

The Concept of Human Excellence in Sanskrit Tradition

The question of human excellence is related to man's material and spiritual development and its connection with a value structure. The dictionary definition of the word excellence is 'the quality of being excellent' and the word excellent means something which is eminently good, the best of its kind. It is also stated elsewhere that excellence is more a philosophy which provides a vision and paves the way for the upliftment of the society.

When one talks of development one understands a certain degree of excellence in all aspects of life. Man does not live by bread alone. He has over and above a physical dimension, a mental, an intellectual and a spiritual dimension. Man's constant effort is to move from living to better living or to reach a level of excellence in his life by working through *annamaya toanandamaya kosha*- the five dimensions of human life. *annamaya kosha* is the physical body sustained by food and shelter, *pranamaya kosha*, the life force sustaining the existence of an individual. The third *manomaya* is the mental identity of an individual who thinks, acts, resolves, loves and hates. The fourth *kosha* is *vijnanamaya* is intellectual awareness that is capable of discriminating, of making judgements. And the fifth *anandamaya* is a perception of being in bliss.

This indicates that some kind of moral ideal is a precondition of all social life. In other words the state of excellence is just not material advancement, the human values are inherent in this

structure and hence when we say he has reached the peak of excellence it means a level of advancement in one's field of action which provides a vision and paves the way for the upliftment of man and society.

Any ontological study of human life from various Sanskrit texts will show life in progressive movement from lower level of existence to a higher consciousness for example four states of human consciousness, *jagrata*, *sushupti*, *swapna*, *turiya* or five dimensions of life, *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanmaya* and *anandamaya* or four achievements of life *artha*, *kama* controlled by dharma moksha or four stages of life *bramhacharya*, *harhastya*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyas*.

According to the teachings of the Manu- dharmasastra, the first signs of awakening in men were brought through *iccha*, *jnana* and *kriya*, desire, thought and action. It is the desire which initiates man to know and it is the knowledge that initiates man to action. Values are essential elements of action. Values mean the cherished end state, and the awareness of actions that direct human endeavour to reach it. Values also help decide legitimate goals which give rise to social action. They indicate truth, goodness, beauty and freedom and also the inherent human drive for realizing these values. values are co-extensive with duties.

Manu prescribes four ends of life *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. In order to fulfil these ends of goals it has categorized four stages of human life *brahmacharya*, *garhasthya*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyas*. The *asrams* have a symbiotic relation to the *purusarthas*. Thus in the *brahmacharya ashrama* one learns about *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* and their relations. In the *garhasthyadharmas* one practices what one has learnt regarding the three. And in *vanaprastha* and *sannyasramas* there is a seeking after *moksha* which would come to one who has lived a life in accordance to the rules laid down. In the laying down of the *purusarthas* and *asramas*, the ancient thinkers, whether they were sociologists, educationists, psychologists or law makers in modern terminology were trying to match their understanding of man's nature and then laying down the values and norms which would further and perfect the nature to reach a certain level of excellence.

One can reach a certain level of excellence in every stage of human life but as the stages are interconnected therefore the ultimate level of human excellence is when man is able to realize the self and renounce the world to be one with the ultimate reality. In the *brahmacharya* stage a student reaches perfection by achieving the main aims of the ancient Indian system of education which are formation of character, building up of personality, preservation of ancient culture and the training of the rising generation in the performance of the social and religious duties.

The view that the hold of religion over the Hindu mind was responsible for making the educational system predominantly other worldly is not true. *Vanaprastha* and *sannyasa* ideals were, no doubt, about the ultimate aim of life but such was not the case with the theory and ideal of *brahmacharya*. The educational system aimed at procuring youths eminently fit to perform their civic and social duties.

However, the pupil was not allowed to forget that he had within him a higher self beyond his little personal ego, and that numerous ways and disciplines were provided by which he could realize this higher self or atleast turn and follow at a distance this higher aim according to his capacity and nature, *adhikara*.

Around him he saw and revered the distinguished teachers who practiced and were mighty masters of these disciplines. Hence objective of education were summarized in a triple formula which gave a wide and lofty framework to the ancient system of education :

Lead me from falsehood to truth

Lead me from darkness to light

Lead me from death to immortality

In the *grihastha ashram* by achieving *kama* and *artha* man acquired certain excellence but as these two achievements human desires and his drive for wealth are controlled by the guiding arm of *dharma* it enables man to have a life of effulgence, purity, unperturbed calm and power.

During this stage of life five-duties are imposed on man which again cultivate in him the ethics of a good life. These five duties – duties to the *sages* and seers who wrote the Vedas, to the *gods* who serve as invisible agencies, to *pitrs* or *ancestors*, to *Mahabhutas* and to humanity – are the traditional ways or methods of man's realization of his ethical and spiritual ideals. The concept of man according to sanskrit tradition is to move from lower bodily level to higher spiritual level. The highest human ideal is the *Jivanmukta* – one who is liberated from Time. Man, according to the Indian view, must, at all costs, find in this world a road that issues upon a transhistorical and atemporal plane (Mircha Eliade).

The whole purpose of life is to pierce the veil of ignorance (*avidya*) blinding him to the nature of ultimate reality. The last two stages of life *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa* lead one to the ultimate objective of life – transcendental liberation, freedom from rebirth and hence freedom from the continued worldly existence of an individual *atma* or soul or release from the anguish of history *karma* and *samsana*.

Thus in this scheme of things, *asramas* in relation to *purusathas*, *dharma* is the most important value. Desired from the root *dhr* (meaning to sustain) it encompasses a whole set of behavioural pattern and also moral and spiritual ideas in individuals, which would then help society to sustain itself in turn. It is thus placed at the head of the four *purusarthas* and is the clue to man's achieving excellence in his socio-spiritual existence. In fact, Indian world view puts *dharma* in the centre of the ever flowing stream of life. This ever flowing stream of

life can be compared with the vedic term, the dynamic order *rta*. It is not static but it is eternally moving us to the golden age of Truth (*satyayuga*) and which is the golden age of deeds (*krtayuga*) and which is said to have its fulfillment in eternal movement.

Krtah Sampadyate Caran

Rta is the truth of becoming, cosmic truth like a flowing river. *Rta* is based on the vedic term *satya* which is the truth of Being which is like a riverbed and hence life is both *satya* and *rta*. Truth of Being as well as Truth of Becoming. The buried truth is the truth which is inside each of us and to know it is to know the *self* when the word *rta* fell into disuse *dharma* found favour and it became the principle of universal law of things but *dharma* had connections with the individual, his actions, his obligations etc. and hence *dharma* is not only that which holds together the whole universe physical as well as moral, it is also 'the ideal in conduct towards which we must move in order to perfect ourselves spiritually'. (Manorma Jauhari, Politics Ethics in Ancient India). In other words following the path of *dharma* is an illustration of man's reaching the peak of excellence and perfection.

Radhakrishnan writes that under the concept of *dharma*, the Hindu brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life. Thus *dharma* is any activity of man which helps the realization of the self and spreads harmony in society; briefly *dharma* is the whole duty of man in relation to the

fourfold purpose of life (*dharma, artha, kama, moksha*) by the members of the four groups (*caturvarna*) in the four stages of life, (*caturasrama*). *Dharma* as a concrete principle means all the duties of a man as a biological, social, political, economical and spiritual being performed seasonally to the best of his ability for the personal as well as social betterment. *Dharma* is the guardian angel – the only friend who follows men even after death, when everything is left behind and the body perishes : *Dharmanugo Gacchati Jiva ekah*.

In the epic Rama is an example of *dharma* because of his moral qualities, and above all because of his devotion to truth. He applies the ultimate *dharma* in different practical ways during different periods of life. He was the ideal man. *Maryada purushattama Rama* – the ideal, supreme of all men he showed others how to live according to *dharma* and therefore how to attain heaven. It is significant that there are virtually no clear reference to salvation (*moksha*) in the Ramayana. *Dharma* is the highest thing in the world, and it is also the means whereby one may attain 'heaven'. In the performance of his *dharma* Rama can be at times so mechanical almost out of proportion that after Sita's banishment his heart breaks not out of pain for her but because for four days he has not been able to attend to his kingly duties at the court (uttara 53:4). It is true that after Sita's final disappearance Rama's grief grows irrepressible but he quickly controls it. Thereafter he 'happily' spends very many years performing his *dharma* as becoming his lineage, his *dharma* as kind and his *svadharma*.

In the Hindu way of life the concept of a hero is developed on the basis of the character of Rama. Those who renounce understand the ultimate truth. This is the highest achievement of a hero – the peak of human excellence. Rama goes to forest at the moment of his glory of coronation. It is not a pre-deterministic fatalism. But the eternal quest for truth. The Pandavas banish ultimately in the Himalayas after the great war. Buddha renounces the world and goes to forest. Mahavira in his prime youth leave everything even his last apparel. Ashoka in the glory of his victory over Kalinga, renounces the war like ambition. The same myth haunts and humbles the masses when they see and hear of a Gandhi walking in the streets of Calcutta sharing the wound of those who were injured in the communal disturbances ignoring the celebrations of freedom at midnight and hence the representative property of a goodman, who is a perfect man, a man of excellence is one, according to traditional Indian Culture, who can be called a stoic but then he does not ignore the society. He cares not for praise or blame, he despises fortune although he accepts its responsibilities if they fall on him. Vidyakara's *subhasitaratnakosha* says:

They value good fortune as a straw,
but are humbled by its burden;
ah, how wondrous is the way
of the truly great

Just as the Gita tells man to be well disposed to all creatures () so vidyakara praises man who always cling to the good of all () This Indian benevolence involves a kindness, a softness of a person, who does not point to other's fault, whose words are sweet as well as truthful and who is unbentful in matters of virtue and soft when confronts humanity. Vidyakara quotes Bhavabhuti to prove this: "Who can understand the hearts of the truly great which are harder than diamonds and softer than flowers"

Mahabharata tackles this whole question of perfection or human excellence in a different way. When Pandavas ultimately leave the world and thereby disclose to us its Central mythical archetype of the self to go beyond self which is possible only if one follows the path of *dharmab* but the tragedy, as uttered by Vyas, is that no one is listening to the voice of dharma. The perfect man follows the path of dharma. We all know the story in the Aranyaka Parva of the little pond guarded by a Yaksha. A drink from that pond killed all the Pandava brothers except Yudhisthira who brought them all back to life because he could answer to Yaksa's questions. One of the questions which the Yaksa had asked was:

Kasca dharmah paroloke

what is the highest dharma for the people living in this world?and Yudhisthira's answer was that, anrsamsyam parodhramah.

Literally the word *anrsamsya* means the state, the attitude, of not being *nrsamsa*. *Nrsamsa* literally means one who injures man, from which other meanings follow such as mischievous, noxious, cruel, base, vile, malicious. *Anrsamsya* would then mean an attitude where such qualities are absent. But the word has more than a negative connotation. It signifies good-will, a fellow feeling, a deep sense of the other. It is humanness, compassion, which makes *nara narottama*- a man of highest human excellence. This gives balance, *samattva*, which is the core essence of yoga philosophy of Gita and which means that the person is always in complete poise which is the source of all movement. It does not allow to fly way from the world but at the same time not to be utterly absorbed in it. So Vyasa says.

First bow to *narayana* (the divine) then to *nara* (the human) and then *narottama* (the best) among men and hence it is an epic of the becoming of man which is the realization of all the divine possibilities inherent in man- the ceaseless endeavour of man to be in harmony with the fullest of life. Mahabharata does not refer to *moksha* but of ever flowing stream of life. One cannot escape the eternal flow of this knowledge. Sooner or later one has to get drenched in it, to float in it, and to be swept by it. Through this knowledge man may take the vow to be man, and not to be a god or demon for both gods and demons desire humanness. This does not imply that man is the superior most; it does mean, however, that the state of being man is that state which allows one to feel for others. The state of being man is the state that accepts everyone and desires humanness for all- desires that humanness which is exclusive but which merges in all. The merging makes *nara narottama*, the perfect man

In Jaina philosophy a man reaches the peak of excellence by following tri-ratna which are *samyag drsti*, *samyag-Jnana* and *samyag carita* and by observing five *vratas ahimsa, satyam, asteyam, brahmacaryam* and *aparigraha* he attains perfection. In Buddhism a man of self-realisation is superior to many gods. Bodhisattva is the spiritual ideal of the man of Mahayana. Bodhisattva, the ideal man of realization, strives more for other's salvation than of his own. By cultivating the ten perfections, namely, generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, forbearance, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity one reaches the position of Bodhisattva, the highest level of excellence taking him to the state of Jivan-Mukta.

Kautilaya's Arthashastra says that the human excellence can be achieved by acquiring the knowledge of *Anviksiki*. It is through *anviksiki* that a person can investigate what is right and wrong in the Trayi (vediclore), what is material gain and loss in *economics (varta)* and what is good policy and bad policy in the science of politics (*dandaniti*) as well as the strength and weakness of these three sciences, Trayi, *varta* (economics) and *dandaniti*. It benefits the people, imports steadiness to intellect in adversity and prosperity. It also gives dexterity or excellence to thought, speech and action. Philosophy, *anviksiki* says Kautilya is the lamp of all sciences, the means of all actions and the support all the laws:

Kautilian *artha*, means of the subsistence of man is now the most important driving force of human beings. The concept of economic development in the modern times has created a methodology of approach to achieve maximum economic gain by reckless exploitation of the means and consequently a management system is evolved where human excellence means to give proper leadership to achieve one's goals and targets of maximum economic benefits. In today's world the amassing of wealth through the drug trade, smuggling of goods, evasion of taxes, selling of state secrets, exploiting the means, and also destroying the ecological balance, display *artha* (wealth) acquired through adharmic acts, greed and materialistic consumerism. S.K. Chakroborty with the help of ancient Sanskrit philosophical texts has admirably evolved a management system where human excellence is achieved through the dynamics of *gunas: sattva, rajas* and *tames*. His contention is that in any walk of life anywhere leadership that has done a lasting good to humanity and the world has been rooted predominantly in *sattva guna*. This is so because as a leader acquires more and more *sattva guna*, with a progressive diminution of *tamas* and an increasing disciplining of *rajas*, he tends more and more to develop an integrated personality. If the links of the small 'me' with the supreme 'I' be firmer and stronger the greater would be the integration and that gives him a level of excellence to create a value-oriented approach for both material and spiritual prosperity and then only any developmental issue becomes meaningful to human lives.

India will have to look into its own ancient Sanskrit literature to find out relevant lessons in the area of management. To cite a couple of such sources Bhishma Parva or Vidurniti of Mahabharata or Bhartrihari or Panchatantra all contain innumerable management tips which can be translated into the modern level management. If Zen Buddhism can be successfully built into the Japanese system of management, I feel nothing can prevent us from incorporating the best in Indian thought into the Indian system of Management, an exercise which will definitely be more effective in tackling the management problems of our country.

The ultimate meaning of Human Excellence is to be in bliss, in happiness, to be one with all to be, as open as the sky, to be as embracing as the breeze and to be as luminous as the bright Sun and ultimately to be one with the pure consciousness- that is manifest as everything.

In this process you find less and less of yourself everyday. And the less you find yourself, in same proportion grow your blessings, your benediction, your bliss fullness and your level of excellence.

Slowly, slowly you learn the mathematics of the world of excellence that the more you are the more in hell, the less you are, the more in 'heaven. The day you are not, it is the state of *jivanmukta*- the ultimate peak of excellence. There is no self any more- Now you are one with the Eternal.

