



Advancing Biotechnology, Moral Crossroads and Religion: A Window through Hinduism

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Abstract

Today's world is, technological and market driven. Our moral convictions are exposed to emerging imperatives of scientific promise and commercialisation, threatening our long cherished assumptions of morality. In the prevailing milieu, the concepts of right and wrong have to be interpreted in the context of individual and community perspectives, keeping intact the interests of heterogeneous groups as well as the present and future generations. Diversity needs to be blended with pluralism. At times, it reflects a unique conflict of equity and legitimacy. The roots of orderly human conduct lie in human virtues, which are innate and universal, providing a chaste and candid tool to determine moral content of human pursuits. For centuries, religion has been a bastion of human virtues, opening a divine path of wisdom and orderly conduct. Religion has a unique property of convergence to truth. Religion is thus a profoundly enabling institution providing insights in to phenomena, which lie beyond our knowledge and control. In this paper, I explore the positive reflections as enshrined in the Indian perception, known as Hinduism, a way of life blending spirituality and belief, blessed with unique wisdom and insight, rooted in intrinsic human virtues, having the capability to provide direction and clarity in today's world of technological turbulence, expanding human personhood, evolving scientific promise and growing moral ambiguity.

Keywords

Biotechnological advancement • Religion • Virtue • Morality • Diversity • Pluralism • Hinduism

Gelişen Biyoteknoloji, Ahlaki Kavşaklar ve Din: Hinduizm'den Bir Pencere

Öz

Bugünün dünyası, teknolojik ve piyasa odaklıdır. Ahlaki kanaatlerimiz, sıkı sıkıya bağlı kaldığımız ahlaki varsayımlarımızı tehdit eden bilimsel vaat ve ticarileştirmenin gün yüzüne çıkan tahakkümlerine maruz kalmaktadır. Hâkim sosyal çevrede doğru ve yanlış kavramları; heterojen grupların ve mevcut ve gelecek nesillerin menfaatleri güvence altına alınarak bireysel ve toplumsal perspektifler bağlamında yorumlanmalıdır. Çeşitliliğin çoğulculukla harmanlanması gerekir. Çeşitlilik bazen, benzersiz bir eşitlik ve meşruiyet çatışmasını yansıtır. Muntazam insan davranışlarının kökenleri, fitri ve evrensel olup insan uğraşlarının ahlaki esaslarının belirlenmesinde sade ve saf bir araç temin eden insani erdemlerde yatar. Yüzyıllardır din, hikmetin ve muntazam davranışların ilahi bir yolunu açarak insani erdemlerin kalesi olmuştur. Din, gerçeğe yakınlaşma noktasında eşsiz bir hususiyete sahiptir. Böylece din, bilgimizin ve kontrolümüzün ötesine geçen olgular için sezgi sağlayan derinlemesine imkân sunan bir kurumdur. Bu makalede, Hint sezgisinde kutsal kabul edildiği şekliyle olumlu yansımaları, yani Hinduizm olarak bilinen, maneviyat ve inancı harmanlayan, eşsiz hikmet ve sezgi ile kutsanmış, içsel insani erdemlerden kaynağını alan; günümüzün teknolojik açıdan çalkantılı, insan bireyliğinin genişlediği, bilimsel vaatlerin geliştiği ve ahlaki belirsizliğin arttığı dünyasına yön verme ve açıklık sağlama yeteneğine sahip yaşam yolunu inceliyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Biyoteknolojik gelişme • Din • Erdem • Ahlak • Çeşitlilik • Çoğulculuk • Hinduizm

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In a world where priorities in health range from safe drinking water to breast prosthesis, promises of biotechnology range from humanising animals to creating new life forms, and the concerns of human rights range from the rights of the dead to the rights of the unborn, the perspectives are dire, deep and diverse. Morality is on the crossroads and in several areas the concepts of right and wrong are unclear. For many, morality includes freedom of making designer babies, the alteration of the human race, endless life span, higher intellect, sharper memory, beautiful body, enhanced sexual prowess, and the fulfilment of scores of urges. An individual's body and its characteristics have become the object of commercialisation leading to prolonged legal battles, with no definite results.² People are dead but their bodies remain alive. Death does not stop them from reproduction.³ The industry's raw material is not silicon or steel but the human cells and tissues. Human relationships and institutions like ancestry, parentage, marriage, family and consanguinity are being redefined - even collapsing. The roots of our moral convictions are exposed to emerging imperatives of scientific promise, threatening our long cherished assumptions of morality. Utility with its vast potential of making the life worthless and misconceived is compelling one to search new meaning in the human existence. Ethicists, theologians, jurists, healthcare professionals and policy makers are busy addressing the emerging challenges but the world continues to be muddled with moral ambiguity. Owing to past bitter experiences and lack of conceptual clarity the promises of biotechnology have turned into suspicions and many biotechnological feats have been shelved for fear of moral miscarriage. Recent gene editing of human embryo by Chinese scientist He Jiankui leading to international outcry is one such example.⁴

The roots of orderly human conduct lie in human virtues, which are innate and universal, providing a chaste and candid tool to determine moral content of human pursuits. Virtues reflected as moral consciousness of human beings - recognized as "conscience" by the global community in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -⁵ provide a far surer way of distinction between right and wrong than intellectual

2 Moore v. Regents of University of California, 793 P.2d 479 (Cal. 1990) California Supreme Court, <https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/2608931/moore-v-regents-of-university-of-california/>

3 R. R. Kishore, "Born from the Ashes: Ethics and Law of Posthumous Reproduction," *EJAIB (Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics)* 27, no. 6, (2017): 190-201. <http://www.eubios.info/EJAIB112017.pdf>

4 Suzanne Sataline -Ian Sample, "Scientist in China Defends Human Embryo Gene Editing", *The Guardian* (28 November, 2018). 30 <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/nov/28/scientist-in-china-defends-human-embryo-gene-editing>

5 Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by United Nations General Assembly at its third session on 10 December 1948 <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

attributes like logic and deduction. For centuries, religion has been a bastion of human virtues, opening a divine path of wisdom and orderly conduct. Religion has a unique property of convergence to truth. Religion is thus a profoundly enabling institution providing insights in to phenomena which lie beyond our knowledge and control.

This paper is an attempt to explore the positive reflections as enshrined in the Indian perception, known as Hinduism, a way of life blending spirituality and belief, blessed with unique wisdom and insight, rooted in innate human virtues, having capability to provide direction and clarity in today's world of technological turbulence, expanding human personhood, evolving scientific promise and growing moral ambiguity.

The Challenge

The human genome sequencing which took more than a decade and cost \$ 1 billion can now be completed within 24 hours for less than \$ 1000.⁶ The strides have been phenomenal. The human status which took millions of years to evolve can be changed or destroyed in a day. Several intractable issues need to be addressed. Conflicting perspectives have led the world's apical judicial fora to deliver heterogeneous pronouncements. While the Supreme Court of the U.S.A found that a "naturally occurring DNA segment is a product of nature and not patent eligible"⁷, the Federal Court of Australia held that the isolation of the gene was in itself sufficient to afford patent protection.⁸

Organ transplantation continues to be a mirage for millions who die while awaiting organs. Altruistic organ donations are not sufficient and xenotransplantation and growth of organs have failed to materialise. Dire scarcity continues and there is a feeling that a prohibition on organ sales is unrealistic.⁹ The area of biomedical research involving human subjects raises several vital issues such as relevance of research to the host population, informed consent, safety of the volunteers, care in the event of research

6 "The Cost of Sequencing a Human Genome," *National Human Genome Research Institute*, (July 6, 2016)<https://www.genome.gov/27565109/the-cost-of-sequencing-a-human-genome/>; Bradley J. Fikes, "New Machines Can Sequence Human Genome in One Hour", Illumina announces The San Diego Union-Tribune (January 9, 2017). <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/biotech/sd-me-illumina-novaseq-20170109-story.html>.

7 *Association for Molecular Pathology v. Myriad Genetics, Inc.*, 569 U.S. 576 (2013).

8 *Cancer Voices Australia v. Myriad Genetics Inc* (2013) FCA 65 file:///G:/New%20folder%20(2)/New%20Volume(F)/Genetic%20Patentability-Australian%20Judgment.htm

9 R. R. Kishore, "Human Organs, Scarcities and Sale: Morality Revisited," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31, (2005): 362-365.

induced injuries, accessibility of the product to the people and exploitation of the poor that need to be addressed.¹⁰ The end of life decisions continue to be tainted with undue moral paternalism, false notions of virtues and conflicting judicial pronouncements forcing many lives to linger aimlessly, in utter pain and agony.¹¹

Assisted reproductive technologies which developed as an answer to infertility are being used for a variety of collateral purposes leading to unwarranted disputes between the reproductive partners, increasing commercialisation and growing exploitation of the vulnerable sections of society. “Human procreation, though seemingly an exclusive private act, has a profoundly public meaning”.¹² Developments in reproductive medicine have transformed what was earlier considered to be a mass of cells into a human being. Moral status of embryo,¹³ right to procreation¹⁴, parentage,

10 R. R. Kishore. “Biomedical Research and Mining of the Poor: The Need for Their Exclusion,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 12, (2006): 175-183.

11 R. R. Kishore. “*Aruna Shanbaug and the Right to Die with Dignity: the Battle Continues*,” *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* 1, no.1, (2016): 38-46.

12 J. L. Velverde, “The Legal Challenge in Assisted Human Reproduction,” *Pharmaceutical Policy and Law* 9, (2007): 164.

13 Kevin D. O’Rourke, O.P, “Is the Human Embryo a Person?,” *Neiswanger Institute of Bioethics and Public Policy Stritch School of Medicine*, (Chicago: Loyola University). <http://opcentral.org/resources/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Embryo-as-Person.pdf>; In re the Estate of the Late K (1996) 5 Tas. R. 365; Davis v. Davis, 842 S.W.2d 588 (Tenn. 1992); Derek Morgan, “Rights and Legal Status of Embryos,” *Australian Health Law Bulletin*, 4, no. 7, 1996; Roe v Wade 420 US 113 (1973); Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania, et al v. Robert P. Casey, et al (505) U.S. 833 (1992); 112 S.Ct. 2791 (1992); 60 U.S. L.W. 4795; Evans v. United Kingdom [2007] 6339/05 Eur. Ct. H.R. 2; Marina Casini, et. al., “Object of Property or Human Being: The Status of the Human Embryo before the European Court of Human Rights”, *Journal for Medical Ethics and Bioethics*, 21, no. 1-2 (2014): 2-13; European Court of Human Rights, Parrillo v. Italy, Application No. 46470/11, Judgment dated 27-08-15 <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22documentcollectionid%22:%5B%22GRANDCHAMBER%22,%22CHAMBER%22%5D,%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-157263%22%7D>

14 Meyer v. Nebraska 262 US 390 (1923); Skinner v. Oklahoma 316 U.S. 535 (1942); Stanley v. Illinois 405 U.S. 645, 651 (1972); Cleveland Bd. of Educ. v. LaFleur, 414 U.S. 632, 639-40 (1973); Eisenstadt v. Baird 405 U.S. 438 (1972); Carey v. Population Services International, 431 U.S. 678 (1977). Pp. 684-686; John A. Robertson, “Noncoital Reproduction and Procreative Liberty,” *Southern California Law Review* 59, (1986): 939-1041; J Boivin, G Pennings, “Parenthood Should be Regarded as a Right,” *Arch Dis Child*, 90, (2005): 784-785. [Available at <http://adc.bmj.com/content/90/8/784.full.html>]; Carl H. Coleman, “Assisted Reproductive Technologies and the Constitution”, *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 30, no.1, (2002), article 4 [Available at <http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol30/iss1/4/>]; Michelle N. Meyer, “State’s Regulation of Assisted Reproductive Technologies. What Does the U. S Constitution Allow?” *Harvard Public Law Working Paper* [http://www.rockinst.org/pdf/health_care/2009-07-States_Regulation_ART.pdf]; Gayle Binion, “Reproductive Freedom and the Constitution: The Limits on Choice,” *4 Berkeley Women’s L.J.*, 12, 1988. <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/bglj/vol4/iss1/2/>; Robertson JA., *Children of Choice: Freedom and the New Reproductive Technologies*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

insemination of unmarried women, ownership of embryo,¹⁵ posthumous reproduction, fate of unimplanted embryos and the child's right to know his/her genetic origin are shrouded in ethical obscurity. Foetal rights increasingly conflict with the maternal rights and it becomes difficult to decide whose rights should prevail.

The human body as a whole enjoys the maximum dignity and is decidedly impervious to any kind of transaction. But, its constituents such as the organs, embryo, foetus, gametes, stem cells and the DNA carry a different perception because of their specific utility and scope of abuse than the body as a whole. As such, the property rights in human body call for definition in generic as well as specific terms i.e. the body as a whole and its different expressions as cells and tissues. The increasing resort to DNA profiling for various purposes - social, legal therapeutic, research and commerce - needs serious deliberation in view of drastic individual stakes involved such as loss of privacy, discrimination, condemnation, unemployment and social ostracization.

Despite vast therapeutic promise in regenerative medicine no definite ethical paradigms have crystallised in the area of cloning of human organs and tissues. No clear consensus has emerged with regard to use of human pluripotent stem cells despite their ability to differentiate into any type of cell and profound therapeutic potential. Brain death has been in vogue for more than forty years but its scientific and social validity continues to be controversial. The informed consent from incapacitated persons, based on their best interests, as determined by the surrogates, poses formidable challenge. The limits of human health need to be defined as in today's world it carries far greater meaning and expectation than the earlier times when it was confined merely to freedom from disease and disability.

In the emerging conundrum, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, is one document which touches upon the intrinsic dimensions of human personhood, close to Indian perception, when it says in its Preamble "Whereas recognition of the *inherent dignity* and of the equal and inalienable rights of all *members of the human family* is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,"¹⁶(*emphasis added*) and also in Article 1. " All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are

15 Davis v. Davis, 842 S.W.2d 588 (Tenn. 1992); Hecht v. Superior Court (Kane), 20 Cal. Rptr. 2d 275, 283 (Cal. 1993). Helene S. Shapo, "Frozen Pre-Embryos and the Right to Change One's Mind", *Duke Journal Of Comparative & International Law* 12, no.75, (2002): 75-103; C.C. v. A.W., 2005 ABQB 290 (CanLII). paras. 21.

16 *Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by United Nations General Assembly at its third session on 10 December 1948, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

endowed with reason and *conscience* and should act towards one another in a *spirit of brotherhood*¹⁷ (*emphasis added*) The expressions “inherent”, “dignity”, “human family”, “spirit of brotherhood” and “conscience” recognized in the said Declaration by the global community in 1948 were enshrined in the Indian cultural thought thousands of years ago as we will see in the later part of this paper.

The advancing biotechnology and the accompanying socio-economic circumstances, in the absence of adequate ethical safeguards, have bred a host of adverse consequences like, undue cost escalation, inordinate delays, ill-informed consents, non-therapeutic interventions, sub-standardisation, negligence, experimentation, commercialisation, discrimination, unwarranted procedures, loss of privacy, religious and cultural transgression, loss of genetic identity and human commodification. Failure to address these issues has led to emergence of many vulnerable sections in the society like, foetus, minor, women, elderly, poor, terminally ill and physically and mentally incapacitated.

Fundamental Questions

For centuries science and humanities have been treated as two different extremes for the understanding of the Universe, resulting in the inadequate utilisation of both. While the former discovers the power of Nature, the latter determines its application. Technology therefore contemplates a matching human content to unfold itself for a purposeful role. Since technology is rooted in an urge for productivity, resource optimisation, automation, and innovation, there is a general belief that it improves quality of life by imparting higher functionality, comfort and security. But, technology in fact, acts in a strange paradox. On one hand it enhances human capability by increasing access to knowledge and resources, on the other hand it encourages concentration of scientific and economic power, leading to inequality and vulnerability. In such a diverse milieu, the ethical paradigms contemplate great deal of resilience and elasticity, without compromising on core human values. Biotechnological advancement ought to be oriented towards a positive purpose. We must learn lessons from the past. We discovered atomic energy which could be a boon for humanity but we used it for destruction by resorting to mass killings. We have been spending precious human resources to explore space out of sheer curiosity to know what lies beyond earth without any specific purpose. Our current engagement with biotechnology contemplates apposite vision and foresight to ensure that its advancement is not used to dehumanise the society

17 Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

All enquiries begin with questions. In the context of bioethics many fundamental questions arise. Who we are? Why we are? What it means to be human? Who owns me? Do I own myself? Can I be owned? Why should I live? For how long should I live? What are the criteria to determine life's worth? Who should die first? Is immortality the goal? What is the purpose of our existence? What are the human virtues? What is human dignity? What is the difference between human being and human material? Why should we not enhance our biological characteristics? Why should I not patent my DNA? Why should babies be not grown in the laboratories? Why should I not sell my body? Why should I not end my life at my will? These questions are only illustrative. There are many more questions.

Answers to the above questions are rooted in enormous multidimensionality. On a deeper thought they all converge to a single discipline i.e, the science of nature. What is this science of nature? It is the science of truth. It may appear to be hypothetical and vague. In fact, it is a holistic discipline where physical sciences and metaphysics merge to see beyond time and space, to realise the endless and infinite. In Nature abstract breeds concrete. Moral consciousness is a part of cosmic order. This consciousness includes harmony with all that exists in the nature and it is essential for our survival.

Humanity is an expression of human virtues. It is a treasure built over the millennia by collective wisdom of many generations, reflecting an ongoing evolutionary process. Culture, religion, art and science are a part of this treasure. They reflect human pursuits flowing out of collective human wisdom. By combining their faculties of imagination and investigation the human family discovered many new objects and phenomena. These discoveries led to innovative creations known as inventions. It is at this point that the morality creeps in because inventions are not innocuous like discoveries. They have applicability. Applicability involves purpose. Purpose has to be consistent with human virtues. The ongoing biotechnological advancement therefore needs to be tested on the altar of human virtues. This means that the essential purpose of biotechnological advancement should be to ensure continuance of a virtuous, peaceful, egalitarian and eco-friendly human race. Untamed technology i.e., the technology devoid of human face may throw the world in to chaos and disorder by generating inequality, conflict and distrust.

Role of Religion

Religion is a divine path to righteousness offering purity, peace and hope. It leads to identification of Self in its original, pure and primordial state. It unites human with the Ultimate Reality that is the origin and foundation of all phenomena. It is

a source of eternal values providing far more profound, spontaneous and sublime foundations of human behaviour than man-made decrees and laws. In today's world of untamed technological advancement leading to commercialisation, insecurity and growing quest for power religion is a source of moral solace and enlightenment. Although religious beliefs and expressions continue to be circumscribed they bestow a chaste and unifying code of conduct. Religion, being tuned to Supreme Consciousness, guides the human beings to inherent divinity present in all beings. In the context of advancing biotechnology which affects the human beings in flesh and blood -- not only their present but future generations too – the religious wisdom provides a candid insight between right and wrong.

Religious pluralism therefore constitutes the root of an orderly society. It leads to amalgamation of human values and beliefs. It generates the feeling of human oneness and social harmony. In an age of unbridled technological and commercial advancement, with serious socio-economic challenges such as diversification of resources for the comfort and luxuries of few, higher power to certain sections of society, neglect of social sectors, inequitable distribution of wealth and exacerbating people's vulnerability, religious pluralism acts as a source of cohesive social order. Religion, if candidly understood, is the biggest source of motivation to channelise people's strength and resources. Free expression of religious faith and practices leads to social stability. Liberal and objective interpretations of religious moorings may evolve in to robust and positive political content. It breeds an inclusive social order by providing representation to people having different faiths and beliefs.

Science and religion may appear to be divergent but in essence there is no difference between the two as both aim to explore the truth. The routes are, of course, different. While the former discovers the truth through analysis and empiricism the latter approaches the truth via faith and belief. In the contemporary milieu of conflicting ideologies and diverse perspectives religion is a bastion of conceptual homogeneity and mutual trust. It is therefore imperative to seek religious guidance while addressing the moral challenges thrown by the prevailing cultural, economic and political heterogeneity.

Indian Perception

India offers a classic example of religious pluralism. The country's population practices several religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and a host of others but no religion stands in the way of policies regarding people's welfare. Religious plurality in India has evolved in to a composite human culture imparting a unique national identity.

The Indian cultural thought is holistic and natural. The expression human dignity as understood by the West and the Georgetown Mantra outlining four principles of bioethics namely respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice¹⁸ reflect only a part of the Indian perception where human dignity and ethics are rooted in far more profound, spontaneous and sublime foundations some of which may be summarised as below:

Dharma

Homo sapiens are endowed with certain intrinsic attributes which are not present in any other creature. In the Indian cultural thought these attributes are recognised as *Dharma*. This is a Sanskrit term for which there is no synonym in the English language. In essence Dharma means human properties just like the properties of other objects in nature. Property means the characteristic which imparts identity to an object. “The property by which a thing is a thing and without which it cannot be what it is called is its *Dharma*. Thus, the essential quality of sugar because of which it is sugar, without which it is not sugar, is its sweetness. Therefore, sweetness is the *Dharma* of sugar; in the same way heat is the *Dharma* of fire; light is the *Dharma* of sun. The *Dharma* of man is his essential inherent divinity, the Self in him”.¹⁹

Thus every object in the nature owes its identity to certain properties. These properties are such that in the event of their removal the object ceases to be that object. The question is what are those properties because of which Homo sapiens are known as human beings. These properties collectively known as *Dharma* may be many but ten of them can be easily identified namely, love, trust, righteousness, truthfulness, compassion, beneficence, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice, and reverence. These properties constitute human virtues which create awareness about good and bad. In the absence of these virtues human being will be reduced to human creature. These ten human virtues generate ten human values namely freedom, peace, justice, equality, autonomy, fairness, altruism, human solidarity, protection of the weak and respect for other forms of life.

Thus, *Dharma* is the source of our entire moral content as human beings. This moral content, unique to Homo sapiens, constitutes human dignity. With the loss of this moral content human person is reduced to a human creature.

18 Tom L. Beauchamp, James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

19 Swami Chinmayananda, *The Art of Man Making, 114 Short Talks on The Bhagvad Gita* (India: Cental Chinmaya Mission, 2000), 515.

The expressions like “human family’ and “spirit of brotherhood” used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948²⁰ were enshrined in the Indian cultural thought thousands of years ago as reflected in the following Sanskrit verse

अयंनिजःपरोवेतिगणनालघुचेतसाम्
उदारचरितानांतुवसुधैवकुटुम्बकम्

(Verse 137, Tantra 5, Panchatantra)

That person is my own, and the other one is not my own is a thinking of small-heartedness. For the generous ones the entire humanity is one family.

Indian cultural thought founded on the inner human voice is not confined to individual well being alone. It aims at achieving universal good as the goal of human life, as prayed for in the following verse,

सर्वेभवन्तुसुखिनःसर्वेसन्तुनिरामयाः।
सर्वेभद्राणिपश्यन्तुमाकश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत्॥

(Prayer composed by Adi Sankara)

May all be happy; May all be free from disease; May all look for the good of others; May no one suffer.

Similarly, the expressions of altruism and human solidarity are deeply entrenched in the Indian cultural thought as a duty to donate. In the holy Gita which is the Hindu equivalent of the Bible or the Quran, the donation has been described as a pious human act in the following verse-

दातव्यमितियद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे
देशकालेचपात्रेचतद्दानंसात्त्विकंस्मृतम् ॥

(Verse 20, Chapter 17, Holy Gita)

Donation at the appropriate place and time to a needy person without expectation of anything in return is a pious human duty.

Eternity and Rebirth

According to Hinduism, life never comes to an end. It is a part of an eternal cosmic consciousness called Atman. Death means a process through which life passes from one body to another. In other words, death means the end of form, not the end of ‘being’. This idea is very deep rooted in every Hindu. This is a part of their convictions and the foundation of all religious expressions. While

²⁰ Chinmayananda, *The Art of Man Making*, 4.

explaining the “true self” (*Atman*) lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* describes the eternal nature of life in the following verses:

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि।

तथाशरीराणिविहायजीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही।।

(Bhagavad Gita - Chapter 2, Verse 22)

As we discard our old clothes and put on the new ones, the soul or Atman too casts off its worn out physical body and takes residence in a new body.

Each living creature, not only human beings, are endowed with Atman (true Self) which is but a part of the same cosmic consciousness that constitutes this universe, known, as the *Brahman*. Thus, all living beings are “made in the image of God” and hence this does not confer a singular distinction on human beings. It is not correct to say that “man is an end in itself”. To call ourselves as “end” and all others as “means” displays nothing more than an ego and a desire to rule which, in fact, is contrary to the laws of universe. The principle of *Atman* and eternity confers cosmic equality on all forms of life in the nature, sending a categorical message of reverence towards all. This constitutes a major root of contemporary bioethics creating an imperative to preserve all forms life in the world.

Open-mindedness

आनोभद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः

(Rig Veda 1.89.1)

Let noble thoughts come from all directions.

Despite being the world’s most ancient living tradition, the Hindu cultural thought is always open to accept new ideas. Although the instructions and prohibitions of the scriptures and counsels given by the gurus who have led a morally pure and elevated life have always been accorded primary importance in matters of morality the individual’s inner voice of conscience has never been neglected. “The Indian religious traditions are intertwined with equally disparate cultural, social, linguistic, philosophical and ethical systems that have developed over a vast history, compounded with movement of peoples, foreign interventions, and internal transformations in structures and identities experienced over time”²¹ Hinduism is therefore essentially tolerant, congenial and respectful toward

21 R. Renugadevi, “Environmental Ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India,” *African Journal of History and Culture (AJHC)* 4, no. 1, (2012): 1-3.

http://www.academicjournals.org/app/webroot/article/article1381908933_Renugadevi.pdf

members of other religions and the doors are always open for the cross-cultural dialogue. Pooling of wisdom is the best way to resolve the intractable issues. This approach was perhaps never as relevant as it is today in view of advancing biotechnology and the crisis of purpose.

Moral Reflections

The Indian perception casts following positive reflections in today's world of moral ambiguity and uncertainty

1. Universe is an expression of holism, synergism and complimentarity. Man cannot live in isolation. As such, it is natural human obligation to protect the environment.
2. Life is eternal. Death is not the end of life. One continues to live after death, in a different abode. As such, one need not be afraid of death.
3. All that exists in the nature is a purpose per se.
4. All forms -- sentient and insentient -- are a part of same cosmic consciousness and everything in the Nature is divine. As such, all are worthy of respect.
5. To be human means to possess human properties collectively known as Dharma reflecting as virtues such as love, trust, righteousness, truthfulness, compassion, beneficence, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice, and reverence.
6. The whole of humankind is one family.
7. Donation at the appropriate place and time to a needy person without expectation of anything in return is a pious human duty
8. There is nothing superior or inferior in Nature. The concept of Homo sapiens as a higher being is purely subjective
9. Treat others as you would like to be treated by others
10. There is an intrinsic correlation between nature and morality
11. Nothing in the nature, including the human body, can be owned. All belongs to nature.
12. In the event of conflict the interest of the weaker shall prevail over the stronger
13. Human dignity is an intrinsic attribute of human species, not cultivated or acquired. It is universal and inseparable

14. There is no scope for dogmatic postures. Open-mindedness should be the approach and all that is good must be accepted, regardless of its origin

Conclusion

Today's technological revolution is not confined to a particular region. It is a global phenomenon, full of watershed moments. Fiction has turned into reality. The issues as profound as dehumanisation of our existence, immortalisation of human life and the creation of new life forms need to be addressed. Human being needs to be saved from turning into human material. The environment needs to be protected from wanton destruction. Biotechnological advancement cannot and should not be stopped but its commercialisation by exploiting people's urges and expectations needs to be curbed. The concepts of right and wrong have to be interpreted in the context of individual and community perspectives, keeping intact the interests of heterogeneous groups as well as the present and future generations. Global bioethics assimilating transcultural perspectives is the need of the hour. The saga of human endurance displays a continuous quest to win over vulnerability and ignorance by pooling of knowledge, experiences and resources. Today's world is moving from diversity to pluralism. In the process, it reflects a unique conflict of equity and legitimacy. We have to embrace heterogeneity while preserving the individuality. This inclusivity is imperative in order to concretize scientific promise in to a purposeful pursuit. At the present stage of scientific and economic development it is not prudent to perceive a world with circumscribed geographical, political or cultural boundaries. Political rivalries and economic competition notwithstanding, the world is moving towards intellectual and moral solidarity.

Positive signs are emerging. Concern for human dignity and protection of human race have already crystallised in to concepts like "common heritage of humanity"²² and "global public good"²³In the emerging pluralism identification of values is necessary in order to harmonise legitimate interests of diverse parties, within the parameters of moral concepts, and socio-economic constraints. Indian cultural thought is founded on a broad base of universal perspectives, extending

22 "Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict," *The Hague*, 14 May 1954

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html; Byk C., "A Map to a New Treasure Island: the Human Genome and the Concept of Common Heritage," *J Med Philos.* 23, no.3 (1998): 234–46.

23 Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg and Marc A. Stern (eds.), *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Gregory Shaffer, "International Law and Global Public Goods in a Legal Pluralist World," *European Journal of International Law*, 23, no. 3 (2012): 669–693. <https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/23/3/669/39976>.

far beyond geographical frontiers. They reflect an ideology founded on Vedic philosophy and wisdom which is blessed with a deep sense of universality, holism and complementarity. Indian tradition based on Eternity, Oneness, *Dharma* and Open-mindedness reflects unique synthesis of micro and macrocosm, offering rare insight in to meaning and purpose of life. Identification of these intrinsic human attributes is a pre-requisite to evolve sound ethical paradigms.

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