



Philosophy

Explore—Journal of Research for UG and PG Students

ISSN 2278 – 0297 (Print)

ISSN 2278 – 6414 (Online)

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<http://www.patnawomenscollege.in/journal>

The Problem of Dirty Hands in Politics: A Philosophical Study

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Received : November 2014

Accepted : March 2015

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Abstract : *Politics is the science of state and the art of government. It is concerned with the activities associated with the governance of a country. The problem of dirty hands is central to the study of political ethics. This study concentrates on good governance as the parameter of politics. A nation's peace and prosperity depends on its system of governance and administration. Corruption, selflessness, greed, dishonesty, indiscipline, absenteeism are some of the problems that are highly prevalent today. In this project we have tried to solve these problems in the light of the views of some Indian and western philosophers. We find that different*

schools hold divergent views regarding the problem of dirty hands. Realists maintain that dirty hands are inescapable. In contrast, Idealists hold that so-called problem of dirty hands is merely an excuse adduced by those who lack moral fiber to do what they really ought to do in governmental context. According to Pragmatists, there is nothing to the notion of goodness above and beyond efficacy, for there is no transcendent concept of goodness to which good action might correspond. Kautilya's Arthashastra also provides a systematic treatment of ancient theory of government providing priority to the welfare of the citizens. Hence, in the current scenario we need to keep up an idealist view regarding corruption and have a zero-tolerance approach to it. Kautilyan methodologies need to be adopted as Kautilyan welfare state corresponds most to present India.

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Keywords: *Good governance, dirty hands, political ethics.*

Introduction :

“The problem of dirty hands” refers to the alleged necessity of compromising or abandoning moral principles in order to play the role of a government official effectively. Politics is the science of state and the art of government. The problem of dirty hands is central to the study of political ethics. This study concentrates on good governance as the parameter of politics.

Our country is a welfare state which is built on the principles of equality and justice to all. Corruption, selflessness, greed, dishonesty, indiscipline and absenteeism are some of the problems that are highly prevalent today. To root out these problems, strict implementation of the ethical code of conduct in all public offices needs to be undertaken. In the words of S.L Goel, “ The Governments, both at the centre and the state, share the concern for ensuring responsive, accountable, transparent, decentralised and people- friendly administration at all levels.” (Goel, 2007:5)

A nation’s peace and prosperity depends on its system of governance and administration. Unity, honesty, transparency, fairness, selflessness, accountability and love for their work need to be inculcated in them since a change in one’s working spirit changes the nature of functioning and work becomes Sadhana. Gandhi expressed his firm faith on the spiritualisation of politics. This meant that if politics was to be a blessing it should be informed by the highest ethical and spiritual principles (Gaubha, 264). Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to explore the problems that our country is facing in public governance and to suggest solutions to these problems in the light of ethics and values.

Significance of the study :

This study is significant because politics is essentially a zone of compromise and it is the presence of compromise that creates a need for

dirty hands. It is certainly true that compromise is a pervasive feature of a political life, but though compromise is hardly unique to politics, it is not necessarily an excuse for immoral conduct.

In several cases politicians and others find themselves in situations they have inherited are otherwise constrained by the decision and policies of others, but they are judged unwise or even gravely immoral, though they may not be fully or even partially guilty in those cases.

Hence, the need of the hour is to make politics a zero corruption zone. In order to achieve this ethical standards have to be maintained by the politicians. The present study is an endeavour in this direction.

Objectives :

The objective of this research project is:

- To discuss the pre-requisites of good governance.
- To discuss the problem of dirty hands in politics.
- To find out the causes that lead to dirty hands in politics.
- To discuss the views of philosophers regarding the problem of dirty hands in politics.
- To find an ethical solution to this problem.

Methodology :

- This work is theoretical, descriptive and analytical based on the study materials collected from various libraries in Patna.
- Study from different books, journals and magazines, audio and visual documents and internet has been done.

Concept of Good Governance :

Good governance means enlightened citizenship as well as accountable and constitutional government. Good governance is

also a key development concept today. India being a welfare state has to see that the principles of good governance are strictly implemented in the country. A nation's peace and prosperity is largely dependent on its system of governance and administration.

Governance has been defined as the use of power and authority by those in government to provide goods and services to the people to uphold the common goods and fulfill the aspirations and needs of the common man. Governance and administration becomes good when the decisions and actions of the government are based on people's consent, legitimacy and accountability. In the words of S.L Goel, "The four key components of governance are accountability, transparency, predictability and participation." (Goel, 4).

India is plagued with poverty, crime, illiteracy, dysfunctional healthcare, broken roads and other infrastructure. Citizens have no control over resources or officials. Lofty schemes, often unrelated to people's priorities are devised by the state and central governments and thrust upon the people. Information obtained under RTI law in several parts of the country reveal ghost roads, non-existent hand pumps, motors, etc. Corruption in India is a huge problem.

Problem of *dirty hands* :

A persistent image in the political sphere is that of the active and powerful man willing to do whatever is strategically important in attaining his desired ends even though doing so many weigh heavily on his conscience. The problem of "dirty hands" refers to the alleged necessity of compromising and abandoning moral principles in order to play the role of a government official effectively. *Dirty hands* is a synonym for corruption. The word corruption derives from the Latin for "broken" and it has a negative connotation, implying a loss of wholeness or integrity. Corruption is an illegal use of authority for personal gains. It is a universal disease causing harm to the people and government almost everywhere in the

world. Since the days of Kautilya the issue of ethics and integrity in government has been a major concern.

In order to meet the threat of corruption to good governance, the following steps are necessary:

- Breaking the nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and criminals.
- Ensuring a cost-effective administration of justice.
- Setting up of public interest litigation courts at the national, state and local levels.
- Making right to information more effective.
- Mobilizing the society to support the system of rule of law.

Corruption is not only an enemy of development and good governance, it is also a foe of democracy. Corruption is a multi-faceted problem having legal, political, economic, psychological and administrative dimensions.

Philosophers' views regarding *dirty hands* :

Corruption is so obvious and yet so mysterious. Even Kautilya expressed serious concerns about opacity in the operation of the world of the corrupt. Corruption is a universal disease causing harm to the people and government almost everywhere in the world. However, in the countries like India it has assumed the shape of cancer.

There are several thinkers, Western and Indian who have given their views on corruption. There are several western thinkers who have given their views on *dirty hands*. Realists say that 'Dirty hands' are inescapable and immoral means be used sometimes to attain moral ends. On the contrary to this, Idealist thinkers hold that immoral means should never be used. Multiple means always exist for any given end and a moral

official will only opt for moral means to moral ends.

According to Deontologists like Kant one's duty is one's duty and it has nothing to do with what other people may or may not do. And according to Teleologists, like Mill and Bentham right actions are determined by the principle of utility. Act always so as to maximize the utility of the greatest number. For them only consequences matter morally. And lastly, according to Pragmatists, like James effective means to one's ends are good in virtue of their efficacy. They are of the view that there is nothing to the notion of goodness above and beyond efficacy.

Niccolo Machiavelli is the historical figure most frequently associated with *dirty hands* realism. In *Il Principe* (1505), he enjoins those who aspire to acquire and maintain power to follow the examples of men constrained by no moral limits whatsoever. Socrates is also realist about dirty hands. Socrates exhorts those who would avoid corruption to eschew the public life. In the words of Jadunath Sinha, "Machiavelli and his followers hold that politics has no connection with ethics. The will of the sovereign is law, and he is not bound to obey moral principles. But this view is wrong. A state should be guided by expediency as well as by justice. The ethical basis of a state is the general will of the people." (19)

According to Kautilya, honesty is not a virtue that would remain consistent life long and the temptation to make easy gains through corrupt means can override the trait of honesty anytime. He observes that too much of personal interaction or union among the higher executives leads to departmental goals being compromised and that leads to corruption.

Arthashastra of Kautilya provides the fullest and the most systematic treatment of the ancient Indian theory of government, providing priority to

the welfare of the citizens. Arthashastra conceives 'danda' to be the surest and the most universal means of ensuring public security as well as the stability of the social order.

Conclusions and Suggestions :

Hence, we conclude that the conflict between administration and morality leads to the so-called 'problem of dirty hands' or corruption. Different thinkers have provided varied views and observations regarding corruption as well as their interpretation of ethicality of such acts.

Realists maintain that dirty hands are inescapable.

Idealists hold that it is possible to govern effectively as well as morally.

For Deontologists, corruption is morally irrelevant.

Hence, we conclude that in the current scenario, we need to keep up an Idealist view regarding corruption and have a zero-tolerance approach.

Kautilyan methodologies need to be adopted as Kautilyan welfare state corresponds most to present India.

Suggestions:

- Zero-tolerance strategy for corruption and strict punishment and jail for corrupt officials.
- Active citizen participation at all levels of governance.
- Satisfaction of citizens: Government should produce and see to the delivery of public services and that too at low cost, strictly implement an ethical code of conduct in the sphere of public governance.

- Work to bring an attitudinal change in the public servants so that they exhibit uprightiness, friendliness and firmness of devotion while dealing with others.
- Lokpal to be instituted in India as well as Lokayuktas in all Indian states on the lines of Kautilya' *Arthashastra*.
- Essential interaction between ethics and new administrative forms and new ways of Governance and public service.
- Timely payment of salary and arrears of the Government employees.
- Inculcation of the feeling that work is worship and making the public servants realize that they are the instruments of God.

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