

The Concept of Morality and Ethics in Indian Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In modern era, people seem to have underrated the necessity of ethics and moral values in their lives. Fame and income have taken frontline priorities and people seem to have running after them which can be achieved out rightly by following the path of truthful life imbibing morals and ethics. Hence, this is the time to speak about the accepted behavior of human beings needed for amicable existence with fellowmen. According to long standing Indian culture man should cultivate obedience, respect, determination, and commitment to lead his life on the path of *Dharma*. Man's inner peace depends on this tenet rather than material possessions. Though man lives in technologically advanced world, there is a dire need for the present generation to know about the philosophy in connection with moral and ethical values. The present paper focuses on the ethics and religion as stated in Indian philosophy with reference to various philosophers.

KEY WORDS: Ethics and Moral Values, Dharma, Philosophy.

India has a long, rich, and diverse tradition of philosophical thought nurtured through two and a half millenniums. The diversity has encompassed several major religious traditions. With the diverse nature of these religious traditions,

Life is irreplaceable for every creature on the earth. Nature and environment are deeply associated to life of all living creatures. In connection with this, the daily routine on our Earth

planet like, rising Sun, singing birds, flowing rivers, and breathing air are the perfect examples for the importance of life and death on the earth. At first human must understand the true meaning of their life. Moral sensibility is essential for the peaceful journey of life. Ethics as a hypothetical science which is based on the foundations of the moral behavior of man, but a significant portion of the moral codes are based on religious beliefs, social customs and traditions. Ethics are nothing but moral principles of a particular religion, region, social group or individual. Ethics has its origin in Indian philosophical thinking.

Contemporary Indian philosophers as Mahatma Gandhi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and others followed and preached the standard humanistic, ethical, and moral values of ancient Upanishads, Vedas, Puranas and Bagavad Gita. By studying Indian ethics, we can understand that the morality is desperately based on certain beliefs, customs and traditions of Indian religions. Because of the advancement in science and technology, man has been changing his life style and living style. To say that, due to the western influence on Indian culture several changes have been taking place.

As a whole, morality is an association of life consist the awareness of an important difference between how to be? And how ought to be? To stress the point that morality is the awareness of existing based on a distinction between our animal demands and the demands of the human life which make the human distinct from the animals?

All human beings in the society have to live and lead a moral life. To lead a moral life, they need certain guidelines and principles of morality to do certain deeds and to refrain from certain deeds. As per Indian philosophy, the words 'Ethics and Morality' are termed as 'Dharma' which means the duties ought to perform by human. Dharma is understood in Vedas as duty par-

excellence. The two terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably. A few distinctions made among different communities, religions, and academics. Both morality and ethics distinguish the difference between “good and bad” or “right and wrong.” Many people think of morality as something that’s personal and normative, whereas ethics is the standards of “good and bad” noticed by a certain community or social setting.

People may have different opinions on ethical standards. As ‘adultery’ is immoral in some communities, and individual may personally agree with that. Many novels were written on the theme of ‘adultery’. Ethics serves as a personal code of conduct for people working in various fields as medicine, law, and business and the ethics themselves are often highly debated and argumentative. Human beings encounter various moral and ethical issues in day to day life. Morals and ethics define the personalities, attitudes, and behavior of their own. Moral are the customs established by a group of individuals and ethics define the character of an individual.

Renowned scholar and one of the most influential scholars of late 20th century of Indian philosophy, B. K. Matilal, says that literature is a mirror of society, allows human to understand the ethics through literature is much easier. As a creative thinker, Matilal inspires the philosophers in global sense.

Philosophy as a way of life, man must be in a position to exercise moral authority as he feels the proper emotions and judges difficult situation correctly. Man should know the good, choose good actions for their own sakes, has an unshakable character, and takes pleasure in just actions.

Professor Thaddeus Metz classifies philosophical approaches to meaning in/of life into three categories:

1) Supernaturalism

2) Subjectivism

3) Objectivism

According to Supernaturalism, the meaning of life is given by supernatural being such as God. Subjectivism believes that the meaning of life differs from one person to another. Objectivism thinks that individual can define their own life. As the life of one is differ from another. Metz argues that Objectivism is the best approach which defines the meaning of life completely.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan gives a spiritual interpretation to the modern theory of evolution. He maintains that human is the highest product of evolutionary process. The fundamental aim of man is to survive, to achieve his goals, and being happy. Human beings are differing from one another in a numerous ways. At first and foremost, differences in personal characteristics such as health, age, sex, and genetic endowments. Human are also vary from one another in the types of external environment and social conditions they live in. These different elements of human diversity crucially affect the way in which resources such as income and wealth are transformed into relevant capabilities.

Indian philosophical and ethical thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahathma Gandhi, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Amartya Sen were influenced by the Western ideas of secularism, humanism and rationalism. Human beings are not satisfied with the fragments of happiness. They are not striving for truth, beauty and goodness of life. The everlasting peace of mind and spirit can be attained only through ethics, religion and philosophy. Moral values are necessary for the development of one's personality. Non-violence, renunciation and suffering are positive necessities of human life.

Amarthya Sen, an economist and philosophical thinker proposes the ‘ethics of capabilities’. Capabilities refer to the extent of freedom that a person has in order to achieve different needs. The differences in living style of human being crucially affect the ways in which resources such as income and wealth, which are transformed into relevant ethical capabilities.

Ethics and religion has a closer connection. The pioneer of the rationalist movement in modern India, Swami Vivekananda tried his best to advocate Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s teaching. He also tried to give an intelligent, concrete and scientific account of practical Vedanta. Though Vivekananda read Adi Shankara’s Advaita, he practiced Vedanta from the caves, forests and common man. So Vivekananda’s Vedanta called as Practical Vedanta. According to his philosophy, the jiva is none other than Siva; every creature is God himself in particular mode of name and form. All human beings are potentially divine and perfect. Since long Vedanta has confined to caves and forests. But it has to be practiced in the midst of family and social life.

Without having a deep understanding of the life and death is senseless and fruitless. As Vivekananda said, “Love your neighbors as yourself, one loves another, because one sees one’s own self in the other”. The people of India are incurably religious. Humanism and Optimism are the breath of philosophy. Man must be self - reliant strong and unshakable. The divinity comes out of man when he finds himself as precious. To achieve progress and to build the pillars of our nation man must be ethically strong.

A few Indian sacred and religious books direct human being towards extreme paths of realization. Though many religious movements prescribe numerous path ways to contact realization, they are not completely accessible to all. According Hindu mythology, God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient but the path ways are difficult to reach. Devotion

towards God, controlling sense organs, following democratic ways, serving others, and practicing ethical and moral principles man can achieve his goal of reaching God.

Ravidasa, one of the Hindu religious saints, and a great philosopher during the medieval times condemns the superstitions associated with devotion. His devotion was deeply in the form of service. According to Ravidasa:

“Service with in the sphere of devotion means service to God and his creatures by service to mankind are service to God. His hospitality and service to the poor and needy is worthy to be noted. Lord resides in everybody’s hearts is not knowable through rites or performances. Highest expression of religion in life is the service of man.” (Bhattacharya, Haridas, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV. p. 380.)

Selfless service to mankind is highly required to lead ethically standard life. As Mahatma Gandhi said “Service to man is service to God”. God presents in every human, we should perceive Siva in every creature. Praying for the fulfillment of our desires is not humanism. To practice humanism, we should serve the disabled as Narayana, hungry as Narayana, and devastated as Narayana.

Vivekananda urges the educated youth to dedicate and contribute their services to eradicate ignorance and illiteracy and starving and oppressed millions. According to him, ethics is nothing but a code of conduct that helps man to be an ideal citizen of the society. The motto of Vivekananda is life is not for self, it is for others. Morality of the course is not the goal of man,

but the means through which is freedom attained. Morality and Ethics will all range themselves in their proper places.

To bring ethical standards among people, religious harmony and communal harmony must be practiced. Ethics of Mahatma Gandhi lit the imagination of the entire world. Gandhiji said, everyone must have faith, respect good will, openness, and understanding among humans. He regarded education as the light of life and the very source from which was created an awareness of oneness. He also taught that the dignity of labour as a leveling social factor that contributed to a national outlook in keeping with the vision of new India. Gandhiji always believed youth are the pillars of a nation building, and a nation built on the strong ethical standards of its citizen. He aimed at creating a climate of confidence and competition and eliminating misgiving and misconceptions, conflicts and confrontation.

We come to know that the Indian religion, philosophy and morality are so integrally related and it is impossible to understand morality without a proper understanding of the religious and philosophical traditions in India. Ethics in India is a complex and multi-faceted one, being constituted of divergent and several religious and philosophical traditions. This diversity of metaphysical beliefs and valuational attitudes is reflected in Indian morality, which is diverse and multi-faceted as the rest of the Indian culture. But however we must not have any impression that there is neither any specific world view or ethos nor any definite moral code, which can be called Indian as such. Indian tradition has been receptive to new ideas and values but yet it has been choosing certain ideas to be incorporated in its religio-moral thought.

To conclude, this paper focused on the standards of ethical and moral values of human being in the living environment with reference to distinguished philosophical thinkers. By referring to

various ideologies of Indian philosophers, one can understand that man can spend his life with utmost comfort by practicing the ethical and moral standards. To build a strong nation, youth should know the importance of ethical and moral values in their lives.

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