ETHICS OF HINDUISM- AN INDIAN CONCEPT

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Ethical behavior is generally taken to mean behavior that conforms to some code of conduct which is held to be authoritative in matters of right and wrong. The set of principles that define what is right and wrong being called 'morality' or 'ethics'.

Ethics refers to the concept of human which pertain to matters of good and evil-also referred to as "right or wrong", used within three contexts: individual conscience, systems of principles and judgments - sometimes called moral values-shared within a cultural, religious, secular, Humanist, or philosophical community; and codes of behavior or conduct derived from these systems.

Religion clearly plays an important part in many Hindu's ethical decisions, and for those with a religious faith ethical behavior is often seen as being necessary, both as an act of obedience to God's wishes and as a requirement for spiritual development

Ethics, which concerns itself with the study of conduct, is derived, in Hinduism, from certain spiritual concepts; it forms the steel-frame foundation of the spiritual life. Though right conduct is generally considered to belong to legalistic ethics, it has a spiritual value as well. . Hindu ethics prescribes the disciplines for a spiritual life, which are to be observed consciously or unconsciously as long as many lives.

Hindu ethics are taught by guidance from leaders and teachers (guru), wandering holy men (sadhus), and sages (rishis). Some gurus are venerated, and may work miracles. Sacred scriptures also give guidance. Morality is taught through Hindu scriptures, for example the *Ramayana*. The scriptures prohibit murder, theft, adultery, and consuming alcohol, and promote kindness to others, respect for all life (ahimsa), vegetarianism, and respect for elders. There is no centralized religious authority, and the religion is held together by the duties of family and caste.

Hindu ethics philosophy has been evolving 4000 years. It sources are the Vedas the oldest known literature in the world. Hindu Ethics differ from much of western ethics in perceiving a direct link between social and spiritual life. Greek philosophy is a "pursuit of truth for its own sake" based on reason and intellect in which the wise, the law maker, direct people to create a moral socially. Hindu ethics is primarily concerned with the right action as a means to religious fulfillment.

Hindu ethics is mainly subjective or personal, its purpose being to eliminate such mental impurities as greed and egoism, for the ultimate attainment of the highest good. Objective ethics, which deals with social welfare, has also been considered by Hindu thinkers. It is based upon the Hindu conception of Dharma, or duty, related to a man's position in society and his stage in life. Objective ethics, according to the Hindu view, is a means to an end, its purpose being to help the members of society to rid themselves of self-centeredness, cruelty, greed, and other vices, and thus to create an environment helpful to the pursuit of the highest good, which transcends society. Hinduism further speaks of certain universal ethical principles which apply to all human beings irrespective of their position in society or stage in life.

Among the social virtues are included 'hospitality, courtesy, and duties to wife, children, and grandchildren.' In one of the Upanishads, a king, in answer to a question by a Rishi regarding the state of affairs in his country, says: "In my kingdom there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no man without an altar in his home, no ignorant person, no adulterer, much less an adulterous."

Hindu ethics postulates that moral virtue is ultimately rewarded by libration from a cycle of repeated reincarnations and the achievement of a paradise beyond the mundane world. it sees personal and spiritual well being as fundamentally independent.

Hindu ethics is based on the premise that ethical life is the means to spiritual freedom. Hinduism has behind it a philosophy that is not only a religious doctrine but also a complex web of moral principles. For Hindus, there are four goals in life: love or pleasure (kama), material wealth (artha), the path (dharma), and release from reincarnation (moksha). Dharma is based on sympathy, fairness, and restraint. Sin is to act selfishly instead of following dharma. Hindus aspire to equanimity and a sense of calmness (shama). Asceticism, the renunciation of physical pleasure, is a path taken by only a very small minority of Hindus. Some Hindus make daily worship and offerings to humankind, the needy, and to guests. Unexpected guests must be welcomed and fed.

It offer practical guidance, rites, prayers, festival and social structure, all aimed at securing social harmony and God realization. Since God is the embodiment of truth and justice right action is the means to experience God realization.

The Vedas are hymns and rites that glorify the Vedic gods, who are representative of the Devine power of the supreme God. They deal with personal issues universal concerns and theories of creation. Hinduism teaches the reading or listening to the Vedas enlivens the connection between individual and the creator Vedic writings are fundamental to Hinduism

The Rg Veda and Atharva Veda, the hymns of the Vedas, are quite specific about action that can be seen as righteous and moral. Honesty, rectitude, friendship, charity, nonviolence, truthfulness, modesty, celibacy, religious worship and purity of heart are all listed as desirable and necessary virtues. The Rg- veda also cities bad intentions, swearing, falsehood, gambling, egoism, cruelty, adultery, theft and injury to life as sinful actions.

The *Manuva-shastra* (codes of Manu) gives details of social rules and practices. Kautilya's *Artha-shastra* discusses economics and politics. The Bhagwat Gita, a central text of Hinduism gives very specific ethical advice. Lord Krishna states that the correctness of the action should be the primary consideration when doing something. He advises Arjuna always to act in accordance with dharma (the ethical living). Furthermore he says, if Arjuna could experiences the Devine, his actions would spontaneously reflect absolute wisdom and purity and therefore all dilemmas would evaporable. In this instance the right course of action is to fight. A Hindu finds the ethics of Hinduism in the poems of Bhagavad-Gita. These were written at a time when there was attack on the establishment by reformers in order to maintain the order of the society. Gita teaches that by fulfilling his class function to the best of his ability, with devotion to God and without personal ambition, a man can find salvation, whatever his class. The teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita are summed up in the maxim 'your business is with deed and not with the result'.

Other texts that that give insight into Hindu ethics also shaped the life of a Hindu. There is the Manasollasa written by 12th Century Deccan king Someshvara III Chalukya that illustrates Hindu morals. Hospitality, charity and honesty are extolled. Piety, performance of religious worship and pilgrimage are also important. Eight virtues of the soul were mentioned in the law book of Gautama, namely compassion, patience, contentedness, purity, earnest endeavor, pure thoughts, freedom from greed, and freedom from envy. Tamil texts of Tiukkural and Naladiyar also stress on the moral codes.

There are many stories in Hindu literature about morality and how best to behave. Deities advise and guide in the Ramayana, Ram is embodiment of dharma teaching the values of obedience respect and duty the

later writings of the Purana specifies to Shiva and Vishnu, advocate worship and devotion as means to libration.

The Upanishads embrace the concept of God as the impersonal Supreme Being the 'Braham'. the verse state the divinity is everywhere that individual is indeed 'Brahma' itself – Aham Brahmasmi (I, am the totality) the Upanishad reaffirm that Moksha (Libration) is the goal of life to achieve libration, it is necessary to follow a strict code of ethical and spiritual discipline austerity chastely silence, and solitude lead the soul forward while self restraint, self sacrifice and compassion free one from greed and anger.

According to Hinduism morality is a societal phenomenon and, since man creates societies, all morality is a concept created by man. It follows, that morality is relative to our environment and does not apply to all persons at all times. Morality can only be relative and subjective; instead of objective, universal and absolute.

A Hindu is advised to contain and restrain all the emotions that may lead to a sinful existence. Thus he is asked to control such emotions as *Kama* (lust), *Krodha* (anger), *Mada* (ego, pride) and *Matsara* (jealousy). The moral codes of various texts repeatedly emphasize the importance of being aware of these ordinary but strong human emotions that lead to the disruptions of a harmonious society. Hinduism asserts that just as there is order in the universe, human life can be equally harmonious and orderly. Human society should express the Devine purpose. All people belong to social caste determined by character, natural inclination and function in society. These castes consists of brahman (the wise) Khastriy (the warrior) vaish (the merchant) sudre (the laborer) within each caste the individual can achieve perfection and the whole system promotes spiritual progress.

Elaboration of the social code is found in the Mahabharata. There are four great aims of human life (*purusharthas*), namely *dharma* or righteousness, *artha* or wealth,*kama* or enjoyment and *moksha* or spiritual liberation; the four stages of life, the student or *brahmacharya*, the householder or *grahasthya*, the forest-dweller or*vanaprastha* and the wandering ascetic or *sanyasa*:-

'Hindu thought divide life into 25 years stages, giving specific ethical advise for each the first stage is for learning, the second is the time for the house holder, the third is a time for meditation and study of scriptures and the final stage is one of renunciation of the outer life. The sequence should ultimately end in libration, the goal of life. Members of family should always follow their duty children should respect and obey their parent wishes, husbands and wives ought to love and respectful advising their families and teaching moral values.'

Many Hindu practices derive from the belief the Brahma the Devine is all-pervading. If Divinity is everywhere then everything must be respected. Nature is not separate from Humanity therefore animals are revered particularly cows. Actually it is practical application of the belief of oneness and therefore the sacredness of life.

Hinduism asserts that all living organisms, including bacteria, fish and human beings have developed from inanimate matter through the process of evolution. Evolution, and life itself, is due to the ability of a complex chemical compound to sense a threat to its continued existence and to react upon such impulse with an attempt to negate any incipient threat. We know this instinctive, automatic interaction with the environment as the survival instinct.

The importance given to spiritual life in India creates the interdependence between the mystical and the practical. Ethics is central to Hinduism, improving the present and ultimately freeing the individual from the cycle of birth and death. Hinduism with all its complexity has unity at the heart of its diversity. Its goals are to raise the quality of life ensure spiritual awaking and fulfill humanity's destiny.

Earnest kindliness and tolerance to all human relations along with non-violence had real effect on Hindu life. Desire for the well being of all beings and benevolence in the form of almsgiving were encouraged especially when done with no expectation of rewards at least in this life. The duties also changed according to the ages and classes of people. The ascetic should set his mind on unworldly things but a layman was encouraged to strike a harmony between religion, profession and material pleasures. Similarly students, householders, elderly and the aged had different functions and duties to fulfill. Especially the orthodox classes also followed taboos like not coming in contact with an untouchable, eating forbidden meat as well as leftover food. However the more intelligent teachers realized that mere outward observance was not meritorious as inner goodness. Rules were not rigid and there was always a way to circumvent the most stringent of the rules.

There are some basic requirements that a Hindu should be aware of and follow. Personal discipline, good conduct, self-inquiry and meditation are important. The highest good is the perfection of the self, or self-realization. It may also have its social frame of reference, envisioning and ideal social order as the ultimate objective of society. Thus the purpose of Hindu ethics appears to have three answers:-

- To lead people to behave in accordance with the wishes of a divine authority.
- To lead people to behave in a way that benefits society at large rather than their own narrow self interest.
- To lead people to control their desires and aversions in the belief that this will result in a more satisfying, rewarding and contented way of life.

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