

Business Ethics in Sanskrit Literature

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Abstract - The purpose behind philosophies, scriptures and education is to build human character and quality. All this is possible only when man has ethics. It is one of the crucial elements for development of human society and progress of the nation. An ethical person is able to develop his physical and mental capabilities. Understanding and implementing ethics in our daily life is need of the hour. It is believed that the best literature of the world is available in Sanskrit language. There is a deep relationship between Sanskrit literature and ethics. In this research paper, we have discussed about business ethics that can be traced from Sanskrit literature.

Keywords - Ethics, Business ethics, Responsibilities, Equality, Alliance, Equanimity, Leadership and Communication, Positive attitude, Self-development, Holistic development.

DISCUSSION

Ethics: Ethics is a system of moral principles. It is concerned with what is noble for individuals well for society. Ethics are values and principles of conduct, quality to adhere good, what we observe in our personal and professional lives.

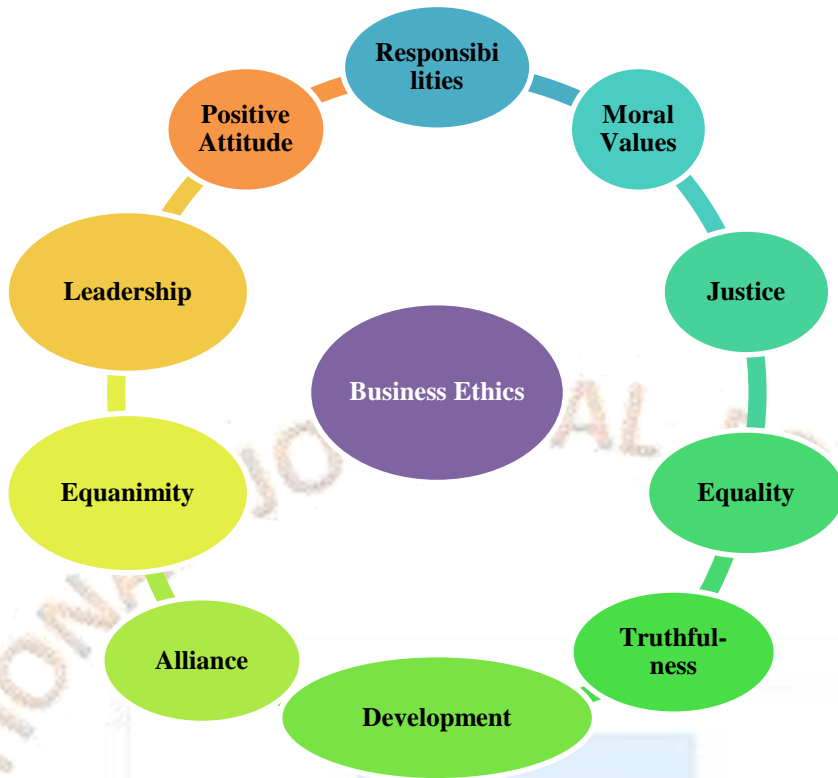
Business Ethics: Business ethics are the moral principles that act as guidelines for the way a business conducts itself and its transactions.¹

Business ethics means a group of rules or principles that the organization should follow. They refer to a code of conduct that companies are expected to follow while doing business. These norms, values and ethical practices are the principles that guide a business.

Business ethics are the norms and moral values of human behaviour expected by the present-day society inclusively and exclusively dealing with commercial transactions. It can be understood as a conduct of a businessman while conducting a business and observing morality in his business activities.

As being ethical is important for an individual, same is also essential for the uplifting a business entity. There are number of rules, principles and ethics to lead a fruitful business. From the perspective of an individual, ethical principles are also applicable to a business because human beings are the driving force behind any business.

Business ethics are not only important for a business but for businessmen as well. By implementing these ethics, a business and businessman can be successful. Some of the business ethics are being described in detail with special reference to Sanskrit literature.



1. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Duties and responsibilities are crucial for a businessman to run any business. A businessman should believe his duties and responsibilities. Success is rewarded to only those who perform their duties responsibly. The same thing is also described in the Yajurveda -

कुर्वन्नेवेहकर्माणिजिजीविषेच्छतःसमाः।ⁱⁱ

The above mentioned *Shloka* calls attention to the fact that human beings should desire to live for 100 years while doing karma. Every business should work with the objective of perpetual succession irrespective of the trials and tribulations it will face. It is only possible by understanding the meaning of duties and responsibilities. As hard work is the key to success, performance of duties is required. A businessman should be optimistic, energetic to overcome the fraudulent activities and trade practices and to adopt positive and fair business activities.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna also said that we should not blame our weakness (of mind) that comes in our way in the form of obstacles. If one's behavior is truly based on wisdom and mercy, then he would experience neither confusion nor grief.

क्लैव्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते।

क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप॥ⁱⁱⁱ

A businessman should believe in hard work and should not depend only on his fate. Success comes to those who perform their Karma with sheer dedication. The same is mentioned in the *Athravaveda*:

कृतं मे दक्षिणे हस्ते जयो मे सव्य अहितः।^{iv}

Profits and wealth can only be achieved with performance, hard work and dedication.

उद्योगिनं पुरुषसिंहमुपैति लक्ष्मीः।

The following mantra from the *Rigveda* also mentioned that the nature and fate will prove beneficial for only those who work hard and understand their responsibilities.

न ऋते श्रान्तस्य सखाय देवाः।^v

Many of the companies do not take initiative for a new product line or launch new schemes or enter into diversified sectors or take innovative plans due to the fear of failure in their actions or activities and they mostly remain uncertain about the future. They should follow and understand that the true essence of success lies only in hard work as this is also described beautifully by Lord Krishna in *Bhagvad Gita*:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥^{vi}

2. MORAL VALUES

The basis of whole society and system of an organisation lies with moral values. It is an essential constituent for any ethical work all over the world. Just as human body cannot survive without food, a society or better system cannot exist for a long run in the absence of moral values.

सर्वलोकव्यवहारस्थितिनीत्या विना नहि।
यथाशनैर्विना देह-स्थितिर्नस्याद्धि देहिनाम् ॥^{vii}

While doing business, one should not follow wrong path because misdeeds and injustice result in decline of name and fame of business or company. According to *Shukraniti* those who follow the path of truth and justice find friends everywhere.

शत्रवो नीतिहीनानां यथापथ्याशिनां गदाः।
सद्यः केचिच्च कालेन भवन्ति न भवन्ति च ॥^{viii}

Only the businesses with ethics and strength can taste the flavor of success in long run.

यत्र नीतिबले चोभे तत्र श्रीः सर्वतोमुखी।^{ix}

In our lives, sometimes we are in dilemma between right and wrong. We all think that we have many options in our life, but actually we have only two options i.e. one is to follow *Shreyas* and other is *Preyas*. For those who choose *Shreyas*, good fortune awaits them and their life ultimately gets fulfilled. The one who chooses *Preyas*, follows the wrong track of the attainment of his goals and later faces lots of misfortune.

<i>Shreyas</i>	Path of values, ethics, and spiritual well-being.
<i>Preyas</i>	Path of valuable goods, material prosperity.

It is also explained in *Kathopnishad* as:

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरोः
स्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते
प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षमाद् वृणीते ॥^x

The above mentioned mantra teaches us what one should do and what one should not in our daily life as well as in our business.

3. JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS

Every business activity should be justified, as goodwill can only be created by following the path of justice. Injustice leads to downfall of a business and ruin its name and fame. Work done with justice is respected by all and in similar way businesses should develop their relationships. The business alliances and partners terminate their relationships with those who do not follow the path of justice. No one wants to be a partner of injustice followers. The same thing can be traced from the *Ramayana* that every living being help those who follow the path of justice as in the case of Lord Rama who was helped by numerous creatures during his exile. Needless to say that those who follow the path of injustice remain alone-

यान्ति न्यायप्रवृत्तस्य तिर्यञ्चोऽपि सहायताम् ।

अपन्यान् तु गच्छन्तं सोदरोऽपि विमुञ्चति ॥

Wealth maximization is one of the overarching aim of business. But we cannot be satisfied just by getting wealth. Money can only get material thing but internal satisfaction does not come from it. This is very well explained in the *Kathopnishad*:

नवित्तेनतर्पणीयोमनुष्यः ।^{xi}

It is equally applied on a businessman that he should not focus only on earning more and more profits, but also work for satisfaction of other stakeholders including customers, society, employees and clients. Wealth earned by way of fraud, injustice and misrepresentation never gives gratification and respect cannot be earned by such means from the society.

A good businessman is identified by the basic feature that he never switches from the path of justice in any condition or phases of business and economy. In the *Nitishataka*, *Mahakavi Bhartarihari* also gives a message that opponents condemn or praise, wealth may come or diminish, we die today or after years but we should not leave the path of justice.

निन्दन्तु नीतिनिपुणा यदि वा स्तुवन्तु ।
लक्ष्मीः समाविशतु गच्छतु वा यथेष्टम् ।
अद्यैव वा मरणमस्तु युगान्तरे वा
न्यायात् पथः प्रविचलन्ति पदं न धीराः ॥^{xii}

4. EQUALITY

The path of fraud, misrepresentation and unfair practices should not be followed by a good businessman. Discrimination on the basis of product, price, quality, geographical boundaries or customers should not be appreciated at all. In the same way, we learn lesson from the *Mahabharata* that we should not treat others the way we do not want to be treated by others.

नतत्परस्यसंदध्यात्प्रतिकूलंयदात्मनः ।

एष संक्षेपतो धर्मः कामादन्यः प्रवर्तते ॥^{xiii}

Maharishi *Ved Vyas* also gives same message to us in this *Shloka*–

“आत्मनः प्रतिकूलानि परेषां न समाचरेत्।”

The feet of success is touched by those businesses who deal with same treatment to all customers and the one who wishes same benefits for the ultimate end users. Such businesses enjoy the ultimate joy with stability in their mind as well as in their business.

According to *Ishavasyaupnishad*, we should treat everyone equally.

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति^{xiv} ।

In short, we can say that as per Sanskrit Literature, equality among all human beings should be established. The concept of equality is essential for ensuring happiness and harmony in the business.

5. TRUTHFULNESS

Goodwill can be enhanced and maintained by the businesses with the simple mantra of trustworthiness. Fulfillment of promises and commitments well in time is the responsibility of a businessman. Business should maintain the trust and loyalty of the customers created towards them. According to the *Taitriupnishada*, when a student returns to the society after learning from gurukuls, he was taught by his guru that whatever work is done for the society, it should be done on the basis of truth.

सत्यं वद। धर्मं चर।^{xv}

In this contemporary world, those who want to uplift their business should follow this path. Sometimes, we face confusion regarding the realistic meaning of truth; it is beautifully explained in *Skandpurana* that one should speak the truth and say nice things. One shouldn't say things that are true but not nice and nor should one say nice things if they're not true.

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयान्न ब्रूयात् सत्यप्रियम्।

प्रियं च नानृतं ब्रूयादेष धर्मो विधीयते॥

While business touches new heights of success, the rumours also spread like fire in the forest. Businesses should take care of such rumours and save themselves from fake promises. They should follow the path of truth to maintain the momentum of success. In *Manusmriti*, Manu also said that a voice with truth should be used.

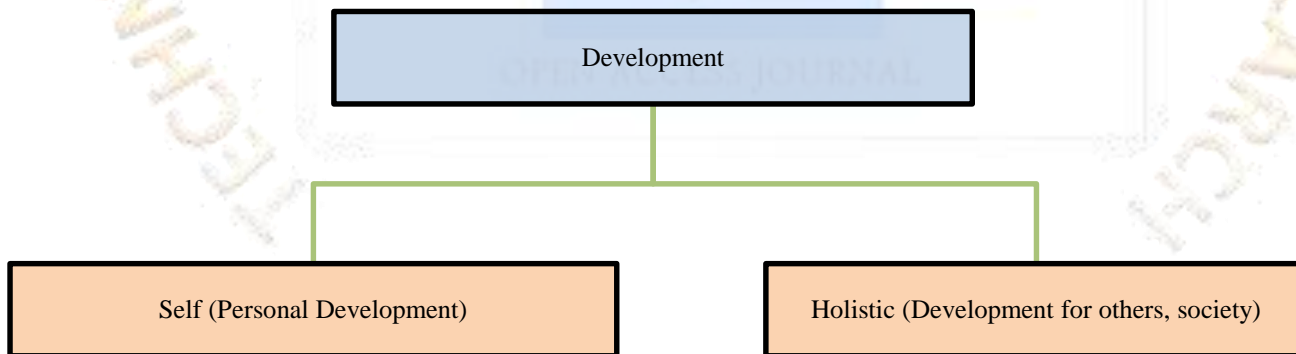
सत्यपूतां वदेत् वाणीं मनः पूतं समाचरेत्।^{xvi}

The employees working for integrity and probity should be appreciated and promoted by the organisation. Those who walk on the path of truth should be honoured, praised and recognised. The *Saamveda* mentioned the same as follows -

स्तुहि सत्यधर्माणम्।^{xvii}

6. DEVELOPMENT

Development is the core meaning of human life. It can be divided into two parts –Self and Holistic.



Along with self-development, we have to reform our society, nature and environment also. Having more wealth does not give us the right to fulfill needs only; we should go with development for all. Development of society is also one of our moral duties. Similarly, we should optimally utilize and extract from the resources as per our needs only and should leave something behind for upcoming generations. *Ishavasyaupnishad* supports the meaning of the same:

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम्^{xviii}

The one who do not think about others cannot contribute to the development of society. According to the *Rigveda*, the person who only enjoys things himself is considered a sinner.

केवलाघो भवति केवलादी ।^{xix}

Similarly, the corporates should also contribute some part of their profits for the development of society and country. The development of a family is inclusive in the development of whole society and an individual cannot grow without developing his society. The contribution to the society is also described in Vedas as: -

“शतहस्तसमाहर सहस्रहस्त सं किर।”

That is, collect with hundred hands and donate with thousand hands. It reveals that we should have spirit of contribution more than what we have.

Everyone should think about his token of contribution towards society. Environmental development is also our contribution to the society because planet earth is our mother and we are her children.

माता भूमिः पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः।^{xx}

7. ALLIANCE

A businessman can get business idea, plans or schemes from any source, but checking the authenticity and applicability of that idea or plan is the main thing. Decisions should be taken after thorough study and deep analysis of pros and cons for the business in upcoming future. We should use our intellect while taking decisions because the true advisors are very rare. It is also said in *Valmiki Ramayana* that men who forever speak pleasing words are easy to be obtained. One who speaks only useful words are very rare to find.

सुलभाः पुरुषाः राजन् सततं प्रियवादिनः।

अप्रियस्य च पथस्य वक्ता श्रोता च दुर्लभः॥^{xxi}

In business, we should also follow the path laid down in the *Valmiki Ramayana*. One should always beware of smoothie and liars. The people who give the right guidance should be trusted and listened carefully.

In order to combat in the business world, companies usually tie up their business with other businesses in order to get the benefit of synergetic effect. Success only comes when the tie-ups, joint ventures, mergers, amalgamations are made with good companies, i.e. doing businesses in an ethical way. Therefore, it is also said in the *Garuda Purana* that we should always be in the company of good people.

सद्भिः सङ्गं प्रकुर्वीत सिद्धिकामः सदा नरः।

नासद्भिरिह लोकाय वा हितम् ॥^{xxii}

Bad company and bad people should be left because the *Shukraniti* has also mentioned that bad people should not be supported in any way.

“त्यजेत् दुर्जनसंगतम् ।”^{xxiii}

Appreciation is one of the major factors for individual mental growth and self-motivation. Employees' recognition, appreciation for better performance boosts their power internally to work with more efficiency and effectiveness. It is also said in the Vedas as:

समानमु प्रश सिषम् ॥

The achievement of goals of a business or of an organisation is only possible when each and every division of manpower works with unity, and work for harmony of the organisation. It is also said in the Vedas that O man! Go together harmoniously, speak together, and understand each other's mind. In short, it can be stated that should work with unity or unity is strength.

संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।

8. PATIENCE AND EQUANIMITY

There is a rule in business that either there will be profit or there will be loss. A businessman should have patience in both the situations. He should not over excite for profits nor depress due to heavy losses. A businessman should have patience in every situation because those who remain patient even at the time of losses in business never destroy their wisdom.

व्यसने वार्थकृच्छ्रे वा भये वा जीवितान्तगे ।
विमृशंश्च स्वया बुद्धया धृतिमान् नावसीदति ॥^{xxiv}

A businessman should remain optimistic in every situation. Even when there is loss, he should not let negativity overpower his mind. Investors with their wisdom and patience can revive their wealth even after suffering from losses. He should not be depressed. According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, depression destroys a person like an angry serpent killing a young child.

नविषादोमनःकार्यविषादोदोषवत्तरः ।

विषादो हन्ति पुरुषं बालं कुद्ध इवोरगः ॥^{xxv}

Negativity destroys ones' knowledge and confidence. There is no enemy equals to grief.

शोको नाशयते धैर्यं शोको नाशयते श्रुतम् ।

शोको नाशयते सर्वं नास्ति शोकसमो रिपुः ॥^{xxvi}

Entrepreneurs should try to be patient even in financial crunch and also have patience when they are touching the heights in their business. A good businessman does not resort to over enthusiasm or extreme depression whatever the situation may be.

विपदि धैर्यम् ॥^{xxvii}

One's mental status should be stable in every condition or phase of life. Similarly, in business the entrepreneur should maintain condition of equanimity irrespective of phases of business such as profits, losses, economic cycles and other conditions.

One should be gentle after getting wealth and should stand strong like a mountain during fatality.

सम्पत्सु महतां चित्तं भवत्युत्पलकोमलम् ।

आपत्सु च महाशैलशिलासङ्घातकर्कशम् ॥^{xxviii}

Same attitude is also beneficial when implemented in business.

9. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Businessman and business leaders have a moral responsibility to set an example for inspiring the society by their deeds and goals. When noble leaders of corporate world are in the forefront, the rest of society gets uplifted. But in times when there is lack of principled leadership, rest of the society has no standards to pursue. It results into self-centeredness and moral bankruptcy. Lord Krishna also said that in the world whatever great people have done, society take inspiration from the lives of such people and follow their actions.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥^{xxx}

In the *Bhagwad Gita*, Lord Krishna said the following words to make Arjuna a good leader, O! Arjun, work has to be done with dedication.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ॥^{xxx}

Good business leaders should not indulge in unethical activities for fulfillment of their desires. Man's desires are endless. He should not do any unethical activity to fulfill his desires. In holy *Bhagavad Gita*, it is said that as fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust and a child by the womb, so is the universe enveloped in desire.

धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्यथादशो मलेन च।

यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम् ॥^{xxxi}

Communication skills of a businessman or a business leader shape his business in a right way. If someone is doubtful and unclear about communication in the business, one should refer to *Bhagwad Gita* as it is answered beautifully in the holy book:

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ॥^{xxxii}

10. POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND SELF-MOTIVATION

Enthusiasm and positive attitude is one of the important factors for performing any task. In the *Valmiki Ramayana*, it is explained as there is no greater force than enthusiasm. Nothing is impossible in this world for those who have positivity, curiousness and innovativeness in their mind.

उत्साहो बलवानार्य नास्त्युत्साहात् परं बलम्।

सोत्साहस्य हि लोकेषु न किञ्चिदपि दुर्लभम् ॥^{xxxiii}

All above aspects are also applicable on business. Businessmen should see opportunities in weakness to attain maximum benefit. Positive attitude is very important for growth of business; it is also described in Vedas as a prayer that only positive things and positive people should be accompanied.

सर्वा आशा मम मित्रं भवन्तु ॥^{xxxiv}

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, we can say that many essential business ethics have been described in detail in Sanskrit Literature. Even today, business ethics are exemplary for us. By implementing all these ethics in business, we can build name as well fame. Ethical business is beneficial for an individual, a society, and a nation. Being ethical in business is the only way to eliminate hoarding, looting and corruption. Business ethics are not only important from law-abiding point of view, but it is an internal feeling within an individual that allows him to do business in a right way. It is also packed with some other benefits such as enhanced reputations and goodwill, safety and is better for work culture for employees, stronger market penetration, and more access to modes of capital, rise in graph of profits and sustainable development of business for a better long-term growth.

Therefore, a good businessman should follow all the above said things so that he can become a good businessman.

ⁱ'Business Ethics', www.corporatefinanceinstitute.com, visited on September 19, 2023.

- ⁱⁱYajurveda,40.2
- ⁱⁱⁱShrimad bhagwat geeta,2.3
- ^{iv} Atharvaveda,7.50.8
- ^vRigveda,10.117.4
- ^{vi}Geeta ,2.47
- ^{vii}Shukraniti,2.11
- ^{viii}Shukraniti,1.10
- ^{ix}Shukraniti,1.17
- ^xKathopanishad,1.2.2
- ^{xi}Kathopanishad 1.27
- ^{xii}Nitishatakam,
- ^{xiii}Mahabharat parv.113.8
- ^{xiv}Ishavasayaupanishad,6
- ^{xv}Taittiriya Upanishad,shiksha valli, 11.1
- ^{xvi}Manusmriti,6.46
- ^{xvii} Saamved 32
- ^{xviii}Ishavasayaupanishad, 1
- ^{xix}Rigveda,10.117.6
- ^{xx}Atharvaveda,12.1.12
- ^{xxi}Valmiki ramayana,6.16.21
- ^{xxii}Garuda Purana,Nitisara,1.108.2
- ^{xxiii}Shukraniti 1.63
- ^{xxiv}Valmiki Ramayana,4.7.9
- ^{xxv}Valmiki ramayana, 4.64.11
- ^{xxvi}Valmiki ramayana, 2.62.15
- ^{xxvii}Nitishatakam,63
- ^{xxviii}Nitishatakam,66
- ^{xxix}Geeta,3.21
- ^{xxx}Geeta,3.19
- ^{xxxi}Geeta,3.38
- ^{xxxii}Geeta,17.15
- ^{xxxiii}Valmiki ramayana,4.1.121
- ^{xxxiv}Atharvaveda,19.15.6

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