

**“Business Ethics and Thirukkural Values”**

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**Abstract**

*Business ethics is a growing and developing discipline. Generally, it is believed that business ethics involves adhering to legal, regulatory, professional promises and commitments and abiding by general principles like fairness, truth, honesty and respect. It has take the part of dimensions of Business Ethics like HRM, Finance, Production, Marketing, Advertising and Corporate Social Responsibilities–Thirukkural and its Origin –Values in Thirukkural–Relevance of Thirukkural to Dravidian Culture–Thirukkural and Various dimensions of Business Ethics..*

**Key word:** *Ethics, Business, Thirukkural, Personal Values, Dravidians Culture.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The concept of ethics comes from the Greek word “ethos” that means both an individual’s character and a community’s culture Ethics simply shows you what is good and what is bad and what is right and what is wrong. Tenets of business ethics operate as system of values that are concerned primarily with the relationship of business goals to human ends; Business ethics has a five-part structure:

1. The specification of moral judgment
2. Moral judgment and the moral standard
3. justification of moral judgment
4. Logical reasoning and moral judgment
5. Moral judgment and moral responsibility.
- 6.

## Need for Ethics

It is quite clear that we can't do away with ethics in our economic activities. Trade, commerce and industry are based on the profit motive. This motive by itself is not bad. No business organization can be run successfully if it continuously suffers losses

## Importance of ethics in business

Ethical behavior is essential for long – term success in business.

This is truly from both a macro and micro – perspective

Macro argument – unethical behavior distorts the market system that leads to an efficient allocation of resources - Micro – highest individual firm unethical behavior leads to decreased long term performance.

Solomon argues that without a sense of community and co-operation there would be simply no firm; indeed without individual and corporate virtue, all success would be empty and transient. There are three approaches to studying business ethics – Descriptive (describing practices, moral codes and beliefs), Prescriptive (an attempt to formulate and defend basic moral norms) and The conceptual study of ethics (analyzing central ethical terms such as right, good, justice, virtue, and attempt to distinguish what is moral and what is immoral).

## Evaluation of Business ethics

Islam prohibits usury (lending money on interest) Buddha is not normally associated with worldly affairs such as business transactions, three points in the Eight to path are Perfect speech, Perfect action, and Perfect livelihood. Roman Catholic Church clearly defined canon law that prescribed what was legitimate behavior in certain fields in the business world. Canon means a stand and or measures – measuring one's behavior

## Different dimensions of Business ethics

### Ethical Concerns in HRM

The academic debate on business ethics mainly concentrates on the social and ecological responsibility of companies within the society. Ethics are regarded as crucial in the external self-presentation and public perception of (economic) organizations. The model of 'enlightened self interest' of business claims that only those companies can be economically successful which manage to convince their stakeholders of their moral integrity. According to the model, the implementation of ethical standards lies in the self-interest of companies. As some authors state in recent publications, ethics also become more and more an internal concern of organisations. Whereas formerly the interests of employees were ignored or only regarded as one of several stakeholders' interests, the "ethical management of employees" (Winstanley and Woodall 2000a: 5) itself gains in significance. Johns (1995:32) states that "the time for ethical leadership has come." Especially human resource management (HRM) plays a decisive role in introducing and implementing ethics. The essay outlines some aspects of ethics in HRM. It sketches ethical concerns that emerged in recent HRM debates, and reflects the viewpoint that ethics should be a pivotal issue for HR specialists. A number of ethical frameworks and their application in HRM policies and practices are reviewed. Here, the focus is mainly on barriers and obstacles to introducing ethical standards in HRM activities. Finally, some first steps to putting ethics into HRM practice are outlined. Although "ethical problems arise almost continually in human resource management" (Hosmer 1987: 313), in academic debates around HRM ethical issues have been of "marginal significance" (Winstanley and Woodall 2000a: 5) for long and gained increasing interest in publications only a short time ago.<sup>2</sup> The attention paid to moral dimensions of HRM was triggered by some objectionable changes in organisations' management of people, as several recent developments in HRM policies and practices had raised a number of serious ethical questions. Ethically doubtful HRM practices develop, for example, in the field of "insecurity and risk" (Winstanley et al 1996:6), as employers tend to shift economic risks onto the shoulders of their employees. The boom of performance-related pay systems and flexible employment contracts are indicators of these newly established forms of shifting risk. Human resource management deals with manpower planning and development related activities in an organization. Arguably it is that branch of management where ethics really matter, since it

concerns human issues specially those of compensation, development, industrial relations and health and safety issues. There is however sufficient disagreement from various quarters. Human resource management occupies the sphere of activity of recruitment selection, orientation, performance appraisal, training and development, industrial relations and health and safety issues. Business Ethicists differ in their orientation towards labour ethics. Some assess human resource policies according to whether they support an egalitarian workplace and the dignity of labor. Issues including employment itself, privacy, compensation in accord with comparable worth, collective bargaining (and/or its opposite) can be seen either as inalienable rights or as negotiable. Discrimination by age (preferring the young or the old), gender/sexual harassment, race, religion, disability, weight and attractiveness. A common approach to remedying discrimination is affirmative action. Potential employees have ethical obligations to employers, involving intellectual property protection and whistle-blowing. Employers must consider workplace safety, which may involve modifying the workplace, or providing appropriate training or hazard disclosure. Larger economic issues such as immigration, trade policy, globalization and trade unionism affect workplaces and have an ethical dimension, but are often beyond the purview of individual companies.

### **Ethics and Market system**

The kind of market system affects business and HR ethics; the latter thus becomes negotiable. In occupations where the market conditions do not favor the employees it is necessary to have government and labor union interventions in order to control the possible exploitation. In free market system, employees and the employer are almost equally empowered, negotiation create win situations for both the parties. Government or labor union interventions become harmful. Globalization has brought about the concept of globalizing labor, trade unions have started to decline and the role of HR as such in issues like employee policies and practices has become a debatable topic. In fact many people are of the opinion that HR is nothing but an arm of the stakeholders through which major strategic and policy decisions are divulged geared towards profit making! Thought there can be no single opinion on ethics in HR that is convincing. Market in itself is neither an ethical institution nor unethical and no policies and procedures alone cannot govern and align markets to human well being. However the requirement of such policies and procedures can also not be denied. In lieu of this HR ethics should take care of things like discrimination (sexual, religion, age etc), compensation, union and labor laws, whistle blowing, health and safety of the

employees etc, Fundamentally, finance is a social science discipline. The discipline borders behavioral economics, sociology, economics, accounting and management. It concerns technical issues such as the mix of debt and equity, dividend policy, the evaluation of alternative investment projects, options, futures, swaps, and other derivatives, portfolio diversification and many others. It is often mistaken to be a discipline free from ethical burdens. Marketing Ethics came of age only as late as 1990s. Marketing ethics was approached from ethical perspectives of virtue or virtue ethics, deontology, consequentially, pragmatism and relativism. Ethics in marketing deals with the principles, values and/or ideals by which marketers (and marketing institutions) ought to act. Marketing ethics is also contested terrain, beyond the previously described issue of potential conflicts between profitability and other concerns. Ethical marketing issues include marketing redundant or dangerous products/services transparency about environmental risks, transparency about product ingredients such as genetically modified organisms possible health risks, financial risks, security risks, etc., respect for consumer privacy and autonomy, advertising truthfulness and fairness in pricing & distribution. According to Borgerson, and Schroeder (2008), marketing can influence individuals' perceptions of and interactions with other people, implying an ethical responsibility to avoid distorting those perceptions and interactions. Marketing ethics involves pricing practices, including illegal actions such as price fixing and legal actions including price discrimination and price skimming. Certain promotional activities have drawn fire, including greenwashing, bait and switch, shilling, viral marketing, spam (electronic), pyramid schemes and multi-level marketing. Advertising has raised objections about attack ads, subliminal messages, sex in advertising and marketing in schools.

## MARKETING

Marketing is the process used to determine what products or services may be of interest to customers, and the strategy to use in sales, communications and business development. It generates the strategy that underlies sales techniques, business communication, and business developments. It is an integrated process through which companies build strong customer relationships and create value for their customers and for themselves. Marketing is used to identify the customer, satisfy the customer, and keep the customer. With the customer as the focus of its activities, marketing management is one of the major components of business management. Marketing evolved to meet the stasis in

developing new markets caused by mature markets and overcapacities in the last 2-3 centuries. The adoption of marketing strategies requires businesses to shift their focus from production to the perceived needs and wants of their customers as the means of staying profitable. The term *marketing concept* holds that achieving organizational goals depends on knowing the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions. It proposes that in order to satisfy its organizational objectives, an organization should anticipate the needs and wants of consumers and satisfy these more effectively than competitors.

### **Ethics of Production**

This area of business ethics deals with the duties of a company to ensure that products and production processes do not cause harm. Some of the more acute dilemmas in this area arise out of the fact that there is usually a degree of danger in any product or production process and it is difficult to define a degree of permissibility, or the degree of permissibility may depend on the changing state of preventative technologies or changing social perceptions of acceptable risk. These production business ethics often deal with defective, addictive or inherently dangerous products and services (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, weapons, motor vehicles, chemical manufacturing). Along with the ethical relations between the company and the environment such as pollution and other environmental ethics issues. All the production functions are governed by production ethics but there are certain that are severely harmful or deleterious which need to be monitored continuously. The following are worth mentioning:

1. There are ethical problems arising out of use of new technologies that are deleterious to health, safety and environment. Technological advancements like genetically modified food, radiations from mobile phones, medical equipment etc are less problems are more of dilemmas.
2. Defective services and products or products those are innately deleterious like alcohol, tobacco, fast motor vehicles, warfare, chemical manufacturing etc.
3. Animal testing and their rights or use of economically or socially deprived people for testing or experimentation is another area of production ethics.
4. Ethics of transactions between the organization and the environment that lead to pollution, global warming, increase in water toxicity and diminishing natural resources.

There are certain processes involved in the production of goods and a slight error in the same can degrade the quality severely. In certain products the danger is greater i.e. a slight error can reduce the quality and increase the danger associated with consumption or usage of the same exponentially. The dilemma therefore lies in defining the degree of permissibility, which in turn depends on a number of factors. Bhopal gas tragedy is one example where the poisonous gas got leaked out due to negligence on the part of the management. Usually many manufactures are involved in the production of same good. They may use similar or dissimilar technologies for the same. Setting a standard in case of dissimilar technologies is often very difficult. There are many other factors that contribute to the dilemma, for example, the involvement of the manpower, the working conditions, the raw material used etc. Social perceptions also create an impasse sometimes. For example the use of some fertilizer by cola companies in India recently created a national debate. The same cold drinks which were consumed till yesterday became noxious today because of a change in the social perception that the drinks are not fit for consumption.

### **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is An obligation, beyond that required by the law and economics, for a firm to pursue long term goals that are good for society. The continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as that of the local community and society at large About how a company manages its business process to produce an overall positive impact on society.

- Conducting business in an ethical way and in the interests of the wider community
- Responding positively to emerging societal priorities and expectations
- A willingness to act ahead of regulatory confrontation
- Balancing shareholder interests against the interests of the wider community
- Being a good citizen in the community

#### ***Is CSR the same as business ethics?***

- There is clearly an overlap between CSR and business ethics
- Both concepts concern values, objectives and decision based on something than the pursuit of profits
- And socially responsible firms must act ethically

The difference is that ethics concern individual actions which can be assessed as right or wrong by reference to moral principles.

CSR is about the organisation's obligations to all stakeholders – and not just shareholders.

There are four dimensions of corporate responsibility

- Economic - responsibility to earn profit for owners
- Legal - responsibility to comply with the law (society's codification of right and wrong)
- Ethical - not acting just for profit but doing what is right, just and fair
- Voluntary and philanthropic - promoting human welfare and goodwill
- Being a good corporate citizen contributing to the community and the quality of life

### ***SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY***

The term *social responsibility* means different things to different people. Generally, corporate social responsibility is the obligation to take action that protects and improves the welfare of society as a whole as well as organizational interests. According to the concept of corporate social responsibility, a manager must strive to achieve both organizational and societal goals. Current perspectives regarding the fundamentals of social responsibility of businesses are listed and discussed through (1) the Davis model of corporate social responsibility, (2) areas of corporate social responsibility, and (3) varying opinions on social responsibility. A model of corporate social responsibility that was developed by Keith Davis provides five propositions that describe why and how businesses should adhere to the obligation to take action that protects and improves the welfare of society and the organization:

- Proposition 1: Social responsibility arises from social power.
- Proposition 2: Business shall operate as an open system, with open receipt of inputs from society and open disclosure of its operation to the public.
- Proposition 3: The social costs and benefits of an activity, product, or service shall be thoroughly calculated and considered in deciding whether to proceed with it.
- Proposition 4: Social costs related to each activity, product, or service shall be passed on to the consumer.



- Proposition 5: Business institutions, as citizens, have the responsibility to become involved in certain social problems that are outside their normal areas of operation.

The areas in which business can become involved to protect and improve the welfare of society are numerous and diverse. Some of the most publicized of these areas are urban affairs, consumer affairs, environmental affairs, and employment practices. Although numerous businesses are involved in socially responsible activities, much controversy persists about whether such involvement is necessary or appropriate. There are several arguments for and against businesses performing socially responsible activities. The best-known argument supporting such activities by business is that because business is a subset of and exerts a significant impact on society, it has the responsibility to help improve society. Since society asks no more and no less of any of its members, why should business be exempt from such responsibility? Additionally, profitability and growth go hand in hand with responsible treatment of employees, customers, and the community. However, studies have not indicated any clear relationship between corporate social responsibility and profitability. One of the better known arguments against such activities is advanced by the distinguished economist Milton Friedman. Friedman argues that making business managers simultaneously responsible to business owners for reaching profit objectives and to society for enhancing societal welfare represents a conflict of interest that has the potential to cause the demise of business.

According to Friedman, this demise almost certainly will occur if business continually is forced to perform socially responsible behavior that is in direct conflict with private organizational objectives. He also argues that to require business managers to pursue socially responsible objectives may be unethical, since it requires managers to spend money that really belongs to other individuals. Regardless of which argument or combination of arguments particular managers might support, they generally should make a concerted effort to perform all legally required socially responsible activities, consider voluntarily performing socially responsible activities beyond those legally required, and inform all relevant individuals of the extent to which their organization will become involved in performing social responsibility activities. Federal law requires that businesses perform certain socially responsible activities. In fact, several government agencies have been established and are maintained to develop such business-related legislation and to make sure the laws are

followed. The Environmental Protection Agency does indeed have the authority to require businesses to adhere to certain socially responsible environmental standards. Adherence to legislated social responsibilities represents the minimum standard of social responsibility performance that business leaders must achieve. Managers must ask themselves, however, how far beyond the minimum they should attempt to go—a difficult and complicated question that entails assessing the positive and negative outcomes of performing socially responsible activities. Only those activities that contribute to the business's success while contributing to the welfare of society should be undertaken.

### **Social Responsiveness**

Social responsiveness is the degree of effectiveness and efficiency an organization displays in pursuing its social responsibilities. The greater the degree of effectiveness and efficiency, the more socially responsive the organization is said to be. The socially responsive organization that is both effective and efficient meets its social responsibilities without wasting organizational resources in the process. Determining exactly which social responsibilities an organization should pursue and then deciding how to pursue them are perhaps the two most critical decision-making aspects of maintaining a high level of social responsiveness within an organization. That is, managers must decide whether their organization should undertake the activities on its own or acquire the help of outsiders with more expertise in the area. In addition to decision making, various approaches to meeting social obligations are another determinant of an organization's level of social responsiveness. A desirable and socially responsive approach to meeting social obligations involves the following:

- Incorporating social goals into the annual planning process
- Seeking comparative industry norms for social programs
- Presenting reports to organization members, the board of directors, and stockholders on progress in social responsibility
- Experimenting with different approaches for measuring social performance
- Attempting to measure the cost of social programs as well as the return on social program investments

S. Prakash Sethi presents three management approaches to meeting social obligations: (1) the social obligation approach, (2) the social responsibility approach, and (3) the social responsiveness approach. Each of Sethi's three approaches contains behavior that reflects a

somewhat different attitude with regard to businesses performing social responsible activities. The social obligation approach, for example, considers business as having primarily economic purposes and confines social responsibility activity mainly to conformance to existing laws. The socially responsible approach sees business as having both economic and societal goals. The social responsiveness approach considers business as having both societal and economic goals as well as the obligation to anticipate upcoming social problems and to work actively to prevent their appearance. Organizations characterized by attitudes and behaviors consistent with the social responsiveness approach generally are more socially responsive than organizations characterized by attitudes and behaviors consistent with either the social responsibility approach or the social obligation approach. Also, organizations characterized by the social responsibility approach generally achieve higher levels of social responsiveness than organizations characterized by the social obligation approach. As one moves from the social obligation approach to the social responsiveness approach, management becomes more proactive. Proactive managers will do what is prudent from a business viewpoint to reduce liabilities whether an action is required by law or not.

#### **Areas of Measurement.**

To be consistent, measurements to gauge organizational progress in reaching socially responsible objectives can be performed. The specific areas in which individual companies actually take such measurements vary, of course, depending on the specific objectives of the companies. All companies, however, probably should take such measurements in at least the following four major areas:

1. *Economic function:* This measurement gives some indication of the economic contribution the organization is making to society.
2. *Quality-of-life:* The measurement of quality of life should focus on whether the organization is improving or degrading the general quality of life in society.
3. *Social investment:* The measurement of social investment deals with the degree to which the organization is investing both money and human resources to solve community social problems.
4. *Problem-solving:* The measurement of problem solving should focus on the degree to which the organization deals with social problems.

**Thirukkural Origin.**

Thirukkural is an universal scripture written by sage thiruvalluvar, a Tamil by birth in tamilnadu recently in southern part of India, a century before Christ This is recognized equal to other religious scriptures in the legal courts and legislative bodies in the state of Tamilnadu, India while administering oath even today. No definitive historical biographical data on valluvar is available that even be used to ascertain the place and or date of birth with any certainty. However in these two thousand years of time span, it can be said that there is no book left in Tamil literature that did not use or not be influenced by tirukkural Though it is written by a Tamil in Tamil language, in Tamil country no mention of its language, country, or people by name is ever mentioned in any of the 1330 couplets. It is aimed at the entire humanity without boxing it in time, space or a society. It addresses the man as an individual as to how he should conduct his personal and family life virtuously, participate in the society that he is part of thus bringing the kingdom of heaven here and now in the space of 1330 couplets.

The word 'Kural' refers to a short verse of only two lines. Ten such verses make up a single chapter of the book called the Tirukkural. There are 133 chapters, so that there are 1330 couplets or two-lined verses that make up the Tirukkural. Each couplet contains a single complete idea. Although poets generally find it rather difficult to write in a couplet form, Tiruvalluvar handles this medium with remarkable skill and ease. He does not waste words. The ideas come to us quietly, in a style that is both graceful and beautiful at the same time.

Each of the 133 chapters is headed by one major idea such as 'Friendship', 'Wisdom', 'Justice', and so on. The ten verses under each major idea give the poet opportunity to expand on each idea fully. The work is divided into three sections. The first section, entitled 'Aram' (virtue) deals with ingredients of an ideal family life. It also gives guidelines to spiritual aspirants. The second section, broadly entitled 'Porul' (wealth) deals with various matters pertaining to government, like royalty, the parliament, politics and alliance. The third section deals with 'Kamam' (love) and is concerned mostly with marriage and love.[Note: 'Aram' is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit word 'Dharma'.] The Tirukkural is thus a book of morals or ethics. It ranks high in the literature of Tamil Nadu. Certainly it is one of the most useful treatises on ethics ever written by man. It leads humanity to live, as it ought to live- in moral purity, in spiritual knowledge, and in perfect health, wealth and prosperity. It is a faithful

friend to the family man, to the mother, to children, to workers, teachers, politicians, artists, scholars and rulers.

### ***Other names***

Thirukural is praised with many names such as

1. *Utravedam* - the ultimate Veda or Creed
2. *Poyyamozhi* - falseless word
3. *Vayurai vazhthu* - truthful praise
4. *Teyvanul* - the divine book
5. *Pothumarai* - the common Veda or Creed
6. *Muppai* - three fold path
7. *Tamil marai* - Tamil Veda

### **Thirukkural Values**

Select some values from thirukkural for success the business are as follows

#### **Wealth**

Wealth unblessed by giver and taker happiness  
Should not be touched

#### **Truthfulness**

Nothing can equal truthfulness  
In getting fame and other virtues

#### **Wisdom**

The wise know what comes next-  
Fools cannot

#### **Training**

Those are fools however learned  
Who have not learned to walk with the world.

#### **Fairness**

The unique virtue is non-killing  
Not lying comes next

#### **Honor**

Those who desire fame with honor  
Will not sacrifice honor for fame

#### **Motivation**

Always aim high – failure than  
Is as good as success.

#### **Purity**

Even lie is truthful  
If it does unsullied good

#### **Fearlessness**

Many face death in battle; only a few  
Face an assembly

#### **Excellence**

Act after taking into account  
The cost, the benefit and the net

#### **Discipline**

If the world cannot do without water  
Neither can aught without rain

#### **Kindness**

The word is his who does his job  
With sympathy

#### **ABOUT TAMIZH CULTURE**

Culture is the learned and shared behavior of a community used for interacting with other human beings. Literature, architecture, sculpture, music, dance, cuisine, festivals, rituals and religion all form part of a culture. Tamil culture belonging to Tamil community is a culture of great antiquity and has made significant contribution to the world civilization. Tamil civilization has been referred to as the last surviving classical civilization on earth. Tamil culture is a product of the Dravidian culture in India. It is believed that the architects of the Indus-Valley civilization were Dravidians and they were pushed to South India by the Aryans who arrived in India at a later stage. Hence Tamil culture has a history of at least 6000 years. The following sentence is found in one of the Tamil poems. Even though it seems

to be an exaggerated statement, it is true to some extent. People from the present Tamil Nadu along with those from most parts of the neighbouring states Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala were called Dravidians. So, a country forming most parts of the present South India was called Dravida Nadu.

Three dynasties called Chera, Chola and Pandya started ruling this Dravida Nadu 2000 years back. Later Pallava dynasty rose to prominence. When Pallava dynasty declined in the 9th century, Chola kings started ruling the country again followed by Pandya kings. Later Vijayanagar kingdom came into existence followed by the Europeans in the 17th century. Among the Europeans, British rule dominated and lasted for more than 200 years. After Independence, the areas ruled by Chola, Pandya and Pallava became a part of the present Tamil Nadu

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the association between Business ethics, personal values with Dravidian Culture. Value predominant approach to the person-business fit problems is the value congruency model. According to this perspective, values are the constitutive are relatively stable traits of individuals that define conceptions of the good and desirable. Organization scientists, having a long-standing interest in values, generally assert that values underline behaviors and structure attitudes in the workplace. To identify the importance of values and its effect among the business owners in their personal as well as the organizational lives; value congruence analysis is attempted. The data are presented in Table 4 which also gives picture of Behavioral Relevance Score. It can safely be concluded that the difference between values internalized and values used in business is negligible. The businessmen, at least, in Tamil Nadu do not experience any value deficiency in any of the 15 values. This shows that Dravidian Culture as measured through Thirukkural-centric Value systems is predominant in the business organizations in Tamil Nadu; the inescapable conclusion is that Dravidian Culture has permeated the business organizational boundaries in Tamil Nadu.

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