

Editorial**ETHICS IN POLITICS
Conflicts and Resolutions****Jose Nandhikkara**

Politics is an essential aspect of human life – essential in building, governing, and developing societies and communities based on rules; it includes both theory and practice of legislating and executing rule of law for common good. In practice, politics refers to achieving, exercising and maintaining positions of power. Citizens, political leaders, parliamentarians, government executives, the judiciary, the media, business, nongovernmental organisations, and religious and educational institutions are involved in this complex fact of life and ethics is fundamental to all stakeholders in politics. Though personal morality may differ from political morality there cannot be any political decision without morality.

Traditionally, it was argued that the use of political power was only right if it was exercised by a ruler whose personal moral character was strictly virtuous; in this sense, Plato placed rule by a philosopher king as the ideal. Machiavelli and Chanakya, however, focused more on the acquisition and maintenance of power by a ruler rather than on the ethics of the ruler for, according to them, goodness does not ensure power and the good person has no more authority by virtue of being good; end justifies means. Political leaders may be required to commit acts that would be wrong if done by citizens; it is also required, however, that leaders meet higher standards than the ordinary citizens, who are increasingly disillusioned with their leaders and their ideologies whether they be religious or secular.

The relation between politics and ethics is a contested zone in the regular life of a polity, both in terms of the ethics of office and the ethics of policy. Individual citizens also battle out the relationship between their own sense of ethics and political duties imposed on them by the state sometimes based on a different set of ethics in their everyday life. Though political ethics extends from rulers to citizens, political ethics differs from the ethics of associations and businesses and the personal ethics of rulers. Personal and political ethics are distinct but closely interrelated. Important

concerns of politics like justice, liberty, rights and duties, etc., are closely linked to the question of ethics.

Mahatma Gandhi considered politics without principle as perilous to humanity. The present day Indian and global politics, however, seem to be agreeing with the claim by Bernard Shaw that politics is the last resort of a scoundrel. People are losing faith in politics and ethics in politics appears to be a contradiction as more and more people are drawn to politics as an arena of investment to cater to their selfish interests rather than for serving common good. Though there is a profound scepticism regarding ethics in politics there is a thirst for ethics in politics: ethics can make a difference in politics.

To examine the complex interrelationships existing between politics and ethics, the Centre for the Study of World Religions, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, and Globethics.net India jointly organized a one-day workshop in collaboration with the School of Law, Christ University, Bangalore. This issue of the *Journal of Dharma* is the fruit of the workshop on “Politics and Ethics.”

Purushottama Bilimoria, in his paper “The Politics of Secularization and Its Moral Discontents/Disenchantments,” seeks to demonstrate how a political-philosophical idea became a worldwide movement, a driving ideology, that has had a formidably deconstructive impact on significant religious practices of societies wedded to traditional patterns of culture, law, and morality. This Enlightenment *epistémé* has also come increasingly under scrutiny, however, for its shortcomings in recognizing the moral basis of certain cultural patterns of religious predilections that people are increasingly not prepared to abandon altogether. From disenchantments (of the sacred and religion – moral proclivities in the public spheres, with some exemptions in the private sphere, such as ‘Personal Law’ in British India and colonial Turkey) we now have with the so-called ‘return of religion in the western world’ moved to a situation of discontentment with the rampant secularization of societies in the wake of modernity and decolonisation. After engaging with Charles Taylor’s re-configuration of his challenging thesis of *secularity*, the paper moves to the Indian scenario and its confused handling of secularism in our post-colonial times.

Josh V. Paramthottu continues the discussion in “Dialectics of Politics and Ethics in Gandhi and Taylor: Connections, Dilemmas, and Convergences.” In his view, the relationship between politics and ethics takes new turns at the dawn of nation-states around the world. Independent

nations are distancing themselves from their initial affinity to religions and ethical principles originating from such religions, to a secular entity proposing its own 'constitutional laws' for the wellbeing of their citizens. The paper analyzes the dilemma of 'secular politics and ethics' in their failure to meet the metaphysical aspirations of human self. Here, the demand for the justification of pluralism or multiculturalism is acknowledged. However, deep consciousness of one's 'religious identity' seems constantly challenging such 'plural assertions'. Reading Charles Taylor and re-reading Gandhi, the author sheds some lights on the importance and relevance of 'authentic politics' which, he argues, are inevitably intertwined with 'ethics' and 'religion'. This was true in the case of both Gandhi, who had an 'experiential approach' to religion, politics, and ethics, and Taylor, who had a 'theoretical approach' to the same spheres of life.

"The Shadow of Truth: Ethical Concerns in the Writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn" by Arvind Radhakrishnan examines the contributions of the Russian writer and philosopher Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the understanding of the workings of totalitarianism. Solzhenitsyn wrote numerous works like *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and *The Gulag Archipalego*. Examining *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* the author probes the ethical concerns that Solzhenitsyn raises in this work, along with his deep understanding of human nature. The paper also seeks to compare Solzhenitsyn's views with that of thinkers like Jean Paul Sartre, Vaclav Havel, and Lev Tolstoy.

The welfare state is often considered the crown of democratic form of governance. The ethic and ideal of social welfare is, however, as old as the ancient civilisations. The scriptures of the major religious traditions of humanity are replete with references to the duty of the well off towards the poor and the vulnerable members of society and also to the vision of a just socio-economic order. However, when it comes to the means of realizing such a social order, there are two competing ethical paradigms, one calling for direct and maximal state involvement in welfare through the setting up of a publicly financed social security program, and the other arguing that the free market is the best mechanism for ensuring social justice. Today, we find ourselves in an era of global economic crisis and the question of a fiscally sustainable welfare state generates intense debate across the political spectrum. "Politics and Ethics of the Welfare State" by Cheriyan Alexander presents a historical overview and attempts an analysis of the ethical principles at play in this debate.

According to Davis Panadan, women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies, especially in India. His article, "Gender Politics and Quota for Women in India," argues that the quota for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in India strengthens the political empowerment of women, transforms the democracy and provides an answer to gender politics in India. A large scale reservation of seats for women in the local bodies and women's proactive participation in the management of the local affairs in the villages has enhanced their status and rights. It is further argued that reservation for women in PRI would contribute to the process and project of women's empowerment.

Professor James Massey in his essay provides ethical reflections on the "Politics and Ethics of Reservation in India" from a liberation paradigm of 'various subaltern groups of India' who are the victims of caste based social order of our society. Their victimization on the basis of caste has been perpetuated by religion on the one hand, and implemented by various political powers at different stages of Indian history, on the other hand. The reservation policies, meant for the benefit of the subalterns, have developed in the past under the same 'social order,' and carried on today by those people or groups who wield political power. It is important therefore to understand religio-political equation behind this 'social order' that ultimately influences the reservation policies. This equation has been understood from the perspective of the 'subalterns,' particularly of Dalits. The special focus is laid on both the politic and ethics of 'reservation' with a reference to the 1950 Presidential Order and the Backward Classes Commissions.

The *Journal of Dharma* calls on all citizens and leaders in the society to nurture ethics in politics for the well being of all – present and future generations. Ethics is fundamental to politics and ethics makes a difference in politics. We need a paradigm shift in the way politics is shaped and realised by citizens as well as political leadership. Even in the struggle for power, trade-offs and compromises between individual, local, national, regional and international interests ethics is necessary in politics. The world stands in need of political leadership imbued with vision and responsibility with a determination to act ethically always both at the personal and political levels. They should have ethical responsibility for their decisions, actions and omissions – towards their own constituency, in the first place, but also towards neighbouring and future constituencies.