CHECKS ON ROYAL POWER

An ideal king in ancient India was to be just like an expectant mother who sacrifices her own desires and pleasures lest they should harm the child to be born. He was expected to forgo his own conveniences, inclinations and pleasures in order to be of maximum benefit to his people. Kingship was not for enjoyment, it was for great worries arising from the duty to protect the people and strict adherence to Dharma. The ancient Hindus, thus, considered the king as a benefactor and as a servant of the people, and not as a master of his subjects, following the dictates of his own whims and desires. They were not accustomed to an autocratic form of government and, therefore, it was not an absolute but a limited monarchy that flourished in ancient India.

The ancient thinkers, however, knew that with a large standing army and enormous wealth at his disposal the king was vested with very vast powers. Therefore, an average king was not likely to follow the ideal with a firm will and determination, because of the human nature. The kings were themselves aware of this fact and, hence, showed quite a concern while selecting a heir-apparent. For example, the Rāmāyana tells us that Daśaratha chose Rāma only after satisfying himself that he was the right choice; but even
after the selection was made, his anxiety did not recede and he said to Rāma, "No doubt you are disciplined by nature and endowed with great virtues, even then I will speak to you out of affection and tell you what is good for you; you should be more disciplined, should keep your senses under control and forsake all vices that cause of kāma and krodha." Dasaratha believed also that the human nature was unsteady and even those who abided by Dharma in their daily life were likely to falter. So the question arises - were there some checks devised by the ancient Hindus to save the people from the whims and fancies of a tyrannical king and to deter the ruler from turning into an autocrat, unjust and oppressive? The answer is that there were such checks and limitations, and the Rāmāyaṇa, too, is well acquainted with many of them.

It must be admitted at the outset that no constitutional checks in the modern sense of word were devised in ancient India. The constitutional checks in the form of non-voting of supplies by parliaments or popular bodies are recent developments, unknown to ancient times. Courts to try kings for their oppressive acts also did not exist in ancient times. Therefore, the ancient Indians naturally did not hit upon these remedies. But they devised a number of other checks which were sufficiently effective in normal times.

The Sabhā and the Samiti or the popular assemblies in the Vedic times, it seems, worked as checks upon the
king. There is evidence to show that a king could hardly maintain his position if the Samiti was not in agreement with him. A king was considered true (sātva) if he attended the Samiti and untrue if he did not do so. The practice of the king presenting himself before the Samiti continued as long as the Samitis existed. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad, one of the youngest Vedic works, relates to the visit of "Svetaketu Aruneya Gautama to the Samiti of the Pāṅcalas" and refers to the presence of a king named Brāhmaṇa Jaimila in a Samiti.

The power of the Samiti declined with the passage of time and it ultimately disappeared from the scene. By the times of the Rāmāyaṇa we find a new body called Pariṣad. We have already shown that the Pariṣad wielded a strong influence on the king. He showed a great concern for carrying the Pariṣad with him. Dāśaratha, as we have discussed above, took great care in presenting his proposal to make Rāma his successor to the gathering. He reminded them how well he had served the people and, thus, established his own credentials as the well-wisher and benefactor of the people, who would never propose anything not good for them. Then he asked for their opinion, but after highlighting the merits of his choice. Had the popular assembly enjoyed no check on the king, there was not any need for Dāśaratha to express himself so humbly and in so many words. Although he had already decided in consultation with his Saivās,
yet he ordered the preparations to anoint his son only
after having the approval of the Parisad. Another example
of the authority of the Parisad is the case of Sītā. Rāma
had banished her without consulting the Parisad. Therefore,
being afraid of the popular body, he begged them to excuse
and assured them that he would accept her back if she
were found pure by the Parisad. Thus, the Parisad was a
check on the royal power.

Religion and spiritual sanctions had the greatest
terror in ancient India, and our constitutional writers
made full use of them in order to curb the evil tendencies.
Observance of Dharma was the high social and political ideal
for all including the king. This is most emphatically put
forth in the Bhadāranyaka Upanishad where it is stated,
"Even after creating the four castes He (the creator) did
not think that stability had been attained. He then created
the most excellent Dharma which is the might of the mighty
(i.e. more powerful than the warrior-class). There is
nothing higher than Dharma. Even a weak man hopes to
prevail over a very strong man on the strength of Dharma,
just as (he prevails upon a wrong doer) with the help of
the king. So what is called Dharma is really the truth..."

The importance of Dharma as an all embracing
institution was thus impressed upon the king so frequently
that it must have had its psychological effect. Not
only that, it was also impressed upon him that Dharma could
destroy him if not followed properly, whereas adherence to it could give him a long tenure of rule.\textsuperscript{12} Kśemendra, for instance, says that a Yavana king could rule over the earth for a long time because he ruled according to the dictates of Dharma.\textsuperscript{13} In the \textit{Arthaśāstra}, Kautilya says that the king who oppresses his subjects or misappropriates public funds is guilty of dereliction of duty and Varuṇa, the chastiser, will punish him severely. He adds that a king who levies an unjust fine has to offer thirty times the amount to Varuṇa as a fine.\textsuperscript{14} "If the king is just", says Kśemendra, "he can achieve the three ends of life for himself and for his people. So he should always try to achieve his \textit{Artha} keeping Dharma ahead because kingdom prospers through Dharma.\textsuperscript{15}

The \textit{Rāmāyana} also refers to \textit{Dharmāṅkūṣa} (the check of Dharma) on the king. We find Vāli accusing Rāma of having violated the check of Dharma and behaving in an unrighteous manner.\textsuperscript{16} Daśaratha found the bonds of Dharma too strong to break and became stupified on finding no way to release himself of the shackles.\textsuperscript{17}

The epic has a reference to \textit{Rājadharma}\textsuperscript{18} also, which can be interpreted as the code of conduct prescribed for the king by the scriptures. This code could be explained by the seers only and not by the king himself. It was considered a great sin on the part of the king if he extracted his share of people's income without providing adequate protection to them, such as he
he would afford to his own sons.\textsuperscript{19}

The restraint of Dharma was quite effective, we learn, and the king did not dare doing anything evil due to the fear of hell. For instance, we read that Rāma did not want to take such an action as was against Dharma and could earn him a place in hell. He told Lakṣmana in plain words that he was afraid of doing Adharma and also of the other world, and was not interested in getting himself installed as king at that cost.\textsuperscript{20} Later he said that a king who was talked desparagingly of among the people was destined to live in hell as long as the talk went on.\textsuperscript{21}

The coercive power allowed to the king by the scriptures made him very strong. Therefore a check of Dharma was prescribed by our ancient thinkers against the misuse of this power. In the Rāmāyana we read the king being advised that the tears falling from the eyes of the unjustly punished people brought great misfortune to the king;\textsuperscript{22} he should, therefore, be watchful that nobody was punished without being properly examined by learned judges.\textsuperscript{23} The king was told that he had to follow the narrow path demarcated by the scriptures and that he could not afford to act according to his own sweet will while distributing justice.\textsuperscript{24}

But the fear of Dharma, evidently, could not restrain a king who was not upright. For him some other effective check was required. The political thinkers, with the
exception of Kautilya, sought a remedy against this evil in disallowing any power to the monarch to formulate new laws in place of the accepted sources of law. In the Rāmāyaṇa also, we find that the king was not allowed to issue any edict. He had to follow the dictates of Dharma, Caritrya\textsuperscript{25} and Lokavṛtta or Laukikamaya.\textsuperscript{26} Vibhīṣana, for instance, told Rāma that he should act in accordance with the rules of Dharma and Lokavṛtta.\textsuperscript{27} Dharma, Caritrya and Lokavṛtta were the respected sources of law, and the king could not do anything which was against these rules. This fact is confirmed by Rāma who, according to the epic, consolèd Vāiśṇava saying that whatever he had done was within the limits of accepted law and was not done because of his own desire.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, the lack of authority to formulate new laws exercised a check on the king in the times of the epic. The king could neither issue a new edict nor alter the established law to suit his own designs.\textsuperscript{29}

Various exhortations were also used as a check on the king. The ancient Indian writers not only tried to terrify the king by the fear of Dharma but also took recourse to a different approach to make him impose a self-discipline, understanding well the limits of the fear of hell. They told the king that it was in his own interest to behave righteously, because it could give him a longer tenure of rule. They carefully recorded the names of Nabuṣa, Sudāsa, Sunukha, Nimi and other such kings who lost not only the kingship but also their lives by being tyrant and
Emphasizing the importance of discipline for a long and happy rule, Manu says, "Many kings who were undisciplined perished along with their dependents, but many others who were disciplined won kingdoms even when living in forest."

In the Rāmāyaṇa we see exhortations used to impress upon the king that it was not only the people who were to benefit if he were virtuous but he, too, gained from it in the form of a long lasting rule. This approach is manifested in many verses spoken by different characters. Some instances are given below:

1. Lākṣaṇa told Sugrīva that the king who was truthful and benevolent and who had his senses under his control was respected in the world.

2. Mālāyān told Rāvaṇa that the king who followed the just course and who was disciplined by learning ruled for a long time and brought the riches and enemies under his control, too.

3. Śūrpaṇakā also told Rāvaṇa that the king who was not righteous was not even as useful as a lump of earth or (a piece of) dry wood. He was as useless as worn-out clothes or a crushed wreath of flowers.

4. She had told him earlier that a disciplined king stayed on the throne for a long period whereas an unrighteous one did not take much time to come to grief.
In the Rāmāyana, the allurements of a place in heaven, a long rule and the fear of destruction have been mixed together. For instance, we read the sages of Dandakāranya telling Rāma that the king who protected the people treating them like his own self or like his own sons achieved everlasting fame as well as a place in the Brahvaloka, and was honoured there; he received also the fourth part of the fruit of good-deeds of the sages. In another context it is revealed that those who committed sins or were cruel and, therefore, despised by the people lived like trees having no roots (therefore ready to fall down any moment).

The coronation oath acted as another powerful check. The king was required to take a vow at the time of his coronation that he would never be arbitrary. The coronation oath in the Mahābhārata has been referred to as 'Sruti.' If a Hindu monarch failed to keep his coronation oath, he was called Astyānātha and Astyapratiña. In the Rāmāyana, we find quite a few coronations being performed but the administration of a coronation oath does not find a place anywhere. It cannot be possible that the coronation oath which continued to exist till later times and finds a mention in the Mahābhārata did not exist in the epic period also, to exercise the check.

Valmīki refers to another kind of check which was exercised at the time of choosing a new king. It was the
proper consideration of the merits of the would be king. We find that Dāsaratha took into account all the qualities of Rāma and proposed his name only after finding that he was the best successor.⁴⁰ This sort of check has been advised by Kautilya also, who says, "When a prince possesses good and amicable qualities, he may be made the Commander-in-Chief or installed as heir-apparent. But never shall a wicked prince be installed on the royal throne."⁴¹

It was believed that the absence of a proper training could be a potential cause for the king to become whimsical, arbitrary and tyrannical. Therefore, the ancient thinkers laid emphasis on the systematic and proper education and training of the princes during their childhood and adolescence. They carefully selected the subjects for the curriculums of princes' education to develop them into ideal kings by inculcating necessary discipline. Regarding discipline Kautilya says, "Self-discipline is acquired and inborn; training disciplines suitable stuff —— Training and discipline in the sciences (are acquired) by (accepting) the authority of the teachers in respective sciences."⁴² He further says, "From study a trained intellect, from intellect (comes) practical application and from practical application (results) self possession, such is the efficacy of sciences."⁴³

Mere training in various sciences was not considered enough. Therefore it was suggested that the king should
associate himself with elders to improve upon his training since training has its root in that.\textsuperscript{14} \textsuperscript{Kūmandaka} also says that the king who serves a well learned, good guru and behaves well acquires the riches; thus exalted, the king becomes suitable and able for kingship and peace.\textsuperscript{15} He places discipline before learning when he says that the king who has acquired vinaya should contemplate on the science of analysis, the Vedas, Vārtā and Daṇḍaniti.\textsuperscript{16} On the education and training Kantūam further says that when he (prince) is ready for, it the experts should train him——; he should be instructed in what conduces to spiritual and material good, not in what is spiritually and materially harmful.\textsuperscript{17} In the Rāmāyaṇa it is alluded that training and education discipline the intellect of the king, and thereby applies a check on the evil tendencies of human mind. According to the epic, the king was disciplined in Dharma and Artha,\textsuperscript{18} in Dharma to discipline his mind and to make him righteous and in Artha to make him an able king. The king has been called 'Srūtāvān, Brāhmaṇamūpāsīta and Vīnītā. He was 'Srūtāvān because he was learned in the Vedas and other sciences, Brāhmaṇamūpāsīta because he had waited upon good gurus and Vīnītā because he had acquired Vinaya.\textsuperscript{19} Like the works on polity do, the king in the times of the epic was impressed upon again and again to consult his elders and counsellors in all matters and not to contemplate alone on any important matter.\textsuperscript{20} The
training in scriptures helped him to cast-away the group of six enemies, acquire control over senses, sharpen his intellect by association with elders, etc. He was made fully aware that he had to divide his time properly for Dharma, Artha and Kama, keeping in view that the latter might not obstruct the implementation of the former or vice versa. In other words, he was advised that Artha should not come in the way of Dharma, Dharma should not block the way of Artha and Kama should not harm either of the two by being injudiciously enjoyed. How a good training could inculcate virtues in princes is evinced by their qualities described in the Ràmâyana. Ràma, we read, could sacrifice not only his kingdom but also his own life for the sake of his subjects.

The training of the princes was not left to the teachers only, who gave them the theoretical knowledge; the princes were associated with administration in order to give them the practical knowledge so that they were not novices when the yoke of kingship was placed on their shoulders. Besides that, the king trained his sons himself and tried to cultivate good qualities in them.

Hermitages and recluse living outside the society were a political factor in Hindu life. The hermitage was representative of the whole Aryan society. At the same time it was a repository of past experience in social and political matters and a seat of clear impartiality. It
could take a correct view of a difficulty in administration and advise the king thereon without any fear. Our literature is full of such references: Narada advised Krishna on his republican difficulties and the Buddha was approached by Ajatasatru before marching against the Licchavis. The Mahabharata impresses upon the king to inform the hermits of the affairs of the state and to take counsel with one whose experience is large, whose family is distinguished and who is selfless. The Arthasastra tells the king that bad government offends the ascetics and recluse, and thereby implies the effectiveness of the check.

The Ramayana tells us that the hermits took active interest in the state affairs and saw to it that the king did not become a tyrant. We find that Bharadvaja had a complete information on what was happening in Ayodhya. He knew about Rama’s fate even before the latter had reached the hermitage. Later, when Bharata went to bring Rama back, Bharadvaja showed concern for Rama’s safety, thinking that Bharata wanted to attack his brother in the forest. Agastya also had full knowledge of the events and told Rama that he had already known about his arrival in the forest.

The epic further shows that the hermits were a very powerful check on king’s power. They commanded a deep respect from the king and were worshipped like the gods. When Visvamitra reached Dasharatha’s palace the latter was considering an important matter with his counsellors; but
as soon as he heard of the sage's arrival, he came out along with his Ruchita and ministers, received him offering archya in accordance with the rules of the scriptures and said, "I consider your arrival as auspicious as receiving Nectar or as rains in a land without water. to me you are like a god."

The sages were a source of awe to the king. He was so much afraid of them that he thought himself doomed if his intentions were suspected as evil or they got annoyed with him. He, therefore, took all the care to make his position clear and beyond any doubt. The awe of sages was so great that Lakṣaṇa preferred to show Durvāsa in immediately to the risk to his own life, and Rāma went to him with folded hands to ask for orders instead of getting annoyed at his untimely arrival.

The effectiveness of the check of sages is also borne out by the references found in the Rāmāyaṇa to the destruction of evil kings by the hermits. The story of Vīśvāmitra is a fine demonstration of the sage-power in the epic period.

Another example of the sage-check is the story of Lavaṇa who was got killed by Čavāna and others with the help of Rāma, because he was not righteous. The sages not only gave all the vital information about the son of Madhu but also advised Rāma how he could easily conquer him.
They told 'Satrugbna who was sent by Rāma to fight the tyrant that he should block the gates of Lavaṇa's city when the Rākṣas was away and destroy him thus, for at that time he did not carry the terrible trident that could kill anyone on the earth. So the sages, we are told, sought help from a righteous king to get an unrighteous one killed. It is also alluded in the epic that even Rāvaṇa was got killed by the sages because he had swerved from the path of Dharma. The effort of the sages in the case of Rāvaṇa has been referred to in the speech of Kubera addressed to Rāvaṇa.70 The story of Sagara's sons also aver that the sages punished those kings who were not noble.71 The sages were so venerable that the king even touched their feet72 and always said on meeting with them that he was gratified by the visit.73

The learned Brāhmaṇas were another check on the autocratic tendencies of the king. "With a culture of intellect ever developing from generation to generation, he had grown into a leviathan of brains, who would have eaten up Hindu society and burst up himself but for the self denying ordinance of poverty. The Brāhmaṇa of poverty living inside the society and state was probably more mindful of current politics than any one else."74 Brāhmaṇas like Brhaspati and Kauṭilya were not merely interested in the systematisation of theories of state, they also made the politics of their country an object of their immediate
concern. 

Bṛāhmaṇa like Pārśurāma even took up arms to punish the evil kings who did not abide by the dictates of Dharma and behaved in an oppressive manner. 

The Rāmāyaṇa also recognises the check of Bṛāhmaṇaś. Their influence is manifested by the concern caused by the untimely death of a Bṛāhmaṇa's son. The king immediately sent for his ministers to discuss the grave situation as he thought it to be. Not only that, he immediately set out to search for the one who was not abiding by Dharma and, thereby, had caused the unnatural happenings in the state. He took rest only after he had solved the mystery.

The Purohita was another effective check in ancient times in this country. In the Rāmāyaṇa, it can be very well seen what a commanding position he enjoyed in the state. The king followed him like a pupil and touched his feet on meeting him. The Purohita could speak to the king even without being asked and point out his failings fearlessly and unhesitatingly. The king always acted upon his advice. For instance, when king Daśaratha developed weakness due to affection for his son and intended to leave the path of truth, the Purohita immediately told him that he was wrong and that he should abide by what had been promised earlier. Moreover, the Purohita could easily say no to the king. The epic tells us that Triśanku's request was not complied with by his Purohita considering that improper.
Arikita of Danda, destroyed the king along with his kingdom because the latter was unscrupulous and giving way to his senses.81

The ministers were also an effective check.

According to Jayaswal: "It is the law and principle of Hindu constitution that the king cannot act without the approval and cooperation of the council of ministers."82 All the ancient Indian thinkers advised the king to consult his ministers in all matters. In Manu’s view, a king who has no ministers (helpers) is a fool and cannot be just while exercising Danda.83 He regards such a king unfit to rule and lays down that he must have colleagues i.e. ministers to consider ordinary and other matters of state along with them.84 Kautilya, the most ardent advocate of monarchy, also says that important matters of state should be discussed in the council of ministers and the king should undertake whatever is approved by the majority.85 He further says that Indra was considered the thousand eyed one because he had a council of ministers having one thousand members.86 Kananda advises the officers, friends and kins to forbid the king when indulging in unworthy acts and to make him do what is worthy, and says that an officer who ignores the king following the wrong path also receives the insult (of dispossession of power) along with the master.87

The Rāmāyana has numerous references wherein the king has been described being advised that he should
consider all matters with his counsellors before taking action. Highlighting the importance of ministers it says that even one able minister can bring a big fortune to the king, and, therefore, the king even though powerful should consult his ministers if desirous of welfare. Thus, the Ramayana alludes that the ministers exercised a strong check on the royal power at least in normal times.

The foremost duty of the minister in the epic period also was to tell the king what was good or bad for him from the point of view of Dharma and Artha. As an illustration of the role played by the counsellor in this regard we find Marica telling Ravana thus: ‘Ravana, your ministers who do not stop you from proceeding on a wrong path are worth killing. A whimsical king who is on the wrong path should be checked by good ministers; you are worth checking, but they are not doing so.’ On the part of ministers we find that many of them spoke to the king without any hesitation and told him what was wrong in his behaviour.

Another check in ancient India was applied by the powerful guilds also. In the Ramayana we find different terms, like Naigemaswukhya and Srenimukhya. The Naigemaswukyas or Naigemas are found associated with a lot of state matters, but we do not know much from the Ramayana about the role played by the Srenimukyas. It can be, nevertheless, assumed that they must have wielded some influence over the king.
The Nāgas, according to the epic, were associated with the state-work more than the others may be because they were rich and influential people. We find that they were present on all the important occasions, namely at the time of Rāma's selection as the heir-apparent,\textsuperscript{97} at his as well as Satrughna's coronation,\textsuperscript{98} to discuss the situation arising from the death of the Brāhmaṇa's son,\textsuperscript{99} etc. They were present also in the meeting where Rāma declared his decision to relinquish the throne.\textsuperscript{100} Thus we see that they were present in almost all the meetings arranged at Ayodhya. They were the people who mattered and, therefore, exercised a check on the king.

We living in modern times are very well aware how effective the leading and popular writers can be in moulding the public opinion. It is well known that writers played a key role in bringing about revolutions. Our own independence could be possible partly because our writers kindled the fire in people's heart to wage a war against the foreign rule.

The ancient writers also caused awareness among the masses that the king was not to act as he pleased, but was obliged to regard his high office as a sacred trust and rule according to the dictates of the Sāstras. Thus they created a public opinion which must have certainly influenced the course of events.\textsuperscript{101}

In the Rāmāyaṇa we hear of a 'Sloka sung by a bear and of 'Slokas sung by elephants, which were obviously from
the works of great and popular writers and were referred to when in doubt regarding certain action, being treated as the code of conduct. Quoting the verse sung by a bear Sītā told Hanuman not to follow the conduct of sinners or retaliate in a sinful manner because for noble ones there conduct was an ornament and should be protected. Subsequently, Sītā further told him basing her argument on the above verse that everybody in this world whether a sinner or a noble one should be treated well by an Arya, because there was nobody who never committed a sin. Rāvana referred to the Hāṣṭi-gītā while answering Viśiṣṭā's argument and said, "Listen from me the verses sung by elephants somewhere in the Pedamavan, when they saw the men carrying snares: (the elephants said) we are not afraid as much of fires or other weapons or snares as we are of the most selfish relations of ours." The above verses are said to have been sung by animals; therefore it appears that there were works of the pattern of the famous Pança-tantra wherein, too, the writer has successfully utilized the animal characters to express ideas imbuing high-class wisdom. The works comprising Śīsa-gītā and Hāṣṭi-gītā were obviously much popular in the epic times, and they created a public opinion and brought awakening among the masses. They popularised the standards of ideal living for men and for kings and, thus, promulgated a check on the people as well as on the rulers to stop them from following a wrong course.
The public opinion created by the scriptures and writers was of real concern for the king. According to Jayaswal, there was a real public opinion in the country which is proved by the directions to the king given in various works. In the Mahabharata, for example, it is said that the king should make secret and trusted agents travel through the kingdom for ascertaining whether his conduct of the previous day has or has not met with the approbation of the subjects, whether his conduct is or is not approved, what action is agreeable in the country and what reputation he has in the realm. In the Ramayana, the king has been warned that he should not do anything which may agitate the people and thus generate a bad opinion. He is advised to ascertain the public opinion about his conduct in two ways if he wants to have a long and prosperous rule: through personal contact with the people by going out on the streets every day and through spies. Referring to the first Rama in the epic said to Bharata, "I hope you appear before the people on the highway everyday in the forenoon after decorating yourself." The second method has been referred to in the speech of Surpanakhā who, according to the Ramayana, told Rāvana that the one who did not employ spies in the kingdom to know the happenings and the public opinion could not remain on the throne for long, and again in the Uttarakanda where we find Rāma sitting among his friends to know what the people generally talked about their king especially in the case of a new
king.\textsuperscript{110} Rāma, we are told, was always very anxious to
know the public mind and had a fear of it as is shown by
the hurry he made in sending Sītā away to forest after
knowing the scandal. It was believed by the king in the
Rāmāyaṇa period that a person of whom people talked ill
went to live in hell, and that one should rather die than
have the public talk loosely of one's conduct.\textsuperscript{111}

If a king had not received the proper training and
education or his tyrannical tendencies were too strong to
get curbed by them, if he was not amenable to the force of
public opinion, if he did not listen to the advice of his
elders, preceptor and ministers, if the terror of hell had
no deterrent effect upon his oppressive activities, what
were the people to do? Our writers do not recommend passive
obedience to wicked and autocratic rulers, and Vālmīki
agrees with them. The Mahābhārata admits the people's
right to kill a tyrant if there was no other way out.\textsuperscript{112}
Kautilya\textsuperscript{113} and \textit{Maha}\textsuperscript{114} do not directly allow such a right
but admit that a tyrant and unrighteous king is killed by
the people. \textit{Kemandaka} also says the same in a concealed
manner: an evil king according to him is consumed like a
moth.\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Aphasanatī Sūtra} admits, too, the right of the
people to revolt, and tells the king to give up the smallest
undertaking if there be popular clamour against it.\textsuperscript{116}
Even the right thing should not be done if the people may
raise voice.\textsuperscript{117} 'Sukra is more explicit and says that the
people should threaten migration to deter the tyrant, hoping that mass migration of the people to some other land would be taken as a prospective loss of revenue and bring him to senses; but if that did not work, the people should dethrone the ruler.\textsuperscript{118}

The \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} admits the people's right to resist and punish the unrighteous king, and refers to many ways the people could defend themselves such as open accusation, migration, agitation, dethroning, imprisonment and killing.\textsuperscript{119} The \textit{Bṛāhmaṇa} whose son died young resorted to open accusation method and said, "People who are not looked after in a righteous manner come to grief because of the fault of the king; when the king leads a sinful life, the people die."\textsuperscript{120} The method of agitation alluded to in the epic was that the agitator would lie down on one side on the ground without taking anything till death or the fulfilment of his demands.\textsuperscript{121} Another similar way was called \textit{Pṛyogavasyana}, i.e. starving oneself to death. These methods of showing resentment against the oppressor were conceded by the king as people's legitimate prerogatives, as is evident from the relevant passages in the \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}.

Migration for the sake of registering opposition to a king's unjustified conduct was also not unknown to the people in the epic period. The people of Ayodhyā, we read, threatened to resort to this means of resistance when they thought that Rāma, the most accomplished son of king
Dasaratha, was being sent into exile in a wrong manner; they declared that they would go with Rama in the form of mass migration to the forest, taking all their riches with them and leaving a ruined city for the son of Kaikeyi.\textsuperscript{123} Rama, however, tried to persuade them to stay back but on failing left them while they were asleep. In the case of 'Sukra vs Dana also we read that 'Sukra ordered the subjects to leave the country to save their lives.\textsuperscript{124}

The extreme way of public resistance, according to the epic, was imprisonment, dethroning or killing of the wicked king. That the king who was not righteous and who had fallen a victim to senses and vices could be imprisoned after considering Nava (propriety) and Anava (impropriety) stands proved by what 'Satruhnna said about Dasaratha; he was of the view that Dasaratha had forfeited his right to kingship by playing in the hands of his wife.\textsuperscript{125} For a case of dethroning we can cite the case of Triśukha,\textsuperscript{126} who was turned out of his kingdom after he had been declared a Cāndāla. Another case was of Vivasvāna who had to go into retreat after his forces were consumed by Vāśishtha.\textsuperscript{127} According to another account, the eldest son of Sāgara was sent into exile for harmful activities.\textsuperscript{128} Lakṣmana is also reported saying that he would kill\textsuperscript{129} or imprison\textsuperscript{130} the king and thereby frustrate the hopes of Kaikeyī and the king to anoint Bharata. This is justified by saying that the king was not following the path of the earlier Rājarṣi\textsuperscript{131} and was acting under the influence of Kāma.\textsuperscript{132}
In the *Mahābhārata*, king Vena has been described killed by Sages because he was oppressive. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we find Vaiśāki being killed by Rāma as he was not abiding by the rules of Dharma.¹³³

So Vālmīki does not preach passive obedience to the people even when the king is tyrannical and not abiding by Dharma. On the other hand, he allows unrestricted right to the people to agitate and raise voice, to migrate to another country, to imprison, dethrone or even kill the king who does not follow the scriptures.

The recognition of subjects right to revolt against the tyrant shows that according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the sovereignty ultimately resided in the people. It could be exercised by a popular uprising and also by peaceful means.¹³⁴ In theory, the sovereign's power was absolute and unlimited in the absence of constitutional checks in the modern sense, and he was referred to as Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Indra, the giver, the destroyer and the enforcer of Varnāśrama-Dharma; but in practice, there were very real checks and limitations that prevented him from using his powers indiscriminately. The subjects were dependent but did not allow the monarch to go against the Śāstras. Moreover, it was not difficult to punish a tyrant in the times of the *Rāmāyaṇa* because the armies were not made up of mercenaries and they, being afraid of Dharma, were not expected to side with the evil king against the people. The people's right to rebel and invite
a virtuous ruler to rule was more feasible and practicable in ancient times than we can think of it in modern times, when governments are armed with tanks, aeroplanes and atomic bombs and the subjects have to oppose them with inadequate means.135

Thus, the checks on the royal power described in the Rāmāyaṇa were most practicable and effective. The king was not allowed any right to interfere with people's way of life or to formulate any new laws. There was a set code of conduct for him which he could not violate if he desired to maintain his popularity, and thereby his kingship. As soon as a king chose to become unrighteous, autocratic ruler, he forfeited his right to rule and could be dethroned imprisoned or slain if he did not respond to peaceful means of resistance.
REFERENCES

1. Nityam rājna tathā bhāvyam garbhini sahādaṃśāmdharmiṇī,
   Yathā svam sukhamutpajya garbhasya sukhamāvahet.
   Agni. P. 222.8.

2. Rājīṁ sārīragrahaṁ na bhogya mahīpati,
   Klesāya mahate prthivīsvadharme pālane. Mārkandeya P. 130.33.

3. Kāmastaṃ prakṛtyaiva viniśto guṇavāṇasi,
   Guṇavatayaś tu ahamātputra vaksyāmi te hitam.
   Bhūyo vinayāmāsthīya bhava nityam jītendriyaḥ,
   Kāmakrodhasamuttāḥi tyajethā vyasanāṃ ca. Rām. II.3.36

4. Kāptu citmayam manuṣyaōnāmityamiti me matih,
   Satāṃ ca dharmanityānāṃ kṛtāsobhi ca Rāgava.
   Rām. II.4.29.

5. Altekar, op. cit. p.93.


8. Supra, Chapter IV.


11. Sa naiva vyabhacchreyo rūpaṃ sattvāyām iṣṭa dharmaḥ
    tadatkarṣastraya kṣatram yaddharmastasmād-dharmātparaṃ
    nāsti. Athis abhīṣamābhyāṃ samāsāṃsate dharmaṃ
    yathā rājna. Evaś yāvat sa dharmāḥ satyam vai tat
    tamātātātāyam vedantamāhur dharmanāḥ vedatī ti dharmāṃ
    vā vedantām satyam vedatītvedatītvedatītvedatīt dvayaṃ
17. Dharmabandhane baddho/mai naṣṭā ca mama cetanā, Rām.II.12.16.
18. Rājadharmaviruddhaḥ ca lokavṛtteṣa garhitem, Rām.V.50.5.
19. Adharmastu mahāpustāta bhavattasya mahāpateḥ, Yo hared baliṣadibhāgam na ca rākṣati putravat.
22. Yāni mithyābhīṣastānāṃ patantyasaṃpi Rāghava, Yāni putrapaśūnghananti prītyarthamaṇuṣasataḥ. Rām.II.94.50.
23. Aprīṭāḥ śastraṅkulaśāṇa lokaḥbādhyate such. Rām.II.94.47.
26. Dharmamārtah ca kāmaḥ ca sāmayam cāpi laukikam,
   Avijñāya kathām bālayāmāmihāya vigarhash. Rām. IV.18.4
27. Rājendhravirudhhan ca lokavṛttanā garhitam,
   Rām. V.50.5.
28. Tadalaṃ peritapena dharmataḥ parikalpitaḥ,
   Vadhō vānaraśārdūla na vayeṃ svavaśe sthitah. Rām. IV.18.33
29. Refer to Chapter III for king and law making.
30. Altekar, op.cit. p.95.
31. Bahavo/vinayāmaṣṭa rājānaḥ saparicchedāḥ,
   Vanaṣṭhā api rājāni vinayatpratipedire. Mām. VII.40
32. Sattvabhijanaṃsāpannaḥ sūnuksaśo jītenāhāḥ,
   kṛtajñāḥ satyavādī ca rājā loke māhātate. Rām. V.33.7.
33. Vidyaśvabhivinīto yo rāja rājasaṃyāmagah.
   Sa śastī cirmeśvāryamarīpāca kuruva vaśam. Rām.VI.26.2
34. 'Suskākāṣṭhairevātkārīyam loṣṭhairapi ca pāṃsubhiḥ
   Na tu sānātparibhrastaiḥ kārīyam ayadvamudāhipaiḥ.
   Upabhuktō yathā vāsah vṛjao va ārditaḥ yathā,
   Evan rājyaśvatibhrastaiḥ samartha/pi nirarthakāḥ.
37. Cirām pāpakaraṇānaḥ kūrāḥ lokajugupsitāḥ,
   Aśvāryam pāpya tiṣṭhati 'aśrṇamūlā iva druṃāḥ.
   Rām.III.28.7
38. Yānca ratrīmājāyehaṃ yānca pretāmi tadbhavamaś-
   taresaṣṭapūrttam, me lokāṃ suṣṭhaṃyuh prajaṃ vṛñjithā
   yati te druhyeyamitī. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, VIII.15.
40. Rām. II.1.
41. "Atmasampannā saṁśādatye yavvarājye vā sthāpayet.
   Arthaśāstra, I.XVI.
42. Arthaśāstra, I.4.
43. śrutāddhi prajñopajāyate; Prajñāyā yogo yogādātmsavatteti
44. Ibid.
45. Kāmasandaka, I.61.
46. Ibid. II.1.
47. Arthaśāstra, I.17. 27-33.
48. Dharmanāthavinītabuddhiḥ, Rām. V.50.3.
49. Rājaividivyvinītaśca brahmaṇānāmupāsita,
50. Rām. VI.6. 4-7; II.104.17; II.94.13.
51. Kaccidatbena vā dharmamērthaṃ dharmena vā pūṃsah, Rām. II.94.13
52. Sarvaṃvedād-vijārtham na satyamvedādbravimi vah.
53. Piturajnāṃ puraskṛtya Paurakāryaṃ sarvaśeṣaḥ,
   Cakṣuḥ Rāmo dharmāmaḥ priyāṇaḥ hitāṇica. Rām. II.1.12.
54. II.3. 23-28.
56. Ibid.
58. Duṣpranitaḥ (daṇḍaḥ) kāmakrodhābh—toṣajñānāvyanprastha-
   parivarajakānapī ko payati. Arthaśāstra, I.3.
59. Rām. II.51.
60. Rām. II.84.
61. Vidito hyeṣa viṛttānto mama sarvastavanagha, Rām. III.12.15
62. Tēṣaṁ tadvacanam 'arutvā sapurodha saṁhitāh,
Pratyujjāma saṁhrūto Brahmāpanava vasaṇāḥ. Rām. I.17.27
63. Yathāmaṇṭasya sampraptir yathā varṣamanudalau, Rām. I.17.33.
64. Devataḥ hi bhavāmama. Rām. I.17.38.
65. Hato/ami yadi mānevaḥ baghavanapi manyase,
Matto na doṣamaṁkṣyonaivaṁ māmanādhi hi. Rām. II.34.15
66. Amminkṣare mām saṃcritre —— Rām. VII.95.6.
67. So/bhūvēya mahātmanam —— Rām. VII.95.11.
68. Rām. I. 90-94.
69. Rām. VII. 52-53.
70. Cintyate hi vañhopayāḥ sarṣisamghāḥ sursistava.
Rām. VII.13.32

For a more detailed discussion on the subject refer
to author’s article in Ayyahana, Gandhi Vidya Mandir,
72. Jagrāha paramapūtastasya pūḍau paramānāpah. Rām. III.11.21
73. Cf. Suvati said to Viśvēmitra;
Dhanyo/myamgrhito/ami, Rām. I.46.22.
75. Ibid.
76. Rām. I.73.
77. Rām. VII.64-65.
78. Supra Chapter IV where Pūchita’s position has been
discussed.
80. Rām. I. 56.
81. Rām. VII. 70-72.
83. So/sahayena mūdena lumbhenākṛtabudhinā, Na 'sakyo nyāyato netum saktena viśayesuṣa. Manu, VII.30.
84. Tesan svam svamabhiprāyaṁ ——— Manu, VII.97.
86. Arthaśāstra, I.14.
87. Kāmandaka, V. 50-52.
88. Cf. Āmātyaiśca suhṛdbhiṣca buddhimadbhiṣca mantriḥbhiḥ, Sarvakāryaṁ sammantrya samahāntyaṁ kāray. Rām.II.104.17
89. Eko/pyamātyo ———- Rām. II.94.19.
95. Rām. II.13.2.
96. Rām.II.23.13.
98. Rām. VI. 116.77; VII.75.
101. Kane, op. cit. p.96.
102. Ayam vyāghrasanipe tu purāno dharmasaṃhitah,
    Rkṣepagītaḥ 'slokastitim nibodhā vāsangama.
    Na paraḥ pāpamātate pareṣām pāpakarmānām,
    Samayo rāksitavyāstumantaścāritabāhūṣaṇāh.
    Rām.VI.101. 3-35.
103. Pāpāṇām vā subhūtnām vā vasdhūrābhām plavāngama,
    kūryaṃ kūryamāryeṇa na kaścinnapārāhyati.
    Rām.VI. 101.36.
104. Śrūyante hasthibhirgītāh 'slokāḥ padmāvane kvaicit,
    Pāśaḥstānmannāndrātyā 'ṣṛṇu tāngadate mana. Rām.VI.10.6
106. Atitadvase vṛttam praśāmantī na vā punah,
    Guptaścārāvaṁgataṁ prthivēmanuṣārayet,
    Jānīta yadi me vṛttam praśāmantī na vā punah,
    Kaccidrocejjanapade kaccidrāṣṭre ca me yasāh.
    Jñānī. XII.90. 15-16 (Kumbhakarna ed. XII.39. 15-16).
107. Udvejanīyo bhūtnām nṛsamāh pāpakarmakṛt,
    Trayāṇamapi lokānām īvaraḥpi na tiśṭhati. Rām.III.28.3.
108. Kaccid darśayaśa nityaṁ manuṣānāṁ viśvāsītam,
    utthāyottbhāya pūrvem rājaputra maṭapate. Rām.II.94.43
110. Vaktavyatām ca rājāno nave rājye vajanti hi.
    Rām.VII.42.6.
111. Anyaham jīvitam jabyam yusmāṇvā puruṣarābhiḥ,
Apevaiabhayahitaṁ kīṁ punarjanakātmajam. Rām. VII.44.13.
113. Durgatītaḥ (āṣāya) kāmakrodhābhyaśamajānāmavāparastha- 
parivrajākānapi kopayati, Arthāṣāstra, I.3.
114. Kāmaṇṭa viṣamah kāḍra dayānāva nihanyate. Māmū, VII.27.
115. Kāmaṇḍaka, V.86.
116. Janaṅghoṣā sati kāḍra-kārma na kuryat, Bhāspatīsūtra. I.95
118. Gunaṁtibaladeśi kulabhūto/gyadharmikāḥ

Nṛpa yāti bhavetam tu tyajdṛṣṭravināsakaṁ. Sukra. II.274
119. Na ciraṁ pāpa Ṛg. III.28.7.
120. Rām. VII.64.12.
121. Brāhmaṇa hyesapāśvena narāṁrodhamarhati, Rām. II.103.17

Anāhāro nirāloko dhanaṁciyam yathā dvijāḥ, Rām. II.103.14.
123. Rām. II.30. 1-19.
124. Rām. VII.71-72.
125. Ṛtvam eva tu mṛgraṁyaṁ samayeśa nayānanvadvat,

Utpattham yāṁ samarūḍho māryā rājā vaśasgataḥ Rām. II.72.4

and, kīṁ na mocayate Rāmāṁ kṛtvāpi pitṛnigrahaṁ,

Rām. II.72.3.
129. Na ca kṛtvānāstra yo lokā vihanyah kīṁ punah pita.
130. Yairvīvāsastavāranyae mitho rājan samarthitah,
    Arohane te vivasyanti caturdasa samāstathā.

    Ṛg. II. 20. 17.

131. Ṛg. II. 20. 21.

132. Nāpah kimivā na brūyāccodyamanah samāmsthathā,

    Ṛg. II. 18. 3.

133. Ṛg. IV. 18.

134. In the case of Asmaṅjasata, for instance, the means adopted was peaceful.