

# SOVEREIGNTY AND THE THEORY OF DIVINE ORIGIN IN ANCIENT HINDU POLITICAL LEGACY

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## ABSTRACT

The theory on sovereign rights remains to be the most important arrangement effected towards the gradual decentralization of the sovereignty of a state and to maintain its stability. The king is God's representative. The theory attempts only to emphasize that sovereignty is God's grace bestowed upon the King and that no one can question him in his affairs. In many of the ancient civilizations of the world, the theory on sovereign rights may be seen exerting its influence on sovereignty. Such a trend can also be observed among the historical sources of Hindu civilization. In this regard one can also observe the main dimensions of this theory exerting their influence on Vedic literature, Dharmasastras, Arthasastra, ancient Tamil literature and also on the Inscriptions of the Mouriyans, its influence can also be identified till the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D in countries beyond India particularly in Southeast Asian Countries that had cultural ties with India. Thus, the 'Deva raja worship' found prominently in countries like Cambodia. Java, Thailand and Samba can be seen reflecting another dimension of sovereign rights.

**KEYWORDS:** Divine origin, Sovereignty, Hindu Civilization.

## INTRODUCTION

Sovereignty is a term that includes such meanings as leadership, royalty and divinity. In the history of Hindu Civilization, a trend has been observed where kingship and sovereign rights are related to divinity. In the field of political science, though several explanations have been offered to sovereignty, the core meaning thereof is entwined with concepts on divinity or sovereign rights. In this regard the definitions given by scholars like Woodrow Wilson and Burgess are popular.

"The reality of sovereignty is better expressed in the definition of Burgess who says that sovereignty is the independent, complete, and boundless supremacy wielded by a King over his subjects and their institutions".(Krishnamohan,T. 2013)

The sovereignty often spoken of in the field of Political science is denoted in English by the term 'sovereignty'. This has been derived from both the French word 'soverainete' and the Latin word, 'supermitas'. In fact the direct meaning of sovereignty Indicates the superior power vested in a King. It was in order to justify such power and make it unquestionably accepted among the subjects, that the theory of 'sovereign rights' appeared. This was the oldest and prominent theory that appeared in relation to the origin of a state (government). From time to time various definitions have been given to a state. In this regard the most recommended are those given by famous scholars right from Aristotle, Sisiro, Harold Laski , Woodwilson, Smith and Garner. "The

state as a community of persons, more or less numerous permanently occupying a definite portion of territory, independent or nearly so, of external control and possessing an organized government to which the great body of inhabitants render habitual obedience.” (Garner, J.W.1994, p.52).

According to Harold Laski defines, “The state as a territorial society divided into government and subjects claiming within its allotted physical area, a supremacy over all other institutions.” (Laski Harold: 2003: <https://www.politicalscienceview.com/elements-of-state-in-political-science/>) The government may be regarded as an institution, created to exert its powers within the domain accepted as having general sovereignty under the power of law.

## **THE THEORY OF DIVINE ORIGIN**

Out of the theories promulgated on the origin of a government, the most ancient is the theory of divine origin.

- State is the creation of God.
- The King is the representative of God.
- The sovereignty of the state is granted by God.

God grants royal powers to a man decided by him. Since that man (the king) represents God, no one in this World can question him. He is responsible only to that God who selected him as King. In its practical stage this theory attempts to justify the royal dynastic rights also. In his work “Principles of political science,” A.C.Kapur opines as follows: “The state, its advocates maintain was created by God and governed by his deputy of vice regent. The ruler was a divinely appointed agent and he was responsible for his actions to God alone.” (Kapur, A. 2002, p.105).

This theory was one much venerated in ancient Greek, Roman and Hindu empires. In medieval Europe, this theory was supported by kings like James I and Louis XIV. With this theory as a model, medieval political scholars like Sir Robert Filmer and Bousser attempted to justify contemporary political trends. Scholars like Martin Luther and Kelvin who attempted to introduce religious reforms and thereby enhance social upheavals, did not reject the theory of divine dignity. However, in the course of time this policy lost its importance in the social arena.

The image of this theory on explanatory notes pertaining to the origin of sovereignty can be witnessed in many instances in the sources of Hindu Civilization. In many occasions Vedic literary works speak attaching the king and his sovereignty with God.

## **VEDIC LITERARY WORKS**

Satapata Brahmanas says that the king is the incarnation of Prajapati

(Satapata Brahmanas. V.4.11.11).

It is also worth mentioning here that Prajapati had been treated as the foremost deity during the late Vedic period when Satapata became prominent. Besides, Parrishit who is described as a famous king in the Atharva Veda, is describe as a person of divine form. The war between Devas and Asuras is mentioned in a story found in Taitreya Upanishad. The devas, defeated in that war performed a sacrifice for their Lord Prajabathy, who

being pleased with their sacrifice, sent his son Indra as the King of Devas. Thereafter the strength of Devas increased and they defeated asuras fled.

(Basam,A.L.1954)

From the above story it could be deduced that the leadership necessary for the success and progress of a society is expressed as a matter of God's Blessing. One cannot deny that the Devas indicated as a community in Vedic literature were just the very people who lived at that time. From this point of view it would be observed that 'Indra' – the oldest indication of leadership, is claimed as the son of 'Prajabathy'.

As a continuation of this, it could be seen in later Brahmana literature that while performing sacrifices all; Vedic Kings were considered to be Indra and Prajapathi and so described. The 'Ratnavihamsi' festival mentioned in Yajurveda is described as a ritual performed in order to attribute divinity to the King in the presence of his subjects. Here the 'Indrabhiseka' ceremony performed through a priest is considered to be, for uplifting every king to the position of Indra.

## **SMRITIS**

The policy of sovereign right is mentioned also in Manusmrti which is primordial among Dharma Sastras. While dealing with royal justice, Manusmrti in its seventh chapter mentions about the King's divine rights in several instances.

“If there is no King, the vulnerable ones will perish through fear of the stronger. Therefore, God created the King so that the entire world may not perish.”

(Manusmrti, 7.3).

The King is one who appeared possessing the qualities of all direction protectors including Indra, Vayu, Yama, Suriya, Agni, Varuna, Moon and Alakesan

(Manusmrti, 7.4).

“Through his greatness, the King often takes the form of Fire, Wind, Sun, Moon, Yama, Kubers, Varuna and Indra”.

(Manusmrti, 7.5).

“Since he possesses the qualities of Direction protectors, the King even if he be of young age, he shall not be disgraced.

(Manusmrti, 7.8).

## **ARTHA SASTRA**

Though Kautilya was aware of the reality of the royal institution, in his Artha Sastra he has not rejected the theory of Divine rights. Knowing that the reality of the theory of Divine rights was indispensable to the stability of a government and an attractive personality, Kautilya has handled this in his work.

In addition to this Arthasastra also says that those who insult the King will be punished not only by the laws existing in this world, but also by the laws of Heaven.

## **MOURYAN EPIGRAPHS**

Mouryan Epigraphs also attach a divine fame to the king, as may be evidence from the titles such as “Devanampiya”, “Devaprasada” and “Devanvaya” used to indicate the King in Asoka’s epigraphs. (Diskhitar, V.R.1932, p.16)

## **ANCIENT TAMIL LITERATURE**

Concepts on Divine rights may be seen entwined in ancient Sangam Tamil literature as well as in Tholkappiyam. This is evidenced from “*Poovainilai*” found in the *Porulathikaram of Tholkappiyam*.

“Mayan Meya menperunjchirappin thava vizup pugal poovai nelayium ”

(Tholkappiyam Poralathikaram, Purath Iyal. 5).

The above verse adorns the King as “Visnu”. In *Attuppada* literature as well as in *Pura nananuru* the King as possessor of divine qualities can be seen adorned equally with such gods as Siva, Balarama, Thirumal and Murugan. In this respect, the two Kings viz Karikala Chola known as Thirumavalavan and Pandiyan Peruvaluthi who slept at the silver stage, are more related to Divine origin rights in Sanga Tamil literature.

“The Palmyrah flag owner in his milky form, and Nemiyan in his water  
coloured frame stood together and if both were great Gods”.

(Purananuru 58.13-16)

Besides, the term “Irai” commonly denoted both the King and the God. Later Thiruvalluvar also has used this idea in his Thirukkural. It may be noted that the first chapter of Porudpal devoted to politics, is under the title “Greatness of God” (Thirukkural, Porudpal Ch.39). One is bound to think that Thiruvalluvar who places King in God’s position in the eight section of that chapter, does not totally discard the theory of sovereign dignity. (Kural 388). The great Vaishnava devotee Nammalvar reminded the continuation of “*Poovai nilai*” in Tholkappiyam through the following lines:

“When I see the revered King, I see Thirumal” (Thiruvaimoli 34.8). Even the inscriptions of Cholas, refer to the king as “God”. Thus we are able to gather information about the theory of Divine origin rights, which happens to be the earliest policy among theories concerned with the origin of a government via the historical sources of Hindu Civilization.

## **DEVARAJA WORSHIP**

The trend of treating the King as God and the sovereignty of a King as derived from God, had been generally prevalent even in Southeast Asian countries. The roots of such trends have been observed particularly in countries like Cambodia, Java, Thailand and Samba. History scholars who conducted studies in Southeast Asian countries have indicated this as “Devaraja’ worship.

## **CAMBODIA**

There is clear evidence to the fact that this worship was introduced into Cambodia by King Jeyavarman the second, in a grand scale. Scholars like Seetha, K.T.Thirunavukkarasu, S. Singaravelu, and D.G.Hall have expressed opinions on this context. Three elements viz: Lingam, King and the Court Priest were 'inter-related' at the beginning in the performance of a Devaraja worship.

The court priest through rituals the court priest acquires the ability of ruling from Siva in Linga form. He establishes it at a temple built either within the city or on the peak of a hill, the Lingam reiterates the King as the representative of God. Thus, the said Devaraja Lingam turns out to be the insignia and acknowledgement bestowing divinity to his rule.

"Codes thought the object of the cult was a Linga obtained from Siva, through the Brahmins. The cult was seen by him as "the communion between the King and the God. The Linga was supposed to contain the "royal essence" and codes saw the cult as being closely linked to the ritual of installing, upon the accession to the throne of a Khmer King.... It was divine Kingship; it was the King who was the great god of ancient Cambodia (Aeusrivongse, N. 1976, p.107).

The 'Dokkaktom' inscription of King Udayadittha the second gives full details of the rituals performed when Devaraja worship was commenced in Cambodia. Apart from this, hundreds of Sanskrit inscriptions excavated in Cambodia have left their impressions on Devaraja worship. The Camer phrase equivalent to the Sanskrit term 'Devaraja' is "Kaamraten Jagata Taa Raajaa" This phrase is found in the Cambodian inscriptions of 1012 A.D. (Aeusrivongse, N.1976, p.113). This means, "This King is the God who is the leader of this Universe." The Devaraja worship which eventually turned out to be an image worship. Gold and Silver coverings with the particular King's form were applied over the Linga. In the course of time, the very face of the King was carved on the Linga. (Mukalingam). Information about such Mukalingam is available in the Sangupetrak inscription of Indonesia.

## **JAVA**

Unlike as in Cambodia a different form of Devaraja worship has been identified in Java. In Java whenever a minor King (Rakiriyana) conquers other minor Kings and establishes his supremacy, he created a token form called 'Chandi'. This would be dedicated to some Deity. The King and that Deity would then be treated alike. People believed that the King after his death would still remain in that Deity. In this respect a 'chandi' established in 772AD by Mataram district Rakiriyana Sanjaya has on it the form of a Sivalingam. It is worth noticing P.Hall mentioning that it remained to be the mark and force of a King's rule. (Hall D.G.1971, p.25).

According to a door Inscription obtained from Preethitkuvanpiril in the Crathi province of Java (716 AD); King Srikanan established God through sages and the best Brahmins available. It is also worth noticing here D.G.Hall mentioning that, this indicates the Devaraja Linga established by King Srikanaradchan.

## **Thailand**

During the consecration of Thai Kings, a mantram is chanted to the effect, "Let the doors of Kailasa be opened." This is only an indication of the wish that the power of Siva should be bestowed to the King. One of the titles offered to Thai Kings was 'Dhivya Devavatharam'. Likewise, even during the 'Swing' festival known as 'Lozinger' which is an expression to show that the King was offering boons in the form of Siva and thereby depicting the King as God. Besides, the other notable matters include the hair knots of the

prince, the 'Kailaya show' during the ritual, the King seated in the attire of Siva and the Prince falling and worshipping at the feet of the King.

## **SAMBA**

Inscriptions reveal that the Devaraja worship had been deep rooted in Samba, found south of South Vietnam. A very important evidence is the Sambapatthiresvara inscription of 875AD. This inscription speaks about King Sambuvarman who built a temple a Sivan temple by the name Patthiresvara. This inscription further informs that "Lord Siva himself gave the Lingam of that temple to sage 'Brhu' who in turn gave it to Urojan who was the first King of Samba." It is worth noticing that this inscription implies that the sovereignty of Samba was a Divine right obtained through Siva. Likewise another 8<sup>th</sup> century Inscription obtained along with Mukalingam in the 'BO' town of Samba relates King Vidyasagara with Siva and implores his sovereignty.

Thus, in the Southeast Asian countries too, the Devaraja worship procedures have to be treated as an arrangement according to the theory of Divine rights brought in to maintain the stability of Royal families (Rasaran 1966, p.378).

## **CONCLUSION**

The theory of Divine rights appears to be an important arrangement, introduced for the smooth spreading out of a government's sovereignty and to maintain its stability. Certain basic purposes behind the formulation of this theory have social benefits. This theory paves the way, to bring together people who were divided among themselves, for a general benefit by the grade of "God and to make Kings maintain a just rule in fear of God's justice. This theory which attempted to maintain social order under the invisible ability of God's decision, did also have some disadvantage use effects in its practical level. Certain tyrannical rulers, in order to avoid people from questioning about their unjust rule, named themselves as the global representatives of God. This was the disadvantage in this theory. In the history of Hindu Civilization the most important dimensions of the theory of Divine rights can be observed in Vedic literature, Dharma Sastras, Artha sastra and ancient Tamil literature as well as in Mourian inscriptions. Beyond India too, its influence can also be identified in some Southeast Asian countries influenced by Indian culture till the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

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