



Institute for Social and Economic Change

Dr. V K R V Rao Road, Nagarabhavi, Bengaluru 560072



Golden Jubilee Lecture Series

Moral Evolution as Development – An Unfinished Task

by

Prof. M V Nadkarni

*Honorary Visiting Professor, Institute for Social and
Economic Change, Bengaluru*

Abstract

If the human species has to survive, development has to be essentially in moral terms, not just material or technological. More than rationality, what distinguishes humans from animals is the moral instinct. Morality makes human beings human. Ethics is what supports or holds the society, and makes long term development in human welfare possible. Mahatma Gandhi defined civilizational process in moral terms. Ironically, humans themselves become the greatest threats to their own survival. Nuclear brinkmanship and environmental crisis are human creations.

For moral evolution, humans do not derive ethical values from nature or the dictum of 'survival of the fittest', but from the fact of their being social animals. Some animals are also social. What distinguishes developed human societies is that the individuals in them are also important, having their rights and freedom to achieve their highest potential. Humans aim beyond subsistence and entertain lofty ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty. Moral evolution is, therefore, not only necessary but also quite possible, and hopefully probable too.

In spite of moral shortfalls and failures, humans have also achieved considerable progress over the last century in reducing poverty, gender inequality, exploitation of children, and marginalisation of social groups. JC Kumarappa, known as Gandhi's Economist, believed in a long term tendency of humans towards reducing violence. However, the human evolution in moral terms is still an unfinished task.

Moral evolution is not automatic or natural. We have to strive for it consciously. Old challenges like religious fanaticism have re-emerged leading to violence, and before they are overcome, new challenges like Artificial Intelligence have risen which can lead to mass unemployment and marginalisation. Ethics has to be integrated into economic, social, political, and environmental policies to face these challenges and promote moral evolution to ensure survival and happiness of the human species. Awareness of and capacity for resolving ethical dilemmas has to be raised. We cannot leave it to religion alone. Religion is sectarian, but ethics is universal. We cannot expect state leaders and corporate executives to seek advice of religious leaders in solving ethical problems. Professional training and research in ethics on secular lines are needed. I suggest, therefore, that ISEC should start a Centre for Studies in Ethics. It will be a pioneering and rewarding step.