Political Aspects Of Idol Worship- A Critical Analysis Of Origin And Impact

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Abstract:
Worshipping idols is international phenomenon. There have been several studies conducted in the past to know the origin and causes of the idol worship. But, what is important, to know the present impact of these idols worshipping. As far as Indian subcontinent is concerned, the existence of idols goes back to the advent of the Indo-Greeks and Kushanas period. It is strictly believed by the author that idol worship was intended to make people to show piety towards the rulers or kings and their royal family. It was justified in the past, as kings have to justify their extractions and exploitations, but now we don't have monarchical form of governments. As far as India is concerned, it is a democracy since its independence from British colonial rule. We don't need idol worshipping in democratic settings, as the people are not required indiscreet devotion in democratic setup as democracy requires enlightened residents so as to run it properly. Even after the fact Indian ruling political parties never harassed this practice. As a result, the governments in democratic nation like India are being run by dictators. Idol worshipping is the major cause for the nations that are though democratic in setup but are ruled in monarchical way.
Methodology: *The method used in the study is historical analysis method on the evidences extracted from various texts.*
Keywords: *Aryan Immigration Theory, Dakshinapatha, Devakula, Arthasastra of Kautilya,*

I.   Political Aspects Of Idol Worship- Origin And Impact

The development of politics and administration during the *Maurya* period was local, historical and complete. The political institutions of the *Maurya* period were developed in harmony with the contemporary social conditions of India. This is the only arrangement that can be possible under indigenous circumstances and this is the historical truth. The Aryan theory of invasion of the British period has been rejected by most of the scholars by now. But it is quite difficult to deny the factors responsible for the formulation of Arya theory of invasion.

In the background of propounding the Arya theory, there was presence of caste and cultural differences prevalent in the society. These same cultural differences may have also given rise to caste hatred and competition. Due to the historical background of the development of politics and administration during the Maurya period, the form of political and administrative institutions developed during that period remained strong and durable. His roots were deep in the society. After the Maurya period, even during the Satavahana period, the presence of Maurya era institutions like *Mahamattas*[i] and *Rajjukas*[ii] confirms this. But this period also faced the entry of various new tribes from the western frontier into India. Most of the tribes that entered India were of marshal nature. They were not refugees. They entered India with the aim of ruling people. They wanted control over India's resources. Obviously, their cultural development was not Indian. The development of *Shaka* and *Kushana* tribes was western and their culture also developed in the environment different from India. Due to the entry of *Shakas* and *Kushana* rulers in India and their rise to political power, changes began to be reflected in the political culture of India. This new political culture had an impact on the main culture of India. This was an unnatural incident. Generally, the dominant culture impacts the political culture or the political culture develops from the dominant culture. The change in political culture due to foreign tribes coming to power without any change in the original culture also had long-term consequences due to which historical interpretations were affected and changed.

After the fall of the *Maurya* Empire, political instability prevailed in North India. Due to this political instability, the north-western region of India became a heaven for new political groups. This should not be taken to mean that only outside tribes established their dominance in the North-West of India but ruling classes must have been created from among the local tribal groups also. The region of North India first came under the influence of the Greeks, followed by the influence of the *Shakas* and then the *Kushanas*. Although the *Satavahanas* had provided political stability in the south and south-west, it was chaos in north and north-west regions which made easy for western tribes to enter and establish their sway over North India. Be it *Shaka* or *Kushana*, the development of civilization in both the ethnic groups took place under the influence of Central Asian conditions. They became civilized in that area and developed the tendency to rule. Even before entering India, these tribes had transformed into ruling groups. Even while entering India, their objectives were mostly political. They took control over Indian resources. There was no challenge left for them in North India, but in the South and South-West *Dakshinapatha* they have the powerful *Satavahanas*. Although their spread in the south and south-west *Dakshinapatha* could not be stopped by the *Satavahana* rulers, the pace of their spread was certainly slowed down. Foreign influence appeared later in South India than in North India, but it would be difficult to explain this difference.

In the south and south-west *Dakshinapatha* this change can be marked in the titles of the kings. He assumed the title of *Kshemraj*[iii], the literal meaning of which was 'Philanthropic King' or 'Prince of Peace'. There are attempts to show the importance of the king for getting public approval. Although in the monarchical system there is no compulsion for the king to be popular, still the kings are found adopting such a title which shows that they not only wanted to be popular but also wanted to establish peace. What might have been this disturbance, the huge task of ending which would have been undertaken by these new rulers. This unrest or dissatisfaction must have been prevalent among the people. There must have been dissatisfaction among the people due to the new type of political culture. The unrest may have been due to political disorder and Chaos. The new political circumstances may have made the people restless and dissatisfied, due to which anger may have arisen among them. The reason for this public anger might have been the imposition of a political culture which would have been different from their original previous culture. The titles of contemporary rulers are addressed to this public anger. To neutralize this anger and unrest, the help of 'religion' was also taken. The kings assumed the titles of *Dharmamaharajadhiraja*[iv] and *Dharmayuvamaharaj*. The literal meaning of the title of *Dharmamaharaj* is that it claims to provide legal legitimacy to the king. This proves that people remained skeptical about the legitimacy of the power of the kings. The inscriptions obtained from *Bhavnagar* of the *Maitraka* dynasty rulers of *Vallabhi* confirm this[v]. In this article the ruler is claiming himself to be a religious ruler. They prove themselves to be 'victorious over religion'[vi]. In an effort to satisfy the people, there was a need to make changes in the original Indian culture. Efforts were made to change many aspects of society to secure political power. In this struggle to secure political power the form of religion was also witnessed the change. In the ancient religious system, logic and science were given priority, which was tried to change through devotion and spiritual practice. To make devotion and spiritual practice more popular, idol worship was used as a powerful weapon. When there is a difference in the purpose and meaning of '*Dhamma*' of King *Piyadassi* and '*Dharma*' of the rulers of *Shaka-Kushan* period. The foreign groups entered India with their own language and dialects which also turned '*Dhamma*' into '*Dharma*'.

In an effort to legitimize one's own authority, the form of religious belief of the society was changed. Ultimately religious beliefs were changed. All this did not happen automatically but was changed at the government level. This was not a natural form of cultural change. Because political changes were not taking place as a result of social changes, rather changes were being made in the main culture with the aim of fulfilling political ambitions of the new ruling class. People's capacity to have faith was being enhanced and their faith was being channeled in the interest of the rulers. The establishment of '*Devkulas*' supports this argument. The rulers of this period were engaged in proving their previous rulers as symbols of faith. Got their statues installed and encouraged people to worship them. The mention of the establishment of '*Pitamah's Devkula*' by Huvishka from the Mathura inscription is important[vii]. In North India, people were being made connatural to worship idols. Sanskrit scriptures can be seen supporting the importance of worshiping idols of ancestors. Ultimately people inbred person worship. Temples were being built containing idols of persons. The entire South India also got involved in the construction of temples like North India. C.S. Srinivasachari has presented in detail the pace of construction of temples in South India[viii]. The process of making the king important through personality worship was in full swing. Sanskrit literature is found presenting with full enthusiasm the importance of considering the king as revered. Indian society was rapidly moving towards the *Bhakti* period. In the south itself, the statue of *Chola* dynasty ruler *Sundar Chola* and his wife was installed in the famous temple of *Thanjavur*. The said temple of *Tanjore* is still world famous for its followers. By making the kings like gods, the importance of the duties associated with the kings was reduced and the tax paid by the people became an obligation and transgression to expect any kind of monetary gain from the king in return.

There was a flood of deity worship and devotion in North India and people became irrational and unscientific in their devotion. *Mathura* came to be known as the 'city of gods'. This happened due to the presence of the royal pantheon, countless temples and the '*Devputra*' himself. Ptolemy has called Mathura the 'daughter of the gods'[ix]. People's minds were being prepared psychologically for devotion and personality worship. Temples were flooded. It has been indicated by C.V. Vaidya that temples also started being built at the cremation sites[x]. There are many messages hidden in the title of '*Devputra*'. This trend is being found in abundance among the ruling classes living in Central Asia. Some Indo-Greek rulers are also found bearing the title of Theos or Theodorus. Whereas Indo-Parthian rulers like *Gundophares*, are also found associating themselves with the gods. The tendency of the rulers of this period to associate themselves with gods was said to be of Chinese origin. The ruling classes of Central Asia changed its form according to the circumstances. This change wasn't natural. The result of this change was the title of 'King of Kings' which was influenced by Parthian influence. As a result of the arrival of divinity in the throne, the status of that king became higher than other contemporary kings.

Just as the rulers of Central Asia had made necessary changes in the definitions of politics according to the contemporary conditions, when they entered India, they also made changes according to the conditions of India. These changes are more reflected in the north-western regions. Due to the style of 'King of Kings', a situation like dual state, also starts appearing in politics. Agathakali-Strato, Strato I-Strato II, Spurleys-Ages and many Gundophares rulers are found ruling under the system of diarchy. Above these rulers there were *Hindu Yavana* or *Kushana* rulers who were called kings of kings. This situation like dual state later starts getting reflected in the rest of India also.

Thus, it is quite visible that idol worship or worshiping the king or the ancestor of king was practiced to make people devoted. An affiance without raising questions raised absolute political power of the king. The kings became autocratic and despots with unbridled power to extractions. They did so in-order to make tax collection smooth and mandatory. It is difficult to find the doctrines of kingship as found in the epigraphs of King *Piyadassi* in the Christian era. King *Piyadassi* can be seen making efforts to raise a model society with norms of Humanity but after start of Christian era the task can be seen siding with intellectual organizations. These organizations are often called as '*Dharma*' and is related to the meaning of '*Dhamma*' of king *Piyadassi*. This is a delusion and fallacy. The advocates of '*Dharma*' did the same task for the king and propounded theories to make the king supreme with bindless powers. King *Piyadassi* never mentioned about any kind of royal tax, but all scriptures which support '*Dharma*' mention about taxes. *Arthasastra* of Kautilya can be seen with a machinery raised to collect taxes only. All *Smritis* and *Dharmasastras* also make people to devoted to the king and pay taxes without any 'if' or 'but'.

With the passage of time, the machinery of extraction became stagnant, creating the subcontinent, a tax heaven, for the new invaders from north-west frontiers. It continued to Europeans also. After entering the subcontinent, these invaders did not require to conduct robberies like Afghan raiders. Finding it easy to extract they preferred to settle down instead. They started to defame the practice of robbery, which, according to new definition was declared illegal. To extract taxes was declared legal as it was suitable and easy to establish. It was easy as the predecessors have made it abiding and acceptable.

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[i] *Luders' plate No.937 & 1144*

[ii] *Luders' plate No.416 & 1195*

[iii] *Luders' plate No.1384*

[iv] *Luders' plate No.1196 & 1200*

[v] *Indian Antiquery, 5.51*

[vi] *JASB-1923, p.343*

[vii] *JRAS-1924, p.402*

[viii] *The Evolution of poitical institutions in South India-IV, p.5*

[ix] *Tarn, Greeks in Bactria and India, p.252*

[x] *Vaidya CV, Medieval Hindu India-I, p.92*