In the present thesis an attempt has been made to study Ethics as a theory of virtues. Such an inquiry appears to have been prominent in the ethical writings of Greek and Medieval ethical thinkers, but unfortunately appears to have been neglected by modern ethical thinkers. The various problems connected with 'virtue', such as the nature of virtue, the unity of virtues, the classification of virtues, etc. engaged the attention of both the ancient and medieval moralists and the ethical philosophers. With the exceptions of N. Hartmann and Mandeville, no modern ethical philosopher, possibly, has made an exhaustive study of virtues, making Ethics, as it were, a science of virtues.

The primary object of the present thesis is to critically study the concept of virtue in different ethical theories and the relation of virtue with some other important ethical concepts, such as, duty, value, right, law, etc.

The different schools in Ethics have something important to state in their approach in determining the nature of virtue. However, the social, relative or an instrumental value of virtues is usually highly exaggerated. Most of the ethical theories determine the instrumentalistic and external nature of virtues rather than their intrinsic and inner worth. These theories engage themselves with (i)
conduct which is mainly an external expression of a person. These theories interpret 'virtue' in terms of the rightness of an action and not in terms of the goodness of a person. Of course, virtues cannot be understood in vacuum but always as fountain springs of overt actions. But ultimately, it is character that should be valued in terms of virtues, which are also called 'character-values'. The originality of the thesis consists in determining Ethics, making virtue as its central concept, because ethically, to be virtuous is more valuable than to be overtly dutiful or socially right in actions. To be virtuous in character requires an inner sanction, while to be dutiful and right in actions are determined by external sanctions. All other ethical concepts such as duty, right, law, are more or less external determinants or measures of man's conduct. While virtues alone determine internally the real ethical worth of man's character. All other ethical concepts, though of academic interest, are of subsidiary value, in comparison with the virtues, the central subject matter of Ethics. Right and wrong are moral concepts, good and bad are axiological concepts, while virtues alone are aretological concepts.

The above discussion raises another problem about the understanding of human nature in terms of virtuous or vicious character. Is man essentially virtuous or vicious? To this different approaches are possible. It appears that some virtues may be spontaneous only in the sense of being
naturally endowed dispositions. But some may have to be acquired through conscious efforts. And this is the wilful building of character which later on, through continuous practice, becomes one's habitual nature.

Of course, it is very difficult to realise all the virtues in the life of a man, but I think that, the idea of the 'greatness of character' is the idea of a strong will disposition to respect some virtue to such a degree as not to be willing to compromise with it on account of worldly pleasures, comforts, securities and/or sometimes even life itself. The epics like Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata are a treasure-house of such characters having one pointed devotion to a single virtue. This is the test of a truly virtuous man. Even a single virtue is sufficient in itself to lead man towards the highest ethical ideal.

Therefore, the study of Ethics as a theory of virtues gives rise to various problems as indicated above. Besides, I have discussed some other relevant important questions about virtue in the present thesis. For example, what is virtue? Is virtue one or many? Have virtues any unity? Can virtues be classified? What is the treatment of virtues in different ethical systems such as Hedonism, Relativism, Perfectionism, Logical Positivism, Humanism, and so on? What is the treatment of virtues in some of the main Indian philosophical systems, such as, Buddhism, Jainism, Nyāya,
Yoga and Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara; Does the ultimate goal transcend virtues? What is the relation between spiritualism and moral preparations? These are some of the prominent questions about virtues, and ultimately I have suggested that ethical life (which is mainly a virtuous life) ought to culminate into spiritualism, which is not anti-ethical but rather supra-ethical in character. Moral life gets its real ethical zeal if it is oriented to spiritual life. The best moral life is truly religious in character.