

Ethics in Public Administration: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract

Ethics is a branch of Philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct with respect to the rightness or wrongness of certain actions. This study aims to oversee the implications of the basic principles of ethics for public administration in the context of different religion and discuss the impact on different administration which in turn acts as the determinants of ethics in public administration. This article also illustrated several concepts of ethics and administration. One of the most important areas of applied ethics is “Administrative ethics” which implies general moral rules to specific sphere of human relations. It involves the application of moral principles to the conduct of officials in organizations. Religion is the pre-stage of ethics and morality. All kind of religion emphasis on ethics in every sector of life; without religious practice ethics is meaningless. This article also tried to outline the situation of ethics in various sectors of Bangladesh administration, especially ethics in civil service, education, health, and banking sector. Finally, this paper suggests the ways to eradicate corruption and unethical behavior in administration.

Keywords: Ethics; Public Administration; Ethics and Morals; Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Nowadays, everywhere, the ethics is widely used. All persons whether in business, government, university, or any other enterprise are concerned with ethics. It means moral codes of conduct. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct with respect to the rightness or wrongness of certain actions. Any society when it develops, it has to observe certain codes of conduct. Otherwise, a society cannot bring progress. Hence, we need certain codes of conduct, which will control the people. Without ethics, we cannot have good governance. Good governance involves equality before law and the rule of law, equal respect for every individual to rise to his full potential, and there should not be wastage of resources (Vittal, 2002). To ensure these aspects of good governance, we need ethics in administration. The importance of ethics in the administration has been recognized from writings of philosophers and political scientists. This article is devoted to discuss the concept of ethics critically and side-by-side few aspects of Bangladesh public administration.

1.1. Ethics as a concept

What is “Ethics”? It is a common question before mentioning the ethics in public administration. Ethics is a philosophical concept. In general, “ethics” and “morals” have been used for same meaning in literature. The reason is behind that both the concepts have been derived etymologically from Latin and Greek words with similar meaning (Rohr, 1978). These concepts are interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation of one another (Khan, 1995) in fact, it deals with good and bad and with moral duty and obligation (Levine, 1990).

According to Bowman, “Ethics is action, the way we practice our values, a guidance system to be used in making decisions. Ethics is work-the labor of the individual and organizations try to live up to closely held beliefs” (Bowman, 1991).

On the other hand, Dollery (1997) stated “ethics is not mysterious but is a part of everyday life.” It is more apparent in the statement of Singer as he remarked that Ethics is not consciously created but is a product of social life, which has a function of promoting values common to the members of society (Singer, 1990).

The definition of Singer is clear enough to make an illustration of what is ethical but ethics cannot be considered as being “enigmatic” because it is a part of life. In this article, our discussion is to the term ethics in the context of Public Administration (Noor, 1991). Hence, it is obvious to define ethics from the administrative view point. Timpson defined ethics in this respect. He mentioned that ethics in Public Administration is a complex endeavor. To understand its uniqueness, you must understand that it involves responsibility, professionalism, integrity, accountability, benevolence, honesty, fair and equal treatment, fidelity, democratic responsibility, trust, and responsibility (Timpson, 1997).

From the foregoing discussion regarding the definition of ethics, it can be said that ethics is regarded as a moral quality concerning the behavior of individuals - maintains an interrelationship with values that are embedded in choices (Cooper, 2012). It is relevant to state that decision-based on choices is contestable, debatable, and requiring public justification (Preston, 1994).

2. Various Aspects of Ethics

In general, ethics is of two types: Personal ethics and business ethics.

2.1. Personal ethics

Personal ethics has been referred as the rules by which an individual lives his or her personal life.

2.2. Business ethics

Business ethics is concerned with truth and justice and has a variety of aspects such as the expectations of society and competition, advertising, public relations, social responsibilities, consumer autonomy, and corporate behavior in the home country as well as abroad (Weihrich and Koontz, 1994).

The following are two of the most of the important applied aspects of ethics: Professional ethics and administrative ethics.

2.3. Professional ethics

Professional ethics is a set of norms that determine an individual position toward professional duties, professional relations with other employees, and finally, toward society as a whole. It reflects the specifics of morality, personal interrelations, and behavior coming from professional activities. It is the existence of special personal relations within professional groups that results in special moral norms regulating these relations.

It includes behavioral codes defining certain types of moral relations between individuals who consider these codes optimal for the performance of a professional duty and the ground for these codes is the social and psychological interpretation of cultural and humanistic purpose of the profession.

2.4. Administrative ethics

One of the most important areas of applied ethics is “Administrative ethics” that implies general moral rules to specific sphere of human relations. It involves the application of moral principles to the conduct of officials in organizations. Normally, it stresses the governmental employees set up ethical standards for managerial decisions, analyze these standards and bear personal and professional responsibility for the decisions made.

More specifically, Administrative ethics assume that individuals in organizations can make moral judgments and can be the objects of moral judgments. Two common views of administration that administrators should either follow the policies of an organization or resign from office and that

administrators should not be held morally responsible for the wrongs of their organizations—deny these assumptions and would make administrative ethics impossible. By understanding how these views themselves are mistaken, we can see how administrative ethics is possible and what forms it should take (Thompson, 1985).

Administrative ethics studies all aspect of employees of public administration and the activities of all the senior managers in all organizations. It bears the following three basic components.

3. Ethics and Religion

The principle basis of ethics is religion but religion and ethics are not similar thing. Without religious practice ethics is meaningless. However, practically ethics is not directly related to religiousness. Most of the religions in the world such as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucians, Hinduism, Islam, and Taoism give emphasis on ethics. However, by and large, most Asian countries have failed to live up to the high morals principles embodied in the religion. In Hinduism, the ethics of administration was summed up in the concept of Dharma. Justice M. Rama in his lecture mentioned that reforming our polity on the basis of Dharma provides valuable insight into the concept of Dharma. He further mentioned that from most ancient times as a part of Dharma, one of the ideals placed before individual were that for a higher or greater interest, lower of personal interest should be subordinated. This idealism is incorporated in a verse in Hitopadesha.

In The Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna gave emphasis on Dharma saying it is better to die rather than give up ones dharma. If everybody practices the concept of dharma, then it brings a sense of self-discipline. In a society where there is self-discipline, automatically there will be peace and prosperity (Vittal, 2002).

The various Muslim philosophers in their extension and occasional revision of earlier classical nation liked ethics to theatrical knowledge that was to be acquired by rational means. Since human beings were rational the virtues and qualities that they embraced and practiced were seen as furthering the ultimate goal of individuals and the community. This goal was the attainment of happiness.

In one of the chapters of the Holy Quran entitled the criterion (Sura Furqan) relegation - to all humanity becomes the point of reference for distinguishing right from wrong. The same chapter goes to cite examples of the past biblical prophets and their role as mediators of Gods words to their respective societies such as Judaism and Christianity. Islam’s beginning is thus rooted in the idea of the divine command as a basis for establishing moral order through human endeavor. Elsewhere in the concepts of a revealed morality that presents humanity vicissitude.

Islam gives emphasis on ethics. We can easily understand it from the following (Table 1) verses in the Holy Quran:

“O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do” (Sura Maidah: 8).

[We said], “O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allah.” Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account” (Sura Saad: 26).

Table 1: Basic components of administrative ethics

Values	Individual group and social statements, opinion, and the attitudes toward concepts such as freedom, justice, honesty, loyalty, and responsibility
Standard and norms	The principles that guideline the action of the people and employees and help lead and control their behavior
Behavior	Different forms of activity limited by certain standards and norms corresponding with social values

Source: Author and Web site

“And O my people, give full measure and weight in justice and do not deprive the people of their due and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption” (Sura Hud: 85).

“O you, who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, acquainted” (Sura Nisaa: 135).

3.1. Why ethics in public administration?

Today’s public managers are facing increasingly complex ethical dilemmas, often having to weight personal and professional values against current public opinion and the laws (Bonzek, 1999). Hence, Government in many countries, dedicated to sound, honest management within their public administration, and the multinational organizations to which they belong, have developed organizational models and governmental or semi-governmental structures to strengthen the ethical conduct of public managers.

Ethics in civil service has been termed as administrative ethics. It is considered as a set of moral norms and requirements for those in public administration to aim their professional activity at attainment of common wealth and effective use of moral values. The goal of civil service ethics is to keep the essence and context of professional activities that are socially approved. Its tasks are to regulate employee relations by means of norm, behavior, and to form an ethical component in the consciousness of public administration employees.

Ethical analysis of civil service problems allows us to develop recommendation and to provide professional public administrator with the necessary ethical knowledge. From the practical point of view, civil service ethics is a system of ethical knowledge and practical recommendations for professional managers. It is a generalization of moral experience in the field of management. From this point of view, Ethics is an essential component of an employee’s competence.

3.2. Position of ethics in the various sectors in Bangladesh

In the following sections of this article, there is a discussion on the present position of ethics in the civil service, banking sector, health sector, and education sector in Bangladesh.

4. Ethics and Civil Service

Although the world’s developed nations have made considerable progress in simplifying administrative procedure and making administration responsive to the popular needs, Bangladesh is still lagged far behind. Unethical behavior and practices of corruption on the part of public officials in Bangladesh are so widespread that it is difficult to locate a single department, which is free from this social evil. It is so deeply embedded in Bangladesh society that it is an inescapable phenomenon in public service in Bangladesh. It involves not only delay in decision-making and provision of service harassment, unfair judgment, and discrimination but also it goes much beyond these and includes the abuse of public trust, misuse of authority, and sacrifice of public interest for private benefit. The most common forms of administrative corruption in Bangladesh include neglect of official duties, bribery, nepotism, frauds, misappropriation of commercial transactions, smugglings, kickback for hiring, misuse of official telephone and transport and outright embezzlement of public funds (Khan, 1995).

4.1. Ethics and banking sector

Nowadays, corruption and bribery have become all pervasive features of countries all over the world. They are no longer the hallmarks of the poor countries alone. The annual report of German-based Transparency International (TI) depicts that the picture in this respect very clearly. In the recent past reports of misdeeds of the executives of some of the biggest companies, banks and financial institutions

and mutual funds in the USA and Europe have starkly highlighted this problem. Very few countries, industries, banks, and financial institutions are now immune from corruption.

In Bangladesh, despite the existence of Anti Corruption commission, many ties of judiciary, including the supreme court, a hierarchical bureaucracy, an elected parliament, thriving banking system with all their laws, regulations, and rules, mostly inherited from British Raj, corruption in not only rampant but also exists in all levels including higher echelons of the society. TI in its latest report has included Bangladesh among three most corrupt countries in the world. The corruption is so virulent to in the country that no business can be done without offering bribes. Bribes are now to be given to get a contract from the government, take a loan from the bank, to seek promotion, to get a posting, and to get medical attention and care which otherwise legally free in government hospital. These are happening frequently only because of the fall of ethical values in administration.

To elevate corruption from banking sector, there was an initiative in 1996. Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) and others initiated this campaign to improve the ethical standard in banking profession and arouse a sense of ethics among bankers to enhance their images in public eyes. To this end, a fund was set up named as Nurul Matin Fund in BIBM. The objective of this fund was to introduce paper on “Ethics in Banking Sector” and awarding medals annually to a candidate scoring highest marks in this paper among others. The campaign started with a bang and great enthusiasms but has not made much headway (Ahmed, 2004).

4.2. Ethics and health sector

Health sector is another sector where also ethical values are absent in Bangladesh. There are an estimated 3.05 physicians per 10,000 population and 1.07 nurses per 10,000 populations (estimates based on MoHFW HRD 2011). In 1993, the doctor and population ratio was 1:10,740 in 2015 the doctor/population ratio has come to 1:12,690 (The WHO standard is 1:1400). During 2001, the number of hospital beds stood at 45607 while the number of hospital beds in 2010 has raised 79,199 means one bed for about 1768 people (The Independent: November 24, 2015). Government hospitals are too few to cater to such a huge population. They are plagued with widespread corruption and lack of maintenance.

The nutritional level of most people has significantly gone down over the past three decades, leaving them weaker with lower immunity to combat disease and illness. Various studies in Bangladesh show that about 700 children die each year from malnutrition. The United Nation Report states that the average height of Bangladesh youth has decreased by 10 cm in <50 years due to malnutrition. Vitamin A deficiency causing 30000 children to go blind each year as well as inadequate amounts of iron and iodine in the diet has caused physical weakness and reduced people’s productivity. A Tk 640 core National Nutrition Project launched in July 2000 aiming to reduce malnutrition in 105 Upazillas could not start even after 3 years because of bureaucratic tangles (Amin, 2004). This is the position of our health sector. Bad policy-making, indifference and lack of government’s consciousness, and most of all by the culture of corruption have largely artificially created the deterioration of the quality of life.

4.3. Ethics and education sector

Education sector is also grasped by corruption in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is the eighth largest countries in the world in population and one of the most densely populated but endowed with limited natural resources. It has to rely on its human resources for progress and prosperity than most of the countries in the world. Education is truly a matter of survival and security of the nation for Bangladesh as Former Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak. once said about Egypt (Ahmed, 2004). But what is the real situation of our education sector? After 44 years of independence, we do not have any proper and unified education policy. It is a matter of great surprise. Food for education program is failed because of corruption. We cannot come out from copying in the public examinations. The quality of teaching is also deteriorating. Terrorism is still going on in the educational institutions. Teachers are being involved in politics. We think these are happening only because of the fall of ethical values.

National education policy 2016 now is in limbo. It failed to offer radically new directions needed and given its mandate and composition and the political climate, could not do so on such issues as accountability of schools and teachers to the community and parents establishing and applying performance standards in terms of learning. Outcomes of students real decentralization to bring planning and decision-making to communities and institutions along with accountability, reversing high inequality in public spending in education, building and maintaining professionalism in educational planning. Management from national to international levels, linking expansion with provision for resources and managements accountability to maintain accepted quality and above all ridding educational policy, and decision-making their implementation of partisan politics that has destroyed the sanctity and the basic tenets of the academia (Ahmed, 2004).

5. Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion shows that the ethical and moral level of Bangladesh administration is very low which cannot be acceptable. It can be said that corruption is going to be endemic and chronic in every aspect of both public and private administration in Bangladesh. It seems that we are in a lizard's hole. This is true that there are some political, social, cultural, economic, and behavioral factors that are helping our administrators and managers to do corrupt practices. Now the question is that how can we overcome those problems or what is the way out from this lizard's whole? It is very important of note that absence of accountability and transparency in administration as well as the absence of moral and ethical practices in Bangladesh administration. However, Islamic administration is value-oriented. IT seeks to maximize the Islamic values and ethical standards. Other major religions in the world also give emphasis on ethics and morals in administration.

The activity of administrators should be regulated legally and morally. If society is morally unhealthy then the legal system does not work. Good legislation, courts, or administration cannot substitute for the lack of morality and ethics. Adequate political, legal, and state life does not exist without the moral development of individuals. Individuals who provide and regulate the connection between society and the state must first of all know and follow social, religious, moral, and legal standards to be able to promote civil society concerns. Besides this, after joining Bangladesh civil service the civil servants and private companies or the private service holders must go for more effective ethical courses at their prosaically period, so that they may be aware about ethics in their service life. Only then, we will be able to make our administration free from corruption and will be able to ameliorate the moral and ethical behavior in every sector of the state. The following recommendations can be drawn from this study:

1. We have to come out from unethical and immoral practices for the progress and prosperity of the nation.
2. Transparency and accountability are must in everywhere in administration.
3. Need to construct a viable administrative order on ethical basis.
4. Officials and administration in all the sectors of the state must need a high level of a social, religious, moral, and ethical culture.
5. We need to adopt more ethical religious education in the syllabus of primary, secondary, and higher secondary education levels.
6. There also should be a course on ethics in all the subjects of honors and masters education in the university level.
7. Legislation that is based on social and religious moral standards and corresponds to the moral, cultural, and spiritual attitudes of society can be effective in practice to eradicate corruption and unethical behavior in administration.

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