

## Ethics – dictionary meaning

The philosophical study of moral values and rules – motivation on ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, kind and evil or virtuous and sinful

Clearly an abstract discipline, its lessons not amendable to verification/validation by the scientific tools of experiment, observation and inference as first proposed by the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century British scientist Sir Francis Bacon

A question of organizing one's thoughts, words and deeds in a manner that conforms to the settled norms of societal values. Ok. How?

## Talisman

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?

Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away."

- One of the last notes left behind by Gandhi in 1948, expressing his deepest social thought.

# Ethics is a Dynamic Phenomenon

- Ethics is a phenomenon that varies across space, time and cultures.
- In Catholic Christians, for instance, divorce is taboo. Not so among Muslims.
- What is sauce for the goose, it has been said, is not sauce for the gander. In other words, what is moral, or good, in the perception of one institution, or person or group of persons, may not necessarily hold good for others.
- The framework, of the ethical superstructure, that governs perceptions of ethical or unethical, good or bad, right or wrong, sinful or virtuous or evil or kind, varies over time and space. It is also subject to change over different religions, castes, communities, sexes and creeds.
  - Abortion is prohibited for Catholics as a rule. However, in India it is legal now.
  - Polygamy, for example, is a sin for the Hindus and Christians, while Islam permits it.
  - The possession or the drinking of alcoholic beverages, likewise, has, at different times and in different countries, been both permissible as well as a criminal offence.

**Contd.**

In this context, I recollect how, in the year 1995, when Andhra Pradesh state had introduced prohibition, one remained a law abiding citizen, even if one possessed, or consumed, alcoholic beverages in Bellary district, in Karnataka State, across the border. Once the person crossed the border, and entered Mahabubnagar district, of Andhra Pradesh state, however, he became a criminal.

- In a similar manner. As you people, will, no doubt appreciate, the taking of the lives of enemies is the bounden duty of a soldier in war. But the same soldier in peacetime, and in civil society, will be tried, and convicted, for murder, if he/she kills another person.

In other words, as John Lily said in his novel, "Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit, "The rules of fair play do not apply in love and war."

Or, as Shakespeare famously wrote, in his play "Hamlet", "For nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

# Who Said what

- Swami Vivekananda  
“You are the makers of your own fortunes. You make yourselves suffer, you make good and evil, and it is you who put your hands before your eyes and say it is dark. Take your hands away and see the light – enlightenment”  
  
“Need overarching beacon light for guidance  
– who wrote “lead kindly light”?”
- Buddha – similarly “tamasoma jyotirgamaya” – “from darkness to light”
- Also Rabindranath Tagore “let light in” from all directions – Rigveda

- **Socrates**

“True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.

The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance.”

- **Confucius**

In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.”

Faced with what is right, to leave it undone shows a lack of courage.

Saadi’s Gulistan

- **Chanakya**

Chanakya Niti is a collection of aphorisms. It is a set of ideas and statements given by the ancient Indian teacher and statesman many of which give

A person should not be too honest.

## What then? Let us see what the major Holy Scriptures say by way of guidance

- **Bhagavad Gita**

“Karmanye Vadhikaraste, Ma phaleshu kadachina”

- **Quran**

“Whoever recommends and helps a good cause becomes a partner therein, and whoever recommends and helps an evil cause shares in its burden.”

“Repel (evil) with what is better. Then will he, between whom and thee was hatred, become as it were thy friend and intimate. And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint.”

- **Bible**

“..... a still small voice .....” – our conscience

- **Guru Granth Sahib** is the character building ground of a Sikh in which are firmly rooted his/her ethical values to run the daily affairs. A man should be ready to help others by avoiding malicious notions. One cannot accept the importance of others in his life until he becomes bounteous.

- **Agam Sutras** cover the foundational doctrines of Jainism such as Ahimsa (non-violence), Anekantavada (non-absolutism), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and the path to liberation (Moksha). These texts form the basis of the Jain community's ethical conduct, spiritual practices, and worldview

## Who did what

- Mother Teresa – one extreme – simplicity, service, sacrifice
- S.R. Sankaran – life = message  
Sankaran was a man who believed in spartan living. Bachelor, vegetarian, frail in physique, and utterly fearless, he literally made the rich and the powerful shiver in their pants when he was Collector of Nellore, district of Andhra Pradesh state. To this day is revered as a God, with people placing his picture alongside those of their favourite deities. Especially the poor and the underprivileged.
- Seshan – discovered, and amplified, the true remit, and mandate, of Election Commission  
With the electoral law remaining the same, and with no additional support in terms of finance or staff, Seshan, single-handedly, transformed the ambience prevailing, in the conduct of elections in the country, in a dramatic, and sensational, manner.
- On the other hand, Hitler or Mussolini, or, for that matter Brutus in Julius Caesar, or even Duryodhana in Mahabharat, are all examples of evil persons, single – handedly causing large-scale suffering or perpetrating injustice.
- From Gujarat state Anna Hazare and Dr. V. Kurien

- “Doing” – Important

Abdul Kalam – “what are you doing’ story

I shared a forum with Dr. Abdul Kalam some years ago while I was a Member of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). I had known him fairly well, and, as we chatted, he asked, “Mohan, what are you doing these days”? I knew he was aware of my job, therefore, somewhat surprised, said “Sir, I am a Member of the NDMA”.

“I know that”, he said impatiently, “but what are you doing”?

Such was Kalam’s focus on concrete action vis-à-vis window-dressing!

# Where are we now?

- The Indian polity has also taken several significant initiatives were always guided by the public interest
- **Not “.... dil ne hum se jo kaha” etc.** To borrow the expression from the popular song from Raj Kapur’s unusual film “Jagte Raho”.
- **But, we need to guard against the danger of, as the French saying goes,**  
**“plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”**

Or,

The more things change, the more they stay the same

- Pleas for fundamental or structural reforms fly in the face of the fact that governments have changed and laws amended, courts have adopted new and bold innovations, and even the Constitution has been amended more than a hundred times but this have not changed much.

# Governance

# Good Governance

# **Dilemmas – governance + civil servants angle**

# Indian System - Evolution

# **Role of the Civil Servant**