

Ethics Present Status

Prof. N.S. Ramaswamy*

Most people in the world would agree that ethical behaviour is desirable for the individual and society. But they would also add that it is difficult to survive, not to talk of prospering, in life if one is strictly ethical. In a competitive world, it is impossible to observe ethical and moral values. It is relatively easy for a teacher or a Swami and his followers in the Ashram to observe ethics, as they are contented leading austere life with no ambition to acquire property, wealth or fame. But most people want name, fame, wealth and comfort. Government rules are so intricate and cumbersome that it is practically impossible to run business without bribing officials, breaking rules and being unethical in execution of projects. Since they would lose money, they cannot adhere to the contractual obligations and stipulations.

Very few lawyers will survive if they cannot tell some lies or hide facts. All religions preach ethics, with some variations in priority and emphasis. But even Evangelists forcibly converted millions to their religion, as they were assured of a reserved seat in heaven. Preachers warned people that they would go to eternal hell, if they do not observe ethics. But belief in hell and heaven is waning. To a Jain or a genuine Brahmin, meat eating is unethical, as they would be hurting a living being which experiences pleasure and pain

like humans. But 95% of the world population eat meat without any feeling of guilt of inflicting pain on animals. Their assumption that God created animals as food for man is not scientific. Experimentation on animals is justified that it is for welfare of man. In Spain they torture animals for pleasure. Hindus and Muslims sacrifice animals to propitiate God. Hunting as a sport is accepted. These people don't find anything unethical about such inhuman acts. Those who practiced slavery did not find anything wrong in beating slaves. Killing animals brutally is a sacred duty for Muslim butchers. At times of scarcity, increasing prices of commodities steeply is accepted without guilt. The 200 Municipalities, which lead the city sewage into the rivers like Ganga and Jamuna, do not find anything unethical, though they consider Ganga as sacred. Epicureans and followers of Charvaka recommend that we should simply enjoy life, forgetting God and ethics. They reject the idea that they would suffer in the next birth or that they would be punished later by some unknown force. Every body does something or other unethical to survive, to make money, to gain an unfair advantage over others or to hurt somebody whom they do not like.

* Padmabhushan and National Professor in Management. Founder Director of the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore. Currently, Director, CARTMAN and Indian Heritage Academy, Bangalore – 560 095. Email : nsramaswamy@hotmail.com Mob : 0091-80 - 93412 59392, or 094480-47014

Man is exploiting animals and Nature's endowments in a massive scale to such an extent that it may be difficult to sustain life in the planet, if the present trend and practices continue. Though the Western world has become prosperous in the last 50 years in terms of consumption of goods and services, their unethical practices have led to recession in the economy, since the entire financial transaction system was indulging in fraud and malpractices. Hitler and Stalin killed millions without any compunction. Even torture was resorted to for converting pagans to the so-called civilized religions.

In the two Ithihasas – Ramayana and Mahabharata – thousands died in the wars, leaving behind their wives as widows and children as orphans. Rama got back Sita and Pandavas got back their kingdom. But thousands wailed and suffered. But these were declared as Dharma Yuddha. Strictly speaking, Rama could have fought Ravana and Pandavas the Kouravas in duels, without involving soldiers and others. Similarly, the two world wars and the atom bombs were justified by the victors that they were doing their duty for saving their nations and to avert worse conditions.

Thus, the 5000 years of recorded history would show that man has been unethical towards Nature, animals and fellow men. There is no proof that the offenders have been punished and will be punished in the next birth. Most religions have postulated a god who is merciful, kind, impartial and so on. Hindu religion conceives god as one without name, form or attributes. It postulates god as energy with intelligence or Chaitanya or consciousness or Brahman, which does not interfere in the affairs of mankind. Hinduism asserts that man is the arbiter of his own

destiny and that he enjoys or suffers, prospers or fails, be healthy or sick, be rich or poor – all due to his Karma in his previous births or deeds done in this birth in earlier years. They have postulated the concept of Karma or Law of Nature or Law of Cause-effect, with the added provision that such favourable and unfavourable outcomes of deeds done would take place in subsequent births, if not in the present birth.

All religions have directly or indirectly postulated a heaven for good deeds and a hell for evil deeds done, which the Hindus do not accept, though there is a mention of hell and heaven in its mythology. In recent years, violence, corruption, misconduct, rape, torture, fraud, scandals and hundred other undesirable actions are increasing every year, which makes one doubt whether man is really progressing as a better man or he is deteriorating as a human being. But, if one looks at five thousand years of recorded history, mankind has certainly evolved from the stage of cannibals and savages to civilized human beings. Thus many intellectuals and preachers argue that mankind is really progressing, in spite of all the negative tendencies we see around us. In effect, it also means that, in spite of all the negative indicators, ethics is gaining ground in certain segments of society, which would increase to larger numbers in the years to come. A combination of teaching of ethics from school stage onwards at one end and good Government and Management at the other would promote ethical behaviour. For instance, 80 million Indians go to temples, churches and mosques regularly; and yet India is considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world, which means unethical.

At the other end, in Finland and a couple of Nordic countries, they hardly go to Church; and yet, they are least corrupt in human relations and transactions (though they still eat meat and hurt animals), because of good administration and management of society. Religion has no role in US and some western countries.

During the time of Mao's rule in China, they were able to bring about or enforce a high degree of ethics in transactions and relationships, because the Chinese Communist system of governance and management was able to improve strict vigilance and control. Also, they utilized social ostracization. But the moment Mao left the scene and Deng introduced the market economy system, Chinese society reverted to their earlier style of functioning, where crime, violence, etc returned with equal virulence as before. India, being democratic with a weak and soft government, is unable to enforce even ordinary rules, such as, "Parking should be done only on one side of the road" and other traffic regulations. When Gandhiji introduced Satyagraha, breaking of the law etc., he was warned by his British friends that the tactics used by Gandhi against the British to get them out would be used against independent Indian Government. Also, in the existing inappropriate political economy system, many, not all, politicians themselves are indulging in large scale corruption; and hence some of the 22 million Government officials are also indulging in massive corruption, are apathetic to people and also behave rudely to citizens. Government has established Vigilance Departments to detect corruption. But it is ineffective. Government has no sense

of compassion to animals. For instance, livestock give two lakh crores of rupees worth of output every year. But the Government does not spend any money for prevention of cruelty being inflicted on livestock. Even the 10 crores of rupee budget of Animal Welfare Board of India is used only for neutering dogs (which is for man's safety) and maintaining Goshalas. Working and meat animals get nothing except worship by Hindus.

Fortunately, some well-managed Indian companies and MNCs do ensure ethical conduct and behaviour of employees and fairness to customers. Tata is well known for their high standard of ethics. Similarly, companies, such as, Infosys, Wipro, L&T, M&M and others have done their best to introduce systems and administrative controls, whereby ethical conduct is facilitated. Technology is also helping, since financial transactions are being done electronically. The regulating and controlling systems are able to maintain a certain amount of transparency in transactions.

The four religions born in India have postulated the Karma theory so that people behave ethically. Even at the time of birth, one's attitude to ethics is completely or partially pre-determined. Thereafter, parents, education, religious teachings, environment, government's vigilance, etc., regulate ethical behaviour of citizens.

The Indian religious approach to enforce ethics is to bank on the theory of Karma, which states that people would benefit by being ethical and suffer by being unethical. Thousands of Swamis are preaching the Law of Karma, as an incentive for good behaviour

and a deterrent for deviant. They also opine that destiny is of two kinds. The first is irrevocable, which cannot be changed by any amount of good work done. Bhagawan Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi had suffered cancer at the end of their life. Sankaracharya and Vivekananda died young. The second kind is where ethical behaviour can erase unfavourable destiny. Instances of such change are illustrated by hundreds of stories in Itihasas and Puranas. In practical terms, ethical behaviour gives us the ability to withstand failures and suffering by bestowing courage and confidence to face negative outcomes. Ethics purifies the mind, which has a salutary effect to maintain good health. An ethical person is liked by others, and in that sense, it is an essential quality for a good manager, leader or professional. Whatever may be the environmental factors, it is possible to observe ethics in many situations, though one may not be able to earn much or rise high in society in terms of name and fame. But the compensation is peace of mind and a sense of wellbeing. Even from the humanistic and common sense point of view, one should observe ethics to the extent one can. It is better to assume that there is another birth and that there is a God or Chaitanya, which may favour or punish us. It is wise to be on the safe side, rather than taking a risk by leading a reckless and an unethical life. The well-known Law of Science says that 'A force is met with an equal opposite force'. Jesus said that 'As you sow, so you reap'. In day-to-day life, one could see that good people are popular and bad people are hated. In addition, good administration, governance and management, along with inculcation of ethical and moral values in schools and organizations as well as within the

family, would help to practice ethical behaviour.

A major part of India's spiritual, not necessarily religious, literature is on upholding Dharma, which is essentially Ethics. Vyasa in Bhagavad Gita, Bhishma and Vidura in Mahabharata, Vasishta and Sri Rama in Ramayana, Vishnu Sharma, Kautilya and Bharthruhari and hundreds of Savants have given mankind guidelines and techniques for observing Dharma and ethics.

We play a variety of roles in our life – student, teacher, ruler, father, mother, neighbour, friend, etc. Our sages gave a Dharma for each such role. If everybody observed their duty and ethics, everybody's right would be automatically satisfied. In mythology, our rulers observed Dharma. So they were a role model for their subjects.

In our case, India has adopted a totally inappropriate political economy model, which has resulted in widespread corruption and Adharma. We have deviated completely from the teachings of our sages and saints. The Indian education system and State policies are unable to take advantage of our scriptures due to the misinterpretation of the word 'secularism'. A new Political Party has to emerge, which should boldly adopt the advice given by our great Rishis, particularly those which are secular and deal only with ethical and moral values and Dharma. There is sufficient evidence that there is a renaissance, and sooner than later, a segment of modern Indian would follow the teachings of our sages. In any case, though media reports give an impression that many things are going wrong, in reality, a large majority of our people are still observing ethics.