Introduction

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that tells us about what is right, what is good or what is a duty. Indian philosophical texts and literatures are also found to discuss such concepts as good, right or duty. These discussions centering these concepts would indeed furnish the basis for providing the details about the salient features of morality from the perspective of Indian philosophy. From the very beginning, one should guard oneself from holding the mistaken idea of delineating the grand master plan of one general moral viewpoint in India which may be characterized as the Indian view about morality. Nobody has any reason to be sceptic about the varieties of perspectives from which issues relating to metaphysics, epistemology or logic have been relentlessly pursued. Even if by Indian philosophy is taken to mean only those philosophers, who owe their allegiance to the Vedas, or in other words, the Vaidika philosophers, in spite of their similarities in some outline, their dissimilarities in detail should not escape a discerning mind. If various schools of philosophy born out of classical Vedic tradition are hardly replicas of one another in the domain of metaphysics, epistemology and logic how could then they be of supposed to propose one uniform viewpoint in the domain of ethics? Our habit of speaking in singular as the Indian view about the nature of morality, as if there is just one view point, should not be encouraged to prevail. Instead we need to talk about ethics of the Nyaya, ethics of the Bhatta Mimamsakas, ethics of the Prabhakara Mimamsakas, ethics of the Samkhya, ethics of the Yoga and so on without dissociating these views from their common origin. It is not uncommon to talk about the Nyaya theory of Pramana in its details as distinct from the Vaisesika theory of Pramana. In Indian philosophical
discourse, especially in the Vedic tradition, texts and literatures that grew up presented a well-knit holistic approach to philosophy as such. *Darsana* as a discipline included metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and logic in their texts, no clear-cut demarcation is maintained in their discussions about various domains of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology or ethics. It is really hard to earmark any particular text in classical Vedic philosophy solely as a text either in metaphysics or in epistemology or in psychology or in ethics. From this it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that, as it was reported to have been done in the past, since there is no text dealing exclusively with morality in the Indian Vedic tradition; hence there was no ethics at all. In fact, compartmentalizing or branching different areas of *Darsana* into watertight domains must have been carried on under the influence of Western Philosophy. In order to understand the nature of morality and conditions of being moral from the perspective of different schools of Indian philosophy, these cannot be dissociated from their respective metaphysical and psychological presuppositions. There is no doubt that ethics in India is impregnated with metaphysics and psychology for here ethics is never a dry intellectual enterprise consisting only of abstract conceptual analysis. This has often given an edge to the critics to say disparagingly that Indian ethics is loaded with metaphysics. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, however, believed that any ethical theory must be grounded in a philosophical conception of the relation between human conduct and ultimate reality. Radhakrishnan had said, ‘As we think ultimate reality to be, so we behave, vision and action go together.’

In any discussion about the *Nyaya – Vaisesika* philosophy, explications about their views on metaphysics, epistemology or logic comes to the forefront. The *Naiyayikas* dealing
with nature, sources, validity of pramana and their prameyas often prefer to call their sastra Pramana Sastra. In the opening aphorism of the Nyaya-sutra, Gautama enumerates sixteen categories (padarthas), for example, the means of valid cognition (pramana), objects of valid cognition (prameya), etc. and declares that a correct knowledge (tattva-jnana) would lead to the ultimate good, i.e., liberation (nihsreyas). Gautama, however, does not prescribe a correct knowledge of all the above categories as a necessary means to liberation, but only a knowledge of some of them that has a direct bearing on the freedom of the self. They are mentioned in the following sutra:

‘Atma-sarira-indriya-artha buddhi- manah-pravrtti-dosa-pretyabhava-phala-duhkha- apavargah-tu prameyam’. It follows according to Gautama that self (atman), body (sarira), sense (indriya), objects of the senses (artha), knowledge (buddhi), mind (manas), motivation (pravrtti), evil (dosa), rebirth (pretyabhava), result (phala), suffering (duhkha) and liberation (apavarga) are the objects of valid knowledge. These things are called as the prameya. It should not be concluded that the Naiyayikas are not at all interested in questions relating to ethics or these questions are unimportant for the Naiyayikas or regarding which they do not have anything significant to comment. The present dissertation is an attempt to explore from the perspective of the Nyaya philosophy, the notion of morality, its scope and other related issues and their significance in the over all scheme of the Nyaya system.

Our discussions would proceed with analysis of first order questions about which actions are right or wrong, which character traits and institutions are good or bad. This would be followed by the second-order questions about the status of the first order questions and
their theoretical status and implication. This study would also engage in meta-ethical study to explain and analyze the viewpoint of the Naiyayikas. Neither is it advisable nor is it possible to present their views as falling under two water tight compartments. What has been said about the Vaidika ethics, in general, is equally applicable to the case of the Nyaya ethics in particular, for no particular text can be cited as dealing with this topic solely. On the other hand, each and every Nyaya text may be cited to have made some contribution to the subject of morality. No Nyaya philosophers, in fact no Indian philosophers, as such have been found to build any moral theory or talk about any moral system consciously whatsoever. On the contrary, in the Western ethical traditions attempts to theorize in the domain of morality, in general, are nothing unusual. Lack of any conscious theorization on the part of the Vaidika ethicists is one of the reasons for often suggesting out right rejection of the possibility of Indian ethics. The present study seeks to penetrate into and extricate theories, explicit and implicit, underneath the Nyaya moral claims for in any discipline theorization helps in extending the scope of our understanding.

It may be pointed out that according to all Hindu ethics, the highest ethics is the ethics of knowledge and purification of desire, i.e., the ethics of the negation of empirical life, but the lower ethics of the practical life is also recognized as a probationary training to the higher discipline of the spirit. According to S.K. Maitra, the ethics of the Hindus is based on a threefold scheme of the spiritual life comprising the stages of sociality, subjective morality and the life absolute and transcendental. The objective or social ethics refers to questions of morality in relation to others, whereas the subjective or individual ethics refers to question of morality in relation to oneself. Man, as distinguished from a mere
animal, is adopting a moral point of view not only in making judgments about the conduct and character of other members of the society, but also about his behaviour to himself as answer. The individual, after a period of discipline in objective co-operation and self-restraint, should look inwards into himself and aim at subjective purity and inner excellence of the will. At that stage, he has to undergo the process which leads to the purification of mind (citasuddhi). It is assumed that cittasuddhi or the purification of the mind is an indispensable condition for the higher stages of the moral life. In this stage, it is however, necessary that the ordinary person should be purified and spiritualised and should learn, through a proper understanding of his inner nature, to subordinate the lower to the higher impulses and to maintain the balance of the soul that are the pre-condition of proper ethical valuation. This description of Indian ethics may aptly be used with regard to the Nyaya-Vaisesikas as well.

No Nyaya philosophers, as such, have been found consciously to build a moral system, though it may not be altogether impossible to systemize their views. In the western ethical literatures and in their views. In the western ethical literatures and in their various discussions, we often come across different ‘isms’ like consequentialism, Contractualism, deontologist theory and others. In the present thesis, attempts are made to unfold some of the salient features of the Nyaya ethics, and its similarities and dissimilarities with the Western ethical approaches. Though the objective of the present study is not a comparative study, it at times dwells upon comparison to bring out with exactitude the underlying aspects of the moral philosophy of the Nyaya.
Ethics deals with voluntary actions for only with regard to those actions questions of good or bad and right or wrong are applicable. Any voluntary action has, generally speaking, two aspects and these are internal and external. The internal aspect consists of the motive or intention that prompts the action and the external aspect consists in the overt act performed or the result coming out of the action performed. Pronouncement of moral judgment upon someone’s action has to be either on the overt act itself or on the inner motive that prompted the action. The problem is: on which of the two the moral judgment is to be passed? Such questions have been extensively debated by western moral philosophers. Indian thinkers have also not been indifferent to these. Almost all the Indian systems believe that our passions are at the root of all our actions. So actions are to be judged, right or wrong in accordance with the good or evil passions which prompt them. According to the Naiyayikas, it is the purity or impurity of our intention (abhisandhi) which constitutes the rightness or wrongness of our actions. There is no merit or demerit in the action itself. It is always the intention which causes merit or demerit. This root cause of every action always lies in the mind.

In this dissertation, discussions about the Nyaya ethics have been divided into nine chapters. These chapters are as follows:-

Chapter 1 The Notion of a Motivated Agent
Chapter 2 Psychological Basis for Human Motivation.
Chapter 3 What is Karma?
Chapter 4 Karma in Medical Literature
Chapter 5  
*Dharma* and its different interpretations

Chapter 6  
Comparison between *Dharma* & the corresponding western ethical concepts

Chapter 7  
God and his role in moral life.

Chapter 8  
Concept of Liberation.

Chapter 9  
Conclusion

In the first chapter, we are going to discuss the nature of agency from the *Nyaya* perspective. The word “agency” has been correlated with the actions that are voluntary in nature. The different kinds of voluntary acts and the underlying desire for all of those actions will be discussed in this chapter. The concept of agency as well as the concept of an enjoyer will also be discussed. Further, we are seeking answer to the question as to whether the agent and the enjoyer are the same individual or they are different. Answer to this issue would be critically examined keeping in mind the views of different schools of Indian philosophy.

In the second chapter, I have tried to focus on the psychological basis for the human motivation. The psychological analysis of the will is a very special feature of the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* system of Indian philosophy. In the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* system, the thinkers like Prasastapada, Visvanath and many others provide an elaborate account of volition. As human beings, the ordinary persons perform various activities. Broadly speaking, all activities performed by human beings are of two sorts: in one case the desire or aversion of the agent in the performance or non-performance of the act has some decisive role to play. But in other instances, it is quite possible that desires or aversion of the actor has no
role to play in the performance of that act. Various types of organic action and automatic action have their suitable effects and also serve some specific ends for the organism. But these actions do not fall within the domain of actions that presuppose either desire or aversion of the agent concerned. In the first place, a person is motivated to act if he has a desire to perform that act. Broadly speaking, desire is different as the yearning for the unattained. Desires are sometimes, self-centered or egoistic and sometimes all-involving, altruistic. In the Nyaya literature, a long list of desires are given ranging from sexual desire, appetite for food and drink, desire to remove suffering of others, desire to renounce the world, desire to deceive others, and finally desire for action. There is also another sort of classification of desire according to which whether the desire is for an end or consequence that is good or whether it relates to the means or the method for achieving certain end. In the case of volition, it is the desire of the second kind that is the desire for the means for attaining a certain end. In this chapter, another important and interesting issue has to be discussed and this is: Do we desire things because they have a value or do things have value because we desire them. In both of these cases, it must be pointed out that values do not exist independently of conscious satisfactions of desires. In the Indian tradition, a thing is supposed to be “desirable” because “it is desired”.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, I have dealt with the notion of ‘Karma’ with special reference to the Nyaya-Vaisesika system. In this context, I want to point out the meaning of the word ‘Karma’ has been understood in the sense of ‘Karmaphala’, i.e., the consequences of a certain action. The Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophy has used the concept of adrsta in different ways. But, in the present chapter, I have tried to elaborate their theory of adrsta with special attention to their theory of action and its consequences. The
karma should not be misunderstood to be the same with the notion of “Fate”. Further, in this chapter, another controversial issue in the framework of Indian philosophy has to be discussed and this is regarding any attempt to reconcile between the reality of moral freedom and causal determinism. Whether the theory relating to karma and its consequences can be retained in the context of the ancient Indian Medical literature, i.e. *Ayurvedasastra* which suggests remedies and cures for diseases is also an important question. A brief analysis has been made to relate or compare the notion of fate (*daiva*) and that of the notion of human effort (*purusakara*). Whether these two are equally essential to an agent, is also an interesting issue that has been critically explicated in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

The word ‘*Dharma*’ has a large significance in any kind of moral theory in Indian tradition. What does the word ‘*dharma*’ mean in *Nyaya – Vaisesika* tradition as well as in other Indian philosophical tradition, is a very interesting issue. In the fifth chapter, all these are discussed elaborately. From the overall discussion, it appears that most of the Indian thinkers have accepted the close connection of *dharma* with *karma*, in its broader meaning as action in general and in its specific meaning as the *karman* determining one’s own character and status in the society. The law of *karman* also serves as the motive for performing one’s *dharma* properly in order to have a favourable disposition and station in rebirth and to achieve *moksa* or liberation ultimately. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to show that the conception of *dharma* encompasses an area that will help one to uplift oneself from sociality to spirituality. The classification of *sadharana dharma* and the *visesa dharma* has been drawn in this connection.
In the Indian moral context we find clearly that the obedience to dharma is not to enjoy freedom from action, but to enjoy freedom in action and that can reveal the true aspiration of human existence. Rabindranath Tagore, in his essay, entitled Realisation in action observes: ‘The true striving in the quest of truth of dharma consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the eternal harmony’.5

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 necessary to keep in mind two basic issues: firstly, about finding and elaborating the true nature of virtue and secondly, about providing justification for the exercise of virtue 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. Thus, it may lead to arguments and counter arguments as to whether moral values are based upon situational values. A comparative account about the notion “virtue” with the corresponding notion of dharma, may also throw some light on the characteristics of Indian ethics and all these are juxtaposed and critically analyzed in the sixth chapter.

The Nyaya Vaisesika philosophers, as we know, have accepted the existence of God. In their different literatures, they have tried to prove the existence of God and in this connection, an interesting debate to be addressed regarding the role of God within the moral frame work. The explanation about the nature of the relationship between the God and the entire system of morality, the cause behind the motivational action and the
relation between God and the volitional acts of an individual are to be provided. The main discussions are carried on following the Nyayasutra of Gautama and its bhasya of Vatsyayana along with some other commentaries on the text. The discussions on issues with critical analysis are incorporated in the seventh chapter of this dissertation.

It may be pointed out by some that the whole Indian scheme of moral life is directed towards the attainment of Individual liberation (moksa), which is more a repository than of morality. The sense of morality worth the name presupposes a sense of self-sacrifice for others. If what is done is ultimately for one’s own sake, how can it be an example of morality? It cannot be anything other than prudence. This is more so in the case of what is called individual morality. For, social morality, even if it is ultimately directed towards the attainment of individual salvation, has at least outwardly a sense of duty or obligation towards others; it has a sense of the sacrifice of one’s own interest for the benefit of others. But, in case of individual morality, there is nothing like this, because it is plainly concerned with individual purification so as to make one’s path for salvation clear.

In the eighth chapter, it is our task to reject this kind of conception and to show that such objections against the Indian view of morality are based on misunderstanding about the concept of morality in general and of self-sacrifice in particular. The institution of morality has for its basic concern the regulation of man’s lower inclination and promotion of the higher ones in realization of his aspiration as a man. Guided by such a concern that the transition from “is” to “ought” is involved. The sacrifice of one’s egoistic interests does not always mean giving up one’s own interest for the sake of others. It also means the sacrifice of lower interest for the sake of higher ones. However,
the role of the institution of morality is not confined only to what is called social or objective morality; it is also concerned with what in the Indian tradition is recognized as individual or subjective morality. 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 given 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. Thus, in this chapter of this dissertation, our endeavor is to show the way that would lead to a morally good life by cultivating or inculcating certain morally desirable traits of character. Further, the nature of his higher goal of life and the mean to attain his goal is also another important point that has been elaborately dealt with in this chapter.

The concluding chapter is an attempt to present an overview of the whole of the Nyaya ethics. Questions relating to the type of ethics that the Naiyayikas embrace and the possibility of its comparison with certain kind of western ethical tradition are not left out of discussion. Whether it is an ethics overloaded by its metaphysical presuppositions or it will come out from its metaphysical presuppositions and will become a unique model of ethics in the Indian tradition has to be seen in course of our whole discussion. All these questions and their possible answer should be searched out from the Nyaya Vaisesika perspective.
The western thinkers conceive of good life, in terms of material prosperity and social progress, whereas for the Indian thinkers the primary objective of all philosophical reflections and social actions is to achieve liberation from all physico-material bondages and achieve spiritual fulfillment. Keeping in mind, this fundamental difference between their outlooks, one should understand why the distinction between the two traditions, cannot be ruled out. It may be conceded, however, at the same time that men across culture also cherish common values.
Notes and References


2. *Vitanda–hetvabhasacchala-jati-nigrahasthananam*  

3. 1.1.9, *Nyayasutra* of Gautama, ibid
