

Perspectives on the Study of Social Indology in Special Reference of Shukraneeti

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Abstract

Shukraneeti is a famous Indian classical text of *Neeti* (Ethics). It was composed by Shukracharya, as mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. About 2000 verses in *Shukra Neeti* are found in the fourth chapter of the *Mahabharata*. The *Shukra-Neeti* or *Shukranti*, also known as *Sukrantisara* - Sukreeti Shastra, is a part of *Dharmashastra* and is regarded as Sukracharya's system of ethics. It is a thesis on the science of governance, structured towards upholding ethics through applying the principles of political science and society's code of conduct. Many valuable facts for humans are described in *Shukra Neeti*; by adopting and assimilating, a person can get all the ideal happiness of his life. This book is the key to success and true joy in life, from which man can learn the art of living even in contemporary times. Following the ethical path (*Neeti*) enhances our current life and impacts our spiritual journey. Unfortunately, contemporary humans often forsake traditional values due to the influence of modern lifestyles, changing standards, and evolving values. This shift is causing a decline in moral principles as well. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of *Shukra-Neeti*, a renowned Indian classical text of *Neeti* (Ethics) attributed to Shukracharya. The process employed involves a detailed examination of the available literature, scholarly works, and historical sources related to *Shukra-Neeti*. The initial phase involves an extensive literature review, including primary texts such as the *Mahabharata*, *Shukra-Neeti*, and related *Dharmashastra* sources. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and research papers focusing on Indian ethics, classical texts, and philosophical works are also consulted to gain a broader understanding of the subject matter.

Key Words: *Shukra-Neeti, Dharmashastra, Dand-Neeti, Ethics, Spirituality*

Introduction

Indology is an approach to studying Indian society that asserts the uniqueness of Indian thought and psychological makeup, marked by qualities like holism and collectivism, distinct from the Western emphasis on individualism, freedom, and liberty. To truly comprehend it, Indology suggests understanding Indian society through the lens of Indian thought, traditions, and philosophy. Srinivas defines *Indology* as a viewpoint primarily centered on the textual aspects of Indian society (Srinivas, 1979). This perspective does not concern itself with real-world circumstances. Instead, it delves into the concepts within classical religious texts like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Dharma Shastra*, *Manusmriti*, Mahabharata, Ramayana, *Shukra-Neeti*, *Ashtavakra Gita*, and more (Sarkar, 1914).

The perspective of Orientalists and Indologists regarding India portrays society as unchanging, existing outside of time and place. According to these scholars, the focus is on traditions and collective entities forming the foundation of social connections instead of individual interactions. Moreover, they highlight religion, ethics, and philosophy as the fundamental elements shaping social structure rather than the dynamics between individuals or groups.

The British, when trying to understand Indian traditions, used their ways of thinking. They focused heavily on how different Indian social groups were and did not pay enough attention to how these groups were connected and worked together as a whole. The strictness we now associate with the caste system during British rule was partly because of the British way of governing and making laws.

Man is a social animal; different groups of human beings have the same thoughts. Society emerges based on culture, and the public community must follow the mutual rules related to it. Shukracharya has mentioned this at the beginning of *Shukra-Neeti* itself. In social bondage, at least one person affects human beings in some way or another. While discussing the importance of *karma*, Shukracharya said that the actions of different human beings concerning lousy luck and good luck are due to their previous work (karma of past life). In such a situation, a man has to enjoy the *Karmphal* according to the previously earned karma. His intelligence and discretion become active according to the truth.

Regarding luck and effort, Acharya Shukla states that the outcomes, or *Karmphal*, manifest as a result of actions performed in previous birth and are categorized as *Bhagya* (luck). On the other hand, the endeavors undertaken in the current life are regarded as efforts. As per Shukracharya, the author of *Shukra-Neeti*, propitious deeds yield favorable results, whereas malevolent deeds bring about adverse outcomes. In the given scenario, in the context of auspicious and inauspicious deeds, the scriptural arrangement suggests relinquishing inauspicious deeds and acquiring auspicious ones.

Numerous literary pieces have addressed the theme of controlling the impulses of anger. Shukracharya also believes that *Madya* (alcohol) and other addictive things affect intellect and discretion and diminish physical strength. So Shukracharya advised using both of them appropriately (Mishra, 1968). He has also shared his perspective on tourism. According to his views, when traveling between two areas, it is advisable to establish a secure *Dharamshala* midway, where guests can lodge, and necessary details about their relationships can be recorded in a register. Today's system of *Dharamshala* can be seen in the cities as *Yadhyay Patil Shala* was in the past. However, the crucial societal etiquette prescribed in *Shukra-Neeti* has faded away (Mishra, 1968).

Indian classical texts encompass more than just abstract thinking and spirituality. In Indian philosophy, Indian culture is enriched not only by the discussion of Brahma, Maya, the living world, and God but also by our classical texts, which are full of such principles on how to progress with each other. Unlike the Western perspective, sociological determinants in India are not solely drawn from physical life. With its foundation in the Rishi tradition, the country follows a transformative journey from Nar to Narayan (from Man to Divine). Behavior supported by science and inclusive of all welfare is indeed divine behavior.

Both the Asuras (driven by selfishness) and the Devas (celestial beings) are engaged in the journey of advancement. The Devas share their achievements for the welfare of all, adhering to the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family). On the contrary, Asuras tend to utilize their gains solely for personal prosperity and the benefit of their group. Actions grounded in science, promoting universal welfare, and fostering coexistence mirror divine conduct. Shukracharya (serving as the mentor of the Asuras) has demonstrated in his policy that ethics for social science is also philanthropic.

Since ancient times, diverse opinions have prevailed regarding the enumeration of Vidya (knowledge). The Yajnavalkya Smriti (Yajnavalkya, 1967), for example, lists 14 Vidyas: Purana, Nyaya, Mimansa, Dharma-Shakha, Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakaran, Chhandas, Nirukta, Jyotish, Rik, Yaju, Sama, and Atharvaveda. This exact count of Vidyas is also acknowledged in Manu's perspective. The Vishnupuran acknowledges 18 Vidyas (Vyasa, p. 24). The Chandogya Upanishad briefly references 19 Vidyas. The "Shukra-Neeti-Saar" outlines directives and corresponding attributes for 32 distinct Vidyas. However, it is evident that these variations do not indicate genuine disagreements but rather variances in intuitive perspectives. According to the mention of Arthashastra by Acharya (Sastri, 1929), Kautilya believes in four Vidya–Anvikshiki, Trayi (Rigu, Yaju, Sam) Varta, and Danda-Neeti. "The school of Usanas, also known as Sukra, believes that there is only one division of learning: Danda-Neeti. They consider all other forms of learning to have originated from this single field." It would, therefore, be interesting to find out which Hindu Court or Courts this manual was intended for, which may be said to have supplied data for the yules and generalizations embodied in it (Sarkar, 1985).

Acharya Kautilya's Arthashastra recognizes four Vidya: Anvikshiki (philosophy), Trayi (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda), Varta, and Danda-Neeti (politics and law). This alignment is supported by references in 'Kamandak' and 'Mahabharata.' Indications of this tradition are also discernible in the Ramayana. The Brihaspati-Sampradaya suggests two disciplines: Varta and Danda-Neeti. However, according to Shukracharya, one discipline exists - Danda-Neeti (politics and law) (Mishra, 1968). This Danda-Neeti is synonymous with ethics, which will be explained later on. Shukra-Neeti's followers believed that education could only be secured with the foundation of Danda-Neeti (politics and law). Danda-Neeti stands as the paramount and essential education among all the vidyas. This knowledge is self-sufficient, whereas other forms remain incomplete or partial. This is why Kautilya, the supporter of the four Vidyas, has also given it the highest place.

Shankaracharya explained the concept of "Ekayana" from the Chandogya Upanishad (Jha, 1942). "Ekayanam" means the science of ethics and politics, called Neeti-Shastram. This term shows that Dand-Neeti, which is about laws and governance, is the best among all subjects. This is why it is praised numerous times in the Mahabharata. Thus, Neeti Vidya, which is about good conduct and governance, is like the root of all sciences and is therefore considered the best. This implies that Neeti Sastra (the science of ethics and politics) is valuable for everyone in all

aspects of life. It is essential for humans because, as social beings, we cannot disregard the precepts this Sastra provides. While a person can have various roles, like being a language expert, logician, priest, or philosopher, these capacities only require learning certain teachings. However, *Neeti Sastra* applies universally to all people, regardless of their roles or skills (Sarkar, 1913).

Neeti Sastra can be seen as the essential sustenance for the social structure, with its teachings serving as the lifeblood and framework of human society. Just as food fulfills the basic needs of our physical well-being, Neeti Sastra addresses the core necessities of social life, supporting its foundational aspects.

The teachings of Shukra-Neeti were not about things beyond our world; they were practical and related to our everyday lives. By pointing this out, Sarkar has questioned the West's idea about India being only about spiritual and otherworldly matters. Indian classical texts are more than spiritual or transcendental (Sarkar, 1914). Max Weber and others, such as Hegel, Gobineau, Buckle, Senart, and Max Mueller (Sarkar, 1914) had persuaded people worldwide that the Indian (Hindu) civilization was focused purely on asceticism, lacked industrial and political aspects, and was more spiritual. Using the Positive Background, Sarkar (ibid) has countered this view by arguing that the Hindu lifestyle combines material and spiritual, incorporating positive elements of the physical world and the spiritual and transcendent aspects of life.

For ancient Indians, welfare was not a one-dimensional concept where individuals maximize utility. People have four primary life goals known as Purusharthas, which are Dharma (living righteously), Artha (gaining material wealth), Kama (enjoying artistic and sensual pleasures), and Moksha (achieving liberation). While Kautilya emphasized the significance of Artha, Shukraneetisara placed greater importance on Dharma. It is worth noting that the term 'Neeti' in Sanskrit, as used in Shukraneetisara, conveys the notion of righteous policy. At the same time, 'Artha' in Arthashastra primarily refers to acquiring material wealth (Deepak, 2021).

The identical spirit of Vikramaditya's understanding of the ordinary world, the equal enthusiasm in tackling the challenges of everyday life, the same human, practical, and positive outlook, and the same concern for fulfilling even the most humble responsibilities that define the protagonists of Kālidāsa's stories, whose innate aspiration was no less than influencing not just the "earth's crust spanning from ocean to ocean, but also the air and heavens," are evident consistently in the texts of Smriti, Neeti, Artha, Silpa, and Vastu literature.

Like other Neeti writings, the teachings of Professor Shukra hold a significant place within this literature. As the authority on Social Philosophy and Legislation, he imparts wisdom to his followers, the Asuras and Daityas. These teachings hold immense importance as they vividly demonstrate the concept cherished by Kalidasa - achieving harmony between the practical and the spiritual or realizing the spiritual aspects through practical means, particularly from a socio-economic and economic-political standpoint.

Strictly speaking, the role of *Shukra-Neeti* within this literary context stands out as genuinely distinctive and incomparable. First and foremost, it serves as a comprehensive guide for kings and politicians, offering inspiration to the general public. It could be likened to a combination of Machiavelli's principles and, to some extent, Rousseau's philosophy. Secondly, it functions as a manual encompassing economics, politics, ethics, and other subjects.

The *Yajnavalkya Smriti* will perpetually command respect as a fundamental textbook of jurisprudence. The *Manu Samhita* is also respected because it connects to the ancient figure Manu, the first lawgiver. Similarly, the *Artha-shastra* said to be written by Kautalya, the Finance Minister for Chandragupta Maurya, who created the first empire in India, is something historians will always pay attention to. It is essential both as a guide to early Hindu empire thinking and as a creation of one of the most influential thinkers and leaders in the world's history.

However, all these venerable documents of Hindu positive literature cannot compare in comprehensiveness and encyclopedic character with the *Neetisastra* of the Teacher of the Shukra cycle in the form in which we have it today and comparatively modern although *Shukra-Neeti* is, it is evitable that Kamandaki-Neeti, the abridgment of Kautalya's masterpiece, should pale into insignificance before it. The entirety of Hindu Indian culture, its methods, and its accomplishments can be found condensed within the Sukra-Neeti, making it an invaluable resource. For contemporary observers, it serves as an invaluable tool for uncovering the intellectual landscape of medieval India and gaining insight into the thoughts that occupied the minds of its educated population. As a sociology, politics, and economics textbook, the *Neetikāstra* of Sukracharyya is thus the Spencerian "synthetic philosophy" as it was of medieval Sanskrit literature.

However, even the esteemed ancient Hindu texts in positive literature cannot match the comprehensive and encyclopedic nature of the *Neetisāstra*, attributed to the Scholars of the Shukra cycle, in its present form. Despite being relatively modern, the Sukra-Neeti inevitably diminishes the significance of Kamandaki-Neeti's abridged version of Kautalya's masterpiece. Hindu India's culture, methodologies, and accomplishments have been condensed into the Sukra-Neeti, contributing to its composition. Particularly for modern readers, it holds immeasurable value as it unveils the intellectual landscape of medieval India, revealing the prevailing thoughts of its educated populace. As a sociology, politics, and economics manual, Sukracharyya's *Neetikastra* can be likened to a Spencerian "synthetic philosophy" of medieval Sanskrit literature.

The study of Sukra-Neeti is, for all these reasons, really a study of Hindu positivism, the human, secular and in Hindu national life and culture, the place of earthly things, *sarisāra*, *vāsanā*, *bhoga*, desires, passions, and attachments in the Hindu scheme of human existence, in short, a study of the positive background and foundations of Hindu sociology, as opposed to its transcendental foreground and superstructure.

The exploration of Sukra-Neeti encompasses a comprehensive examination of Hindu positivism, delving into the secular and earthly facets of Hindu society, culture, and existence. It scrutinizes the role of worldly aspects such as material life (*sarisāra*), living environment (*vāsanā*), indulgence (*bhoga*), desires, emotions, and attachments within the framework of Hindu philosophy. Studying Sukra-Neeti entails investigating Hindu sociology's tangible underpinnings and fundamental elements, distinct from its spiritual surface and overarching structure.

The scope of a *Neetisāstra* is more or less like that of a Dharma-sutra or Dharma-sastra, one of the three divisions of Kalpa-sutra, which is one of the six Vedangas or auxiliaries to the Vedas. The province and relative position of Dharma-sutra in Sanskrit literature is thus described by Oldenberg: "The frame within which the exposition of the Dharma-sutras is enclosed is an essentially broader one than in the case of the Grihya- sutras. The same phenomenon may also be observed in Buddhist Vinaya literature, where the exposition of the life of the community was at first given only in connection with the explanation of the list of sins (*Patimokkha*). Only later was an attempt made to provide a more complete explanation covering all aspects of community

life. The *Grihya-sutras* begin discussing the various events and daily routines within a household. These texts mainly focus on the rituals and ceremonies associated with household life, which is logical given their connection to the older ritualistic literature known as *Srauta-sutra*. Then came the Dharma-sutras, which took a significant step forward. Their goal is to describe the entirety of rituals and traditions observed in personal, social, and public life. They naturally touch on some of the ceremonies discussed in the *Grihya-sutras*, but their main focus is on legal and customary aspects.

Shukra-Neeti is a text credited to Shukracharya. It is a text on morals. *Shukra-Neeti* also provides much information on ancient Hindu culture, sociology, and political science. It is an abridged form of several earlier *Neeti Shastras*. There is no unanimous agreement on when or where the text was written. His entire treatise consists of five chapters, and it has 2,567 verses. In conclusion, we see that according to the Indian thought stream and Indian knowledge, *Shukra-Neeti* has included all social, economic, political, and life measures. *Shukra-Neeti* covered a significant aspect of Human life, for example, the policy of social life, duties of government, political philosophy, marriage, family, women, social assistance business, labor market and migration, social life concern of science, financial planning, and life issues.

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