not just what these thinkers said, but why it matters, and how you might carry their ideas forward.

If you are preparing for the civil services or competitive exams, this book will give you conceptual clarity, historical depth and ethical nuance. But more importantly, it will help you develop the kind of civic imagination that true leadership demands.

If you are a student, this book will challenge you to think beyond the classroom, to see politics not just as a subject, but as a space of values, vision, and transformation.

If you are a seeker or ideologist, this book will offer you a pluralistic lens, one that honours debate, diversity, and dissent as the lifeblood of Indian political traditions.

Let this book be your companion, not just for exams, but for life. Let it help you ask better questions, make wiser choices, and become the kind of changemaker our society needs.

With deep respect for your journey,

—Authors

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Acknowledgement

"गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुगुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः"

This book is the fruit of a unique student–teacher collaboration between Satyendra Gupta and Dr Namo Narayan. Their combined perspectives, a scholar guided by a lifetime of teaching, have shaped every chapter and pedagogical tool in these pages.

"तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः

— Bhagavad Gita 4.34

We owe deep gratitude to all our teachers and mentors who exemplify this verse. Their wisdom, patience and willingness to engage in dialogue have shaped our scholarship and enriched the pedagogical framework of this book.

"ततः पुरुशो विष्वतः जगत्योमुखः विद्यया अमृतमश्नुते

— Mundaka Upanishad 2.3.1

We thank the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad for nurturing student leadership and civic engagement and the Indian Political Science Association for fostering rich scholarly exchange. As longstanding members of ABVP, the intellectual dialogues at these platforms sharpened our objectivity and motivated us to fill a critical gap: students rarely find a text that tours real-world political ideas through innovative classroom activities.

We express our deepest gratitude to our families for their unwavering support, encouragement, and patience throughout the long months of research, writing, and revision. Their faith in this project sustained us through every challenge.

We are also grateful to colleagues, peer reviewers and educators whose critical feedback and shared insights refined our arguments and strengthened our pedagogical approach.

Finally, this work is dedicated to the students, civil service aspirants and young scholars whose curiosity and passion for public life continue to inspire us. May this student-teacher endeavour encourage you to think critically, engage ethically and become changemakers in your own communities.

Dated: May 12, 2025

— Dr. Namo Narayan
Satyendra Gupta

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UNIT 1

ANCIENT INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

1. MANU
2. KAUTILYA
3. AGANNASUTT
4. THE JAIN TRADITION

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Welcome Note to the readers

Dear Readers,

The journey into Indian political thought begins where it all started—in the profound wisdom of Ancient Thought. This opening unit serves as the bedrock for understanding the rich tapestry of Indian political, social, and ethical philosophies that have endured through millennia. Here, we explore the foundational texts and traditions that shaped not only the governance systems of their time but also influenced moral and societal structures deeply intertwined with Indian civilization.

In Chapter One, we engage with the legal and ethical framework laid down by Manu in his monumental work, the Manusmriti. His ideas on law, order, and dharma offer a complex and nuanced understanding of governance rooted in social harmony.

Chapter Two invites us into the world of Kautilya, the brilliant strategist and political philosopher who authored the Arthashastra. His insights on statecraft, economics, and diplomacy provide a pragmatic approach to governance that remains relevant even today.

In Chapter Three, we delve into the philosophical and political discourse of the Agannasutta, a Buddhist text offering profound reflections on the origins of society, governance, and the ethical responsibilities of rulers.

Finally, Chapter Four introduces us to the Jaina tradition, a school of thought emphasizing nonviolence, truth, and asceticism, which profoundly influenced political and social ideologies throughout Indian history.

This unit invites readers to reflect on the enduring legacy of ancient Indian thought, exploring how these foundational philosophies continue to resonate in contemporary discussions of governance, ethics, and societal structure. Let us begin this enlightening journey into the roots of Indian political heritage, setting the stage for the chapters that follow.

Ancient Indian traditions can be broadly categorized into two streams: the Brahmanical and the Buddhist traditions. According to Bhikhu Parekh, there exists a profound continuity in Indian thought, seamlessly connecting ancient and modern times. Buddhism, while often seen as distinct, is not entirely separate from its Brahmanical roots. It can be regarded as "the rebel child of Hinduism" and "the Protestantism of the East" reflecting its reformist stance within the broader framework of Indian philosophical and spiritual heritage. (Parekh, 1986)

Brahminical Tradition

The Brāhmanic tradition represents an ideology and a way of life, originating from the Vedas (Ṛigveda, Yajurveda, Sāmveda and Atharvaveda) and the whole range of Vedic literature, which includes numerous Brahmanic Scriptures appended to all the four Vedas, Āranyak scriptures, Śad-darshana, Purānas,Upanishads. In addition, Brahmanic tradition also includes post-Vaidik diverse schools of thought such as Dharmasutras, Epics, Vedanga and Up-vedas, Dharmashastras, Smriti Scriptures (including Manusmriti and Yājnavalkyasmriti), Arthaśastras (including Kautilya's), Nitiśastras (including Śukraniti and Kāmandakīya Nitisāra) etc. These scriptures provide details concerning virtues, truth, rights, freedom, political life, etc. (Mookerji, 1947; Doniger, 1991)

Most of the inference and perception were put forward by the Rishis / Brahmans, hence was named as 'Brāhmanic'.

During the evolution of Brāhmanic tradition, it is difficult to reach a consensus for periodization and historicity of texts. Vedas, also known as Shruti,
were not available as text for a very long period. Similarly, as per one belief,
Mahābhārata was originally written as "Bharat", then as "Jaibharata" and lastly, as
"Mahābhārata". There are many projections of Ramayana followed in various
parts of the sub-continent, making it difficult for identification and reading of
primary texts and classical secondary commentaries of political purport and
relevance. (Brockington, 1998)
Hindu/Brahminical text are found in Two Forms- 1. Shruti and 2. Smriti.

Three rinas
1. Matra-rinas,
2. Pitra-rinas and
3. Guru-rinas.

Making a case for political economy, Kautilya's dan-dadhara aids Vārtā because both treasury (related to Vārtā) and punishment (Danda) are necessary for the control of one's own kingdom and those of the enemies.

Within Brahmanical Traditions there are two traditions:

1. Dharmashastra
2. Arthashastra

Dharmashastra Tradition

The Dharmashastra tradition is a key part of ancient Indian thought that focused on how to live a good and just life. These texts, like the Manusmriti, Yagvalkya Smriti, and Narad Smriti offered guidance on personal behaviour, social duties, law, and justice. They combined spiritual values with practical rules, helping people understand their responsibilities in family, society and governance. (Kane, 1930; Lingat, 1973) At its heart, Dharmashastra aimed to create harmony by linking ethics, law, and inner discipline.



Influence on Indian Law

- Moral Foundations: The idea of justice (Nyaya), duty (Dharma), and truth still echoes in Indian legal thinking.
- Family Laws: Hindu personal laws (on marriage, inheritance, etc.) still reflect Dharmashastra principles.
- Ethical Spirit: The emphasis on fairness, harmony, and moral responsibility continues to shape legal debates.

While modern Indian law is secular and rooted in the Constitution, it still carries the ethical legacy of the Dharmashastra, especially in areas like personal law and moral reasoning. (Derrett, 1970)

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Worksheet: Understanding the Sources of Dharma

Part A: Match the Source!

- Draw a line or write the correct letter-number pair to match each Dharma source with its description.

Dharma Source	Match with →	Description
A. Vedas		1. Teachings remembered and written down, like Manusmriti
B. Smriti		2. Voice of the inner self or conscience
C. Sadachar		3. Ethical behavior followed by respected people in society
D. Atman		4. Ancient sacred texts seen as the highest authority on Dharma
E. Rajshasana		5. Royal orders or laws issued by kings

Part B: Reflect and Write

Question:

Which source of Dharma do you think is most important in today's world—and why?

Your Answer:

The notion of Brahma and Kshtra

In ancient Vedic political thought, two key concepts emerged: Brahma and Kshatra, representing spiritual power and physical or regal power, respectively. These ideas sparked debates over which type of authority should hold more significance in governance. To make this more relatable, think of Brahma as the guiding principles rooted in wisdom, morality and spiritual leadership, similar to the role of advisors, philosophers, or constitutional values that shape a country's decisions. On the other hand, Kshatra symbolizes the physical might and administrative control required to enforce laws and protect society, much like the role of modern governments or security forces.

For example:

- **Brahma in modern governance:** Consider the Indian Constitution, which acts as the moral and guiding authority, defining the rules and ethics of governance.
- **Kshatra in practice:** Think of the government and its officials implementing policies, enforcing

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laws, or the police ensuring order in society.

The interplay of Brahma and Kshatra reminds us that both spiritual guidance and administrative strength are essential for a balanced and effective governance system. These debates from ancient times are still relevant as they highlight the need for collaboration between ideals and practical action in leadership today.

Notion of brahma:

The word 'Brahma' comes from the Sanskrit root 'Brih', meaning "to grow". This reflects growth, not just physically but also spiritually and intellectually, like when people work on self-improvement or learn new skills. Martin Haug explained that Brahma refers to prayer or acts of worship. This makes it easy to think of it as the way humans connect with the divine through devotion, like offering prayers or performing rituals. Rudolph Ruth added that Brahma originally symbolized the energy or effort directed toward pleasing the gods. Over time, this idea evolved into a broader religious meaning. Importantly, Brahma is different from Brāhman (the ultimate reality) and refers to something that grows or evolves, much like a seed growing into a plant when nurtured. Deussen described Brahma as a human will striving for the Absolute, or the ultimate truth or purpose. This could be compared to someone relentlessly pursuing their dreams or higher goals, such as a scientist working tirelessly to uncover breakthroughs or an artist perfecting their craft to express something profound. In essence, Brahma connects ideas of prayer, effort, growth, and striving for greater purpose, making it a concept that resonates with both spiritual and personal growth in real-life contexts.

Notion of kshatra

Kshatra, often translated as sovereignty or ruling power, represents the authority and strength associated with leadership and governance. The concept appears frequently in ancient Indian texts like the Rigveda, where it signifies rulers and their role in society. In later Samhitās, Kshatra is linked to the ruling class, distinct from the other social groups, such as priests (Brahmins), common people, and the servile class. This division reflects the societal structure of that time, where rulers (Kshatriyas) held administrative and military power, while Brahmins focused on spiritual guidance. In the Brāhmanas, A close connection is drawn between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Brahmins were associated with Brahma power (spiritual and intellectual authority), and Kshatriyas with Kshatra power (sovereign and military strength). However, this relationship was not exclusive. Brahmins could enhance Kshatra power through their wisdom and guidance, while Kshatriyas could pursue spiritual growth under Brahmin influence.

Kautilya's Perspective: Kautilya believed that the synergy between Brahmins and Kshatriyas could lead to extraordinary achievements. For example, when rulers sought advice from sages, their decisions often resulted in strong, effective governance, capable of overcoming even the toughest challenges—what Kautilya described as the "conquest of the unconquerable." For example, Think of Brahma and Kshatra in modern governance. Brahmins, with their spiritual and intellectual roles, are similar to think tanks or constitutional advisors, who provide moral and strategic direction. Kshatriyas, on the other hand, are akin to political leaders or the military, who take action to implement policies and protect the nation. For instance, during a crisis, leaders often rely on expert advisors to make informed decisions, blending both wisdom and authority.

This ancient idea highlights the importance of collaboration between intellectual guidance and executive power in building a strong and effective governance system.

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Four Pursuits of Life

1. **Dharma:** Dharma, a central concept in Indian tradition, represents the essence of a righteous life. Derived from the Sanskrit root 'Dhri', meaning "to sustain" or "to uphold," Dharma embodies the principles that maintain order and harmony in society. B.A. Salitore's perspective expands Dharma to cover a wide range of matters, from law to piety, touching on public behavior toward oneself (Swadharma) and society (Varnadharma) and Ashrama dharma.

The Mahābhārata describes Dharma as the foundation of society's moral and spiritual order. Dharma integrates virtue, righteousness, and socio-ethical-religious ideas. It encompasses various duties:

- Raj Dharma: Duties of rulers.
- Praja Dharma: Duties of the subjects.
- Mitra dharma: Duties of friendship.

Manu's proclamation states that ethics is the true essence of Dharma (Achara Parmo Dharma), emphasizing moral behaviour as its core. Kautilya's Arthashastra explains Dharma as social duty, highlighting its diverse applications in governance and societal harmony. This portrayal of Dharma underscores its timeless relevance in shaping individual conduct and societal order.

2. **Artha:** Artha, one of the four Purusharthas (life pursuits), emphasizes economic activities and the pursuit of wealth and power to sustain life and ensure prosperity. It plays a crucial role in maintaining societal stability and individual well-being. Kautilya advocated for a balanced approach, where the king enjoys charity, wealth, and desires equally. Overindulgence in any of these can harm personal and societal harmony. He endorsed the idea of maximizing wealth and expanding territorial power as vital aspects of governance and stability.

Definition of Artha: Artha has been described as "Vritti", meaning the livelihood of humanity, emphasizing its role in supporting everyday life. This perspective showcases Artha's significance as both an economic and strategic pursuit, essential for societal growth and individual success. Artha can mean:

- In a narrow sense: Wealth and material resources.
- In a broader sense: All means necessary for acquiring and sustaining a powerful system, aligning with the other Purusharthas for a harmonious life.

3. **Kama:** Kama represents the pursuit of worldly pleasures, aesthetic desires, and enjoyment in life. It is considered one of the four Purusharthas (goals of life), emphasizing the importance of experiencing joy while maintaining balance with other pursuits. Kautilya was one of the first thinkers to develop a balanced philosophy that acknowledged the necessity of worldly and aesthetic pleasures, alongside Artha (wealth) and territorial expansion. He advocated for harmonious integration, ensuring that indulgence in desires does not conflict with righteousness (Dharma) or economic responsibilities (Artha).

Kautilya encouraged rulers to enjoy pleasures but in moderation, appreciating charity, wealth, and desires equally, as they are interconnected and essential for a fulfilling life. This vision of Kama highlights the need to enjoy life's pleasures responsibly, without compromising ethical and societal duties.

4. **Moksha:** In Indian tradition, individuals are seen as integral parts of society, constantly working toward Moksha—salvation or liberation from the cycle of rebirth. This is achieved by balancing

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Dharma (righteous duties), Artha (material pursuits), and Kama (worldly pleasures) through active participation in everyday social and economic activities.

- The State was envisioned as a forceful authority designed to ensure the protection of all living beings, with its primary role being to harmonize the four purushārthas—Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth), Kāma (pleasure), and Moksha (liberation).
- The Brāhmanic tradition established a relationship between the king and his subjects founded largely on the mutual exchange of responsibilities and duties.

The Katha-Upanishad describes Dharma and Moksha as Śreya (the higher good), while Artha and Kāma are classified as Preya (the pleasurable or desirable).

The notion of varna

The term 'Varna' indicates the division of society into four major functional classes. It originated from the Sanskrit root 'Vri', which means selection/ adoption of activities/duties and their performance by one's virtues and capabilities. According to G.H. Mees, social, cultural, professional or occupational, symbolic and occult, these five conceptions have been the basis of the Varna system. There are four varnas in Purusha Sukta of 10th mandal of Rigveda- Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaish, Shudra. (Sharma, 2015)

The notion of Danda

Danda, in ancient Indian traditions, represents the power and authority of a ruler to maintain order and justice in society. In Satapatha Brahmana, The king is called 'Adandya', meaning he is beyond punishment. This highlights the king's supreme position as the authority figure who enforces Danda but is not subject to it. Think of this as the idea that a judge enforces laws but is not bound by the penalties of those laws in their role. In Manusmriti, Danda is described as the king's tool for ensuring peace and order. It refers to penal actions, such as enforcing laws and punishing wrongdoing, essential for keeping society stable. Kautilya expanded Danda to include all actions needed for effective governance. This means using resources wisely, protecting them, and managing relationships within society to ensure growth and stability. For example, a government building infrastructure, ensuring safety, and distributing resources fairly all fall under this broader concept of Danda. In simple terms, Danda symbolizes the ruler's responsibility to protect society, enforce justice, and manage resources effectively. It's a reminder that authority must be used for the good of the people.

Evoluation of Political Ideas

Origin of Kingship

Ancient Indian Brahminic literature highlights that both society and the state have quasi-divine and quasi-contractual origins, meaning they were believed to be founded with divine approval and mutual agreements. According to this tradition, people faced chaos and lawlessness, referred to as Matsyanyaya (a situation where the stronger prey on the weaker, like fish). To restore order, the people requested divine help, and Brahma sent Manu to govern and protect them. This reflects an early idea of a "social contract," where people sought leadership to maintain peace. In Prithu tradition, Prithu, a descendant of Virajas, became the ruler after committing to protect and serve the people. This shows the ruler's responsibility towards society, emphasising mutual trust and duties.

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Kautilya's Arthashastra also mentions the people asking Manu, the Vaivasvat, to become their king to end Matsyanyaya. In return, they agreed to give a portion of their resources (royal dues) as payment for his leadership and protection.

In simpler terms, these traditions highlight how society looked to leaders for order and security, and in return, leaders were expected to serve and protect their people, creating an early form of governance built on mutual agreements. Think of it as an early form of governance like today's idea of a government elected to serve and protect the citizens.

Objective of state

Kautilya's approach to welfare placed the family at the center, expecting families to care for their own members during times of crisis according to their traditional roles (Varnashrama). He believed that the state should provide only limited welfare, acting as a safety net, while most support should come from individual self-help and familial responsibility.

This idea remains relevant today. Modern social policies often balance targeted government assistance with the recognition that families and communities are essential in supporting one another. In an era where public resources may be stretched, many governments emphasize creating safety nets while encouraging self-reliance echoing Kautilya's vision of combining limited state intervention with strong family support.

Foreign Policy, Diplomacy and Inter-state Relations

Brāhmanic literature shows that ancient India had a surprisingly advanced system for managing contacts between states. Although we know little about international relations during the early Vedic period, later texts reveal a sophisticated approach to diplomacy. They describe how states used negotiation and formal principles to build and maintain relationships—a system of foreign affairs that laid the groundwork for practices still seen in international relations today.

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Chapter: 1

MANU

Manu is considered to be the first man on earth, who gave birth to the human race with her wife Satrupa. So the humans are also known as “Manushya” or “Manav”. Manu is considered as the first law giver. Manu has told what is Dharma of different Varnas. He wrote his code of law centuries ago, popularized as “Manusmriti”. (sarkar, 2022)

Manusmritiis is a part of Dharamshastra. It was written between 200 BC-200 AD. (Olivelle, 2005) It was translated into English language by Sir William Jones in 1794. It is believed that it was the first Sanskrit text translated to English. (Saiyed, 2025; Sarkar, 2022) Manusmriti, often regarded as "The Law Book of Manu," introduces a structured legal system for the state. Instead of leaving all judicial decisions solely to the king's judgment, it sets up a layered system. In this system, legal experts serve as advisors to the king, and there are clearly defined rules for using juries, taking oaths, gathering evidence, and determining punishments. This framework ensured that justice was administered fairly and systematically. The main objective of Manusmritiis to maintain ‘dharma’ i.e. law and order. It contains practical rules governing Individual, families, Varnas. (Olivelle, 2005)

Parts of Manusmriti

Manusmriti comprises 12 chapters and contains a total of 2,694 stanzas. These verses are organized thematically, covering topics such as creation, education, marriage, governance, penance, and liberation

Chapter	Themes
	Creation
	Duties and Rituals
	Code of Religious Procedures
	Procedure for First Two Stages of Life
	Disciplines of Life, including Eating habit, Purifications etc.
	Third and Fourth Stages of Life
	Duties of King
	Policies of the State
	Duties of Men, Women and Classes of people
	Social Classification, Duties in Distress
	Atonement/Expiation
	Effects of Actions (Karma) in Past Lives, Three Modes /Guṅas, Ultimate Salvation

What is dharma?

The term has been derived from Sanskrit root ‘dhr’ that means ‘to hold’. So, Dharma is a way or path to hold one's life systematically. In Atharvaveda, Dharma is described as “Prathvim dharmam Dhritam”. i.e. The world is upheld by Dharma.

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There is no appropriate word available in any of the European languages which can be treated as the exact translation of the Indian word 'Dharma'. It should not be confused with religion. When we will not follow dharma, it will lead to arajakata (anarchy). It will lead to pralaya (catastrophe). This will bring end to the life on earth. If king does not follow dharma, according to Manu, such king will go to hell. King is supposed to be from Kshatriya varna. Kingship was a hereditary institution. Dharma is discussed in Dharma shastras. Most well-known dharma shastra is Manusmriti.

Dharma is a law to govern human society. Dharma is based on rta. Rta denotes cosmic law i.e. the law of universe or law of nature. Shrutis contain rta (riti). Shrutis represent Vedas. Vedas contain revealed knowledge. The knowledge is revealed by Bramha to Rishis (sages). Smritis are based on the revealed knowledge found in Shrutis.

Manu Smriti is written with a focus on the "should" of dharma rather than on the actuality of everyday practice in India at the time.

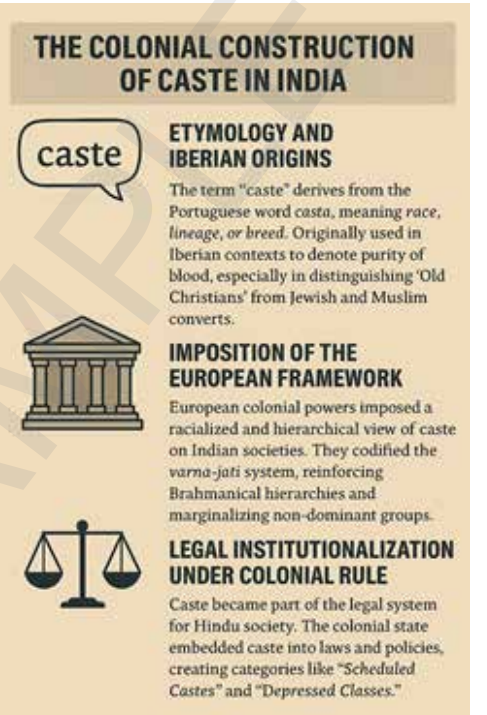
The concept of Dharma is very wide and multiverse. Major elements of Dharma are-

1. **Purushartha**: Manusmriti sets 4 goals of life. These are-
   a. Dharm - The principles or ways for life management.
   b. Arth - Attainment of materialistic well-being or fulfilment of worldly desires.
   c. Kam - non-materialistic well-being and desires.
   d. Moksh - Freedom from all these worldly desires or greed i.e. Kam, Krodh, Lobh, Moh and Ahankar.
   e. Moksha is the most valued Purushartha.
2. **Ashram**- The word 'Ashrama' is derived from the root 'Shrama', which means to exert. It has two meanings:
   a. A place where one may perform exertions.
   b. The action of performing such exertions.

Ashrams denote different stages of life. There are specific goals in each stage. Manu divides life in 4 Stages as per their age. These are - 1. Bramachary, 2. Grihasth, 3. Vanprashth and 4. Sanyas

3. **Varna-** Manu categories Human Society in 4 sections

Caste



Key Colonial Legal Steps on Caste

1. **Census Classifications (1881–1931)**: Turned caste into rigid, state-defined identities, especially under Herbert Risley's racial rankings in the 1901 Census.
2. **Anglo-Hindu Law Codification:** Applied Brahmanical texts like Manusmṛiti to define Hindu customs, sidelining diverse local practices.
3. **Government of India Act, 1935:** Formally recognized "Scheduled Castes," embedding caste in electoral and administrative systems.
4. **Temple Entry & Privilege Cases:** Courts often upheld caste-based exclusions while resolving disputes over rituals and honours.
5. **Communal Award (1932)** : Introduced separate electorates for Dalits (Depressed Classes), politicizing caste identity.

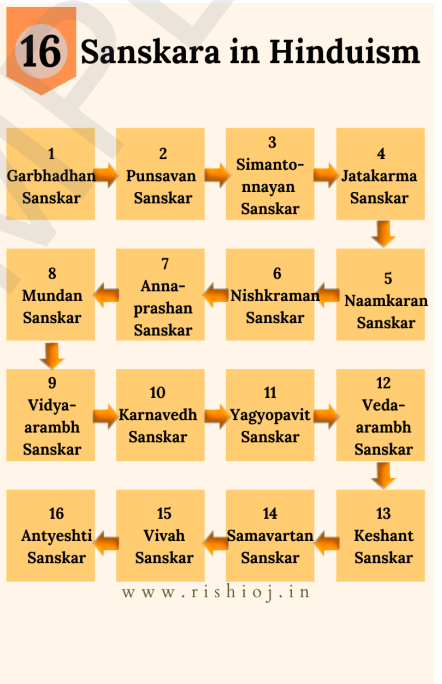
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as per their occupation or interest of occupation. These were called as "Castes" during the colonial period. These are- 1. Brahmin, 2. Kshatriy, 3. Vaish and 4. Shudra

There are some other people that are not included in any of the above, that are known as 'Antyaj' or 'out-castes'.

4. **Sanskar**: In hindu tradition, Sanskars has been considered as an essential rule for the human being and so it is mandatory to observe this rule. 16 Sanskars are performed during the life of a human being. Sanskars means "Sanshodhan- Parishodhan- Parishuddhi.".

   a. Childhood Sanskars
   b. Educational Sanskars
   c. Marriage Sanskar
   d. Death Sanskar



The theory of origin of state

Manu's theory of origin is a Quasi- contractual and theory of origin of state. State is a contract between man and God. A.S. Altekar categorises Manu's theory of origin of state as 'Semi-devine'. **Chapter 3** of Manusmriti mentions Manu as the guardian of the contract between the people and the king and **Chapter 7** of Manusmriti mentions the theory of state.

Pre-state stage

Initially there was no state, which means there was arajakata. In this situation, Matsyanyaya was prevalent. (Big fish-eating small fish – might is right.). Hence people requested Brahma. Brahma created Manu.

Manu is the first king and the law-giver. Now it is the duty of the people to obey the laws.

Features of kingship

King has divine personality. Eight gods (Ashta basu) have given a part of their personality to the king. Thus, king combines Indra, Varuna, Agni, Vayu, Surya, Chandra, Yama and Kuber. There is difference in the idea of kingship in east and west. In west, kings used to have divine personality as well as divine rights but in India king only had divine personality, but no divine rights.

Divine rights symbolize absolute authority. Kings didn't had absolute authority, kings were under the law. Kings were to follow 'rajyadharm'. Dharma as found in dharmashashras or as told by great sages and Brahmins.

Duties of the King

Manusmriti envisions the ideal king as a disciplined Kshatriya, rooted in dharma and scriptural knowledge. His personal conduct must reflect restraint—rising early, avoiding daytime sleep, and steering clear of indulgences like hunting, gambling, and sensual distractions. Governance demands

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reverence for Brahmins, daily worship, and active care for public welfare. The king is tasked with building infrastructure, supporting the needy, and guiding citizens toward yogakshema and the four puruṣārthas. Justice is hierarchical, with punishments scaled by varna status. Economically, he collects graded taxes based on land fertility and shares in traded goods. Women's status remains subordinated, governed under male supervision and devoid of legal autonomy.

Key Duties mentioned in Manusmriti

- Uphold Kshatriya dharma and scriptural wisdom.
- Respect and worship Brahmins daily.
- Maintain personal discipline: rise early, no daytime sleep, avoid excesses.
- Care for orphans, destitute, and support public works.
- Promote yogakshema and the four puruṣārthas.
- Administer punishment by śāstra-based varna hierarchy.
- Levy graded taxes and claim royal share in goods.
- Enforce gender norms with women under male guardianship

The main functions of the king

The king's duties are deeply anchored in both pragmatic governance and dharmic responsibility.

1. **Dandaneeti (Policy of Punishment):** The king ensures order and stability through disciplined administration and the calibrated use of punishment as prescribed by dharmaśāstra texts.
2. **Taxation:** He organises resource collection based on principles of fairness and land productivity, securing the economic foundation of the state.
3. **Justice and Judicial System:** As the ultimate arbiter, the king delivers justice following scriptural law, maintaining social harmony and reinforcing moral conduct.
4. **Inter-State Relations:** Diplomacy, alliance-building, and warfare fall under his domain, shaping the kingdom's position within the broader political landscape.
5. **Morality and Religion:** Upholding righteous conduct, the king acts as a moral exemplar, promoting Vedic values and religious duties to sustain cosmic and social order.

Taxation

The foundation of India's taxation system traces back to early legal and political texts such as the Manusmriti and Arthashastra, which outlined detailed norms for revenue collection rooted in dharma and governance. These texts illustrate that direct taxation—imposed based on one's occupation and capacity, was a key responsibility of the king, designed not merely to enrich the state but to sustain public welfare and moral order. (Sharma, 2016; Bhatia, 2023)

Under this framework, the king levied taxes on traders, artisans, and agriculturists, calibrated to their livelihoods and social functions. Tax payments were made in diverse forms: gold and silver coins, livestock, raw materials, and even personal services.

One of the clearest articulations comes from Manusmriti (7.130), which prescribes:

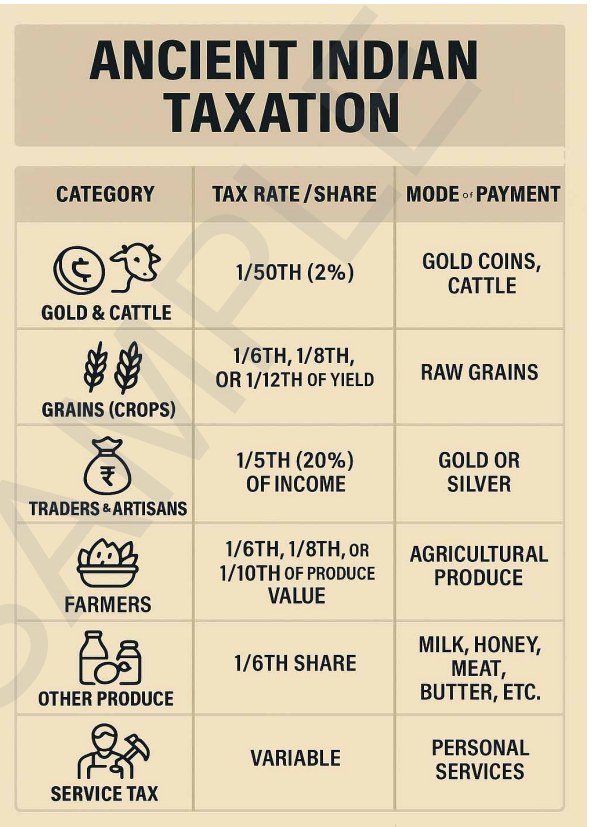
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- 1/50th share on cattle and gold, symbolizing the king's modest claim on wealth and resources.
- 1/6th, 1/8th, or 1/12th share on grains, proportionate to the fertility of land and productivity.

Additional income tax provisions specify:

- **Traders and artisans** were to pay **20% of their income**, often in precious metals.
- **Farmers** contributed **1/6, 1/8, or 1/10 of produce value**, with the rate adjusted according to crop conditions.
- The king also held rights to a **1/6th share in traded goods** such as **milk, honey, meat, butter**, and other commodities.

These tax norms highlight a nuanced system grounded in **economic pragmatism, ethical kingship**, and **context-sensitive governance**, making ancient India's fiscal thought remarkably sophisticated and morally embedded.



Inter-State Relations

Manu's ideas on inter-state relations are largely based on political expediency and established righteousness. Manu was in favour of war under two conditions, when there is a threat to one's kingdom and secondly to expansion of territory. Manu suggested certain techniques to protect its state which he called "Chaturopaya". They are - 1. conciliation, 2. dissension, 3. bribery and 4. force to tackle the opponents. Manu was in favour of the first and the last technique.

Manu as the father of Indian polity

Manu is considered as the father of Indian polity due to the following reasons:

He presented, in his smriti, a picture of the socio- economic, cultural and religious environment prevailing in ancient India.

- He focused on the institution of kingship.
- The hierarchy of social castes (Varna system) and their relations formed the integral theme of his political philosophy.
- Manu exhibited a deep concern for the protection of ethical autonomy of the society.
- Manu had not attempted the political phenomenon as a distinct identify by the had discussed it in the context of wider social purposes connected with religion and morality.
- Manu has not presented a theory of state but provided an account of government and its functions.