

ETHICS IN UPANISHADS

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Abstract

In common sense, what we understand by the western term ETHICS is a rational enquiry in to the standards of right and wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct, which ought to be accepted by a class of individuals. In the philosophy of Upanishads this kind of study falls in the category of "àcàramimàsà" which is practiced under the supervision and guidance of an "Ächaryà" who is competent authority to usher his disciple on the path of self realization. His discourses are based on the statement like "Satyamev jayate nànfam" viz. "only the truth sustains and false has no ground" and "Yànyàsmàkam sucharitànì tani tvyà sevitayànì no itrànì" viz. "whatever are our righteous actions, only those are to be followed by you and not others which might be challengeble". Such statements are used enormously by the thinkers of Upanishads. They do talk of Dharma and "Skandhàs" of dharma to be performed in the practice of rituals like "yajnà, adhyayana and dānam" which are nothing but the welfare of society and individuals.

But if we want to analyse the "àcàrmimàsà" of the Upanishads in the later period then find the two types of morality followed by the Vedantins- one is followed during the period of "Sādhanà" to attain purity of mind essential to achieve the goal of Bramhan experience. The other one is not followed under any circumstances but it is spontaneous and flows effortlessly without any predetermined conditioning from the activity of Brahmavit -- "Brahmavit brahmaiv bhavati". This conduct of a Brahmjnani is a manifestation of his masterly siddhavasthà which cannot be judged by the prerequisites of the bookish texts. Maharshi Yajñavalkya, Kings like Janaka, Pravahini, AjātShatru and Ashvapati are the living examples of morality of Siddhavasthà or finality.

Keywords: Ethics, Ancient Indian ethics, Ancient Indian wisdom, Ancient Indian Morality.