

## Religious Values and Management Ethics

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### Abstract

The Importance of religious values though has great impact on the management ethics, has rarely being understood by the Indian business scenarios of today. We find that all religions show a positive relationship with extrinsic work values. Furthermore, we find that religions show a positive relationship with intrinsic work values. We also find that those who report no religious affiliation also view work values positively. We suggest that these results are perhaps a result of the converging effects of globalization. Management researchers are also accurately trying to define and promote these concepts based upon logic and reason. A religious person follows his code of conduct because he believes that it is proper behaviour and reaction to the varying challenges and circumstances which arise during the course of life. Since a religious person does his good deed not necessarily for its own sake, but because he has been instructed to do so by God his act is non-moral. One has to understand the underlying principles mentioned in the religious scriptures and try to make an analysis with relation to the management ethics, so that one will be able to create a relationship between the two.

**Keywords:** Religion; Myths; Ethics for management

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### The Hindu Tradition

"Hinduism, is the predominant faith of India. Taken as a whole, Hinduism is one of the oldest religious traditions in the world. But it is difficult to study, for it is also one of the most diversified religious traditions. Philosophy (*darshana*) in the Hindu tradition means "seeing the truth" and applying this truth to the problems of everyday life. Thus, for Indian thinkers, the purpose of studying philosophy is not merely to gain knowledge, but to discover and live the highest kind of life, the life that will bring permanent self-realization. People must try to establish the truth that exist in the religions and not simply or blind foldedly depend on the spiritual books or testimony of others. Apart from establishing

a relationship between spiritual values and management techniques, one should –

#### *Myths behind hindu religion*

One indication of the difficulty of setting forth the central points in Hindu thought is that there are many texts that, collectively, can be called Hindu Scripture. First, there are the Vedas (literally "knowledge" - that is, sacred knowledge). The earliest texts are the *Rig Veda*, a collection of over one thousand hymns addressed to the gods - hymns to Indra, the god of civilization, war, and storm; to Varuna, the guardian of morality; and to many others, most of them now forgotten. Included in the Vedas are the *Brahmanas*, lengthy treatises concerned with the details of the sacrificial ritual administered by the Brahmin class. Finally, in the eighth to fifth centuries B.C.E., there were added to these the most famous of the early Indian writings, the *Upanishads*, which attempted to explain the inner meaning of the reality behind the religious quest in a philosophical manner. All these writings form the essential canon of sacred scriptures in the orthodox Hindu tradition.

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In the period following the *Upanishads*, there was, within Hinduism, a great development of devotional religion. This was expressed strikingly in the most famous of Indian scriptures, the *Bhagavadgita*, or "Song of the Lord." There is some doubt as to when the *Gita* was compiled, but it was probably some time during the period 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. (the common era, equivalent to A.D.)

No other scripture is more widely read in India today. To read the *Gita* is to be introduced to some of the main themes of Hindu thought as well as to some of the main practices of Hindu life. It also introduces one to splendid Hindu poetry and to the god Krishna. It is convenient to name four major periods of Hindu thought: first, the early period of Vedic polytheism; second, the period of the Vedanta with its descriptions of Absolute Brahman; third, a period beginning about 200 B.C.E., with an emphasis on *bhakti* and last, the modern period, with its response to Western influence.

#### *Brahman and the self*

Central to much of Hindu philosophy is the emphasis on the one unchanging reality that transcends space, time, causality, and all particular things. This Absolute cannot be comprehended by human thought or adequately expressed in words and concepts. According to the nondualistic view (which emphasizes the oneness of existence) only Brahman is real, and the individual souls and the universe are illusory veils obscuring Brahman. Closely allied to the concept of Brahman is the concept of the self, or soul, or *atman*. The true self of each person is identical with Brahman. From the transcendental standpoint, the self is immortal, free, and identical with Brahman. The divine nature of the self is veiled, but not destroyed, by false images and ignorance, for it is ultimately without traits and beyond language. The true destiny of the self is the realization of this identity with Brahman. From the phenomenal standpoint, there are many individual selves, enmeshed in the world of

affairs and seeking deliverance from the round of births and deaths. Thus we need to distinguish between the real and the empirical self.

What are the relations among Brahman, the self, and the universe that we perceive? A Hindu scholar says: "Brahman is the sole reality, and it appears both as the objective universe and as the individual subject. The former is an illusory manifestation of Brahman, while the latter is Brahman itself appearing under the limitations which form part of that illusory universe." The objects of the empirical world, although of a certain order of worldly reality, are appearances in that they belong to the world of cause and effect, to which Brahman does not belong. The individual self, however, is not illusory in this sense. The self is Brahman appearing under limiting conditions. It is not a phenomenon of ignorance the way physical objects are. Through an intuitive, non-logical experience one realizes the identity of the eternal self and Brahman.

#### *Central values in hinduism*

All Hindu systems of thought seem to agree that there are four main values to be completed and brought to perfection in the course of rebirth. In ascending order of importance they are: (1) *Artha* (wealth) and (2) *Kama* (sensuality). These are the worldly or secular values. They are legitimate if they are kept in their places and do not stifle other values. Material prosperity, good health, and long life are desired by most Indians. However, both the life of activity and renunciation are recognized. (3) *Dharma* (social and individual duties) includes all caste roles and obligations of occupation, gender, kin, generation, and temperament, as well as other ethical responsibilities. (4) *Moksha* (release from finitude and imperfection) is the intrinsic or eternal value, and the supreme spiritual ideal. It gives liberation from the wheel of existence, and cannot be achieved without complete experience and resolution of the other three. Discipline is essential if we are to achieve

illumination, and the overcoming of selfishness is essential if we are to realize our genuine self and attain release. Unless a person achieves release in this life, which is rare indeed, she or he is destined to repeat the round of more existences.

According to Hinduism, no soul is eternally damned. The law of *karma*, the law of sowing and reaping, determines the form that will be taken in each new existence. This is the law of cause and effect in human life. Through our conduct we determine our own destiny in that good *karma* is acquired by living up to our *dharmic* duties and bad *karma* by ignoring or violating our given *dharma*. An unethical life may lead to rebirth below the station of the present life, and a life of goodness may lead to a more favored existence or to ultimate **liberation from the round of rebirths**. Thus, the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth are said to be grounded in the moral structures of the universe. They permit freedom and ethical advance in that they are under our control and are not determined by cosmic or environmental forces completely beyond our influence.

The concept of the four *ashramas*, or stages in the life of the individual, relates the goal of liberation to the needs and tasks of daily life in society. A man's duties are set by the stage of life at which he has arrived. The four stages are (1) the life of a celibate student under the mentorship of a teacher; (2) a long period of householdership, beginning with marriage, when a person assumes the responsibilities of parenthood and other social obligations and when one provides for those dedicated to the spiritual quest; (3) a period of increased religiosity, when householder duties can be passed on to the next generation, during which one retires to the forest with his wife to practice rituals and for meditation and reflection; and (4) by complete renunciation of family and caste and by practicing austerities and rigid self-control, a person seeks union with Brahman. If the person is successful in the fourth stage, struggle and strife cease and he gains peace and freedom through union with the all-embracing World Soul (Brahman). The inner spirit of humanity is the focus of

attention, and its development, illumination, and release are the highest values. These stations were primarily for men. At the time of traditional Hinduism, women were excluded from the more rigorous structures of the *ashramas* and received their spiritual merit from working to uphold the *dharmic* obligations of their husbands.

We propose that there is a positive relationship between Hinduism and both work values. Happiness can be attained through the fulfillment of the desires; that is, extrinsic values. In fact, the latter has played a crucial role in achieving business excellence (Sharma and Talwar, 2004). Hindus have traditionally viewed living the good life through four aims, namely *dharma* (fulfilling one's duties), *kama* (pleasure), *moksa* (achieving liberation), and *artha* (material prosperity). As such, *artha* or achievement of material prosperity plays an important role in the Hindu good life. It is thus likely that Hindus pursue extrinsic work values as they are expected and encouraged to accumulate wealth (Gold, 1989) as one of life's stages. However, it is also likely that Hindus look for intrinsic values, such as a job that is interesting and that contributes to society. Religions seem to view work very similarly provide important contributions both theoretically and practically. Multinationals are advised to design work environments that respect important religious differences. However, these multinationals will nevertheless face workers who favor both intrinsic and extrinsic work values.

#### *Hinduism, Values and Management*

Global corporations and governments appreciate the importance of an ethical public appearance. Thus values and ethics for business and government have become important components of management training. The movement for management values originated in the United States, it quickly spread to Europe, and India can hardly be said to lag behind. Indian initiatives in this field receive financial support from enterprises such as the Tata Group, the ONGC

(Natural Oil and Gas), and the BPCL (Bharat Petroleum).

The slipping away of public control mechanisms seems to encourage managerial misbehaviour. Promoters of business ethics in the United States and Europe have understood that the growing private sector requires clear formulations of ethically acceptable corporate behaviour. Thus 'values in business', 'values-based management', 'ethical entrepreneurship', and so forth, have entered the market of management teaching. Hindu values and business Concern for ethical corporate behaviour was first expressed in India in the early 1980s. The then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, informally urged Swami Yuktananda, a monk and follower of the Shri Ramakrishna movement, to promote Indian values for the moral improvement of Indian management. Indian values, it was claimed, derived from the inclusivist (Hindu) Vedanta philosophy. Vedantic Hinduism (like Christianity in the Western world) in the 1980s came to be regarded as a cultural resource for Indian managers. It was thought that values awareness would prevent corruption. Less corruption in the end meant less financial loss. The target groups for values training were managers of private and public sector enterprises, high-ranking state civil servants, and executives of the Indian Administrative Service. Promoting values in Indian government, however, inevitably has political implications. In the 1990s, the Hindu conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power at the national level. This boosted efforts to promote Hindu values in management. Professors working at institutes of management in Calcutta, Lucknow, and Ahmedabad began to lecture on Indian (read Hindu) ethics for management and developed special training courses for Indian managers. While the number of courses is steadily increasing, the serious scholarly literature on the subject remains small. One scholar with an international reputation has held undisputed sway over the field since the 1990s: S.K.

The promotion of religion as the

fundamental source of ethical behaviour is based on two sociological observations:

- (a) the great world religions of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism have large followings, and are more universal in aim and intent than political or social ideologies;
- (b) unlike ideologies, world religions address (or claim to address) issues of ultimate human concern such as life, death, good, evil, and the hereafter. Thus, Hinduism (the religion of about 85 per cent of Indians) provides fundamental Indian values. One may question the need to turn to world religions to seek ultimate values. But so long as religions provide values to millions around the world, academics have reason to study their impact on values discourse. Indian intellectuals who regard themselves as secular and (often) leftist balk at the use of religious texts as sources for values, especially the use of Hindu texts as sources for ethics in business and politics. Their apprehension is not groundless. Hindutva and management

The most famous and influential representative of the first approach is S.K. Chakraborty. In his courses on values for managers he presents a leadership model that builds upon hierarchy, strict obedience to a boss or leader, rituals, and punishment for those who disobey this leader. In some of his courses and articles Chakraborty has argued for abolishing the present secular constitution and parliamentary democracy, and replacing them with a Hindu constitution and rule by a few wise gentlemen.

is Shri Sathya Sai Baba. Arindam Choudhury in his best-selling book *Count Your Chickens Before They Hatch* wants Indian managers to act with self-confidence and a sense of initiative. One of Choudhury's Hindu role models is Swami Vivekananda. However, the vocal supporters of egalitarianism and democracy are outnumbered by those who tacitly support hierarchy and authoritarianism. Abdul Kalam, Ex-President

of India, has outlined a dream to 'ignite' the minds of youth through widespread education with the aim to build a technologically advanced nation. In order to realize this dream, government institutions and businesses must work in a socially and economically progressive environment. This requires universal basic education fostering independence of mind, rationality, problem solving, and initiative. In short, a democratic egalitarian temperament is essential to growth in every respect. It is estimated that over 90 per cent of India's work force is barely educated and works in the informal sector. The greatest challenge for the future will be the full mobilization of this work force on a socially just and economically responsible basis. Serious debate on values is indispensable. Indian executives in government and business must reflect on the ultimate ideals that ought to guide the future of India: will the country be transformed into a more democratic and economically equitable society that enables all of its citizens.

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