INTRODUCTION.

Rajadharma in Sanskrit texts has very often been translated as 'duties of the king'. The term, however, can be and has been interpreted in many ways; and this work is being undertaken mainly to clarify the different issues involved in the interpretation of the notion and to attempt to bring out its full significance. The interpretation, especially by modern writers, vary very widely, and not all of them, it appears, have done full justice to the significance of the concept. In the succeeding pages this work will aim not only at a systematic analysis of rajadharma as it was significant to ancient Indian thought but also at an attempt to examine the politico-legal and the ethical context in which the concept developed.

There is a large number of texts in ancient Indian literature which deal with rajadharma or from which ideas on this subject can be derived. It would be impossible to deal with all such texts. Hence we are restricting our study only to a few most well-known texts which amply deal with rajadharma and which, because of their detailed treatment of the subject, can be regarded as representative texts on it.

In this connection it will be useful to describe briefly the work already done in this field by earlier writers. It is not intended, in these pages, to dispute the scholarship and originality of famous scholars like K.P. Jayaswal and P.V. Kane. It is only to be pointed out that the idea of rajadharma
cannot, even from the point of view of ancient texts on the subject, stand alone. It has to be subordinated and interpreted in the light of the wider and more profound ethical concept of dharma. Jayaswal seems somehow to have overlooked this fact, and he reads ancient Indian political theory as though it has little ethical significance. Kane has made a very valuable contribution in his monumental 'History of Dharmasāstra'. But Kane's work is so exhaustive that it includes far more topics under its scope than merely rājadharma. It is necessary, therefore, to highlight rāja-dharma, with all its connotation, as central to the political and social thought of ancient India, and furthermore, to view it as arising out of an ethical outlook basic to Indian culture in general.

Other writers like N.C. Bandyopadhyaya, U.N. Ghoshal and Beni Prasad have also dealt with the subject of rājadharma in a narrow sense shutting it off from its ethical import. Political theory in ancient India like that of the Greeks had developed from an ethical basis. This is the reason why the idea of rājadharma cannot be separated, even for purely analytical purposes, from dharma. To the modern student of political thought, who is used to regard political theory as an independent discipline, it might appear strange that we are forced to treat the subject philosophically, but it is impossible to divorce political ideas of ancient India from the general ethical beliefs of the times. In fact we would go so far as to assert that an ethically free political theory is not really possible. Man's ethical being is the mainspring behind the political and social institutions. It is this assumption that has shaped the entire interpretation.
of राजदharma in the succeeding pages.

P.T. Raju, a leading modern Indian thinker, has been one of the first to emphasise that the concept of dharma is basic to the whole of Indian life and thought. In metaphysics it has sometimes been equated with ultimate reality. In his book 'Idealistic Thought of India', Raju thinks that Indian philosophy will be lifeless if we subtract from it the conception of dharma. N.S.S. Raman, a student of Raju (and under whose supervision this work has been completed) has, in his unpublished doctoral thesis, extended this interpretation to the ethical, social, political, economic, and legal fields, and he has tried to establish that dharma is the central conception not only of Hinduism but also of Buddhism.

The word dharma comes from the Sanskrit root 'dhr' which means 'to hold' or 'to sustain'; but there is a big difference of opinion regarding the actual meaning of the term. Jayaswal (in his book Manu and Yājñavalkya) has translated it as 'law'. Kewal Motwane translates it as 'Social Relations', and B.K. Sarkar makes dharma and religion synonymous. All these definitions are inadequate in so far as they fail to explain the full significance of dharma in its ethical context. And राजदharma too, in a similar manner, has been inadequately translated so as to restrict its real meaning. For example, Jayaswal translates it as 'politics'. It will be seen that this translation, apart from its ignoring the deeper nature of राजदharma, is incorrect even on etymological grounds.

It is difficult to lay down any objective
criteria for a proper study of ancient thought and institutions. Any criteria which we might lay down may still be such as conforms to a particular viewpoint. Very often the writers might consider only points relevant to their purposes, leaving out the rest. Reading out of context is a familiar way of putting forward one's own point of view. This has been, for example, practised by the commentators on the Vedānta both ancient and modern. Another attitude is that of the colonial administrators and the missionaries who already have some pre-conceived notions about the thoughts and ideas of the people with whom they set out to work and thus they give extremely biased accounts. Yet another attitude is that of ultra-nationalism to which some of the Indian writers are unfortunately wedded. These writers attempt to show, at any cost, that Indian ideals are as good as, and sometimes even superior to, the western ideals, ancient and modern. Value judgements of this sort would not lead to any fair understanding of either the East or the West, although a genuine attempt at mutual understanding would always be welcomed in order to know the various ways in which the ancient human mind in general worked. Thus although comparative studies have been undertaken in this work, we have tried our best to avoid the above pitfalls. Comparisons have been resorted to for purposes of clarifying the meanings of certain notions as fully as possible by drawing out analogies with similar notions in other systems of thought.

No study of ancient Indian social thought can be freed from a detailed analysis of the idea of dharma on which in fact the whole of Indian social and political ethics
appears to be based. The ancient mind was in search of a principle, a standard or an order to explain facts of experience. The principle of order was taken for granted in all conceptions of reality in ancient India. It formed the criterion on which the various systems of thought were constructed. In metaphysics, the principle was termed as 'rta' by the early Vedic seers, as 'Brahman' by the Vedāntins, and as 'dharma' by the Buddhists. In the ethical sphere, the principle of order was inexplicable if it was wholly transcendental; so the moral order was construed with reference to the empirical situation.

In actual conduct too we cannot visualise a state of things without some kind of moral order. The reference here is not only to those simple rules of moral behaviour like 'Thou shalt not kill' or 'Thou shalt not steal' etc; but also to the ends and aims of conduct. The principle of dharma not only refers to such ordinary rules of conduct but is also a 'purusārtha' - an end of life. Even in ritualistic conduct (in which context the Mimāṃsakas interpreted dharma) an order is pre-supposed though the end is 'adrsta', not intelligible. A simple distinction between the ritual conduct and the ethical conduct is that the latter has an end (somewhat similar to what Aristotle called 'telos'). It is from this angle that we approach the problem of rājadharma. The end of political conduct is as fundamental as the mechanics of it. A proper approach to the study of rājadharma would be not merely to interpret it as an art of political living but also as the end of such living. Rājadharma is not a mere
elaboration of the ingenious devices in the art of government; it has to be subordinated to an end which is primarily ethical.

_Dharma_ having an indispensable reference to the empirical differs radically from the metaphysical absolute (the metaphysical Absolute of the Hegelians or 'Brahman' of the Advaitins). The absolutists interpret the world and life as 'appearance' (मयाः in the language of the Advaitins). The absolute as reality is a logically coherent principle, not found in the empirical world; and since _dharma_ is ethical it cannot divorce itself from empirical conduct. It should not also be thought that _dharma_ is essentially fixed, having a static form. Each historical age, like a particular stage in the life of a person, manifests a unique order characteristic of itself depending upon the nature and circumstances of the situation. The Principle of order, _dharma_, is eternal, but the character of this order appears to have no fixed dimensions. The saying 'राजाम केलास्य कारणम्' (a king is the cause of the epoch) only emphasises the extent to which an individual in the position of a ruler can shape his own destiny as well as that of the other people. But _rajadharma_, truly speaking, does not pre-suppose any particular political system. It is meant to embrace the entire and diverse political and social organisations of _man_.

The first two chapters of this work are an
elaboration of the above view-point. Chapters III, IV and V are attempts to interpret ājīdhamma as described in some well known ancient Indian treatises. The remaining chapters are devoted to an ethical study of kingship and government in ancient India as elaborated by the dharmaśastras. At the end of the work a critical analysis of the relation between ethics and politics is undertaken in the context of the idea of ājīdhamma as expounded in the earlier chapters.

The interpretation, as offered in this work, of this basic notion in Indian political and social thought is, of course, just a viewpoint, which has been sought to be expressed as convincingly as possible. It is realised, even at the outset, that there may be other interpretations. Attention has certainly been drawn to some of these in the succeeding pages along with their shortcomings.

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1. N.S.S. Raman - *Ethical Implications of Manu's Code*. (Rajputana University, 1956).

2. Cf. *Manusmrti* - I.35. "One set of duties (is prescribed) for men in the *Kṛta* age, different ones in the *Tretā* age and in the *Dvāpara*, and (again) another(set) in the *Kali*, in proportion as (those) ages decrease in length".