Moral Dilemmas in the Era of Globalization: Critique of Classical and the Modern Dilemmas

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Abstract—*A moral dilemma arises when we are confronted with equally valid moral alternatives. One faces a dilemma when one is committed to two or more moral obligations and one cannot fulfill one without violating one's duty to another. The choices that one makes test the moral fibre of one's character. We have several such illustrations dilemmas in the Mahâbhârata and European modernity. One of the major achievements of the last millennium is the emergence and development of Globalization. What gives globalization its unending fascination is the moral dilemma which everybody faces.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is an attempt to discuss moral dilemmas in the era of globalization as a critique of classical and modern dilemmas. In the classical moral dilemmas, I have enumerated various kinds of dilemmas which is faced by all the legends of Mahâbhârata including women particularly Kunti and Draupadi. Further in European modernity, Kant has given universal principles for moral actions so that dilemmas are resolved. Finally in globalization, we find that it is not uniform; there are processes of globalization, of particularization of universals and universalization of particulars. I'll attempt to resolve the dilemmas from pluralistic point of view of Indian philosophy.

2. CLASSICAL MORAL DILEMMAS

It was the Mahâbhârata in which we come across various dilemmas. The well known example is Arjuna's dilemma at the beginning of the war, which necessitates the Bhagvadgitā. Yudhishthira is often confronted by moral dilemmas where he has to make choices with an unwavering heart. Perhaps because he is the eldest or because he is the son of Dharma and himself Dharma incarnate. Since he is tested again and again, it is Yudhishthira who is the chief protagonist and not Arjuna or Bhima.[i] The story is not essentially about courage, valour or strength but about spiritual strength, flexibility and ability to face life unflinchingly. Some examples might help.

Yudhishthira's four brothers are layed low by the Yaksha of the lake for not being able to answer his questions. Yudhishthira satisfies the Yaksha, who then asks him which of his brothers does he want brought back to life. Without hesitation Yudhishthira asks for the life of his stepmother's younger son Sahdeva although the Yaksha repeatedly tries to persuade him to ask for one of his real brothers. Yudhishthira does not do so because he feels that to be unbiased is his greatest dharma and so he cannot forget his responsibility towards his dead stepmother, Madri.[ii]

Again, Yudhishthira is tested when the Gandharva Chaitrath imprisons the Kauravas who have come to the forests only to mock and humiliate the Pandavas and wants to kill them. Yudhishthira orders his brothers to go and get them released, although they are unable to understand the logic of this, as it would be in their interest to allow the Kauravas to be killed. Yudhishthira explains that it is their dharma to avenge the injustice done to them but it would be cowardice, and lack of humanity to allow the Kauravas who are after all their own brothers to be murdered by Chitrasena.[iii] Yudhishthira is seen as physically the weakest of the Pandava warriors but his moral strength is above that of his other brothers.

3. EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT

Kant's principles of morality can give us insights into the Universality of morality. Behind the notion of ought, there is a deeper philosophy and that is the philosophy of European Enlightenment. There is, however, a lack of sufficiently broad, accurate, comprehensible and useable definition of the early Enlightenment. Part of the reason of this lack is that during Enlightenment there have been complex and quite often contradictory views on such issues as democracy, modernity, secularism, religion and scientific knowledge etc. It is very difficult to provide one definition as the definition of the enlightenment, which fits all the men usually assumed to belong to it. Generally among the enlightenment thinkers we have Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Condercet and others. This is, however, not the occasion to go into the details of their

specific philosophical systems, their mutual agreements and disagreements. I am basically concerned with the concept of freedom as the key concept of Enlightenment and as the ultimate source of Human Rights to resolve dilemmas. Notwithstanding the mutual difference between one philosopher and another in the enlightenment, they have a fundamental preoccupation, i.e., freedom. It was Kant, one of its earliest prophets, who asked that question and answered it in his article in the Berlinischer Monatsschrift, December 1783 issue, entitled Beanwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklaerung? Or "Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment"?

Kant's answer is: "Aufklaerung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner Selbst-verschuldeten Unmuendigkeit": "Enlightenment is the coming out of man from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to serve one's own understanding without direction (Leitung) from another. This immaturity is self-imposed; Reason itself languishes, not because it lacks understanding; what it lacks is resolution and courage; it is unwilling to serve itself (Sapere Aude ! Hebe Mut). Take courage to serve your own understanding! This is therefore the Motto (Walspruch) of the Enlightenment."[iv] It is in this rather general framework of the Enlightenment rationality that the concept of humanity has evolved and it gets its elaborations in the categorical imperatives.

Kant is the first philosopher who has tried to give a definition of how a moral action ought to be in conformity with the Enlightenment rationality. These are the Principles of human actions such as 'universality', 'end in itself' and 'kingdom of ends.' These principles could be prescribed to any study of morality anywhere. There have been certain attempts to define moral issues in terms of the constitution of nationality, ethnic, cultural and religious identities, etc. But if we wish to define morality in the most general sense of the terms inclusive of all specificities, Kant's categorical imperative is the only principle that could be taken into account. Kant has tried to give a definition of how a moral action ought to be what a moral action ought to be. These are the Principles of human actions such as 'universality', 'end in itself' and 'kingdom of ends.' These principles could be prescribed to humanity as a whole in terms maxims of the categorical imperative. The maxims, of course, go as follows:

The first maxim: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a Universal Law." [v]

The second Maxim: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[vi]

The third Maxim: "So act as if you were through your maxim a law making member of a kingdom of ends" [vii]

These maxims cannot be strange to any culture though they could be naïve to every culture; they are universal and can be used to resolve moral dilemmas. One can easily imagine that the absence of any of these maxims could be tantamount to the denial of human dignity.

4. MORAL DILEMMAS IN GLOBALIZATION

Globalization started during mid 70s in the developed countries in the last century and since 1990, the world has moved towards globalization in a big way. Globalization has evolved out of the golden period of capitalism; i.e.1940 to 1975. Globalization has challenged the Nation/State territorial sovereignty, the institutional autonomy, shrinking the concepts of space and time. With the collapse of Socialism in the Central and East European countries during 1990s of which People's Republic of China just managed to escape, the world has moved towards defining values of universalism set out in "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and in setting development goals in the United Nations conferences on environment, population, social development, women and human settlement.

Globalization is essentially a product of technological advancement. Origin of globalization involves economic factors with trade and finance liberalization; trade linked technology and political and moral situations helping it. It is a broad mindset that believes those world structures are possible. Globalization may be defined as Universalization, Internationalization, Liberalization, Westernization and Deterritorization. There are four dimensions involved in the formulation and implementation of the Policies towards globalization. The Neo-Liberals want that the market force should determine the course of globalization. The Reformists put the public policy where as the Radicals want to de-globalize or to bring the society to pre-global status quo ante. Finally the Revolutionaries try to take globalization to the post-capitalist stage. There are certain imminent consequences of globalization, such as the end of State, the end of modernity and ideologies and the end of nationality, etc. It is in this context that moral dilemmas arise affecting both the aspects of moral values i.e. the relative and the universal. One of the features of globalization is that people, resources, knowledge, ideas and along with these the moral values move from one place to another. Globalization has the twin function to perform, viz. to enhance people's sensitivity to their moral values and to transform their attitudes to other values. Ronald Robertson argues that globalization is "the interpenetration of the Universalization of particularization and the particularization of universalism".[viii] Moral dilemmas arise only in this process of the fusion of the universal and the particular. It has created problems and a bit of it has gone towards fundamentalism and terrorism. This has led to a perception of globalization as an encroachment of the dominant moral values and culture of the West upon other cultures. The 'theory of Clash of Civilizations' by Huntington is based upon the assumption that historically distinct cultural-

religious traditions may not be able to arrive at reconciliation for degrees of inter-cultural interaction, dialogue and sharing, leading inevitably to larger conflicts in the future as the globalization process gains momentum.[ix] Globalisation carries the seeds of its own subversion.

These are dilemmas that are familiar to us being a part of our own experience and leave us grouping. What gives globalization its unending fascination and eternal relevance are the moral dilemmas that everybody faces, being constantly confronted by equally valid alternatives. It presents irreconcilable alternatives and the choice between them seems to be made irrationally or for reasons other than moral. The well-known example is that globalization is by no means uniform; it always means different things to different people. And there are sufficient moral grounds to justify or to reject certain choices. For some, globalization means media, rapid transmission of messages and symbols. For others, it is a deregulation of domestic as well as external markets – goods and services. It appreciates the total capital market with the need to promote investment. This is done with Cyber Space and the Internet. It can describe the expansion of economic activities across ethnicity and identity, values and practices and even beyond national boundaries. This later on is converted into trade and commerce, banking, rural institutions and so on. All these are necessary beyond the State because globalization means Global Banking, trade and commerce, Global migration of population, etc. All these require certain rules, institutions and the infrastructures, which can go beyond Nation/State. So we have organizations like WTO, GATT, new definitions of the UNO and other UNO funded organizations. With these institutional mechanisms, global reality is regulated and managed. Globalization also has structural pre-requisites and imperatives. One such imperative is that people will 'move' and with them there will be a movement of consciousness and values.

5. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization means liberalization and free movement of goods, services, capital and finance across national boundaries. In the world currency market more than $1.6 trillion is now exchanged each day and about 1/5 of the goods and services produced each year are traded; hence offering several opportunities for individual countries to achieve higher growth rates. In the last one decade, there have been several discussions on the implications with its positive and negative factors that globalization is going to have on development process particularly in developing and under developed countries. In these countries, development is defined as a 'composite reality'; it is not only economic development but also cultural development, philosophical development, development of morals, ethos and values. In these developments local cultures and local identities are recognized as the valid elements of any design of human kind. So much so, the "'Copenhagen Summit on Development" which was

held in the early 90s dealt very clearly on this theme that somehow the kind of change that is taking place in the world today is leading to massive mobility of human kinds, human resources, ideas and consciousness. There is a global worry on the process of globalization and the consequences that globalization will affect local cultures, local identities, the philosophical heritage and the very diversities that constitute the cultural matrix of human kind. I feel that globalization of technology, trade and commerce and the optimization of these factors may not be of much help unless we re-vitalize local identities. In fact, globalization, by its very process, enhances people's sensitivity to their local identities. There is the view that globalization triggers on the one hand massive movement of people, resources and values from one part of the globe to another part. To this extent there is interaction and homogenization between globalization and local cultures. On the other hand, the technology of globalization encourages and helps the formation of local cultures. This is an obvious fact. If we are on Cyber Space or on the Internet, we have teleconferencing. Even sitting in this hall, we can have dialogues with students and teachers in Europe and USA. But the question is — will this technology help preserve local identities? There is a feeling that local identities may not be 'real identities' but only 'virtual reality'. The Internet and Cyber Space have a different language. By computerization and digital system of Cyber processes, one can create such realities, which do not happen in real life. This, which does not happen in real life but by simple amalgamation of parameters, which are pre, structured and defined, you can create a 'virtual reality'. Thus technology can help in fostering local identities. People who are in minority at one place can search for like-minded people throughout the globe. This way they can all come together through teleconferencing, without physical movement from one place to another. So globalization technologically does not prevent local identities.

The negative factors of globalization are at two different levels. It threatens the interests of the powerful and the weak nations along with the corresponding notions of values and the morals. This is the dilemma of globalization. It is generally criticized in terms of Economic Darwinism implying survival of the fittest. Globalization is also the coming together of rich entrepreneurs of the whole world with the belief or rather make-belief that they do not need the poor. It threatens the power of those who are very strong specially those countries, which are totalitarian. We have examples of Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary and so on during late 80s and early 90s. I am not saying that media was totally responsible for the collapse of socialism. That will be too simplistic. There were many other factors involved. Like, Soviet Union was simply a Union of Republics but never a State. In the 70 years of socialist experience, socialism itself became vacuous, mechanical and undynamic. It may happen in anywhere. Even in India, democracy is getting vacuous. There are such signs. We have to be vigilant. But facts of the matter remain. Media did play an important role in shaping

public opinion of the post second world war Soviets. People in these countries got exposed to new views, new value systems and new styles of life. People see what is happening around the world and State cannot control. So the powerful and vested interests are threatened. When this threat comes about, there is counter resurgence of ideas. All it does is to narrow down the process of globalization. It gives rise to different forms of fundamentalism. There may be ideological fundamentalism or cultural fundamentalism; even there will be fundamentalism of benign kinds, consumer fundamentalism, environmental fundamentalism, industrial fundamentalism and so on. This way globalization creates turmoil at the top.

Globalization also hurts the weak and the poor nations. They are hurt because they have no 'say' or 'share' in the process of globalization. This is what is the worry in the developing countries. There are many developing countries where political system is not conducive for encountering globalization. So there are examples of barring Disk Antenna, Transponders, Satellites, etc. And this is a very hopeless task. Many countries have tried it. But they have failed. So this is a loosing game. The poorer countries which are not at all prepared to face globalization; they face problems in different ways. In such countries market is always restrained. If large number of people is illiterate and below the poverty line and have no access to new jobs and new way of understanding global situation, then they are out of market. So globalization, which brings market, creates this problem for the weaker people.

Morals and conceptions of good are said to be relative to cultures, even large cultural identities have now disintegrated into smaller ones- cultural pluralism. Moral theories still oscillate between Utilitarianism in so far as public policy, decisions of the emerging democracies are concerned, and Kantianism, in so far as individual moral life and principles are concerned. Both of these alternatives, however appealing, are now seen to have a moral dilemma between personal and the public morality that cannot be resolved. More attractive today are Aristotelian Ethics expanded to include many present-day virtues and a communitarian ethics, which goes back to a sort of Hegelian Sittlichkeit as the basis of one's moral conceptions. It is here that the above moral dilemma can be resolved because both of these allow for pluralism and reject grand narratives. Pluralism and tolerance are the ethos of globalization. On the one hand, there are the pluralities of Nation- States, of world-religions, of large cultural, ethnic, linguistic groups, with numerous internal differences; on the other hand, there is an overwhelming sense of One World i.e. the world coming together through technology. The idea of a Global Village, as an ideal, is widely valued.

6.   INDIAN RESPONSE

For Indian minds, puzzled about the moral dilemmas in the wake of globalization, I will humbly recommend a change of perspective. Let us leave the moral issues raised by Aristotle,

Kant, Hegel and even Marx, get out of the Enlightenment Frame of Mind and go to the Upanishads. There is no other way of detoxifying ourselves from the fumes of Enlightenment Rationality because the western way is not the only way of thinking and experiencing, let us as Indians emerge ourselves in our own rich Indian Heritage, especially before its breaking up into Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu- for example, the Samkhya-Yoga heritage common to all three traditions - the great philosophical perspective that undergrads all Upanisadic, Vedic, Buddhist, or Jaina thought and experience. Keep your painfully acquired critical rationality from Kant and Hegel, but do get not tyrannized by it. Stay critical, but do not reject out of hand what seems strange at first. Expose yourself without hesitation to a system of thought and experience, which has endured for millennia and awarded us with freedom, autonomy and sovereignty.

To bring this paper to a close, we cannot stop the process of globalization. But globalization is not forever; history has not come to an end. Despite the lofty claims that State has withered away in the era of globalization let me say it in very clear terms that State still exists and is accountable to the people. Where people are left out, they will not sit back quietly. There will be counter resurgence of struggles, which may take the shape of crimes like drug related crimes, ethnic struggles and so on. Therefore State has to come forward to make strategic decisions. State can certainly and strongly find and frame rules and institutions for governance to provide enough space for local identities, communities and environmental resources to ensure globalization. Re-defining such values as in the adopting of Human Rights and setting development goals on Environment, Population, Social development, etc.; globalization should be with regard for pluralistic value systems without violation of human rights. Without marginalizing local identities, the reward of globalization should go towards creating equity between nations.

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