BASIC VALUES EMBODIED IN INDIAN CULTURE AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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DEDICATION

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Concoction of Politics with Ethics: A mare's nest or a Necessity?

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Abstract

As a branch of social sciences politics is associated with power and it is a means for resolution of conflicts within society. Politics deals directly with the distribution of power. Under the influence of the cupidity for power politicians and government officials engage in activities that are contrary to the common ethical standard of the society and the ethical standards of the society appear as a myth for the common people who are generally guided by societal ethics. These Ethics are standards of behaviour that make up an individual's or society's code of conduct. The ethical principles are universal in nature and try to understand societal problems in a uniform way. These principles are societal ethics that generally guide people in their moral life. On the other hand, political laws are incompatible with the idea of universality. Politics interprets societal issues and prescribes what can be done within a specific context. It never claims to provide the ultimate or final solution to societal issues. Therefore, it appears that the relationship between ethics and politics may seem conflictual and contrasting one. This article will try to analyze whether politics and ethics can exist together or their coexistence is a mare's nest or it is a necessity for the democratic system. It will try to identify efforts in a democratic society to make politics and ethics as compatible as possible. It will try to highlight the importance of political ethics in that effort.

Key words: Politics, Ethics, Societal ethics, Relationship, Political ethics, Democratic system

Introduction: The debate over the coexistence of politics and ethics is a never-ending process, particularly in a democratic political system. In recent times for a radical democratization of the state the ethical dimension has become crucial to politics. The focus of most of the social science literature on politics has shown a clear shift towards the ethical question. Almost all branches of social sciences systematically study the ethical dilemmas that a society confronts. The question of ethics is pivotal to politics as it deals directly with the distribution of power. Politics is a means for resolution of conflict that arises in a society from the yearning of power. Under the influence of this zeal for power politicians and government officials engage in activities that are contrary to the common ethical standard of the society. It means that ethical principles associated with political activities and processes may differ from the moral life of the common people. Thus, the ethical standards of the society appear as a myth to the common people who are generally guided by societal ethics. The relationship between politics and ethics therefore appears as problematic and it needs a detailed analysis to understand their actual relationship.

The changing relationship of politics with ethics: Politics as a concept has changed over the periods. Initially in the Greek world it was treated as Political Philosophy. For political philosophers like Plato and Aristotle most important inquiries were 'what should be' or what ought to be regarded as 'ideal' or 'good' form of society or state. For Aristotle, politics was a practical science, since it was concerned with the noble action or happiness of the citizens. In his opinion it was a normative discipline rather than as a purely empirical or descriptive inquiry. Aristotle's political science encompassed the two fields which modern philosophers distinguish as ethics and political philosophy.

Subsequently, as the study of politics increasingly embraced empiricism; values, morality, ethics was gradually

avoided in the study of politics. The source of this tradition can be found in Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's dichotomy between freedom and morality fostered a tradition of value-free social sciences. These social Sciences overlapped historically with the liberal states that emerged in the 17th and 18th century; it left citizens free to lead their own lives without any kind of obedience to the existing religious or political authority. It gave priority to human liberty over moral and ethical order.

This value-free tradition of political studies reached its peak with the emergence of Behavioural political theory. It is an approach in the study of politics which sought to provide an objective, quantified approach in explaining and predicting political behaviour of the individual and groups as well. David Easton, leader of the Behavioural movement, identified value free study as one of the eight features of behavioural approach. Under this influence of Behavioural movement along political philosophy turned into Political Science and the metaphysical analysis of politics was replaced by scientific data analysis, measurement and quantification methods. David Easton defined politics as 'authoritative allocation of values' within a society. This definition identified politics as practical in nature and absolutely opposite to ethics, which is normative and abstract in nature.

Incompatibility of Societal ethics with politics: The word, Ethics comes from the Greek terms Ethos and Ethikos. The term Ethics can be defined as moral principles or values that govern the conduct of an individual or group. It says what is and is not acceptable. Ethics are standards of behaviour that make up an individual's or society's code of conduct. Generally speaking, ethics refer to the rules or code of conduct that people use to determine when an action is acceptable or not. It's the values and beliefs that guide people in their daily lives, as well as how they make decisions. Ethical principles guide us to do the right thing

when we don't know what the best thing to do is or if there are other options. These principles are universal in nature and try to understand societal problems in a uniform way. These principles are societal ethics that generally guide people in their moral life. On the other hand, political laws are incompatible with the idea of universality. Politics interprets societal issues and prescribes what can be done within a specific context. It never claims to provide the ultimate or final solution to societal issues.

This aspect is not a new phenomenon in the study of social sciences and particularly in politics. The societal principles of ethics were refused to be accepted time and again as a driving force in the history of political studies. Niccolò Machiavelli and his followers in the reasons of state tradition have consistently argued that the prince, i.e., the statesman, is not bound by ordinary morality when it comes to advancing the interests of the state. Machiavelli believed the prince ought to act in accordance with the good whenever possible, but he should be ready to commit evil deeds when it is necessary for running the statecraft successfully. The prince cannot be bound by the same moral precepts that apply to ordinary men. In support of this view in his book 'The prince' he said that "because it is often necessary [for the prince] to operate against his own faith, as well as against charity and humanity, in order to preserve the state." In-fact he argued that the moral code guiding political leaders must be more "flexible" and permissive than the morality of ordinary citizens.

Political realists who followed Machiavelli, also argued that politicians and policymakers have their own system of values which they follow for the promotion and protection of national interest. These special systems of values are different from the values of the common people. The politicians and policymakers would not be able to function effectively if they are bound by the values of the common people, because that would act as a

limitation in their pursuit of power. For the realists, politics is nothing more than an active pursuit of power. Therefore, they argue that the guiding principles of moral life of the common people or the societal ethics can never be part of politics. Hans J Morgenthau, a realist from early Cold War period, in his book Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, proclaimed as fourth principle of realism that 'to confuse individual morality with state morality is to court disaster, as state in pursuit of their national interest are governed by a morality that is different from the morality of the individuals in their personal relationship.'

Co-existence of Politics and Ethics: Apparently it may seem that coexistence of normative aspect i.e., ethics with practical and value free aspect i.e., politics is a mare's nest. But in reality, their coexistence is a necessity for the civilised world. In a democratic society, there must be an effort to make these two as compatible as possible. This concern has been reflected in different ways in the field of political studies.

The empirical understanding of politics was proven flawed and these flaws were identified by David Easton himself. He started the post-behavioural revolution along with Austin Ranney, Peter H. Markel and others. David Easton himself argued that the role of the intellectuals must be to protect human values of civilization. The post-behaviouralists were deadly opposed to the attempts of the behaviouralists in making Political Science as value-free science. They argued that the Politics must be relevant to society and it must deliberate over basic issues of society such as justice, liberty, equality, democracy etc. The approach of the political realists also changed over the years, and they also have shifted from a position where they always pitched politics against ethics to a position where the idea of Political Ethics has been accepted by them as a more acceptable alternative.

Political Ethics: Political Ethics is not simply the application of personal morality to the political sphere. Political ethics are the ethics of those who conduct political activity. It is a power to reach an end that is the common good, collective or general interest. Political ethics, which is also known as political morality or public ethics, is the practice of making moral judgments about political action, and the study of that practice. It is a field of study which deals with the ethics-politics debate on two different levels. These are the (1) ethics of office or the ethics of process and (2) ethics and public policy.

The ethics of the office: The ethics of the office or process acknowledges that there is a difference between the ethical principles that govern political offices differ from those principles that govern the moral life of the common people. The objective of the study of the ethics of the office is to determine the extent to which these two principles of ethics may differ. Ethics requires government offices or the official processes of the government to avoid harming the general people, but it may also get into a situation where it becomes necessary to take the risk of sacrificing lives of the common people for the sake of the nation. For example, though the government knows very well that civilians will lose their lives if the government orders firing on agitating mobs, yet it is seen in every country in the world that governments are towing the same path to maintain the civil order of the country under such unstable situations. The scope and structure of modern politics multiply the occasions on which they arise, and magnify the consequences that they produce. Therefore, the question that becomes pertinent is, to what extent are government offices permitted to take actions that would otherwise be wrong?

The source of this ethical problem is inherent in the nature of political office itself. Public offices are **representational in nature.** Officials or politicians who occupy these offices work for

the people who send them as their representatives. As they act for the people they are representing in the office, they assume rights and obligations that ordinary citizens do not have, or do not have to the same degree. They even get permission from the office, in the name of performing their duty, to use force, lie, maintain secrecy and break promises they had given. In this process they grossly violate many moral principles that common people share between themselves. This tradition of 'Dirty Hand' is a problem continuing from the days of Machiavelli. Machiavell approved this of the princes, who for reasons of state transgressed the conventional morality of their time. In modern democratic society also, many politicians and officials get their hands dirty in this manner. Michael Walzer in his "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," argued that 'in order to do what is right politicians must get their hands dirty'. Even if an act of the government is right in utilitarian terms yet officials who do that may feel guilty at personal level on moral ground. This is described by Walzer as a paradox: the politician must do "wrong to do right". But such an act is not permissible from the view of deontology. They suggest that politicians should refrain from doing such activities which he thinks is wrong to do, he should set aside his moral dilemma and take the right decision. On the other hand, from a democratic point of view the problem of dirty hands is completely different, here the question of moral dilemma is absolutely irrelevant, what democracy wants is democratic legitimacy of all the activities of the politicians or the government officials. If their activities are not democratically legitimate then they are **abusing their power** because in a democratic system politician and the government officials get their hands dirty in the name of people and with the implicit approval of the people. For Walzer, keeping these occupants of government office accountable and giving them punishment was most important but, in a democracy, the more

important task is to compensate the victims of the decisions taken by those politicians or officials. Victims of poll violence, train accidents, natural disasters, man-made disasters get compensated for this reason after implementation of the decisions taken by dirty hands. Apart from this, keeping the politicians or leaders accountable to the citizens for decisions that are **legitimately made in secret**, is also a matter of concern for them.

There comes the question of political ethics, which suggests that people should ask, to what extent does the end justify the means in politics? Politicians use secrecy, deceptions and violence as means and justify their acts with the goal they want to achieve. Politicians often take the path of Machiavelli and argue that "when the end is good…it will always excuse the means". But in true sense, the justification of these means depends on a number of factors and it should not be justified only by the good result or end these means achieve. These factors are **the value of the end**, if the activity of violence or deception or secrecy appears to be more important than the sacrifice of the victim, than the activity could be accepted as justified; if **alternative means** for achieving the goal was available then the means taken by the dirty hands of the politicians cannot be justified ; **the identity of the victims of the decision taken by the Politician or official**, the end of the activity of the officials can be justified if all the victims are identified properly and compensated for their loss; **the accountability of the officials or the politicians**, if the official accountable for the activity could be detected before the activity was done, his dirty hand could be justified for what he did, as he did that with **prior approval**.

In a democratic system the representational nature of the office of the politicians creates another ethical problem. In their effort to win an election or to retain their office politicians often use such means which are not moral in nature. The politicians may

act against the dictates of their conscience. However, Nadia Urbinati and Mark E. Warren have suggested that they should not be bound by the preferences of constituents; they should use their autonomous judgment within the context of deliberative bodies to represent the public interest.

The organizational nature of public office also creates problems for the ethics of office. The problem is that of identifying persons actually responsible for doing certain activities. The structure of public office is such that many different individuals in an organization contribute in many ways to the decisions and policies. Therefore, it becomes difficult to identify who is responsible for the results. Dannis F Thompson has identified this problem of ethics as **'the problem of many hands.'** In philosophical literature a collectivist approach has been suggested which holds the organisation as a whole responsible for the activity. It helps to identify the agent who is responsible without unfairly blaming individuals.

Ethics and public policy: In a democratic system political ethics examines many policy areas, like global distributive justice, immigration, environment, animal rights, abortion etc. In these policy areas problems arise in the form of conflict between the values of the ends or outcomes themselves. Most of the issues in policy ethics are driven by the general tension between partial or the social liberal's and impartial or the cosmopolitan's claims or obligations. In the policy area of global distributive justice, social liberals give priority to the nation state and cosmopolitans give priority to the interests of each individual equal respect regardless of their citizenship. In the policy area of immigration, the cosmopolitans tend to favour open borders while the social liberals justify restrictions to protect domestic institutions. In the environmental policy area, the conflict is in part between current and future generations, here one group must necessarily speak for

the other in the absence of the future generations. In the animal right policy area, the conflict takes place between human and other species. Human beings speak for the animals.

Political ethics examines these policy areas keeping in mind the importance of the circumstances of democratic politics which requires collective decisions that are binding on all citizens and they have a right to an equal voice in deciding policies. However, in a pluralist society they disagree fundamentally about what policies are right. Even if they believe a policy to be right, they have to consider whether in light of the disagreement it should be modified and an alternative policy adopted.

Conclusion: Politics and ethics are apparently separate and often identified as conflictual and contrasting in nature. Most of the studies conducted by the scholars of different social sciences to understand their inter-relationship have generally reached two different and contrasting understandings. One understanding says that politics can be sufficiently subsumed by morality, i.e., they want to reduce politics to morality and the other understanding prescribes that morality and politics cannot coexist and they will remain independent of each other. But in reality, their coexistence is a necessity for the civilised world. Until and unless these two values are linked together the democratic system will not be able to function properly. In order to bring the dirty hands of the politicians and government officials under control it is necessary to determine the boundary of their legitimate actions and this restriction can be applied with the help of political ethics which is the ethics of those who conduct political activity. Political Ethics should also intervene in policy matters and examine policy areas of the government officials from a democratic point of view. In fact, political ethics has successfully resisted the trend toward a view of politics as structure, which leads to a conception of politics devoid of human agency. Since political ethics is a power to reach an end

that is the common good, collective or general interest it is the only means which can create an atmosphere where politics and ethics can exist together.

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Indian Philosophy of Values: Some Observation

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The subject of value is a very complicated. Values plays an important role and occupy and important place in human life. Indian thinkers commonly speak of two functions of knowledge one which is theoretical, viz. revealing the existence of some object (*artha-paricchitti*), and the other which is practical, viz. affording help in the attainment of some purpose in life (*phala-prāpti*).[1] The results of these two functions of knowledge are respectively what we mean by 'fact' and 'value'. A thirsty traveller, who happens to come upon a sheet of fresh water, discovers a fact; and, when later he quenches his thirst by drinking the water, he realizes a value. These functions are regarded as closely connected with each other, since the knowledge of a fact usually leads to the pursuit of some value. The number of facts that may be known, it is clear, are innumerable; and the values that may be realized through their knowledge are equally so. It is with the latter that we are concerned here. The Sanskrit word used for 'value' means 'the object of desire' (*iṣṭa*), and the term may therefore be generally defined as 'that which is desired'. The opposite of value or 'disvalue' may be taken as 'that which is shunned or avoided' (*dviṣṭa*). For the sake of brevity, we shall speak only of values; but what is said of them will, with appropriate changes, apply to disvalues also.

One of the distinguishing features of Indian philosophy is that, as a consequence of the pragmatic view it takes of knowledge, it has, throughout its history, given the foremost place to values. Indeed, they form its central theme; and questions like those of

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[1] Vātsyāyana's commentary on *Nyāya-Sūtra*. I.1.1,3.