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A Critical Study of Social Morality and the Practice of Community Ethics in Rural Communities in Sri Lanka: Selected Few Villages in Puttalam District – Kalpitiya DS Division

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Abstract:
Community ethics is a subject field, which comes under the developmental ethics. Community development involves every individual in the community. Each individual has a responsibility in the development process. Development means not just the physical development of the country. It should be included the development of social, cultural, environmental, spiritual aspects as well. Social morality is an important aspect here. The objective of this research is to examine the importance of community ethics in the development process. The methodology that has been used here is analytic and descriptive methods. Secondary data was collected through books and research papers and questionnaire method was also used. The data showed there is a strong collaboration in the subjected village. And also some environmental issues also could find. Beyond that it could be say that the social morality has made the villagers to move forward with the undergoing development process by the government.

Keywords: Community, development, ethics, morality

1. Introduction

This research has focused the community development by giving special attention to the community ethics and social morality in the development process in Sri Lanka. Community development can be defined as a process that all the community members gather and take collective effort in providing solutions for the problems occur during the development process. Therefore community development can be included the economic, social, environmental, cultural and every aspect in the community that promotes the wellbeing of the members. Community development also involves the collective responsibility, which makes the individuals of the community more responsible towards the development process. Therefore, it is not only the economic growth that has to be achieved in a society, but also the social, cultural, environmental and every part of the individual life has to be enhanced.

Community development provides attention to improve the quality of the life of people. And it also provides shared benefits among the members. More than that, the community development always provides alternatives on the resources and finds the opportunities to balance the diverse interests of the community. Therefore, the community development can be recognized as a crucial point in the development process for a country. This enhances the wellbeing, and the quality of the community members while moving towards achieving the development goals. Also some research and discussions done relevant to the community development prevails that the core value systems and the practical application of ethics and principles are not important in achieving the development goals.

In this research we first tried to explore the challenges faced by Sri Lanka with the secondary data and the related literature in the community development process. The challenges were identified as political, security problems, corruption, lack of monitoring and problems of implementation and evaluation of development programs. Behind these problems the core issue that we figured out was the inability to move with the traditional and cultural value systems with respect to the common acceptance of ethical views within the community level. That means, the community has neglected the values and ethical principles in the development process.

To have a sustainable community engagement in the development process it is necessary to assess and evaluate the existing ethical principles within the community. In western world, the ethics are given an important role in developing the community life. Since ethics as the operator, which determines the right and wrong, it has an incredibly massive work to be done in the society. It is a conscience or a sense of inquiring whether the human actions are right or wrong. And if these ethics or value systems were repressed it will impact on human behavior and action also mal-practices will rise. People would act unethically, harming others, committing violence, fraud and acting against the laws and regulations of the country.

Community has to be taken as a main factor in the community development process; therefore, it has to be engaged with the identification of the needs and wants of the community. The objectives of the community development are diverse from country to country. But as a whole it focuses on the improvement of the lifestyle of people, reducing the poverty, development of the country infrastructure, social reconciliation among people, strengthening the liberation,

focusing new research and innovation, and at the end to provide the wellbeing. All these factors mentioned are clearly linked with the ethical policies of the community. The problems of the economy such as the unemployment, economic inequity, and poverty social problems like cast discrimination and race problems and problems regarding law; like injustice, violence etc., can be the problems in the development process.

Throughout the history, the morality and moral principle has been the bridge between the individual and the community to the wellbeing and happiness. Ethics governs a major part of the human life. But the study of ethics relevant to the development process has been given a less attention. If ethics were not practiced violence, and immoral activities will take place in the society. Human rights will be violated and also the respect that anyone should have for another being could be lost. In this research what I wanted to emphasize was whether development barriers could be address through a proper ethical system. And also expected to understand how a country like Sri Lanka identifies the importance of value system and living ethically and its practicality. My attempt was to recognize the importance of the social development, which means the qualitative development of an individual for a developed country. Therefore, I believe a systematic and a scientific investigation should be done in the theme of community ethics. In this research, the objective is to evaluate the nature of social morality and to understand how important the community ethics in the social development in Sri Lanka.

2. Materials and Methods

This research involves both analytic and descriptive methods. The analytic part has focused on conceptual clarification of community ethics in western ethical inquiry with Asian ideals. Therefore, I have referred some online e-materials and library books as well. In the descriptive method one village called 'Illanthadiya' in Kalpitiya DS division in Sri Lanka was selected. I collected data through several field observations done in the village and through questionnaires. Three questionnaires were provided as a questionnaire for youth, a questionnaire for professionals, and a questionnaire for villagers. In the field observations data was collected through interviews and discussions. The questionnaires were made with open-ended questions, since it was expected to get the person's inner feelings and opinions of the moral life.

3. Results & Discussion

The term morality is often misunderstood as not having a connection to the topics of development, governance and conflict. But beyond these the morality engages in topics like culture, religion, secular values and personal values, which are contributing in shaping the society. And it provides the identity and a purpose to a society and set the harmony within the community while enhancing the shared values of the society. According to Chloe Schwenke, 'when society takes on the deliberative task of resolving conflicting values and articulating a set of shared values, this in turn helps to clarify the moral obligations of all members of that society and sheds light on the relationship of a society to other communities, nations, or groups' (Schwenke, 2009, p.06).

Human beings are the ones who are responsible to choose freely how to act in the society. Therefore, the moral evaluation done by an individual is self-evident. This means individuals are capable of reasoning and have a moral sense that can build moral judgments. Therefore humans have the capacity of understanding the value of moral worth of some action. But individuals of a community always do not mean they behave in the way that they are supposed to behave. Or sometimes they don't know how they must behave. They might have a limited ability to solve problems and some might have egotism, these are the universal human attributes. But still in a developed country the moral awareness is important. Therefore it is needed to use the ability of making moral assessment for the promotion of community cohesion and the development.

Each person's moral sensibility develops with his/her observations of how people live in the society. And each individual have a sense that how he/she should behave within the community. When a person grows up, they start to follow a certain amount of morals according to their society's social values, but at the end they do not realize that there is a common set of moral values that is universal to all society. That is why the moral conflicts can occur involving a genuine moral disagreements; between different groups, and communities. Morality can be understood as a social concept, which is about how to deal with the other members of the community. According to Bernard Gert the morality can be defined as an informal public system applying to all rational person, governing behavior affects others, and includes what are commonly known as moral rules, ideas, and virtues and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal (Schwenke, 2009, p.06).

Ethics is the process that is used by the society to make discipline the community. It can make consensus of the values and that brings the conflict. Ethics provide the order and structure to the society that makes a value of the moral principles while providing rational and persuasive moral systems. It tends to discuss about the moral obligations by examining the virtue and vice. It is important to decide what is good and right and also what is bad and wrong in a society in order to give a structure to the moral values of that society. Therefore, this research focused the existing moral values of the village Ilanthadiya in the Kalpitiya DS division. This village is contains mixed cultural and religious features. People are mostly involved in fishery, and agriculture. And this village also promotes the tourism especially the availability of dolphin fish has taken a lot of attention of tourists. The power station of Norochcholai is situated in this village. Therefore it can say this village also has an economic value and many resources are available.

Three questionnaires were provided to 175 villagers; 25 youth individuals, 50 professionals and 100 community individuals were taken randomly. The total population of the village was 3778 people, and among them there are about 1908 of male persons and 1870 female persons. There are all-together about 762 families are living in the village. According to the Grama Niladhari (the government officer in the village) reports, there are about 480 kids between the ages of 0 to 05 years. There are about 620 of children between the ages of 06 to 15. There are about 2370 individuals

between the age ranges of 16 to 60. And beyond the age of 60, there are about 306 persons. Based on their religion there were 2020 Buddhists, 2554 Catholic persons, 903 Hindus and 96 Islam individuals.

Three questionnaires were given. The first was the community-based questionnaire where it was expected to understand the individual relationship with the family, the relationship with the village and their identification of the government services. Among the sample of 100 individuals, there were 59% who lived in the village more than 15 years. About 20% of the sample has lived between 10 to 15 years in the village. About 16% of the sample has lived 5 to 10 years in the village. And about 5% of the sample has lived in the village less than 5 years.
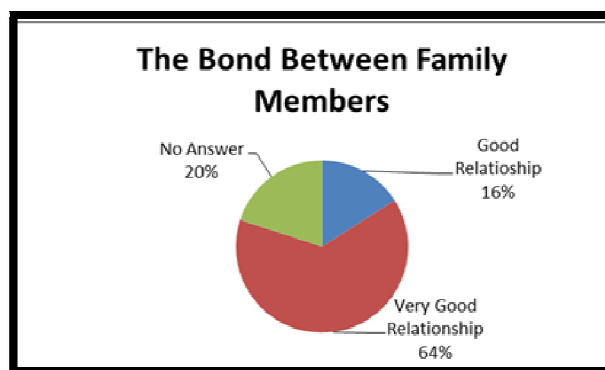

Figure 1: The Relationship between the Individual and Family

According to the figure 01, there are about 64% of villagers who are having a very good relationship with the family members. Among the sample about 16% of the villagers were having a good relationship with their family members. And about 20% of the sample has not answered the question. Therefore considering the answers given by the sample it can say there is a good relationship among the individuals of the family. The next part of the questionnaire was about the bond between the individual and the other villagers.
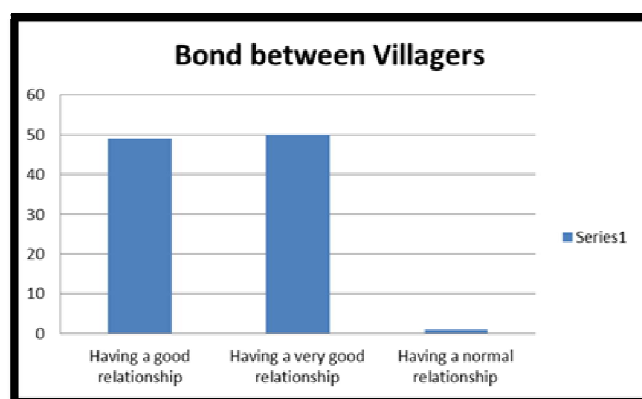

Figure 2: The Relationship between the Individual and the Community

The relationship between the individuals and the villagers was strong since most of them have lived in the village more than 15 years. Among the sample 49% of individuals were having a very good relationship with the villagers, while about 50% of the sample was having a good relationship. And about 1% of the sample was having a normal relationship. This shows there is a strong relationship among the villagers. According to the filed observations and the interviews done with the villagers, they answered there is no any religious or race problems among the village. About 99% of the problems are solved within the village without going to the law or police. And about 99% of people work collaboratively. Also there can be seen the religious collaboration in the village. The monks of the temple and the priest of the church are collaboratively working in village problems. This can be taken as a progressive moral approach. The next part of the questionnaire was about the services provided by the government officers. In this it was expected to understand the Grama Niladari performance, school performance, and their government services.

Grama Niladari officer is the government officer in the village. Since he is providing a greater service than any other in the village a question was included asking whether the villagers are satisfied with the grama niladari performance. It was expected to figure out whether the grama niladari is involved in any violations of law, and whether providing the services honestly. Among the sample 6% of the individuals have answered that Grama Niladari officer's performance is unsatisfying for them. And the majority of the sample about 72% of the individuals answered that they are satisfied with the grama niladari performance. 22% of the sample didn't provide an exact answer.

Then the next focus was on the performance of the midwife, which means government health officer of the village. Usually this officer is a female. About 31% of the sample was well-satisfied with the health officer's work. 58% of the sample was genuinely satisfied with the performance. 11% of the sample was not satisfied with the performance. The

relationship between the teacher and the students of the village school was also concerned here. Among the sample 65% of the individuals suggested the children were having a good relationship with their teachers. About 3% of the sample claimed that children are not having a good relationship and 31% of the sample had no idea about the relationship between teachers and students. According to the interview done with the principal of the school he said most of the students leave the school after grade 11, because after that they join their family business. In the questionnaire it was also expected to see the political interference in the village resources and to people. About 5% of the sample refused to answer the question and 1% of the sample answered the politicians are influencing the life of the villagers. But 94% of the sample answered there is no interference of the politicians to the village. Therefore it can say the government services provider's performances are satisfying and the politician involvements are lesser to the villagers.

The next questionnaire was given to 50 professionals, and the expectation was to figure out whether they are satisfying with the services that they provide and the enrolment of ethics in their daily practice in workplace.
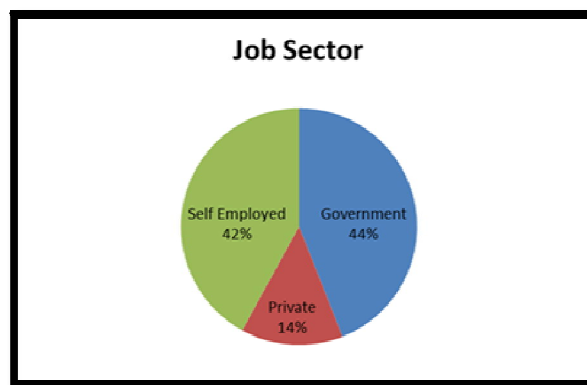

Figure 3: Job Sector

Among the 50 of the sample there were 42% who were involved in their own work. Fisherman and farmers were taken into consideration here. Then about 44% were involved in government employment; teaching, nursing, government bank etc. 14% were involved in the private sector employment. Among these professionals about 96% claimed that no political interference is done in their workplace. But 4% of the sample claims there are certain political interferences happen in the workplace. And within the sample 96% agreed that the ethics should be followed in the workplace and 92% of the sample were already following ethical behaviors in the work place. Therefore it can be taken as a progressive attempt in the village level.

The third questionnaire was given to 25 youth individuals. The youth was taken between the age ranges of 15 to 25. And this questionnaire was focused on the youth involvement in the public work of the community, and the collaboration. Among the 25 youth sample 84% of them are involving in public work in the village, and about 16% of the sample were not engaging in public work. But 80% of the youth sample is engaging collaboratively in the village work. And the rest of 20% answered they are not eager to join the collaborative work. Since the youth are much direct in their answers, a question was asked about the relationship between the religious leaders and the politicians. 8% of the youth sample agreed to the claim that the politicians influence religious leaders. And about 72% disagreed to this claim and 20% gave no answer.

All the data collected showed that this village has a strong relationship among villagers, youth are working collaboratively, no problem occur between different religions or races. But with the interviews and observations done it could identify that, there are certain environmental problems in the village. Since the Norochcholai power station is situated in the village there are several problems faced by the villagers. The power station burns coconut shells to produce power. But as a result of that a dust is made, and when the wind flows over the village it spreads this dust all over the village, in every house, every tree, and every land. This problem should be give attention because this has impacted on health problem among villagers. Some are having lung problems. The dust polluting water covers the wells. These people claim they had the best and most pure water in the area, but now they buy water from shops for their personal use. The water quality is decreased because of the power station. It is said that the hot water is poured to the sea and the biodiversity of the sea is damaged in a considerable manner. Corals, and fishes are dying due to this problem. This also affects the fishery industry of the area. There have been taken several actions by the villagers, church priest and other religious leaders to avoid these problems, requesting the government, but no solution has been given. Therefore it can say there is a problem related to environmental ethics in this village, which impacts the daily life routines of the people.

4. Conclusions

Community ethics is a major part of the community development. It should also concern about the moral development of the society in the development process. People have to be aware of their moral obligation and responsibilities in order to collaboratively involve in the development process. Through the data collected in this research it can mention that the village Illanthadiya is having a considerably good level in the moral obligations. The each individual lives peacefully with harmony among the community. The service providers are also engaged in their duties ethically and aware of their responsibilities to the community. Among the problems occur in the village the violation of environmental ethics should be given a major focus. Government interference is needed in this problem. And also a proper ethical policy

framework can address the problem. The education, health is satisfying in the village but still these people do not want to educate their children. This can be taken as a weakness in the development process. The lands are daily used in agriculture, and the agrarian officers should give their attention to provide these people with necessary equipment and knowledge.

The discussion of moral judgments or morality, it is necessary to study the field of ethics. In this matter I tried utilizing the applied ethics knowledge into the grass root level of the development. The development should involve the community ethics, developmental ethics, professional ethics, tourist ethics, environmental ethics, animal ethics, etc. All these knowledge should be practically implemented in the development process. In seeking answers to the ethical questions it is important to dig back to the traditional value systems and basic moral values and principles taught throughout the history within diverse cultural aspects.

The community development should focus on two major aspects as taking care of who are vulnerable to suffer, and the second is the promotion of development, empowering the intellectual moral principles and practical ethics. A moral community always tries to recognize the moral failures and faults of doing right and wrong. This is important in development because development involves a collective effort. This village of Ilanthadiya is culturally diverse, but still contains the moral understanding of the responsibility. They help each other and bounded together and live peacefully. The government services are well arranged and the majority of the community is satisfied with their performance. This is a positive and a progressive in the grass root level of the community. But the enhancement of these progressive aspects is important. Therefore, the moral responsibility and the moral awareness of the community are much important in development process.

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