

Relevance of Vethathiri Maharishi's Social Philosophy and Ethics-A Study

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Abstract: *“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself,”* ¹said Leo Tolstoy. Vethathiri Maharishi is a real philosopher with the tendency of a real thinker who thinks about heart of life and its core values. The aim of Vethathiri is to establish a global philosophy with the result that man cultivates the characteristics of world citizenship, the ideal of one world, one religion and one truth. These in turn pave the way for “World-Peace and Harmony”. In order to achieve this, Maharishi lays down certain principles on which human personality has to be developed. These principles like world without war, economic justice, fair judiciary, one world federal government, reformation of culture, living under the guidance of intellectuals, respect for womanhood, living in tune with the law of nature, sports to be made non-commercial, significance of the law of cause and effect and basic amenities to be available to all.

The paper examines and discusses how maharishi has given practical ways of providing justice and harmony for establishing social ethics in his philosophy.

Philosophies and philosophers are innumerable but the real philosophy and real philosopher is distinguished from the rest of those who discusses and describes the universe with its own miracle and majesty unlike so called philosophers but the real philosopher expounds and exposes the heart of human problems and purposes. Vethathiri Maharishi is a real philosopher with the tendency of a real thinker who thinks about heart of life and its core values. The aim of Vethathiri is to establish a global philosophy with the result that man cultivates the characteristics of world citizenship, the ideal of one world, one religion and one truth. These in turn pave the way for “World-Peace and Harmony”. In order to achieve this, Maharishi lays down certain principles on which human personality has to be developed. These principles are:

1. World Without War
2. Economic Justice
3. Fair Judiciary
4. One World Federal Government
5. Reformation of Culture
6. Living under the Guidance of Intellectuals
7. Respect for Womanhood.
8. Living in Tune with the Law of Nature.
9. Sports to be made non-commercial.
10. Significance of the Law of Cause and Effect.
11. Basic Amenities to be available to all.

WORLD WITHOUT WAR: According to Maharishi, War is the cruel act of humans killing fellow humans, individually or en masse. We are here to live. The entire world is meant for our living, with natural resources in abundance. Everyone should live by utilizing and enjoying the natural resources in co-ordination with others, helping to one another. The World has so far witnessed innumerable wars. What were the benefits of war and who were the beneficiaries? asks Maharishi. He repeats untiringly that war is unwarranted. He feels that war is foolish because:

- (i) All of us were born on the same earth;
- (ii) The life protecting air that we breathe is common for all;
- (iii) The Sun that warms and lights the entire world is common for all;
- (iv) The Sea Water that evaporates and rains is common for all;
- (v) None of the above has been created by anyone;
- (vi) In this world everyone is born, lives and will die;
- (vii) If the killing of one part of human kind by another is justified then murderers alone will remain.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE: *No religion denies that material property cannot give peace of mind, but no religion left possessing it*” said famous thinker Carl Jung.¹ It is usually thought that religion is on the side of establishment and vested interests - economic as well as political and it can never become a resource for justice. It is weapon in the hands of vested interests rather than weaker sections of the society. Every religious tradition has history of siding with the powerful ruling establishments. Religion and its socio-economic role should also be assessed in the light of complex social, economic and political forces working in the society. An attempt should be made to study religion and religious ideals through scriptural injunctions and how they were interpreted and practiced in the given socio-economic and political conditions. Also the role of priesthood has to be objectively judged whether it allows religion to be hijacked by vested interests or refuses to compromise.

The cruelty of exploiting human lives under the excuse of custom and coercion by entrenched powers must no longer be allowed to continue. When people join the civil sense, they are asked to take the oath not to accept any sort of bribe from anyone. So also every person assuming an elected post should be required to take such an oath. Many may feel that it is not possible to check bribing. However, Maharishi asserts that just as surgery is often unavoidable and essential for saving lives, certain strict decisions have to be taken and implemented on the long-term interests of the society. Enlightened persons with social responsibility may bring appropriate changes in the above plan. However, there is no doubt structural reforms in our economic system are imperative if we wish to have a cultured civilization. Maharishi wants all nations to enjoy prosperity, happiness and peace.

A FAIR JUDICIARY: According to the Article 6 of the Human Rights Act of America fair justice means ,*“In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law.”*² Justice is at the heart of a democratic society. Arguments about justice or fairness have a long tradition in Western philosophy. In fact, no idea in Western civilization has been more consistently linked to ethics and morality than the idea of justice. Maharishi’s views on justice are thought provoking and the word has to heed what he says as they pave a practical way to fair justice.

The right to live is the birth right of every person. Everyone lives only through the mutual help and cooperation of the society. Therefore, one should know how to live in a way that does not result in problems either to him or to others, in present or in future, which will lead to in a peaceful life. The human race has passed through several ages-ages when the understanding of consciousness and the education to develop such knowledge were not present. Even then, humanity realized the need to protect the society through controlling and restricting people.

“A person who killed another was himself killed by the sentence of the Honorable Judge, If capital punishment is the penalty for murder, and if punishment is only for having committed the crime, then what was the crime of the family members of the deceased? Does not the death of the head of the family bring irreparable suffering to each member of family? Is this true justice?”³

In the name of war, Maharishi feels that innocent people are lured to death. This is as akin to that of luring animals before sacrifice at the temples. In Indian villages we witness the practice of animal sacrifice at temples. When an animal is to be sacrificed, one person will lead it to the temple by a rope around its neck.

ONE WORLD FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: World government is the notion of a single common political authority for all of humanity. Although the common theme in conspiracy theories about a New World Order is that a secretive power elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through an authoritarian world government is prevalent, many thinkers expressed their views on the subject. Furthermore, the greatest flaw in the UNO charter is the “Veto Power granted to the five mighty nations who are engaged in the manufacture of arms and ammunitions throughout the world, there by earning billions. This is a serious mistake in the functioning efficiency of the UNO. Due to these lapses, the UNO is not able to achieve the objectives for which it was established. However, the present lapses in the UNO cannot be beyond rectification. They could be easily rectified. A pact should be drafted and ratified through the UN Security Council, whereby the responsibility of safeguarding the borders of the nations of the world shall be entrusted to the UNO.

During Maharishi’s visits to the USA he had several discussions with the officials of the UNO. He had also delivered a lecture at the Hammers Kjold Auditorium. Later, he presented a plan for world peace at a gathering held in Yucca valley, California which was unanimously approved by those present. In his book world Peace Maharishi proposed the following draft for “the Constitution of World Human Rights.”⁴From the above discussion, it is obvious that Maharishi aims at “one world government”, where all the countries are under its control. In such a government, there would be no narrow differences between different nations. No one will be considered as a citizen of particular nation or country on the contrary, he/she will raise to the level of a “world Citizenship”.

REFORMATION OF CULTURE: In spite of existing exhaustive discussions and debates on culture and its nature, Vethathiri formulated a universally fit five-fold moral culture, to be cultivated by man. The five-fold moral culture, formulated by Vethathiri is as follows:¹⁷

1. Each person must live by the earnings made through his or her own mental or physical labor.
2. One’s method of living should not cause any suffering to the body or mind of my person.
3. One should not kill any living being for food.
4. One must have the utmost respect for the possessions and freedoms of other’s and help to protect them.
5. One must cultivate loving kindness and strive to alleviate the miseries of others to the extent possible.

Thus the five-fold reformations of culture, propounded by Maharishi were emphasized earlier by our ancient sages like Buddha and Mohair and modern social reformers like Gandhi.

LIVING UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF INTELLECTUALS: Who should rule the state was a long standing issue in both politics and philosophy. In his book, Plato writes a dialogue involving his mentor Socrates. Socrates believed that the elements that make up an 'ideal' state, he called this ideal state Kalipolis ⁵. According to Plato philosopher beings should be in the ruling class in the 'ideal' state. Philosophers should be rulers because they have knowledge of the truth that others don't have and they only can makes crucial decisions about what is best for the city-state. Philosophers loved wisdom, they seek truth in all things and they can see and understand things clearly which according to Plato most people can't do. Plato thinks that Aristocracy is the ideal type of government; he believes that only the wisest few should lead the rest. A good philosopher will always put the good of the city before himself and he will always do what is best for the city. The reason why Maharishi concludes the society should be guided by intellectuals is highly logical and practical. He said it because he is a philosopher or he wants to reason the cause of philosophers. But he has a strong foundational conviction. Being a philosopher, and knowing about logic, ethics, metaphysics and political philosophy, does necessarily make an expert on the interests of the people. It is the people who, in theory, rulers are aiming to represent and support. Since the people of the world differ in their knowledge, customs and traditions, living as per the guidance of the intellectuals and the wise is the safest mode of living. By this, we can avoid conflicts and achieve success and peace. Therefore Maharishi argues that all people should live under the guidance of the enlightened thinkers.

RESPECTS FOR WOMANHOOD: There are many civilizations in the world where respect for women and their role in society are prominent and others where regard for them and their status should be improved. Yet the level of civility along with moral and spiritual standards in a society can often be perceived by the respect and regard it gives for its women. Not that it glorifies them for their sexuality and then gives them all the freedom men want so they can be exploited and taken advantage of, but that they are regarded in a way that allows them to live in honor for their

importance in society with respect and protection, and given the opportunity to reach their real potential in life. Among the many societies that can be found in the world, we have seen that some of the most venerating regard for women has been found in Vedic culture. The Vedic tradition has held a high regard for the qualities of women, and has retained the greatest respect within its tradition as seen in the honor it gives for the Goddess, who is portrayed as the feminine embodiment of important qualities and powers. Throughout the many years of Vedic culture, women have always been given the highest level of respect and freedom, but also protection and safety. There is a Vedic saying, "Where women are worshiped, there the gods dwell." Or where the women are happy, there will be prosperity. In fact the direct quotes from the *Manu-samhita* explains as follows:

"Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare. Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers. The houses on which female relations, not being duly honored, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek (their own) welfare, should always honor women on holidays and festivals with (gifts of) ornaments, clothes and (dainty) food." ⁶

LIVING IN TUNE WITH THE LAW OF NATURE: Archeology is revealing evidence that strongly suggests that the evolution of humans began in Africa. Almost throughout the vast span of prehistory, human ancestors lived in mobile groups engaged in scavenging, gathering and hunting. At that time they never thought of law of nature ; because they were living just above the animal level-state. When the kings expanded their area of the kingdom, wars with other nearby groups became essential. During the wars many innocent people who served as soldiers were killed without any cause. Then the human tendencies reduce to the lowest level. Even at this time the people living in the country had no necessity to think of law of nature as their basic essential were cared for by their kings.

Thus, the entire universe is the result of the four phenomena:

- Absolute Space
- The wave emanating from such infinitesimal energy particle; and
- Infinitesimal energy particle;
- Magnetism

Therefore Maharishi's philosophy comes under Metaphysical naturalism, also called "philosophical naturalism", is a philosophical worldview and belief system that holds that there is nothing but natural elements, principles, and relations those required to understand our physical environment by mathematical modeling. Metaphysical naturalism holds that all properties related to consciousness and the mind are reducible to, or supervene upon, nature. Broadly, the corresponding theological perspective is religious naturalism or spiritual naturalism. More specifically, metaphysical naturalism submerges the supernatural with nature.

SPORTS TO BE MADE NON-COMMERCIAL: The importance of sports in the life of any one is invaluable and goes much further than the basic answer that "it keeps kids off the streets." Sports play a pivotal role in the makeup of an individual. Many are in *tamoguna*, and so, as the Bhagavad-Gita itself counsels, 'one must get over *tamoguna*, which is lethargy and lack of proper understanding, by cultivating *rajoguna*, or activity, dynamism'. *Sarira madhyam khalu dharma sadhanam*, say the shastras, meaning that the body is the means to the attainment of all dharma or right living and thinking. From *rajoguna*, one must graduate into *sattvaguna*, namely, purity and the other virtues that enable a person to have spiritual realization. Therefore in order to reach that *rajoguna* one has to achieve the former one. "**You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita**" is one of the most popular quotes of Swami Vivekananda.⁷ Maharishi's argument towards sports may appear to be discouraging and not correct. It gives an impression that he is against national and international athletic competitions held in modern times, which go against the wishes of sports lovers. However, we must understand the spirit behind Maharishi's argument. It is beyond doubt that in the name of sports, in the present day world, the youth are wasting much of their valuable time in watching sports on T.Vs and indulging in unlawful activities like betting. Such activities, must be shunned. Sports should play a vital role in bringing good health to the body, but at present in the guise of sports the youth are indulging in many unlawful activities. This is what, Maharishi objects to. If sports are utilized for right purpose, he welcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT: Our actions and deeds are alike seeds. If one sows seeds of grasses, one shall harvest the crop of grass and not a cereal crop like wheat or rice. He has to sow seeds of wheat or rice to harvest the grain or cereal crop. Law of the Karma stipulates if a person is spreading happiness through charity and kind it means he is sowing the seeds of happiness that will produce the fruits of happiness. This simply means that good things happen to those who do good work and bad things happen to people who indulge in doing bad things always in their lives. A famous stanza in a poem clears this fact⁸.

If you sow **honesty**, you will reap **trust**.

If you sow **goodness**, you will reap **friends**.

If you sow **humility**, you will reap **greatness**.

If you sow **perseverance**, you will reap **victory**.

If you sow **consideration**, you will reap **harmony**.

If you sow **hard work**, you will reap **success**.

If you sow **forgiveness**, you will reap **reconciliation**.

If you sow **openness**, you will reap **intimacy**.

If you sow **patience**, you will reap **improvements**.

If you sow **faith**, you will reap **miracles**.

Maharishi wants to understand and explain the worldly phenomena scientifically. According to him one should not be led with blind superstitions, beliefs and dogmas. His philosophy is that “we reap, as we sow”. Things cannot happen by miracles. On the contrary, they are achieved through hard-work and labour. This message, Maharishi conveys through his principle of “Cause and Effect”.

BASIC AMENITIES TO BE AVAILABLE TO ALL

In order to prevail peace and harmony on earth, Maharishi feels that food and water to be available to each and every person of the world. He observes that food and water are vital for the survival and longevity of every living being. In ancient times, people initially settled wherever they found water resources. Later on boundaries emerge according to the establishment of nations their government and laws. To conclude, Maharishi argues for ethical life. Morality constitutes the basis of his philosophy. He wants a world without war, economic Justice and a fair judiciary, to prevail in Society. Moreover like Jiddu Krishnamurti⁹, he visualizes a world Government, where national barriers and distinctions would disappear. He desires people should live with culture. Maharishi is aware of the fact that man may be civilized but need not be cultured. Therefore, the emphasis of Maharishi is that of culture rather than advancement in civilization. Like Plato, Maharishi argues the need for guidance of intellectuals in a government. A Government ruled by brutes will hamper the development of society and ultimately lead to destruction. Therefore Maharishi emphasizes upon the need of intellectual guidance in a Society.

UNIQUENESS OF MAHARISHI’S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY: A philosopher is any man who has begun to think seriously. Philosophy is the natural pursuit of conscious beings, or it becomes their natural pursuit when they are unable to find reasons for what they experience. As the fruit of philosophizing, philosophy is the deposit of the serious thoughts of other men. One can know a great deal about these thoughts of others without doing any philosophizing oneself. In fact, philosophy is often held to be a dull and useless subject mainly for this reason. Maharshi’s philosophy plays an important role in us how we *think* about reality, which in turn has an impact on how we approach reality. These rational or conceptual thoughts determine how we act. His thought functions to how we *experience*¹⁰ reality also. It helps us wonderful ability to take part in and to be connected with that which is outside ourselves. Actually, this first-hand experience of an outer reality is what enables us to find a solid sense of ourselves as real. That seems a bit counter-intuitive at first, but it remains true that the more outer-directed we are, the more real we feel and experience ourselves to be.

Maharishi’s social philosophy wonderfully connects all world philosophies with the three words - "pluralism", "relativism" and "tolerance", which are the source of spectacular confusion today - the confusion extending from personal faith and witness to good citizenship to public policy. This confusion has also led to an entirely unnecessary of others’ intimidation in public discussion, as if those who dismiss historic humanism somehow were speaking from moral high ground.

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