

Humanism and Ethical Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Politics is the mirror of society. It is connected to every aspect of life. Politics pervades the entire society, leaving nothing untouched. Everything, including water, forests, land, resources, education, culture, industry, commerce, character, thought, power, and administration, is determined and influenced by politics. Politics encompasses the entire social environment.

With power comes imitation. Whatever those in power do, the entire nation begins to emulate. Therefore, politics requires utmost purification. It is where the need for good individuals is the greatest. If followers come to believe that all leaders are dishonest, how long can they themselves remain honest? The presence of a virtuous individual in politics can bring about radical change. A good individual has the unique quality of not clinging to power, for they do not become elevated because of the chair; rather, they are placed in the chair because of their elevated character.

An overview of the Indian political landscape reveals that it suffers from a lack of ideology and a dearth of values. This has led to deep contradictions, stagnation, and a crisis of character. Indian political parties often claim allegiance to their respective ideologies, but ideological harmony has disappeared. All parties and leaders are merely trying to woo the public in their favor. The pursuit of power has overshadowed the critical goal of public welfare. India's political crisis is deepening further. The entire political system is sinking into the haze of religious, cultural, and moral decline.

The political crisis in the country has not arisen solely due to political corruption, criminalization, cultural disconnection, or the poison of casteism. Rather, its root cause lies in the decline of moral values. By neglecting the spiritual truths of life and morality, and instead moving toward materialism, politics has become dehumanized. As Prem Singh writes, "The most significant dimension of India's political crisis is the establishment of capitalist consumerism as a decisive ideology."

Political Science and Ethics:

No politics can exist beyond the scope of 'ethics.' 'Morality' is the foundation of politics. Those who adopt the principle of double morality turn politics into a business. Today, a common tendency has developed to achieve goals by separating means and ends, regardless of the methods used. Politicians seem more interested in the success of their agendas rather than in public service or welfare. They are willing to achieve their objectives even through unethical means. However, the success of politicians cannot be purely political; it must also be ethical.

Reinhold Niebuhr opines that since it is very difficult to externally evaluate human goals and motives, the 'social consequences' of any action or policy should be considered the real test of its morality, rather than its hidden objectives. If the domain of politics is open, uncontrolled, and beyond regulation, several evils will inevitably infiltrate it, and it will gradually take the form of 'unethical politics.' Such politics will encourage individuals to commit crimes with a clear conscience. Consequently, the gap between politics and ethics will continue to widen.

Ethical Democratic Socialism:

The "political system" is an essential dimension of the social system. Politics is related to the administration of power. The nature of political life varies according to the nature and distribution of power, as well as the limits within which individuals and groups acquire and utilize power. However, "power" cannot be separated from values, as the nature of power, which dominates the political landscape, is a dimension of the developmental process and consistently aids individuals in acquiring new forms of relationships. Since individuals are interconnected, power and values are also interrelated. The attainment of values requires power, and the use of power inherently implies values. Therefore, power relations are a function of the values inherent in interpersonal relationships.

The political system is not a separate domain of life but rather the culmination and apex of the social system, as it represents the most extensive and explicit expression of life. For this reason, natural laws and universal principles and standards cannot be disregarded in the realm of politics. The concept of ethical democratic socialism asserts that the evils prevalent in society can only be eradicated when its members develop a sense of "dharma," i.e., the fulfillment of their duties. All members of such a society, especially politicians, must take it as their duty to work for the welfare and happiness of every individual. Our duty is defined as "what we ought to do," and the essence of ethics lies in this sense of "ought." Hence, political organizations should operate with an ethical spirit and on the basis of moral principles.

In ethical democratic socialism, the "state" functions to ensure internal and external security and to appropriately manage and utilize collective resources to enhance the general welfare of society's members. A moral and democratic state will not be based on power alone, although, at times, it may use power when necessary to prevent social disorder and to create an environment conducive to the development of moral values. Such a state will neither be authoritarian nor one that fosters crimes due to property inequalities in a capitalist society.

This state will be reformative, addressing human weaknesses. A moral-democratic state will not only utilize its power for ethical objectives but will also use power in an ethical manner.

Powers in a Democratic Society:

In a moral and democratic society, power is not entirely concentrated in the hands of spies and police, as the purpose of its use is to achieve "cooperation," which can only be freely provided by independent citizens in a free environment. For this, we must awaken social consciousness, provide cultural inspiration for spiritual cooperation, and foster a "spiritual longing" that transforms the fulfillment of restricted, rigorous, and labor-intensive duties into a source of "joy."

Ethical democratic socialism believes in the internal and spiritual equality of individuals because it always sees "humanity" as an "end," not as a "means." In such a society, the government works for the well-being of all individuals. The government achieves this goal through the concept of "responsible freedom," in which the state becomes a true instrument of civilization and sets an example of social responsibility for its citizens.

In such a society, individuals have equal opportunities to live freely and happily. It is a combination of political status, moral concepts, and social conditions. It seeks to harmonize emotional equality with the reality of natural inequality. In this society, individuals achieve the goal of self-rule (Swaraj) and can attain their highest welfare. Their legitimate rights are not violated, their entire personality develops, and it provides the best support for personal responsibility and self-help.

Modern democracy, however, suffers from many flaws. It works against individual freedom, promotes the tyranny of the majority through party systems, and encourages extremely slow development and the perpetuation of incompetence. It thrives on numbers, irresponsibility, amateurism, and immature politicians. It fosters evils like lack of principles, extravagance, corruption, bribery, nepotism, dishonest practices, materialism, consumerist attitudes, wealth accumulation, flattery, greed, immorality, and spiritual degradation. The only effective solution to curb these distortions is the establishment of an "ethical democracy."

The System of Political Democracy:

In India, the method of Western political democracy has been imitated, which is not entirely acceptable as it exerts a corrupting influence on the citizens and leads to moral degradation. This system is based on materialistic philosophy and hedonistic principles. The loyalty of politicians in such a system is not toward an invisible God but rather toward the "shiny gold." In Indian politics, power and money become their gods, creating a moral crisis. Politicians, driven by the greed for power, accept false ideals and engage in the "transformation of values." The so-called democracy divides the entire society into various factions.

The party system fosters hatred, conflict, competition, neglect of duties, irresponsibility, character assassination, and widespread chaos and ruin in society. The party-based system makes the proper selection of candidates impossible and suppresses individuality. It degrades the entire political sphere into something vile and despicable. The worst aspect of the democratic system lies in the character assassination of politicians and the absence of rational and spiritual elements in politics. If we wish to make rulers virtuous, learned, and cultured, we must include wise thinkers at the highest levels of governance who can instill moral principles into public life. Excellence is distinct and exceptional. Ethical democracy does not entrust the task of policymaking to individuals unfamiliar with moral principles. Instead, it trains and promotes only those individuals who are most qualified to lead. In an ethical democratic society, politicians will be free from material concerns and competition, and they will always carry a sense of duty.

This group of politicians will be composed of experts, such as skilled farmers, scientists, educators, ethicists, and spiritual leaders - individuals rich in knowledge, experience, and character. Their selection will be based on secret evaluations and investigations within society. They will provide comprehensive guidance to the society and state. These leaders will be exceptionally rational and knowledgeable about moral principles.

In an ethical democratic political system, there will be no dictator disguised as a prime minister around whom the entire government machinery revolves. There will be no party politics. Practices such as party propaganda, election strategies, party leaders' commands, political lobbying, partisan campaigns, or undesirable tactics will not be followed. A group of

policymakers will be formed from the elected members, selected solely on the basis of merit. In such a political system, there will be no traditions of "party discipline," "party actions," "party leader directives or desires," or sycophantic workers.

Vision for the Future: Humanitarian and Ethical Politics:

The future will undoubtedly be filled with numerous challenges and ethical threats. It is difficult to predict the speed, extent, and boundaries of the devaluation within political systems. However, the direction of Indian politics seems to be veering towards the disintegration of ethical values, serving as a warning to remain vigilant and aware. Today, Indian politics stands precariously amidst fears, uncertainties, failures, taboos, distortions, despair, possibilities, and opportunities.

The current political predicament of India can be resolved, as it has also witnessed its golden era. Indian political thought has even provided direction to the world.

Whenever politics begins to center around "power" or revolves exclusively around "authority," the issue of ethical degradation arises. Therefore, in politics, deliberating on how power should be managed, divided, or distributed becomes a philosophical challenge. The proper use or misuse of power carries significant and concrete ethical implications.

"Morality" should be considered the ideal and benchmark not only in private life but also in political conduct. As individuals and citizens, our expectations and ideals are inherently similar. The security and peace of both the home and the nation are equally important. The freedom to develop private and political relationships is also a part of our culture, and the protection of individual ideals and freedoms relies on the state's ethical conduct, policy-oriented thinking, and principled behavior.

Coordination and Harmony between Politics and Ethics:

Max Weber described two principles of ethically-inclined conduct: one is the "Ethics of Responsibility," and the other is the "Ethics of Ultimate Ends." Those who believe in the ethics of ultimate ends do not concern themselves with the consequences of their actions and refuse to accept responsibility for the outcomes of their deeds. They consider themselves "responsible" only when their sacred purposes remain unfulfilled. They oppose injustice in the social order.

On the other hand, individuals who believe in the ethics of responsibility act by anticipating the consequences of their actions and accept responsibility for them. Weber argues that the moral contradictions of life cannot be avoided and that individuals must accept responsibility for their decisions and actions. He emphasized bridging the gap between the "ethics of ultimate ends" and the "ethics of responsibility" in the realm of politics by introducing the concept of the "charisma of personality." Weber believes that the combination of these two principles is appropriate in politics. According to him, "Politics is governed by the mind, but it is certainly not driven solely by the mind. It requires the will of the people, foresight, expectations, indomitable courage, and moral judgments."

"Politics" is more than developing brotherhood in personal relationships; it is a process akin to breaking through tough barriers. It is achieving the probable, as sometimes individuals accomplish the impossible. Indeed, to penetrate and resolve political problems and to achieve the goals of innovation and creativity in politics, there is a need for morality, responsibility, public welfare, effectiveness, and ethical and complete conduct.

We are passing through an era of transformational values. Today, politics is enveloped by an atmosphere of doubt, distrust, lack of faith, unrest, crime, moral degradation, and despair. The disintegration of political values continues. Only by adhering to the principles of spirituality, ethics, and religion can the moral and character decline of politics be prevented.

Certainly, the current political distortions have shaken the entire nation-state system. Even so, the political consciousness and inner conscience of the country's weary and wounded citizens have not been entirely suppressed. One can hope that Indian politics, by renouncing materialism, selfishness, opportunism, crime, communal toxicity, emotional exploitation, and the deceptive pursuit of power, will one day—if not today—awaken from its deep slumber to address the issues of political disintegration, democratic decline, political fragmentation, growing public distrust, internal conflict, and cultural degeneration.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the thoughts of the towering political figure Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it can be said that when a moral individual and an ethicist engages in politics, it becomes more humane and refined. If a politician's background is rooted in moral values and conduct, they cannot disregard human sensitivities. Whenever a saint, spiritual person, self-satisfied, or morally refined individual enters politics, they will not stain their hands with the blood of innocent humanity. Their heart will be



filled with compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and love; thus, their political actions will not deviate from their ultimate purpose. Their politics will not be a profession but rather a medium of service, sacrifice, and self-contentment for humanity, society, and the nation.

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