CHAPTER-1
INDIAN MORAL THOUGHT

As the title of the work suggests, the first chapter is an attempt to give an exposition of the nature of Indian moral thought with special reference to the concept of puruṣa, who is an empirical moral being continuously striving for the betterment and enlightenment of himself and society as well and not the Ādi Puruṣa of Puruṣa-Sūkta of Ṛgveda or Puruṣottama Puruṣa of the Bhagavadgītā and the like. The main objective of this chapter is to go into details of Indian moral thought through theories and concepts which are available in Indian philosophical tradition like the concept of Rta, the theory of puruṣārtha-s etc. Second chapter is devoted to the nature of puruṣa as has been discussed in Vedas, Upaniṣads and other Indian philosophical systems. The third chapter is exclusively on Mīmāṃsā school as it is the only system which provides maximum details on puruṣa as an moral agent and his actions. Fourth chapter gives an ethical analysis of the text Puruṣa-Parīkṣā of Vidyāpati Thakkura, whose main query is the nature of puruṣa. He defines puruṣa as puruṣārthavān [who has attained four objects of life, i.e. dharma (righteousness), artha (worldly prosperity), kāma (love) and mokṣa (salvation)] who is vīra (hero), sudhī (intelligent, i.e. the master of theory), and savīdyā (the skilled adept, i.e. the master of practice) qualified with śaurya (valour), viveka (discretion) and utsāha (energy). The last and the final chapter gives the conclusion.
NATURE OF INDIAN ETHICS

At the outset, it must be made clear that moral thought is basically an inward phenomenon and the actions performed by *puruṣa* who is a moral agent, are outward. Actions also involve the motive of the agent, his sense of responsibility etc. Indeed, morality has been the most basic element with reference to the concept of *puruṣa*. It may be regarded as an “institution of life for anyone to adopt in his life, so that his actions in terms of the moral point of view might be branded as good or bad, right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameful etc.”¹

Since Rgvedic period onwards, the entire philosophical tradition in India has predominantly been practical and not purely theoretical. It has been dealing with issues like ‘how life can be best lived?’, ‘what is the source of moral standards?’ or ‘who prescribes moral laws’ etc. and many more such issues. It also provides a long list of virtues that must be cultivated to achieve the goal. The answers to such issues are available in the traditional Indian philosophy which may vary or may not even convince some rational minds today, but these issues have been prominent in Indian thought. It will be clear from the following that ethics has always played an important role in Indian philosophical tradition but, rather it has been on higher pedestal as compared to other aspects because it is directly concerned with *puruṣa*. One of the Upaniṣads declares, “one who

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has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain mokṣa through knowledge.”

Indeed, the moral component has been always a major ingredient of Indian philosophical thought. Although in Vedic tradition, religious, philosophical and ethical ideas were not so much segregated as these are separately studied branches today. In Vedic philosophy there was a holistic approach to life available. But this does not amount to saying that there was no ethics in Indian thought. Probably, such a segregation was not required. Thus, to level a charge against Indian philosophy as having no ethics is not correct. “This mistaken view is derived from the superficial understanding of some of the Indian philosophical doctrines such as the so called pessimism of Buddhism and the Sāṁkhya, the doctrine of the illusoriness of the world (jagatmithyātva) advocated by the Advaita Vedānta, Śunyavāda (the doctrine of Void) of Mādhyamikās and the like.” Further “it is seldom realized that behind their superficial interpretation there lies their deeper significance which consists in conveying the demand for the restrained of the excess of worldliness which is the conditio sine qua non of the realization of the ideals of human life”. There

2 *Katha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.24.


is always an impartial and unprejudiced enquiry into the treatment of problems regarding puruṣa's life.

One unique feature of Indian ethics is the recognition of the importance of the main ideal and the attempt to determine the way to the realization of this ideal. Though the ideal is spiritual but the way to achieve it is moral. It is said, "the attachment of mokṣa is not achieved in a vacuum, nor is it pursued in a random and uncharted way. It is sought in the social life of man, by adopting primarily an ethical way of life as indispensable to it. There is no road to mokṣa that bypasses the moral ideal."5

Regarding Indian ethics one may partly agree with Prof. B.K. Matilal that what is discussed as morality today, was not discussed in the past. He says, "professional philosophers of India over the last two thousand years have been consistently concerned with the problems of logic and epistemology, metaphysics and soteriology, and sometimes they have made very important contributions to the global heritage of philosophy. But except some cursory comments and some insightful observations, the professional philosophers of India have very seldom discussed what we call moral philosophy today. It is true that the Dharamśāstra texts were there to supplement the Hindu discussion of ethics, classification of virtue and vices and enumeration of duties related to

5 P.N. Rao, Essays in Indian Philosophy and Religion, Lalvani Publishing House, Delhi, 1971, p. 64.
the social status of the individual". He further says that “the tradition itself was very conscious about moral values, moral conflicts and dilemmas as well as about the difficulties of what we call practical reason or practical wisdom. The consciousness found its expression in the epic stories and narrative literature which can therefore be used for any illuminating discussion of moral philosophy in India”. These words of Prof. Matilal clearly indicate that ethics was not only very much consistent but also a crucial part of the tradition, perhaps its presentation and the nature was different.

**RTA**

Let us for example take the concept of *Rta*. The term *Rta* occurs frequently in Indian philosophical literature and conveys a very fundamental concept. It is the foundation of morality. “*Rta* is taken to have come out of the root √R which is supposed to have two primary groups of meaning. It signifies ‘to move’ and (through movement) ‘to fit or to arrange’. Thus, movement or activity and order or organization (including law) seem to be the two basic elements constituting the Vedic concept of *Rta*. Everything in the universe which shows activity and law and order through activity may be said to have *Rta* for its underlying principle.” In later literature this term falls into disuse.

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7 Ibid., p. 23.
8 K.N. Tiwari, *Classical Indian Ethical Thought*, p. 119.
gradually and found its expression in a wider term like dharma. Prof. Kāṇe finds in Rta the rudiments of the later doctrine of dharma. According to him there are three aspects of Rta. It means “the course of nature or the regular and general order in the cosmos; with reference to sacrifice it means the correct and the ordered way of the cult of the gods; and thirdly it also means the moral conduct of man,” i.e. it stands for the cosmic order and moral order too. This moral order regulates the entire cosmos, each and every puruṣa. The entire creation is well-ordered and not chaotic because of Rta. There is essential unity in it. No ordinary puruṣa can know it, for it is concealed by itself.10

Those who know the order are Rtaṇḍa. “Rta represents sublime moral order which is inviolable. The inviolability of Rta makes it superior to gods and the cosmic ethics on the one hand, and individual human beings on the other because Rta works throughout the cosmos inevitably and justly. This implies that even in the case of individual actions Rta, the eternal moral law, is responsible for the apportionment of reward and punishment.”11 The ideas of moral order and punishment of sins are found in the hymns. These hymns are addressed to the god Varuṇa. It is the god Varuṇa who has the authority and power to discriminate between truth and falsity.12 Varuṇa is not only a

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12 Satyānte avapaśyaṁjanāṁ. Rgveda, 7.49.3.
guardian of Rta but also the punishment-giver to the one who tries to transgress it. In the Vedas it is taken as a principle of righteousness or goodness as it is clearly stated, “the wicked travel not the pathway of Rta”. The opposite of Rta has been taken as Anṛta which means pāpa or evil. It makes clear that Rta stands for principle of good. Such a rich and strict moral tradition has been available in Vedic view that no one seems to have the courage to disobey it. Such a strictness was perhaps necessary to maintain peace, harmony and overall welfare of the society. The expression of morality has been objective rather than eternal in Vedic sources which gradually changed into customs, traditions, social laws that played a vital role in forming moral laws or standards.

**Puruṣārtha**

The concept of Rta which later found its expression in dharma resulted in the concept of puruṣārtha. "The term Puruṣārtha literally signifies 'what is sought by men', so that it may be taken as equivalent to a human end or purpose....The significance of the first element (puruṣa-) in the compound is not accordingly the restriction of the scope of the ends sought, but only of the manner of seeking them. The implication of the other element (-arthā) in it is that the end is non-existent at the time it is cognized as worth pursuing,

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13 *Rgveda*, IX.73.6.
and is still to be accomplished. It is a ‘to be’ which is ‘not yet’, and therefore
demands for its attainment effort on the part of the person seeking it.”

The theory of puruṣārtha with its four components: dharma, artha, kāma and
mokṣa contains in it a complete value system of the Indian philosophical
thought. It includes material, moral and finally the spiritual aspects of puruṣa.
In other words, all the desired and desirable objects are subsumed under these
four components which are consciously pursued. Puruṣa lives in this world,
performs all the mundane affairs and finally aims for mokṣa, though it is not
possible for all puruṣa-s to achieve this goal. But ethical or moral principles
have to be pursued even for the mundane affairs.

The concept of puruṣārtha has been further illustrated by means of various
narratives in the epics like the Ramāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas etc.
The characters like the Rāma of Ramāyaṇa and the Yudhiṣṭhira of the
Mahābhārata are considered to be the protagonists of dharma. Many other texts
are available in Indian tradition which deal with any one of puruṣārtha-s, for
example, the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭīlya and Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana. Both these
texts provide valuable information about artha and kāma respectively which
reflect the practical side of the Indian view. The Arthaśāstra is a text on
practical wisdom, gain, possession and power. It’s focus is on the welfare of the
society at large. Kauṭīlya himself accepted the authority of the Vedas and

14 M. Hiriyanna, Popular Essays in Indian Philosophy, Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore,
p.65.
affirmed that the world progress is possible when maintained in accordance with the injunctions of the Vedas. This text is followed by other texts namely Kāmandakīya, Nītisāra and Sukraṇīti. The Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana deals with Kāma as one of the puruṣārtha-s. It says that kāma is a necessary food for life.¹⁵ Vātsyāyana warns readers of his text that one should view kāma with dharma and artha. His treatise is also followed by many other works such as Kokkaka’s Ratirahasya and Kālanamalla’s Anaṅgarāṅga etc. Similarly, there are the Dharmaśāstra texts which deal primarily with the dharma as one of the puruṣārtha’s. These texts deal with wide range of topics like moral conduct, caste, rules, rituals, civil and criminal laws and also include matters relating to other values such as code of conduct that govern activities related to social, legal, political and religious spheres. Both the customary code of conduct as well as personal dharma (duty) are prescribed in the Dharmaśāstra texts. According to these texts, one and the same duty may not be prescribed universally for all. Duties may be prescribed according to one’s natural inclinations, abilities, capacities, class and stage of life.

It is significant to mention that the scheme of four puruṣārtha-s has been one of the central points of the Indian philosophical tradition. It is advised that these four components should not be followed in exclusion of each other, for they are closely intertwined. Dharma denotes a moral base of the universe without which it will fall apart. In this sense dharma implies not only moral virtues or duties

¹⁵ Vātsyāyana, Kāmasūtra, 1.2.3.
but the whole set of customs, laws, rules, rituals religious beliefs and practices.
It is required for both material and spiritual gain. It has been the controlling and regulative force. Desires, enjoyment of desires, material or economical or any kind of desires are all accepted but they need to be bridled otherwise they bring disastrous consequences not only to individual puruṣa who is craving for them but also for the entire society at large. Dharma ensures a compromise between svārtha (self-interest) and parārtha (other’s interest). It is parārtha which has been kept on a higher pedestal in comparison to svārtha in Indian philosophical thought, for it helps one achieving mokṣa. There is a hidden paramārtha in it. Besides being relative to each other, dharma, artha and kāma all have intrinsic and instrumental value. Mokṣa cannot be said to have an instrumental value because it is an end in itself. After mokṣa nothing is achievable. But the other three puruṣārtha-s can be used both as means and as an end in themselves. For example, dharma which is not only good in itself but also instrumental for both artha and kāma. It permeates and pervades both kāma and artha in the sense that one is to follow and aim at kāma and artha only under the regulation and guidance of dharma. It is instrumental to mokṣa also.* This clearly gives an indication that dharma is the most important component of the entire system of puruṣārtha-s. It is, in fact, that foundational pillar on which the entire Indian ethics rests.

* (Though Prabhākara school of Mīmāṃsā held the view that the dharma is not an instrumental value to achieve mokṣa, it is an end in itself.)
Dharma

The term 'Dharma' has a wide range of meanings. The etymological meaning of dharma (derived from the Sanskrit root धर्म 'to hold', 'to support') is 'upholder', 'sustainer'. It also includes what is proper, correct, customary or traditional. Dharma also signifies right, duty, law, religion, religious merit, custom etc. In its comprehensive meaning, it represents the totality of those social and moral rules which are supposed to uphold the society. Expansion of the idea of dharma may be traced in Atharvaveda which says that earth is sustained by dharma and the same hymn maintains that the great satya, the stern Rta, consecration, austerity, prayer and sacrifice sustain the earth.

Dharma is the support of the whole world. That is why sometimes it is taken to be ultimate. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad also declares that dharma is the highest force that guarantees everybody’s right; even the weak sets the hope on dharma against the more powerful. Dharma is also represented as justice, an impersonal self-sufficient principle. The Chāndogya Upanishad (2.23) mentions three dharma skandha-s namely, (a) sacrifice, study and charity, (b) tapas,

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16 Maho dhamāṇam taviśim. Rgveda, 1.187.1
Dharmāṇanagnim vidathasya sādhanam. Rgveda, 10.92.2

17 Prithvīnim dharmanā dhrtām. Atharvaveda, 12.1.17

18 Satyam brhad ṛtam ugram dīkṣā tapo brahma yajñaḥ prithvīṁ dharayanti. Atharvaveda, 12.1.1

19 Dharmē sarvam prathīṣṭhitam tasmād dharmam paramam vadamī. Taittiriya Āranyaka, 10.63

20 Abalīyān baliyāṃsam āśaṁsate dharmena.
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.14.
austerity and (c) *brahmacarya* where the association of the idea of *dharma* with practice becomes clear.

*Dharma* may also mean the religious merit arising out of pious deeds. It is such a broad concept that one cannot find its exact synonym in any of the European languages to Sanskrit equivalent. It signifies the norm of actions and includes the conceptions like law, customs, religion, duty, virtue etc. It is a prescribed conduct that sustains the society and regulates it. Not only that it provides answers to questions like, why *puruṣa* should be moral?, but also provides justification to deeds in the form of reward and punishment accordingly. Such a justification makes *dharma* more effective.

The concept of *dharma* has been understood differently by various schools of Indian philosophy. According to Sāṅkhya school, *dharma* is subjective category. It "appertains only to the mind which is a modelization of *prakṛti* in the empirical state of *parināma* or transformation. It is *prakṛti* which evolves under *Puruṣa*’s transcendental influence into the empirical world consisting of empirical subjects with mind and organs of experience on the one hand and objects of experience on the other".  

Sāṅkhya believes that empirical self is an independent category, a form of *prakṛti* which is independent of transcendental *Puruṣa*. But *prakṛti* evolves into the empirical self under the reflection of *Puruṣa*. Naiyāyikas do not believe in such absolute dualism of the empirical self

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and transcendental self. It is only through spiritual discipline that the embodied soul becomes free and receives its transcendental purity of being. Thus, dhrama may be held to be subjective in the sense of being a quality of the atman itself in the empirical state. Dharma does not belong to the acts themselves but to their abhisandhi (intentions). Actions, which are visudhabhisandhijatah, i.e., pure intentions, are called meritorious and those which are asudhabhisandhijatah or impure intentions are unrighteous. Sāṃkhya and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika have been in agreement that dharma and adharma are purely subjective in the sense that they belong to the empirical puruṣa.

Totally divergent to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya, is the view of Mimāmsā, which holds that dharma and adharma are objective and dharma is essentially of the nature of an artha or good, i.e., of the nature of something objective and not subjective. It is not a mere artha but an artha which is codanā or vidhivākya, sanctioned by scriptural prescriptions. Mimāmsā explains artha in terms of pleasure and pain. Whatever does not produce duḥkha (pain) in excess of sukha (pleasure), is an artha and whatever produces pain in excess of pleasure is anartha. Thus, dharma is an artha which must be sanctioned by vidhivākya.

Prabhākara propounds that dharma is revealed by niyoga, i.e., the imperative or command involved in a śāstric prescription. It is revealed by preraṇā, the authoritative suggestion to the will implied in a command or imperative.

23 Codnālakṣanah arthaḥ dharmah. Mimāmsāsūtra, 1.1.2.
Dharma is an objective category. It is non-empirical or super-sensuous in nature. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and his followers, on the other hand, hold that the ceremonial and the yagādi, sacrificial acts prescribed by the scriptures are in themselves the constituents of dharma. Dharma, according to Kumārila, is not the same as that of Prabhākara who took it as apūrva (super-sensuous potency). According to Kumārila, dharma consists of those acts which are prescribed by the scriptures. This means that no scriptural prescription can lead to any anartha (evil). And as far as evils are concerned, they come within the scope of niṣedha (the prohibitory or negative prescriptions) of the Vedas which are obviously intended to lead to artha-s (good). Thus, as against Sāmkhya and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, who regard dharma as subjective in one sense or the other, the Mīmāṁsā treats it as an objective category. According to Prabhākara, this category is a sort of apūrva (super sensuous potency) with which scriptural prescriptions are imbued while in Kumārila’s view the acts prescribed by the scriptures.

Dharma helps puruṣa to subjugate his own desires for the betterment of society. It also makes puruṣa’s life worth living. Even artha and kāma should be in conformity with dharma as has been stated in the Bhagavadgītā where Śri Kṛṣṇa has identified himself with kāma which is not contradictory to dharma. Indeed, the three values dharma, artha and kāma are equally important, i.e., a balanced

24 Balanī bālvaṭāmasīmi kāmarāgpavivarjitaṁ,
Dharmaviṛuddho bhūteṣu kāmosmi bharatarṣabha.
Bhagavadgītā, 7.11.
attitude towards these values makes a life successful.\textsuperscript{25} But when there is a conflict amongst these, \textit{dharma} should prevail, says \textit{Yajñavalkya.}\textsuperscript{26}

The author of \textit{Kāmasūtra}, Vātsyāyāna also accepts superiority of \textit{dharma} in relation to \textit{artha} and \textit{kāma}. It leads to the acquisition of other world.\textsuperscript{27} He recommends that they are to be pursued in a balanced way, not one at the cost of the other. “It is possible, by means of a proper correlation of the \textit{puruṣārtha-s}, that is to say, by \textit{kāma} and \textit{artha} that they together promote and do not hinder \textit{dharma} and by subordinating these three to the ultimate end of \textit{mokṣa} - to build up a truly integrated personality and to realize an essentially full life - a life which is aesthetically beautiful (\textit{kāma}), materially rich (\textit{artha}), ethically sound (\textit{dharma}) and spiritually free (\textit{mokṣa}). It will be seen that it is these \textit{puruṣārtha-s} which have been made to serve as the psycho-moral basis of man’s role in this world.”\textsuperscript{28}

In other words, the essence of Indian moral thought lies in the fact that under \textit{dharma}, \textit{artha} and \textit{kāma} and their proper co-ordination, the pursuit of pleasure has not been suppressed, it has been rather moderated, which provides a way towards perfection i.e. \textit{mokṣa}. It may be worth mentioning here that Vedantic

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Dharmārthāveye kale śreyah kāmārtheu dharma eva ca, Artha evahe vā śreyas trivarga iti su sthitih.} \textit{Manusmṛti}, 2.224.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Arthaśāstra tu balavad dharmāśāstraṁ iti sthitih.} \textit{Yajñavalkya Smṛti}, 2.21

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Dharmasyāloukikatvār tadabhidhāyakam śāstraṁ yuktam.} \textit{Vātsyāyana, Kāmasūtra}, 1.2.16.

thinkers have suggested four prerequisites termed as sādhanā-catuṣṭya for attaining mokṣa. Though these sādhanā-s are actually prescribed for achieving mokṣa yet irrespective of its achievement, they also help puruṣa in being moral. They are:

(a) *Nityānitya-vastu-viveka* (discriminating power to distinguish between what is permanent and impermanent.)

(b) *Ihāmutrārthabhogavirāgā* (detachment from worldly and other-worldly objects.)

(c) *Śamadamādisādhanasampat* (developing self-control through six properties) which are following: śama (equanimity or restraining the internal organs), dama (restraint or controlling the external sense organs), uparāti (renunciation or abstaining from what is other than the inquiry into truth), titikṣā (endurance or tolerance), śraddhā (faith in the teaching of preceptors) and samādhāna (concentration or focusing the mind).

After following the above three means consciously, puruṣa not only can enable himself to receive knowledge to attain mokṣa but discipline himself vis-à-vis society at large.

(d) *Mumukṣutva* (desire to be released from the bondage of saṃsāra). Indian thinkers have suggested three steps to attain adequate knowledge for mokṣa while keeping in mind the variation in the nature of puruṣa. The three steps are śravana, manana and nidīdhyāsana. As these are three different steps, there are three different ways suggested in Indian
philosophical thought. These are \textit{karma-mārga}, \textit{jñāna-mārga} and \textit{bhakti-mārga}. Out of these, \textit{jñāna-mārga} is said to be the most difficult one. One who adopts this path is able to distinguish between futile and worthwhile objects. It is suggested that one who is unable to adopt this path can go for \textit{bhakti} or \textit{karma-mārga}. However, one can adopt any \textit{mārga} provided personal motive is substituted by universal well-being (\textit{lokasaṅgṛaha}).\textsuperscript{29} Constant practice of such actions may remove all selfish traces from the mind of \textit{puruṣa}. Detachment and dedication has to be the motivating force. The concept of \textquote{Anāsakta karmayoga\textquote} of Bhagavadgītā maintains the similar motive of desireless action. In the state of \textit{mokṣa}, \textit{dharma}, \textit{artha kāma} and everything else becomes meaningless. It is that unity with the Supreme which occurs when one realizes oneself in total harmony with the Supreme Self. One may get rid of continuous transmigration and all other kinds of limitations through this realization. He has nothing to gain or to lose as far as the material world is concerned. He has identified himself with everything else and cannot harm anyone.

This oneness precludes all probability of conflicts induced by the sense of individuality. In the ultimate analysis, \textit{mokṣa} is the only Real value as far as the

\textsuperscript{29} (a) \textit{Dharmam samācharent purvaṁ tato'rthaṁ dharmasanyutam,}
\textit{Tataḥ kāmaṁ careṇ paścāt siddhārthaḥ sa hi tatparam.}

(b) \textit{Lokasaṅgṛahasanyuktanām vidhātā vihitāṁ purā,}
\textit{Sūkṣmadharmārthaniyataṁ satāṁ caritamuttamam.}
\textit{Manusmṛti, 259.26.}
transcendental world is concerned. But other values play a vital role and thus are not denounced. For all practical purposes these values have to be practiced.

The domestic life is not denounced, if performed within its purview. He who has returned back to his home after having studied the Veda from the teachers’ family during leisure after performing duties to the teachers’ family according to the rules, settles in his household, pursues the studies of Vedas in a sacred place makes (his sons) virtuous, withdraws all his senses into the self, commits no violence to any being and lives in this way all his life, reaches the world of Brahman and does not return again. Therefore, moral values retain their relevance to the society for its welfare and upliftment of oneself. It is said, “study, sacrifice, morality, austerity, knowledge itself- all these ultimately count for nothing but there is a sense in which one climbs to the heights at which the highest good becomes attainable.” Moral values help one in getting the mind clearer so that ultimately the Highest Truth can be realized.

NATURE OF MORAL LAWS

One may ask as to what is the nature of Moral laws? The answer from Vedic view possibly would be that it is the eternity or objectivity that makes certain

30 Acāryakulād vedam adhiyā yathāvidhānām gurōḥ kaemātiṣṭeṣeṇābhisamāvṛtya kutumbe' sucau deśe svādhyāyam adhiyāno dhārmikān vidadhod ātmanī sarvendriyāni sampratiṣṭhāpyā, hiṃsān sarvabhūtānī ānātātra tirthebhyāḥ sa khalu evām varṇayaṇa yāvādāyaṇaṃ brahma-lokaṃ abhisamādyate na ca punar avartate. Chāndogya Upāṇiṣad, 8.15.

ideals as moral laws, e.g. \( \text{Rta} \) is eternal and objective so the moral laws must also be eternal and objective. Although theorization on such issues is not available in Vedic philosophy proper, but several theories have been advanced by different schools of Indian philosophy. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika believes in God and holds that the moral laws are divine and personal in nature as they have been emulated from God. These commands of God do not merely reveal the laws but constitute them. The Mīmāṁsā, which does not believe in God, differs from Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and dismisses this view that personal laws are divine in nature. On the contrary it holds that the moral laws are \( \text{apauruṣeya} \) (impersonal), laws comprising \( \text{vidhi-s} \) (injunctions) and \( \text{niśedha-s} \) (prohibitions) emanating from the Vedas. They are objective or as such are authoritative in themselves.

Some Vedantins hold that moral law is neither revealed nor constituted by the commands of God since God is himself in the form of Brahma. \( \text{Vidhi-s} \) (injunctions) are neither personal nor impersonal. Śaṅkara differs from this view. He holds that the moral law, as presented by the Vedic injunctions and prohibitions, is impersonal only in the sense that it is brought to light by the \( \text{vaktā} \) (communicator) of the Vedas but is not created by him. This communicator is \( \text{Īśvara} \) and not a spiritual expert. Śaṅkara further holds, unlike Mīmāṁsā, that the Vedas are only of empirical character and true, only in a relative or pragmatic sense. Thus, the value of the prescriptions of the Vedas
is pragmatic and consists in their usability. Life governed by such prescriptions is empirical and is tarnished by the ill-effects of bondage.

**ŚREYAS VERSUS PREYAS**

An ethically significant distinction is made between the good and the pleasant in the form of śreyas and preyas. It is said that the śreyas is one thing and the preyas is another. Both of these attract the individual in different ways to different objects or ends. He who chooses śreyas rises higher but he who chooses preyas fails in aim. The good and the pleasant come in mixed form. But one has to discriminate between the higher and the lower and adopt the former and shun the latter. The wise man acts accordingly does this while the ignorant does the opposite. It is also said that the śreyas and preyas come to man mixed up together. The wise man discriminates and chooses the former (the course of virtue) and rejects the latter the course of worldly pleasure. The foolish man, on the other hand, chooses the pleasurable, the preyas.

Vijñānabhikṣu, one of the commentators of the Sāńkhya school observes that search for pleasure is unable to give lasting satisfaction; it is transient and not different from pain. Naiyāyikās believe that the highest good and the supreme

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32 Anyacchreyo’nyadutaiva preyaste ubhe nānārthe purusam sinitah, Tavyoh śreyādādānasya sādhu bhavati hiyate’rthād yah preyo vrñīte. Kātha Upaniśad, 2.1.

33 Śreyāsca preyāsca manusyametastau sampritya vivinakti dhīraḥ. Śreyohi dhīraḥ abhipreyaso vrñīte preyo manda yogakśemād vrñīte. Ibid., 2.2.
ideal of life is not the attainment of pleasure or happiness but freedom from pain and sufferings. In fact, they hold that pleasure and pain are positive experiences but they are always inseparably bound together and consequently neither of the two can be attained or avoided without the attainment or avoidance of the other. But freedom from pain as an ideal gives us permanent pleasure which is never enjoyed with pain. Mīmāṃsākās like Kumārila believe that pleasure derived from virtuous acts is preferable. Thus, the Indian philosophical systems (with the exception of Čārvāka) denied seeking pleasure to be the only moral standard of life.

**AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES**

Another interesting question that may arise here is regarding scriptures alone being the authority to prescribe moral laws. In this regard, the Mīmāṃsā has strongly accounted for the authoritativeness of the Vedic imperatives but Kumārila Bhāṭṭa and Prabhākara differ from each other in their explanation on the authority of the scriptural imperatives. Both the thinkers hold that there is a moral order which includes the scriptural imperatives as its essential constituent. The Bhāṭṭa school holds that these imperatives are a sort of causes, analogous to the physical causes and they produce effects as well. Prabhākara vehemently denies this causal explanation of the scriptural imperatives. According to him, scriptural imperatives are inherently authoritative. The difference between the two views is that according to Bhāṭṭa, the consciousness of the authority of the
scriptural imperatives result from their bhāvanā (impersonal operation or process) whereas, according to Prabhākara, it is not the result of a process or any operation but prerāṇā (a unique uncaused feeling of impulsion) on part of the moral agent. But they both agree that there is no extraneous factor in the explanation of the consciousness of scriptural authority.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika holds that the scriptural imperatives are not impersonal. They are unquestionably personal being commands of the divine person or God. The divine commands in the form of scriptural imperatives may exercise their authority in an appropriate manner, but there is something on the side of the moral agent which would serve as the condition on the authority. This something is none other than the phalecchā i.e. the icchā (desire) for the phala (consequence). This phala is earned from the obedience to scriptural vidhi-s (injunctions). Hence, according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika explanation of the consciousness of the authority of scriptural imperatives consists in holding that imperatives are not impersonal but they are the commands of the divine origin. Besides, moral agent is conscious of their authority, not directly but through the intermediacy of his phalecchā.

In this way, two divergent explanations are available regarding the consciousness of the vidhi-s. One, that this consciousness is not determined by any extraneous condition i.e. it is unconditional, as represented by Mīmāṃsā. The Mīmāṃsā school is the only one to regard this consciousness as
spontaneous. Instead of being determined or motivated by the idea of an end, it is supposed to be higher than the performance of duty for its own sake, since Mīmāṃsā believes in the authoritativeness of the scriptural imperatives which is inherent and spontaneous. The other explanation is offered by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika which states that consciousness in question is determined or mediated by something and since the same is lacking spontaneity, so it is conditional. This is mainly because of the desire for the consequence in the moral agent. The conditionality of consciousness of the authority of scriptural imperatives is due to its being determined by the desire for the consequence. Such a consequence as well as desire, may be empirical or transcendental. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika belief in this conditionality is empirical in as much as the desire for consequence is concerned. This is the desire for happiness which is due to accrue from obedience to these imperatives. Sāṅkhya school though condemns scriptural imperatives, holds that these are capable of producing human happiness. It is in agreement with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika in admitting the empirical conditionality of the consciousness of the authority of scriptural imperatives.

Advaitins believe that the scriptural imperatives are significant only in the sense that they are a preliminary step in the process of spiritual realization which culminates in the direct and immediate experience of the identity of the puruṣa with Brahman. This obedience to scriptural imperatives completely disappears when the culmination of the spiritual realization is achieved. Rāmānuja, the Viśiṣṭādvatin, on the other hand, holds that the consciousness of the authority of
scriptural imperatives is not spontaneous but conditional on account of its being motivated or determined by the non-empirical desire for divine knowledge. Like Śaṅkara, he also believes that obedience to these imperatives is one of the means to the attainment of divine knowledge which is the highest good.

**MOTIVE OF MORAL ACTION**

In performing moral action, the role of volition (power of using one’s will) is pre-conditioned by Prabhākara. He believes that puruṣa must have the idea of kārṇa, the consciousness of something to be done and whatever is done, must be done with the will. Naiyāyikas do not agree with Prabhākara on the role of volition. According to them, the real motive of voluntary actions is something external. Not only that these actions are sometimes conditioned by dveṣa (aversion) besides icchā (desire), the idea of good and evil also plays a vital role. For Prabhākara, good and evil has nothing to do with the primary motive of acts. It is the motive which is prior and the idea follows thereof. Naiyāyikas, on the other hand, say that the two phenomena, namely, iṣitasadhanatājñāna (the consciousness of the good) and kārṇa jñāna (the consciousness of duty) are not separate from each other but are held together into a unitary complex. One may ask as to what constitutes the iṣtatva (desirability) of the object? This question does not arise for Prabhākara. For him, the idea of good or evil does not play any role in volitional process. The motive of performing an act is the most important requirement. But according to
Naiyāyikas the desirability of the object of desire consists in the productivity of happiness or its capacity to ward off sufferings. Unlike Čārvākas they distinguish between sensual pleasure and happiness. They differentiate between ordinary or empirical actions promoted by rāga (attraction towards happiness) or by dveṣa (aversion) and non-empirical or transcendental impulse towards mokṣa which is regarded as the highest good. Thus, Naiyāyikas speak of two kinds of objects of desire:

(a) Sukha-prāpti (attainment of happiness) or Duḥkha-parihāra (avoidance of sufferings) or both.

(b) Mokṣa (the realization of absolute freedom) the desire for pure or non-empirical.

MORAL VIRTUES

Indian moral thought has provided a comprehensive system of values in terms of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa and a long list of virtues, which may be inborn or acquired, to cultivate. Though its perennial quest for the highest goal has been the most pervasive feature yet the significance of these values for the welfare of society at large has not been overlooked. “Indian philosophy is essentially a philosophy of values. Facts as such do not fascinate the Indian philosophers except as revealers of value....A philosophy is to be judged by its
fruits, and the final fruit of philosophy is the experience of value."³⁴ As a whole, Indian philosophical thought "goes beyond logic, and becomes an affair of one's life - not sound and furry signifying nothing but a thing of utmost significance for man's entire being."³⁵ To aspire these values, purusa should inculcate virtues.

It is significant to draw a distinction between virtues and values in this context. Virtues may be said to be the traits of conduct whereas values may be said to be the given system or belief to which one aims at. The dictionary define virtue as "the quality of moral excellence, righteousness and responsibility......a specific type of moral excellence or other exemplary quality considered meritorious; a worthy practice or ideal."³⁶

The good traits of character are called virtues and bad traits are called vices. Virtues are those qualities or habits of human character which one admires and values. They make for the survival and the welfare of the groups and are therefore often deliberately cultivated. Changing social conditions make it difficult, if not impossible to set forth any complete list of virtues and vices. All one can do is to pick out those aspect of conduct which the community of that age recognizes and approves.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 153.
"The term value may refer to man's attitude for or against anything, to his preferences and avoidances, his desired-objects and aversion-objects, his pleasure and sufferings, his goals and ideals, his interests and disinterests, what he takes to be right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, useful and useless and so forth."\(^{37}\)

One may say that 'values' are core beliefs that guide and motivate actions, whereas 'virtues' are doing something right because it is good thing to do. In the present context, values are four, i.e. dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. These objectives other than mokṣa are taken both as means and ends. Values also guide and motivate actions.

A list of moral virtues recognized in the Vedas is as follows:

(a) Satya (Truth): In its conventional sense it means truth, laying stress on exactitude, accuracy etc.\(^{38}\) As an adjective satya means true, correct, i.e. corresponding to the state of fact, real. Seers claim the existence of Indra to be real.\(^{39}\) In moral sense, satya mean faithfulness and sincerity as applied to one's conduct. The relation of God with satya is variously described.\(^{40}\) It should be in conformity with Rta.\(^{41}\) In Vedic literature, at

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\(^{38}\) *Satyam bravīmi vadha it sa tasya*. *Rgveda*, 10.117.6.

\(^{39}\) *sa kilasi satyaḥ*. *Rgveda*, 2.12.15.

\(^{40}\) *Satyadharman, Satyakāma, satyasya sūnuḥ satya' srava Satyakama*. 
Ibid., 8.4.12

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 4.51.
some places satya and ṛta are equated. The Vedic seers called the satya to be the highest of all values.\textsuperscript{42}

(b) Ānurūpya (Conformity): ṛta also implies ānurūpya, according to which everything has a proper place. It is the law of nature. It should prevail not only between two puruṣa-s but in all the large groups like family, society etc.\textsuperscript{43}

(c) Dāna (Liberality): Dāna has been one of the major virtues according to Indian thinkers. It is giving food, shelter or other things to someone who is in need. It is a divine value which is highly praised by Vedic seers.\textsuperscript{44} The custom of generous gifts to the brāhmaṇa-s indicate the donors’ regards for knowledge and brhmanical virtues for the recipients. Teacher in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad instructs his pupil to give dāna with faith.\textsuperscript{45} In Kaṭha Upaniṣad, it is said that the worthless gifts result in a cheerless state of existence for the donor after his death.\textsuperscript{46} The text, Puruṣa-Parikṣā also through the tale of dānavīra highlights the importance of this virtue. It recommends that dāna to be one of the necessary virtue of earning the title ‘puruṣa’.

\textsuperscript{42} Satye sarvam pratiśhitam tasmād satyaṁ paramaṁ vadanti. Taittirīya Aranyakā, 10.63.1

\textsuperscript{43} Saṁ gacchadhvaṁ saṁ vaddadhvaṁ saṁ vo manāṁsi jānatām. Rgveda, 10.191.2; Atharvaveda, 3.30,6.74,7.52.

\textsuperscript{44} Rgveda, 10.117.1-6.

\textsuperscript{45} Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 1.11.3

\textsuperscript{46} Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1.1.3.
(d) **Ätitheya** (Hospitality): This virtue must be adopted by householder. According to the Vedic seers *agni* and *soma* are the *atithi-s* and due respect must be paid to them in rituals.\(^{47}\)

(e) **Śuddhi** (Purity): *Śuddhi* signifies that actions performed with goodwill invariably have an auspicious intention. One of the Rgvedic hymn says that may we follow the path of prosperity, like the sun and the moon, and further be associated with him who gives, who does not kill or harm and who knows.\(^ {48}\)

(f) **Śraddhā** (Faith): *Śraddhā* is also very important value. Without faith one cannot believe in supernatural power. *Agni* is kindled by faith, and the oblation is offered up with *Śraddhā*.\(^ {49}\)

(g) **Ātma-samyama** (Self-restraint): In order to rise above animal instinct, it is important to have control on actions and deeds. Due to this instinct one indulges in the pursuit of desires which create discontentment and conflict. It is said that if the senses are like horses, mind has to act as rein; if the mind itself is not restrained, the uncontrolled senses are liable to misdirect.\(^ {50}\)

Vedic seers have suggested two ways: *brahmacarya* and *tapas* to control the mind.

\(^{47}\) *Atithir grhe grhe. Rgveda*, 10.91.2

\(^{48}\) *Svasti panthām anucarema sūryācandramasāv iva, Punar dadatāghnatā jānatā saṃ gamemahi. Rgveda*, 5.51.15.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 10.151.1.

\(^{50}\) *Kena Upaniṣad*, 1.3.3-5.
(h) **Brahmacarya (Studying the Vedas):** It is one of the four stages of áśramadharma vyavasthā in which one learns to control desires. Students study Vedas, observe vows and abstain from sexual intercourse. By means of *brahmacarya* a teacher seeks his student and a maiden gets her husband.\(^{51}\)

(i) **Tapas (Austerity):** *Tapas* is another way to control animal instincts in a *puruṣa* and enhance the mental source of power. It is called a living force.\(^{52}\) Even *ṛta* and *satya* are said to be born of *tapas*.\(^{53}\) Through *tapas* one becomes invincible and attains heaven.\(^{54}\) In a *puruṣa*’s life it means controlling the senses such as self-denial of sensual enjoyments. Charity, fasting, study, *brahmacarya* all come under *tapas*. *Svādhyāya* is also *tapas*.\(^{55}\) A student should learn Vedas and memorize them. Similarly, a teacher should transmit his sacred knowledge to his pupils. It is he who guides them. The role of his guidance is portrayed in *Rgveda*.\(^{56}\) Vedic seers insisted on leading a moral life but the cultivation of virtues was not limited to Vedic times.

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51 Ācāryo *brahmacaryena brahmacārinam icchate,*
   *Brahmacaryena kanyā yuvānam vindate patim.*
   *Atharvaveda,* 11.5.17-18.

52 *Rgveda,* 10.129.2.

53 Ibid., 10.190.1.

54 Ibid., 10.154.251.


56 *Aṣetraṇvīt kṣetraṇviddam hy aprāt sa praiti kṣetraṇvīdham hy aprāt,*
   *Sa vai bhadrām anusasana syota śrutim vindaty anjasinam.*
   *Rgveda,* 10.32.7.
In Upaniṣads also adherence to these values is observed. Though all the Upaniṣads do not attach equal importance to all these values. Some lay stress on satya, some on tapas and so on. But the basic teaching of all the Upaniṣads is that practicing of moral values is an indispensable factor to achieve the ultimate goal. The Upaniṣads do not deny the phenomenal world and at the same time lay a great emphasis on moral code of conduct. In Taittirīya Upaniṣad, the teacher asks his pupil to follow only those acts which are not reprehensible. Immoral acts such as deception, theft etc. are those vices which must be avoided. Their superiority of the insistence on the application of ethical norms is apparent from the claim of Asvapati in Chāndogya Upaniṣad:

*In my kingdom there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard; none who has not installed sacred fire, no adulterers. How can there be adulterers?*\(^{57}\)

In the same Upaniṣad five vices are mentioned which were regarded as major sins in later literature. These are: stealing of gold, drinking wine, killing a Brahmin and association with those who have committed these crimes.\(^{58}\)

Almost all schools of Indian Philosophical thought take note of these virtues and insist on cultivating them. Yoga system which was founded by Patañjali, has given a set of values, which are not totally divergent from previously described

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\(^{57}\) Na me steno janapade na kadaryo na madyapah, Nānāhitagnir nāvidvān na svairī savairinī kutah. Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 5.11.5.

\(^{58}\) Steno hiranyasya surām pibāṃs caite patanti catvārah pañcamaś-cācaramstaīr iti. Ibid., 5.10.9.
ones, and are also a necessary pre-requisite for the practice of yoga. They are termed as yama-s and niyama-s. Yama-s are:

(a) *ahiṁśā* (abstention from injury to living creatures)
(b) *satya* (truthfulness)
(c) *asteya* (abstention from stealing)
(d) *brahmacarya* (studying the Vedas)
(e) *aparigraha* (renunciation)

Of all these Yama-s, *ahiṁśā* ranks the highest. One has to give up all kinds of hatred, selfishness and jealousy which are the root causes of all injurious behavior towards others. *Satya* implies that one’s conduct must be in conformity with his words, thoughts and deeds. The other three yama-s are to discipline mind, body and to create the balance between the two. According to Yoga philosophy, the five yama-s are the great universal vows not to be restricted by class, place, period or notion of duty. The five niyama-s are as follows:

(a) *sauca* (cleanliness)
(b) *santoṣa* (contentment)
(c) *tapas* (purificatory actions)
(d) *svādhyāya* (study)
(e) *Īśvara praṇidhāna* (devotion to God)

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59 *Jātideśakāla samayāvacchinnāḥ sarvabhaumahāvratapī*  
Yogasūtra, 2.31.
Besides *yama*-s and *niyama*-s, Indian thinkers also talk about *asana* and *prāṇāyāma* i.e. certain postures and control of breath for the purification of the mind so that mental and physical fitness follows. According to Patañjali, these virtues help in seeking the true significance of altruism. Pursuit of the highest good is a sheer vanity without a prior training in self-restraint and control of worldliness. He opines that these virtues be cultivated universally by all, irrespective of their social position, occupation and capacity. It shows that he has been in favour of universal ethical codes so that humanity may be brought together.

Vātasyāyana, the exponent of Nyāyasūtra, has given a list of virtues under the triple classification of *dharma*, viz., *kāyika* (bodily), *vācika* (verbal), *mānasika* (menta). Some of these virtues are listed below:

(a) *paritrāṇa* (saving the distressed)
(b) *dāna* (charity)
(c) *paricaraṇa* (social service)
(d) *dayā* (compassion)
(e) *priyavacana* (sweet speech)
(f) *hitavacana* (beneficent speech) etc.

Vidyapati’s *Puruṣa-Parīkṣā* which is an inquiry into the nature of *puruṣa* primarily deals with an exposition of virtues, which according to him are the

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60 *Nyāyabhāṣya*, 1.1.2.
basic criteria for being a puruṣa. He has posited and highlighted virtues according to the socio-political condition of Mithilā (the city which he belonged to). Obviously, these virtues are also the major component of Indian moral thought but his narrative style of presenting them is very effective to imbibe. These virtues are, namely vīrya, dhi and vidyā. Under these three, he tends to incorporate various other virtues like satya, dāna, dayā, saurya, viveka, utsāha, śraddhā etc.

It is significant to note that these virtues as vīrya, dhi and vidyā have had a prominent place in ancient Indian moral tradition. For instance, the virtue vīrya (power, force) occurs three times in Kena Upaniṣad (2.4; 3.5; 3.9). In one of the sloka-s, while explaining the knowledge of brahman, it is said that “when it is known through every state of cognition, it is rightly known, for (by such knowledge) one attains life eternal. Through one’s own self, one gains power and through wisdom one gains immortality.”

Similarly, dhi (wisdom), occurs in Iśa (10;13) and kaṭha Upaniṣad (1.2.7; 1.2.11;1.2.2). While explaining the difference between ignorance and knowledge, in one of the sloka-s, it is said that “distinct, indeed, they say is the result of knowledge and distinct, they say, is the result of ignorance. Thus, have

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61 (a) Pratibodha-viditam matam amrtatvam hi vindate,
Ātmanā vindate vīryaṁ vidyayā vindate amṛtaṁ.
Kena Upaniṣad, 2.4.
we heard from those wise who have explained to us these. We cannot grasp the nature of ultimate Reality by either discursive knowledge or lack of it. If knowledge and ignorance both are real, it is because of oneness and consciousness of multiplicity are different sides of the Supreme self-awareness.”

In Kaṭha Upaniṣad “the supremacy of wisdom to wealth, earthly as well as heavenly is shown.”

Vidyā (knowledge) also occurs several times in the Upaniṣads. In the beginning of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, a clear distinction between two forms of knowledge is made: the Parā and the Apara.64 In the category of Apara are included all the Vedas as well as the vedāṅga-s and of the Parā it is simply stated that it is that through which the immutable is attained.65 It has been stressed all through the Upaniṣad that both the forms of knowledge are to be learnt and mastered.

Without the proficiency in Apara, which makes the intellectual development complete, it is impossible to have an access to the realm of Parā-vidyā. There are various kinds of vidyā-s discussed in Upaniṣads. For example, Agni-vidyā (Kaṭha Upaniṣad), Ātma-vidyā (Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad), Udgīthā-vidyā,

62 (a) Anyad evāhur vidyayā anyadāhur avidyayā,
     Iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇāṁ ye nas tad vicacāṣire.
     Isa Upaniṣad, 10.
     – S. Radhakrishnan, Ibid., p. 574.

63 (a) Kāmasyāptim jagataḥ pratiṣṭhāṁ krator ānartyāṁ ahhyasya Pāram,
     Stoma-mahād urugāyam partisthāṁ dṛṣṭva dhṛtyā dhūrō Nachiketo tyasrākṣiḥ.
     Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1.2.11.
     (b) S. Radhakrishnan., p. 612.

64 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 1.1.4.

65 Yayā tadaksaram adhigamyate, Ibid., 1.1.5.
Upakosalavidyā, Oṁkāravidyā, Gāyatrī-vidyā, Dahara-vidyā, Dirghāu-vidyā, Bhūma-vidyā, Madhu-vidyā, Mantha-vidyā, Sāṇḍilya-vidyā, Samvarga-vidyā, Satyakāma-vidyā, Sāma-vidyā (Chāndogya Upaniṣad) and many more in other Upaniṣads.

On the basis of the above sketchy outline, it may be said that Indian moral thought provides ample schemes of virtues that govern the life of a good puruṣa. It is because of this reason that Indian Philosophy seems to be more practical than theoretical. The Indian scheme for life is more inclusive. It gives a balanced view of life. It says that regulated life can neither be lived by bread alone nor without it. Similarly, suppression of desires is neither desirable nor necessary. But over-indulgence in sensual gratification for material objects does not give a balanced view of life. That is why, it has been suggested to adopt “a holistic approach to the analysis of human behavior so that both the spiritual aspects and the material aspects could be considered together in the analysis of the human behaviour.”

According to this approach, behavior is governed by two kinds of forces:

(i) Force of materialism (behavior is governed in terms of self-interest, desire, consumption, acquisition).

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(ii) Force of ethics (behavior is governed in terms of morality and righteousness).

These two forces are represented by the two characters, Arjuna and Duryodhana from Mahābhārata. The former represents the case for social welfare with the fulfillment of material self-interest to the minimum necessary extent where as the latter represents a typical mode of maximization of self-interest in terms of material benefits. Hence, a moral agent keeps balance between social welfare and self-interest by making minimum use of material objects.

The most remarkable feature of Indian moral thought is that whatever is stated in philosophy, is to be practiced in the life of puruṣa. This is one distinctive feature of Indian thinkers that has made all the values applicable to the practical affairs of common life. A righteous application of these ideas in daily life is dharma, a regulator that connects puruṣa’s life with the spiritual consciousness and central to the whole process for proper functioning. From this point of view, dharma is an ethical as well as a social norm. It is the law of functioning or living life. It is through dharma that all conflicts between puruṣa and society can be removed. But more remarkable in the Indian view is the idea that dharma is neither very rigid nor absolute. Within a general framework, it is always changing according to the needs and development of society. Regarding three ends (dharma, artha and kāma) of life, Vātsyāyāna says that when they are considered together the proceeding one is better than the succeeding one in
order. That is, artha or polity is superior than kāma and dharma is superior than artha. But in particular context, the superiority may vary and hence, the artha is superior for a king, because the empirical world runs on this basis. In the same way, artha is superior for a courtesan also.67

One may object to this view of changing feature of dharma and ask: Does that mean moral rules are not eternal or objective as said in Vedas while talking of the concept of Rta? To answer this question one may draw a distinction between moral ideals and moral codes. Moral codes are a set of conventions, traditions governing the behavior or activity of a particular group of society, whereas moral ideals are the perfect principles; they are objective and universal. They are not applicable on any one group but on all individuals at par. In this sense, moral ideals may be called eternal while moral codes have changed from time to time. The changes in moral codes do not mean the volition of the fundamental principle of the continuity of dharma as the ideal. Dharma as a principle is unchanged but its content has always changed. In this way, dharma, being relative, in one sense, is the cause of the maintenance of society’s law and order; in other sense it is such an essential nature of the individual, his character which determines his duty towards society. This is how moral codes become working principles.

67 Eśāṁ samāvāye pūrvah pūrvo gartyan, 
Arthaśca rājñāh, tannuḷāvatvālloka-yātrayāh
Veśrayāśceti trivarga-pratipatih.
Kāmasūtra, 1.2.14-15.
Indian philosophical tradition give numerous such instances wherein variation in moral codes is followed without avoiding the fundamental principle. For instance, the Vedic notion of moral order known as *Rta* has been converted into *dharma*. Another instance is from *Mahābhārata*, where Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest son of Kunti, said to be an expert in Dharmaśāstra, says that where the source of Dharmaśāstra cannot be traced back to the Vedas, it is safe to follow the path taken by the learned people. *Mahābhārata* has assigned a prominent role to the path trodden by great people as a source of guide to moral actions. It says that the argument “leads to no certain conclusion; the *Sruti*-s are different from one another; there is not one *ṛṣi* with infallible opinion; the truth about *dharma* or duty is hidden in caves; therefore that alone is the path which the great men have trod.”\(^68\) Regarding great *puruṣa*-s, Manu says that they are the ones who are morally good. They are most refined souls. Manu has used the term *śādhu* for such *puruṣa*-s who are well versed in Vedas and free from attachment and aversion.\(^69\) Jaimini says, “those acts which cannot be ascribed to any worldly motive, and which are yet done by good men must be recognized as *dharma*”.\(^70\) This clearly indicates that instead of looking for the eternity or universality of the moral ideal, it is advisable to act wisely in the given situation. It follows from the above that moral codes are more workable than moral ideals. Since the

\(^{68}\) *Mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ.*
*Mahābhārata, Vanaparva, 314.119.*

\(^{69}\) *Manu* *śruti*, 11.1.

\(^{70}\) *Jaiminisūtra*, 1.3.7.
moral realm is distinct from logical realm that cannot be thrusted upon puruṣa-s. Sometimes even the fear of punishment and reward is unable to do that. External forces of any kind implementing moral laws have been unsuccessful.

Indian moral thought tries to provide solutions to such issues through a theory of the four puruṣārtha-s which not only impel puruṣa but also regulate him to cultivate such a conduct that he himself gets justified to act morally.

In this way, Indian thinkers discussed every detail of life with a keen insight and a scientific sense of analysis and combined it with the conception of dharma. Even political and social institutions were meant to serve material welfare of the society through moral means. All such ideas have been presented and posited in the text Puruṣa-Parīkṣā which are represented in a narrative style through various tales. According to the author of the text, for being moral, puruṣa must be qualified with certain attributes which he may not acquire simply because he belongs to a class whose members are equipped with such virtues. He has to earn his own dignity and honor as an empirical moral agent. Such an agent, who does not remain divorced from actions, is supposed to manifest concern for himself as well as for others. In this process, his actions should be guided by viveka, utsāha and śaurya.

Hence, puruṣa needs to be moral not because of any compulsion but because all experiences teach him that it is only by being moral that he can do good to
himself and to society. Not only this, he can get rid of all sorrows and sufferings too. Indian philosophical thought suggests two ways:

(i) *Nivṛtti-mārga*

(ii) *Pravṛtti-mārga.*

The latter is most commonly accepted and desirable as all cannot become *saṅhyāsin-s.* The Bhagavadgītā also preaches for the same. It talks about the *Karma-yoga.* It says that one must not be away from his duties as a member of society. However, whatever duty one may opt for, the important point is that *puruṣa* should also look for the interest for the welfare of society at large. *Puruṣa-Parikṣā* also lays stress on *pravṛtti-mārga* (though the term has not been used in the text). Tale 11, pp.48-49 clearly indicates that the holy men and fools both remain away from actions thus, are not desired by the society. The above brief analysis of Indian philosophical literature suggests that ethics is such a foundation stone on which the entire Indian philosophy stands. To negate the foundation means the collapse of the entire structure.