Hindu Ethics

_Ethics_ – moral principles that govern behaviour

_Dharmā_ – Hindu term for ethics, includes: duties, rights, laws, conduct and virtues for right way of living

_Ethics in Hindu Scriptures:_

_Vedas_ – (circa 6000 BCE)

_Gītā_ – (circa 3000 BCE)

_Manuṣmṛiti_ – (circa 1250 BCE) and

_Patanjali Yoga Sutras_ – (circa 200 BCE)
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**Objective level** – Social ethics: (1) *Ashram dharma*, (2) *Varna dharma* and (3) *Sadharan dharma*

(1) *Ashram dharma* – framework to express one’s personality, incorporated within *Purushartha* – the aims of life: *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha*

*Dharma* – behaviour in accord with *ṛta* – includes right way of living

*Artha* – economic prosperity

*Kama* – desires, pleasure of senses

*Moksha* – liberation, self-realisation
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Vital debts – to be paid before qualifies for Moksha

Rishi ṛna – debt to teacher paid thru study

Pitṛ ṛna – debt to ancestors thru begetting

Deva ṛna – debt to deities thru ritual performances

Ashramas:

Brahmacharya – (student stage): celibacy, respect for teachers, parents and elders

Grihastha – (householder): getting married, earning money, caring for family and society

Vanaprastha – (hermit): retired life, withdrawal from worldly life, contemplation, social work

Sannyasa – (renunciate): complete detachment, seeking god-realisation
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**Varna Dharma** – role based on natural tendencies

**Brahmin** – teachers or priests; study of scriptures, conducting pujas, and religious ceremonies; prevalence of *Sattva guna*

**Kshatriya** – rulers, administrators and warriors; maintaining law and order; prevalence of *Rajas*

**Vaishya** – merchant class, traders, farmers; maintain the economy; prevalence of *Rajas* and *Tamas*

**Shudra** – manual labour class, blue-collar workers; perform menial tasks; prevalence of *Tamas guna*

**Dalit** – outcast or untouchables; perform cleaning toilets etc. Mahatma Gandhi called them *Harijan*
Three Gunas – tendencies, qualities or properties

*Sattva* – quality of balance, harmony, purity

*Rajas* – quality of passion, activity, egoism

*Tamas* – quality of dullness, apathy, impurity
**Sadharan Dharma** – generic duties for all humans

These universal duties as per *Manusmriti* are:
- **Dhairya** (Steadfastness), **Kṣamā** (Foregiveness),
- **Damah** (Control of senses), **Chouryābhava** (Non-appropriation),
- **Śauca** (Cleanliness), **Indriya-nigraha** (Repression of sensuous appetites), **Dhi** (Wisdom),
- **Vidyā** (Learning), **Satya** (Truth), and
- **Akrodha** (Restraint of anger)

Similar ethical precepts are set forth in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: **Yama** - the precepts of Social Discipline includes:
- **Ahimsa** (non-violence), **Satya** (truthfulness), **Asteya** (non-stealing), **Brahmacharya** (celibacy), and **Aparigraha** (abstention from greed).
**Niyama** (the precepts of Individual Discipline) includes: **Śauca** (cleanliness), **Santosha** (contentment), **Tapas** (austerity), **Svadhyaya** (self-study), and **Isvara-Pranidhana** (surrender of the self to God).

Social ethical codes change with time and situation, e.g. Killing is a crime but is permissible in self-defence.

**Manusmriti** states:

*Satyam Bruyat Priyam Bruyat, Na Bruyat Satyam Apriyam Priyam Cha Na Anritam Bruyat, Yesha Dharma Sanatanah*

Speak the truth, speak what is pleasing; Do not speak the unpleasant truth; Do not speak untruth even if pleasant; This is the eternal law.
Subjective level – Personal ethics – purification of mind (Chittasudhi). Internalises morality: Duty to virtue

*Gita* (chapter 16th) lists the following personal qualities:

**Daivi Sampat** (Noble Qualities) - need to possess:
- *Abhayam* (Fearlessness),
- *Sattva Samśuddhiḥ* (Purity of heart and mind),
- *Jñāna yoga vyavasthitih* (established in the pursuit of knowledge),
- *Dānam* (alms giving),
- *Damah* (control of senses),
- *Yajña* (sacrifice or worship),
- *Svādhyāya* (self-study of scriptures),
- *Tapas* (austerities),
- *Arjavam* (uprightness),
- *Ahimsa* (non-injury),
- *Satya* (truthfulness),
- *Akrodha* (absence of anger),
- *Tyāga* (renunciation),
- *Śāntiḥ* (Peace),
- *Apaiśunam* (absence of ill-feelings about others),
- *Daya* (compassion),

- continued
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Aloluptvam (non-covetousness), Mārdavam (gentleness), Hrīḥ (modesty), Acāplam (absence of fickleness of mind), Tejaḥ (boldness), Kṣamā (forgiveness), Dhṛiti (steadfastness), Śauca (cleanliness), Adrohah (absence of hatred), and Nātimānitā (absence of pride) – (Gita 16.1-3)

Asuri Sampat (Demonic Qualities): We need to shun: Dambho (ostentation or boastfulness), Darpah atimānah (arrogance and ego), Pārushyam (harshness or rudeness in behavior), and Ajñāna (ignorance) - (Gita 16.4) Kāmaḥ (lust), Krodhaḥ (anger) and Lobhaḥ (greed) are gateway to hell - (Gita 16.21)
**Transcendental Ethics** - ultimate aim of life is *Mokṣa*. Social and personal ethics are means to an end, not an end in themselves. It is the total transformation to the ultimate bliss, free from *Maya* - leading to the experience of the one’s true nature – *Sat* (pure existence), *Chit* (pure consciousness) and, *Ananda* (pure bliss). That is the enlightened state – the Buddha state, when all the empirical contradictions are transcended – cold and heat, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, good and evil, right and wrong.
Ethics is a big topic as it covers almost all aspects of our living. I would like to conclude this discussion here with quotations from two of our great Swamis: Swami Sivananda of Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, who summarises the ethical behavior as “Be Good Do Good”

And Swami Vivekananda provides a simple test for morality. He says, “That which is selfish is immoral and that which is unselfish is moral”.


References:
1. The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals by Professor S. Cromwell Crawford, University of Hawaii, Asian Studies Program 1982.

The next part of my presentation would include discussion on **Environmental Ethics**, an important social issue.