

**BHAGAVAD GITA AND INDIAN ETHICS PREACHING OF
GREAT PHILOSOPHER ADI SANKARA**

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Abstract

Ethics” was once considered irrelevant by corporate loyalists, but now discussion of it is increasingly seen as not only important but also as critical to a company’s success. The paper is a theoretical review. The purpose and objective of the paper is to explore and understand the meaning of business ethics in the context of Indian philosophical thought. The study focuses mainly on the contribution of Hindu philosophical thought though makes reference to other philosophical thoughts namely Buddhism, Jainism and Arthashastra. The discussion is divided into four sub-sections. In the first section an attempt has been made to understand the broad characteristics of Indian philosophy and ethics. In the second section a brief outline of management ethos in Indian philosophy has been given. In the third part an attempt has been made to find the relevance of Philosophical ethics to modern corporate governance. And finally the last section deals with individual ethics in Indian philosophy. The entire discussion revolves around the axis of establishing link and relevance between Indian ethics, as found in Indian philosophy and modern business ethics.

Keywords: Corporate Ethics, Indian Philosophy, Insights.

I. INTRODUCTION

Different meaning is given to business ethics by various people. Business ethics are rules of business conduct, by which the propriety of business activities may be judged. Ethical principles are dictated by the society and underlie broad social policies. These principles when known, understood and accepted, determine generally the propriety or impropriety of business activities. Business ethics also relates to the behavior of manager. It can be defined as an attempt to ascertain the responsibilities and ethical obligations of business professionals. Here the focus is in people, how individuals should conduct themselves in fulfilling the ethical requirements of business? Carter McNamara has defined: “Business ethics is generally coming to know what is right or wrong in the work place and doing what is right- this is in regard to effects of products/services and in relationship with stakeholders.” There are three key reasons why ethics plays a key role in business.

Thomas Donaldson sums up that “there is a growing realization all over the world that ethics is vitally important for any business and for the progress of any society. Ethics makes for an

efficient economy: ethics alone, not government or laws, can protect society; ethics is good in itself; ethics and profits go together in the long-run. An ethically responsible company is one which has developed a culture of caring for people and for the environment; a culture which flows downwards from the top managers and leaders.” All businesses exist and operate within society and therefore they should contribute to welfare of society. To survive in the market, business should gain loyal customers and perform social responsibility. According to George A. Steiner, “the managers of the biggest companies know as a business gets larger, the public takes more interest in it because it has a greater impact on the community. They seek to maintain a proper image of their company in the public mind. This leads to the assumption of greater social responsibilities.” Thus, business either big or small must operate on grounds and discharge their social obligations to survive in the long-run.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

True, ethical behavior and ethics as a science do not necessarily presuppose a religious-philosophical creed. However, not only does every activity presuppose some knowledge of pragmatic matters, it also involves ideas or beliefs regarding the nature of the objective world and the subject. In ethical behavior man has to be conscious of himself as a moral agent, and this presupposes some definite concepts of the human self, as also of the goal(s) or value(s) which man has to realize through his conduct. Hinduism as a religion is both a view of life and a way of life which are related as the theoretical and practical guides of the same spiritual life. Any study of Hindu ethics ought to take into account innumerable discussion on ethical matters, scattered throughout ancient Indian literature. Jainism and Buddhism as two branches of larger Hindu philosophical thought gives detailed accounts of ethical and unethical behavior and also talks in great lengths about the duties of man.

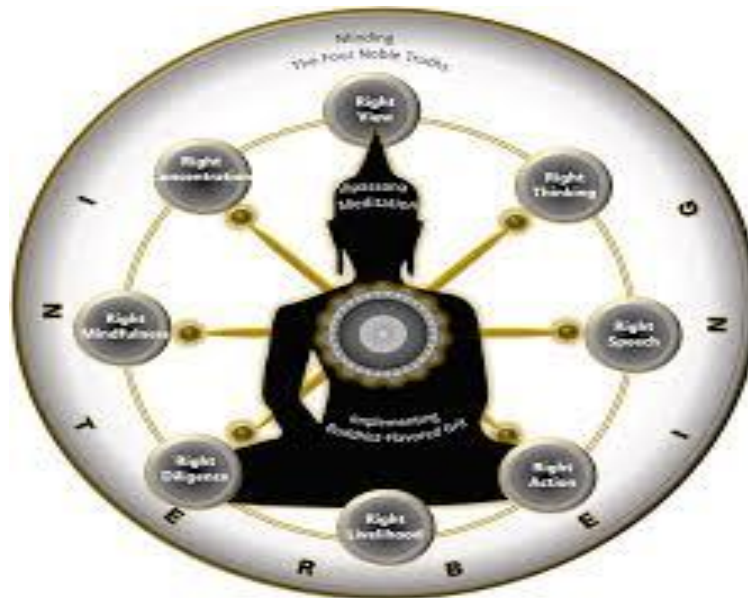
Ethics in Indian philosophy is conscious living within the frame of certain principles of conduct laid down by those regarded as authorities. In general, therefore, the ethical institutions of life or the moral point of view, consists in the awareness of an important distinction between what is and what ought to be. In Indian philosophy ethical behavior may be both social and personal. Ethics as an institution of life has been recognized here from the very early age of the Vedas. Rather it has been recognized as the most basic element in human life. But then it has not necessarily been recognized as a social enterprise in the sense of being an instrument of the society to help guide the people living in the society. It is rather engrained in the very being of the universe. Ethics has a divine origin. Man has simply to adopt it from there.

The Vedic distinction between Rju (straight) and Vran (crooked) and the Upanisadic distinction between Sreyah (desirable) and Preyah (pleasurable) have much to do with the origin of the sense

of right and wrong and hence can be related to ethical and unethical behavior in the context of modern day business ethics.

III. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INDIAN ETHOS FOR MANAGEMENT

Indian philosophy regards work as worship and the customer as God himself. Serving the customer is equated with serving God. The Gita is neither a practical guide-book of moral efforts nor a philosophical treatise discussing the origin of immoral tendencies and tracing them to certain metaphysical principles as their sources; but, starting from the ordinary frailties of attachment and desires, it tries to show how one can lead a normal life of duties and responsibilities and yet be in peace and contentment. One (manager) must develop one's third eye (Janana Chakshu) - the type of wisdom, vision, insight and foresight. Wisdom worker has an interacted personality. Every human being have inner resources (divine virtues) which are much powerful than outer resources (capital, material, plant etc.), thus they should make use of those inner resources. Gita has prescribed certain duties which were common to all, which can be related to corporate ethics. These are forgiveness, self-control, non-stealing, steadiness, truthfulness, wisdom, and learning.



According to the Vedas the Divine Law is the moral standards. Dharma is the root of good conduct; wealth is its branch; customary good conduct produces merits. Duties to the country (desadharma) should not be violated. One should conform to the ethos of the people, and should not perform an action condemned by the society. Truthfulness, kindness, calmness, and harmlessness are the four parts of dharma. The Bhagavad Gita inculcates the threefold method of karmayoga (work), bhaktiyoga (concentration) and jnanayoga (knowledge). Karmayoga states that one should always do one's appointed duties. Action is better than inaction. Inaction is death. Action is life. He ought to perform his specific duties for the sake of duty, which fit in with his native abilities. He can attain his highest personal good thereby, and contribute to the social good. He should also perform

his duties with perfect detachment. Only these actions can reach highest ethical standards. The Gita stresses the purity of the mind, the inner purity of motives and intentions. Work according to Gita as stated in Bhaktiyoga should be done with maximum concentration and pure mind and finally according to Jnanayoga knowledge is very important and it guides us in every aspects of life.

- Ahimsa or non-injury in thought, word and deed, including negative abstention from inflicting positive injury to any being, as well as positive help to any suffering being.
- Satya or truth in thought, word and deed.
- Asteya or not to steal, i.e., not to take by thought, word or action, anything to which one is not entitled.
- Brahmacharya or abstention from self-indulgence by thought, speech or action.
- Aparigraha or renunciation by thought, word and deed.

IV. INDIAN VALUES AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Indian culture, which embraces many philosophical viewpoints like Vedas, Gita, Buddhism, Jainism becomes nothing but a collection of human values many of which assume special significance for corporate activities such as corporate governance, productivity enhancement and corporate social responsibility. Values such as nishtha (sincerity), samarpana (commitment), kartavya-parayanta (responsibility), aparigraha (non-possession), brahmacharya (moral conduct), jigyasa (curiosity to learn), kauslam (efficiency), vividha (innovation), samatva (impartiality), etc. are particularly relevant for corporate governance. Indian culture is based on cherished values of satyam (truth), shivam (righteousness) and sundaram (beauty). Indian ethos have all along emphasized five basic human values, namely, truth, righteous, conduct, peace, love and non-violence which are universally applicable for one and all these values are concerned with physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of human resources, and thus assume overriding significance for corporate governance. Fairness is very important for corporate governance, which is described by phrases like “advaistha sarvabhutanam”, “samah sarveshu bhuteshu” and “sarvatra samam pashyati”, which are commonly heard in Indian culture. Fairness towards one and all in the Gita is described by such phrases “vasudhaiv kutumbakam” oneness of whole universe. According to Patanjali’s yoga Sutras, ‘yama’ consists of five important values non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, brahmcharya, and non- receipt of gifts. Thus, selling products or services, offering gifts or commissions should be regarded as unethical. Non-stealing is very important value in the context of global technology transfer which has a vital link with intellectual property rights. Volume eleven of the Arthashastra deals with the conduct of corporations – and with their relationship to the sovereign. Though Kautilya uses the word corporation in the sense of corporations of independent fighting men; it could equally be applied to our modern public sector corporations. In any case, our latter day “corporate warriors” might be interested to learn that the

earliest corporations were indeed corporations of fighting men and not business corporations! (Though they carried on both trade and agriculture; they made a livelihood from wielding weapons.)

V. CONCLUSION

The holistic approach of Indian Wisdom is needed for modern management to integrate matter/spirit or skills/values or object/subject. Modern management must incorporate Indian ethos to perfect the truncated model of man and recognize man as a whole man to assure wholesome human progress. Spirituality as well as material progress to satisfy the hunger of mind and soul as well as the hunger of physical and vital human being. Value-based holistic approach to management will assure such all round wholesome human development and prosperity. As per Indian ethos, the inner mind and inner aspects of man are emphasized. Focus is on developing inner mind. Faith and sincerity are two needs of management philosophy. Work must be done in right spirit and right attitude and in perfect way. A management with proper combination of values and skills can assure harmony and progress of organization as well as society. This is unique contribution of Indian ethos.

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