The concept of *karma* and its foundational *karma* doctrine constitute a fundamental structure of Indian ethics. The belief in *karma* and the commonsensical use of the doctrine bring into focus the pre-eminently moral aspect of our value systems. The *karma* doctrine may be considered as the basic presupposition of our moral life. Moral life is lived by a living individual in a social world and in this sense; every individual becomes the member of his society. Consequently, what follows that every society virtually becomes a moral community. It is in such a community, or such a world, that the individual pursues a set of values, performs a set of actions which may be right or wrong, fulfils certain obligations or duties, exhibits certain reactive attitudes which constitute his virtues, makes certain moral claims which constitute his genuine rights, etc. It is very obvious to an individual to wish for, or expect, certain reward or appreciation for his morally right behavior, and punishment for his morally bad behavior. In the case of wrong action, though the agent may not wish to be punished in any way for his wrongdoing, he cannot deny his punishment. In fact, that morality, as well as immorality, ought to pay, morality in a pleasing and immorality in a pinching way, for the individual who does it, is taken to be, in all cultures of the Indians, an unquestionable, or apriori, ethical truth. It is this truth, which is expressed in the common sense view that the moral man deserves to be rewarded, or at least admired, and the immoral man punished, or at least condemned. Every action done by an individual has a consequence either pleasurable or painful. This consequence is in no way arbitrary or accidental because it is
what the doer deserves to experience on account of having done the action. In fact, according to most of the classical Indian ethicists, this *karma* doctrine functions as the foundation.

**Karma in General**

The law of *karma* is said to be derived from the Vedic law of ‘*rta*’, or an application of it, in the realm of morals, or, in that of the socio-political-moral functioning of the human world. The word ‘*rta*’ means order, regularity, or course, which enables it to denote a principle or law to the effect that there is complete order or orderliness, regularity or uniformity in nature, which even gods are not allowed to disturb. However, the etymological meaning of the term ‘*karma*’ is derived from the Sanskrit word, ‘*karman*’. This word ‘*karman*’ is derived from the root *kr*, which means ‘to act’, ‘to do’, ‘to make’, ‘to perform’. Thus, in its derivative sense, the word ‘*karma*’ is meant for the ‘action’ or the ‘performance’. However, in the philosophical sense, the term ‘*karman*’ means to suggest an ‘action potential’ that manifests itself as the moral results or consequence in present or future lives. In this sense, the word, ‘*karma*’ has been used in the sense of the result of an action, i.e. the karmic residues or the *karmaphala* that remains in one’s life. Now, the consequences that *karma* produces in one’s life can be expressed in three ways:

Firstly, the doer or the agent gets appropriate consequences, which everyone is entitled to by virtue of his past actions. Actions of an individual have the casual efficiency of producing consequences, which the respective individuals have to enjoy or suffer.

Secondly, it determines the character and life of an individual.
Thirdly, the doctrine claims, every action that we perform leads to double results—a ‘phala’ in the form of pleasure or pain and a ‘samskara’ or tendency to repeat the same type of deeds in future. Whereas we are necessarily bound by the former, the later we are free to regulate, and it depends on the success with which we regulate these tendencies or dispositions. This freedom to regulate one’s samskaras in particular and to perform actions in general constitutes a very important aspect of the karma doctrine.

Now, it is important to notice that for some schools of classical Indian Philosophy, “the law of karma can be stated as a conjunction of three claims:

1. every action produces some pleasure or pain,
2. which and only which its doer necessarily experiences in the present or next life because
3. He deserves, or ought to experience them and them alone.”

It is a big problem whether these three claims can be accepted undoubtedly or not. In the last section, the issue will be taken up once again.

Some basic beliefs and assumptions can also be accepted with the help of these three claims and these are:

1. That every action must necessarily be followed by its consequences, which are not merely of a physical character, but also mental and moral. It produces an effect upon the character, disposition, instincts and tendencies of the agent.
2) It is assumed by most of the classical Indian philosophers that an act 
(karman) performed under a set of circumstances, create a karmic residues 
(karmasaya) and this karmic residue has or is accompanied by 
dispositional tendencies (samskara). This samskara indicates physical, 
mental and moral traits with which a person is imbued and which arise 
from the previous experiences or action.

3) The consequences of an individual’s action not being fully worked out in 
this life, they demand a future life for their fruition.

4) The inequalities among men in worldly position and advantages and the 
apparent discord between their characters and their happiness or sufferings 
may be due to this law of karma.

5) Assuming transmigration and samskara as a necessary part of this belief 
system, it follows that man is not only responsible for the consequences of 
his actions, but he deserves them in all fairness. For whatever we 
knowingly do irrespective of which life we may be talking about – is sure 
to bring us the results we merit. The idea of retribution thus becomes a 
integral element in the karma doctrine, which signifies not only that 
whatever happens to us in life is determined by antecedent causes, but also 
that whatever happens to us is the just reward and punishment for our 
actions. Before proceeding any further, the actions must be settled that 
may fall within the scope of the doctrine. In fact, the voluntary actions, in 
general, are supposed to be the objects of ethical evaluation. Non- 
voluntary or involuntary actions may also refer to a certain kind of 
‘Karma’ or ’action’, but they do not refer to any kind of the ‘Karmaphala’ 
or the consequence of the action.
The Interpretation of the *Karma* Theory in some Indian Philosophical Systems

The different Indian philosophical systems have provided interpretations about the *Karma* doctrine and the theory of rebirth. The orthodox schools as well as the heterodox schools except the materialist schools have formulated many arguments in support of the law of *Karma*. According to the materialist schools like Carvakas, there is no soul. They have provided the theory of *Bhutacaitanyavada*³ The Carvakas do not believe in the theory of rebirth and in the theory of reward or punishment of any kind of actions. Life is only for enjoyment. The Buddhist schools, one of the most eminently accepted as the heterodox schools, have generalized this *Karma* doctrine into the conception of ‘*paticcasamuppada*’ (theory of Dependent-origination). According to this doctrine, the consequent invariably follows upon the occurrence of the antecedent and if the antecedent ceases, the consequent subsequently ceases. The twelve interdependent links (*Dvadasanga*)⁴ represent *paticcasamuppada* (*pratityasamupada*) doctrine. The term *paticcasamuppada* or ‘*pratityasamupada*’ has been differently interpreted in later Buddhist literature. *Samutpada* means appearance or arising (*pradurbhava*) and *pratitya* means after getting and combining the two terms what follows that ‘arising’ after getting (something). The elements, depending on which there is some kind of arising, are called *hetu* (cause) and *paccya* (ground). These two words however are often used in the same sense and are interchangeable. It is also observed from the fact that the peculiarity of the notion of dependent origination is that it presupposes the notion of simultaneous occurrence of cause and effect and it is also involved in the law of *Karma*. Following the Buddhist literature, it is shown that the ‘casual efficiency’, (*arthakriya – karitva*) karma
is such that good actions produce good effects and bad actions produce bad effects. In the
_Digha Nikaya_ also we read how Payasi was trying to give his reasons in support of his
belief that “Neither is there any other world, nor are there beings, reborn otherwise than
from parents, nor is there fruit or result of deeds well done or ill done.” The Buddha and
his followers regarding the doctrine of rebirth and the karma doctrine accepted many
other views. According to them, _karma_ could produce its effect in this life or any other
life only when there were covetousness, antipathy and infatuation. But “when a man’s
deeds are performed without covetousness, arise without covetousness and are
occasioned without covetousness, then in as much as covetousness is gone these deeds
are abandoned, uprooted, pulled out of the ground like a _Palmyra_ tree and become non-
existent and not liable to spring up again in the future.” In fact, karma by itself without
craving (_tanha_) is incapable of bearing good or bad fruits.

The Buddhists divided karmas in three kinds and these are body, speech and mind
(_kayika, vacika_ and _manasika_). The root of this _karma is_ however, volition (_cetana_)
and the states associated with it. If a man wishes to kill animals goes out into the forest in
search of them, but cannot get any of them there even after a long search, his misconduct
is not a bodily one, for he could not actually commit the deed with his body. So, if he
gives an order for committing a similar misdeed, and if it is not actually carried out with
the body, it would be a misdeed by speech (_vacika_) and not by the body. However, the
bad thought or ill will alone whether carried into effect or not would be _karma of_ the
mind (_manasika_). However, the mental _karma_ must be present as the root of all bodily
and vocal _karmas_, for if this is absent, as in the case of an _arhat_, there cannot be any
karma at all for him. Karmas are divided from the point of view of effects into four classes, viz 1) those which are bad and produce impurity, 2) those which are good and produce purity, 3) those which are partly good and partly bad and thus productive of both purity and impurity, 4) those which are neither good nor bad and productive neither of purity nor of impurity, but which contribute to the destruction of karmas. In this way, Buddhism contributes some new traits to the karma theory which however is also intimately connected with their metaphysics. The Jainism also accepted the karma doctrine. They accepted that it is because of their merits or demerits that the jivas are born as goods, men, animals or denizens of hell. The cause of the embodiment of soul is the presence in it of karma matter. The Jainas think that through the actions of body, speech and mind, a kind of subtle matter technically called karma is produced. The passions of a man act like a viscous substance that attracts this karma matter, which thus pours into the soul and sticks to it. The karma matter thus accumulate round the soul during the infinite numbers of past lives is technically called karmasarira, which encircles the soul as it passes on from birth to birth. This karma matter sticking to the soul gradually ripens and exhausts itself in ordaining the sufferance of pains or the enjoyment of pleasures for the individual. While some karma matter is being expended in this way, other karma matters are accumulating by his activities, and thus keep him in a continuous process of suffering and enjoyment. According to the Jainas, there are four kinds of karma which determine (1) the length of life in any birth, (2) the peculiar body with its general and special qualities and faculties, (3) the nationality, caste, family, social standing etc, (4) the inborn energy of the soul by the obstruction of which it prevents the doing of a good action when there is a desire to do it.
There is respectively called (1) *ayuska karma*, (2) *nama karma*, (3) *gotra karma* (4) *antaraya karma*.

The Jainism accepts *karmas* as the cause of bondage and sorrow. According to any *karma* matter that has been generated by good, bad or indifferent actions, it gives us pleasure, pain or feeling of indifference. In fact, it is on account of *karma* that the souls have to suffer all the experiences of this world process, including births and rebirths in diverse spheres of life as Gods men or animals, or insects. The *karmas* are certain sorts of infra-atomic particles of matter (*karma – vargana*). The influx of these *karma* particles into the soul is called ‘*asrava*’ in Jainism.⁷ The *asravas* represent the channels or modes through which the karmas enter the soul. They also distinguish two kinds of *asravas*, *bhavasrava* and *karmasrava*. In this section, the discussion of these two kinds of *asravas* will not be extended. Next to this, the *Jainas* gives an account of *nirjara*.⁸ This *nirjara* also is of two kinds, *bhavanirjara* and *dravyanirjara*. *Bhavanirjara* means that change in the soul by virtue of which the *karma* particular are destroyed. *Dravyanirjara* means the actual destruction of these *karma* particles either by the reaping of their effects or by penances before their time of fruition, called *svavipaka* and *avipaka nirjara* respectively. When all the *karmas* are destroyed moksa or liberation is effected. Thus, it is, however, remarkable that with the exception of the *Carvaka* materialists, all the other systems agree on the *karma* doctrine. All the Indian systems agree in believing that whatever action is done by an individual leaves behind it some sort of potency which has the power to ordain for him joy or sorrow in the future accordingly as it is good or bad. When the fruits of the actions are such that they cannot be enjoyed in the present life or in a human life, the individual has to take another birth as a man or any other being in order to suffer them.
It is found that the explanation and the analysis about the doctrine of karma are repeatedly present in the Vedic and the Upanisadic period. Various suggestions and tentative statements are found in the old Upanisads, for instance in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad and the Chandogya Upanisad. Again, the analysis of the variety of formulations of the concepts of karma and samsara are also found in the Mahabharata. Generally, the epic sages take up their respective positions within the philosophical framework of the various Vedas and Upanisads by accounting for the fashioning of human destiny through the medium of human action. In the Mahabharata, the idea is propounded that a person reaps the results of his acts performed in previous lifetimes and comes to good or ill fortune as a result of his acts alone. In the Dharmasastras, the most coherent and significant survey is provided in the twelfth chapter of the Manusmriti. Among the traditional sciences, the medical texts of the Indians, i.e. the Caraka Samhita and the Susruta samhita also provide many instances to support the doctrine of karma. In the next chapter, the impact of the karma doctrine over the medical sciences will be elaborately discussed. However, the reflection of the doctrine is also found in the various texts of the Indian philosophical schools.

In this chapter, attempts have been made to accumulate the views and interpretation of different Indian philosophical schools regarding the doctrine of karma in general. Karmas are classified by the Samkhya – Yoga system with reference to (a) the bodily mechanism for performance of karmas, (b) the time in which they mature or yield fruit, and (c) the results they produce.
(a) Bodily mechanism for performance of karmas: karmas are classified on the basis of the organs of the body which perform them: mind (manas) speech (vacana) and body (sarira), mental karmas are called manas karma, and the other two are bahya karma or external actions (b) Time for ripening of karmas: there are two classes of karmas on the basis of when they mature: niyata vipaka [karamas which are bound to fructify] and aniyata vipaka, [karmas or actions whose fruition at any future point of time is uncertain]; it cannot be asserted in the case of such karmas that they must necessarily bear fruit.9 The niyata vipaka karmas further classifies as (i) drsta janma vedaniya, those whose consequences are experienced in the same life and (ii) adrsta janma vedaniya, those karmas which will fructify at some unknown time in future, but they must fructify at any time.(c) Consequences of karmas: karmas are either dharma or other adhrama. Accumulated karmas or the dharma and adharma that are produced from karmas form a karmasaya, which determine jati, life, state and form of existence, ayuh, life span and bhoga, the happy or painful experiences, that the jiva has to undergo in one embodiment. The earlier mentioned karma, i.e., adrsta janma vedaniya karmas, do not mature in one time and these type of karmas continue to subsists as vasanas or samskaras or karmic residues. Vasanas are accumulated karmas and they fructify in many lives, whereas the karmasaya fructify in one embodiment. According to this system, karmasaya, by their very nature, must necessarily mature in one lifetime and vasanas can mature intermittently over many lives, the former, that is, karmasayas are called primary karmas, whereas vasanas are called secondary karmas.
The *Samkhya* have classified karmas according to their moral quality into four groups and these are (i) *kṛṣṇa*, (ii) *sukla*, (iii) *sukla – kṛṣṇa*, (iv) *asukla – akrṣṇa* that is non – moral or natural.

The *Yoga* philosophers have formulated the doctrine of *karma* in the following way. According to the *yoga* philosophers, an act (*karma*) performed under normal circumstances – that is, with purposive intention and passion, create (*kr*) a karmic residue (*karmasaya*), either meritorious (*dharma*) or unmeritorious (*adharma*) that depends on the quality of the act. This karmic residue has or is accompanied by dispositional tendencies (*samskara*) of more than one sort, which includes at least two kinds of traces (*vasana*), one kind which if and when it is activated, produces a memory of the originating act, the other which if and when it is activated, produces certain afflictions (*klesa*). These *klesas* are erroneous conceptions, which characterize the thinking of those engaged in purposive activities, and it is they which are primarily responsible for the agent being in bondage, that is, continually creating karmic residues. However, it is found that the *Samkhya* and *Yoga* philosophy shares the same theoretical construction regarding the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth.

The *Purva Mimamsakas* divide *karma* into four types and these are *nitya, naimittika, kamya* and *nisiddha karmas*.10 These *karmas* are accepted as the Vedic *karmas* for these are prescribed by the Vedas. Both the *nitya* and *naimithika* karmas are deemed to be mandatory and only the *kamya karmas* are optional as they are intended for the achievement of certain human objectives or purposes such as “*svarga kamo yajeta*”11 On
the contrary, no purpose or result is necessary in the case of nitya and naimittika karmas. They have to be done only for the maintenance of the scriptural (Vedic) injunction. According to the Purva mimanisakas, the performance of dharma or religious acts produces a beneficial potency or transcendental force which leads to the achievement of the desired objectives of kamya karmas, such as heaven, these potency is known as apurva, which is generated just because these acts are enjoyed by the Vedas.12

However, throughout the discussion of the Purva Mimamsakas doctrine of karma, it may be observed that they have evolved a new category of karma, i.e., “veda – vihita karma” and these are nitya - naimittika karmas. In the classical doctrine of karma, only the theorists have developed the concept of kamya karma and its function. In that case, the karmic residue (karma phala) are important for it can produce either good or evil consequences and they do not produced neither of this, then the two types of faults may happen.

These are ‘akrta – abhyapagama’ and ‘krtapranasa’.13 But the Purva – Mimamsakas have highlighted the fact that there is a new type of akamya karmas, which is performed without any desire for reward or gain and whose performance produces no fruit (phala) as such but whose non – performance causes sin. These are aptly described in Bhattacintamani as ‘nityakarma janya prayavaya’.14 Further, it is worthy of noting that there is no explicit reference to apurva in Jaimini’s ‘Mimamsasutra’. The concept of ‘Apurva’ is found only in Sabara’s bhasya and its commentaries and sub commentaries. This chapter is not the proper place to discuss the background of the Mimamsa usage of
this concept. The way in which it is discussed by Sabara and his commentators leaves no
doubt that, even within the discussion of Mimamsa sutra, it is a very controversial
concept. Apart from this, to all the commentators, it is not a controversial issue that the
‘Apurva’ is a potency produced by the sacrifice which makes it possible that its fruits be
reaped at a later time; this power (sakti) is necessary as a connecting and mediating
principle between the actions and their promised results. In this context, ‘apurva’ appears
as a specific device to account for a special problem. Yet Kumarila himself leaves no
room for doubting that it has wider and more general implications. Kumarila commits
himself much more deeply to develop a comprehensive metaphysical theory of apurva
than his rival Prabhakara, and he goes much more clearly and resolutely beyond
Sabara’s statements. In presenting the atman as the “substratum” (asraya) of ‘apurva’,
which inhere in it as a ‘samskara’, he is influenced by the Nyaya-Vaisesika viewpoint
and presented in the Vatsyayana’s Nyayabhashya and elsewhere.

It seems obvious that the Vaisesika concept of adrsta, the retributive potency of past
deeds stored as a quality of the soul (atman), has served as a model for the explication of
apurva by Kumarila and by subsequent authors. Apurva and adrsta are often found in
close relationship. They may be used almost interchangeably, or adrsta may function in
specifically sacrificial contents as a concept, which includes apurva. Sankara in his
philosophy, also used apurva, in such a way that it relates to karma, that is, what is called
‘adrsta’ in Vaisesika philosophy, in general. Kumarila does not use the term ‘adrsta’,
rather he uses the term ‘samskara’, which in Vaisesika system is restricted to other
functions. A possible source for the use of samskara in kumarila’s discussion of apurva
would be the “examination of the fruit” (phalapariskaṣa) in the ‘Nyayabhasya’\textsuperscript{15}. This section responds directly to the basic concern of the discussion of ‘apurva’ concept: how can actions, specifically sacrificial performances but also actions in a general sense, produce results which occur a long time after the completion and disappearance of the actions? The ‘Nyayabhasya’ answers that actions leave certain dispositions (samskara), namely, dharma and adharma, in the soul and that these make it possible that the fruit, such as heaven (svarga), is reaped at a much later time.

In Mimamsa, only the ‘utsarga’, the official act of initiating the sacrifice, has to be done by the sacrifice, has to be done by the sacrificer; the actual performance themselves may be left to “paid agents”. Although Kumarila maintains that the soul (atman) or the sacrificer is the subject or the ‘doer’ of the sacrificial action, the question of personal authorship and responsibility of the agent is less important here; what produces apurva is rather the impersonal power of the sacrifice itself, which is only activated during the actual performance of the sacrifice. Apurva may be stored and coordinated in the soul; yet it is not merely and not even primarily a quality or subordinate ingredient of the soul; it remains the effect and the stored power of the sacrifice. However, in the development of the Mimamsa concept of Apurva, with the general theory of karma, in particular in Kumarila’s presentation, the attempt has been made to defend and to explicate the uniqueness of sacrificial causality.

The Nyaya – Vaisesika concept of ‘adrṣṭa’, on the other hand, exemplifies the encounter of a system of cosmology, philosophy of nature, and the categorical analysis with
soteriological ideas and the attempts has been made to explicate and to justify the theory of karma and samsara within it’s own conceptual framework. Jayanta Bhatta, in his ‘Nyayamanjari’, discusses the problem of sacrificial causality in accordance to the Nyaya tradition. Though Jayanta Bhatta belongs to the Nyaya group, he constantly refers to a view which does not recognize the storage of sacrificial effect, of apurva as a samskara of the soul. The samskara view is presented as a specialty of the Nyaya School.

**Nyaya- Vaisesika Analysis of the Karma doctrine**

The term, ‘adrsta’ has been used as a familiar alternative of the term, ‘karma’ according to Nyaya – Vaisesika literature. Actually, the Naiyayikas have provided the term ‘karma’ in their early stage of writings. But, the Vaisesikas and the neo – Naiyayikas prefers the term ‘adrsta’ instead of the term ‘karma’. Therefore, in the writings of the classical Vaisesika system, as represented by Prasastapada and the other commentators, adrsta is a very comprehensive term.

Let us examine the Vaisesika view regarding the meaning of the term, ‘adrsta’.

In the classical Vaisesika system, as represented by Prasastapada, adrsta is a comprehensive and meaningful term for dharma and adharma, two of the twenty four qualities (guna) enumerated in the list of guna categories (padarthas) of the system. However, the Vaisesika sutras, attributed by Kanada, have only a list of seventeen gunas which does not include dharma and adharma, as the qualities of the soul. Although the sutra has not enlisted adrsta among the qualities, the term and concept is nevertheless quite familiar in this text. Most of the occurrences of adrsta are found in a section 16 that
deals with various causes of mostly physical movements. The *Vaisesika* have taken the meaning of the *karman* as the third category or *padartha*. *Adrsta* moves objects in ordeals and magnetic processes, it causes extraordinary movements of earth and water, the circulation of water in trees, the upward flaming of fire, the horizontal blowing of wind or air, the initial movements of atoms and minds. Another section uses *adrsta* in a more religious and ethical perspective, referring to the invisible results and purposes of rituals and ethical activities, to their merit and demerit. In this way, it is observed that *adrsta* covers at least two different sets of problems and implications, and it may be questioned whether or to what extent there is an original conceptual unity in these two usages. As far as the physical and the cosmological usage of *adrsta* is concerned, its primary function seems to be to account for strange and extraordinary phenomena in nature that would not be explicable otherwise, as well as for phenomena which seem to be signs or to contain an element of reward and punishment. However, the sutra text does not indicate the fact that *adrsta* must inhere in souls (*atman*) of an individual. Thus, the word, *adrsta* refers mainly to two meanings according to the *Vaisesika* sutra. The first one is in the physical sense, i.e. it causes the unction of a prime mover (that it causes the initial movements of atoms and minds and after a period of *mahapralaya*, during which the whole world process has come to a complete rest, the regeneration of our universe starts again. The second meaning is obviously from different perspectives, i.e. in the non-physical or more specifically in the ethical sense. The term ‘*adrsta*’ is introduced to ensure the retributive efficacy of actions which have a ritual or moral significance. Further, it is noticed that the *Vaisesika-sutra* does not state that the unseen physical power behind such phenomena as the upward flaming of fire and the retributive power of past deeds stored in the soul are
identical, nor does it state that they are different. It is not known to us that when the identity, which is taken for granted by Prasastapada and later Vaisesika, was first established in an explicit and definite manner. Already the Nyayabhasya of Vatsyayana has a more unified concept of dharma and adharma as being inherent in the soul and the connection between the retributive efficacy of deeds, stored as ‘dispositions’ (samskara) of the soul and certain physical processes has been made more explicit. In the tradition of Vaisesika school, Prasastapada, leaves no doubt concerning the unity of adrsta in its various physical, ethical and religious functions. He universalizes its application as an indispensable factor that functions in the processes of life and consciousness. Dharma and adharma are the supporting causes and conditions of life in general, of its basic condition of breathing as well as of mental processes like desire and cognition. In particular, Prasastapada emphasizes the role of adrsta in the cosmic processes of the periodic destruction and regeneration of the whole universe. There is no doubt that adrsta has now become all pervasive and that it functions as the key factor in re-interpreting the natural world as samsara, in the sense of the mechanism of reward and punishment.

Yet, even the great systematizer Prasastapada has not been able to harmonize completely the ambiguities inherited from the Vaisesika sutra. There remains a tendency to separate the contexts of physical or cosmological explanation and of ethics. However, Prasastapada says that apart from its other functions, adrsta has to account for such phenomena in the merely material, physical realm of the elements (mahabhuta) which do not have an ascertainable cause (anupalabhyamanakarana) and which can be beneficial or harmful (upakarapakarasamartaha) to us. This twofold condition illustrates a basic
ambiguity in the meaning of *adrsta*, on the one hand, it serves as a kind of gap-filler in the realm of physical causality, and on the other hand, it serves as a device to interpret the world process as *samsara*, in terms of reward and punishment, of what is beneficial and harmful to us.

More or less a similar response is found in the *Nyayabhasya* and other texts, regarding the meaning of the term *‘adrsta’*. *Adrsta*, that may primarily has been a mediatory factor in the causal explication of the universe, subsequently offered itself as a channel for a much more decidedly dharmic and soteriological reinterpretation of the *Vaisesika* theory of the Universe. At the same time, this theory of the universe and of the categories of reality was presented as a framework and basis for explicating in a theoretically coherent manner the status and functions of retributive causality, to account for *karma* in terms of a comprehensive metaphysics. In so far as *adrsta* is presented as a potentially all pervasive factor in the universe, in particular as the moving force of its periodical regenerations, a karmic framework has been provided for the functioning of natural causality.

An important condition of the understanding of *adrsta* is that its substrata, the souls, are supposed to be omnipresent (*vibhu*). Its efficacy is thus not at all restricted to that particular body which is attached to its underlying atman as an instrument of the experience of *samsara*. Since any atman is omnipresent, its *adrsta* can function anywhere and affect all those entities which may become relevant for it in terms of karmic reward and punishment. An illustration of this is given in Uddyotakara’s *‘Nyayavarttika’*: if
someone waters a tree, the success of his action, that is, the process of fertilization and growth, may be influenced by the karma of the person who at a later time will eat the fruits of the tree. It becomes the function of the tree, directed by the karmic potential of a soul, which may or may not be that of the person who watered the tree, to provide an opportunity of retributive experience of enjoyment. The necessity of the discussion of adrsta is already a theme in the Nyaya sutra and the Nyayabhasya and its sub commentaries, like Uddyotakara’s Nyayavarttika, Udayana’s Nyayakusumanjali. All of these texts give us an elaborate and formalized proof to support the retributive causality of dharma and adharma.

Udayana, in his ‘Nyayakusmanjali’, has offered a couple of arguments to understand the relation of causality in the Nyaya framework. It is always a well-known fact to all the Naiyayikas that an effect must be produced from a cause, i.e., a cause is always prior to an effect. To discuss the relation of causality, Udayana puts forward five different hetus. Among them, the first hetu is ‘sapeksatvat’, i.e., the effect is a dependent object and it depends on none other than its own cause. The way by which Udayana tries to establish the existence of adrsta is to refute the arguments given by the purvapaksins like materialists Carvaka, the Samkhya philosophers and the Vedantins. While providing the effect as a dependent object of its cause, Udayana gives example of a pot, which is itself an effect for an effect must be of the nature ‘kadacitka’ i.e., it is produced at some particular time and it may be destroyed at some particular time. In the hetu, ‘sapeksatvad’, the word ‘apeksa’ means to say mainly the cause. In that sense, a cause must be prior to its effect. Thus, all the non-eternal objects, which are produced as well as
destroyed at a certain time, have a cause. Like the pot, the mental object like pleasure and pain are also effect for they have some prior events that may be called ‘cause’. As these are called effects, so these are positive objects which have production and destruction as well.

However, it has been established by Udayana that all kinds of effects, either physical or mental, have to be dependent on some prior event at a particular time and this prior event may be called as the ‘cause’ of that effect. Further, one may object that as the effect depends on its cause subsequently, the cause may also depend on another cause and the series may continue, as it will lead to infinity. To answer this type of objections, Udayana provides the second hetu, ‘Anaditvat’. The hetu means to say that the streams of cause and effect is ‘Anadi’, i.e., it is eternal. The relation of a seed and its sprout is also eternal as well as infinite. In that case, one may argue that this infinity may be fallible. However, Udayana does not accept this infinity to be fallible. He argues that if the infinity will fallible, then it could never be proved by any kind of pramanas but the relation of seed and its sprout can be proved by the perception as well as inference.20 Thus, this type of causality relation is a positive relation and it can be proved by perception as well as inference and in that sense, it will not be fallible.

Now, the purvapaksins, especially the Vedantins argue that if one Brahman will be the cause of the whole world, then it is not necessary to admit different causes for different effects. In that case, the Samkhya may argue that one and only Brahman is not the cause of different effect of the world, and the prakrti must be the cause of the world. To solve
the type of problem, Udayana posits another *hetu* and this is, ‘vaicitryat’. By this *hetu*, he means to say that as the world is a combination of various type of effects, so the cause behind these effects may also different in types. For example, the pot is not the same with clothes though both of them are considered to be the effects. These two are not same for their causes are not same. With the help of this type of influence, Udayana proves that different types of effects originating from the different types of causes.

Again one may argue that though there are different causes behind each and every effect, it is not necessary to consider the unobservable facts behind the observable effects. But, according to the Udayana, this type of argument will not be sustained. He has provided another *hetu*, ‘visvavrttitah’, for admitting ‘adrsta’. He shows that the persons who are involve in various sort of sacrificial activities have the intension to enjoy the consequences of those activities and the consequences are nothing but attainment of heavenly pleasures. It seems that as these activities are observable, so its causes must also observable and there is no need to admit any kind of imperceptible force like ‘adrsta’. From the *hetu*, ‘Visvavrttitah’, it is known as these sacrificial activities are momentary so, these could not be present at the time of the attainment of heavenly pleasure. In that case, there is no way not to accept an imperceptible cause, which will produce from those activities and stay for a long time. This imperceptible factor is nothing but the unseen force or in Nyaya – Vaisesika terminology, ‘adrsta’.

There are many additional arguments to prove the existence of *adrsta* behind the *drsta* effect. It is found that the physical activities, like yoga are *drsta* effects and there causes are *adrsta*. In the same way the mental activities, like pleasure, pain are also, the
observable effects which are enjoying by the deferent individuals. Udayana argues that there must be some causes of these activities. Many of our pleasure and pain, being the positive entity, can be explained in terms of perceptible causes. However, there are some other kinds of pleasure and pain that can not be explained in terms of perceptible causes. For those cases, two alternatives are open to us. Either there are no causes behind these effects or there is a cause, which is imperceptible. If the first one is admitted, then in the Nyaya framework, the cause – effect relation will not be sustained. If the second one is accepted, then the co-existence theory of the Nyaya-Vaisesikas can be maintained. In the Ihalaukika state, behind the observable pleasure and pain, the imperceptible cause, i.e. adrsta must be admitted. In the same way, adrsta is also the cause of imperceptible pleasure and pain. Now, Udayana has tried to prove the locus of adrsta, i.e. where does this imperceptible force inhere.

In the Nyaya framework, the cause is always present in the same locus with its effect. For example, the act of burning takes place in the same locus with the fire. Thus, according to the co-existent theory of cause and effect, Udayana has given the hetu, ‘Prayatmaniyamad Bhukte’. As the mental activities like pleasure and pain are the qualities of the individual self, so their causes either they are perceptible or imperceptible must present in the individual self. Now, as the self is eternal, so if some pleasure and pain are not enjoyed in the present life, then they will be enjoyed in some other Life. By the hetu mentioned above, Udayana has proved that each individual enjoys and suffers his own result. Further one may argue that the imperceptible power resides in those objects that are going to be enjoyed and in that sense; adrsta will originate from those
objects and not from the individual self. Prof. Haridas Bhattacarya expresses this argument in his tika written on ‘Nyayakusumanjali’ in this way. Prof. Bhattacarya expresses another argument to reject this kind of objection. The argument is: each and every effect must co-exist with its cause in the same locus and this view is supported by the Naiyayikas. The imperceptible power, ‘adrsta’ must reside in the same locus, i.e., the individual self, with its effects, the pleasure and pain which also has been enjoyed by that individual self. Otherwise, two possibilities may take place. It may be the case where one does an action, but the same person cannot enjoy the consequences. Another unwanted situation might be where one does not perform any action but he has to enjoy or suffer the result of the action. In this way, ‘krtahani’ and ‘akrtaprasanga’ may take place.

Udayana provides another additional argument to establish the existence of the imperceptible power, ‘adrsta’. The argument is:

“Ciradhamsam phalayalam na karmatisayam
Bina.
Sambhogo nirbisesanam na bhutaih samskratai
api 1/9”

The argument elucidates the fact that this imperceptible power is supposed to inhere in the selves of every individual and not in the properties of the objects experienced. One may argue that the observable effects must be produced from the observable causes and it cannot be otherwise. However, according to Nyaya, it cannot be the case. It may be
noticed from the different Nyaya literatures that observable effects are produced from the observable causes as well as from imperceptible causes. On the country, the imperceptible effects may also originate from the perceptible causes. Now, these two alternatives have to be explained. In the first alternative, the Nyaya philosophers have tried to prove the thesis that there are many perceptible effects which originate from the imperceptible power. For example, every individual has enjoyed his own pleasure and pain that is caused by the own ‘adrsta’. In this case, the effect like pleasure and pain are ‘drsta’ but it may originate either from ‘drsta’ or perceptible causes, or it may originate from ‘adrsta’ or imperceptible causes. The elaborate discussion about this matter has been made earlier.

For discussing the second alternative, another argument has to be produced given by Udayana. The argument is:

\[ Viphala Visvavrttirno na duhkhaikaphalapi drstatvabhapahala vapi vipralambho api va \]
\[ Nedrsah /8/ 25 \]

From this argument, it is observed that the desire of an individual is always fruitful for their desire must be guided by their istasadhanatajnana.

The Naiyayikas have tried to establish that the attainment of heaven is nothing but the consequence of the desire of the persons who are involved in the sacrificial activities. One may argue that an individual having the intention of cheating or depriving somebody may do the sacrifices. But no human being, by gifting away all of his belonging to others,
avoiding all his pleasures, praising celibacy and austerities and inspired by faith, mortifying himself throughout his life, solely to gratify his desire to cheat and mislead others, will make this type of stupidity. However, the intention (pravrtti) of an individual to perform such type of sacrificial activities is to acquire the good for this world. If the heavenly pleasures could not be attained in this world, it has to be attained in the next world. Thus, with the help of the method of residues, Udayana has proved that the imperceptible effects (adrsta) may also originate from the perceptible causes. Moreover, the perceptible causes, i.e. the sacrificial activities are not the direct cause to attain heaven for these activities are temporary in the sense that the effect of these activities will destroy at a moment. For this reason, the imperceptible power, ‘adrsta’ has to be considered to attain heaven and it is also the mediatory factor to link the religious activities with its consequences.

After the settlement of the fact that adrsta, the invisible force, must be established in the individual, it is the time to consider another controversial issue and that is: whether does this force reside in the soul of the individual or in the body of the individual. If one admits that, the locus of this power is the different bodies of different individuals, it may lead to several problems. In that case, the consequences of the enjoyment resides in the individual’s soul as the same individual suffers the result of his or her previous karmas whereas the cause that is the unseen force or adrsta resides in the body of another individual. But, this type of cause-effect relationship can not be maintained for according to the Naiyayikas, the cause and the effect must reside in the same adhikarana or locus. Again, one may argue that the adrsta may be present in the different bodies and the
particular body is conjoined with the particular soul in the relation of *svasraya-samyoga sambandha*.

And in that case, the locus of cause and effect must be the same. The reply to this type of objection is found in the Haridasi *tika* of *Nyayakusumanjali*. In the *tika*, the argument has been provided in this way. If *adṛṣṭa* has been admitted in the different bodies, and it also resides in the soul, then as the soul is all-pervasive, then we have to admit that the same *adṛṣṭa* is the cause of the enjoyment and sufferings of all individual souls. Then it may be the case where one does not perform evil action, but he has to suffer pain due to *adṛṣṭa* and where one does a good action, but he does not get a good result due to *adṛṣṭa*. Generally, it must be granted that the special connection of one individual soul with one individual body is due to *adṛṣṭa* and it is the cause of a particular human body, being so. Thus, it is explored from the above discussion that the locus of *adṛṣṭa* is not the individual’s body; rather this imperceptible power resides in the soul of the individual. Actually, the *adṛṣṭa* of the parents, conducive to the experiences resulting from the birth of the child and the *karman* of the personality that is conducive to the experiences to be gone through in the mother’s womb- both these karmas conjointly bring about the birth of the body.

How far the *Adṛṣṭa* can be applicable in different status, is a very interesting question to the ordinary person. So far the *Nyaya-Vaisesikas* perspective may be concerned, it may be stated that the *adṛṣṭa* is responsible for the formation of the body of the individual. Only the union of the husband and the wife is not the sufficient cause of the birth of the child. In every case, *adṛṣṭa* must be present. In this connection, two kinds of *samyoga* have to be remembered and one of them is the *Vijatiya samyoga* of the soul with the
particular body and this happens in presence of adrsta. Gautama’s sutra 26 indicates the fact that the creation of the body is also due to the past karman of the person. The two qualities of the empirical self i.e. merit and demerit inheres in the substratum, the self, in the relation of samavaya. Further, the particular, empirical self, connected with the physical body in the relation of samyoga. This is a special kind of samyoga that has been discussed earlier. However, the Naiyayikas have admitted the view that one’s body is created according to some karman or adrsta but it is not similar to other’s body for the other person’s body has been created according to his own karman and not of others. In that case, as the adrsta of two individuals are not the same, so the consequence that follows from adrsta would not be the same.

**Classifications of Human Actions.**

In the context of the working of the law, classical Indian ethical theorists first make a distinction between two kinds of actions, sakama and niskama karma. A sakama karma is one which is done with a desire to produce a result and a niskama karma would be one in the doing of which no desire is involved. In other words, the sakama karmas are bondage-causing actions, and they are intentional in nature while the niskama karmas are unintentional in respect of their consequences. There is another type of classification from the point of view of their effectuating potential, their effect-producing readiness. There are three types of actions and these are: a) prarabdha, b) anarabdha. The second one is further divided into two groups and these are: sancita and sanciyamana. 27 There is another kind of classification and this is mainly based on the scriptures. This is four-fold classification into nitya, naiṃtītika, kamya and pratisiddha. 28
Nature of the doctrine

Transcendental argument

It is believed that the law of *karma* is applicable to the case of living beings whether they are in the same or different socio-ethical status. It may be said that this law is a kind of causal law. Most of the causal laws are the result of inductions and inductions are the generalizations from observed instances and inductive generalization does not assert strict universality or necessity. The law of *karma* is not to be treated as an empirical law based on induction or inductive generalization from a set of empirical data. It is empirically non-demonstrable, i.e. neither probable nor refutable by means of any evidence obtained from experience. The belief in it is said to be justified on the ground that there are some very important facts which can be made intelligible or rational only if we accept it. Therefore, it is not fair to make use of any kind of empirical or observational facts for the assessment of its acceptability. However, in Kantian sense, the postulation of a law may be considered as providing a type of transcendental argument. Let us analyze the notion of transcendental argument as well as the causes behind the acceptance of the law of *karma* as a transcendental argument. There are principles in science which inductive inference assumes as valid principles of explanation and such principles are called ‘Transcendental Argument’. The law of karma may be considered as one of the transcendental arguments. Moreover, it is observed that things and processes in terms of which it is formulated could not conceivably be perceived by the senses and therefore could not be imagined. And in that sense, the law of *karma* is supposed to be a valid ‘transcendental argument’. If, however, it is not a valid transcendent argument, then it is not a valid inductive generalization either, yet it seems that such argument or law- as you
sow, so you reap- is an intrinsic part of the changing conceptions of the good life in the ethical philosophies of India.

**The law is examined in the sphere of intentional actions**

The domain of the operation of the law is said to be the entire universe, which means that it applies to both human and non-human beings. Without discussing whether animals can be said to have the ability to perform an intentional action, the discussion is confined only to the law and the concept of karma with reference to human beings and their conduct. The law of karma is a law pertaining to action in the normal sense of the term. A normal action is either intentional or unintentional in nature. The action that is done with the intention to achieve something may be called the intentional action. This kind of action has also an objective, which could be positive or negative.

**The law is the conservation of moral values.**

The belief in *karma* and the use of the doctrine bring into focus the pre-eminently moral aspect of our value systems. The *karma* doctrine can be said to be a principle of justice – a principle of allocating to each his own. The law of *karma* is said to be an extension of the law of causation to the world of action because it claims that every action has some effect or consequence. This law acquires its distinctive significance by being an extension in the moral direction. An action entitles its doer to some joy or sorrow, and the law operates in such a manner that he unfailingly gets what he is entitled to or deserves. Nothing that accrues to a doer because of his actions is ever lost and nothing accrues to him on account of anything other than his action. It is, therefore, that the law is called of conservation of moral values. The law of conservation means that there is no loss of the
effect of work done (krtapranasa) and that there is no happening of events to a person except as the result of his own work (akrtabhyagama). The world that is regulated by the law of karma is said to be a moral world and is constituted and guided by moral needs.

This karma doctrine is individualistic in respect of serving appropriate consequences, which everyone is entitled to by virtue of his past actions. Actions of individuals have the casual efficiency of producing consequences, which the respective individuals have to enjoy or suffer. This is because the individual, who is endowed with the power of freedom of, will, does all his actions by choice, so it is supposed, and is therefore responsible for the consequences they produce. But although the responsibilities are taken up or accounted for with regard to one’s past actions, the scope of accountability is not limited to the past but extends to one’s future on the basis of his present actions, for present actions also produce consequences for which the agent is responsible. Thus, the scope of karma doctrine is not only retrospective but also prospective, ‘As you sow, so you shall reap’ is equally applicable to consequences of our past actions as well as to those of our present actions that fructify in the future.

There is another moral element that has been noticed in the doctrine of karma and it is: whereas we do not have any choice regarding the consequences of our past actions and have to go through their experiences pleasant or painful, we do have choice and control over the consequences of our present actions. If what we are in this life with all its pleasures and sufferings is determined by what we have been in the previous life, then what we will be in future life lies entirely within our control, so that the belief in the
doctrine of *karma* is an effective incentive for right conduct. In this respect, the *karma* doctrine leaves ample scope for moral progress and development.

The idea of rewards for good conduct and punishment for the bad is an important means to moral growth. In addition, this important factor leads a man to a firm commitment to the obligations of a truly moral life. The fact that man is the architect of his future through his present actions that are fully under his controls, it must be noted, is true of present actions in all his past lives as well as those in his present life – it also assumes transmigrations and *samsara* as a necessary part of this belief system. From this of it followers that man is not only responsible for the consequences of his actions, but he deserves them in all fairness. For whatever we knowingly do – irrespective of which life we may be talking about – is sure to bring us the results we merit. The idea of retribution thus becomes an integral element in the *karma* doctrine, which signifies not only that whatever happens to us in life is determined by antecedent causes, but also that whatever happens to us is the just rewarded and punishment for our actions. The *karma* doctrine, thus, is not a blind mechanical law but an essentially moral or ethical law. Instead of making man a helpless sufferer of the pain and pleasures of life, he is shown to organize his life in accordance with ethical principles. For man is not only, a relational being with power to know moral values from disvalues, but is also a moral agent, a valuing being, who is capable of ordering his living in his own way.

Another question may arise in this connection and this is: Does the *karma* doctrine imply the necessity or freedom or both? Prof. Hiriyanna has rightly pointed out that the idea of necessity relates to the results of the *karma* and idea of freedom relates to the matters of
moral progress. Indeed, the doctrine claims, every action that we perform leads to double results – a ‘phala’ in the form of pleasure or pain and a ‘samskara’ or tendency to repeat the same type of deeds in future. We are necessarily bound by the former, and with regard to the latter we are free to regulate, and depending on the success with which we regulate these tendencies or dispositions depends the moral progress we make. S.N Dasgupta has pointed out that by the law it suggests to mean ‘whatever action is done by an individual leaves behind it some sort of potency which has the power to ordain for him joy or sorrow in the future according as it is good or bad.’

Universal Acceptability of the Karma Doctrine

Many questions are raised about the acceptability of the karma doctrine. Rajendra Prasad shows that the law of karma can be stated as a conjunction of three claims: (a) every action produces some pleasure or pain, (b) which and only which should be experienced in the present or next life because (c) the individual, deserves, or ought to, experience them and them alone.

b) Let us examine these three claims and their implications. However, while examining these we must not lose sight of the fact that the three claims are interdependent, the presuppositions of which makes the law of Karma what it is. For otherwise, (a) would have nothing to do with (b) and (c), and the same would be true of (b) and (c) as well. Admitting that one’s action produce some effects, it does not follow that one must experience them all or that one deserves them all. Secondly, even if one’s actions produce an effect and he deserves it too, it does not follow that one experiences the effect in any of his coming lives. Thus, the claim (b) would have nothing to do with the claim (a) and (c). Conversely, it may also be the case, that one experiences
something, which he does not deserve and which is not the consequence of any of his actions. A familiar story from *Ramayana* may help us to support this type of the case.

c) *Ahalya,* became the victim of her husband’s anger and was turned into a stone; but she neither deserved this nor was this a consequence of her action (i.e. the alleged adultery which she did not commit knowingly). It may also be questioned whether what she did would at all be a case of adultery, for all the while she took the imposter, *Indra* is disguise,

c) As her husband *Rsi Goutama,* who and who alone were in her mind. However, if deserves something (claim c), it would mean that what he deserves is the result of one of his actions (claim) and in all fairness he must experience it (claim-b). However, Prasad has observed the fact that one must experience something does not imply, or is not the same thing as saying that one experience it. Thus, claim(c) strictly has nothing to do with the claim (b). It is therefore not a logical interdependence that binds the three claims together. Their interdependence is a postulate and a presupposition of the law of *Karma*, which is admittedly neither logically provable nor empirically demonstrable. However, the law may be supposed to be as a sort of transcendental argument that claims to make intelligible some very important facts of life, which would otherwise remain unexplained without belief in this law. The gap between virtue and success in life, the inequalities of life’s benefits and burdens, and most important, the sufferings of people which e) cannot be treated to any of their actions in this life, are all these important facts which are supposed to find a rational explanation in the law of *karma*. In all this the belief in the cycle of births and deaths constitute an essential requirement for the karma doctrine in order to make it internally coherent. And it is also to be noted that this belief is virtually
another transcendental argument without which the *karma* doctrine cannot be explained, since one single life is often inadequate to explain and establish the deserts and entitlements accrued from actions. But this presupposition is also equally unprovable and non-demonstrable as well. It is thus true that if one does not accept this belief he will have strong reasons to reject the law of *karma*.

d) Another important problem with the claims of the doctrine, especially as spelt out by claim C, is that it assumes that all actions are moral actions, that all our actions entitle their doer to experience the sufferings and enjoyments of the results. This is contrary to our normal understanding of the concept of human actions, which recognizes the distinction between moral and non-moral ones;

e) The classical Indian institution, has never felt the need to make this distinction, which nevertheless is of crucial logical and philosophical importance. Indeed, the supporters of the *karma* doctrine take it for granted that every action of ours generates some moral entitlement.

The law of *karma* is claimed to be a retributive theory of morality in as much as it insists that whatever sufferings or enjoyments one undergoes are the deserved effects of his actions. But its retributivism gets into serious trouble in its being tied up with the theory of rebirth. All one’s suffering are the deserved results of one’s past actions, so the law claims, but not all these sufferings are explainable as the results of one’s past actions performed in one’s present life. So, in order to prove that it is the agent’s desert, a present suffering is traced backwards to one’s actions done in a suppositions past life. But the success of this supposition depends on proving that the does who has done a bad action in
a previous life is the one who suffer in this life. This tacit assumption of personal identity is severely suspect in the obvious absence of bodily Continuity, which alone can tell the difference of ‘same person’ from a ‘similar person’. The usual invocation of memory as the explanation of personal identity in such cases is hopelessly inadequate since memory, in order to qualify as a criterion of personal identity, is independent on physical continuity and cannot be a sufficient condition of personal identity. This argument may indicate the weakness of the rebirth theory, which in turn, weakens the karma doctrine considerably. For to say the least, unless the actions of a supposed past life are one’s actions, one’s sufferings and one’s pains in this life, it cannot be explained as deserved reward or punishments in this life. Yet, the law of karma, as received from tradition and interpreted by most modern writers, relies heavily on this postulate of ‘one’s own actions’ in a past life giving rise to the rewards or punishments in the present. Hiriyanna presents, “We can as well conceive of man’s continued existence in a series of lives (samsara) and then the difficulty of accounting for what befalls him in any life disappears, because we can trace it to the deeds done by himself in each earlier birth. If we look at life from this perspective, past karma which explains the present conduct of a person and the good or evil that follows from it is eventually traceable to nothing but his own actions.”

The belief in rebirth has another problem that relates to the morality of the karma doctrine. If one does not remember anything of his past life, it may not disprove the reality of that life and the continuity of the person through the (supposed) past life and the present, as Hiriyanna argued in defense of transmigration. But what is missed in this
argument is the crucially important point about the justice of punishing a person for what he does not, say, cannot be able to, remember to have done even if he did it in ‘his’ (supposed) past life. The law of karma, which is expressly ethical, is weakened in that respect on account of its necessary corollary, the belief in rebirth and transmigration. However, despite all of its vulnerability and questionable logic, the belief in transmigrations forms so much as essential element of the law of karma that it, along with the belief in moksa and karma, forms a logical trilogy in the sense that any one of the beliefs can be explained only in association with the other two.

Another objection that has been commonly urged against this doctrine of karma is that it leads the fatalism. That kind of fatalism stands always against the moral progress. In this connection it is noticed that the subject matter of ethics is traditionally circumscribed by the following three questions:

1) What ought to do?
2) What is the meaning of ‘good’?
3) Are we able to do what we ought to do?

The first two questions are moral ones and the third question concerns with the freedom of will. If the karma doctrine has been admitted, then the question may arise that to what extent this doctrine can be acceptable. And if it has been accepted in its proper sense, then to what extent, can an individual free. The idea of rewards for good conduct and punishment for the bad is an important means to moral growth of the society as well as of an individual. If what we are (in this life with all its pleasures and sufferings) is determined by what we have been (in the previous life), what we will be (in future life)
lies entirely within our control, so that the belief in the doctrine of *karma* is an effective incentive for right conduct. Thus, far from being fatalistic and deterministic the *karma* doctrine, in this respect, leaves ample scope for moral progress and development. This is also an important factor leading man to a firm commitment to the obligations of a truly moral life. However, this issue will be discussed elaborately in the next section. However, regarding the acceptability of this doctrine, Radhakrishnan in his essay says, ‘there is no doctrine so valuable in life and conduct as the *karma* theory.’\(^{39}\) it has been mentioned by many scholars in more than one content that the belief in the law of *karma* has exercised a powerful influence on the Indian mind even in modern times also. Hiriyanna quotes Deussen’s example of a blind man who has been reaping the result of blindness to some crime committed by him in his previous birth and Datta refers to Gandhi attributing the earthquake of the year 1934 to some common sin of the sufferers.\(^{40}\) Such examples can be very easily found even on today and they exhibit some sort of rationalization. In fact, whether, or not the law has any impact can be said only based on proper empirical or sociological research.

Actually, the idea of reincarnation, the idea of rebirth as well as the idea of souls transmigrating from body to body, through a long series of rebirth, has been among the earliest and the most widespread beliefs of mankind. But, in the west, the attitude is somehow different. Before the twenty first century, the idea of rebirth was not a well-known idea. Though at the beginning of this century, the idea, while not yet mainstream, has been taken seriously by an ever-increasing number of people. In traditional India, belief in the successive rebirth is taken for granted. The principle of *karma* also indicates the fact that righteous action will earn its doer a merit (*punya*) that will bear fruit either in
this life or in a future existence, in the form of various satisfactions. In the same way, the unjust action results in a demerit (papa) which brings multiple sufferings in this life or in another life yet to come.

Now, it is our task to whether it is possible and to what extent it would be possible in the western culture of today. In search of real transmigrating principle of the Indian tradition, especially in the Nyaya tradition, it is found that there are traces (samskara) which are left behind in the jivatma as a quality and this is considered as a transmigrating principle.

**Freedom of will and its relation to karma doctrine**

It is an accepted fact that ethical goodness consists in doing certain acts and refraining from certain others. But, has man the option to do so? Has he the choice of opting for the right and refraining from the wrong or evil? This is a very important problem of ethics. If this problem can be solved in a negative way, the whole edifice of ethics may collapse. If a man has no option, to choose the alternative course of action, then it is meaningless to exhort him to do this and not to do that. If everything is within the control of certain external, then an individual may feel helpless and then all moral codes may seem to be useless. So, what is the position in the Indian tradition in this regard? In this context, the notion of freedom has to be analyzed from the Indian perspective. It is stated that the law of karma is the law of causation in the moral realm. This law seems to be deterministic. So, the question may sometimes arise: If the moral world is strictly governed by the law of karma, where is the scope for choosing? Actually, if the present karmas are the natural corollary of our past karmas and potencies and dispositions that one has inherited from
the past life determine the course of action in the present life, then it seems that there is no scope for free choice. In this content, the real meaning of the *karma* doctrine requires to be clearly understood. In this content, it should also be pointed out that modern science no longer has any belief in an unalterable and absolutely deterministic mechanism. In this context, it should also be pointed out that modern science no longer has any belief in a deterministic mechanism. Despite of that it admits that there is a certain measure of indeterminacy in nature. The past, being determined, can be calculated. But the future is uncertain, not merely because of our ignorance, but also because of the very nature of things. The causal law is not absolute and cannot explain all things. If there is any uncertainty even in the realm of physical nature, there must certainly be a greater degree of freedom in human nature. *Karma* of an individual does not bind man completely. The concept of the cycle of *samsara* does not give a man totally free. Man has the freedom to go out of the deterministic way and live his own life freely. In the word of Radhakrishnan, ‘the cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past karma, but we can call them as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, or lose, and there is freedom.’

In this context, it is worthy to note that the word ‘*karma*’ may mean the actions that have consequences as well as the actions that have no consequences. In classical Indian ethics, the concept of an action having no desire occupies a very important role. However, in the present section, we are not going deep into this type of *karma*. The intentional actions are subject to be discussed in the present section. That type of *karma* causes bondage and in this situation, the concept of freedom may arise. However, the debating issue is: whether the concept of intention or desire is logically involved in the concept of action. In this
case, it may be assumed that in the ordinary sense, ‘action’ means intentional action. That is, an action A may be an intentional action if in reply to this question, why did you do A? One can meaningfully mention an intention or desire as the reason for having done.

This freedom to regulate one’s *samskaras* in particular and to perform actions in general constitutes every important aspect of the *karma* doctrine. Freedom of the agent in respect of what he does, does not allow control or constraint by anything external, though it is compatible with, or rather characterized by an internal constraint, i.e., self-determination.

The law of *karma* is thus a postulate of practical reason, which at all stages, (in all lives of the individual) is governed by self-determination and is in no need to acknowledge the existence or role of any external agency, not even of God.

The kind of determinism that the laws of *karma* enforce is nothing other than self-determinism, a determinism that is affected by our own past *karmas*. As the law of *karma* is the precondition of Indian ethics, there is clear scope for freedom also. So, freedom is not the lack of all kinds of determinism. Freedom is hampered only if our will or action is determined by our own motives, desires, characters etc. thus freedom is not indeterminism, it is self-determinism and in that sense, the real opposite term of freedom is not determinism, but fatalism.

However, with reference to various texts, of Indian ethical culture, it is found that the role of fate, generally known as *daiva*, has been considered in determining our course of actions. On the contrary, the human effort is also important and that man has freedom to act, if only he has the will to do it. As a matter of fact, the *daiva*, and the *purusakara*, are the two wheels of the same cart. Buch says in this respect, ‘Fate is the capital, while our
present *karma* is the income. If we merely centre our attention on enjoyment, our capital will be gradually lost. Fresh efforts are necessary to add to the capital of our good deeds. It is here that the usefulness of our own efforts, our *purusartha* lies. We are governed by the past, but we can govern the future, because our present deeds will be crystallized into destiny.39

On a proper realization of the meaning of the word ‘*daiva*’, human effort does not in any way prove to be irrelevant. It is rather necessary because our destiny itself is the result for the most part of his own deeds. And it is more for less very clear that where there is scope for effort, the role of freedom or choice is also there. The same thought also reflects in the teaching of the *Mahabharata* when it asserts the fact, ‘man, having first settled some purpose in his mind, accomplish it himself working with the aid of his intelligence. We, therefore, say that man himself is the cause ……. If a person weren’t, in the matter of his acts, himself, the cause thereof, then sacrifices would not bear any fruits in his case, nor would anybody be a disciple or a master. It is because a person is himself the cause of his work, that he is applauded when he achieve success, and censured if he ails. If a man were not the cause of his acts, how would all this be justified?40? So, the relevance of the human effort and subsequently that of man’s freedom to choose are accepted as acts, because otherwise rewards and punishments for one’s acts become meaningless. So, in accordance with the *Nyaya* view, man has got freedom to choose and to act, so that a responsible moral life may have meaning. In this context, one must understand here what his freedom actually mean. One is not free in the sense that his actions are completely undetermined and arbitrary. Rather, he is determined in his choice of actions by his own dispositions which are all determined to a great extent by his own past *karmas*. So, he is
determined by his own choice but the determination does not come from any power other than him. It is therefore, self-determination and consequently freedom. All our actions are determined by our own disposition, character and habit formed as a consequence of actions done in the present or past life. Thus, the law of karma reigns supreme in the view of life, but it is a repository of freedom in the sense of self-determination and not of complete determinism where there is no scope or freedom and choice.

**God’s grace and his relation to karma**

However, if the law of karma is governed by self-determination, then there is no need to acknowledge the existence or role of any external agency, not even of God. For if the law of karma is a specific form of the casual law operating in the domain of morality – i.e., in the domain of human actions and conduct and the consequences thereof – then to admit this all controlling agent would impede the operation of this law and militate against it all important moral feature. It is for this reason that not only the heterodox schools like Jainism and Buddhism but also orthodox ones like *Samkhya* and *Mimamsa* would not allow the existence and the role of God in the operation of the karma doctrine. The divine influence would go against the unimpeded operation of the law by telling upon its rigor and objectivity. It would divest the law of its all-important moral nature by making God the virtual causes of the doing of men, thereby depriving them of moral freedom in choosing their actions and hence deserving the consequences thereof. The idea of a divine dispenser of the reward and punishment for men’s actions, given by some schools like the *Nyaya – Vaisesikas*, purportedly to safeguard the ethical matters of this doctrine, \(^4\) pays only a lip service to God by making him act in consonance with the karmas of men; for the authors of this idea – the said theistic schools – conceive of him as
‘a common cause in the operation of the law of karma’ and explain the award of differences in giving rewards and punishment to different individual agents on the basis of this respective moral deserts, thereby limiting his power of omnipotence.

Specially, following the Nyaya – Vaisesika perspective, God does not act arbitrarily though he is, no doubt, supreme, and in a sense, it is he who is the cause of every action, because everyone who acts is caused to act by him. He takes into consideration the past actions done by a person in his previous life and accordingly arranges the situation for his further activities. In spite of his all powerfulness, God allows freedom to people in matters of their actions. The admission of the existence of the omnipotent God does not deny the law of karma. It is argued that all the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedas would be meaningless if God would not grant people freedom to act in terms of their past karmas. For the injunctions and prohibitions to have some real significance, human effort must be given due importance. The detailed account regarding this issue will be discussed in the chapter, “God and his Role in Nyaya Morality”.

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Notes and References


2. It is to be noted that the word’ karma’ is wider in significance than the word’ dharma’ in so far as karmas can be dharmas as well as adharmas, dharmic actions as well as adharmic ones, which are both deeds or actions, the former give rewards and the latter give punishments in the karmic scheme of things.

3. The theory of Bhutacaitanyavada- it is the theory held by the Carvaka philosophers. According to this theory, life and consciousness are the products of the combination of the matter, just as the red colour was the result of mixing up white with yellow. Or as the power of intoxication was generated in molasses (madasakti). The meaning of this theory has been properly explained and elaborated by Pro. S.N. Dasgupta, in his famous book, ‘A History of Indian Philosophy’, vol-1, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1922

4. Names of the twelve interdependent links-1) Ignorance(avidya) , 2) Impressions of karmic forces(samskara), 3) Initial consciousness of the embryo(vijnana), 4) Psycho – physical organism(nama-rupa), 5) Six sense- organs including mind(sadayatana),6) Sense object contact(sparsha), 7) Sense- experience(vedana), 8) Thirst for sense- enjoyment(trsna), 9) Clinging to this enjoyment(upadana), 10) Will to be born(bhava), 11) Birth or rebirth (jati), 12) Old age and death(jara- marana). The twelve links are not always constant. Thus, in
the list given in the ‘Dialogues of the Buddha’, avijjaa and samskara have been omitted and the start has been made with consciousness, and it has been said that ‘cognition turns back from name and form, it goes not beyond’. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, C. D. Sharma, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1960, p-74


7. “Gunaratna says : “ The influx of karma means the contact of the particles of karma matter, in accordance with the particular kind of karma, with the soul, just like the sticking of dust on the body of a person besmeared with oil.” ,Gunaratna, p – 192 *A History of Indian Philosophy*, S.N. Dasgupta, vol – 1, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1922

8. The Purging off of the karmas or rather their destructions, the meaning of the term ‘nirjara’ have been given by Pro. S. N. Dasgupta, in his *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol-1, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1922, p-195

9. *niyata vipaka* and *aniyata vipaka*, these terms has been used by Veda Vyasa in his commentary on *Yogasutra*, iedited and translated with editor’s Bengali commentary by Purnachandra Vedantachunchu, Calcutta, 1898, p-i13
10. *Nitya karmas* – the actions which are to be done simply because a scripture requires that they be done and no reason to be asked to justify why they should be done. *Naimittika karmas*—those actions which are to be performed when some special things happen. *Kamya karmas*—these are to be performed when an individual wants to achieve some objective. *Nisiddha karmas*—these are actions the doing of which is prohibited by a scripture.

11. *‘Svargo kamo Yajeta’*—this Vedic injunction suggests the individual to perform sacrifice for obtaining heaven—Jaimini’s *sutra*, 6.3.17

12. As regards the non-Vedic *laukika karma* or *kriyas* secular acts, as a rule, no ‘*apurva*’ is produced. Such acts produce results either immediately or proximately. It is, however, assumed that only if there is an insuperable impediment or barrier in the fulfillment of an act in the form of the result, that act produces, ‘*apurva*’. Thus, ‘results are to be regarded as pertaining to the other world(*alaukika*) only in cases where it is found absolutely impossible to obtain and experience them in the physical world ‘*‘*—these has been taken from G.N. Jha’s famous book *PurvaMimamsa in its Sources*, Benaras, 1942, p-297

13. *Akṛta- abhyagama*- A type of absurdity that is related to the fruition of one’s action, but the action is not performed by the same individual. *Kṛta pranasa*- Another type of absurdity that is not related to the fruition of one’s own actions.


17. ibid, *sutra*, 6.2.1


19. In the *Nyaya kusumanjali*, 1.9, Udayana defines *adrsta as karmatisayam*, i.e. a potent *karma*.

*Ciradhvastam phalayalam na karmatisayam bina.*

*Sambhogo nirvisesanam na bhutaih samskrtai rapi* 1.9

21. ‘[Namu drstam yogadyaba karanamastu kimdrstena ityatrah visavrttitha, The objection has been raised by Udayana himself and thereafter he tries to answer this objection in Nyayakusumanjali , written by Udayanacarya, edited by Sri Shyamapada Misra, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1988.


23. bhukterbhogasya pratiniyatma vrttitvat, vyadhikaranadrstasya bhogajanakatve atiprasangat, Haridasi Tika, on Nyayakusumanjali, ibid.

24. ibid.

25. ibid, sutra 1.8.


27. In the classical Indian tradition, actions are classified from the point of view of their effectuating potential, their effect producing, or consequential. The above classification has been brought into the desireful and the desire less actions that have been done from the point of view of the motivation or motivating agency, of actions. From the point of view of effectuating, actions are first said to be of two types.
i) *Prarabdha karmas* are those types of actions which is already effectuating. ii) *Anarabdha* karmas are that type of actions which is not yet effectuating. The second is further divided into two types of actions and these are *sancita* and *kriyamana*. The *sancita karmas* are those which have been already done, but yet they effectuating actions. The *kriyamana karmas* are those which is being done but the consequences are not fructified.

28. Another kind of actions which basically is a classification of actions considered doable by the scriptures and held to possess differing degrees of stringency. This is a fourfold classification into *nitya* , *naimittika* , *kamya* , and *pratisiddha*. The *nitya* actions has been done simply because of scriptures that they should be done and no reason be asked to justify why they should be done. *Naimittika karmas* are those which has been performed when some special things happen, like the birth of the child. The third kind of actions is called *kamya*. These actions are performed when the individual wants to achieve some objective for example, to have a son, to defeat an enemy etc .Under the forth, the *pratisiddha* , class of actions , the actions are considered which is disallowed or prohibited by a scripture, like a *brahmana’s* associating himself with a *sudra*.

29. It is to be noted that the word’ *karma*’ is wider in significance than the word’ *dharma*’. In so far as *karmas* can be *dharmas* as well as *adharmas*, dharmic actions as well as adharmic actions , which are both deeds or actions , the former merit rewards and the latter punishments in the karmic scheme of things.


33. ibid, p-222

34. ibid, 221

35. ibid, 233


37. ibid, p-180 The attempt to disapprove past life on the basis of non-remembrance of it, the author argues, would be to confound a thing with the consciousness of it. The author would argue against the received view if *karma* that the mere supposition that it exists and even the additional supposition that it helps in explaining the discrepancy between virtue and success in life (as is usually argued by many modern writers , including Hiriyanna) does not and cannot prove that it exists.
38. Prasad, Rajendra, *Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality*, ICPR, Delhi, 1989, p-249


42. Buch, Maganlal. A, *The Principles of Hindu Ethics*, Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1921