

## **ETHICS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

### **Introduction**

Moral consciousness is an undeniable fact of human experience. The moral sensibility is something essential for the peaceful society and the work. Even gods are believed to incarnate to restore righteousness and peace in the society. Down through the centuries, many religious teachers, and philosophers were interested in the rational ground of morality. The caste duties of the Hindus prescribed in the *Dharmasastras* are well articulated commands, which are meant to regulate the life of the community. Ethics as a speculative science is based on the foundations of the moral behavior of man, but a substantial portion of the moral codes are based on religious beliefs, social customs and traditions. When we take the Indian ethics too the morality is very much based on certain beliefs, customs and traditions of Indian religions.

It is true that the foundations of Indian ethics can be sought in the metaphysical and the theological beliefs in the form of worship, prayers and in the form of ideals and principles that directed man's life in the society. When we speak of Indian ethics, we cannot deny the intimate relationship that prevails between ethics and Hindu or any other religion. Ethics and religion are so closely related and whatever may be the religion, it contains within itself some system of morality for the guidance of its followers. And thus Indian ethics is the indispensable part of Hindu religion and other religions of Indian origin. Indian ethical ideals and principles are very much found in the Vedas and in other Indian literatures and in other teachings of the Indian religions.

Like religion and art, morality also is an institution of life for anyone to adopt in his life. By this institution of morality one's actions from the moral point of view might be branded as good or bad, right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameful etc. And again by morality one may be entitled to judge others' action as good or bad, right or wrong. In this sense morality can be regarded as a particular way of looking at issues of character and conduct. It is in this sense of morality, that we talk of human beings as moral agents but not of animals, we also talk of moral concepts, laws and principles etc for a morally good or morally right life.

Morality means conscious living within the frame of certain principles of conduct laid down by those regarded as authorities. So in general morality as an institution of life consists in the awareness of an important distinction between what is and what ought to be. So men should live not merely in the light of what is but also what ought to be. Specifically speaking morality is the awareness of a living based on a distinction between our animal demands and the demands of the higher faculties of human life, which make the human distinct from the animals.

Since the ancestors of Hindus in India were spiritual in nature they fixed their attention on a life beyond death. They regarded the human soul (inner being) as an eternal entity co-existing with the Supreme Being. They believed that every human soul goes to the round of births, rebirths and reaps the fruits of actions. When a soul comes to be associated with the gross material body, it is bound to perform certain deeds and in conformity with laws divine, reaps the fruits thereof. The belief is that, if good deeds are performed, happiness results and if evil deeds are performed, misery falls to the lot of the doer. The human soul never dies; it can never remain without doing 'actions' and can never claim exemptions from reaping the fruits of its deeds. It reaps as it sows. Any man ultimately looks for happiness which is the fruit of *Karma* and so he should necessarily know what is good and what is bad. Every law giver and every thinker of India in ancient period felt, the supreme necessity of framing certain rules of conduct and of presenting the ultimate end to which all the

life of a human being is to be directed in this lesson on Indian ethics we will be dealing with the Hindu ethics, some ethical notions of Buddhism and Jainism.

### **Sources Of Moral Ideals In India**

Any human being in the society is called to live and lead a moral life. To lead a moral life, he needs certain guidelines and principles of morality to do certain deeds and to abstain from certain deeds. What is the primary source of morality in India? The answer could be the authority of the Scriptures especially that of the Vedas, after the Vedas, the authority of the *Smrtis* is accepted. So Vedas (*Srutis*) and the *Smrtis* (*Dharmasastras* of Manu) taken together, have been regarded as the source of morality. Of these two (Vedas and *Smrtis*), the Vedas are regarded as superior. In the event of a conflict between the two, the verdict of the Vedas prevails. Besides *Srutis*, *Smrtis* and practices of good people conscience and reason also play a role in the matters of morality. The inner conscience also is the source and test of morality. This means that even the desire arising out of right will or determination may serve as a source or guide to morality. Right will is to be identified and decided. In recent times, especially; in the thoughts of Gandhi, and Aurobindo, conscience has been accorded a very important place as giving the final verdict regarding questions of morality and immorality.

The very concept of Indian morality is both authority based and social reasoning. Both in Buddhism and Jainism reason has been given a prestigious place. In Jainism right faith is given the first place among the three jewels. One is advised to use his reason in ascertaining the validity and worth of the precepts before following them. In Buddhism too the use of personal reason is neither disallowed nor despised. The four noble truths are to be followed but even then Buddha says wherever there is disagreement, questions can be asked for removing doubts. In modern Hindu thought, reason is given better place, especially in the ideas of Vivekananda and Gandhi. For them reason is not the source of moral ideas, but yet they believe in the role of reason in the matters of morality. Hence, the primary role is given to Vedas and *Smrtis* as the fundamental source of morality in Indian tradition, but besides them, all the above mentioned sources also played their roles in deciding the question of morality and immorality in Indian tradition.

### **Ethics: Its Meaning In Indian Tradition**

The Indian term for morality and ethics is '*dharma*'. *Dharma* comes from the root '*dhṛ*', which means to hold together. And thus the function of *dharma* is to hold the human society together for its stability and growth. Right conduct is essential if the human society is to survive. The *dharma* in Hinduism is coextensive with morality. *Dharma* in the Vedas refers to the highest truth and power and it is very much understood as the performance of Vedic sacrifices and other rituals in the Vedas and *Dharmasastras*. So *Dharma* is understood in Vedas as duty par-excellence. *Dharma* is also generally understood as the duties of humans according to one's own caste and stage of life (*Varnasrama Dharma*). And thus many Hindu thinkers say if one does his duty; he will achieve either heaven or a better birth in the next life or even prosperity here and now. Thus the Hindu concept of *dharma* has been recognized by its very close association with ritualistic and caste-oriented duties. And the purely moral sense of duty is overshadowed. But yet the Hindu thinkers advocate and recommend the practice of moral virtues and moral norms, which make a man as man. These moral virtues are called *Sadharana Dharma* or universal duties. Hence the term *dharma* in Hinduism has two connotations1) performance of ritual sacrifices and duties according to one's own caste and the second is the practice of moral virtues and norms. So when we speak of *dharma* as morality, it includes all the duties one ought to perform and all the virtues he ought to practice to attain *moksa* or liberation.

### **Ethics In Vedic Period**

When we speak of Indian ethics, its early beginnings have to be traced from the Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda. One of the central ethical concepts of the Rig Veda is '*rta*', a conception of unifying order or moral law, pervading all things. The concept '*rta*' has given rise to two other important concepts, the concept of *Dharma* and the concept of *Karma*. The concept *Dharma* has got so different and divergent meanings, but generally it is known as duty. The concept *Karma* signifies that there is a uniform moral law, governing the actions of man and the rewards and the punishments appropriate to their actions. '*Rta*' is the foundation of these two concepts. The more important and essential element in the Vedic ethics is that of love and worship offered to the gods in complete submission. Moral order or law is reflected in the right performance of sacrifices and so one who performs these sacrifices and the ceremonial duties laid down in the scriptures, would achieve the goal of eternal happiness in heaven. So the ethics of the Vedic Hindus is primarily a god-oriented ethics.

The highest goal of life for the Upanishads is no longer happiness as in the Rig Veda, but liberation from bondage to the transitory existence and the re-attainment of the inner essence of the soul. The Upanishadic ethics is primarily atmancentric and intellectualistic. The Upanishads declare that the Vedic sacrifices are totally irrelevant for the realization of *moksha*. And so man is constantly exhorted to seek his individual liberation and not worry about other social, moral obligation. This kind of philosophical individualism definitely undermines the values of social morality. For the Upanishads, the identification and the realization of the self with Brahman is very important. In this metaphysical realm only we can speak of Upanishadic ethics. The oldest Upanishads say that the perfect sage is a saint who burns evil away and he is free from evil. So it is in the avoidance of evil, we can see the clear moral teaching in the Upanishads. Katha Upanishad declares in 1,2,24 that he who is always impure is born again and again that he fails to reach the highest goal. Good conduct is very much necessary for the attainment of man's metaphysical good (identification of the self with Brahman). And man who is wise is morally a good man whose nature approximates to the divine model (Kat.Up 1, 2, 24, Ch.Up 8, 6, 1). So the Upanishads are clear in saying that the man who has wisdom does not sin. He ceases to do evil and through his wisdom he annuls the evil of his former life.

### **Ethics In Dharmasastras And Itihasas**

The institutes of Manu and other *Dharmasastras* are the main source books of both Hindu ritualism and social morality. The Upanishads emphasized the liberation of the individual, but the *Manusmṛiti* subordinated individuality to social structures. Though individual, one belongs to a family and a sub-caste and he is always taken care by the family in which he is, and so the Hindu social morality is relativistic on several counts. Man's duties are accepted to be relative to time (*Yuga*) and place (*Desa*). The duties of a person are also strictly relative to his *Varna* (class) and the stage of Life (*Asrama*). Manu has decreed certain virtues as universal. They are, contentment (*dhairya*), forgiveness (*kshama*), selfcontrol (*dhama*), non-stealing (*asteya*), cleanliness (*sauca*), coercion of the senses (*indriya nigraha*), wisdom (*dhi*), knowledge of the Supreme Atman (*vidhya*), truthfulness (*sathya*) and abstention from anger (*akrodha*) (VI: 91-92). These virtues are common, universal *dharma* (*Sadharana Dharma*), which can be called morality. Thus the *Dharmasastras*, Epics and the *Puranas* have their own specific goal but they seem to share more or less a common '*ethos*' from the point of ethics.

## Way Of Righteousness In The Gita

The realization of the Supreme Reality through a life of righteous actions is the central well-knit theme of all the eighteen chapters of the Gita. Actions are to be performed with the realization of *Brahmajnana*. To attain the *Brahmajnana* one is advised to make a diligent search through devotion, renunciation and selfsurrender. From attachment desire springs from desire wrath arises, from wrath comes infatuation, from infatuation loss of memory and mind and finally from loss of mind he perishes. So liberation from all kinds of bondages is possible only by the realization of the Brahman or surrender unto the Lord and vice versa, the realization of the Brahman is only through the liberation from all kinds of bondages. Actions are to be performed without any attachment to the fruit of the actions. This is one of the means of attaining *Brahmajnana*. Thus Gita emphasizes both on *Karma* Yoga and *Gnana* Yoga for the attainment of the Supreme Bliss, but yet *Karma* Yoga is superior to *Gnana* Yoga. Here *Karma* Yoga simply means a mode of realizing the Brahman through devotional meditation on the name of God, and the practice of one's own duties without any attachment. One will be blessed with *Brahmayoga*, which will lead him not only to moral success but also to the infinite spiritual joy and peace.

There is another way promoted by the Gita to attain the ultimate realization in life and liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, which is known as *Karma* Yoga (Path of activity). The *Gita* has described this way as the method of disinterested action (*NishkamaKarma*). To attain *moksa* one has to be freed from the bondage to one's own actions. So the Gita suggests the golden rule that actions should be done with the spirit of non-attachment to their fruits. Both the epics, *itihasas* have a bundle of ethical and moral codes and injunctions. The practical guidelines of the essential ethical ideals and thoughts of Hindu tradition.

## Ethical Concepts Of Hindu Tradition

### Doctrine of *Karma*

The doctrine of *Karma* states that whatever a man suffers or enjoys is the fruit of his own deed, a harvest sprung from his own actions, good or bad committed in his previous life. *Karma* is of four categories: 1) *Sanchita Karma*, which means the accumulated past actions 2) *Prarabdha Karma*, which means the part of *Sanchita Karma*, this results in the present birth itself. This is also called predestination 3) *Kriyamana Karma*, which means present willful actions or free will 4) *Agami Karma*, which means the immediate results caused by our present actions. *Karma* simply means action. And this *Karma* must remind us that what is called the consequence of an action is really not a separate thing but it is a part of the action and it cannot be divided from it. The consequence is the part of the action, which belongs to the future but yet the part is done in the present. Whatever a man sows he shall reap.

### Transmigration of Soul

The doctrine of *Karma* and transmigration of soul are so closely bound up together. After the death of the body the life of the individual is continued in another body and so on in indefinite series. According to this theory, the soul though pure and blessed in itself, gets entangled in the *Samsara* (cycle of birth and rebirth). It is because of the *Karma* it passes through innumerable births (transmigration) before it regains its original state.

### Supreme Goals (*Purusharthas*)

The dominant interest of the Indian thought is in the highest value of human life. There are four values, which give meaning to human life. They are called *Purusharthas*. They are as following 1) *Dharma* 2) *Artha* 3) *Kama* 4) *moksa*. *Dharma* is usually distinguished into *sadharana dharma* and *varnashrama dharma*.



*sadharana dharma* refers to the duties of the universal scope and validity. There are ten cardinal virtues known as *sadharana dharma* according to Manu, endurance, patience, self-control, integrity, purity, and restraint of senses, wisdom, learning, and truth, absence of anger or non-violence. The *varnasrama dharma* refers to the duties of persons according to the castes and the stages of life. Thus '*dharma*' is considered to be a means value for attaining personality integration in the spiritual level or liberation.

The term '*artha*' generally indicates the attainment of riches and worldly prosperity, advantage, profit and wealth. *Kama* is a comprehensive term, which includes all desires: desires ranging from the cravings of the flesh and the yearnings of the spirit. In Hindu thought there is always a clear emphasis on the enjoyment of secular pleasures along with the emphasis on the realization of spiritual values. The uniqueness of the concept of *kama* and enjoyment in the Hindu ethics is that all of them were to be related to the spiritual goal of human existence and so the Indian ethics insisted on a regulated enjoyment. In every school of philosophy in India the first three *Purusharthas* are treated as the instrumental values, which directly or indirectly promote the *Parama Purusharthas* - the highest values of human life namely *moksa*. *moksa* is also known as by other names such as *mukti*, *apavarya*, *kaivalya* and *nirvana*. This liberation is intimately bound up with the *Karma* *samsara*, the doctrine of transmigration.

### ***Svadharm***

By this term we mean each individual has to grow to his best according to his own *dharma*, that is to say the principle of individual growth is called *Svadharm*. *Svadharm* is in relation to an individual's temperament and stage and duties in life, based on *varna* and *asrama*. It is made in terms of three *gunas*, the *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (virility), and '*tamas*' (darkness). These three qualities are found in each individual in varying proportions and thus this varying proportion of qualities is regarded as the basis of different types of actions and of four castes. The concept of *Svadharm* is very much based on these three classifications and it is well promoted by Indian ethical code that if the society is to function smoothly there should certainly be a hierarchical arrangement of functions and duties in it.

### ***Varnadharm***

In Hindu ethics, we find *varnasrama dharma* as a social stratification, based on above said *gunas*, profession and birth. Although theoretically it is justified to have such a classification of people in the name of their propensity and quality they possess in terms of their attitude, caste system in Indian ethics remains an issue. It has been very much practiced and all ethical principles and codes are based on it. By way of profession one's caste is determined in some ways, both in theory and in practice. This looks somehow fine and rationally justified. Yet social mobility in the ladder of categories of people is not very much practical and it is not ensured. Even if a person develops *sattva guna* and becomes a teacher of scriptures, he / she cannot become a 'Brahmin' for the very reason that he was not born a Brahmin. Although theoretically Hindu ethics preaches it, social mobility in such practice remains only an utopia. One's birth, *jati* determines everything in caste systems. A Sudra is denied of the right of undertaking purificatory rite in the form of investiture of sacred thread (Upanayana), which is supposed to give a man his second birth. He is not allowed to perform Vedic sacrifices or read or listen to the Vedas. Severest punishments were prescribed and carried out, if a Sudra even dared to recite or had a chance to hear the Vedas. A Brahmin unconditionally deserved the greatest honour and all kinds of gifts. He could not be given any corporeal punishment. He was exempt from the state taxes. The severest punishments were prescribed for the offender of a Brahmin.

Hence, Hindu ethics regarding *varnadharma* is still a contested and controversial moral and social code.

### **Stages of Life (Ashrama Dharma)**

According to Hindu thought the life was divided into four stages or *Ashramas*: that of the *Brahmacari* (Studenthood), the student who is bound to celibacy. The second stage is *Grihastha* (the householder), and the third is *Vanaprastha* (the forest dweller) and the last is the *Sannyasin* (the mendicant). A man should pass through these stages regularly and no man should enter any stage prematurely. A man after having studied the Vedas or two Vedas or even one Veda, in due order, without breaking celibacy must enter into the householder order. And when the householder sees wrinkles in his skin and whiteness in his hair and sees his grandson, only then he must retire to the forest. After having passed the third portion of life in the forests and having abandoned attachments, the man wanders as an ascetic, which is the fourth portion of life. This succession is regarded as so important for the due development of the *Jivatma*, and the proper ordering of the society.

### **Hindu Rites - Samskaras**

Sacrifices form the central theme of the Brahmanical religion and philosophy. The sacrifices not only please gods but also feed them. Through them the sins are also atoned. The important Vedic sacrifices are the *Srauta* sacrifices and the *Grihya* rituals. Besides all these rituals there are many personal or family sacraments known as *Samskaras*. These *Samskaras* are religious acts of purification and they are the ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of the individual, so that the person may become a full-pledged member of the community. For the performance of these sacraments, “*samkalpa*” or the mental attitude is the most important condition. The most important *Samskaras* are 1) *Garbhadhanam* or conception, *Pumsavanam*: (Ensuring a male offspring), *Simanthonnayanam* (Parting of the hair), *Jata-Karman* (Birth-Ceremony), *Namakaranam* or naming ceremony, *Nishkramanam*: taking the child out of the house so that it may see the sun, *Annaprasnam*: the first feeding of the child with solid food (rice) in the sixth month, *Chudakaranam*: the rite of tonsure ceremony, *Karnavedham*: Piercing of earlobes, *Vidhyarambam* (beginning of knowledge), *Upanayanam* (Initiation by a teacher), *Samavarthanam*, *Vivaha* (Marriage), *Antyesti* or Funeral Rights

### **Ethics In Buddhism**

The Buddha thought ten meritorious deeds for us to perform in order to gain a happy and peaceful life as well as to develop knowledge and understanding. The ten meritorious deeds are: 1. Charity 2. Morality 3. Mental Culture 4. Reverence or respect 5. Service in helping others 6. Sharing merits with others 7. Rejoicing in the merits of others 8. Preaching and teaching the *Dhamma* 9. Listening to *Dhamma* 10. Straightening one's views. Moral conduct benefits all Beings with whom one comes into contact. Mental culture brings peace to others and inspires them to practice *Dhamma*. Reverence gives rise to harmony in society. Service improves the lives of others. Sharing merits with others shows that one is concerned about others' welfare. Rejoicing in other's merits encourages others to perform more merits. Teaching, listening to the *Dhamma* is important factor for happiness for both the teacher and the listener. Straightening one's views enables a person to show to others the beauty of *Dhamma*.

There are ten demeritorious deeds from which the Buddhist are advised to keep away. These deeds are rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion and they will bring suffering to others. These ten deeds are divided into three sets: 1. Actions of the Body

2. Verbal Actions 3. Actions of the Mind. Bodily actions are killing of living beings, stealing, and unlawful sexual intercourse. 2. Four verbal actions are: Lying, Slander, Harsh Speech, and Meaningless Talk. 3. The other three actions of the mind are: Covetousness or being desirous especially of things belonging to others, ill-will, wrong views.

Buddhist morality judges an action good or bad basing on the intention or motivation from which it originates. If a person performs an action out of greed, hatred, delusion, his action is considered to be bad. On the other hand, if he performs an action out of love, charity and wisdom, his action is good. Love, charity and wisdom are known as the “the three Good Roots.” Here the word ‘root’ refers to the intention from which that action originates.

In Buddhism a person’s first duty is to cleanse him of the mental defilements of greed, hatred and ignorance. The reason for doing this cleansing is not because of fear or desire to please some Divine beings. If this is so, that would mean that the person is still lacking in wisdom. He is only acting out of fear like the little child who is afraid of being punished for being naughty. A Buddhist should act out of understanding and wisdom. He performs good actions because he realizes that by so doing he develops his moral strength, which provides foundation for spiritual growth, leading to liberation.

### **Five precepts**

Telling about ten meritorious and ten evil actions, the Buddhism invites the lay Buddhists to adopt five precepts voluntarily to follow in order to live together in civilized communities with mutual trust and respect. Following these five precepts helps the lay Buddhist to make a spiritual journey towards liberation. These five precepts are purely voluntary ones. A good Buddhist should remind himself to follow the five precepts daily they are as follows, I take the training rule to refrain from Killing living creatures, Taking which is not given, Sexual misconduct, False speech, and Taking intoxicating drugs and liquor. The precepts are the basic practice in Buddhism. They are also an indispensable basis for people who wish to cultivate their minds. Without some basic moral code, the power of meditation can often be applied for some wrong and selfish motive. These five refrains is called as *Pancasila*

### **Kindness and charity**

The Lord Buddha proposes Universal Love or “*Metta*”. By this, Lord Buddha invites one to cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Speaking about charity Buddha says that the essence of true charity is to give something without expecting anything in return for the gift. A charitable person should not make other people feel indebted to him or use charity as a way of exercising control over them. He should not even expect others to be grateful. The act of true charity leaves both the giver and the recipient free. A real charity must proceed from the whole person as an act of his body, heart and mind. It should not be an act of generosity but it should be a “Dana” when a person performs “Dana”, he gives as a means of cultivating charity as a virtue. It reduces one’s craving and his selfishness.

### **Love for Animals**

The Buddhists are encouraged to extend love for all living beings without restricting only to Human beings. Since every living being has a right to exist so it is not right for us to take away the life of any living being. It is unfair for us to deprive their living rights. If we believe that animals were created by someone for men, it would follow that men were also created for animals since some animals do eat human flesh. Buddhism says the destruction of any creature represents a disturbance of the universal order. Man’s cruelty towards animals is another expression of his

uncontrolled greed. Our own existence on this earth may not be guaranteed if we do not take stern measures for the survival of other creatures.

### **Jaina Ethics**

Like Buddhism, Jainism also rejects Vedic ceremonialism and sacrificialism and also it takes ahimsa to be the most important ethical virtue and consequently denounces the Vedic sacrifices. In the observance of ahimsa, Jainism rather surpasses even Buddhism. In the observance of ascetic rituals also, Jainism goes further than Buddhism especially in the case of monks. The *pancamahavrtas* and *triratnas* form the ethics of Jaina tradition. Right knowledge, right faith and right conduct are known as *Triratnas* – or the three gems of Jainism. Right knowledge is the detailed cognition of the real nature of ego and non-ego, which is free from doubt, error uncertainty etc. It can be obtained only by studying carefully the teachings of the omniscient *Tirthankaras* or teachers who have already obtained liberation and therefore are fit to lead others out of bondage.

Then that preliminary faith should be supported by right knowledge again for having right faith based on general acquaintance (*samyag- darsana*) in support of right knowledge. Right faith does not imply that one must blindly follow the *Tirthankaras*. But one must have the right attitude of respect towards truth. Further by studying the teachings of the *Tirthankaras* one can strengthen his belief. But these two are rendered useless unless they are followed by rigorous practice. Right conduct is the third indispensable (*samyag-caritra*) condition of liberation. It is this that enables one to stop the influx of new karmas and also to eradicate old ones. It consists in the control of passions, senses, thought, speech etc. Right conduct is therefore described as refraining from what is harmful and doing what is good. Right conduct enables man to liberate himself from bondage. The Jaina prescription for right conduct: One must follow the five great vows namely the *panca-maha-vrata* for the perfection of right conduct. They are *Ahimsa*, *Sathyam*, *Asteyam*, *Brahmacaryam* and *Aparigraha*. *Ahimsa* denotes abstinence from all injuries to life – either *trasa* or *sthavara*. *Satyam* is abstinence from falsehood. It is speaking what is true, good and pleasant. *Asteyam* refers to abstinence from stealing. *Brahmacaryam* pertains to abstinence from sensual and casual pleasures. One must refrain himself from *karma* of any form altogether either in speech talk or action. *Aparigraha*: By this what is meant here is that abstinence from all kinds of attachments. It lies in giving up attachment for the objects of five senses.

### **Summary**

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.

Hinduism also accepted the fact that man's *dharma* comprising of all his duties and virtues, changes with the changing times. Hindu religio-culture is very composite, so we need to choose those aspects of Hindu-religio culture, which are most in harmony with our modern values and we also need to frankly reject other ideals, which are not in harmony with modern values. From all these that we saw above, we can



conclude this lesson on Buddhists ethics basing our concentration on the urgent call of Buddhism to the modern world today. Buddhism calls for tolerance in the world today so that peaceful co-existence among the people can be possible. The Buddha's advice is, "Let us live happily not hating those who hate us. Let us live free from hatred among those who hate us. Let us live happily and be free from ailment. Let us live happily and be free from greed among those who are greedy (*Dhammapada* 197-200). Buddha says, "If a person foolishly does the wrong, I will return to him the protection of my boundless love. The more evil that comes from him the more good will go from me. I will always give of only the fragrance of goodness.

### **Ethics of Amartya Sen**

Sen proposes that people's well-being should be evaluated on the basis of their 'capability to achieve valuable functionings'. This approach is called 'the capability approach' which consists of two distinct notions: functionings and capabilities. Functionings refer to the number of 'doings' and 'beings' that a person manages to achieve in life. Sen mentions both basic functionings like nutrition, life expectancy, health and education as well as complex functionings like self-respect, social recognition and political participation. Capabilities refer to the extent of freedom that a person has in order to achieve different functionings. When we look at a fasting monk and a starving poor child, they do fare equally in terms of achieved functioning since both do not eat. But in terms of capabilities, they are unequal in as much as the monk has the freedom to choose that state while the child does not have that freedom. The capability approach therefore is a freedom-centred approach.

The capability approach differs from two other prominent approaches: utilitarianism and liberalism inspired by the American Philosopher John Rawls. Having defined utility in terms of pleasure, happiness or desire-fulfilment, one of the chief aims of utilitarianism is to maximise its overall value in society. Although such thinking today does not form a distinct political ideology, it exerts considerable influence on public policy decisions: 'greatest happiness of the greatest (and perhaps, the socially and politically powerful!) number.' Many countries in the world seem to follow this crude utilitarian calculus when pursuing developmental projects such as building huge dams, establishing industries and sometimes even initiating large-scale deforestation. In contrast to utilitarianism, Rawls bases his philosophy on a set of individual rights: 'each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override'. His first of the two principles of justice requires that civil and political rights, including freedom of speech and freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest, be given absolute priority. Rawls, in his second principle tries to balance the demands of efficiency and justice: while society's offices and positions should be available to everyone in an open competition, in order to keep social inequality within manageable proportions special attention has to be paid to the needs of the worst off in society.

Sen acknowledges Rawls to be a great moral and political philosopher particularly for advocating a non-utilitarian political philosophy. Yet, Sen thinks Rawls' theory to be limited from the point of view of human capabilities: it does not go deep enough to capture human diversity and some blatant inequalities in society. Human beings differ from one another in a number of ways. There are, first and foremost, differences in personal characteristics such as health, age, sex and genetic endowments. Human beings 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 ways in which resources such as income and wealth are transformed into relevant capabilities. A physically handicapped person, for example, might be in need of more resources to be mobile than an able-bodied person. Or,

increasing the social and political participation of traditionally oppressed groups would demand efforts more than just providing access to resources; it might require tackling some entrenched social, economic and political practices and structures. Since Rawls' theory works with the assumption of a liberal society with citizens having more or less equal capacities, Sen points out, inequalities and disadvantages arising from human diversities are either postponed to be settled by legislative or judicial procedures or at the most relegated as issues falling in the domain of charity.

## **ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF MAHATMA GANDHI**

### **Introduction**

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is a father of our nation. Ethical teachings are the central philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi is a universally accepted as an exemplary model of ethical and moral life, with a rare blending of personal and public life, the principles and practices, the immediate and the eternal. He considered life to be an integrated whole, growing from truth to truth every day in moral and spiritual status. He believed in a single standard of conduct founded on dharma of truth and nonviolence. He successfully led nonviolent struggles against racial discrimination, colonial rule, economic and social exploitation and moral degradation. So long as these manifestations of violence remain, Gandhi will remain relevant. Gandhi was a good man in a world where few resist the corroding influence of power, wealth and vanity.

Among the vital messages of Gandhi's leadership are: even one person can make a difference; strength comes not from physical capacity but from an indomitable will. Mahatma Gandhi was not an armchair academician or a cloistered visionary. He was deeply concerned with the world around him. He disclaimed being a visionary. Gandhi spoke in a low tone and was a hesitant public speaker. Yet people of all classes were drawn to him and instinctively felt him to be a leader of deeply spiritual and moral perceptions, which he sought to realize through the pursuit of Truth. Over 54 years of Gandhi's public life were lived as an open book. He lived in South Africa for 21 years and then in India from 1915. All through his life he remained a seeker after Truth.

A central quality of his leadership was its natural evolution through intense interaction with the people and the events. Gandhi single-handedly made nonviolence a universal substitute for violence and the bed-rock of his leadership. His nonviolence was the way to counter injustice and exploitation, and not run away from a righteous battle. He associated the qualities of humility, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance as corollaries of nonviolence. To Gandhi the spirit of service and sacrifice was the key to leadership. For the spirit of service to materialize we must lay stress on our responsibilities and duties and not on rights. He illustrated it through the example of concentric circles: one starts with service of those nearest to one and expands the circle of service until it covers the universe, no circle thriving at the cost of the circles beyond. Service to him implied self-sacrifice. He said that Sacrifice is the law of life. It runs through and governs every walk of life. We can do nothing or get nothing without paying a price for it, in other words, without sacrifice.

The commitment to service, however demands a strong sense of conscience (moral imperative), courage (fearlessness, bravery, initiative), and character (integrity). To Mahatma Gandhi, 'inner voice' was synonymous with conscience. Leaders need to develop and follow their conscience even more than ordinary people as they set the path for others. Hence, he wrote: None of us, especially no leader should allow himself to disobey the inner voice in the face of pressure from outside, any leader who succumbs in this way forfeits his right of leadership. For a leader to

follow the right path requires courage and its associated qualities: Courage, endurance and above all, fearlessness and spirit of willing sacrifices are the qualities that are required today in India for leadership.

Gandhi in his time wielded more power over the minds of people than any other individual but it was not the power of weapons, or terror or violence; it was the power of his convictions, his pursuit of truth and nonviolence, fearlessness, love and justice, working through incessant service and sacrifice for fellow human beings. His power came from empowering the weak, to lead the masses in the fight against injustice, exploitation, violence and discrimination. Satyagraha elevated the struggle for survival to the highest moral-spiritual levels and ordinary, emaciated people turned heroes. His power arose through the people whom he gave a sense of self-respect, purpose and moral strength.

Mahatma Gandhi expresses that morality is quite inseparable with the conception of God and religion. Morality is the core essence or religion. For Mahatma Gandhi, spiritual is the highest goal of man and all else must be sub-servant to that goal. Mahatma Gandhi said that there are seven deadly sins in human life. The following seven sins are deadly sins according to Gandhi. They are

1. Wealth without work.
2. Pleasure without conscience.
3. Knowledge without character.
4. Commerce without morality.
5. Science without humanity.
6. Religion without sacrifice.
7. Politics without principle.

Ethical teachings of Gandhi are the great source for right, peaceful, healthy and blissful living in the world.

### **Non-Violence**

Mahatma Gandhi says that Non-violence means to keep oneself completely away from such action which may hurt others physically or mentally. Violence is a behavior involving physical force intending to hurting, damaging or killing. Nonviolence is to bear distresses by oneself to make others happy. Non-violence is the most effective means to fight against discrimination and falsehood. Nonviolence is not the outward strength. Non-violence is the internal power. Nonviolence promotes vegetarianism and reverence for all life. Non-violence prevents murder, war, capital punishment in the world. Non-violence avoids abortion, mercy killing, suicide and infanticide in human society. Non-violence creates freedom from physical and psychological violence, exploitation, injustice, inequality and discrimination. Non-violence develops love, co-operation, forgiving, help, and kindness in humanity. Non-violence is fundamental to the discovery of truth. Truth is God and non-violence is God's love. Truth is the ultimate goal of human life and non-violence is the means to achieve ultimate goal. Without violence it is not possible to seek and find truth. Non-violence and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disintegrate and separate them. They are like the two sides of the same coin. Mahatma Gandhi expresses that the first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving, and kindness. Honesty, they say in English, is the best policy. But in terms of non-violence is an unchangeable creed. It has to be pursued in face of violence raging around you. Non-violence with a non-violent man is no merit. In fact, it is become difficult to say whether it is non-violent at all. But when it is pitted against violence, then one realizes the difference between the two. This we cannot do unless we are ever wakeful, ever vigilant and striving.

The power of non-violence is the power of internal force. According to Mahatma Gandhi It is no non-violence if we merely love those who love us. It is

nonviolence only when we love those who hate us. Non-violence to be a potent force must begin with the mind. Non-violence of the body without co-operation of mind is the non-violence of the weak or the cowardly, and has therefore, no potency. It is a degrading performance. If we bear the malice and hatred in our bosoms and pretend not to retaliate it must recoil upon us and to destruction. It follows, therefore, that if non-violence becomes successfully established in one place, its influence will spread everywhere. The basic principle on which nonviolence rests is that holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe.

Mahatma Gandhi tells that the non-violence of my conception is a more active and more real fighting against wickedness than retaliation whose very nature is to increase wickedness. Non-violence is one of the major moral qualities of human being. Non-violence is a power force than violence because it is linked with the bravery of mind. Non-violence is a powerful weapon of the strong. Mahatma Gandhi used non-violence not only for the purification of his soul, but to purify the conduct of the human society. He practiced non-violence in mass action and devised means to fight out injustice.

## **TRUTH**

Mahatma Gandhi says that truth is the law of our being. Truth is God. Truth is which is. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. Truth is a virtue. Truth is in fact self-revealing, but that we have become blind on account of our ignorance. Ignorance, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is not necessary or natural to the self. Mahatma Gandhi says that moral degradation or perversion of one kind or cause ignorance. He explicitly mentions the six deadly enemies which cause prejudice, malice and ill-will to arise, on account of which the person is unable to see or feel the truth. These deadly enemies are desire, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy. Therefore, in order to practice truth one must constantly endeavor to oneself from these evils, one must cultivate moral purity and courage and must not allow these enemies to cloud his vision. Mahatma Gandhi is also aware that in the present day world falsehood appears to be more paying and beneficial. By speaking lies people do get success.

Mahatma Gandhi is aware of it, but very logically he demonstrates the superiority of truth over falsehood. There is one condition regarding the speaking of the truth which Mahatma Gandhi accepts because of its pragmatic value. Even in accepting this Mahatma Gandhi is trying to be faithful to the ancient Indian teaching. The condition is that the truth should be spoken in a pleasant way. If the truth is expressed in an unpleasant, blunt and rough manner, it may be socially injurious as a might give rise to anger and quarrels. In fact, in the ancient Indian philosophy there is a maxim which says, 'speak the truth, and speak the pleasant; but do not speak the unpleasant truth'. Mahatma Gandhi seems to be influenced by the element of practically contained in this maxim. Therefore, he says that truthfulness has to be practiced, that it is an art which has to be developed by rigorous and constant discipline and practice.

## **NON-STEALING**

Mahatma Gandhi tells that Non-stealing is not to steal. Non-stealing is not to take by thought, word and action anything to which one is not entitled. There are two senses of the word non-stealing; it popularly means the observance of the rule of not taking away the belonging or the property of anybody unless it is given by that person. But, there is a more rigorous meaning of the word nonstealing; it forbids the keeping or holding in possession of such things that are not needed.

Mahatma Gandhi uses the non-stealing in both these senses. In fact, in conceiving the nature of this virtue he is influenced by Jainism which believes that



stealing is also a kind of violence. Property is, in fact, outer life, because bodily existence depends upon property. Therefore, to rob one of his properties is to take away his outer life. Non-stealing is a virtue also because stealing is not compatible with the highest virtue of love. Therefore Mahatma Gandhi recommends that a truly moral individual has to take a solemn vow to cultivate the virtue of non-stealing.

### **NON-POSSESSIVENESS**

Mahatma Gandhi says that Non-possessiveness is renunciation of possessions by thought, word and deed. Non-possessiveness is restricted to contentment. Non-possessiveness is non-acceptance. Possessiveness is unwilling to share one's possessions. Mahatma Gandhi feels that the tendency to possess things is the cause of all evils. Therefore, one must cultivate the discipline of living with what one has. Mahatma Gandhi is aware that it is not possible to practice this virtue in the absolute way, because absolute non-possession is impossible in life; even the body is a possession- the things needed for the preservation of the body are also possessions, and therefore, so long as we are alive we cannot completely do away with possessions. Even so, non-possessiveness has to be practiced to the best of one's capacity because this does away with the cause of rift in social life and provides a solid foundation for a universal love to flourish.

### **CHARACTER**

Mahatma Gandhi expresses that Character is moral and ethical strength. Character comes from within. Character is the key to success. A man of character will make himself worthy of any position he is given. Character, not brains, will count at the crucial moment. Character is any day more eloquent than speech. Character must be above suspicion and truthful and self-controlled.

What will tell in the end will be character and not a knowledge of letters. What we start receiving education through our own language, our relations in the home will take on a different character. The real property that a parent can transmit to all equally is his or her character and educational facilities. The truest test of civilization, culture and dignity is character and not clothing. Success is the certain result of suffering of the extremist character voluntarily undergone. Sorrow and suffering make for character if they are voluntarily borne, but not if they are imposed. Men of stainless character and self-purification will easily inspire confidence and automatically purify the atmosphere around them. In the times to come the people will not judge us by the creed we profess or the label we wear or the slogans we shout but by our work, industry, sacrifice, honesty and purity of character. If you express the requisite purity of character in action, you cannot do it better than through the spinning wheel. If you have no character to lose, people will have no faith in you. Character alone will have real effect on masses.

Mahatma Gandhi tells that all your scholarship, all your study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth would be vain if at the same time you do not build your character and attain mastery over your thoughts and your actions. A vow imparts stability, ballast and firmness to one's character. A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers. A dissolute character is more dissolute in thought than in deed, and the same is true of violence. Literary training by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height and character building is independent of literary training. Character cannot be built with mortar and stone. It cannot be built by other hands than your own. The principal and professors cannot give you character from the pages of books. Character building comes from their very lives and really speaking it must come from within you. Mahatma says that if wealth is lost nothing is lost; if health is lost something is lost; if character is lost everything is lost.

## **Summary**

Mahatma Gandhi is a great ethical values philosopher. He expresses that non-violence is free from physical and psychological violence in living. Violence is hurting killing damaging physical and psychological sense. Non-violence develops vegetarianism and respect for all life. Non-violence prevents wars murders, exploitations, inequalities and injustices in the world. Non-violence is a discovery of truth. Non-violence is the means to truth. Truth is the law of our being. Truth is God. Truth is which is. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. Truth is a virtue. Truth is in fact self-revealing, but that we have become blind on account of our ignorance. Mahatma Gandhi explicitly mentions the six deadly enemies which cause prejudice, malice and ill-will to arise, on account of which the person is unable to see or feel the truth. These deadly enemies are desire, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy. Therefore, in order to practice truth one must constantly endeavor to oneself from these evils, one must cultivate moral purity and courage and must not allow these enemies to cloud his vision. Non-stealing is not to take by thought, word and action anything to which one is not entitled. Non-stealing is a good moral quality. Nonpossessiveness is renunciation by thought, word and deed. Non-possessiveness is restricted to contentment. Non-possessiveness is non-acceptance. Mahatma Gandhi feels that the tendency to possess things is the cause of all evils. Therefore, one must cultivate the discipline of living with what one has. Mahatma Gandhi expresses that Character is moral and ethical strength. Character comes from within. Character is the key to success. A man of character will make himself worthy of any position he is given. Character, not brains, will count at the crucial moment. Character is any day more eloquent than speech. Character must be above suspicion and truthful and self-controlled. True disarmament cannot come unless the nations of the world cease to exploit one another. Morality is finding out the true path and fearlessly following it.