

The Enduring Relevance of the Apad (आपद) Dharma Principle

The theory of apad dharma, or duty in times of emergency, adversity or distress constitutes one of the most refined contributions of ancient Indian thought to the ubiquitous issue of governance under extraordinary circumstances. It represents a framework of adaptive governance where rigid norms are temporarily relaxed to preserve life, stability and social order. This principle of conditional flexibility can be observed across domains, from social organisation to fiscal policy in ancient texts such as the Dharmashastras, Arthashastra and the Mahabharata. In contemporary governance, similar principles are reflected in emergency provisions, market interventions and crisis-driven welfare policies. Apad dharma implies reciprocal obligation between the leader and the people, where while the leader strove through different measures to ensure the well being of the people, the latter with their participation and cooperation aided the state in times of crisis.

The articulation of the modalities of governance in periods of crisis assumes special significance in the post COVID world. India's response to COVID-19 reflected decisive leadership, citizen participation and the administration of over 2.2 billion free vaccines in record time. The incredible spirit of cooperation and resilience demonstrated by determined Indians proved to be an exemplary model for the entire globe. A thread of continuity can be traced from the apad dharma concept of ancient times to the modern constitutional emergency provisions. Its importance also lies in the fact that it aligns with our fundamental duty to serve the country whenever called upon in times of emergency.

The Mahabharata's Shanti Parva tells the story of sage Vishvamitra's struggle during a period of extreme adversity. Referring to apad dharma, it illustrates how even the most righteous may be forced to transcend conventional norms to survive. Faced with the desperation of a twelve-year famine, Vishvamitra argued that the preservation of life was the ultimate priority.

जीवितं मरणच्छ्रेयो जीवन् धर्ममवाप्नुयात् ।
तस्माज्जीवितमन्विच्छन् न विहन्येत कर्मणा ॥

(Shanti Parva, 141.64)



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Life is superior to death. By living, one can eventually attain dharma. Therefore, one who desires life should not be discouraged by the (temporary) nature of their actions.

Besides the social sphere, apad dharma also applied to the economic domain. Since Kautilya considered Artha (material wellbeing) as the foundation of prosperity and the most important of all the purusharthas or goals of life, the treasury (kosha) was the most crucial element for the state.

यः विपदि सम्यदि च
स्वामिनस्त्रन्त्राम्युदयं कोषयति
= संश्लेषयति इति कोषः ।
(Nitivakyamrita: 21/1)

That which accumulates and preserves the resources of the master in both adversity and prosperity is called a treasury (kosha)

A state facing great financial difficulty that may have been caused by famine, drought, or an expensive operation like a war could collect additional revenue through special taxes which could be levied on all occupational groups within the population. If enough resources were not garnered by the above voluntary donations of gold. Honours and status symbols were bestowed on them in return for gold. Bhishma, in his advice to Yudhishtira on good governance, emphasises that taxation should not be a 'uniform across the board' policy. A virtuous government must adapt its demands based on three critical factors- place (desha), time (kala) and capacity (bala) guided by dharma and public welfare. Apad dharma justifies exceptional fiscal measures for state survival. However, such emergency extractions were transient and conditional, bound with the obligation of later remission.

given means, the rich could also be asked to make voluntary donations of gold. Honours and status symbols were bestowed on them in return for gold. Bhishma, in his advice to Yudhishtira on good governance, emphasises that taxation should not be a 'uniform across the board' policy. A virtuous government must adapt its demands based on three critical factors- place (desha), time (kala) and capacity (bala) guided by dharma and public welfare. Apad dharma justifies exceptional fiscal measures for state survival. However, such emergency extractions were transient and conditional, bound with the obligation of later remission.

In addition to special levies, the Kautilyan state actively regulated grain markets to prevent hoarding, black-marketing and artificial scarcity. Price controls ensured that the poor continued to afford food. The state supervised markets through officials like the panyadyaksha (superintendent of trade). Merchants who sought higher profit margins, for every additional 5 per cent, the penalty was 200 panas. If the merchants were found conspiring to hoard food grains with the aim of selling at a higher

price, they were to pay a fine of 1000 panas. If brokers and middlemen were caught accumulating stock in excessive quantities authorised by the chief controller, the excess was to be seized. These norms in the Arthashastra are similar to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 which shields the consumers from dishonest traders by empowering the Government to control or prohibit the production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities. In the ancient period, famines hugely burdened the state economy. Kautilya viewed famine as a major calamity of the state and prescribed proactive state intervention. He suggested that the state should grant relief to the subjects by distributing seeds and food.

दुर्भिक्षे राजा बीजमक्तोपग्रहेणानुग्रहं कुर्यात् ।
(Arthashastra: 4.3.17)

In phases marked by an acute shortage of food, besides distribution of seeds and grains, food-work projects such as building forts or irrigation works were initiated. The PM's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, which has been distributing free food grains to over 800 million needy Indians, began as an emergency welfare measure at the time of the pandemic. The main objective of this scheme is to provide food security and protect the most vulnerable sections of society during economic adversity.

As implied earlier, the principles underlying apad dharma are not confined to ancient texts. They find continued relevance in contemporary governance, particularly in the way state responds to crises through regulatory flexibility and targeted intervention. A case in point is the conflict in the Middle East. India happens to be the world's second largest importer of LPG, almost 90 per cent of which is sourced from the Middle East. As a response to the disturbance in the global energy supply networks caused due to the conflict, the Government invoked emergency powers under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and promulgated measures for equitable distribution in order to prevent shortage of domestic cooking gas supplies for over 33 crore households that are dependent on LPG. The Government also ordered all oil refiners across the country to maximize LPG production prioritising domestic consumption. This is the theory of apad dharma in practice.

The theory of apad dharma offers a conceptually rich and ethical framework for governance in times of crisis. While the state takes the required steps to support its citizens, the people also must willingly accept necessary restrictions, treating it as a part of their duty to cooperate in national interest. Our fundamental duty enshrined in the constitution, which refers to the duty of every citizen to defend the country and render national service when called upon, truly reflects the principle of apad dharma.

Fable with Moral

The Bird with two Heads

(Panchatantra)

Once upon a time, there was a huge banyan tree beside a river where lived a rare bird. It had two heads, but only one stomach.



One day while flying high in the sky it saw a shiny, red object on the river side. The bird flew down quickly and picked it up. It was a beautiful fruit. The bird had never seen such a wonderful fruit. It began eating it and realized that it was the most delicious fruit the bird had ever eaten.

The second head on seeing this demanded to taste a part of that fruit. It argued that since it was the twin head, the fruit should have been also shared with him. The first head silenced it by saying, "Why are you making it a big deal? We are twin heads, but don't you know that we've the same stomach? Whichever head eats it, the fruit will go to the same stomach. Moreover, I'm the one who discovered this fruit. Thus, it's my right to have it."

The second head on hearing this was very hurt. It kept quiet at that time, but grew anxious because of the greedy behavior exhibited by the first head. One day the second head saw a tree laden with fruits. The bird quickly flew towards the tree. It plucked one fruit and as soon as he was about to eat it, the first head shouted, "STOP!"

The first head barring the second head from eating the fruit, remarked, "Don't you know this tree bears the poisonous fruits? If you eat this fruit, both of us will die instantly."

The second head looking at the first pretended as if it was not paying attention.

The first head pleaded again to dissuade him from consuming the toxic fruit. To which, the second reacted with anger and said, "As I've seen and plucked this fruit, I've every right to eat it. Nothing would change my mind."

The first head kept requesting but the other head did not listen to his twin head. He wanted to take revenge. He ate that poisonous fruit causing the twin-headed bird's death.

Moral of the Fable

Ego destroys teamwork and leads to ruin.

Did you know?

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya offers one of the world's earliest and most detailed analysis of embezzlement. He identifies multiple ways officials could siphon state funds-such as falsifying accounts, delaying revenue deposits, or misusing public resources-and treats these as serious threats to the kingdom. Rather than assuming honesty, he argues that officials are naturally prone to corruption and must be constantly monitored. His solutions include strict audits, cross-checking records, and even using informants, who were rewarded for exposing fraud. Punishments were severe: fines could be up to twelve times the stolen



amount, and in extreme cases, even death. Kautilya's approach shows a remarkably modern understanding of financial accountability and anti-corruption systems in governance.

Wisdom Word Search

Y A A N A B A P H I K A W
A Y E E W A A R O L A N A
T L K Q O H I K J D Q K Y
H H E A S N Y P I L K I E
A P O D N J P A O D A M L
N L J U T G T Q P I O J G
G E T X D U L G I Y T K W
L I M W T A I O S K P S A
S N T P O M N I N O L H A
T G L Q P Q A G L S D X R
I A G W A Y E T L O I L O
X K Y Z J I D F K T I W L

WORDS TO FIND

Ayee Waarol, Kanglon, Leingak, Paodam, Thoudang, Waarol, Wayel, Waayetloi, Yaanaba, Yathang.

- AYEE WAAROL** - Memorandum; a formally submitted written communication.
- KANGLON** - Principle; a foundational idea guiding action or policy.
- LEINGAK** - Government; the system or authority that administers the state.
- PAODAM** - Report; an official account or record of events and findings.
- THOUDANG** - Duty; an assigned responsibility.
- WAAROL** - Statement; a formal declaration or expression.
- WAYEL** - Trial; a judicial proceeding for examination and judgment.
- WAAYETLOI** - Counsel; advice or guidance offered in deliberation.
- YAANABA** - Agreement; mutual consent or accord between parties.
- YATHANG** - Direction; an order or authoritative instruction.

Note: These governance terms are drawn from Manipuri, one of India's 22 Scheduled Languages, reflecting the region's rich administrative and linguistic heritage.

Marvels of India

ASHTA PRADHAN

A Pinnacle of Indian Governance The Ashta Pradhan council, instituted by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the 17th century, represented a masterful administrative framework that powered the rise of the Maratha empire by blending efficiency, specialisation and accountability.



Composition
This eight-member body included the Peshwa (Prime Minister handling executive duties), Amatya (Finance Minister managing revenue), Sachiv (Correspondence Superintendent), Sumant (Foreign Secretary), Senapati (Military Commander), Panditrao (Religious Affairs Head), Nyayadhish (Chief Justice) and Mantri (Intelligence and Royal Correspondence). They reported directly to Shivaji to prevent power concentration and ensure swift execution.

Governance Efficiency
The system enabled parallel handling of diplomacy, finance, justice, military strategy and internal security, sustaining expansion across diverse terrains during conflicts with the Mughals. Rooted in principles from ancient texts such as the Arthashastra, it emphasised merit over birthright, fostering loyalty and competence.

Legacy for Contemporary Bharat
Formalised around Shivaji's 1674 coronation, the Ashta Pradhan symbolised self-governing resilience, outmaneuvering larger empires through a structured yet flexible administration: principles that echo in Bharat's democratic institutions today.

QUIZ Governance

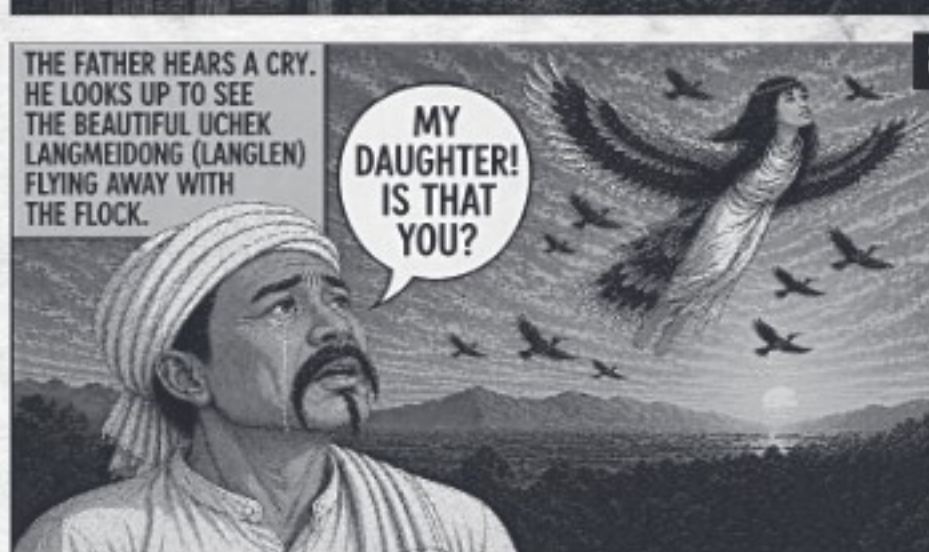
Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1. "No living being may be slaughtered for sacrifice" - This is depicted in one of the Rock Edicts of King Ashoka. Which of the current 11 Fundamental Duties enshrined in the Constitution of India illustrates the need to abjure violence?	51A(h)	51A(i)	51A(j)	51A(k)
2. By which community is killing an insect considered as Violence?	Lokayatas	Buddhists	Jains	Ajivikas
3. "Karmasu Kaushalam" (Excellence in Action) - Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 50): Which Constitutional Fundamental Duty advocates a similar version of this?	51A(a)	51A(e)	51A(f)	51A(j)
4. In which Kural number by Thiruvalluvar lies the following: "The worthy work and earn wealth in order to help others"?	211	212	213	214
5. Our ancient Indian texts repeatedly advocate reverence towards the environment and living beings. Which Prajadharma/Fundamental Duty aptly fits this reverence?	51A(b)	51A(c)	51A(e)	51A(g)

ANSWERS: 1 - B, 2 - C, 3 - D, 4 - B, 5 - D

तौकहाद

Uchek Langmeidong

A Meitei folktale of Manipur



MORAL OF THE STORY: Cruelty does not pay. A pure heart finds its path to happiness.