VI

Comparison between *Dharma* and the Similar Western concepts

The ethics of the *Hindus* is based on a three-fold scheme of spiritual life that comprises the stages of sociality, subjective morality and the life absolute and transcendental. The different stages of sociality has been represented in a scheme of *varnasramadharmanas*, i.e., duties relative to one’s *varna* or social class and one’s *asrama* or specific stage in spiritual discipline. Thus, the *varnasramadharmanas* comprises the ethics of sociality as well as the ethics of individual capacity. Besides these, there is also a code of common duties or *sadharanadharmanas* which every man must observe whatever his social position or individual capacity. Thus, these duties are considered as the duties of universal scope and validity.

However, the *sadharanadharmanas* and the *varnasramadharmanas* constitute the objective morality of the *Hindus*, i.e., morality as represented in a code of external acts. Nevertheless, objective morality is not sufficient by itself and it is necessary that the individual after a period of discipline in objective co-operation and self-restraint should look inwards into himself and try to modify his character trait. Even, subjective morality is not the highest stage of the spiritual life. It is itself a mean like the stages of sociality. Moreover, the combination of these two must lead to the ultimate end of the life of an individual. It is assumed that ‘*cittasuddhi*’ or the purification of the mind is an
indispensable condition for the higher stages of the moral life. An individual’s mind will be purified if he has exercised certain virtues and give up the vices. Through the exercise of these virtues mentioned in different Indian literature, one will become a virtuous man whose mind is also purified.

The Western scholars, specially, the virtue theorists also share the opinion that the virtues inherited in one’s character, should improve his life and should make him a virtuous person. Before entering into the discussion of the nature of virtue ethics, it is needed to clarify why this particular question is being investigated in the present context. In fact, Indian ethics in general, and the Nyaya ethics in particular, show great concern for the virtuous character. The concept of virtue occurs both in the western ethical tradition and in the Indian ethical tradition. To understand the concept of virtue either from the western or from the Indian ethical perspective, it is very necessary to keep in mind two basic issues and these are, firstly, to find out the true nature of the virtues and secondly, to make justifications of the exercise of virtues in different situations. As the virtues are the values of human conduct itself, and as conduct extends over the different kinds of situations, they necessarily show a rich variety, differentiated according to their material.

A comparative account about the notion virtue with the corresponding notion of dharma may also throw some light in the characteristics of Indian Ethics. The discussion may follow after the Nichomachean ethics of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle, Padarthadharmasangraha of Prasastapadacarya along with the Nyaya kandalitika of Sridhara Bhatta on the bhasya of Prasastapada. It is very difficult to say in a straightforward manner what virtue ethics is all about. In the first place, there are
differences of opinions regarding the status of virtue ethics either as supplementary or complementary to other ethical theories or as completely independent of other major traditional ethical theories. In recent times, most of the proponents of virtue ethics consider it as an independent move. It has been observed that during the last century in most of the western ethical theories the inner life or character of the individual has not been given much importance, if not altogether ignored in discussions of morality.\textsuperscript{1} To meet the various challenges of life, as counteractive to the predominantly held view that ethics is action–guiding, once more need is felt for looking at the character or inner life of the individual. This led to adopt the ancient idea of virtue. One important feature of virtue ethics as distinguished from other two traditional ethical theorization is that it is not so much concerned with framing moral laws, rules or principles. Virtue ethics is concerned more with a virtuous individual, its inner traits, disposition and motives that qualify an individual to be virtuous. Within the province of virtue ethics the task of framing of rules or laws are generally regarded as secondary or derivative than dealing with the basic inner traits or character of the individual. In the case the virtue ethics, the role of the agent is very much important for in this area primarily attempts are made to account for the virtuousness of an individual by reference to his motives, dispositions or will. On the other hand, the ethics of rules are mainly concerned with characterizing human voluntary actions as right or wrong, as morally permissible or obligatory depending on how they match with appropriate rules. Apart from these, there are other ethical epithets like good, admirable, virtuous etc. In the domain of the virtue ethics, the expressions that are suitable are ‘virtuous’, ‘vicious’, ‘admirable’, ‘deplorable’, ‘morally good’, and ‘morally bad’. It must be noticed that no action is qualified by the adjectives
‘virtuous’ or ‘vicious’; rather these expressions are qualifying epithets for character. As proponents of virtue ethics, we can cite the names of Aristotle, Plato, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and James Martineau of nineteenth century. Aristotle in his Nichomachean ethics argued that the best life for a human being –eudemonia- consists in the exercise of the virtues. In the virtue ethics, the notions of virtue are basic. Aristotle as a virtue ethicist puts greater emphasis on the evaluation of the character of the agent than on the evaluation of his actions. For Aristotle, an action is noble or fine if it is such an action that has been performed by a noble or fine individual. For Aristotle, a virtuous individual is a measure of virtuousness of an action. Nevertheless, Aristotle’s ethics leaves open the possibility for the occasional performance of a noble or a fine action even if the agent concerned is not a virtuous individual. Aristotle’s definition of a virtuous individual is one who sees or perceives what is good or fine to do in any given situation. Thus, in the Aristotelian scheme of ethics, a clear cut distinction has been made between the virtuous individual who performs noble or virtuous actions because these are noble thing to do and certain noble or virtuous actions that are not so because these are not performed by certain noble or virtuous individuals. Hence, it is said that Aristotle’s virtue ethics is agent focused but is not agent-based and in this sense, this is a less radical variety of virtue ethics. As distinguished from this, an agent based approach to virtue ethics would say that ethical or moral status of any moral actions are entirely derived from the corresponding independent and fundamental character traits or motives of the individual. Hence, a logical distinction is to be maintained between a virtue ethics that is agent focused and a virtue ethics that is agent based. Agent –based virtue ethics presents a very radical variety of virtue ethics and historically, it is very difficult to find any example of a
proponent of this view. As an agent centered view, it not only denies that an agent’s inner life or character is determined by action-guiding external standard. It says that agent, his character, inner life constitute in some sense the basis and measure of all moral activity. The radical kind of virtue ethics would maintain that actions, that are judged to be right or wrong, are not independent of how, why, and by whom actions are performed. As a branch of virtue ethics, it would lay more emphasis on the character of the agent and this particular type of virtue ethics would say that character or inner life is fundamental and independent and evaluations of actions are derivatively dependent on the inner life of the agents who perform those actions.

Our next concern is to critically examine the other contemporary theory of ethics. In this connection, mainly the theories of Deontologists and the theories of the Act-utilitarianists have to be discussed. To a Deontologist, an action is right if and only if it is in accordance with a moral rule or principle. To an Act–utilitarianist, an action is right if and only if it promotes the best consequence. The Deontologists needs a further premise to provide a statement about the nature of moral rule as being laid down by reason on us or as required by rationality. Likewise, act-utilitarianism would require a premise to specify what constitutes the best consequence. On the contrary, a virtue theorist who says that an action is right if and only if it is what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances allows for the possibility that two virtuous agents faced with same choices in the same circumstances may act differently. For example, one agent in a critical situation might opt for taking his father off the life support system and the other agent might opt for leaving his father on it. The question is: how does one try to account for this difference in attitude? The proponents of virtue theorists might say that a virtuous
agent is one who acts virtuously, that is, one who has virtues intrinsically in his character and he must exercise the virtues. As in the previous two theories it has been shown that each of these theories need to be supported by two other premises, in this case also a further supportive premise is required to supplement the virtue theory. This premise is as follows: A virtue is a character trait that a human being needs to flourish or live well. Thus, the virtue theorists try to forge a link between virtue and flourishing or living well or Eudaimonia.

Again, in any Kantian brand of ethics or Deontological ethics, it is recognized as duty to benefit others, i.e., to promote the well-being of others and this way of promoting well being is virtuous and morally meritorious. But no duties are recognized for promoting his own well-being, hence benefiting oneself is not considered to be meritorious. So, it seems that this type of ethics do not give proper importance to the agent. The agent, who is the possessor of virtue, is devalued.

Further, the Consequentialism, another important ethical theory, is also open to the same charge of devaluing the agent, but from a slightly different perspective. The charge of devaluing the agent is not brought against consequentialism for not placing any moral value on acts or traits promoting solely the well-being of the agent. Act consequentialism urges us to produce the best possible overall results we can, thus leading to an obligation on our part to sacrifice ourselves or our self interest whenever an objectively better state of affairs would result from our doing so. Thus, consequentialism and utilitarianism seem to require more self sacrifice on the part of many moral agents that intuitively it seems
fair to require of them. In both of these theories, the status of the agent does not get more importance and in these theories, the actions are important.

**History of Aristotelian virtue theory**

Historically, Aristotle’s Nichomachean ethics is the first systematic treatment of ethics in western civilization. It belongs in the tradition begun by Socrates and advanced by Plato, a tradition that stresses both upon the supremacy of man’s rational nature and the purposive nature of the universe. Within this framework, the ethical theories of Aristotle and his teacher, Plato stand in sharp contrast. This difference stems from conflicting conceptions about the nature of the ultimate moral principle and also from different metaphysical suppositions. According to Aristotle, the forms, which make objects understandable, cannot exist apart from particular objects. Aristotle rejects the Platonic view that the moral evaluations of daily life presuppose a ‘good’, which is independent of experience, personality, and circumstances. Rather, he insists that the basic moral principle is immanent in the activities of our daily life and can be discovered only through a study of them.

In keeping with his general position, Aristotle begins his ethical inquiry with an empirical investigation of what it is that men fundamentally desire. In his search, he says that there are three popular views about the nature of this life. One is that it is the life of pleasure, but the life which aims at pleasure, regardless of the source from which it is derived, is worthy of beasts rather than man. The political life aims at honor, but honor depends more on him who gives it than on him who gets it. The life of moneymaking cannot be regarded as an end in itself. There remains a fourth life, the contemplative life, and here
he sounds that this is the ultimate end for men which is ‘self-sufficient’—“that which even when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing,’ and secondly this end must be the final end—‘that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.’ Thirdly, this end must be attainable by men. Thus, it is found that Aristotle regards human life as consisting of the pursuit of ends, and his main object is to discover the nature of end at which men are aiming at, though he does not always distinguish this from the question what the ends are at which men actually do aim. Aristotle maintains that ‘Eudaimonia’ alone is the goal, which meets these requirements. This word is usually translated in the sense of ‘happiness’ but the translation is not satisfactory. For, the word ‘happiness’ is a state of feeling, but Aristotle makes it clear that by ‘Eudaimonia’ he means a certain kind of activity, not a kind of feeling.

Now, the nature of ‘Eudaimonia’ and the conditions of its attainment has been discussed. In this connection, Aristotle seeks to get further light on the nature of ‘Eudaimonia’ by asking what the typical function of man, the function that only man has, must be. The life of nutrition and growth is shared by the plants. The life of sense perception is shared by the animals. What remains is the life of rational elements in us. Thus human good turns out to be ‘activity of the soul in the sense either of being obedient to a rational principle or of apprehending such a principle.’ In his Philosophical system, this view is significantly modified by the doctrine of potentiality and actuality. To him, it is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, or if there were more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete, - by which one gets the ultimate end of his life. Thus, considerations of the conditions requisite to the attainment of ‘Eudaimonia’ leads Aristotle to the discussion of virtue.
The consideration of virtue is continued in Book 2 of Nichomachean Ethics. Just as men become builders by building, they become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts: ‘states of character arise out of like activities. ‘And activities which produce excellence are those in which both excess and defect are avoided. Virtue, has, too an essential connection with pleasure and pain and by taking pleasure and pain in the right things and in the right degree. There is some difficulty, he admits, in the saying that it is by doing virtuous acts that we become virtuous, it might be said that to do just acts, we must already be just. But, Aristotle points out that acts which are such as a just man would do are not just acts unless they are done as the just man would do them – that it is possible to do acts which are on the outside precisely those that a just man would do, but to do them without the knowledge that they are just, or without the desire to do them because they are just, or without having the firm character that a just man has.

He turns next to the question what kind of thing virtue is- a passion, a faculty, or a state of character, and he has no difficulty in showing that it is a state of character. It will be discussed in the next section. However, Aristotle, in his ethics, not only describes virtue as a state of character, but also tries to explain what sort of state it is. It is noteworthy that every virtue or excellence brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence, and makes the work of that thing be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good, for it is the excellence of the eye that compels us to see well. Similarly, the excellence of the horse makes a horse both good in itself and good at running and at carrying its rider and at awaiting the attack of the enemy. Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well. Thus, for
Aristotle, as for other Greek philosophers, ‘virtue’ refers to the excellence of a thing, i.e. the disposition to perform effectively its proper function. For example, a ‘virtuous’ knife cuts well, and a ‘virtuous’ physician successfully restores his patients to health. By the same token, Aristotle argues that a virtuous man lives according to reason. However, he subdivides human virtue into two types the moral and the intellectual. In this chapter, the discussions has been made mainly on the moral virtues which is concerned the habitual choice of actions in accordance with rational principles. In addition, if somebody becomes a virtuous man, according to the definition of virtue, then he will get pleasure. Aristotle also points out that the virtues arise in us for we are adapted by nature to receive them and these (virtues) are made perfect by habit. Ross says that of all the things that come to us by nature, we must first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity, but in the case of the virtues, we get them only by exercising them. “For the thing we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men becomes builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”

It is noticed form the different texts of the Aristotelian ethics, that virtue is displayed only in those passions and actions that are voluntary. From Book 3, chapter 5 to the end of Book 4, a detailed account of the virtues and vices has been given by Aristotle. He starts with two of the four cardinal virtues recognized by the Greeks and these are courage and temperance. Aristotle describes that each virtue is a certain kind of mean to the end, ‘Eudaimonia’. Thus, it is our task to elucidate the nature of virtues and how the moral virtues have been considered as the means to the end. The things that occur in the soul, he says, are of three kinds: feelings, faculties and states of character or
dispositions.(1105b 19-21). But the virtues with which we are concerned, are neither a feeling nor faculties, so it must be a state of character or dispositions.

**Definition of moral virtue**

To say that virtues are the state of character, we first have to clear the concept of the things, i.e. passions, faculties, and the states of character. By passions, or feelings, Ross means appetite, anger, fear, and in general the feelings are accompanied by pleasure or pain; by faculties, the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity and by states of character, Ross suggests the things in virtue of which we stand well, or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately and similarly with reference to the other passions. Now, neither the virtues nor the vices are passions or feelings, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed, for our passions, but for our virtues and our vices we are praised or blamed. Again, we feel anger without choice, but the virtues are made of choice or involve choice.

For these reasons, also they are not faculties, for we are neither called good nor bad, nor praised or blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions, again, we have the faculties by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature. If, the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character. Aristotle’s famous ‘doctrine of the mean’ explicates the fact that virtue is a kind of ‘mean’, that is to say, something ‘in the middle’, between the two extreme emotions, it
aims at what is intermediate. Men are good in one way, but they may become bad in many ways. Virtue is a state of character, concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us. Now, it is the mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depend on defects, and it is the mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence, in respect of what it is, i.e., the definition, which states its essence, virtue, is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme. But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean, or some have names that already imply badness, e.g., shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder, for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It would be equally absurd; then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency, for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong, for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency nor excess and deficiency of a mean. Ross, in his essay, suggests that the above statement should be illustrated with reference to particular virtues. We have to explain all the virtues with reference to the individual’s conduct, for this is the domain of all these virtues. In this connection, the virtues that has been discussed by Aristotle, has been mentioned in the chart. Ross in his essay has highlighted the fact that the extremes are opposed to each other and to the mean. Ross also shows that
Aristotle characterizes the virtue as one of the three dispositions among which two of them are vices involving excess and deficiency respectively, and one a virtue, i.e., the mean, and all are in a sense opposed to all, for the extreme states are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other, and then the intermediate to the extreme, as the equal is greater relatively to the less, less relatively to the greater, so the middle states are excessive relatively to the deficiencies, deficient relatively to the excess, both in passions and in actions. For the brave man appears rash relatively to the coward and cowardly relatively to the rash man. Similarly, the temperate man appears self-indulgent relatively to the insensible man, insensible relatively to the self-indulgent. Hence, the people at the extremes push the intermediate man each over to the other and the brave man is called rash by the coward, cowardly by the rash man and correspondingly in the other cases.

Henceforth, from Aristotelian ethics, it can be said that the moral virtue is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and actions, has been sufficiently stated. Hence, also it is not easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g., to find the middle of a circle is not for everyone but for him, who knows, so too, anyone can get angry – that is easy – or give or spent money, but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor it is easy, therefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. Hence, he who aims at the intermediate must first depart from what is the more contrary to it. For of the extremes one is more erroneous, one less so, therefore, since to hit the mean is hard in the extreme, we must as a second
best, as people say, take the least of the evils, and this will be done best in the way it has been described.

**The Examples of the Moral Virtues and Their characteristics**

The examples of moral virtues that have been provided by Aristotle are:

1. courage,
2. temperance,
3. virtues concerned with money

A. liberality

B. magnificence

4. Virtues concerned with honor
   A. pride
   B. the virtues intermediate between ambition and unambitiousness

5. The virtues concerned with anger
   A. good temper

6. The virtues of social intercourse
   A. friendliness
   B. truthfulness
   C. ready wit

7. A quasi virtue
   A. shame
Now the illustrations have been made about the several virtues, and say what sort of things they are concerned with and how they are concerned with them, at the same time it will become plain how many they are. First, let us speak of courage.

According to Aristotle, courage is a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence. The word ‘fear’ means all the evils, e.g. disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death etc. According to Aristotle, the motive of courage is the sense of honor, it is the mean between the two vices, and these are cowardice and rashness. Ross has mentioned five kinds of courage, but, in the present section, not all of these discussions are entertained. Ross mentions another virtue and that is temperance. It is a mean with regard to pleasure. The virtue, temperance, is the mean between two vices and these are self-indulgence and insensibility.

The next virtue is ‘Liberality’. It seems to be the mean with regard to wealth, for the liberal man is praised not in respect of military matters, not of those in respect of which the temperate man is praised, but with regard to the giving and taking of wealth, and especially in respect of giving. The word,’ wealth’ means to say all the things whose value is measured by money. The liberal man, like other virtuous man, will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly, for he will give to the right people. the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving, and that too with pleasure or without pain – least of all will it be painful. But, he who gives to the wrong people or not for the sake of the noble but for some other cause, will be called not liberal but by some other name.
Magnificence also seems to be a virtue concerned with wealth, but it does not, like liberality, extend to all actions that are concerned with wealth, but only to those that involve expenditure, and in these, it surpasses liberality in scale. The magnificent man is liberal, but the liberal man is not necessarily magnificent. The deficiency of this state of character is called niggardliness, and its excess is the vulgarity. The virtues that concerned with honor are pride which seems even from its name to be concerned with the great things. The proud man, since he deserves most, must be good in the highest degree, for the better man always deserves more, and the best man most. Therefore, the truly proud man must be good. And greatness in every virtue would seem to be characteristic of a proud man. There is another virtue, which is intermediate between ambition and unambitiousness. We blame both the ambitious man as aiming at honor more than is right and from wrong sources, and the unambitious man as not willing to be honored even for noble reasons.

Ross also pointed out that in all events this is a state of character that is praised, being an unnamed mean in respect of honor. Relatively to ambition, it seems to be unambitiousness, and relatively to unambitiousness, it seems to be ambition, while relatively to both severally it seems in a sense to be both together. Actually, in this case, the extremes seem to be contradictories because the mean has not received a name. The name of the virtue that concerned with anger is good temper. The virtue has been placed in the middle position, and its deficiency as well as excess is without a name. The excess may be called a sort of ‘irascibility’. For the passion is anger, while its causes are many and diverse. The person who is called good tempered, is the man who is angry, at the
right things, and with the right people, and further, as he thought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.

However, the virtues that are discussed earlier are the individual virtues. Some social virtues may become essential to our social life. These are friendliness, truthfulness and ready wit. Friendliness is a disposition of having the friend. In gatherings of men, in social life and the interchange of words and deeds, some men are thought to be obsequious, i.e., those who to give pleasure, praise everything and never oppose, but think it their duty ‘to give no pain to the people they meet’, while those, who on the contrary, oppose everything and care not a whit about giving pain are called churlish and contentious.

In the field of social life, truthfulness is necessary. The truthful man is thought to be apt to claim the things that bring glory, and he must be truthful in his words and his deeds.

The persons, who can do jokes at right time and in right way, may be called the ready-witted person, and evidently, here there is an excess and deficiency as compared with the mean. Those who carry humor to excess are thought to be vulgar persons and those who do not make any jokes to others in the right way and in the right time, are thought to be boorish and unpolished. However, the means in social life, that have been described, are three in number, and are all concerned with an interchange of deeds and words of some kind. They differ, however, in that one is concerned with truth, and the other two with pleasantness. Of those concerned with pleasure, one is displayed in jests, the other in the general social intercourse of life.
Shame should not be described as a virtue, for it is more like a passion than a state of character. It is defined, at any rate, as a kind of fear of dishonor, and produces an effect, similar to that produced by fear of danger, for people who feel disgraced, blush, and those who fear death turn pale. Both, therefore, seem to be in a sense bodily conditions, which is thought to be characteristic of passion rather than of a state of character. Thus, in the schema of Aristotelian ethics, it is very difficult to understand any general rule about the appropriate feelings and emotions for they are varying according to the agents as well as the situations as it happens. Moreover, the contemporary virtue theorists also have considered the varying situations of the society and its relation to the virtues as well. Aristotle has also mentioned that the feelings of the virtuous person must also be in harmony accompanied with his reason and so it suggests that what is essential of a virtuous person is that he always in each occasion, has the right amount of feeling, and the degree of intensity of that feeling is also appropriate to the particular situation in which he finds himself.

However, in the Aristotelian scheme of virtue ethics a clear-cut distinction is maintained between a virtuous individual who performs noble or virtuous actions because these are noble things to do and certain noble or virtuous actions that are not so because these are not performed by certain noble or virtuous individuals. According to him, one becomes a virtuous person by being trained to act in the virtuous way and the trainee will not act as virtue demands before he can be counted as a virtuous person. Aristotle also has mentioned the three points that distinguishes the virtuous person from the non-virtuous one and these are: 1) the person should know of what he is doing (i.e. his performance is not a mere accident), 2) the person has the power to choose the act and he chooses it ‘for
its own sake,' and 3) the person should perform the action with a firm and settled disposition (1105a28-33). Thus, the virtuous person will choose to do the virtuous thing and will choose it ‘for its own sake’ i.e. simply because it is the virtuous thing and not for any superior motive. Now, we are going to consider what Aristotle actually says about the virtue of character,"I mean virtue of character, for this concerns feelings and actions, and in these there is excess and deficiency and a middle amount. For example, it is possible to feel too much and too little fear, confidence, desire, anger, or pity, and in general, to be pleased, pained too much, or too little, and in each case, this is not good. But to feel them at right times, for the right objects, towards the right people, for the right reason, and in the right way, that is both middle and the best and it is the part of the virtue." However, according to Aristotle, each virtue is concerned with a particular desire or emotion and the virtues are acquired by training and habituation. If the training is successful, one becomes accustomed to acting in the right way and to enjoy acting in that way. One chooses that way of acting and chooses for its own sake, i.e. simply because it is the only virtuous way. Thus, people from their earlier ages, have developed their mind to accept the virtuous way and tried to reject the vicious way of thinking. Again, it must be pointed out that according to Aristotle, virtue is not the absolute mean; it is relative, varying from person to person and from time to time.

In this connection, a more central question is to be pointed out and that is: whether Aristotle is right in placing the concept of virtue at the heart of his moral discussion. To search the proper answer of this query, mainly two aspects must be kept in mind. In the first place, when one goes through the Aristotelian ethics thoroughly, it seems that the good actions are those that are done ‘with excellence’ and in those circumstances, those
will be considered as the right actions. But, actually, the word does not sound what Aristotle has actually meant by ‘with excellence’. For he construes ‘excellence’ (virtue) as a disposition of a person rather than a feature of this or that particular action and so the orientation has changed from actions to people. In the second place, Aristotle goes on to develop his virtue theory entirely in accordance with Greek tradition by talking not of one virtue but of many virtues and these may be characterized by social as well as individual virtues. One might think that a single virtuous disposition –always to do the right thing, for the right reason, in the right spirit, and so on –is all that he should require, and in a way it is thought that it is what he does require. But in fact, he conforms to his tradition and speaks of many separate virtues—courage, temperance, good temper, justice and so on. Clearly, the main reason for separating the different virtues is the thought that a person may have some of these virtues but lack others, and Aristotle will explain by saying that some of his desires—and—emotions must be well trained while others are still wayward.

Again, according to Aristotle, moral virtues will aim at the mean both in feeling and in actions and hence it may be defined as’ a disposition to choose, consisting essentially in a mean relatively to us determined by a rule, i.e. by the rule by which a practically wise man would determine it. Here it is also noticed that the definition of moral virtue involves a reference to an individual virtue. Actually, moral virtue is not complete in itself. To be a morally virtuous man, one must have practical wisdom within himself, and so moral virtue in its full sense implies the possession of practical wisdom by the virtuous man himself. In respect of excellence, virtue is an extreme, but in respect of its essence and its definition, it is a mean. However, Aristotle has said that a virtue is a tendency to control a certain class of feeling and to act rightly in a certain kind of situation. Thus, we have
three virtues consisting in the right attitude towards the primitive feelings of fear, pleasure, anger, and the four virtues concerned with two of the main pursuits of man in society – the pursuit of wealth and that of honor and lastly three virtues of social intercourse. Aristotle has also considered a quasi virtue, shame that is not characterized as a real virtue.

**A Comparative Analysis of the Indian view of Virtue with the Western concept of Virtue**

A comparative Analysis of the notion of virtue with that of corresponding notion of *dharma* may also throw some light in the characteristics of Indian ethics. It is not possible to cover up each of the salient features of virtue both from the Indian as well as western perspective. However, our endeavor is to compare and construct the similarities as well as differences both from the Indian as well as western perspective. In this context, a comparison can be drawn with the help of two main books and these are *Padarthadharmasamgraha* written by Prasastapadacarya, and the Nichomachean ethics of Aristotle. However, it may be pointed out that in the Aristotelian ethics as well as in the *Nyaya* ethics, the character of the agent is very much important. Moreover, in the contemporary virtue ethics, the discussion of the character of the agent is important. According to the theory, the character traits are the reliable and fixed dispositions. If an agent possesses the character trait of kindness, we would expect him or her to act kindly in all sort of situations, towards all kind of people, and over a long period, even when it is difficult to do so. With the help of these virtues, the agent can develop and give a shape to his character through a long and gradual process of education and habituation. Thus, it
is observed from the above fact that virtue is not itself a habit. Habituation is merely an aid to the development of virtue.

In this respect, one may object that as this type of ethics has its primary concern with the agent’s own character, so it is to be considered as the self-centered ethics. Actually, it is observed in all ethical theory that morality is supposed to be about other people and is related with the flourishing and the well-being of the other people of the society. In this respect, the question may arise, whether the virtues are only self–regarding, i.e. the human quality that inheres in one’s self only help and prosper one’s life. The answer is negative. Virtue is a trait of character of a certain type. It is a character trait, which exercises some restraint or controls over the behaviour of the individual whose character trait it is. Moreover, since every virtue plays a social role or may be applicable in a social context, this self-control of the individual may become a principle for motivating agent of social control. It is a principle of self-control or self-restraint in the sense that through it the individual himself controls or restrains his behavior in relation to some other member or members of the society. For example, a kind man, i.e., one who has the virtue of kindness, himself restrains his behaviour in relation to a suffering man, and tries to reduce his suffering and if it is not possible, then at least he expresses sympathy for his sufferings. Thus, one virtue may become other-regarding. The concept of self-regarding and other regarding virtues can be introduced in the Indian ethics. It seems that if the virtues become the means to attain apavarga, then those virtues may be regarded as the self–regarding virtues, i.e. they only help to prosper one’s own character and not of others. The two words, ‘abhyudaya’ and ‘nihsreyasa’ specifically refer to one’s own prosperity and the liberation. However, the virtues are also other regarding as well.
Those kind of social virtues are regarded as other-regarding virtues, which pay more attention to the good of the others going beyond the one. Feelings of compassion, benevolence, liberalness, etc nourish the moral caliber of man by motivating him to take care for the welfare of others and generate in him the desires to take appropriate steps for other’s welfare. That is why any philosophical, religious, or ethical theory, which prescribes that all feelings, emotions and desires be gotten rid of, is bound to impoverish man’s moral equipment and thereby the quality of his entire life.

From the western perspective, the eudaemonist account of virtue ethics claims that the good of the agent and the good of others are not two separate aims. Both results from the exercise of the virtues. Instead of being too self-centered, virtue ethics teaches us to unify in the domain of morality and to understand the requirement of one’s own self-interest. In the Indian context, the ‘dharma’ may signify harmony. It comprises self-harmony and the harmony with other people. The word sometimes means the preservation of the social harmony and in that sense, it may be considered as the other-regarding virtue. In the Indian context, the concept of Rta may be introduced to understand the social harmony. It is a comprehensive principle, which forms the basis of ethics in the Veda. It is the principle of universal dynamics operating on all levels of the dynamics; it might be physical, vital, psychological, spiritual, and ethical. The word ‘Rta’ is suggested to mean the uniformity of the laws of nature and in that sense, it is of the universal dynamics and cosmic order.

Now, this concept of Rta, takes almost purely an ethical turn when it is put in conjunction with dharma. Rta is the principle of cosmic order which guarantees that there is no
arbitrariness in the moral world. But it hardly gives us any criterion to distinguish between right and wrong, moral and immoral. It may be said that a life of righteousness is a life according to the *Rta*, but where does one find the criterion to distinguish righteousness from unrighteousness. It will perhaps be found in a criterion ulterior to that of *Rta*. *Rta* by itself can hardly give us any such criterion. If at all it will give us any such criterion, it is in the form of truth as a virtue. Therefore, whatever, is truthful is in accordance with the *Rta* and hence righteous (virtuous) in nature.

It may also be noticed that the principle of self harmony leads to the concept of *caturvarga*. *Dharma, artha, kama*, are to be sought by the individuals bound by attachment while *moksa* is the goal for those who forsake attachment from the empirical life or *samsara*. Gautama, in his *Nyayasutra* and Vatsyayana’s *Bhasya* on the *Nyayasutra*, proceeds to enumerate diverse rule of conduct, which if they carried out, will lead to the preservation of social harmony. These rules of conduct considered as subjectively appropriated by the moral agent and thus realized as moral attributes or determinations of the personal life.

Another similarity may be drawn between the Indian as well as western concept of virtue.

In the Aristotelian scheme of virtue ethics, a clear-cut distinction has been observed between a virtuous individual who performs noble and virtuous actions because these are noble things to do and certain noble or virtuous actions that are not so because these are performed by certain noble or virtuous individuals. According to Aristotle, a virtuous person can be distinguished from the other persons in three ways: i) the person knows what he is doing (i.e., his performance is not a mere accident), ii) he chooses to act as he
does and chooses it for its own sake and iii) he acts in this way from a firm and settled disposition. Thus, the virtuous person will choose to do the virtuous thing and that kind of virtuous act has been done from his virtuous motive. For that reason, Aristotle has pointed out two elements that are involved in a completely good action – a) that the thing has been done should be the right thing to do in a particular situation and b) that it should be done from a good motive. In this way, in the Aristotelian ethics, the distinction is made between a virtuous person who necessarily chooses the virtuous path only and the ordinary person who is not so much virtuous even though he lives his life in a virtuous way.

In the Indian context, more specifically, in the Nyaya context, though no clear-cut distinction has been made by Gautama and Vatsyayana, yet somewhere a distinction can be drawn between the jivanmukta person and the ordinary person. The ordinary person is very much different from the person who seeks for liberation. By performing the obligatory and the occasional deeds, an ordinary person may acquire the quality, that we call ‘dharma’ in his own self, which as Gautama and Sridhara describe, is self-purification (atma-samskara).\(^8\) Viswanath interprets it as ‘fitness of the self to attain liberation’ (atmanah apavargaksamata)\(^9\) This qualification acquired through ethical training, which Aristotle says ‘Habituation’. It enables the aspirant to enter upon the second stage of the discipline which comprises of three factors, i.e. sravana or formal study, manana or reflection and the nididhayasana or meditation. The details of these three steps have been discussed in the earlier chapter. However, after practicing these three steps successfully, it results in a direct knowledge of the self as distinct from objects, beginning with the physical body and ending in misery, the objects with which it
entertained earlier the false notion of identification owing to mithyajnana. The latter is removed by tattvajnana or the direct experience of the true nature of the self. The mumuksu, i.e., one who aspires to be liberated would continue to live till the portion of the merits and demerits accumulated by the self in its previous lives (sancita karma) is exhausted the portion which is known as prarabdha karma that has fructified and begun to bear fruit in the form of the present body. The sancita karma, according to Jayanta, will be rendered ineffective by the power of tatvajnana.10

Such a person, who is free from sancita karma, and who is living out only his prarabdha karma, which has fructified is called a jivanmukta person. This state of jivanmukti is admitted by Uddyotakara, Vacaspatimisra, Viswanath, Udayana, and Jayanta Bhatta. It is found that the jivanmukta person is very much different from the ordinary person in three ways. Firstly, the person performs certain common as well as specific duties. Secondly, he performs the intellectual discipline, which comprises three factors, i.e., sravana, manana, and nididhyasana. Thirdly, the person who is jivanmukta cannot engage himself in any activity with the sense of agency of the form ‘I am the agent of this action’. Nevertheless, in an ordinary person, the false notion of ‘I’ in respect of body-mind sense complex always resides. However, in this connection, it may be noticed that the concept of a jivanmukta person, who is liberated and yet alive is somehow similar to that of Aristotle’s notion of a virtuous man.

However, the next purpose is to search out the similarity between the Western virtue ethics and the Nyaya-Vaisesika ethics regarding the different types of virtues. The main purpose of this discussion is to highlight some of the psychological factors that are
relevant to construct a good character. In Book II of his Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle has enlisted different types of virtues under different categories. He has categorized the virtues as courage, temperance, some of them are concerned with money, and some of them are concerned with honor. There are also social virtues such as truthfulness, friendliness etc. Like this manner, the Naiyayikas have also enlisted different types of virtues. In the earlier discussion, these virtues have been discussed elaborately. In the Nyayakandali, Sridhara, has mentioned thirteen characteristics that will help one to attain dharma and keep him aside from the adharma. It is also observed that the Naiyayikas have suggested that there are certain peculiar circumstances where some of the wrong acts may not be accepted as sinful one. In that case, to understand the dharma as a moral virtue has to be reconsidered and reassessed. In the Nyayabhasya, Vatsyayana classifies the dharma or righteousness as the virtue of the body, the virtues of the speech and the virtues of the mind. It is observed from the earlier discussion that the virtues that are expressed in the bhasya, are somehow similar to the Aristotelian account of virtues. It is found that the virtues of the mind, i.e. Detachment (asprha), compassion (daya), and reverence (sraddha) are speciality of the Hindus. We may compare them with the Aristotelian virtues, which are justice and friendship, i.e. justice based on a proper regard for the rights of others, and friendship is a social feeling. Instead of friendliness, which is based on strongly defined individuality and worldliness, they recommend compassion (anukampa) and faith (paralokasraddha). Nevertheless, it is also pointed out that the virtues like, asprha, unworldliness, or detachment, do not belong to the same category and they are diametrically opposed to the Christian ideal of life.\textsuperscript{11}
The comparison may be concluded in this way. It is found that the classical western moral philosophy has taken upon itself the task of legitimizing and grounding our moral beliefs and intuitions with the help of certain fundamental principles. These principles are such as the principle of Universalizability, the utility principle according to the different ethical theory like the deontological theory, the theory of the Act-utilitarianisms etc. Whatever is in the ancient thinking, today the moral thinking, by returning to the more descriptive Aristotelian virtue theory and recognition of various dimensions of human excellence, has broken loose from the constraint of the Kantianism-Utilitarianism framework. In comparison with the new perspective, the dharma theory fares well. The concept of dharma covers a large variety of different, even if loosely connected, phenomena.

The meaning of the word ‘dharma’ is sometimes understood as a ‘purusa guna’, i.e. the character trait and in some other sense, it may be understood as the duties, i.e. the rule of conduct. By performing the sadharana dharmas or common duties and varnasrama dharmas or special duties, an individual acquires certain qualities in his own self and by attaining those qualities, he will try to lead a quality life. To answer briefly, it may be said that the quality life is to enjoy one’s life virtuously. It is through the proper discharge of these common or universal duties and the special duties of one’s asrama or specific stage in spiritual growth that one realizes that special quality of the self, which constitutes dharma, virtue, or righteousness. Therefore, it is noticed from the different literatures of the Indian ethics, that the duties are the tool to acquire the virtues in one’s life and after attaining all the virtues, one may lead a virtuous life.
Finally, it is noticed that in the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* framework, the universal as well as special duties are performed by an individual and these all are lying in the third category, i.e. *karma* maintained in the *Nyaya* system, and by performing these *karmas*, one would get certain qualities in his own self which belongs to the second category, i.e. *guna*, and these two *gunas*, i.e. *dharma* and *adharma*, inheres in the individual’s self, which is the substratum of these qualities. Thus, the Naiyayikas have tried to cover the two broad categories, i.e. *guna* and *karma* under one and this is *dharma*.

However, *dharma*, as Gautama and Sridhara describe, is self-purification (*atmasamskara*) and this is acquired through the ethical training. It also enables the aspirant to enter upon the second stage of discipline which is intellectual and which comprises three factors, i.e. *sravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana*. After practicing these three, the knower of the truth would experience the real nature of the self by *tattvajnana*. In that case, the *sancita karma* will be rendered ineffective by the power of *tattvajnana*. Such a person who is free from his *sancita karma* and who is living out only *prarabdha karma*, which has fructified is called a *jivanmukta* person. When the *prarabdha karma* is exhausted after giving forth its fruit, the body of the *jivanmukta* would fall off, and he would remain as the self free from the nine qualities which are adventitiously foisted upon it. The self, would become free, from worldliness, and would remain in its intrinsic nature. The mind, according to the *Nyaya- Vaisesika*, is eternal, and being so it would exist along with the self. However, its presence is quite inoperative then, and is inefficacious in giving forth knowledge and other qualities.
Thus, it is noticed that the Nyaya-Vaisesika ethics places emphasis upon the self’s struggle to overcome its worldliness by the cultivation of moral goodness. The nature of ethics may be taken into consideration to compare the two extremely different theories, i.e. the Aristotelian theory and Nyaya-Vaisesika theory. It may be stated that the Aristotle’s ethics is often called teleological or goal-oriented ethics. The Naiyayikas with their consequentialistic bias have opted for the theory according to which the individual has in view the end (ista) to do some good for himself and for others. The discussion about ista has been done in the chapter, ’Psychological Basis for Human Motivation’. However, the point must be noted that the Nyaya-Vaisesika ethics is also a kind of teleological or goal-oriented ethics. Further, the Nicomachean ethics is considered character-centered ethics. Aristotle, in his ethics, has elaborately discussed the different virtues or character traits that will make each person’s action better and thus would try to develop a better character of that person. Aristotle regards human life as consisting in the pursuit of ends, and his main object is to discover the ends and he describes the end as ‘Eudaimonia’. It is activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, or if there be more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete, to which Aristotle adds ‘in a complete life’, since activity for a short time does not constitute a satisfactory end. Similarly, in Nyaya ethics, the different virtues have been considered and these character traits are supposed to make a man’s character good from within.

A morally good life may thus be conceived as a virtuous life, and the latter is said to consist in respecting, cultivating or inculcating, certain morally desirable traits of character. These are the broad similarities between two different approaches to ethics. However, similarities need not be carried too far at the cost of other basic dissimilarities.
Notes and references

1. According to Immanuel Kant’s ‘Deontological theory’ of the eighteenth century, morality is based on a universal and impartial law of rationality. The Utilitarianism, on the other hand, talks about the consequences that are produced by the performance of any particular action. This theory gives emphasis on the duties of the individual.

2. In the Greek period, specially, in the Aristotelian ethics, there is no clear-cut distinction between the virtue theorists and the other ethicists. However, to understand the subject matter of the Aristotelian ethics, we can call him as a virtue ethicist.


4. ibid, p-29

5. ‘Virtue’- the Greek Word traditionally translated, as ‘virtue’ (arête) has not the specifically moral connotation that ‘virtue’ has acquired in modern English. The English word, ‘excellence’ that is sometimes used by Ross, is less liable to mislead. Thus, moral virtue will be characterized as ‘excellence of character’ and intellectual virtue is the ‘excellence of intellect or intelligence’.

7. It is clearly stated that virtue is always at the same time both a mean and an extreme, but in different connections. In every virtue, two points of view stand over against each other, one ontological, which refers to the existential form of the conduct, we might say, the material of the value – and one axiological, which concerns the valuational quality itself. In the sense of the latter, virtue is an extreme, in the sense of the former, a mean.


8. *Atma-samskara*: this word has been used in the *Nyayasutra* by Gautama, 4.2.46, edited by Phanibhusana Tarkabagish, chapter- IV, Paschim Banga Rajya Pustak Parsad, Calcutta, 1998 p-241


