

## **A PERSPECTIVE IN INDIAN BUSINESS ETHICS**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I speak about the concept of ethical awareness prevalent today in corporate. For that purpose I briefly survey the works on Vedas and Upanishads and their relevance in modern times. Secondly whether the epics are discussed upon as works on dharma? Thirdly what is dharma for an Indian today? What is the role of Indian literature on the ethical awareness? Whether they look to the West for ethical theories? Answers to many of these questions are keys to the unlocked questions about the recent trends in Philosophy in India.

**KEY WORDS: DHARMA, UPANISHADS, VEDAS, ETHICAL AWARENESS,**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The ancient philosophical knowledge in India, which is relevant to practice even today, is evident from the works on dharma such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Dharma Sutras etc. There was no separate legal body required to monitor the behavior of the individuals. The modern day has no dearth of individual capacity to grasp the wisdom from these works, but the practice in line with the knowledge is absent. By that people call the attention of the world to indicate the lofty pride in the wisdom on one side and the demonical practice on the other side. 'Which way India?' is a big question today. What happened to the ethical awareness of Individuals? Are they following our Vedas, epics and Upanishads any more or do they look to the West for their wisdom in practice? The answers to these are an interesting note on the recent trend and the future of ethics in India.

**Second Online Session of Society of Positive Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies  
(SPPIS) Haryana  
24<sup>th</sup> June, 2014**

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#### THE ANCIENT WISDOM AND PRACTISE IN ETHICS

The Upanishads or the end part of Vedas are rich in their Philosophical content. The Vedas are called *dharma moolam*, the source of dharma (Kane 1930, 4). They indicate the purpose of life. It is said that (Sankara 1989, 7) being born as a man, having desire to liberate oneself and seeking association of men of wisdom is indeed rare; “*Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoho*”, the mind is the cause of both liberation and bondage. “*Na karmanana prajaya dhanena thyageneke amrtatvamanashuhu...*, (Kaivalyopanishad 1991, 15)”, not by action, people (kith and kin) and wealth does one realize the concept of immortality.

On studying the Upanishads, it becomes apparent that an underlying assumption of the Indian ethos is that the individual reflection and self analysis plays a vital role in life. (1) The main principles from the Chandogya Upanishad are *tapas*, *danam*, *arjavam*, *ahimsa* and *satyavacanam*. Geden quotes the Chandogya Upanishad as stating “life is a soma festival and in this miniature ethical system in five words is incidentally inter woven, when as the reward of the sacrifice (*dakshina*), which is to be offered at the great sacrificial feast of life, are named:-(1) *tapas*, ascetism; (2) *danam*, liberality; (3) *arjavam*, right dealing;(4) *ahimsa*, no injury to life;(5) *satyavacanam*, truthfulness.” (Geden, 2011, XVI, 365)

The Vishnu dharma shastra divides wealth of house holders as three varieties; *sukla* which is by free gifts, inherited wealth, wealth which comes at the time of marriage; *sabala* are the things obtained from sale of forbidden goods, or from one who is under obligation to sell, obtaining from the castes below one’s own varna, things obtained by bribe; *Krsna* are the things obtained by avocation of a varna other than the immediate lower one, what is obtained by gambling, theft, violence and fraud. Though the detailing of concept of ethics in these old works was meant for practice, rather than the more theoretical (though sometimes deep) analysis of ethics which may be encountered in Western metaphysics, it also incorporated and was the outcome of high thought. So when men acquired wealth the right means was described and practiced. Men stood up to their speech, for honesty and truth.

#### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BUSINESS ETHICS

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The works of dharma shastra like various *sruthi*, *smriti*, and *apta vakyas* are still in practice but not overwhelmingly.

But again and again individuals are turned outward seeking these. In the hectic day of living for survival many in fact do not bother about the mind and its thoughts. There is no time to reflect, the concept of liberation is itself questioned these days and though people do look to their conscience to a certain level, the seeking after mental purity is not the objective.

“The Indian ethos may have existed once upon a time. It doesn't today. There is too much individualized brutishness prevalent at every level of society. Let's hope the press will re-double its efforts and uncover the realities which we have carefully ignored. Then, maybe, we will be ready for transformation” (Romesh Thapar 1980). The current scenario in India is alarming to the common man; for much reformation is required to bring in the floating values and morality in common practices. (2)

#### RESEARCH ON ETHICAL AWARENESS

One survey on ethical awareness in India was conducted by the Indira group in and around Pune. The Ethical awareness survey report by Indira Group is divided into two sections. The first section discusses whether at the student level they are able to recognize what an ethical issue is and whether the study of ethical awareness is welcome from their side. As a logical continuation the ethical awareness of teachers is also added and their area of study is about whether they would take effort to take training and teach ethics as a subject is also studied. The second part studies ethical awareness in corporate employees using an awareness survey conducted in companies located in Pune and its periphery. The top drivers of unethical behavior were found to be: cut throat competition, pressure from the top/ bosses, government interference, globalization, and over smart accounts/legal advisors. In concluding, Prachee Javadekar observes, “The major findings of this survey are: the standard of ethics in India is low and is also declining. The teaching community finds it difficult to impart ethics education formally. The students are confused about ethics. The corporate employees feel that they have to behave unethically due to external forces. Thus, there is an urgent need to make (all) the citizens of India ethically responsible. To redefine (the) ethical practices and build consensus upon them. To incorporate

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ethics in the systems and procedures followed at institutional and Governmental levels.” One has to learn to share credit for success with the inner team so that they feel a part of the mission. (Indira Institute 2010)

According to the survey, ethical practices have to be revived in India. It can be done by due credit to the employees of various corporate for right practices.

Similar to this survey, an ethical awareness survey of corporate employees was conducted as a part of the doctoral research of the author of this paper. However its focus was slightly different: it tried to study what theory they follow today and whether they were aware of the fact that awareness was from within? There were more than 175 respondents from companies located in the major cities in India. The results were slightly different from those obtained by Indira. People do seem to follow the concepts like nishkama karma, etc., in India and also they are aware of the fact that the awareness is always from within. But then, what makes them deviate from the self set standards of ethical models? Basically the individuals in ethical practice in life accept their greed for money. The greed for women land and gold has returned again. The theory and practice has a wide gulf as far as ethics in life goes.

The greed for women has also lead to the injustice we came across in the newspapers these days. Is it the media which is bringing it to limelight or the crime rate is more? The newspapers and media are sensitizing the issue. The modern amenities like social media also make people aware of their individual rights from childhood.

What is lacking amidst the common mass is the ability to have strength to face the troubles and turmoil. The teachings of Upanishads are a readymade tailored to the needs of common man today. As observed by Hume it is what is in treasure for the future India. To have discipline and courage to live an ethical life has to be absorbed in every Indian for a better tomorrow. The question is then how these values can be made more practical. The words of wisdom from Himalayan saints have guarded the nation and would do so in future. When men reach masters for wisdom and not the person called saint there is a hope for better tomorrow. It is the teaching not the persons who are called saint to be followed. The concepts and principles alone, which are

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in the air in a conservative country like India would speak itself volumes about the ethical practices still prevalent in the country.

## CONCLUSION

Ethical awareness is the ability to guide one's behavior by one's self. It is to have concern for a principle centered life, fearless devotion to the righteous life, ability to fight against the injustice, being tolerant, being skillful and deriving joy at it and the ability to locate the crux of the ethical dilemma. As far as India goes it is still a land of ethical awareness. The concept of purification of mind, yoga, meditation which triumphs the world are from our Indian soil. With such a cultural difference and varied beliefs we still are a nation with its multiplicity in wonderment. When there are nations who try to interfere in others affairs to conquer them, India inspite of foreign disturbances had averted wars and are tolerant to its neighbors. It is due to the concept of Satyagraha; Indians are not lacking in their inherent potential, they are warriors of high order and also peace lovers who are self controlled. The various scams and unethical practices are due to the few who come to power and have misused their capacity. The greedy are in the picture but that does not make our entire nation. The seed of integrity in the soil, cannot be washed away completely by any amount of cultural intervention. It has a charm and longevity from Himalaya to the rock memorial in Kanyakumari.

## NOTES:

1. Similar sentiments have apparently been expressed by Socrates "... the unexamined life is not worth living". (Plato , 35)

2. A forceful exhortation from a rather different source expressing similar sentiments is as follows:

25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

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26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,

29 Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (The Bible, 2011)

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