

# Ethics All The Way

---

- Prof. KMP Menon\*

---

Any mention of ethics reminds one of what John Ruskin said about books. "There are two kinds of books; one is books for the moment and secondly, books for all time." According to most people Ethics also belong to two kinds. Ethics of the situation and Ethics for all time. Those who give importance to situational ethics tend to ignore the ethics which apply for all time. For example, it is the aim of Business Managers to maximize profits. It is perhaps unethical on their part not to do so. But aiming to maximize profit regardless of ethical considerations will ultimately rebound on the organization itself. The gains may be of only short time duration. Marshall divides the time period for economic analysis into different time periods; the very short, the short, the medium, the long and the very long. The very long period is also known as the secular period. The very long period is a time span of 50 years and more. It is very clear that any organization which cut corners by ignoring ethical considerations will not last over a very long period.

A word about the meaning of secular may be called for here. This word of Latin origin was first used in a religious context. What it really

means is something that is free from all dogmas and doctrines. In other words not bound by any changes that can be brought about by time. It corresponds exactly with the word 'Sanatana' as used in Sanskrit. There is an aspect of ethics which is true for all times and all places. In fact Sanatana Dharma is all about secular ethics. All the epics and all the scriptures of so called Hinduism emphasize ethical conduct and nothing else. It is an appropriate background for a much awaited rejuvenation of all spheres of human activities. It is pointless to attempt to turn the clock back towards the Vedic period or a Rama Rajya or even to the handicraft based village economy as envisaged by Gandhiji. On the contrary we should look forward to building up an ethics based civilization for the twenty first century. Now we should identify and avoid as much as possible the mistakes of the past. Just before the First World War a great optimist published a bestselling book called 'The Great Illusion.' Its thesis being that there need be no more wars, because the gaining of territory was no more of any advantage. Trade could lead to

---

\* The author is a writer whose interests range over a variety of subjects. He is a Scholar of Philosophy, Fine Arts, History and Economics. He can be contacted at [menonkmp@gmail.com](mailto:menonkmp@gmail.com)

the desired results in a more effective way. Now it is clear that the author, Norman Angell, was right because despite two world wars, Japan and Germany more than succeeded in reaching the top positions in the comity of nations. Today means of communication have improved beyond imagination and the world has shrunk to a global village. It is important that enlightened humanity update their world-view. It is conceivable that a more enlightened perspective on the path of the powerful will result in the creation of a brave new world. In this world there need be no misery of poverty. Swords will be turned into ploughshares and there will be abundance for all. For this to happen there needs to be a general awakening to consideration of ethics. In this task it is possible that India can lead the show. In fact the business house of the Tatas' has already shown that it is possible to combine ethical behavior with a social conscience and profitability.

In fact there is a lot of thinking on a new kind of Capitalism. In this thinking there is emphasis on a variety of stake holders connected with the organization. This is very different from the earlier model of management theory in which the shareholders had the maximum emphasis. At one time what was Right for General Motors was Right for America. In UK the great Banks, the Big Five, and of course the Bank of England were considered as spotless as to be above reproach. On the other hand in Russia, the Government and the Party were considered omniscient and omnipotent. In recent times all these great idols and shibboleths have fallen by the wayside. All of them have proven fallible, if not disposable. In the case of the Banks, there are questions about unconscionable payments to the top brass.

The key to such reconsiderations is a matter of ethics. It is not ethical for example for the top management to be paid so much when their business is floundering and many workers are jobless. When all the other "isms" have proved their incompetence, it is only an ethical capitalism that can offer a better life for large numbers of people across the globe. It is possible that the new capitalism will be on the lines suggested by the Brazilian political philosopher, Roberto Unger. Disillusioned with the left and the right, Unger, believes that a reform of the market structure is needed. He emphasizes that everyone in the country is a stakeholder in every organization. It is their interest that should take precedence over the interests of the shareholders. Though the law prohibits monopoly in developed capitalism, each organization acts as a monopoly in some ways. In short, they deny access to the majority of the people in the country. Unger suggests that the key to the new capitalism is "access to markets". In other words, if somehow mass access is ensured, if necessary by law, a prosperous new world can be created. He thinks that revolution as we know it is not the answer to anything. What he would like to happen is a "Devolutionary Change". Today, democracy no doubt responds to every crisis. But this is not enough. Perhaps, in India, such a change has begun as witnessed by the Aam Aadmi Party's recent success.

India is in a flux. A change for the better is what we want. For this to happen we need to disseminate the right idea that are well thought-out and debated. In every field whether public administration, government, economy or academics, there is a need for fresh new ideas with an ethical base.

The media is full of allegations and counter-allegations. No one wants to tolerate corruption or beastly behavior or rampant sexual indecency. But how does one go about it? It is certainly not by mob violence or condemnation by the media or by making laws as a knee-jerk reaction to a tragic incident. It will be a shame on the country if a person is arrested and hounded by the media, powerful politicians or institutions just on the basis of an alleged misdemeanor. A sound legal maxim is that it is better to let a few wrong doers escape punishment than let one innocent person suffer punishment. How does one verify or prove an allegation supposed to have happened in the closeness of a boudoir or a luxury hotel room or a lift for that matter? One bench mark of the appropriateness of the law is to compare it with the laws of other countries. How does the interpretation of Article 377 compare with laws in the other civilized countries? In any case the laws of civilized countries provide the accused with the luxury of presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Further there is the provision of the benefit of doubt. Once having tarnished a great reputation by media it is difficult to resurrect it. One ardently wishes that India is not falling back to barbarism.

A thinking man of ancient Greece remarked "I am always a lover of cleanliness in public life; but to those who would appropriate the title find too many points destructive of cleanliness and hateful to her genuine advocates." When we look to history we find that all such movements have been counter-productive. The French Revolution was a case study for English thinkers, politicians and even poets. This helped England to avoid such a convulsion. What is needed is a change of heart, so that a strong ethical foundation is built in our

coming generations. It will no doubt take time to strengthen our institutions with a sound moral base. The educational institutions should take the lead so that a new 'Dharma' can pervade the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and the fourth estate, the media.

For this to happen it is necessary that the whole educational system should change.

### **The Ethics of Education**

It is necessary that the field of education should be suffused with ethics all the way. This is because it is the hatchery of future generations. The future of the country is forged by education. It is a field in which wrong should be eschewed and what is right, should not only be adopted but also seen to be practiced. Educational management should bristle in all aspects with transparent ethicality. It is an unfortunate fact that our country has a long way to go in order to reach this ideal situation. Having adopted the P.P.P (public, private, participation) model, the education delivery system can go a long way to fulfill the 'felt need' of our society. Undoubtedly, the investment in education has increased several fold after the 1990s, which may be considered the era of liberalization.

Investment in education is admittedly the most desirable form of investment from society's point of view. This is because the returns thereof go far beyond the benefits which can be calculated in money-terms. Such investment can raise the level of an entire society to a higher level of existence that is free from grinding poverty. To take the example of Kerala, we can see that, it is the investment in education that has made vast numbers of people employable abroad. This has contributed to its affluence and

'quality of life' parameters which are equal to any in the West. Thus we can start with the premise that investing in education is by itself an ethical activity.

Yet, as in other fields, it is in the details that the devil lurks. To begin with, investment in education is lop-sided and flawed. It goes least to where it is needed most. The primary level is where it is urgently and massively required but universities take up the lions' share. The government could urge all those who would fund glamorous high level universities to invest also in some primary schools. Of course all compulsion is counter-productive and all philanthropic activity should come from the heart.

Even where massive investment has taken place, we find that major part of it has gone to making of impressive infrastructure. What is left over from providing the infrastructure goes towards administration as a recurring cost. Ultimately what is left for the main purpose of 'delivering education' gets only a pittance. Thus the whole society is denied the benefits that could have been possible. This is of course an unethical state of affairs.

In conclusion, it is necessary to work out a system which gives sufficient attention to all the aspects which go towards an equitable and ethical organization of Indian society of the future.



## **Religious thought influences business ethics in JAPAN**

Being deeply religious is not a prerequisite to doing business in Japan, but it helps to explain the particular set of business ethics that permeates the Japanese business environment. Business ethics in the country have evolved almost directly from the Buddhist temple or the Shinto shrine.

The Japanese religions - Confucianism, Shintoism and Buddhism - are transcendental in nature. This means that each believes that every single thing, including people, has its own soul or spirit, or numen as the Japanese call it. Each individual numen combines with all others to form the great life force of the universe. Inasmuch as Japanese people live in an environment in which everything and every event has a purpose as an expression of this life force, the meaning of work for them becomes unique. Work is understood to be a self-expression of the great life force, and Japanese people unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, try to unify themselves with the great life force by concentrating on their own work.

The second aspect of transcendentalism that affects Japanese working practices, and therefore ethics, is the emphasis on groups. In the group environment, a group is considered to be superior to its ordinary members mainly because, while the group is expected to be able to connect with the numen of the universe in a direct way, the members of the group individually are not related to the force in the same way. The only way for the members to connect with the life force is through the activities of their group.