

MODERN MAN'S DILEMMA AND KRISHNA'S TEACHINGS

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Abstract

Ethical and moral dilemmas are a tricky territory one usually prefers not to tread, for it causes a lot of strain on his decision-making faculty. Besides, the decision taken during such a dilemma inevitably leaves one with some sadness as neither of the choices is unambiguously acceptable. The purpose of this research is to show how one can avail the teachings of Lord Krishna to resolve his dilemmas.

Key words: Ethical dilemma, morals, Krishna

Moral dilemma versus ethical dilemma

Moral and ethical dilemmas are two different things, but these terms are often used interchangeably. An ethical dilemma deals with the rules and ethics. Whether to abide by an office rule or break it is an ethical dilemma. Here, the rules are already set by an external source like a code of conduct at workplaces.

Armed forces, police, lawyers, doctors, sportspersons and teachers etc have their professional code of conduct laid down by their institution.

A moral dilemma tests man's own principles regarding right and wrong. Individual's belief system determines his morality. Morals of a lawyer may prevent him from defending a rapist but his ethics as a professional lawyer require him to defend the accused.

While ethics may vary depending on the place, time and context, morals of a man are mostly constant and consistent at all times and places.

Yet another difference between the ethics and morals is that the former is governed by professional, societal and legal guidelines, while the latter transcends these norms.

Moral and ethical dilemmas have troubled man since ages. At times, the same situation may involve both the types of dilemmas.

When ethics and morals are on the same side

(a) When man's ethics and morals are on the same side, his dilemma is not very torturous. The following example explains it. An ATM dispenses with an extra Rs 2,000 note. The man would face the dilemma of whether to return the extra money to the bank or keep it. The ethical code of conduct laid out for an ATM user warrants that he must return the extra money to the bank. Here, his morality would also tell him to return the unearned Rs 2,000 note. However, his greed for keeping the unearned money is posing a problem to him. So here, ethics and morals of the man are on the same side. Such a dilemma is not very torturous for the man as it does not involve any ethical or moral paradox.

When ethics and morals confront each other

(1) The example of a lawyer given earlier underlines one such situation. If he refuses to defend a rapist, he violates his profession's ethical code of conduct, and if he defends the accused, he experiences transgressing his own morality.

(2) Arjuna had also faced a similar situational conflict at the beginning of the battle of Mahabharat around 5,000 years ago in Kurukshetra, now situated in Haryana state of India. A tormenting dilemma struck him when he saw his own gurus, grandfathers, cousins and relatives in the opposition camp. The ethics of

being a warrior warrant him to fight even when the enemy happens to be his gurus, grandfathers and relatives. If he does not do so, he violates the ethics of a warrior and subsequently loses the battle. And if he chooses to uphold the warrior's ethics and fights, he transgresses his own morals which warrant him to care and respect his gurus and grandfathers. Here, we see that the dilemma emerging out of a confrontation between the ethics and morals of a man are very grave and tormenting.

Modern man's dilemma

We are using Lord Krishna's teachings below to resolve a hypothetical dilemma which a modern man may face in reality as well.

The national cricket team has reached the knock-out stage of the World Cup tournament after performing well in the initial rounds. The World Cup being the cricket's biggest tournament held after a gap of five years, the pressure on all the players, coach and supporting staff is tremendous. A single defeat will knock the team out of the championship, breaking the hearts of over 120 crore cricket-crazy countrymen. The coach and team management have warned the players against any complacency and laxity in practice sessions and matches.

The coach has laid down a strict rule that any player found reporting late to the practice session or skipping it would be immediately sacked. Viraj Sahni is a talented opening batsman who is in a tremendous form and has single-handedly ensured team's victory in earlier matches in the tournament. However, he is lazy and undisciplined. Despite the coach's warning, Sahni sneaks out of his hotel room in the night for a drink at a pub, wakes up late in the morning and skips the practice session.

The coach is furious. What should he do – sack Sahni from the team in the middle of the tournament or let him off with just a warning?

Sacking him would weaken the team while letting him off would send out a wrong message to other members of the team.

Krishna's words of wisdom

We would like to resolve the coach's dilemma through the teachings of Lord Krishna. One of the many lessons that Krishna teaches mankind through his own life and conduct is that one should be pragmatic in the face of a crisis or a dilemma and try to minimise the loss (if it cannot be wholly averted) and collateral damage.

After the five Pandava brothers return from their 13 years of exile, they demand their share of half kingdom from Dhritrashtra. However, Dhritrashtra's eldest son Duryodhan rejects their demand and instead challenges them to a battle. As the battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas seems inevitable, Lord Krishna gets worried. He knows that the battle would cause catastrophic losses in terms of life and property to both the sides. He makes one last-ditch effort to avert the battle by reaching out with a proposal to Duryodhan.

He says:

"Duryodhan, the battle would cause immeasurable loss of life and property to both the sides. Every effort should be made to avoid this mayhem. Give Pandavas just five villages to subsist on instead of the half kingdom, and they would still be satisfied. This way, you would not lose much and they would not ask for more. This will avert the massive battle."

However, Duryodhan rejects this proposal of Lord Krishna, shattering all hopes of peace. He says:

"I will not give Pandavas land measuring even the tip of a needle. If they have the strength, they can win it in the battlefield."

Thus, we see that Krishna tries his best to avert the battle and minimise the loss of life and property. That his efforts fail due to Duryodhan's arrogance and greed is a different thing.

Resolution of coach's dilemma

We have seen that Krishna advocates pragmatic approach and adjustments during a crisis in the larger interest of the mankind. What should be

the coach's approach in Viraj Sahni's case? Should he sack the in-form batsman for violating the ethical code of conduct laid down for all the players? But this will dilute the country's chances of winning the biggest cricket tournament. And if the coach lets Sahni off the hook lightly, it would send out the message to other players that one could get away even in case of grave indiscipline. It would also undermine the authority of the coach and team management. This is an ethical dimension to this case. One must check the moral dimension for arriving at a well thought-out decision. Over 120 crore people have high expectations from the team, of which Sahni is a very important player.

Sacking him would disturb the equilibrium of the whole team which is currently functioning as a very close-knit, cohesive unit. It could affect the performance of other players as well.

Being in an important position, the coach is morally bound to take into account these possible implications of sacking Sahni. In the larger interest of the country and team, the coach should adopt a pragmatic approach and avoid sacking Sahni from the team during the tournament. Presently, it would be appropriate to issue a strict warning to Sahni and bar him from playing in a few international matches after

the World Cup, besides imposing a hefty fine on him.

Conclusion

In Sahni's case, morality triumphs over ethics. From Krishna's teachings, we learn that while facing a moral or an ethical dilemma, one should always look at the larger picture, take into account the long-term implications, adopt a pragmatic approach and act in the larger interest of the society and mankind.

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