

ARTICLE

LABOUR RELATION IN SUKRANITI

Sukraniti comes under the nitishastra. Sukraniti consists of 2575 slokas divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the duties of the King and the second with the function of crown prince. The other three chapters deal with general rules, related labour relations is found mainly in the second chapter, though there are references to it in the other chapters also.

The protection of rights of each section of the society is an issue of live debate in the present age. These rights are considered safeguards for the happiness of one-self. We, in our country have always been concerned about the deeper aspects of human beings and their happiness. Labour and their welfare are important aspects of our ancient law codes. In fact, in ancient times labour was worshiped for performing 'creative' tasks.

Many of the laws relating to the employer and the employee are mentioned in the ancient smrtis. For example, *Vetana-dana* (payment of wages, *Svamipala Vivada* (employer-employee disputes), *Abhyupetyaasurusa* (breach of contract of service) *Vetanasya anapakarma*, *Vetanadana* (non-payment of wages) are given in detail in *Manusmrti*, *Yajnavalkyasmrti* and *Naradasmrti* etc. *Sukraniti* contains many provisions relating to employer-employee relations. These codes have not lost their relevance even today. In fact, modern management experts use these as part of their strategies.

Among the oldest of law codes, especially regarding governance and administration is *Sukraniti* or the laws as laid by Sukracharya. He prescribes a holistic approach towards the issue of labour, which includes both the employer and the employee. He prescribes the qualities that the master should possess. According to him, low wages, harsh treatment, insult, abuse and imposition of heavy fines or severe punishment are the causes of unrest among the employees. 'Satisfied by payment of adequate wages and in time, promoted honorably, cheered by gentle words and consoled in grief, the employees would never let down or desert their master' (*Sukraniti* 2,418-419).

Every worker needs economic, social and personal security. When these needs are not fulfilled, conflicts arise between the workers and the employer, which lead to industrial disputes, the *Sukraniti* says. This is supported by the modern day studies on industrial unrest. Some of the common causes of industrial disputes are psychological, institutional, economic and denial of legal and other rights of workers. (*Khanna O.P.: Industrial Engineering & Management, 1992, p.21*) Sukracharya highlights the psychological aspect of disputes by pointing out that the servant should desert such a king (master) who does not remember the good done for him, is not satisfied with good service and is suspicious (*Sukraniti* 2,435).

Similarly the servant should follow certain codes in his behaviour towards his employer (*Sukraniti* 184-88). Sukracharya considered that truth and philanthropy are the two most sacred of all virtues. The employer should always select persons with such qualities. Envy and untruthfulness are the greatest of all sins; untruthfulness is considered as a greater sin than envy. Ultimately, a good servant is one who knows when and what is to be said, and what is to be done, and does it at the proper time.

Sukraniti places immense importance on communication. It gives several examples to prove that an organisation will go astray in the absence of proper communication. Those officers who do not explain what is good and what is harmful to the employer are really his secret enemies in the form of workers.

Sukracharya has pointed out that a master who does not have faith in his counselors is like a thief in the form of a ruler, an exploiter of the people's wealth. He should not form his judgement based on hearsay. He says that the officers should not envy one another, nor should they ever get into conflicts. Where the officers and the king are working in harmony there, *lakshmi* (wealth) is extensive and long lasting. (*Sukraniti*.2, 254-57)

Appointment, promotion and transfer are to be based on merit. The *nit*i suggests that the king should appoint ten chief advisers. Their posts should be held by rotation. As the officers become qualified for greater responsibilities, they should be readily promoted as stagnation takes away satisfaction and kills the incentive to work and the administration suffers on account of absence of motivation. (*Sukraniti* 2,109-116)

Sukracharya also cautions about the natural infirmity of man, whereby he gets intoxicated by power. So no officer should be allowed to wield power in the same office for a long time and recommends periodical transfers. He also gives tips on sickness benefits (2.409-411), leave rules (2.407-8,412), bonus as defrayed wages (2.415), payment of pension, family pension (2.413-14), etc. to the workers. Besides these, three types of wages (2.396-400), classification of workers (2.406), compensation to son and wife (2.416) have been mentioned by Sukracharya. In fact the bonus is considered as the claim of the employee on the profit made by industry. The note-worthy point is that in *Sukraniti* the payable bonus is 1/8th of annual salary, irrespective of the profit made or even in the absence of profit. According to *Sukraniti*, bonus means deferred wages.

In times of crisis the employer should call on the wise men, preceptors, brother, friends, workers, relatives and counselors and humbly consult their wishes in the proper manner (*Sukraniti* 5,50). He should inform them about his problems and request them to give their counsel as friends and not as workers. He should say that he has no other source of help besides them. Sukracharya says that, an excellent worker is he who does not desert the master in difficulty and the ideal master is one who sacrifices his life for the sake of his servant. (*Sukraniti*.5,55-6).

The employer-employee, king-servant relations are based on Dharma. It is the guiding principle. Dharma is a principle based on mutuality. In this context any deviation from fair conduct is construed as estranging from the path of *Dharma*. What one does to ensure one's own welfare should always contribute to the welfare of all. When one makes profit out of labour exerted by others, that person is duty-bound to ensure their welfare. The right of employees thus can be seen as the duty of the employer. The Indian way of life therefore gave emphasis to everybody's duty, which, if discharged, ensures the fulfillment of everyone's rights also. Where duty is violated rights find no means of fulfillment.

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