

Q) Discuss the theory of kingship as described by Buddha in Digha Nikaya.

Ans: The earliest Buddhist view on the origin of the state or kingship is seen in the **Agganna Sutta** of the **Digha Nikaya**. It is regarded as a great ancient Indian contribution to the history of political theory. **Agganna Sutta** is the 27<sup>th</sup> Sutta of the 34<sup>th</sup> Sutta in **Digha Nikaya** which deals about origin of life, family, society and state. It refutes the prevailing Brahmanical divine theory of the origin of state and propounds a social contract theory. The Buddhist theory of the origin of the state is the first theory of origin of state in India. Scholars are of the opinion that the **Agganna Sutta** of the **Digha Nikaya** describes one state in the evolution of society which may be described as a pre-political era. According to this theory the ruler is not anointed by God but is chosen by the people.

### **The State of Nature and the Early Buddhist View**

The origin of the universe and state out of the original state of nature is explained in the **Agganna Sutta**. It is in the dialogue form. It is discourse imparted by Buddha to two Brahmins, **Bharadvaja** and **Vasettha**, who left their family and caste to become monks. Buddha emphasizes the moral practices and the Dhamma (practice of religious life). Then he explains about the beginning of the Earth and the birth and the social order.

The state of nature was a perfect one in which the people lived in happiness and tranquility. This perfect state lasted for ages but at last this pristine purity declined and there set in evils.

### **The main and basic features of the Agganna Sutta on Origin of the State**

1. At one stage in the formation of the universe, beings with life lived long on happiness alone. With the formation of the crust of the earth they associated themselves with the earth and enjoyed its flavour and became desirous of it. The sun and the moon appeared. Time became divided as night and day, and so this universe evolved.
2. With the bodies of living creatures becoming coarse as a result of feeding on the flavour of the earth, colour differences appeared. Consequently pride and arrogance followed. The flavours of the earth disappeared.
3. Later a kind of mushroom appeared. Living creatures fed on them. Further colour differences and coarseness developed. Later even these mushrooms disappeared.

4. Next a kind of creeper grew upon the earth. Living creatures fed on these for a very long time. With the resultant changes in colour, pride and arrogance increased.
5. Subsequently, grains - a variety of dryland paddy grew on the earth. Then living creatures fed on this grain for a great period of time. Together they flocked in the morning and evening to gather the grain. With this developed physical and mental differences. Consequently domestic life came into being.
6. At this time a certain lazy living creature procured sufficient grain for the morning and evening in one trip. Another living creature who observed this collected sufficient grain to last him for a week in one trip. Thus living creatures began to store grain privately. Later the grain became extinct.
7. Then the living creatures cultivated grain. They shared it privately. This was followed by marking of land, on an individual basis.
8. At this stage a certain greedy creature stole another's property. The rest warned the thief many times to no avail, and so finally they were even obliged to beat the thief in order to restrain him. Thus theft, lying and fighting became prevalent among men.
9. Later, men gathered to discuss this situation and decided that one among them should be chosen to enforce justice and mete out punishment. Thus they requested a clever and popular handsome man to accept the administration of justice, for which they offered him a portion of their harvest. The head of the political community was called **Mahasammata-the great elect**, because he was appointed or chosen by the people. This was the **first appellation**(name/title).
10. Later he came to be called '**Ksatriya**' as he was the "**Lord of the fields**" (lands). This was the **second appellation**.
11. Still later, as he brought happiness to men with the Dharma(rule of law) he was called 'Raja'. This was the **third appellation** used.

The **Mahasammata** was an executive head which enforced the customary or the tribal conventions. He was not a lawgiver but only interpreted, codified and enforced the natural laws that already existed. Thus the text refers to the ideal state of life to start with, followed by its degeneration due to emergence of evils like theft, falsehood and establishment of family and property. After this, a series of agreements were made and finally state was established by electing the most capable

and wise person among them as the legitimate ruler. The state was a human institution arising out of the state of nature. The anarchy in the state was ended by popular election of a ruler.

**According to the Agganna Sutta the factors which led to the origin of the State could be classified as follows:**

1. With the changing pattern of procuring and producing food necessary for the economy or general livelihood man was led to accumulate private property.
2. The emergence of anti-social activities based on the expanded idea of 'I' and 'Mine', 'You' and 'Yours', stimulated by economic conditions.
3. The need for an authority to enforce law and order in the society to suppress anti-social activities and maintain social order and the institution of private property.

The anointed Raja is not a dynastic or a divine king but a popularly chosen ruler. Buddha said that the qualities of the subjects of a kingdom depend largely on the behaviour of the kingdom's ruler. He outlined 10 qualities- 'Dasa-Raja-Dhamma' which are as follows:

**Dana**(generosity), **Sila**(morality), **Pariccaga**(sacrifices), **Ajjava**(honesty and integrity), **Maddava**(kindness or gentleness), **Tapa**(restraint of senses and austerity in habits), **Akkodha**(non-hatred), **Ahimsa**(non-violence), **Khanti**(patience and tolerance) and **Avirodha**(non-opposition and non-enmity).

Thus, we see that the state arises as a punitive institution with the aim of establishing order in the society. This was as a result of agreement between the ruled and the ruler, in which the ruled transfers part of the sovereignty for specific purpose. The relationship between the state and the subject is a contractual obligation in which one commands and the other obeys. The Buddhist theory of state is a kind of democratic theory and also an advanced form of social contract theory of origin of the state.