CHAPTER V.

CONCEPT OF DHARMA

The word dharma is derived from the root 'dhr' which means to hold together. The word is used in three different meanings. In the metaphysical sense it means 'the essential nature of a thing' for example the dharma of fire is to burn. Again the two other meanings are ethical. Dharma appears to mean those duties and obligation which follow from one's station in society viz. varnasrama dharma. It also means those actions and duties which are intrinsic to the moral nature of man. The two-fold moral obligation stresses the two-fold character of man. One is that all men have common nature. Second, different individuals have different peculiarities of temperament and character. Hindu ethics tries to explain the sadharana dharma (the duties that are common to all) and varnasrama dharma (caste duties).

From a survey of Hindu scripture it is clear that people laid emphasis on a number of sadharana dharma (uni-

1. H.K. Dava Raja: The mind and spirit of India, Delhi, 1967, p. 159.
versal virtues). The great emphasis is given to the cultivation of the virtues, such as truthfulness, straightforwardness, self control, compassion, forbearance, freedom from envy etc. Then there was an emphasis of social duties and obligations which indicates the social concern of Hindu ethics.

Individual occupies a certain position in the society and according to his position he was to exercise certain responsibilities in maintaining the social harmony which will ultimately contribute to the social good. 

In ancient India there was no ethics or moral philosophy which was pursued as a separate discipline. An individual had to observe certain rules of conduct as a member of the community and he had to cultivate certain virtues in order to prepare himself for the religious life to the pursuit of salvation. The three principles are recognised as the root of social order. They are as follows: Dharma, \( \text{\textcircled{\textit{a}}} \) 

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3. Vedaprasana Ka., \( \text{\textcircled{\textit{a}}} \) rayaha dnanam dharma, ll.l.
and Danda which is also known as Rajadharma. Under these three principles the concept of dharma is discussed. Primarily, the term dharma stands for duties in general, the duties or modes of behaviour that follow from the moral nature of man. In later literature there was the expression of a dharma—dharma duties or virtues pursued by all men. The Aryans of the Rigveda were not organised into castes or classes, but they were familiar with the concept of a moral order which had jurisdiction over man. This order was signified by the term Rta.

The great God Varuna was the guardian of Rta. He was the protector, preserver and custodian of Rta. One of the most important concepts in the Rigveda, Samhitas is the concept of Rta. It stands for a cosmic order and includes natural religious and social phenomena. The opposite of Rta is Anrta. Rta is a cosmic force and all natural phenomena are subject to its laws. When it is applied to the Yajna it stands for the due order of sacrifice. In the social field it applies to moral order. The concept of Rta devotes both harmony and order. Anrta means sin and untruth. In one mantra it is asserted that wicked

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4. Commenting on the conception of Rta in the Rigveda John Mackenzie observes yet it is very significant that at this early stage, we should find such a unifying conception as that law or order. (John Mackenzie) (Hindu ethics) 1922, p. 7.

5. Yajna = (sacrificial offerings to the Gods).
travel not the path of rta. These concepts assert that there was an extremely well-developed moral consciousness in Vedic times. The concept of rta gives rise to those other two powerful concepts in Hindu thought and behaviour viz. dharma and karma. It has been well recognised that the concept of dharma is very complex. It has had a long history and has undergone many changes. The ancient Indian concept of dharma is like the modern concept of 'law'.

The 'law' means a body of enacted or customary rules, the controlling influence of rule, a binding injunction, one of the branches of the study of the legal profession; the judicial remedy, something underlying natural phenomena and so on. This variety of use does not indicate anything vague in the concept.

Thakur points out: 'The ancient Hindu allowed dharma to stand for various things not because of their failure to define it but because of their effort to have that all-embracing principle which would cover all aspects of human life'. The concept of dharma stands as the fundamental order of

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8. Ibid., p. 55.
social as well as moral life. From the Rigvedic concept of rta the law of karma is also derived. It also signifies that there is a uniform moral law governing the actions of men and that rewards and punishments are apprehensible to even actions. It implies that every action has got its consequence, good or bad desirable to undesirable. It also implies that action has "a subtle potency" and determines a man's character. The law of karma is a special manifestation of dharma and provides an incentive to righteous conduct.

It is essential to consider the sources of dharma, codes, beginning with the fundamental claim that dharma is given to the Vedas, as the eternal revelation to the seers (rnis) of old. The content of the Dharma has been recorded in sacred texts. Dharma is theoretically rooted in, derived from and determined by the eternal Vedas. In fact rejection of the vedic authority was a major criterion for distinguishing heterodox religions and social system in India. With the virtually universal description of authority for dharma to the Vedas, it is surprising to find that Vedic texts have little to offer on dharma in the sense of the social regulation.

offered in the dharmasastras or the presentation of philosophical interpretation of the basis of social system.  

The interests of vedic texts are elsewhere, earlier in ritual development (the connotation of dharma in the Brahmanas) and later in the search for the presence of reality in the human consciousness as in the Upanisads. The emergence of the Hindu social order is not unrelated to the process reflected in the Vedas, particularly the claim of the priests to authority for social order in determining and maintaining the essential ritual order and also in the concern for the maintenance of the emerging social fabric from the dangerous neglect perceived by some in the spiritual adventures expressed in the Upanisads. But as texts, the Vedas even in the broad meaning of Shruti simply are not the actual source of dharma.  

The social pattern that emerged was said to rest on the Vedas in the sense that Smrti writings were understood to be derivation from the 'shruti texts and it is regarded as the source of Dharma'.

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11. Ibid.
smrti stands second to 'sruti with which it is understood to be intimately associated. The rules which had previously existed only in memory or smrti now came to be recorded in words also known as smrti.

The third source of dharma after 'sruti and smrti in ancient texts is sadacara or good custom. Although understood as supplementary to the more authoritative source the idea or principle or category was in actuality central. It expresses the actual source of the dharma prescripts and served an extremely important role in relating earlier smrti works to the Vedas as well as in legitimating their subsequent extension, elaboration and revision in the complex dharma literature. Sadacara connotes good behaviour with a double reference to approved customs. The good and the pious man who were the determiners of approved customs.

Yajnavalkya\textsuperscript{13} lays down 'what ever customs, practice and family usages prevail in a country shall be preserved intact ..........'

Mulla points out 'In Hindu law, custom has the efficacy of law. It is not merely an adjunct of ordinary law but

\textsuperscript{13} I : 343.
a constituent part of it'.

The custom, achara is also dharma. According to Manu, dharma is that which is followed by those learned in the Vedas and what is approved by the conscience of the virtuous who are exempt from hatred and inordinate affection. Again Mulla points out, 'The ancient law promulgated in the Samiritis was essentially traditional and the injunction was time honoured. Therefore, the institutions and immemorial customs should be preserved intact. The law was not to be found merely in the texts of the Samiritis but also in the practices and usage which had prevailed under it.' Manu asserts, '... the sacred law has been fully stated ...... and also traditional practices and usages of the four varnas.' The Juna parva of the Mahabharata states 'Dharma has its origin in good practices and the Vedas are established on Dharma'. The Apastamba dharma sutra starts by saying "we shall now propound the acts of productivity of merit which are sanctioned by tradition and current usage". The Samiritis themselves are in part based on immemorial custom.

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15. II.1
16. Ibid.
17. 1:107.
18. 27:107.
19. 1:111.
Mulla observes, "The importance attached to the law creating efficacy of custom in Hindu jurisprudence was so great that the exponents of law were unanimous in accepting custom as itself constituent part of the law."

The efficacy of custom is clarified by Devala. If any usage required by utility is established in a locality (which is contrary to the written text of law) it should be practiced therein only, but not in any other district.

Whatever customary law is prevalent in a district in a city, in a town or in a village or among the learned, the said law must not be disturbed. The ancient attitude towards custom must have been necessitated by the diversity of usage in various parts of the country. The king who is supposed to conquer a new area is required to respect the custom followed by the people of that area. This is why Gautama and Manu have laid down that one of the chief duties of the monarch is to administer justice according to local usage and the written codes.

Narada asserted that the decision should be based on reason and supplemented this by stating 'custom is powerful and over-rides the sacred law'.

20. Ibid., p. 2
22. VIII 41 : 66.
23. IV . 40.
Brihaspati goes further and asks the judicial authority to recognise even local, tribal and family usage. As Nalla writes custom can override any text of the smritis.\(^2\)

Then what are the essential attributes of a custom. The judicial decisions have laid down that a custom having the force of law must be ancient and it should be observed by the group without any interruption, so that it is obligatory. But it must not be immoral or opposed to public policy.

Besides this, \textit{sruti, smriti and sadacara}, Manu spoke of \textit{svasya\textit{a} pr\textit{a}ya matmanah}, which is agreeable to one's conscience as the fourth source of \textit{dharma}.\(^3\) The thing is that he expresses the same four sources where he uses the term as \textit{manah tushti}, satisfaction of the self for conscience.\(^4\) He says "when the performance of an act gladdens his heart (that is conscience) let him perform it with diligence; but let him avoid the opposite".\(^5\)

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 64.
\(^{25}\) Dharma and Society, pp. 17-18.
\(^{26}\) II : 12.
\(^{27}\) II : 6.
In another verse he says "The soul itself is the witness of the soul and the soul is the refuge of the soul; despite not thy own soul, the supreme witness of man." In these four verses, Manu considers conscience as important ingredient to determine whether an action manifests dharma or not. It has been found that higher caste people, particularly brahmins follow smriti and achara, that is scripture and custom. The lower caste people, who have no acquaintances with the smritis follow only customs.

Again the courts of law followed smriti and achara. The enlightened few who made the fourth source of dharma conscience, the guide to action. In this way, in a society dominated by customary morality, conscience plays a minor role to determine an action is ethical or not. The social thinkers recognise that only those actions which are guided by conscience are truly ethical, in opposition to actions which are guided by prescriptions and customs. When a man is guided by conscience he becomes critical of rules and customs. When a society accepts conscience as the standard by which the actions of man should be guided, that society rejects those which are not in consonance with conscience and

28. VII : 84
justices. Sruti, smriti and achara are external sources of moral law or dharma and conscience has been taken to be internal source. That if one's conscience is cultivated and if it is pure he would know his duty in any given situation. That is why Manu enjoins 'perform only such actions as would satisfy your conscience. Avoid others.' Kautilya asserts that one should act in conformity with one's conscience. Those who are conscientious, they would not allow themselves to be swayed by their bodily needs and emotions. They are usually objective and they would think of the quality act view and its consequences. They also use some standard to judge their actions and they would try to improve it. Therefore, a man who is guided by this conscience or duty chooses a path or action according to his concept of duty or his conscience. His action is said to be this choice. Here it is not dictated by an external source whether it be Sruti, Smriti or achara. There is nothing here fixed or rigid that guides his behaviour.

The ruling idea of ancient Indian thought was the unity in diversity not uniformity. This led to the recognition:

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30. Ibid., p. 30
31. IV, 161.
32. Ibid., p. 31.
of the fact of social change. The ancient Indian sages also advocated the need for preserving the continuity of the tradition. For this reconciliation of tradition and change an attempt was made to give expression in the concepts of sruti and smriti. Generally, sruti stands for universal, eternal fundamental principles and smriti stands for a group of values from these principles and finds its expressions in the limited, temporary and relative field of social life. This is why there is a saying that dharma has two aspects, sanatana dharma which is to be universal and Yuga dharma which is valid only for an age. The smritis recognise this principle of social change, Jaina says, "There is one set of dharmas for men in the krita-yuga a different set for each of the Treta, Deva para and Kaliyuga, the dharmas change according to the change of the Yugas." 33

In the same way it has been said "The Hindu view makes room for essential changes. There must be no violent break with social heredity and yet the new stresses, conflicts and confusions will have to be faced and overcome; while the truths of spirit are permanent the rules change from age to age." 34

33. I : 85

Vivekananda observes, "we know that in our looks a clear distinction is made between two sets of truths. The one set is that which abides for ever, being built on the nature of man, the nature of the soul, the soul's relation to God and so on. The other set comprises the minor laws which guide the work of our everyday life ......... they belong more properly to the Puranas to the Smritis and not to the Shruti ........ customs of one age, of one yuga, have not been the customs of another and as Yuga comes after Yuga they will have to change'.

Social flexibility has been the chief character of Hindu dharma. To uphold the Sanatana dharma is not to stand still. It is to seize the vital principles and use the modern life. All true growth preserves unity through change. The word dharma means that which sustains, upholds and holds together. According to Keith the concept of dharma largely superseded the Rigvedic concept of rta in the Brahmanas, since rta was found inadequate to meet the needs of complex social organisation. The dharma-sastras celebrated the concept of dharma, which was meant to constitute the distinctive duties of the four varnas and the four ashramas, so that the term varnasrama dharma has been looked upon as the Sanatana dharma, the eternal the per-

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perpetual, permanent and even lasting duty of man. It may be said this is the meaning of the term dharma which has been generally used for over two thousand years. Dandekar writes that the concept of dharma is all comprehensive and said to comprise precepts which aim at securing the material and spiritual sustenance and growth of the individual and society. 36

Another significant characteristics of dharma which deserves to be specially noted is that it was regarded as not being static. The content of dharma often changed in the changing contexts of time, place and social environment.

In spite of the comprehensive character of dharma in its most common connotation it was limited to two principal ideas, viz. the organization of social life through well-defined and well-regulated classes (varnas) and the organization of an individual's life within those classes into definite stages (ashramas).

Dandekar further asserts that though the word Varna Vyavastha generally translated as caste system strictly speaking Varna does not denote caste as one understands today. 37

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36. P.N. Dandekar in De bary (ed), Sources of Indian Tradition, Delhi 1963, p. 218.

37. Dharma and society.
It is equally important and valuable to plan an individual’s life in four stages or periods called Ashramas. This planning was based on a psychological study of the interests, needs, capacities, characteristics, and social adjustments of an individual at different stages of life from childhood to old age. Today life appears to be chaotic and confused. There is little difference in the pursuits of men at different ages. As it is seen from childhood to old age, men and women have to earn their living; have to do almost the same kind of work, no matter whether they are fit for it or not. The ancient Indians understood the absurdities of such a kind of living and divided life into four periods and assigned a proper function with its appropriate discipline to each of them.

The first period is meant for building up physical, mental, and spiritual health, strength, and endurance. It is called the Brahmacharya Ashrama* (student life). The second period is called the Grihastha Ashrama which an individual settles down into a family life and performs the duties of a householder. The third period is called the Vanaprastha Ashrama in which an individual retires from the life of a householder.

* Sanjukta Kumar Chatterji: Indian Culture, Delhi, 1966, p. 34.
and along with his life companion devotes himself to the service of the society in the best way he can without any idea of accumulating anything for his family as he did when he was a householder. The fourth period was called Sanyasa ashrama in which the individual should give up all worldly pursuits and interests and should devote himself to meditation and Yoga. It is found that in accordance with principles of biology, psychology, sociology, economics and politics, the ancient seers like Manu, Yajnavalkya, Atri and Varistha determined the function, the duties and the place of individual at each stage. According to their opinion a student should do nothing else than that which is conductive to the building up of a strong and healthy body. He is to be a life of hard work, self denial, austerity and purify. He must make himself a full-statured man, ready to undertake the duties of a householder on leaving the educational institution. The life of a householder is a very responsible life. It is to be a discipline life. He has to acquire wealth according to the principles of dharma—truth, honesty, justice, kindness and self-control etc. He has to bring forth and bring up children without whom a household is not happy. He has to be a productive member of the society. Is home is the happy home in which old parents, children and women must feel happy. As it is said every little home must be a
Having lived for twenty-five years or so as a householder, an individual should withdraw his interests from the family and retire to a quiet place where he can think about deeper problems of life and thereby be of some service to the society. As it is found he is a fit person to be legislator, an educator or an adviser to the Government. Indian social thinker like Dr. Bhagavan Das thinks that only people who have retired from family responsibilities and have no worldly ambitions should be trusted with great national responsibilities. He adds that most of the great works on philosophy, ethics and science have been written by those people who made a proper use of this period of life. When the individual is no longer physically fit to do strenuous work in the service of society he must make the best use of the rest of his life by setting at some secluded and peaceful place and he will meditate on the deeper problems of life and the universe. In this stage he may dictate books, teach those who approach him for enlightenment and guidance. He may use of his

39. Ibid., p. 35.


41. Ibid., p. 36.
time by practising some kind of Yoga. According to Indian culture old age should not be a miserable age. It should be the most peaceful and happy state of life. Hence, at this stage, happiness does not depend upon fleeting enjoyments of life but upon the inner light and contentment of the spirit. It is believed that death only opens a gate to another life the quality and contents of which are determined by our own actions.42

The later half of his life called the path of nivritti or withdrawal from the attachments to the world and by the time he dies a normal death he quickly leaves this world and gladly awaits entry into another through the gate of death.43

The merit of this system of ashramas is that ancient Indians realised the need for shifting the emphasis as one advanced in life. A person grows older there is generally greater psychological maturity. One sees that during childhood there is an exclusive investment of interest in self and as he grows an individual takes interest in other people that one finds greater satisfaction in giving than in receiving.44

42. Ibid.
43. Indian Culture, p. 37.
44. Dharma and Society, p. 104.
That an individual with a mature personality becomes primarily a creative and contributing person. He is free from anxiety and quite serene. Then what are the implications of ashrana dharma with respect to the growth of personality. Throughout the period of adolescent there are striking changes in the body and in behaviour as a result of sexual maturation. Thus the teenager attains adulthood. In the Brahmacharya stage, the teenager is able to live away from intimate relationship with his parents, brothers, sisters, and others and lives with his teacher’s family and his own peers. This enables him to develop social relationship with non-family members and thus he becomes mature. At this stage he has the opportunity to develop emotionally, socially and intellectually. When children grow up, are married and set up their own homes, when one retires from one’s occupation, new adjustment problems arise. It is in this context is to admire the insight into personality development that is displayed by ancient Indians with respect to the last two stages of life viz. Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. These two stages in life involve a complete change in the attitude of the individual towards himself and towards the world and society. We must overcome his narrow identification with his family, caste people, village people etc. and

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
he has to develop a wider outlook. He develops a sense of equa-
nimity towards what the ancient Indians identified as the
dvandvas. As Gita puts it, 'He from whom the world does not
shrink and who does not shrink from the world and who is free
from joy and anger, fear and agitation he who has no expectation,
is pure, skilful in action, unconcerned and untroubled, he who
neither rejoices nor hates neither grieves nor desires such
a person has psychological maturity'.

A mature individual becomes citizen of the universe,
deeply interested in the well being of every human being. This
is said to be the essence of the ancient Indian concept of
Sanyasa. The first two stages of life are institutionalized
viz. studenthood and marriage family and work. The last two
ones are not life is left to the individual. The third and
fourth ashramas consist essentially in de-involvement from
worldly life, and involvement in life in a wider sense of the
term viz. attaining oneness with the Brahman, the universe as
a whole.

The Varnasrama Dharmas, or the duties of the individual
and of the four chief classes of society are out and out

47. XII : 15-17.
48. Ibid., p. 105.
Practical rules of the ethical social organisation of human beings. 49

The essence of dharma is the golden rule. In the Mahabharats in the Shanti Parva, Anusasana Parva, and the Gita, there are several verses on this Golden rule which also explain why it should be observed.

The 30th verse of section 66 of Shanti Parva asserts, 'That man who regards all beings to be like his own sect, who never does any harm and who has his wrath under control, obtains great happiness here and hereafter'.

Again the sixth verse of section 113 of Anusasana Parva asserts 'He who regards all as his own self, and behave towards them as towards his own self, who never does any harm and who completely subjugates, his wrath will be happy'.

Once again eighth verse of section 113 of the same Parva lays down 'one should never do to another what one regards as injurious to one's own self.

This brief is dharma. He who acts in a different way does so yielding to consideration other than dharma'. 50

49. Ethical Philosophies of India, p. 61.
50. Ibid., pp. 106-107.
The Gita enunciates the Golden Rule thus 'He who sees with equality everything in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain is considered a perfect Yogi'. 51

Elsewhere it says 'seeing God equally well established in all, one does not destroy one's self through one's self and thus attains the highest goal'. 52 One should identify one self with one's neighbour, with other human beings, or with any being in the universe.

The sixth mantra of Isavasya Upanisad asserts 'In the wise man who perceives all beings as not distinct from his own self at all, and his own self as the self of every one — he does not by virtue of that perception hate everyone'.

Again the same idea seems to be echoed in the seventh verse of section 113 of Anusasana parva 'He who sees the entire living beings in himself in the entire living beings even the gods go on in search of him abandoning their other duties'. The basis of the Golden Rule appears as the universality of the self the realisation that all beings and everything is the manifestation of one Brahman. In the 29th verse of the sixth chapter of the Gita 'He whose self is harmonised by Yoga both the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self,

51. The Gita VI : 32.
52. XIII : 28.
everywhere he sees the same'. What is the benefit of this realisation? The seventh Mantra of Isvasya Upanisad explains, what delusion what sorrow is there for the wise man who sees the unity of existence and perceives all things as his own self.

It emphasises that the person who develops this attitude of Sarvatmabhava attains equanimity overcomes delusion and passions at the same time. In the 262nd section of the Shanti Parva there are two verses which declare that compassion to all persons and interest in the welfare of all is dharma. 53 'I know the secret of ancient dharma which enunciated the good of all beings in the world and friendship with all.' 6 Again, 'He verily knows the substances of dharma who is always the friend of all and who is interested in the welfare of all in thought, word and deed'. 54 There is a reference regarding dharma in the 10th verse of the 100th section of Shanti Parva 'Dharma has been propounded for the welfare of all beings. Therefore, that which leads to advancement and growth is dharma'. It is clear that the mantra from the Isvasya Upanisad emphasises the benefit to the individual who develops Sarvatma bhava and the verses from the Shanti

53. 262-6.
54. 262-9.
Parva emphasises the social aspect and the Sarvatmabhava promotes the welfare of all human beings and of all living beings and of all living beings in the universe.55

Finally, there is the excellent statement by Devala: "Know this to be the essence of dharma and then practise it; refrain from doing unto others what you will not have done unto others".

The ancient Indian texts state both positive and negative aspect of the Golden Rule of Dharma. They are found to analyse that the basis for this behaviour is to do welfare and growth of all human beings. The question is that through the Golden Rule is enunciated so clearly, it is found that it has not been operative in Indian society for thousand of years. It appears that Indian society is hierarchical as it is based on the Jati system. This paradox can be understood if one remembers that the concept of dharma has been used as a universal principle - Padharana dharma and particularistic principle Varnashrama dharma.56 The Padharana dharmas are found as the universal principles governing all human actions like truth, ahimsa, compassion etc.

55. Dharma and Society.
56. Ibid., p. 108.
The most comprehensive dharma is the golden rule, suvarna niyama, that is harmful to oneself one should not do to others. This may be said the quint essence of dharma. Behaviour which is contrary to this is born of selfish desire. It is clear that in vedic times there were no castes or jatis, there were only classes. Due to historical circumstances the classes became rigid and it were based on birth. The result is that the emphasise was laid more on the particularistic aspect of dharma, rather than the universalistic as it is referred. The universal dharma, its golden rule became insignificant. There might be another cause of this situation as has been noted above the Gita lays down that he who looks upon all persons and beings with an equality of vision is considered to be he Varana Yogi. Thus the practice of the golden rule as it was two thousand years ago was considered possible only for a highly developed human being. It implies that it is not done by ordinary human being as well as it is not supposed to be practised in daily life. Those who can see with equal eye are said to be sage and capable of looking at all creation from the ultimate stand point of reality. The Dharmasastras seem devote much time to a description of Varnasrama dharma, particularistic entities. 

57. Anugasana parva, pp. 113-8.
and it compared a hardly a verse or two in relation with sadharana dharma and Svavarna niyama universal duties and the Golden Rule. It has been observed that Hindu ethical ideas are mainly based on the vedantic realisation of the one Brahman manifested in all human beings.

Indian ethics means the theory of good and evil and of right and wrong as found in the Indian philosophical literature and practised and preached by the great thinkers of India from the Vedic period of the present day. The essential feature of Indian Philosophy is the practical applicability of its ideal. Perfection, progress and immortality as opposed to imperfection, cessation and death are the ideals of all the schools of Indian Philosophy. Indian Philosophy does not look backward as Mrs. Stevenson believes. It is far sighted, progressive ever developing ever evolving. The chief instrument in both philosophies is reason, and the primary ideal to be achieved by both is well being man.

"The Greeks were primarily interested in social questions while the Indians were attracted by questions about the nature of inner spirit man ......... But whether philosophy is concerned primarily with man as the Atman or as essentially

58. Sutradhar A. K. Roy, pp. 104-105
a social being it is concerned with man all the same, culture, no country lives or has a right to live for itself. If it has any contribution to make towards the enrichment of the human spirit it owes its contribution to the widest circle it can reach. 61 That ethical thinking in India developed under different sorts of environment and at quite a different period of history is compared with the development of moral philosophy in the west.

There are some special features of Indian ethics. They are as: (i) Remoteness in time, (ii) Practicability, (iii) metaphysical basis, (iv) Absoluteness when we say Indian ethics as remote we mean that it is the oldest moral philosophy in the history of civilization.

The remoteness of Indian ethics is a mixed blessing. This remoteness has been responsible for making Indian ethics well established in the practical life of its followers that certain forms of behaviour persist even today. In spite of the passage of thousand of years the fundamentals of Indian ethics are embodied in the day to day life of the followers of almost every school of Indian Philosophy.

Indian ethics instead of analysing the nature of good lays down practical means of attaining a life of perfection here and now. In explaining the nature of good, it gives us practical guidance towards attaining and realising good in our life. Indian ethics propounds the four purusarthas or the end of human life, which are the means as well as ends and which is the goal of self-realisation. The purusarthas have no meaning apart from practical application.

The most important special feature of Indian ethics is its strong and deep metaphysical foundation. The metaphysical background of Indian ethics makes it an ethico-metaphysical theory, a synthesis of theory and practice. It is an intellectual understanding and self-realisation. The highest goal of Indian ethics is the attainment of Moksa which means perfection not in the theoretical sense but in the practical sense of rising above all the contradictions of pleasure and pain, praise blame, heat and cold, loss and gain, even of right and wrong and of good and evil. Indian ethics in an absolute ethics and spiritual perfection is responsible for this absolute nature of Indian ethics. It is most cosmopolitan as well as absolutistic. It is through and through spiritualistic. The

62. Ethical Philosophies of India, p. 61.
63. Ibid., p. 62.
acceptance of the spiritual oneness and one physical manyness of the universe is the ethics not physical nature of Indian Philosophy. The prevailing notion of dharma is very narrow and confined to Jati dharma. It narrows one's vision and comes in the way of developing national and world outlook. The main task in Indian culture of today is to abandon this narrow outlook and to develop the universal ethics of love for all human beings. The another aspect of this new outlook is respect for individuality. There are two demands made on an individual the demands of the body and the mind.

"This dharma is honey to all beings and all beings are honey to this dharma ....... This knowledge of self is the only means of immortality. This unity that underlies all is brahman. This knowledge is the means of becoming all." 65

When an action is determined by dharma, righteousness promotes self realisation as well as it contributes to social development. Dharma is the moral law. It derives its authority from love and reason, from compassion and rationality. The moral laws enunciated by various religious texts are valid because they are to be based on compassion and reason. It means that each person should understand and judge dharma in

64. Ibid., p. 63.
65. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (11:5.11).
the light of love and reason.

The compassion for human beings and rationality are universalistic. This promotes the interaction and development of society as a whole. The Gita lays down that the Chaturvarna system was created by God according to the division of quality and work—Guna and Karma. Radhakrishnan points out commenting on this verse that the emphasis is on Guna and Karma and not on Jati (birth). He also quotes an ancient verse which points out that the Brahmin and the outcaste are blood brothers—antyojo vipra jatis cha eka ev saho darah. The Gita enumerates the four Varnas and describes the duties of each. In these verse also birth is never referred. Thus Radhakrishnan puts it that each individual has his own inborn nature svabhava and makes it effective in his life as his duty, svadharma.

It is true with the renaissance started in the early 19th by Ram Mohan Roy and with the impact of western social ideals there was gradual change in the social climate. The social reform movement started earlier in the 19th took a definite shape in 1885 under the leadership of Panade, there was

66. Dharma and Society.
a campaign among the English educated classes to do away with the restrictions of caste on marriage, interdining, untouchability etc. It follows that finally with the non-co-operation movement launched by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji, equitarianism gained strength and it has been enshrined in the constitution. Equality is guaranteed as fundamental right and the chapter on Directive principles of state policy of the constitution contains Articles formulated to promote the welfare of the backward classes. 68 The custom continues to be the guiding principle of life among people of all levels of education and culture. It is neither the moral nor rational principles govern day to day conduct. Even today that conformity to custom is dharma. But the new concepts of equality, social mobility have become totally inoperative if at present the dharma and jati would have been identified. 69 The various observers point out the complexity of this important concept. Dharma is perhaps the most comprehensive concept in the entire history of Hindu thought. It is pointed that the world is used in very different senses in the different schools and religious traditions of Indian thought. 70

68. Ibid., p. 90.
Dharma is used in so many senses that it eludes definition. It stands for nature, intrinsic quality, civil and moral law, justice, virtue, merit, duty and morality. The basic social dharma underlines religious practices theistic sects and higher philosophies in India. The breadth of dharma and the inter-mixture of religion and ethics involved is evidenced in the treatises on dharma whose contents are virtually co-extensive with the entire sphere of human behaviour and whose numerous and vital prescriptions descend to minutest details of life and conduct. It is a far reaching concept which embraces the whole human life. But most interpreters would agree with Heinrich Zimmer that dharma comprises the whole context of religious and moral duties. The considerable misunderstanding results from the frequent rendering of dharma simply as "religion". Dharma as the religious dimensions of a life viewed as polarized into sacred and secular as Paul Harmsnourseal comments, "The distinction of religion and law can be

73. P.V. Kane : Dharma and Samsa, Philosophy, East and West, 1957, p. 36.
justified only from European point of view the two notions are one in the Indian dharma. 75

Bhagavan Das has also cautioned against dissociation of sacred and secular: "Dharma is not mere other world religion, but is also every duty every law, every proper and specific function of everything or being in this and in all other worlds". 76

The literal meaning of dharma that which integrates, holds or maintains is quite central to the concept of dharma, because its brings out clearly its intricate character as a principle or law which may have both ontological as well as axiological status. The Indian tradition is not in favour or maintaining an ultimate distinction between being and value. The concept of rta also indicates a fusion of existence and value. The cosmic principle of the universe is the same as the moral law which regulates man's life. Macrococson is governed by the same laws as the microcosom. 77 The dimensions of dharma range from the lower range of the value ladder of artha and kama to the middle level of social norms and moral values.

to the uppermost level of life in a spiritual and religious culture. It, therefore, occupies a pivotal position in any scale of value. It is both existence and value, being and ideal, empirical and transcendental, instrumental and absolute, personal and impersonal, teleological and deontological, subjective and objective, naturalistic and supernaturalistic.78

The difference in views about the actual content of moral values are usually justified on the ground of changing times, conditions and circumstances; because the notions of duty, virtue and norms will have to be dynamic in order to be really effective and normative. The sets of moral duties and virtues obtained from different cultural traditions have been different.

The law of moral regulation of both inner and outer life, society and social organisation has always been the same. Hence, various characterisation of dharma serve only to illustrate its outer limits and enrich its contents.79

Indian culture invariably moves from the external to the internal from the material to the spiritual. The eternal, universal, absolute, transcendental, and pure is preferred to

78. Ibid., p. 152.
79. Ibid., p. 161.
the perishable, the perishable, the particular the instrumental, the empirical and the mixed. 80

Spiritual values are higher than the physical on account of their wealth of experience. Freedom to be aware of values and to choose and prefer some of them must be acknowledged because freedom itself is a supreme value. It gives ample freedom to man in respect of his faith and beliefs and in choosing his own way of spiritual life. It represents and fulfills the eternal aspiration to attain the summum bonum of life.

Dharma is the eternal way (sanatana marga) that leads man from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. 81

Dharma is such law, duty, morality, justice, virtue or religion. All of these are involved but we should cease looking for an equivalent for tradition as much as premature identification with western concepts tends to blind one to the particular multifaceted structure of meanings in the Hindu...

80. These values correspond closely to the five fold criterion mentioned by Hartmann in his book ethics. These are indivisibly, independence, depth of satisfaction, eternity and autonomy.

Dharma. As G.H. Mees suggests Dharma, like many other concepts of ancient cultures (India, Greece, Rome) is indeterminate rather than vague. His reason for stressing this distinction is that in his opinion indeterminateness does not preclude inner clarity whereas vagueness is the opposite of clarity. 32

It is remarkable that Indian thought includes no concept of "right"; there is much talk about duties. Shri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita teaches his friend Arjuna to perform the duties that are demanded by his station in life, without any expectation. In the modern age, one thinks more of his rights than of his duties. "Rights" is simply a glorified word for our individual and selfish interests, sublimated forms of animal wants.

In Indian culture an attempt was made to make men forget them. That good and great men in society never talked of rights but always of duties and others followed them. A little reflection will convince that we owe much to others that it is really difficult to shake off the obligation. to get rid of the obligation to others for our own good we have to do good to others. Keeping this in view Indian culture has prescribed five types of Yajnas or sacrifices. 83 In one of the

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83. Indian Culture, pp. 26-27.
convocation addressed of ancient India, the teacher exports the
new graduates to look upon every stranger as a God. That a
Hindu is expected to look upon every human being as his bro-
ther or sister and humanity as his family.

It is only petty minded persons who make a distinction
between theirs and others. Those who have great hearts look
upon the whole world as their own family. He who looks upon
others as himself really sees.

The Buddhi or reason is the highest mental principle
in man according to Indian culture. It is this principle
which determines the truth and falsity of a judgement. 'scriptu-
res do differ but there is always agreement upon what is rea-
sonable. Reason may be regarded as one of the principles of
dharma. In the Vedas, the greatest prayer asks us inspiration
for four intelligence. Therefore, in Hindu culture there has
always been a great emphasis on being reasonable in all
activities of life. The great sage Vasistha advised his
pupil Rama in the Yoga Vasistha, in which fundamental feature
of Indian culture finds clear expression, that one should
prefer a reasonable statement of a child to the unreasonable

84. Taittiriya Upanisad X12.
85. Ibid., p. 30.
A devotee of reason should value the works even of ordinary persons if they provide knowledge which is logical.

The truth might be super-rational but it cannot be irrational. Hence man relies on reason more than one anything else. There is a prayer "may every being overcome difficulties may everyone look for the good and may everyone have a purified reason and may everyone be happy everywhere".  

To sum up the salient feature of Hindu ethics is that morality constitutes an integral part of religion. Moral endeavour is directed to the goal of liberation. The central concept of Hindu ethics is dharma which appears to be rich and has got variegated meanings. There is a significant direction and synthesis between morality and religion which emphasises the Gita's disinterested action.

The modern Hindu ethics seems to vindicate the relevance of basic Hindu ethical concepts. The caste system has been criticised and it has been pointed out that varna in its genuine form has still its significance and meaning in

86. Yoga Vasistha 11.18.3-4.

87. Ibid.
the modern man. In the midst of growing materialism, scientiﬁsm and agnosticism the Hindu thinkers have emphasised the spiritual basis of ethics. Bhagavad Gita is to be the main source of inspiration to the Hindu ethical thinkers. The lasting message of 'song celestial' has a deeper meaning which cures the maladies of the modern world. 88

The various Indian systems emphasise the performance of dharmas in accordance with one's ability. Whatever may be the spheres, what is needed is 'the good will' by which one can legislate oneself for all humanity. A truly moral man likes to contribute to the social stability. He does not possess ego and all his actions are meant for the happiness and welfare of beings. 89

89. Balbir Singh: The conceptual frame work of Indian Philosophy, Madras, 1976, p. 284.