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Relevance of Integrity, Morality and Ethics in Contemporary World: Learnings from Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT – Integrity is apparently a matter of choice between what is right and what is easy. It is more related to one's everyday behaviour. Morality means customs and Ethics means character Integrity is more than morality and ethics, for these two are acclaimed externally and adhere to societal expectations of one's conduct. Together, they are like a beacon that sails us through the tough turbulent currents of moral and ethical dilemmas. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is a treatise on morality-ethics or dharmic (virtuous) living. It ardently endorses ethical and moral behaviour, virtuous conduct, inner purity and selfless social deeds. Integrity, morality and ethics are inextricably knitted together to weave the social fabric of the society. It is the core of effective leadership, personal happiness & professional excellence

Key words: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Integrity, Morality, Ethics, Sthitaprajna

I. Introduction

“If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything.”
“Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity.”

- Anonymous

Integrity is apparently a matter of choice between what is right and what is easy. It manifests itself in everything one does-thoughts, behaviour and actions. It is more related to one's everyday behaviour, both covert or overt and decision making.

Morality has its origin from Latin word 'Mos', which means customs.

The term Ethics has been derived from the Greek word 'Ethos' meaning character.

A person cannot be considered a respectable human being if he/she lacks integrity, morality and ethics. All human beings are governed by moral & ethical principles and conduct at will or otherwise, during all the stages of biological life cycle.

II. The Concept

Integrity is apparently a matter of choice between what is right and what is easy. It manifests itself in everything one does-thoughts, behaviour and actions. It is more related to one's everyday behaviour, both covert or overt and decision making. The word integrity is considered to have been originated from the French word 'integrite or integre', Latin integritas or

integras, English integer or integrate, which conceptually means being intact and indicates wholesomeness and completeness of inner self and most importantly uprightness.

Morality has its origin from Latin word 'Mos', which means customs.

The term Ethics has been derived from the Greek word 'Ethos' meaning character.

Integrity is more than a concept and certainly far beyond being a mere cliché. Integrity is more than morality and ethics, for these two are acclaimed externally and adhere to societal expectations of one's conduct. Integrity, on the other hand is intrinsic in nature and is an internal state of being, an enduring personal commitment to honour moral and ethical values for moral reflection. Together, they are like a beacon that sails us through the tough turbulent currents of moral and ethical dilemmas, guiding us through states of internal and external conflicts by illuminating the path of honesty, truth, justice, and compassion.

Personally, or professionally, they define who we are, what we think, what we do and how we behave, when no one is watching over. But before we start understanding relevance of these concepts in today's world, let's dig deeper to understand, who is an integral and moral person?

III. Admired Literature

According to the literature on ethics and integrity, one of the several admired works was done by Huberts (2014) where he defined eight identifiable characteristics of a highly integral person by using the keywords wholeness and coherence; moral reflection; value(s) like incorruptibility, professional responsibility; laws and rules; moral values and norms; and exemplary behaviour.

Dobel (1999,2016), defined an integral person as the one, who has high moral values.

Becker (2016), considered an individual an integral person only if he/she exhibits virtues in thinking, behaviour and conduct.

IV. Observations & Opinion

A person cannot be considered a respectable human being if the one lacks integrity, morality and ethics. All human beings are governed by moral & ethical principles and conduct at will or otherwise, during all the stages of biological life cycle. These principles hold a great relevance in today's contemporary world and are still considered the fundamental building blocks of a healthy society. The absence of these ideologies from any system or society would lead to plethora of societal and cultural perils. One can easily witness parents being sent to old age homes, family members fighting for share in joint wealth, nepotism, corruption, communalism and terrorism surfacing in the societies where there is an absence of these quintessential philosophies.

During the recent decades, these notions have significantly gained popularity with more prominence in governance and are also seen as the essence of political and economic development of any country. More so, they have become a buzz in several academic disciplines and have risen the choice ladders amongst researchers.

Traditionally, the focus has always been at the micro level and majorly the discussions centred around the personal integrity and morality of all individuals, however, in modern times the terms have been used at a macro societal level, more so in a righteous manner. In common parlance, the term integrity, morality and ethics have a plethora of associations ranging from a person, a manager, a leader, to an institution, an organization, a society or even a system.

Beyond the associations of the terms with different subjects, the concept ardently endorses the inherent quality of being in accord with fundamental moral values and principles by making right moral choices. Irrespective of the time, these principles will always remain fundamentally vital to every society.

A. What is Dharma?

Integrity, Morality and Ethics are collectively known as 'Dharma', the eternal laws of the cosmos. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is a treatise on morality-ethics or dharmic (virtuous) living and holds widespread esteem because of its practical ethical purport for over 5000 years. It ardently endorses ethical and moral behaviour, virtuous conduct, inner purity and selfless social deeds. It considers an ethical person to be a religious person who serve the ultimate purpose of human life. Arjavam, sincerity or straightforwardness; Sthairyam, stability; Ksantih, tolerance and Atmavinigraha, self-control is few of the values taught to the mankind for the ethical conduct. It puts us on right path in life by guiding us with noble human values. As described by Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Sthitaprajna is a perfect person having all noble values; truthfulness, honesty, courage, benevolence, peacefulness, obedience, and mercifulness are few of the 26 qualities as outlined by Sri Krishna to Arjuna.

According to numerous recent researches done by researchers in the domain of establishing relationship between leader integrity (or ethical leaders) and employee work engagement, it was observed that such leaders not just significantly contributes toward establishing mutual trust between them and the followers but also help to develop a highly integral and conducive work environment. Leaders with high integrity and morality strengthen the organization, the system and the nation at large.

Remembering Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary, it can be rightly said that all the great leaders like Bapu, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Nelson Mandela and others had one thing in common, all were great visionaries and had high integral and moral values. Integrity, morality and ethics are inextricably knitted together to weave the social fabric of the society. It is an intriguing concept, the foundation of human character. It is the core of effective leadership, personal happiness & professional excellence.

Do not let tough situations challenge your moral conduct and value system. Do not let short term gains weaken your ethical code. No matter how intelligent, educated, intellectual and skilful you are, if you lack integrity, morality and ethics you are worth not more than a penny. The former President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, during one of his illustrious speeches at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad quoted "I will work with integrity and succeed with integrity".

Morality, Ethics and Integrity are the foundation stones of a healthy society leading way for a prosperous nation and hence making this world a peaceful place to live. Just the way body needs oxygen to survive, similarly our soul needs IME (Integrity, Morality, Ethics). Do not let obstacles take a ride on

you, be the captain of the ship called life, sail with integrity and the world will remember you for your decisions and respect you for your actions.

śamo damas tapaḥ śaucam
kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca
jñānam vijñānam āstikyam
brahma-karma svabhāva-jam

śamaḥ—peacefulness; damaḥ—self-control; tapaḥ—austerity; śaucam—purity;
kṣāntir—tolerance; ārjavam—honesty; eva—certainly; ca—and; jñānam—wisdom;
vijñānam—knowledge; āstikyam—religiousness; brahma—of a brāhmaṇa; karma—
duty; svabhāva-jam—born of his own nature.

Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty,
wisdom, knowledge, and religiousness—these are the qualities by
which the brāhmaṇas work.

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