

Service Ethics in Academic Profession

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The Concept of Service Ethics in India

Traditionally the service was not considered a remunerative career in Indian culture. Particularly, academic professions like teaching or health care like medical profession were considered a service to society and not for earning money.

With this type of ethics, the academic community was expected to concentrate on improving their knowledge and disseminating the knowledge to the benefit of the society. The basic motto was “*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*” (Education is that which liberates human being). Consequently, the purpose of education was to remove the prejudices that we accumulate in the process of our life. So the first priority in academic profession was the human concern where by what one consumed for one’s own pleasure was considered secondary to what can be contributed for the pleasure of others. This is illustrated by the episode of Gandhiji - One Srilankan journalist tried to interview Gandhiji in 1946, Gandhiji was very busy with the negotiations prior to Independence. However, he consented to give 3 minutes to the “foreign” journalist. The journalist was warned that he had only 3 minutes with Gandhiji. So the first thing he wanted to ask for was his autograph – that took one minute and so two

minutes were left. So he asked Gandhiji to give a message for his people. Gandhiji said, “The message I am giving is not only for Srilanka, it is for all nationals of developing countries which are going to get independence in the near future and the message I want to give them is: “Try to Minimize Your Wants – and Satisfy Your Needs.” The message did not mean very much to the journalist. So he asked for an explanation. Gandhiji said, “When people become free to take their own decisions for development, they are likely to provide for what they want and not what their people need.” (For example, they want five star hotels but their people need drinking water in the villages). Gandhiji’s prophecy came to be true and while every kind of luxury is available in India, yet drinking water is not available in many villages. (During the 1977 Janata regime, George Fernandez said that there are villages where Coca Cola is available but drinking water is still not available. So he removed Coca Cola from the scene – but the result was that those villages had neither Coca Cola nor drinking water!)

Gandhiji was very strong about frugality for individual comfort. When he returned from South Africa he used to wear zabba, dhoti and the so-called Gandhi cap. In his first trip to

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Madurai, he found that a woman was washing half her saree in the river - wearing the other half. He asked his host, "Why is she doing such a strange thing?" The host replied, "She has only one saree. She wears half and washes the other half. When that half is dry, she wears it and washes the half that she was wearing." Gandhiji was shocked at the idea that the woman did not have more than one saree for herself. So he said, "It is criminal for me to wear so much cloth - zabba, dhoti and cap ! So he measured the area of the saree and decided to have two sets of loin cloth and that became his dress. Even the cap which was named after him – he stopped wearing it.

So the basic approach to this type of ethics is that till all others get the essentials they need, we should not spend on luxuries. However, the feeling virtually vanished with Gandhiji and all types of luxuries have become part of our life.

The socialistic ideas which ruled the intellectual thinking in 20th century with the dictum "From each according to his ability – to each according to his need" created a communist social system which also influenced the academic profession. However, this came in conflict with the capitalist system which provided motivation for people to produce more and more and improve progressively standard of living creating a welfare society.

In the welfare society subsidies were given by the government through bureaucratic channels. The resources passing through various sticky hands did not reach where the resources were urgently required.

Thus, came the necessity to conduct the academic profession professionally. This means:

- ❖ A systematic objective method for selecting beneficiaries.
- ❖ A market survey to assess the immediate need.
- ❖ A system to see the available resources are spread as evenly as possible.

A continuous effort is required to breach the gap between potential and those whose ideas can help in managing and marketing financial resources. This is a challenge we are facing today to see that the commercialization does not overrule the academic professions and ethical ideas are able to direct the academic process.



A Sanyasin visited the Ashram of Mata Amritanandamayi one day. Exhibiting an air of great self-importance he said, "I represent a group of sannyasins who will arrive here in a few days. The entire group wishes to camp here for a whole day. We will need good food and comfortable accommodation."

"Son," Mother said, "you have expressed the desire of the children in your group to stay and to have food in the Ashram when they arrive. That is okay. Amma is only too happy to serve you. But it is not proper for you to demand comforts and good food. One who seeks the Truth should not demand anything. He should not ask for comforts and pleasures. A sadhak should feel content with whatever comes to him..."

"Awaken Children

– A biography of Mata Amritanandamayi (Vol. VI)