The Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta: A Guideline for Good Governance and Rājadhamma

Krishna Murari[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of good governance from both modern political theory and classical Buddhist thought, focusing especially on the Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, preserved and collected as one of the suttas (discourses) of the Dīgha Nikāya. It first outlines the features and importance of good governance as articulated by contemporary frameworks, which emphasize the rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, inclusivity, and responsiveness. Thereafter, it examines how the Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta presents an ideal model of governance centered on the ruler's moral virtue, public welfare duties, nonviolence, and the supremacy of Dhamma (Sanskrit Dharma, ethical law). Through comparative analysis, the study identifies significant parallels, such as a shared commitment to justice, welfare, and anti-corruption, as well as key differences, notably the Sutta's emphasis on personal virtue over institutional structures and its fusion of secular and spiritual authority. Finally, the paper highlights the continuing relevance of Buddhist governance ideals today, particularly in the context of inclusive development, environmental stewardship, and ethical leadership. The findings suggest that both ancient and modern perspectives agree that governance is not merely about power but the moral responsibility to serve society with compassion, justice, and integrity.

Keywords: *Good Governance, Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, Dhamma, Ethical Leadership, Public Welfare*

INTRODUCTION

"Governance" broadly refers to the processes of decision-making and implementation through which a society is managed (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). Good governance builds on this concept by ensuring that these processes effectively address societal needs while upholding justice and the public good (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). It is considered fundamental to

[1]Associate Professor, Department of History, Aryabhatta College, University of Delhi. Email: murari@aryabhattacollege.ac.in (**ORCID ID :** 0009-0008-6670-2634)

development; in fact, poor governance is often described as a "root cause of all evil" (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.) in society, leading major donors to condition aid on the implementation of governance reforms. In contemporary terms, good governance encompasses principles such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, broad participation, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). These principles aim to minimize corruption and ensure that institutions serve all segments of society.

Modern Indian political theory and thought extensively deals with the issue of governance. For instance, Ambedkar, who borrows extensively from Buddhist philosophy, believes that true governance transcends power. It is a moral obligation grounded in compassion, justice and unwavering integrity in service to society. He believes that governance should be understood as an ethical commitment to serve society through integrity and compassion. Ambedkar emphasised that governance must secure social justice, dignity and ethical restraints and firmly believed that power exists to serve, not to dominate and policies must aim at reducing suffering and inequality. The idea of governance in Buddhism and in Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thought shares strong ethical foundations but differs in method and context. Ambedkar consciously reinterpreted Buddhist principles to address modern constitutional governance. Ambedkar adapted Buddhist ethics to a modern constitutional framework. He viewed the Indian Constitution as a modern form of *Dhamma*. Governance must be based on justice, morality, and reason, not religion. Unlike traditional Buddhist kingship, he stressed on state intervention. He believes that governance must destroy caste hierarchies and ensure equality and hence supported affirmative action as moral governance.

Similar traits could be discerned in Buddhism. However, its fundamental concern was not to deal with any political aspects of life but with 'the existential problems (*dukkha*) of human life and their cessation (*dukkha-nirodha*)' (Buddha, n.d.). To ameliorate the condition of the people suffering in the world, Buddhism, too, has long articulated ideals of righteous rule apart from other things. In this context, a *sutta* (discourse) of the Buddha, enshrined in the Dīgha Nikāya, (Buddha, trans. Bodhi, 2012) the first text of the Sutta Piṭaka is noticeable. This *sutta* enumerates the story of a kingdom, highlighting the effects of good and bad governance. Herein, it appears desirable to quote the views of Balkrishna G. Gokhale, who, citing

the Buddhist views, says, "In the very beginning, in the pristine state of humanity, all men were virtuous. Each respected the rights of others and fulfilled his own obligations conscientiously. There was no theft, there was no lying or cheating, and there was no violence. With such idyllic conditions, the state was superfluous as a regulatory agency and hence did not exist. But later, we are told, the standard of human behaviour deteriorated. Untruth, deceit, theft and violence ruled the lives of men as every man's hand was against his fellow beings and might prevailed over right (Gokhale, 1966). It is in this background of the deterioration in human behaviour, a necessity was felt to frame certain guidelines or rules to overcome such situations. Hence, as evident from the perusal of the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*, (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.) the Buddha delivered a discourse, highlighting the duties of a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) who rules over his kingdom according to *Dhamma* (truth or law), technically termed in Pāli as "*Rājadhamma*" (and "*Rājadharma* in Sanskrit) (Narayan, n.d., p.16), the application of which in running a government could be much conducive and productive to the progress of the socio-political sphere of a country. This discourse, in fact, depicts how an ideal ruler governs over his kingdom non-violently and justly, following the activities of moral virtue and social welfare (Buddhist kingship, n.d.).

In this background, the present paper aims to explore the concept of good governance in general terms and through the lens of the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*. Hence, the author of the paper intends to present an outline of the standard features and importance of good governance from modern perspectives, vis-à-vis the *Cakkavattisīhanāda* by examining how this *sutta* treats the issue of governance, and finally compare traditional ideals, as enshrined in Buddhist literature, with contemporary political theory. Throughout the paper, the emphasis is placed on how Buddhist principles, especially as enumerated in this *sutta,* converge with or differ from modern governance norms.

FEATURES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Modern definitions of good governance converge on several key principles. A United Nations analysis identifies and advocates participation in or inclusive political involvement of citizens as a cornerstone, noting that freedom of association and expression ensures that all voices, especially the vulnerable, can influence decisions (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Likewise, the rule of law is

essential to implement the government's decisions. Fair and impartial legal frameworks, backed by an independent judiciary and police, must protect the rights of citizens and hold all actors accountable for their governing activities (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Closely related is accountability that institutions (both governmental and non-governmental) answer to the public for their actions, which presupposes transparency in governmental decisions and data, related to them must be open and understandable (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Responsiveness to and effectiveness in governing activities could be taken as additional characteristics of good governance. It serves stakeholders within a reasonable time, and produces results that meet societal needs while using resources wisely and justly (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Good governance is also consensus-oriented, mediating diverse interests to reach broadly acceptable, equitable or inclusive solutions, ensuring that all members, particularly minorities and the disadvantaged, feel they have a stake in society (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). In short, a well-governed society enables collective decision-making that is open, just, and geared toward the common good (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

For example, an authoritative UNESCAP report concludes that good governance "assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account, and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making." It also explicitly lists eight major attributes, namely, participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and subject to the rule of law (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Similarly, the World Bank emphasizes that good governance involves the proper use of power to regulate a country's economic and social resources for development, explicitly aiming to reduce corruption, include minority interests, and meet community needs (Good Governance: Definition and characteristics, 2021). Across these frameworks, the emphasis is on *procedural norms*, such as open processes and checks on authority, and ethical outcomes like justice, fairness, and security for all, at least the weaker and needy sections.

IMPORTANCE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

These days, good governance is widely recognized as a useful tool in both development practice and political theory. Societies with a high quality of good governance tend to experience better economic performance, poverty reduction, and social stability. Contrary to this, poor governance, marked by corruption, arbitrariness, and exclusion, is seen as a root cause of the society's conflict, underdevelopment, and moral decay (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). This is why, now, as one UN document notes, major donors and international organisations often tie financial aid to make reforms that promote good governance (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). Underlining this aspect of good governance, when we assess the Cakkavattisīhanāda *sutta*, we reach to address a meaningful, golden and universal principle that poverty is the root cause of all evils, leading to spiritual and moral degeneration in society. This *sutta* further emphasises that a regeneration of the nation and society is not possible without liquidating poverty (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, pp.52-54).

At its core, good governance underpins the realisation of rights and the public interest. Public institutions are expected to conduct their affairs and manage resources without any abuse or corruption as a component of good governance. This aspect of the good governance guarantees the realisation of and respect for human rights (Good governance, n.d.). This implies that, in practice, the governments govern to serve the interests of the many, not only of a privileged few. This shows that good governance aims to minimise corruption, care for all, protect minorities, and listen to the marginalised (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). A transparent and accountable government is more likely to instil confidence among citizens to trust it and invest in the future. Enforcement of rules by the government impartially is one of the basic components of good governance, as it engenders a stable environment for commerce, education, and innovation. Contrary to this, when governance is poor or broken down, people lose faith in the institutions, undermining development and social cohesion.

Moreover, many scholars link good governance to the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, they believe an effective, inclusive government can better deliver public services, protect the environment, and adapt to future challenges. In short, in the light of the discussion mentioned

earlier, it could be said that good governance is not only a desirable abstract ideal, but a practical precondition for the well-being of a society. It is the "ideal towards which" states should strive, recognising that few attain perfection, but all benefit from moving in its direction (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE *CAKKAVATTISĪHANĀDA SUTTA*

The *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta,* rendered in English as "The Lion's Roar of the Wheel-turner", gives a detailed account of the Buddhist mythological conception of a *Cakkavatti* king, which had been a common heritage of all the traditions of Indian culture (Walshe, 1995, p.xx). It depicts the issues of good governance in the form of the duties of an ideal king, called "*Rājadhamma*". In this discourse, the Buddha describes a mythical age of prosperity of a kingdom under a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) that undergoes the age of moral decline, and then enunciates the "noble code" of the wheel-turner king's duties (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Contrary to the modern concept of good governance, which focuses on institutions, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* emphasises the moral character and responsibilities of the ruler himself. For example, it begins by declaring that the supremacy of the *Dhamma*, i.e., cosmic law and moral truth, must prevail above all (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). A virtuous king rules over the kingdom being "*Dharma*-centred" and known as *dhammika* (just), as his authority is legitimised because he upholds *dharma*, not because of taking birth in a king's house (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59).

The Pāli texts prescribe certain duties of a king, known as "*Rājadhamma*". The concept of "*Rājadhamma*", which played a significant role in Indian Political thought, is viewed and interpreted differently. Outside Buddhism, it was used in the sense 'strategies used by kings to gain their goals irrespective of morality or immorality.' Further, it had been used in the sense of the 'duty of kings to protect the caste system' (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). However, in the Buddhist tradition, the term '*rājadharma/rājadhamma*' refers to the moral practices to be followed by rulers (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). This '*rājadhamma*' consists of ten (10) royal duties, called "*Dasa-rājadhamma*" about which Sara Shaw observes, "The ten *dhammas* are not the same as the ten perfections acquired over many lifetimes, the necessary commitments of a *bodhisatta* vow. Rather, they represent a worldly, or we could say even secular, counterpart to the ten qualities that mark a *bodhisatta*, within the

world of politics and state" (Shaw, 2017, p.99). It is remarkable to mention, here, that Pāli Nikāyas do not make a detailed analysis of the ten duties of the king; rather, it is the Jataka literature (Jātaka, IV, p. 176, V, p.377), which frequently makes references to the ten duties of a king.

Since the executive powers of a state were, generally, vested in a king in Ancient India, his behaviour and attitude in relation to governance were very crucial. To prevent the possibility of a king (i.e., ruler) turning out to be a tyrant, the ruler was brought under the control of *dharma* and was time and again trained to act in consonance with moral virtues, enshrined in the code of *dharma*. Aligning almost with this tradition, Buddhism also prescribed moral teaching for a king, which could be taken as "Ten royal virtues" that must be followed by a king to govern the state. It was expected that a ruler, while ruling over his kingdom or state, would in no way violate the ten royal duties (Jātaka I, pp. 260, 399, III, p.274).

The ten qualities of a virtuous king may be enumerated as under:

i *Dāna* (generosity or charity),
ii *Sīla* (morality or virtue)
iii *Pariccāga* (sacrifices)
iv *Ajjava* (honesty or integrity)
v *Maddava* (Kindness)
vi *Tapa* (Restraint of senses or austerity in habits)
vii *Akkodha* (absence of anger)
viii *Avihimsā* (non-violence)
ix *Khanti* (patience) and
x *Avirodha* (absence of contradiction or opposition).

To understand these virtuous qualities of a king better in the context of good governance, the explanation of each of these qualities appears essential to mention here.

Dāna*:* The term '*dāna'*, though, refers to the practice of donating to someone. It is a highly appreciated practice in Buddhism to develop detachment from worldly possessions, the fulfilment of which creates different kinds of problems in human life. Buddhism lists *dāna* (generosity) as the first practice among the lists of ethical conduct. Even the path of *a bodhisatta (future Buddha*) begins with *dāna.* This practice heads the different sets of

meritorious deeds, making it clearer that generosity is the central point of ethical practice in Buddhism. So far as the practice of *Dāna* by a ruler/king is concerned, it enjoins upon the king to be generous enough while governing the state to provide the poor people with what is necessary for them. In the modern context, it inspires the government to render welfare services to the people. The lack of such services could result in poverty and, finally, social distress. This aspect of the *'dāna'* could be vividly assessed from the perusal of the Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98).

Sīla*: Sīla*, generally translated as virtue or morality, refers to a group of commandments not to be followed by an individual who wants to live happily and peacefully in society without creating problems for others. The practice of *sīla* is considered essential for both laypeople and monastics to proceed on the spiritual path, leading to the welfare and happiness of people in particular and society in general. Without the practice of morality, which results in physical and vocal purifications, the progress on the spiritual path, which leads to the development of wisdom, is not possible. "Essentially, *sīla* means sense restraint-everyone must guard their senses. This is achieved by following precepts without any breach. Typically, laypeople from all walks of life-royalty, administrators, merchants, and householders - observe the five precepts in their daily lives" (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). Kings in Buddhist literature are shown to uphold the five precepts (*pañcasīla*) in ordinary conditions and even observe *uposatha* on special occasions. Although rulers are vested with power, they are not expected to misuse it. Morality in Buddhism provides practitioners with a blameless conscience (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). Some kings are depicted as being willing to give up their lives to preserve morality (Sīlavīmaṃsana Jātaka, n.d.). Even more strikingly, the *sīla* upheld by the universal monarch includes the five precepts (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995).

Pariccāga*:* The term '*paricāga'* is rendered into English as 'giving up, liberality and sacrifice' (Davids & Stede, 1925, p.424). Technically, it refers to "complete giving up something, by someone, to the needy" in order to ensure their welfare or well-being. This practice enjoins upon a ruler that he must sacrifice his comforts for the well-being of his/her citizens (Davids & Stede, 1925, p.98).

Ajjava*:* The term '*ajjava*', rendered as sinlessness, refers to the quality of uprightness or straightforwardness. It signifies adherence to what is right and acting accordingly without being biased by favouritism, anger, fear, or

ignorance. Since decision-making is an integral part of the governing process, the practice of *ajjava* enjoins upon a ruler to make decisions with proper consideration without adopting any partial outlook towards anyone on the basis of caste, creed, gender etc. A ruler should not shy away taking upright decisions, even if, he has apprehension of losing his life and affecting the entire country.

Maddava: The term '*maddava'*, rendered as 'softness' or 'gentleness' in a way, refers to the mind full of loving-kindness (*metta-citta*□) (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Such a mind enables a ruler to behave with friendliness with his subordinates and subjects in order to establish a trustworthy and better relationship. Such an attitude of a ruler could be seen as quite opposed to a dictatorial or tyrannical rule. It guides a ruler to take care of the welfare of his subjects compassionately, ensuring their fair treatment, regardless of caste, class, or gender. With this attitude, a ruler or leader upholds *dharma* (righteousness) and does not allow personal bias to interfere in administration.

Tapa*:* Tapa refers to 'austere practice' enjoins upon a ruler to lead a life with strict sense-restraint like ascetics (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Generally, it involves voluntary acceptance of hardships for spiritual growth, self-purification, and moral upliftment. However, its relevance extends beyond personal spirituality; it has a societal and ethical dimension, particularly in leadership and governance. Consequently, a life given to self-indulgence at the expense of the worries of ordinary citizens is not the practice of leaders with integrity (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98).

Akkodha*:* The term '*akkodha'* refers to a state of 'no-anger' which is opposite to '*kodha*', anger. It encourages a ruler to hold no grudges, animosities and revengeful activities against their subjects for any reason whatsoever. In a modern sense, it enjoins upon a ruler to refrain from any 'political victimisation'. This means that the rulers cannot exercise anger against any segment of the country, either against the direct competitors or the general public (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Rather, it ensures a ruler makes policies based on reason, justice, and long-term public interest rather than personal vendettas or emotions.

Avihimsā*: Avihimsā*, which means non-violence, is a highly emphasised moral value in the Indian tradition. It refers to the practice of refraining from causing physical, emotional, or psychological harm to any living being. It implies compassion, empathy, tolerance, and respect for life. Past experiences

as well as present experiences, as evident from the perusal of history, show that a ruler adopted violent means to achieve his ends of the state. On the contrary, in the context of good governance, *avihimsā* plays a crucial role by shaping a humane, just, and peaceful society. It is in consonance with one of the Buddhist royal duties that enjoins upon a ruler to avoid violence against the people. Non-violence, in fact, ensures that conflicts or any armed struggle should be resolved through dialogue and understanding rather than force. It is so because non-violent thinking begets a non-violent course of action. Underlining this aspect of violence and non-violence, a noted Pāli text, the Dhammapada, says, "Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal life" (Dhammapada, Verse 5; Buddha, n.d.). Non-violence, in fact, supports policies that never exploit people or the environment. Good governance under this principle seeks long-term welfare over short-term gains by respecting freedom of speech, protest, and dissent, and enabling participatory decision-making, empowering citizens without coercion. In this regard, the examples of Asoka the Great and Mahatma Gandhi could be cited here, who followed the policy of non-violence to achieve their ends.

Khanti*: Khanti,* which means patience or endurance or tolerance, encourages a ruler to face difficulties that arise in the process of governing the state. It implies enduring hardship, criticism, or provocation without anger or retaliation. It is not passive submission but rather a conscious, mindful restraint that arises from understanding and compassion. A ruler who practices patience fosters peace, fairness, and justice, all of which are vital to a well-functioning and compassionate society. It is worth noting that the process of making decisions and implementing them requires a lot of patience. In a democratic system, these days, the ruling party tries to suppress its opponent political parties by force or illegal means, considering them as their enemies. This attitude of the ruling political party goes against the essence of the *rājadharmas*, the guiding principle of the state (Pannaloka, 2024, p.100).

Avirodhatā*: Avirodhatā*, which means absence of opposition, may be interpreted as amity, friendship, benevolence or refraining from revengefulness. In the context of governance, it implies the absence of internal contradiction and the harmonious alignment of principles, policies, and actions. It enables consistency in policies, leads to predictable governance, fosters trust among citizens and institutions, and ensures that laws are applied uniformly, avoiding

arbitrary or contradictory rulings. It promotes the cultivation of amity in society. A government that upholds this principle demonstrates integrity and earns the trust of its people. In a world of increasing complexity and pluralism, *Avirodhatā* serves as a guiding light for coherent policy-making and responsible leadership.

The picture that we may draw from the above description is that the Buddhist policy of governance should be based on moral ideals, directed to adopt economic and political principles that ensure the welfare and happiness of the people. The latter four qualities emphasize the demand to stick to a compassionate approach to governance (Pannaloka, 2024, p.97).

In this background, it is clear that apart from other things, the wheel-turner (*cakkavatti*) must provide *care, shelter, and protection,* regarded as a holy triplet *dharma,* for every class in society. The text explicitly lists welfare obligations to his own household, the army, his nobles and civil servants, regional governors, the learned and prosperous, city-dwellers and villagers, monks and brahmins, and even animals and nature (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In each case, the ruler is to ensure *justice and safety* for those under his domain. For instance, he is urged "not to conduct himself unjustly" toward conquered peoples and "to provide the poor whom you have conquered with financial support" (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Similarly, the king must even guard the natural order: one duty is "providing just care, shelter and guard for living beings and nature or the environment" (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). This wide-ranging welfare mandate anticipates modern notions of social safety nets and environmental stewardship.

In addition to material welfare, the king must maintain high moral standards. He is admonished never to act "against the *Dharma*," i.e. he should not be unjust or immoral in discharging his duty as a head of the state (kingdom) (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In order to do this, he must consult wise and virtuous advisors for guidance in upholding these ideals (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In Buddhist terms, *Dharma* itself is considered the "king of kings". So, the ruler subordinates himself to the principles of truth and righteousness (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). The *Sutta*, in fact, explicitly states that universal kingship is not hereditary. One becomes a universal monarch through the merit of one's conduct, not by birth (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In short, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* envisions a ruler whose power is legitimised over his citizens and kingdom only by upholding his ethical law and duty.

These duties can be summarized as a code of good governance: protect all classes, live by *dharma*, provide public welfare, consult the wise, and embody virtues. Buddhism thus blends legalistic and moralistic models, the "rule of law" in this *sutta* as the rule of *Dharma*, and the king's role is to be its guardian. Significantly, the *sutta* extends governance to spiritual and ecological realms by caring for monasteries and the natural world (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). The king is described as *raja-dharma* personified as the ideal monarch, presenting himself as a model of the ten virtues of kingship (generosity, virtue, honesty, kind restraint, non-anger, non-violence, patience, etc.) (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Thus, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda* enumerates an ancient list of wisdom to govern a state, "featuring the good qualities of governance", centred on compassion, justice, and *dharma* rather than on bureaucracy or winning elections by the majority of citizens' votes.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH MODERN POLITICAL THEORIES

When we compare this Buddhist view to modern political theories, both parallels and contrasts emerge. However, many features discussed therein overlap with each other. For instance, the Sutta's emphasis on justice and protection for all citizens resonates with the modern liberal-democratic idea that government must serve the common interest and safeguard rights (UCLG ASPAC, 2021). Its care for the poor and marginalised mirrors contemporary social welfare ideals. It's a call for non-violence and honesty that aligns with anti-corruption and peacebuilding norms. In both paradigms, accountability and the rule of law (civil law or *dharma*) are foundations of stability.

However, significant differences are also evident. The *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* assumes an absolute monarch endowed with supreme authority, whereas modern theories (especially democratic theory) assume power derives from the people or the constitution. Where the *Sutta* places moral virtue above institutional form, contemporary governance models often stress institutions and procedures over individual morality. For example, liberal democracy emphasises the separation of powers, free elections, and individual rights, trusting that collective institutions will yield fair outcomes. In fact, Buddhism's concept of *cakkavatti* as a "king who rules righteously and non-violently" parallels classic notions of an ideal leader (cf. the Mandate of Heaven in Confucian thought) (Buddhist kingship, n.d.).

Notably, the *Sutta* depicts the *cakkavatti* king (wheel-turner) as supra-political in one sense. He is simultaneously a secular ruler and spiritual protector, since *Dharma* is his law and "banner" (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). This blurs the line between church and state; indeed, in traditional Buddhist kingdoms, the king was often the head of the religious order as well as the state (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). Modern governance, by contrast, usually separates religion and state. Thus, while democracy prides itself on pluralism and legal-rational authority, the Buddhist view glorifies moral authority and social unity under a righteous leader.

Another contrast is the basis of legitimacy. The *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* explicitly rejects hereditary rule without merit (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). It shares a feature with many modern views but posits merit in a Buddhist sense, highlighting the spiritual worth and virtuous conduct as the ultimate qualification. Modern political legitimacy, however, rests on constitutional law (constitution) and consent of the democratically elected representative rather than personal moral merit. In practice, modern rulers are expected to follow impersonal laws and norms (rule of law, human rights), whereas the Buddhist ideal is a ruler who embodies those norms.

Despite these differences, important bridges exist between the two. Both modern theorists and Buddhist texts acknowledge that unsound and corrupt leadership leads to societal decline. The *Sutta's* narrative of moral decay echoes warnings by political philosophers that tyranny or corrupt rule erode civilization and its legacy. Likewise, the *Sutta's* remedial advocacy for justice, charity, and wise counselling has analogues in modern good-governance prescriptions for fighting corruption, social support programs, and civil society dialogue (UCLG ASPAC, 2021). Although the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* comes from a pre-modern, monarchic context, its core vision that rulers must be benevolent, just, and welfare-minded is fully compatible with contemporary ideals of responsible leadership and public service.

RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The ideals of good governance expressed in the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* appear remarkably useful, valuable and pertinent even today, as the principles of governance, enshrined in this *sutta*, resonate also in the modern democratic frame of government and developmental process, beyond traditional monarchies. The *sutta's* call to protect all members of society (nobles, commoners, clergy, even animals and nature) is a brilliant example

that directly illustrates to today's emphasis on inclusive and sustainable development (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). Its injunction to care for the poor, farmers, merchants and other vulnerable groups anticipates contemporary social safety nets; its decree that the ruler consult wise advisors foreshadows modern practices of having expert councils and anti-corruption agencies by the head of the government.

The *sutta's* ethical lessons even have the potential to inspire secular leaders. "The ten virtues of a king, namely, generosity, morality, honesty, kindness, austerity, patience, non-anger, non-violence, etc, are listed in this Sutta" (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). These are the universal values that can be applied anytime, anywhere in the world to run a just and welfare government. Modern experts on good governance, in fact, stress today the need to adopt and apply similar qualities as hallmarks of good leadership. These qualities promote and inculcate integrity, responsiveness, and stewardship in good leadership. The Buddha's broad concern for mandating all welfare, extending even to wildlife ("animals and birds"), (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.) reflects global concerns like animal rights and ecological protection.

In sum, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda* provides a timeless guideline or format for good governance, prioritising the importance of ethical conduct for those who run the government. It underscores that values matter in politics: an honest, compassionate government will benefit society just as much as well-designed institutions. Today's discussions concerning governance often invoke the need for transparency and the rule of law; the *sutta* reminds us that these require virtuous actors to operate effectively. As development agencies and civil society worldwide push for more accountable, inclusive governments, they echo the ancient Buddhist vision that rulers must be selfless caretakers of the whole community, upholding *Dharma* as the highest law.

CONCLUSION

Good governance, discussed, whether in traditional Buddhist literary terms or modern political theory, ultimately relates to the concerns of government *serving the people* wisely and justly. Contemporary definitions highlight democratic participation, institutional accountability, the rule of law, and equitable inclusion as key features (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). On the other hand, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*, couched in the language of kingship, encapsulates

many of the same principles through a Buddhist lens: a ruler must be virtuous, provide basic requirements for every class, make effort for the protection and welfare of all including the poorest and the environment, and govern the state under the supremacy of *Dharma* (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). The striking parallel between the modern concept of good governance and Buddhist ideals of good governance is that both traditions prefer to see governance not as mere power, but as a moral responsibility for the welfare of society.

By comparing these perspectives, it may be said that ethical leadership is as essential as institutional design. A modern democracy without integrity is as vulnerable as a monarchy without compassionate responsibility. Conversely, the *sutta's* emphasis on care for all, accountability to wise counsel, and protection of the weak offers a corrective measure to any system that neglects human dignity. In the contemporary world, which faces and witnesses numerous episodes of corruption, inequality, and environmental crisis, the application of the ancient tenets of *Dharma*-based governance appears quite useful, valuable and relevant. The enduring lesson is that good governance is good *Dharma*: a society flourishes when its leaders rule with righteousness, compassion, and inclusiveness, just as the Buddha taught in the *Lion's Roar* discourse.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION:

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