

***Rāja Dharma* in Hindu and Buddhist Political Thought**

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Abstract

This paper examines the foundational principles of governance in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as exemplified by *Rāja Dharma* and the doctrine of ethical kingship, which converge on shared ideals of righteousness, compassion, and service to society. In Hindu political philosophy, *Rāja Dharma* delineates the sovereign's sacred obligation to uphold justice, safeguard moral and cosmic order, and ensure the material and spiritual welfare of the populace. It envisions the ruler as both a protector and a moral exemplar, harmonising political authority with dharmic responsibility. The paper also foregrounds Buddhist political thought which conversely advances a vision of leadership grounded in selflessness, non-violence, and ethical restraint. The *Dasa Rāja-Dhamma* prescribes ten royal virtues that guide rulers in fostering harmony, equity, and collective well-being without succumbing to ego or tyranny. Both traditions advocate pluralism, tolerance, and the respectful coexistence of diverse religious and cultural identities. Though emerging from distinct metaphysical frameworks, Hindu and Buddhist models of governance offer a unified ethical paradigm that remains relevant for contemporary discourses on leadership and justice. These systems demonstrate that moral legitimacy, rather than coercive power, constitutes the true foundation of enduring and inclusive governance.

Keywords: *Rāja Dharma, Dasa Rāja-Dhamma, Ethical governance, Hindu political thought, Buddhist political philosophy, Pluralism*

Introduction

Ancient Indian political thought offers a comprehensive and philosophically rich vision of governance, in which the concept of *rāja-dharma* occupies a central place. Far exceeding administrative concerns, it embodies an ethical and spiritual responsibility, compelling the sovereign to safeguard not only the physical domain but also the moral and cosmic order. Rooted in the Vedic tradition, epics, and *Dharmaśāstras*, this concept reflects a civilization, where political legitimacy derives not from conquest or lineage, but from dharmic alignment—the universal principle that sustains righteousness and societal equilibrium (Olivelle, 2004).

The evolution of *dandanīti*—the doctrine of disciplined statecraft—complements *rāja-dharma* by supplying the coercive apparatus required for law enforcement. Yet, this force was not to be used arbitrarily; it was envisioned as a tool to uphold *dharma*, not subvert it. The king, as the bearer of *danda*, was obliged to exercise power with restraint, wisdom, and justice (Kangle, 1992). In this dual system, *dharma* provides the ethical foundation, and *danda* functions as its executive extension.

Buddhist political philosophy brought ethical kingship into sharper relief. The *Dasa Rāja-Dhamma*—ten cardinal virtues of a righteous king—outlined a governance model centred on generosity, non-violence, honesty, and self-restraint (Walshe, 2012). Here, the ruler is a *dharmiko dhammarājā*—one who leads through moral authority rather than force, seeking the well-being of his subjects as a sacred duty. The political vision of the Buddha, thus, blends pragmatism with compassion, where rulership becomes a vehicle for collective harmony and spiritual progress.

A landmark development in Indian political thought came with the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya, who integrated the pursuit of material prosperity (*artha*) with the principles of *dharma*. Though steeped in realpolitik, the text reiterates that effective governance must remain morally grounded. The king is not only a strategist but also a protector of the *rāstra*, tasked with harmonising administrative efficiency with ethical obligations (Kangle, 1992). The epics further illustrate these principles. Rāma, in the *Rāmāyana*, exemplifies ideal kingship grounded in justice and self-sacrifice. In contrast, the *Mahābhārata* warns of the collapse of *dharma* when rulers like Duryodhana succumb to

greed and arrogance. The *Śāntiparva* articulates an elaborate treatise on *rāja-dharma*, portraying the king as a paternal protector and upholder of justice (Brockington, 1998).

In essence, ancient Indian political philosophy conceives of the king not as an autocrat but as a dharmic steward, entrusted with ensuring cosmic balance and societal welfare. Governance, in this tradition, is inseparable from ethics and spirituality—a convergence that continues to offer profound insights into the nature of moral authority and political legitimacy.

The Meaning of *Rāja-Dharma* in Ancient Indian Political Philosophy

Within the vast and philosophically sophisticated tradition of ancient Indian political thought, *rāja-dharma* emerges as one of its most pivotal and ethically resonant concepts. It delineates the sacred responsibilities and moral obligations of the sovereign, extending far beyond the confines of legislative enforcement or administrative efficiency. Rather than a utilitarian code of kingship, *rāja-dharma* constitutes a deeply ethical and metaphysical paradigm, rooted in the universal principle of *dharma*—the moral and cosmic order that regulates both the human and the natural realms (Olivelle, 2004). Etymologically, the term symbolises a union of *rājan* (king) and *dharma* (righteousness), thereby enshrining the idea that the authority of the ruler must be bound by moral rectitude, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to justice.

The central tenet of *rāja-dharma* affirms that the monarch's foremost duty is the preservation of *lokasangraha*—the cohesion, security, and spiritual advancement of the collective. The king is not conceived as a sovereign autocrat, but as a *dharmika*—a moral executor and custodian of social order. His role is divinely sanctioned, not by virtue of lineage or conquest, but by his alignment with *dharma*. In this model, justice (*nyāya*) does not stem from personal volition but from adherence to scriptural injunctions and the ethical imperative of impartial governance. The ruler, as *dharmapāla* (protector of *dharma*), is tasked with upholding righteousness, dispensing justice without bias, and embodying *dharma* in both private conduct and public policy (Kane, 1962).

This conception vested the king with the responsibility to maintain the moral infrastructure of society by ensuring the observance of *smṛti*-based injunctions.

These texts, such as the *Manusmṛti*, demarcated the duties and codes of conduct appropriate to each *varṇa* (social class) and *āśrama* (stage of life), thus offering a prescriptive blueprint for social harmony. The ruler's mandate was not merely punitive but pedagogic. He was expected to educate and guide his subjects in the righteous path, acting as a guardian of tradition and an exemplar of moral probity (Olivelle, 2004). In this sense, judicial authority was subordinated to ethical instruction, and the application of law was to be infused with *dayā* (compassion), *buddhi* (wisdom), and *viveka* (discernment).

Significantly, *rāja-dharma* elevated the institution of kingship from political strategy to sacred vocation. A ruler was expected to embody *ksamā* (forbearance), *dāna* (generosity), *satya* (truthfulness), and *dayā* (compassion)—virtues that formed the moral foundation of good governance (Kangle, 1992). Any deviation from these principles was believed not only to lead to political unrest but to disrupt *rta*, the cosmic harmony that governed the universe. The king was thus envisioned as a microcosmic reflection of cosmic law, and his failure to abide by *dharma* risked engendering both terrestrial disorder and divine disapproval.

This understanding is richly elaborated in the *Mahābhārata*, especially through the figure of Yudhishthira. His reluctance to accept kingship after the carnage of the Kuruksetra war underscores the immense ethical burden associated with rule. Advised by Bhīṣma and Vidura, Yudhishthira is reminded that *rājya* is not a matter of privilege but a moral yoke, requiring constant self-restraint and unwavering commitment to *dharma* (Brockington, 1998). The legitimacy of rulership is thus never unconditional; it is predicated on the king's capacity to act as a steward of justice and a servant of the collective good.

Therefore, *rāja-dharma* cannot be understood as a static or rigid doctrine. It is a dynamic and evolving ethical imperative that obliges the ruler to harmonise *danda* (coercive authority) with *jñāna* (spiritual wisdom). In this vision, the state becomes a moral organism whose vitality depends not on coercion or hereditary entitlement, but on the sovereign's fidelity to principles of justice, equity, and universal welfare. The ancient Indian king was not a lawgiver in the modern, secular sense; he was the human embodiment of a cosmic responsibility—to preserve order through righteousness, to serve without arrogance, and to lead with wisdom anchored in moral truth.

The Vedic Concept of *Rāja-Dharma*: Kingship and the Guardianship of *Rta*

The Vedic conception of kingship is inseparably bound to the metaphysical principle of *rta*—the cosmic order regulating truth, morality, and harmony. In early Vedic hymns, particularly in the *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda*, the king (*rājan*) is not a mere political authority, but a sacral figure entrusted with upholding this cosmic equilibrium. His legitimacy derives not from lineage or conquest but from his alignment with *rta*, which serves as the foundation of both spiritual and political order (Jamison & Brereton, 2014).

In this worldview, the king is likened to Varuna, the celestial guardian of *rta*, whose gaze ensures adherence to moral truth. The king's earthly role mirrors Varuna's divine function—monitoring justice, performing rituals, and sustaining societal cohesion. His sovereignty is consecrated through *yajña* (sacrificial rituals), reaffirming his obligation to preserve not only legal stability but also metaphysical balance. The *Atharvaveda*'s royal consecration hymns (e.g., AV 4.22; 6.87) confirm that kingship was conceived as a sacred transformation rather than a mere institutional designation (Macdonell, 1897).

The ruler, therefore, becomes the pivot between divine law and human society. His duty encompasses ritual observance, ethical conduct, and the suppression of *anrta*—falsehood and disorder. Kingship, in this sense, is a divine vocation, morally bound and ritually regulated. The Vedic texts consistently emphasise that the king's authority must be exercised with humility, vigilance, and ethical precision, lest cosmic and societal disorder ensue (Heesterman, 1985).

This model of kingship was structurally independent of hereditary entitlement. Election or birth was secondary to the sovereign's moral fitness. The king's suitability was tested against his capacity to internalise restraint (*niyama*), cultivate self-discipline, and uphold the sacrificial duties essential to maintaining *rta*. Governance, thus, was embedded in the cosmic rhythm, aligning human authority with divine will. In sum, the Vedic paradigm envisions the ruler as a moral mediator, whose primary responsibility is not dominion but the maintenance of sacred order. It lays the foundation for subsequent political theories that emphasise *dharma* as the supreme principle governing both state and cosmos.

Buddhist *Rāja-Dharma*: Ethical Governance

Buddhist political thought offers a distinctive ethical vision of rulership, grounded in compassion, wisdom, and moral restraint. The doctrine of *Dasa Rāja-Dhamma*, enunciated by the Buddha, codifies ten cardinal virtues a sovereign must cultivate to govern justly. These include generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), self-sacrifice (*pariccāga*), honesty (*ajjava*), gentleness (*maddava*), self-discipline (*tapa*), non-anger (*akkodha*), non-violence (*avihimsā*), patience (*khanti*), and non-opposition to justice (*avirodha*) (Walshe, 2012).

Unlike coercive models of authority, this framework defines leadership through moral legitimacy. The king becomes a *dharmiko dhammarājā*—one who rules through the power of virtue, not fear. In the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (DN 26), the Buddha proposes that societal decay stems from poverty and neglect, not inherent immorality. Rather than punishment, the king must ensure economic support, welfare measures, and equitable distribution of resources—thus linking material justice with moral regeneration.

The *Aggañña Sutta* (DN 27) reinforces this ethos by proposing an early form of social contract theory, wherein society voluntarily entrusts leadership to a virtuous individual—*Mahāsammata*—for preserving order. The legitimacy of rule, therefore, emerges from ethical competence and collective trust, not divine ordination or military might.

Buddhist political ethics extend beyond prescriptive virtues. *The Jātaka tales*, chronicling the Buddha's past lives, portray him as a compassionate ruler, sacrificing personal comfort for public welfare. These narratives emphasise that the true merit of kingship lies in humility, service, and self-governance. Furthermore, Buddhist *rāja-dharma* transcends monarchic systems. It offers a timeless paradigm of ethical leadership applicable to democratic societies, administrative institutions, and civil governance. It promotes a vision of rulership as an act of service and moral stewardship, advocating empathy over aggression, and collective harmony over authoritarian control.

The Ten Royal Virtues (*Dasa Rāja-Dhamma*) in Buddhist Political Thought

The *Dasa Rāja-Dhamma*—the tenfold royal code of virtue—stands as the

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normative backbone of Buddhist political thought. Each virtue represents a facet of ethical leadership aimed at fostering social justice, non-violence, and human dignity.

1. ***Dāna* (Generosity):** Implies state-sponsored welfare. The ruler redistributes wealth, ensuring food security, healthcare, and education—thus reducing inequality and strengthening civic trust.
2. ***Sīla* (Moral Conduct):** Demands personal integrity and public accountability. It insists on right speech, honest policies, and the rejection of corruption.
3. ***Pariccāga* (Self-Sacrifice):** Refers to prioritising the public good over personal gain. The ruler leads a life of voluntary simplicity to better understand and serve the people.
4. ***Ajjava* (Honesty):** Establishes transparency and trust. It forbids deceit in governance and affirms the ruler’s duty to speak and act truthfully.
5. ***Maddava* (Gentleness):** Encourages humility in power. Even punitive actions are to be carried out with compassion and understanding.
6. ***Tapa* (Self-Discipline):** Promotes restraint in personal life and moderation in state expenditure. A disciplined ruler leads by example.
7. ***Akkodha* (Non-Anger):** Urges patience and measured response to provocation. Emotional balance enhances wise decision-making.
8. ***Avihimsā* (Non-Violence):** Condemns war, repression, and cruelty. Policies should minimise suffering and resolve conflict through dialogue.
9. ***Khanti* (Patience):** Endurance in adversity fosters resilience and steady leadership. It helps preserve harmony during crises.
10. ***Avirodha* (Non-Opposition to Justice):** Calls for alignment with the moral aspirations of the people. Governance must reflect social consensus and ethical order.

These virtues are not ornamental; they shape the ethical architecture of governance. Collectively, they transform rulership from a position of dominance into one of ethical accountability and social responsibility. The sovereign, in embodying these principles, becomes a vehicle for both temporal stability and spiritual upliftment.

Rāja-Dharma in the Rāmāyana: A Dharmic Model of Kingship

The Rāmāyana, attributed to the sage Vālmīki, is not merely an epic narrative but a profound exposition of *rāja-dharma*. Through the figure of Śrī Rāma, the text projects an ideal of kingship rooted in moral restraint, compassion, and selfless service. Rāma is the *dharmarājā*, an archetype of the virtuous sovereign whose commitment to truth and justice supersedes personal desire or familial attachment.

The concept of *Rāma-rājya* envisions a polity in which governance is ethically guided and spiritually anchored. Rāma's conduct throughout the epic illustrates this principle. His unwavering adherence to *dharma*—whether in accepting exile, renouncing the throne, or confronting personal sorrow—serves as a lesson in sacrificial leadership. Power, in his hands, becomes an instrument of service rather than dominion.

His address to Bharata provides an extensive discourse on kingship. Rāma stresses the need for ministerial competence, reverence for elders, protection of women and vulnerable groups, and continuous ethical introspection. He warns against pride, anger, indulgence, and poor judgment—traits that corrupt rulers and destabilise the kingdom. Governance, he teaches, must be conducted with vigilance, discipline, and consultation.

The *Rāmāyana* also presents a nuanced view of statecraft. Rāma exemplifies mastery over the *pañca-durga* (fortifications), *sādgunya* (foreign policy strategies), and *sapta-anga* (seven limbs of the state), reflecting a sovereign who is not only spiritually evolved, but also strategically astute.

His rule merges the moral authority of a sage with the administrative competence of a statesman. Thus, the *Rāmāyana* articulates a kingship paradigm where the sovereign is a sacred trustee, governing through empathy, restraint, and unwavering devotion to *dharma*. The legitimacy of rule is inseparable from the ruler's ethical stature.

Rāja-Dharma* in the *Mahābhārata*: Political Ethics in the *Śāntiparva

Among ancient texts, the *Mahābhārata*—particularly the *Śāntiparva*—presents the most expansive discourse on *rāja-dharma*. In a dialogue between the mortally wounded Bhīṣma and Yudhisthira, the treatise offers a holistic vision of kingship that balances spiritual aspiration with pragmatic governance.

Yudhisthira, reluctant to rule after the devastation of war, is instructed that *rāja-dharma* is the fulcrum of societal order. The threefold goals of life—*dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*—are attainable only when the king discharges his duty ethically. Rulership is not a reward but a solemn moral burden, justified only when exercised in alignment with truth, compassion, and detachment (Hiltebeitel, 2001). Bhīṣma equates kingship with paternal guardianship. The king must protect the people as a father protects his children. His conduct should be free from wrath, desire, and vanity. Justice must be impartial, and his life a model of self-control and moral discernment. A ruler, he insists, must first conquer the self before attempting to govern others.

The *Śāntiparva* also reinforces the strategic responsibilities of a monarch. The doctrines of *dandanīti* are essential for maintaining order, but *danda* must be tempered with wisdom. The text highlights the karmic consequences of unjust rule, portraying the sovereign not as an autonomous agent but as an instrument of *dharma* accountable to the cosmic order. This *parvan* thus enshrines a form of governance that demands both ethical elevation and political acuity. The sovereign is both a servant and a custodian of righteousness, navigating statecraft through the lens of moral obligation.

Rāja-Dharma* in the *Manusmṛti*: Sovereignty as Custodianship of *Dharma

The *Manusmṛti*, one of the most authoritative *dharmaśāstra* texts, outlines a vision of kingship in which sovereignty is subordinate to *dharma*. The king is not the source of law but its protector and enforcer, bound by a higher moral order that transcends personal will or dynastic claim (Olivelle, 2004). *Rāja-dharma* in this text is concerned primarily with the maintenance of social order, particularly the *varnāśrama-dharma*—the duties of the four social classes and four stages of life. The king’s task is to ensure that each class performs its functions harmoniously, preserving the structure through education, legal regulation, and moral exhortation.

The *Manusmṛti* emphasises *satya* (truth) and *ahimsā* (non-violence) as foundational virtues. The king's speech and action must be both truthful and kind. The text warns against arbitrary rule: "When punishment is inflicted after full consideration, it makes all subjects happy; but inflicted without consideration, it destroys everything" (*Manusmṛti* 7.20). Central to *Manusmṛti*'s conception is the doctrine of *danda*—the king's authority to punish. However, *danda* is not a tool of oppression but a moral instrument to uphold justice. The text holds the king accountable for any misuse of power, asserting that unjust actions invite karmic retribution and societal decay. Even the king is subject to *danda* when he deviates from *dharma*. Thus, *Manusmṛti* frames kingship as a spiritual trust. The ruler's power must be exercised with restraint, guided by wisdom and *dharma*. Justice, in this view, is the alignment of power with truth, and the king's legitimacy hinges on his fidelity to this sacred alignment.

***Rāja-Dharma* in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*: Ethics in Realpolitik**

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya represents the most systematic and pragmatic articulation of ancient Indian political theory. While its primary focus lies on artha—material prosperity, state consolidation, and political power—it never severs the thread that binds governance to *dharma*. Kautilya does not present a cynical or amoral doctrine of rule; rather, he constructs a deeply grounded model wherein the moral stability of the king becomes a prerequisite for political longevity and state resilience. His ideal sovereign is not a tyrant but a *rājarsi*—a philosopher-king who harmonises ethical insight with administrative expertise, balancing prudence with compassion and strategy with moral restraint (Kangle, 1992).

A core tenet of Kautilya's framework is the principle that the well-being of the king is inseparable from the well-being of his people. The king is not an end in himself but a means to *praja-sukha*—the happiness, security, and prosperity of the subjects. He asserts unequivocally: "The king's happiness lies in the happiness of his people; his welfare lies in their welfare." This ethical mandate reframes kingship as public trusteeship, demanding relentless accountability and responsive governance.

Though often perceived as a manual of realpolitik, the *Arthaśāstra* tempers every exercise of power with moral constraint. *Danda*—the sovereign instrument

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of coercion—is not lauded for its severity but regulated by reason, justice, and prudential foresight. Excessive punishment or vindictive rule is seen as detrimental to both *dharma* and *rajya*. Kautilya repeatedly warns against *adharma*-driven governance, noting that rulers who deviate from righteous conduct sow the seeds of rebellion, moral decay, and divine retribution.

Moreover, the ruler must act in conformity with the *cāturvarṇya* system, not to entrench inequality but to preserve social balance through functional interdependence. At the same time, Kautilya recognises the limits of autocracy, advocating council-based decision-making (*mantriparisad*), surveillance mechanisms to check corruption, and regular audits to maintain transparency. He embraces delegation of authority, local governance, and institutional frameworks that anticipate many principles now echoed in modern administrative systems.

The personal life of the king is also subject to scrutiny. Kautilya advises against indulgence in luxury, sensuality, and unnecessary display of wealth, prescribing instead a lifestyle of discipline, vigilance, and austerity. The sovereign must rise early, attend court diligently, inspect the affairs of the military, treasury, judiciary, and foreign relations, and remain constantly alert to threats both internal and external. The *Arthaśāstra* thus envisions a composite kingship, where ethical governance, strategic foresight, and public service converge. It does not dismiss the realities of political rivalry, espionage, or conflict, but insists that these must be approached with dispassion and dharmic rationality. The durability of a kingdom, according to Kautilya, lies not in coercive dominance but in the ruler's ability to uphold justice, manage prosperity wisely, and inspire moral confidence among his people.

Ultimately, the brilliance of the *Arthaśāstra* lies in its synthesis. It does not romanticise kingship, but neither does it render it soulless. It acknowledges that power is necessary, but also insists that power must be regulated by ethical constraints and guided by the overarching aim of social stability and spiritual integrity. In this way, Kautilya offers not a manual for despots, but a profound political philosophy for a sovereign who must navigate a complex world while remaining anchored in the eternal principle of *dharma*.

Conclusion: Synthesising *Dharma* and Political Authority in Ancient Indian Thought

The philosophical construct of *rāja-dharma*—as articulated in the Hindu

and Buddhist traditions—encapsulates not merely an ethical prescription for kingship but a comprehensive civilisational ethos, wherein political authority is inextricably woven into the fabric of cosmic order, moral obligation, and spiritual discipline. Both traditions, despite distinct doctrinal foundations, converge on a unifying axiom: power without virtue is not only unsustainable but illegitimate. In this worldview, governance is not a contractual mechanism or a pragmatic tool for administration, but a sacred vocation, intrinsically bound to *dharma*—the universal law that governs both personal conduct and the structural integrity of the cosmos.

In Hindu thought, particularly through the *Rgveda*, *Manusmṛti*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Rāmāyana*, the king is envisioned not as a sovereign above the law but as its first subject—a moral sentinel responsible for preserving the varnāśrama order, ensuring justice through *nyāya*, and wielding *danda* with discernment. His authority is derived from his proximity to *dharma*, not from conquest or descent. Rulership is granted not by birthright, but by merit and ethical conduct, continuously reaffirmed through service, self-restraint, and adherence to cosmic harmony (*ṛta*). The king, in these texts, is both servant and protector, a bridge between the metaphysical ideal and the political realm.

Buddhist political philosophy, although emerging from a different metaphysical orientation, constructs a similarly profound ideal through the *Dasa Rāja-Dhamma*, where ethical governance supersedes hierarchical dominion. The sovereign, here, is expected to be the living embodiment of *karunā* (compassion) and *paññā* (wisdom), whose task is to reduce suffering and cultivate moral clarity among the masses. Power is seen as a moral burden, not a privilege, and its only legitimacy derives from the sovereign's capacity to act without attachment, malice, or ego. The *dhammiko dhammarājā* is not a ruler in the conventional sense, but a bodhisattva of the state, one whose policies are acts of compassion and whose leadership is a vehicle of collective liberation.

Both traditions converge on the foundational premise that *dharma*—not coercion—is the fulcrum of legitimate rule. Governance, when aligned with *dharma*, becomes an instrument of cosmic maintenance, restoring equilibrium whenever it is disturbed by greed, injustice, or ignorance. This alignment is not abstract but operationalised through ritual discipline, moral instruction, judicial fairness, and strategic governance. In this model, politics is neither

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value-neutral nor autonomous; it is normatively grounded, regulated by ethical checks that transcend temporal expediency.

The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* embody these ideals through narrative illustration. In Yudhisthira's existential crisis over accepting kingship, or in Rāma's renunciation of personal happiness for the preservation of justice, we see that true sovereignty demands the sacrifice of self-interest in service of higher moral laws. The king's agency is never unbounded; it is always tempered by scriptural norms, spiritual humility, and public accountability.

Even in the *Arthaśāstra*, a treatise famed for its realist pragmatism, Kautilya does not abandon ethical foundations. His ideal ruler—the *rājarsi*—is one who synthesises strategic acumen with ethical restraint, wielding artha not as an end but as a means to uphold *dharma*. Statecraft is technical, but it is also teleological—oriented toward a greater moral end. In Kautilya's conception, power that is unmoored from ethics is not only corrupting but ultimately self-defeating.

What makes ancient Indian political philosophy uniquely enduring is this sacralisation of the political. Governance is not merely an exercise of sovereignty but a ritual performance, a *yajña* in which the king offers his intellect, energy, and authority for the spiritual and material upliftment of the realm. The state is not a secular institution in the modern sense but a moral organism, animated by the king's character and restrained by the mandates of *dharma*.

This vision contrasts sharply with modern political theories that often posit a separation between ethics and governance, treating the state as an impersonal apparatus for law enforcement and economic regulation. In contrast, the Hindu-Buddhist paradigm places spiritual consciousness at the core of political legitimacy, affirming that governance devoid of virtue becomes oppressive, even if efficient. The goal of leadership is not merely to rule justly but to transform society ethically, enabling each subject to progress materially, morally, and spiritually. In an age plagued by corruption, ideological polarisation, and the instrumentalisation of power, the doctrines of *rāja-dharma* offer more than historical insight—they offer a moral blueprint for our collective future. By re-centering justice, compassion, restraint, and discernment at the heart of governance, modern politics can restore both legitimacy and trust. These ancient principles do not belong to a bygone world; they are timeless imperatives for

any civilisation that seeks to harmonise power with righteousness.

In essence, *rāja-dharma* represents the highest synthesis of ethical duty, political responsibility, and spiritual realisation. It reminds us that sovereignty is not a trophy to be wielded but a sacred covenant—to be honoured through wisdom, humility, and unwavering service to the common good.

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