

## REFLECTION UPON MORAL JUDGMENT IN PEDAGOGIC DISCOURSE

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper discusses ethics in terms of teaching and moral situation arising in a pedagogic discourse. Under such condition, many a times, it becomes difficult for a teacher to arrive at a decision due to conflicting situation that it creates. Inherent in this is the assumption that there are no single principles for arriving at a solution under such paralytic situation. The paper dispels the notion that there are certain proven rules capable of guiding us while addressing moral situation. The authors strongly believe that there is no escape from such situation arising while teaching and if a teacher want to address such situation then he/she must have to become a reflective teacher since no amount of psychological or pedagogical knowledge would help us take this decision rather they only help us organize and teach knowledge and skills in effective ways. Taking cue from the Lord Krishna-Arjun discourse of epic Mahabharata, the authors tries to delve deeper into the matter to arrive at pragmatic solution for moral judgment.*

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching is often taken as merely disseminating information and correlating facts derived from books to the children. But the fact is that it is not limited to providing information rather it is a very complex activity and many a times creates difficult situation to deal in with. The purpose of teaching is to create an integrated personality among students and hence it should not be seen in terms of merely producing scholars and technicians as market demands. Reflecting upon above mentioned purpose of teaching, a teacher faces several problems pertaining to classroom pedagogic dissemination and the most difficult among them is the problem of making ethical and moral decision freely. Many a times a teacher get paralyzed in making decision under such situation because of the conflicting values relating to personal self and professional self. A teacher in no circumstances can evade such situation in classroom pedagogic discourse which he/she may address through moral judgment. To understand moral judgment, it is imperative to understand 'ethics' since both of them are closely related and two side of the same coin.

Philologically the word 'ethics' has been derived from the term 'ethos', which means 'character' and hence it is also called Moral

Philosophy. Ethics is basically a science of character, habits of activity or behaviour of human beings. The word 'moral' is a derived from the Latin word 'mores' meaning conventions or practice. Hence, ethics may also literally means the science of convention or practice and the science of human conduct. In terms of teaching, habits and behaviour are relative to the permanent peculiarities of teacher's character where as conduct is the mirror of character. Thus, teaching ethics is relative to the science of character or habit of a teacher reflected in pedagogical discourse. It evaluates teacher's habits, character and voluntary determinations and discusses their propriety or otherwise.

Ethics in general considers the duties of human beings, where as in context of teaching, it is related to the duties of teacher towards their profession. Being an ethical science it pronounces ethical decisions upon conduct of a teacher which is reflected through motive in conduct. Thus, there is voluntary determination which is activated form of character. Therefore, it studies what is right and what is wrong in character with regard to pedagogy. Since the propriety of habits and determination can be determined by measuring them with the ideals of life, therefore, there may occur a conflicting situation for a teacher which paves a way for the

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importance of ethics relating to teaching.

In ethical situation, supreme good determines the propriety of the immediate good. For example, teachers are supposed to teach the students since it is his immediate good because the academic future of students depends upon it. However, in some conditions a teacher may have to desist from taking the class in order to care his ailing mother. Here the propriety of the immediate good of teaching class is determined by the supreme good of postulating the superiority of duty to oneself. Thus, ethics is above all the science of the supreme good however; it is different from the natural and factual sciences and is a normative science. It shows what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. In the words of James Seth (1908), "As the science of the Good, it is the science par excellence of the ideal and the ought". In Muirnead's words, "It is related not merely, to temporal behaviour but to behaviour in the form of the basis of legal decision". Its function is to give decisions on behaviour, whether the behaviour is right or wrong. Similarly, Mackenzie says, "Ethics can be defined as the study of what is right or good in conduct". In this definition ethics has been accepted as the study of both right and good. But there is difference between right and good. 'Rectus' the Latin word from which right has been derived, means straight or according to law. Thus, good behaviour will correspond to law. Good comes from the German 'gut', meaning that which is useful for the supreme good. In this instance, good is that which leads to supreme good. Mostly good is taken to mean an end, not a means to an end.

The most widely accepted aim of education is man making or character building. Prof. J.S. Mackenzie<sup>4</sup>, says that as the science of character ethics analyses the psychology of ethical consciousness. It shows how different moral norms evolve in different circumstances but then it examines the validity of these norms and provides solid basis for social ethos of the educand. It examines the theories moral of standard and shows the possibility of arriving at a correct ethical criterion. Ethics is not only

theoretical rather it also helps in the application of moral principles in actual life. Therefore, ethical activities are accompanied by a feeling of vice and virtue and details for it. Due to the relation of good and bad to every human activity, the field of ethics includes the conclusions of other sciences and arts. Ethics gives moral judgments on these too. In this way, many psychological, political, economic, sociological, religious and philosophical problems come to be included in the field of ethics. Philosophical problems like the real form of human personality, voluntary nature of volition, immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and unity and the moral order in the universe, etc., are included in ethics. The sociological problem relating the relation between the individual and the society is also an ethical problem. In this way, in brief, it may be said that wherever there is human behaviour and human volitions, there is scope for ethics. In John Dewey's words, "The foremost conclusion is that morals have to do with all activity into which alternative possibilities enter. For wherever they enter, a difference between better and worst arises.<sup>5</sup>" Thus, ethics in terms of teaching has greater importance.

The complex human life exerts differing and forceful pressure upon a teacher. Since every human being has intelligence and sentience, therefore, the feelings, senses, desires and tendencies pull the person in one direction where as the intellect, create a conflicting situation and pulls in another direction. The teacher often confront with a situation where he/she has to deal in with different non-conscious material and conscious human being, therefore, he/she find it difficult to take up to any of the causes of action open to him/her. In such a conflicting situation a teacher becomes paralyzed and it becomes a difficult task for him/her to take decision. Such a situation can be termed as a moral situation. As for example, in the Mahabharata, Arjuna faced a moral situation when the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas stood face to face in the battlefield and he observed that the fight is between the relatives and saw no fun in wading through the blood of these people to be a crowned king as he thought that killing them would ruin his own family.

Speaking in his sorrowful vein Arjuna said:

न चैतैतद्विधमः कतरन्नो गरीयो यद्वा जयेम  
यदि वा नो जययुः!!  
यानेवेव हत्वा न जिजीविष्माम स्तेवेवस्थिताः प्रप्रमुखे  
धार्तराष्ट्राः!!  
कार्पण्यदोष्टोपेपहत स्वभावः पृच्छामि त्वां  
धर्मममूढचेतेतेताः!!  
यच्छेयेयः स्यान्निश्चितम् ब्रूहि तन्मे शिष्यस्तेहेहं शाधि मां त्वां  
प्रपन्नम् !!

It means that we do not know the course of action which is best for us and we do not even know whether we will defeat them or they will beat us down and those son of Dhratrashttra whom we do not want to kill and succeed are arrayed against us. With my very being tainted by the vice of faint hatredness and my mind puzzled with regard to duty, I ask you (The Krishna) to tell me a decidedly satisfactory means because I am your disciple and quite under your protection. Give me guidance.

Actually, such a moral situation arises because of the fact that a human being has moral consciousness. Under such situation, though the reason may become paralyzed but the moral consciousness remains activated and awake. A teacher differentiates between good and evil but he can not make a distinction between what is supreme good and what is complete evil which puts him/her in a fix situation. Thus, the moral conscious of a person remain acute in moral situation.

The second characteristic of a moral situation is the presence of alternatives. In a moral situation there are at least two alternatives, both of which appear to be equally good and equally bad. Due to this doubt, the person's will power does not work. The main cause of this doubt is the conflict between an individual and the society, between selfishness and selflessness. In the above mentioned example, Arjun had an advantage in fighting. Had he died, he would have gone to heaven or else he would have got the kingdom. However, on the other, was the question of society. The benefit for the society was abstaining from fighting which Arjun himself acknowledged and said benefit of the

society is superior to individual good. He was finding it difficult to choose between the two alternatives.

A man in a moral situation is aware of his responsibility due to his moral consciousness. But his responsibility seems to weigh even heavier due to free will. He thinks that he is the architect of his destiny and that good or bad in future depend upon him. If a teacher does not think himself independent of the internal or external conflicting situation, moral situation would have no meaning. Thus the cause of moral strife is the freedom of teacher. Even in such situation a teacher remain aware of the social bonds. He keeps on feeling that he should not do anything against the society and the people. Thus, the strife between freedom and determinism is as strong as the struggle between selfishness and selflessness. In the above mentioned example, it is clear that Arjun had decided not to fight but even then being a Kshatriya he feels it his duty to fight and will show his cowardice if he decide not to fight. Thus he becomes stupefied between his personal desire and public duty.

### THE REMEDY

Moral deliberation is an important factor to address a moral situation. If moral analysis can make a moral truth clear that the true personal gain lies in selflessness, then this conflicting situation would end. In the above mentioned example, the conflicting situation arose to Arjun because he differentiated between knowledge and action, left action and steeped himself in knowledge. Had he performed his duty as natural role without any longing, the two would have appeared to be identical which Lord Krishna said that actually knowledge and action are not different.

एकं सांख्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति स पश्यति!!

(He who see yoga and Sankhya as one,  
see correct).

Thus, under moral situation a teacher should keep doing his duty without consciously getting attached to it as in such situation there often remain a conflict between an individual self and

social self. The moral situation paves a way for doubt about the genuineness of the action as to whether the action is right or wrong. The only way to dispelling the doubt is to logical analysis of the alternatives and to gain knowledge of the right and the wrong and to choose the right. The moral strife of Arjuna was solved through logical ways. As a result of which Arjuna says to Lord Krishna

नष्टमोहेहः स्मृतिर्लब्ध्वा त्वप्रसादान्मयाच्युत !!

स्थितोऽस्मि गतसंदेहेह करिष्ये वचनंतंतव !!

(O, Achyuta! By your kindness, my delusion has been removed and I have received knowledge whereby I am now out of it and I will obey your command. This is the solution of a moral situation. Moral decision comes after moral solution)

### ARRIVING AT MORAL JUDGEMENT

A teacher may reach at a moral decision if he/she follows certain steps as required.

**Classification of alternatives:** It is due to the indistinct nature of the alternatives in an ethical situation that no path suggests itself. In the Gita, Arjuna had two alternatives- to fight or not to fight. Although he saw many defects in both the alternatives yet he decided that it was morally creditable to be called a coward and disregard duty than to fight, bringing ruin upon the whole family and he did this for want of better alternatives. Under such thought, to fight would be selfish; it had therefore, to be sacrificed for selfishness. But he also knew that he is disregarding his duty as a Kshatriya and thus he was in a fix due to this conflict. The other alternative that Lord Krishna suggested was the third alternatives whereby work is to be done with a purpose of social consolidation and consequence to be left upon God. In such a situation, duties will be fulfilled and there will be no bondage due to result of actions.

**Analysis of consequences:** After the alternatives have been classified, the duty of a teacher should be analysis of the consequences. The teacher analyzes consequences of alternatives on the basis of history and past experience. If the consequences of all

alternatives are analyzed, the situation becomes clear and moral judgment easier. In case of above mentioned example, Arjun, analyzed more about the consequences of fighting than the consequences of abstaining from it. Lord Krishna said that infamy accruing from abstention would be worse than death. Besides, analyzing the consequences of the third and the best alternative, nishkama karma yoga, he has shown that it has no defects and is good from every standpoint. Thus, it is essential to analyze all alternatives while moral judgment.

### Imagining oneself in the time and place of the

**consequences:** By the power of imagination, a teacher should think of the consequences of his work by imagining to himself the shape of things to come. Thinking in this way may facilitate judgment. The more powerful the imagination, the quicker will be decision of correct course of action to be followed.

**Empathetic analysis:** A teacher with an eye for ethics should be imaginative enough to be able to establish a connection with others and to understand their condition. He should analyze the consequences of his work from the viewpoint of society. He should put himself in the place of another and think of the effect his work may have on them. Only then will he be able to work rightly from the social viewpoint as any work improper from the viewpoint of altruism is always improper, whatever may be the justification from selfish viewpoint. Thus, a compromise between the personal and social good is necessary for moral judgment.

**Evaluation and comparison of values:** After the forth step a teacher should evaluate the activities of each alternative and see which one of them has higher moral value comparatively. Such task makes a proper knowledge of ethics indispensable. He should know about the values and which of them are superior comparatively. Since, in a moral situation intellect becomes paralyzed so that advice can be solicited from some able person. In the example cited above, Lord Krishna evaluated the various alternatives and after comparison of each value, suggested the best course to follow.



**Decision:** A mutual comparison of values of alternatives brings the best alternative in to focus, leaving the other out of it and hence the path is decided under moral judgment.

**Action:** Unless the decision is given an active form, the mental struggle of moral situation does not cease. Thus, a complete solution of moral decision is possible only when it is made active.

Thus, after discussing the matter conceptually and theoretically and on the basis of Krishna- Arjun discourse, it may be said that the above steps in the activity of moral decision provides a pragmatic solution to address such paralytic situation if encountered. It is possible that their order may be slightly changed or may vary for better solution.

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Prof. J. S. Mackenzie, classify ethics into four parts which is the foundations of all education. These are: 1. Psychology of ethical consciousness; 2. Sociology of an ethical life; 3. Theories of ethical criterion; and 4. The application of this criterion in ethical life

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