



## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN INDIA: THE SHIVAJI MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of a 'Welfare State (Sukhi Rajya)' is an age-old notion in the Indian political history. Kautilya in his work Arthashastra has clearly stated that 'the welfare of the people is the primary duty of a king (Prajā sukhe sukham rajnah I prajānamcha hite hitam II).' This message became a guiding principle to all the rulers who ruled the different parts of India after the Mauryas.

'Political Leadership' and the concept of the 'Welfare State' go hand in hand. Without the practice of ethical leadership a ruler cannot think of the welfare of his people. The Rajan of the Vedic times was not only the leader of the people of that time; he was also a representative of the people. He ran the administration as per the aspirations of the people.



**KEYWORDS:** Indian political history, Political Leadership, Welfare State.

### INTRODUCTION

Works on the *Rajaniti* have placed before the Indian administration great ideals to be followed by the political leaders from time to time. The great Indian rulers starting from the ancient period followed these ideals while running the administration of their respective states. Hence, the concept of 'Sukhi Rajya' has been brought into practice to a great extent in the political history of India, with some exceptions.

The medieval period in Indian history saw much political turbulence due to the rule of political dynasties of foreign origin. That was the period when much of the Indian ethical and moral values have been thrown to the winds. This was the period when 'might' was always considered as 'right.'

During such a period of political turmoil, the medieval India saw a ray of hope in the rise and rule of Shivaji, though for a brief period. The geo-political equations of the period were very less conducive for Shivaji to fulfil his dreams. Even then he succeeded to a great extent.

Shivaji's concept of '*Hindavi Swaraj*' to a great extent tried to free the Indian political system from the foreign enslavement. He believed that 'The evil could be remedied only by the establishment of a universal empire throughout the country from sea to sea.'

R.H. Rawlison in his work '*Shivaji, the Maratha- His Life and Times*' says that 'this was a dark and violent age, and at least Shivaji's hands were not stained, like those of Aurangzeb, with the blood of his kindred. He was never deliberately or wantonly cruel.'

The saints of the period saw in Shivaji the required ability to meet the challenges of the period and find suitable solutions for the recovery from the crisis. They said, 'The corrupt Muslims have become our Kings, everywhere misdeeds have cropped up, Then He incarnated Himself, To Remove the sins of this Dark Age.'

The religious mentor of Shivaji, Swami Ramdas saw a great ray of hope in the rise of Shivaji in the political arena of medieval India. He said 'The pillar of a people's hope, the centre of a world's desire, to animate the heart, to kindle the imagination and to inspire the brain of succeeding ages to the highest endeavours.' Likewise many contemporaries of Shivaji wished that the rule and the political leadership and acumen exhibited by Shivaji will result in bringing positive changes after witnessing much oppression by the foreign rule. Their wish was not belied by Shivaji and he came up to their expectations through his political, administrative strategies. This aspect highlights the leadership quality of Chhatrapati.

The *Ajna Patra* of Ramachandra Nilakanth, who served Shivaji as his *Amatya* for ten years, is a Political Testament and throws much light on the personality and administrative capabilities of Shivaji.

The text contains a long narration regarding the political rise of Shivaji from a political non-entity to the status of a *Chhatrapati*. It says 'The epoch-maker *Chhatrapati* was at first a Muslim's dependent, but managed from the age of fifteen to free his small *jagir* of Poona and based his future greatness on that small beginning, entirely on his own effort and initiative.'

The text further says, 'He judged the capacities of men and created his own helpmates and servants by enabling them to do great things, so that he could succeed in what appeared impossible at the beginning. He welded the scattered elements of his people into a united body and with their help accomplished his main object.'

The political rise for Shivaji was not a cake-walk. He toiled day and night to declare his independence from the mighty Adil Shahis of Bijapur at the initial stage. This early stage of his political life was based on much political and military strategic thinking through which he was able to achieve much success. At the initial stage of his career itself Shivaji able to exhibit his organisational skills when he organised the Mavalis and trained them to fulfil his political ambitions. A leader is known for his self initiation and efforts through which he will be able to command respect and followership of others.

Shivaji was a great strategist. He executed his mission with much precision coupled with prior planning and consultation. His planning was also coupled with Situational Intelligence.

The text further says regarding his political career, 'All these he encompassed with the extraordinary power of his own ingenuity. He overcame every enemy, some he openly attacked, some he compelled to accept a fight, some he surprised by means of ingenious contrivance, others he weakened by involving them in mutual dissensions, sometimes secretly fomenting quarrels.'

'Others he confounded by sudden raids upon their camps and habitations. Some he boldly met in open combat, some he won over through tempting offers, some he boldly went to visit personally, some were scattered through curious stratagem.' 'He audaciously built his own forts and shelters in alien jurisdictions; in the case of some who were already strongly entrenched in naval bases, he raised his own rival sea-forts. His navy forcibly entered some inaccessible ports. In this way dealing differently with different opponents he established an independent kingdom of his own..... with unchallenged supremacy. Thus, he elevated his Maratha nation consisting of 96 clans to an unheard of dignity, crowning the whole achievement by occupying an exalted throne and assuming the title of *Chhatrapati*.' The strategic military planning with the like-minded people was a continuous process for Shivaji which he did time and again to get the desired military results, though he fought against the mighty and well-established military powers.

Ancient texts on *Rajaniti* talk about the dos and don'ts to a king. Ramachandra Nilakanth further explains, 'All this he did for the defence of his religion, for putting Gods and Brahmanas in a position enabling them to have their proper functions performed without molestation. Under Shivaji's rule robberies and injustice became unknown, and his commands came to be strictly obeyed by all.'

A successful ruler is known for his strategic thinking and quick decision-making. If an appropriate decision is not taken at a crucial moment, one cannot get the desired results. These

qualities of a successful leader can be attributed to Shivaji- 'We can say that Shivaji's principal service lies in his having quickly transformed the inherent lawlessness of the Maratha people into a national solidarity by his unequalled leadership, enabling them to attain to the foremost place among the various races of India.'

The rise of Shivaji in the political arena of medieval India is a story of great struggle and sacrifice coupled with political will and determination. He was able to build his independent political entity from scratch amongst the most disorganised Maratha groups.

Ramachandra further records, 'We know well what a factious, turbulent and riotous life the Maratha clans of the western hills used to lead for centuries before the rise of Shivaji. They had been wasting their energy in internecine disputes, obeying no law, no authority and making life and property hopelessly insecure in the land.' At this juncture the rise of Shivaji gave this disorganised brave political group the much awaited political leadership.

'He correctly gauged the situation; he at first heartily joined the mass, and by quickly gaining their confidence established such a complete hold upon their contentious but valiant spirits, that they soon learned to render implicit obedience to him; and under his leadership they put forth a united national effort in defence of their country's liberty. The roving undisciplined bands soon came to realize the value of willing comradeship and followed their leader in weal and woe.'

Building an independent political entity for oneself is a herculean task which requires large amount of financial resources for building a strong military power. Shivaji exhibited his leadership qualities successfully through which he was able to make his dream true. 'Shivaji succeeded not only in establishing his own independence, but also in bringing about the necessary solidarity among the scattered warring elements of his homeland, so that the Marathas were transformed into a nation and a power of first rank in Indian politics.'

Shivaji believed that *Swarajya* is possible only through *Surajya*. Hence, he laid the foundation for a strong administrative set-up in his State. 'He placed before the nation the higher ideal of *Swarajya*, of political emancipation from the chains of grinding slavery that held down his country for centuries together. Shivaji was manifestly a high gifted personality, ready to meet any danger, always possessing supreme self-confidence, at once stern and kind-hearted, an ideal king of the type which Kalidas has immortalised in his famous description of Dilip' observes his *Amatya*.

His administrative reforms were manifold. He preferred to use Marathi language as his official language in preference to Persian and Urdu which were dominating the rest of India. He borrowed Sanskrit phraseology for official purposes. For this purpose a special dictionary of court terms named *Rajavyavahar Kosh* was prepared and it was extensively used in the official communication.

While defending his national and cultural interests Shivaji never developed any hatred towards other religions and communities, especially the Muslims. All communities and religions were given full religious liberty which was his State Policy.

The age-old administrative principles became the foundation while designing a new administrative policy for the Maratha State. The Maratha king accepted the division of the departmental work among is eight ministers known as *Ashta Pradhans*. This measure much suited to the needs of his time to give an effective administration to the people. Ancient Hindu Traditions found in the Sanskrit works on polity served as the basis for this division of the work.

He was an 'an intensely practical administrator' who clearly saw the danger of distribution of land among the officers and others in lieu of service rendered by them. Hence, he made elaborate arrangements for the payment of salaries to his ministers and officials in cash. He considered the existing *Jagir* system harmful to the economic interests of the State.

'Shivaji's administration was based on few important principles which had aimed at fulfilling his dream of *Swarajya*:

1. The country should be defended against enemies by means of well-garrisoned forts
2. All services were to be paid in cash and not by grants of land.
3. Servants were employed on the principle of merit and not hereditary

4. Revenue was not to be collected through *Zamindars* or middlemen but through a well-supervised government agency.
5. The system of farming lands was abolished; in other words, land revenue was never auctioned
6. All government work was divided among well defined separate departments
7. Equal opportunity was offered in the public service to all castes
8. Expenditure was so budgeted as to lay by some surplus every year

He gave much importance to preservation in the State than on the acquisition which was a very noteworthy point in his administration. Shivaji distinguished himself as a ruler ahead of his times when he insisted on order, implicit obedience and strictest discipline. The manner in which he regulated the behaviour of his troops during their campaigns of conquest or plunder is noteworthy. Honest dealings were handsomely rewarded and the least dereliction in the duty was punished severely.

The French envoy Germain who visited Shivaji at Tiruvadi in July, 1677 has highly commended the simple life style of the Maratha ruler. He wrote, 'The camp of Shivaji was without pomp, without women; there were no baggages, only two tents but of simple cloth, coarse and very scanty, one for him and the other for his prime-minister.' Simplicity is one of the great traits of a great leader.

### **An Estimate of Shivaji as the Maratha Leader:**

Many scholars and writers on Shivaji have highly commended his leadership qualities through which he was able to fulfil the aspirations of the people who supported his political cause:

Sir Richard Temple in *Oriental Experience*: 'Shivaji was not only a bold man but he had the peculiar power of arousing enthusiasm in others and he was the man who raised an abject race from nothingness up to empire. Besides, Shivaji was a great administrator. He founded many institutions which survived for more than a century'

**Acworth in Introduction to the *Ballads of the Marathas*** : 'While Shivaji's genius as a captain is universally recognised, scant justice is done to his constructive and administrative abilities and to the permanence of his idea, both of conquest and government.'

**Contemporary English merchants of Surat**: 'Shivaji is the fairest friend, noblest enemy and the most politique Prince. He will continue victorious even to a miracle.'

Sir Jadunath Sarkar, an authority on Medieval Indian History, has written exhaustively on the life and career of Shivaji. His book entitled '*Shivaji and His Times*' published in 1919 throws much light on the life of this great Maratha king.

At the Shivaji's birthday celebration in Madras in 1928, Sir Jadunath Sarkar spoke extensively on the great character of this Maratha king. The speech highlights the political, administrative, military skills of Shivaji which were applied at appropriate times to get the best results for his Maratha State: 'Shivaji's political ideals were such that we might accept them even today without any change. He aimed at giving his subjects peace, universal toleration, equal opportunities for all castes and creeds, a beneficent, active and pure system of administration, a navy for promoting trade and a trained militia for guarding the homeland. Above all he sought for national development through action and not by lonely meditation.'

'All this national expansion proceeded from the initial energy of one man. Shivaji was the central power-house of the new Maharashtra. He had the supreme royal gift of quickly judging every man's character and capacity and choosing the best instrument for every task that he wanted to be done.'

But he was a self-taught man; he never visited any great capital, court or camp. His administrative and military systems perfectly suited to his country and age, were his own creation. Therefore, the historian of Shivaji at the end of a careful study of all the records about him in eight different languages, is bound to admit, that he was not only the maker of the Maratha nation, but also the greatest constructive genius of Medieval India.

States fall, empires break up, dynasties become extinct, but the memory of a true 'hero as King' like Shivaji, remains an imperishable historical legacy for the entire human race. Shivaji was a genius far

in advance of his times. He conceived and carried out most of the reforms and measures usually associated in our days with a civilized state.

While his political activities with reference to an independent Maratha sovereignty have been commonly understood, his reforms in the social, religious and economic spheres of a full national life have received scant justice. He certainly was a champion of Hinduism, but was no bigot. He treated all religions with equal respect.

Judged even by the strictest standard Shivaji stands out unmistakably as a unique personality, not only in his own time but in the modern age as a whole. In the midst of the surrounding darkness he shines forth as a brilliant luminary far ahead of his day.

‘Shivaji was the last great constructive genius and nation-builder that the Hindu race has produced. He called the Maratha race to a new life. He raised the Marathas into an independent self-reliant people, conscious of their oneness and high destiny and his most precious legacy was the spirit that he breathed into his race’

‘He has proved by his example that the Hindu race can build a nation, found a state, defeat enemies; they can conduct their own defence, protect and promote literature and art, commerce, industry; they can maintain navies and ocean-trading fleets of their own and conduct naval battles on equal terms with foreigners. He taught the modern Hindus to rise to the full stature of their growth. Shivaji has shown that the tree of Hinduism is not really dead, that it can rise from beneath the seemingly crushing load of centuries of political bondage; that it can put forth new leaves and branches. It can again lift up its head to the skies.’

It is no exaggeration to say that he is the ‘Creator of the Maratha Nation.’ In a long narration the great author of works on medieval times of India has aptly described the great personality of the Maratha king. The description highlights different facets of the great Maratha king, be it political, social or cultural.

### CONCLUSION:

A systematic study of the history of Shivaji from different perspectives- political, social, administrative, cultural and of course historical will highlight the unique leadership quality which he developed over a period of time. This political leadership became a role model to his successors in the Maratha history like Baji Rao I.

But, unfortunately, ‘His reign was too brief and his dynasty too short lived, for the world to see the full development of his constructive statesmanship and political ideals.’

A note of caution also should be kept in mind while studying and analysing the political career of Shivaji – ‘Shivaji must not be judged by twentieth century western standards.’ Keeping all these limitations in mind an attempt will be made in the presentation to highlight the unique contributions of Shivaji as a political leader.

Political leadership in the past has a link to the future too. Without a sound past, we cannot think of a bright and vibrant future. Hence the best practices of the past which are described in the pages of history should be studied as the case studies.

Some administrative practices of great rulers of India in the past are still relevant in the modern times and many new lessons can be drawn from them. Be it Kautilya-Chandragupta Maurya, Vidyaranya-Harhara and Bukkaraya, Swami Ramdas-Shivaji, the teacher-student duo have much to say in modern times relating to political leadership. It is high time that we should have a relook at the history of our past to draw much inspiration and great lessons.

### We would like to conclude the essay with some pertinent questions:

- Can we consider Shivaji as a Change Agent relating to the history of Medieval India?
- Is it possible to accept and adopt some of his administrative reforms in modern times?
- Can we give a new dimension to our defence policies based on the military strategies followed by our rulers in the past?

- Can we give a new dimension to the history of Medieval India based on the new findings, evidences and new historical interpretations?
- How to instil a sense of pride among the readers of Indian history by citing the examples of the great sons of this country like Shivaji
- Now, should we re-write or re-interpret our history?

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