

Threads of Business Ethics in the Sigal Sutta

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Introduction

Ethics is the normative study of human behaviour in the ordinary business of life. It deals with the rightness of human conduct, considering external standards and a set of goals toward which life is to evolve. However, the rise of modern mechanical civilization and the rapid development of science and technology gave birth to a Godless mode of moral thinking, causing a change in age-old, static ethics, much like clouds before a strong wind. It broke normative universalism by rendering moral measures and meaningless propositions, even before creating a new ethical code. This age of moral uncertainty gave rise to Applied Ethics.

The lively ethical debate spawned by Thomson through her article, "A Defense of Abortion", wherein she argued that even if a fetus is a person with the right to live, should it be permissible to be aborted? is still in progress in the field of Applied Philosophy. Peter Singer's books, *Animal Ethics*, *Practical Ethics*, and many others, became the impetus for many ethicists to apply philosophical analysis to concrete ethical issues. Several areas of Applied Ethical studies emerged owing to their situational nature. Though these are different from each other, they adopt similar methods in their analysis under their ethical foci. It gave birth to various fields of Applied Ethics, such as: -

- Animal ethics: - Is it permissible to eat meat?
- Information Ethics: - May I pirate a music?
- Sexual Ethics: - Should prostitution be legalized?
- Environmental Ethics: - Do trees have rights of their own?
- Business Ethics: - Do corporations have moral status? And so on.

The present paper deals with tracing out the threads of Business Ethics, in the Sigal Sutta, a chapter of the 3rd volume of Digh Nikaya of the Pali Tipitaka. It is undoubtedly a piece of outstanding individuality in the entire Pali Tipitaka. It prescribes codes of conduct for the common people and even the professionals, which is highly useful even today, in solving the modern ethical riddles, that people face in the everyday business of life. It suggests the duties of a layman or political and social activists, as well as business professionals in society. Before dealing with the threads of business Ethics it seems proper to narrate in brief Business Ethics.

Business Ethics

It is a classification of applied ethics. It evaluates ethical principles and moral problems in a business environment [1]. Business is an economic and social activity. It is social because it is of the people (owned by the people), for the people (meant for the people), and by the people (run by the people). Any social activity implies moral evaluation. Since business makes a difference in the nature and social environment, ethical activity is also involved here. Normally it is believed, that business and ethics have a remote relation, as it is self-centric. Since selfishness is present here ethics cannot function, as profit is its motto. "When profit becomes the sole obsession, such ethical concerns are ignored [2]. When moral norms are ignored the efficiency in respect of production and distribution gets affected. Hence, there is a need for business ethics, as it examines moral problems that can arise in a business environment. This includes Corporate Social Responsibility. It is a concept whereby organizations consider the interest of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities, and the environment

in all aspects of their operation, over and above the statutory obligation to comply with legislation.

The Buddha has always recommended inculcating value in human character and conduct [3]. In the business world, disvalues like dishonesty, lying, bribes, kickbacks, or shady deals often ensure greater business prospects. Though these are expedient in short gains in the long run these are proven self-defeating. The moral values pay in the long run for any business concern. It makes any business enterprise a healthy unit even if other things remain constant. Since value-based work culture results in greater success in terms of efficiency in performance business enterprise, the Buddha has recommended observing moral virtues (Sila) in everyday life and shunning the disvalues as they ruin the entire personality [4].

Business involves management and workers. "Since business is directed to a common goal, it is necessary that the human components are harmoniously and optimally harnessed so that they function to achieve the unitary goal [5]." The Buddha advises shunning the friendship of persons whose conduct is immoral. He has given a long list of the persons with whom one can never enter into a partnership or friendship. At the same time, He has earmarked the types and qualities of good persons [6]. Now, in the selection of partners, workers, executives, and other members for a business organization one must be careful. In doing so one must take into account one's skill, functional expertise, and efficiency at the same time value and virtue of the candidate must be taken into account. Persons of good moral character should be considered while recruiting employees or entering into a partnership with someone. The Buddha, in Sigal Sutta, has enumerated the types and qualities of a person, in detail, with whom one can enter into friendship. He says "Four are the friends who should be reckoned as sound at heart (Suhad): -the helper; a friend who is the same in happiness and in adversity; the friend of good counsel; the friend who sympathizes [7]." The Buddha has provided reason and rationale for such selection [8]. He further adds

"The friend who is a helpmate, and the friend of bright days and dark, and he who shows What is you need, and he who throbs for you? With sympathy: - these four the wise should know"

Relation of the Employer and Employee

It is crucial [9]. The Buddha explains to Sigala how to take care of good friends, employers, and employees to work together for the common end. For earning maximum profit, the employers have forgotten this relationship and their pious duties towards them. Obsessed with his self-interest, they forget the basic fact that good employees are the fulcrum of the business activity." It is suicidal... because his share in the form of salary ... diminishes the profit [10]." Employees are the wings of any business house or industry. Employers must cater to their employees' basic needs by ensuring healthcare facilities, occupational safety, merit-based incentives, etc., and creating a working ambience for employees. If these are met with properly their excellence, ability, and zeal to perform are multiplied. This is the reason that the Buddha has opined that such friends should be treated tenderly and with proper care. They should be served like a parent, if they are old enough, and like sons, if they are junior to you in age and experience [11].

Man is a psychosomatic being. His sentiments, feelings, willingness, actions, and needs must be paid proper attention and care. Otherwise, his skill, efficiency, and expertise will be affected adversely and that may convert any healthy business house into a sick unit. The above-mentioned, words of the Buddha, indicate that through one's kind treatment, one can win the confidence of a friend (in a social context) and business partner or employee (in a professional context). In the age of globalization workers for any industry or business house come from different parts of the world, often leaving their family members. People with heterogeneous backgrounds, mindsets, and capacities constitute the team that works for a common goal. The proper care and sharing of their feelings and problems, by the immediate boss as well as kind words and homely behaviour of the employer, or seniors of the firm may inculcate in them the family feeling for all the members (including employee and employer) as well as for the industry or business house. Thus, homogeneity can be maintained. In this atmosphere, people will perform their duty with multiplied vigour, and even a sick unit can recover and convert into a healthy one.

Duties towards the People and Crisis Management

Today, industrialization has changed the hue and colour of the society, and the natural environment. On the geographical and natural plan, forests were cleared, and people were dislodged from their indigenous soil. This breaks their sentiment and aggravates their discontent. The physical rehabilitation and the financial compensation can never address the problem of alienation. It is imperative on the part of the corporate world to run welfare programs soothing to their psychic wounds, in addition to enhancing the economic well-being of the people around them.

Besides that, it is the duty of the industries or corporate houses to assist the government during the critical stage of man-made or natural calamity, as well as their own time of crisis. In case the company becomes insolvent due to a huge loss or recession in the market. In both situations, it is the moral duty of any business concerned to meet the crisis in the interest of the nation, shareholders, and of its own. Accordingly, the fund allocation should be made to meet such an insurgency. The Buddha, in Sigal Sutta, has categorically said, "One should divide his earned wealth into four equal portions. Two portions should be used for him and household work (in the case for the promotion of business and welfare of the employees), one portion should be spent on life-friendly things and the natural environment (in the corporate sector, for ameliorating the conditions of the employees and the people who have suffered because of the establishing the industry), and one portion should keep reserve for crisis management.

References

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2. Aditya Kumar Mohanta, Philosophy of Value, Centre of Advance Study in Philosophy, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar 2nd edition. 2007. 190.
3. Sigala Sutta, Digh Nikaya. 182: 3.
4. Ibid 182-185.
5. Aditya Kumar Mohanta, op cit. 191.
6. Sigala Sutta, op cit. 187-188.

7. Dialogues of the Buddha, T. W. Rhys Davids. Low Price Publication, Delhi, First published in 1910, Reprinted in L. P. P. 2001. 3: 178-179
8. Dialogues of the Buddha, op cit. 179.
9. Aditya Kumar Mohanta, op cit. 209.
10. Ete pi mitte cattaro, iti vinnaya pandito. Sakkaccam payirupaseyya, mata puttam va orasam, Singala Sutta, op cit. 188; With sympathy: - these four the wise should know, as friends, and should devote himself to themunjeyya, as a mother to her own, her bosom's child., Dialogues of the Buddha, op cit. 179.
11. "Evam bhoge samahatva, almatto kule gihi, Catudha vibhaje bhoge, sa ve mittaniganthati. Ekena bhoge bhunjeyya, dvihikammam payojaye Catuttham ca nidhapeyya, apadasu bhavissti" ti. Singala Sutta, op cit. 188.