
Ethical Virtues of Sikhi

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Abstract

Human life on this planet is full of misery, depression, sorrow, and sufferings. The whole surroundings of the world seem a tensed and unhappy place. In so-called modernized western society, human beings are living in stress and miseries. In this consumerist culture, people everywhere, despite significant enhancement in the standards of living and economic conditions feel a sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. In most of the religious preachings about ethics and morality very little attention is paid about ethics. Sikh Ethics is vast area of Sikh religion, which has received continuous attention and has been subject for interpretation or re-interpretation.

Keywords: Sikhi, Ethics, Sikh Ethics, Ontological, Virtues.

Introduction

The Sikh religion is the most profoundly spiritually moralized religion; founded on the spiritual-ethical message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Ethics defined by the Sikh Gurus is not a simple term as discipline such as ‘good,’ ‘right’ or ‘duty’ but it fabricates the whole human behavior with high moral values and virtues which are not just helpful in upbringing the social life but also imbibe the source of spiritual enlightenment. The hymns of holy preceptors comprise of deep mystical experience of Supreme Reality, which is not just the fundamental, spiritual and humanistic idea, but it manifests the sovereign rules and principles of life. As Guru Nanak manifested in *Sri Raga* that:

“As everything is underneath Truth but, the living with veracity is superior to all ethical deeds.”¹

Contentment is one of the most pre-requisite virtues for sublimation of one’s instinctive impulse to lead a life of equilibrium amidst sorrows, grief, pain, and sufferings. The cardinal virtue, contentment finds expression along with truth, compassion, love, patience, celibacy and other ethical virtues. All the religious scriptures stress on the cultivation of ethical virtues like

truth, compassion, reverence, restraint, love, sympathy, non-violence, and temperance, etc. These virtues are practiced not only for personal development but also for their social, psychological, religious and spiritual importance.

I. Ethics: Meaning and Nature

In the Indian religious terminology, ethics and religion are so intently intertwined that whatever may be the religion, it constitutes within itself moral values and code of conduct for its seekers. The origin of Indian ethics is traced from the oldest scriptures, i.e., Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda, where word 'rta' is used as an ethical term. According to John Mckenzie, the term 'Rta' cannot be easily translated by any solitary English synonymous. It is a wide philosophical term which enveloped the various interpretations. While trying to explain this term, he says 'it is usually the cosmic order and as the order that is involved in the proper expression of man's relation to the gods.'ⁱⁱ Here this law of nature is defined in the sense of law for man, i.e., moral order. So 'rta' is further identified as an ethical term and truthfulnessⁱⁱⁱ.

In modern terminology, Ethics is defined as "the science of morality or as the study of right conduct or duty."^{iv} Ethics may be illustrated as the science which relates to the rightness and wrongness of conduct. P.B. Chatterji exemplifies it as:

"Ethics has been defined as the science of moral character as expressing itself in right or wrong conduct or action or as the science which deals with the goodness and badness of human character and seeks to determine the ideally perfect type of character which it is the duty of all men to strive to realise themselves."^v

Ethics play an important role in infusing proper standard of human conduct and gradual purification of religion. According to W.S. Shahakian, "Morality is not concerned with the study or discipline but with the standards which the individuals are enjoined to observe in their conduct."^{vi}

For example, one person is intelligent, hardworking, amiable and honest. The other person is equivalently intelligent, hardworking, amiable but treacherous. They both have all three factors same, but the last one makes differences. This mindset of the second person makes him totally differential because of his intelligence, hard work, friendly behavior purpose towards malicious artifice. Ethical conduct is the godly action, which endeavors us towards finding the truth and guides us in developing divine wisdom. Divine virtues are like true brother and sister through which enlightenment is obtained^{vii}.

The reason for the study of ethics consists of various factors. These factors affect the major aspects of life, where man must not only make a decision but also has to be aware of the fact that there are right ways and wrong ways of doing things. These ways are not applicable to spiritual or religious ways of life but also to all the fields related to human knowledge. Ethics seeks to bring up the true values of life of men in all the fields may it be business, profession, medical, legal, teaching, and so forth. It makes one aware of great ability and technical skill in business or profession with moral values and sense of ethical deeds. Mere knowledge of moral values and familiarity with virtues may not be enough unless or until it becomes a fundamental ingredient of life and manifests through man's character. Harold H. Titus has rightly remarked:

“Ethics is the exercise of human values. It attempts to stimulate the moral sense, to discover the true values of life, and to inspire men to join the quest for these values.”^{viii}

II. Sikh Ethics: Ontological Basis

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the fundamental and primary source of Sikh ethics. It is a treasure house of knowledge and wisdom of the utmost reality of the universe, revealing the ultimate goal of human life and recommending the way to achieve it. Prof. Avtar Singh says:

“The Holy scripture of the Sikhs contains the ethical teaching intertwined with the metaphysical and religious declarations.”^{ix}

This makes easy for a layperson to implement ethics itself in actual life and make union with the Utmost Reality. Guru Granth Sahib is the repository of ethical and moral values as taught by Gurus and holy preceptors. Hymns of *Gurbani* inculcate both the individual and the social aspects of ethics. The message is not just to navigate and make one realize to achieve ultimate goal that is merging one's soul to the ultimate entity but also to adoring the moral values in man for the betterment of oneself and society and to guide how one ought to behave with others. The Hymns of Gurus and Bhagats touch the various aspects of human life for making one's life equipped with contentment and ethical virtues.

Conclusion

The crucial problem arises as to how it is possible for a man to sublimate his instinctive impulses to lead a balanced life amidst grief and sufferings of life. Desires have no limits and human makes continuous efforts for their fulfillment, and at last, they earn nothing but diseases, frustration, depression and psychic disorders. Satisfaction and happiness come very rarely in their way, and their materialistic attitude makes them sufferers, dishonest, jealous, angry and full of

hatred. This deflation in one's personality causes a spiritual degradation that would result in obliviousness of spiritual consciousness. Sikh ethical term *sachiara* is an ideal term which describes not only the one imbued with the ethical deeds but also every action and behavior of the being tends to reflect contentment. Contentment and truth thus acts the herald for the other ethical virtues and thus it tends to be the precursor for the other virtues truth, compassion, austerity and moral obligations to follow within the being.

ⁱ schu ErY sBu ko Aupir scu awcwru] Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 62.

ⁱⁱ John McKENZIE, *The Religious Quest of India HINDU ETHICS A Historical and critical Essay*, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p. 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.8

^{iv} Phanibhushan Chatterji, *Principle Of Ethics*, The Author, Calcutta, 1940, p.1.

^v *Ibid*, p.1.

^{vi} W.S. Sahakian, *Ethics: An Introduction to Theories and Problems*, Harper and Row Publishers, U.S.A., 1974, p.6.

^{vii} dy gunw siq BYN Brwv hY pwrMgiq dwnu pVlvdY] Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 966.

^{viii} Harold H. Titus, *Ethics for Today*, Eurasia Publishing House (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1966, Third Edition, p.11.

^{ix} Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2009, p. 9.