

Principal's Message

The life of modern man is becoming difficult, complicated and disturbed at the material, psychological and spiritual levels. He has to face different alternatives, solve complex problems and compromise with difficult situations. His so-called friends, 'science' and 'technology', with all their potential for research and advancement, have given him pleasures and comforts, true. But they have also made him a slave by giving him all sorts of luxuries on the one hand but making him lose his individuality and power of discrimination on the other. He has, moreover, become immune to ethical considerations. He does not know what is 'right' and 'wrong', rather does not want to know the difference between these two concepts. With his 'pragmatic' outlook, whatever helps him is right, whatever suits him is good, and whatever he achieves, and achieves easily, is just. These attitudes influence not only his work and business, but have even percolated to the supposedly most humane of all professions – that of healing the sick and ailing. The medical profession has had its share of problems managing the diseased, but issues and concerns of ethical conduct in medicine have also now started assuming importance.

Bio-ethical Considerations

In such a scenario, bio-ethical considerations have risen to the forefront in the last few decades.

Topics like Suicide, Euthanasia, Abortion, Surrogacy, Cloning, Stem Cell research, Organ-transplantation, Industry Sponsored Research etc. are occupying the consciousness of the modern mind. Let us take a few examples:

- **Suicide** – is it a private act?

Does a man have any right over his death? Plato admitted self-killing under extreme distress, poverty and shame. Aristotle did not agree with Plato and thought of suicide as an act of cowardice and an offence against the State. Epicures suggested ending of life if it ceased to be a pleasure. Stoics gave man permission to live only as long as he wished. The Jewish and Christians thinkers, St. Augustine and St. Thomas, condemned self-killing. Manu disapproved of attending the funeral pyre of a man who ended his life by suicide. How do we explain the Jaina concept of Samlekhana or Hindu concept of Jivant Samadhi? The dilemma is that our obligation to meet the needs and secure the welfare of persons justifies intervention; our obligation to respect the liberty of others requires non-interference.

Questions can be similarly asked about some other bioethical issues of great concern to the modern man:

- **Euthanasia:** Should we allow euthanasia to terminal patients to rid them of their misery and ensure them a dignified exit?
- **Abortion:** Do we have the right to expel the foetus before it is viable? When does a foetus become viable? How do we handle religious prohibition of abortion, which is still seen in many societies?

- **Cloning:** Science has achieved the pinnacle of success by creating a clone but has given rise to a number of ethical problems in the bargain. How far should science be allowed to go in animal / human creation?
- **Organ transplantation** has become extremely useful, almost like getting a new life, but giving enough scope for over-charging, smuggling of organs, organ trading and other mal-practices. How do we handle such issues?
- **Surrogacy:** Can surrogacy be a boon for a childless-couple? Who is the real mother: the childbearing one or the social one? What happens if uteruses are given on hire, or surrogacy becomes one of the professions?
- **Clinical trials** on human beings and animals: has far can we go, and how far is it justified?
 - **Bioethical issues in/with Academia and Industry Connection:** Industry sponsored research and clinical trials; what are the ethical challenges posed by such sponsorship, and how can they be taken care of so the opportunities of biomedical advance are not at the expense of ethical concerns?
 - **Bioethical issues in Stem Cell research**
 - **Bioethical considerations in IVF** (In vitro fertilization)

Concluding Remarks

On the one hand science and scientific discoveries are struggling to minimize human pain and suffering and trying to get more and more solace and comfort for the human race. But on the other, they are contravening the fundamental rights and status of man both at the personal as well as social level.

Words like 'good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong', 'useful', 'moral', 'just' etc have either lost their significance or have changed their definitions. The ethical path - whether, as a general pattern or 'way of life', a set of rules of conduct or 'moral code', or an inquiry into ways of living and rules of conduct - this ethical path is itself becoming difficult to follow ethically.

It is high time men as rational, social, emotional and spiritual animals introspect on these problems and try to preserve and promote their identity with due respect to their empirical instincts, rational status and ethical identity in the universe. A dialogue between concerned thinkers and researchers on these issues is very necessary today.

Hence this conference.

Dr. (Mrs.) Shakuntala A. Singh
Principal

Message

I have great pleasure in noting that your institution, the Joshi-Bedekar College, Thane, is organising a National Seminar on Bio-ethics on 24-25 Jan 2007.

The topics you propose to cover are extremely timely and important. Suicide, Euthanasia, Surrogacy, Abortion, IVF, Organ Transplantation, Cloning, Stem Cell Research, Medical Ethics are all of great significance, as they impact the lives of many members of society the world over in many significant ways.

I have been happy to be associated with this initiative right from its inception, and would have loved to accept your kind invitation to address the seminar. Pressing personal commitments prevent me from doing so. However, I take this opportunity to offer my most sincere good wishes for the success of this initiative.

May the deliberations at this National Seminar help chart new paths in our quest for enlightened progress and a more egalitarian society,

I wish the Seminar all success.

Prof.(Dr) N. N Wig

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