Chapter III
A SURVEY OF THE CONCEPT OF VALUES FROM THE VEDAS TO THE DARŚANAS

Vedic and Upanishadic Thought

The sources of the Indian philosophical ideas and religious beliefs are to be found in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Philosophy and religions have been closely associated with each other in India, because, according to ancient Indian thought the final objective of both is the same, viz., to make man realize his supreme end which is release from Samsāra, i.e., from the cycle of birth and death. The purpose of religion is to refine man’s emotions and sentiments as well as to sublimate them and transform man’s entire life. The main task of philosophy is to bring light to the understanding and thereby help man realize his true nature.

The great poet-philosopher of India, Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore has eloquently expressed about the noble ideals and values of ancient India in the following words:

“I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatory of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons- Satyam Jīrnam Anantam Brahma: Brahma is Truth, Brahma is Wisdom, Brahma is Infinite; Šantam Šivam Advaitam: Peace is in Brahma, goodness is in Brahma, and the unity of all beings”. The ancient Indian Civilization is inspired by the spiritual insight of our sages marked by certain moral integrity, a fine balance of individual desires and social responsibility. Spiritual life is the true genius of India. From the time of her recorded history India has produced, in almost every generation and in different geographical parts, holy men who embody for her all that the country holds most dear and sacred, namely, the lofty moral and spiritual ideals. The greatness of Indian culture lies primarily in her philosophy and religion, and the source of her philosophical ideas and religious beliefs lie in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads.
One important reason why Indian philosophy has maintained a close alliance with religion is that in India philosophy has been essentially a quest for values. The important incentive for philosophical quest is the desire to realize the highest value in life. In India, man's supreme goal was generally regarded as spiritual freedom or the attainment of mokṣa. This goal was the basis on which both religion and philosophy met. The philosophers adopted the method of logical inquiry. But it was felt that mere intellectual pursuit was not enough. Similarly, it was found out that, though a life lived in accordance with moral principles was absolutely essential, it was felt by the wise man that one should rise above the moral realm of the distinction between the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, and ascend to that ultimate source of all moral and spiritual values. Thus philosophical thought in ancient India was both trans-logical and supra moral. Each value was accorded its due place at the right level. Thus the Indian philosopher recognized that even the lower ends like wealth (artha) and pleasure (kāma) should be in accord with righteousness (dharma) and mokṣa, the sumnum bonum of life. Greatest importance has been given to mokṣa. It is the quest for mokṣa that has kept Indian philosophy and religion together.

We can trace the reciprocal influence of both religion and philosophy right from the hymns of the Rg Veda and the Upaniṣads, through the literature of the classical age, down to modern interpretations of traditional Indian thought. From the side of religion, the conception of a philosophic monotheism was formulated even as early as the Vedic hymns. And from the side of philosophy, a monistic or non-dualistic view was enunciated by the ancient sages. These two currents have flowered later in the philosophical systems respectively of Rāmānuja and Śaṅkara. According to Professor T.M.P. Mahadevan, the dominant trends of religio-philosophic thought in India are philosophic monotheism & spiritualistic monism.

The element of monism and monotheism is found in the Rg Veda itself. In one hymn the Rg Veda declares repeatedly that the great divinity of the Gods is one: Mahat devānām asuratvam – ekam (III.55). Another famous passage says:
Ekam sad – viprā bahudhā vadanti what is but one Reality sages call it by different names, as Agni, Yama and Mātariśvan (R.V., I. 164.46). This element of universalism is one of the traits of Hinduism. Such as approach involves the attitude of harmonization, by discovering the underlying unity of the different conceptions of God. The element of non-dualism and unity is present in what is known as the Nāṣadiya hymn of the Rg Veda (X 129).

The monistic thought of the Rg Veda has been echoed in the Upanisadic conception of Reality. The Vedas and the Upanisads are known as Śrutis. There are two views of Reality in the Upaniṣads, viz., the saprapāṇca (cosmic) and the nisprapaṇca (acomic). According to the first view, Brahman is the ground of the manifestation of the universe, but according to the second view, Brahman is the basis of the illusory appearance of the world. The cosmic view is that the Real is the one substance out of which the many modes of the world appear. The acomic view regards the Brahman as the distinctionless substrate on which the illusory world appears and that the Brahman as such is attributeless (nirguna).

Regarding the ethical thought of the Rg Veda, it may be pointed out that the summum bonum was harmony with the will of the Gods who maintained the order or Rita or the principle of harmony in nature and the cosmos as a whole. The Upanisadic view of the cosmos is that there is nothing other than the Brahman—that Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. The Taittiriya Upanisad defines Brahman as that from which all beings are born, that by which when born they live, and that into which they enter on deceasing. The doctrine of the cosmic self (Brahman or Ātman) is taught in several stories. In the Chāndogya Upanisad mentions an episode in which sage Uddālaka teaches his son, Śvetaketu the truth of the non-difference of the individual soul from Brahma.
Ethical Thought in the Upanisads

In the Rg Veda the sumnum bonum was harmony with the will of the gods who maintained the order of Rta. In the Brahmanas the sumnum bonum was sacrificial rectitude. In the Upanisads the highest ideal for man's ethical endeavours is self-knowledge. Vedic ceremonialism and caste duties give way to a new spiritual quest, which turns inward for the purpose of understanding Ultimate Reality. This quest is eloquently expressed in this well-known prayer:

From the unreal (asat) lead me to the real (sat)!
From darkness lead me to light!
From death lead me to immortality!

The motivation behind this introspective search is the fundamental idea running through the early Upanisads that "underlying the exterior world of change there is an unchangeable reality which is identical with that which underlies the essence of man". Stated in the words of the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad:

Verily, he is the great, unborn Soul, who is this (person) consisting of knowledge among the senses. In the space within the heart lies the ruler of all, the lord of all, the king of all. He does not become greater by good action nor inferior by bad action.

Summarily stated, the Upanisadic sages synthesised two notions, which originally had totally different connotations, namely, "Brahman" or the ultimate source of the external world, and "Atman" or the inner self of man. These sages teach that the Brahman of the macrocosm is none other than the Atman of the microcosm—"That Self is, indeed, Brahman." By equating Brahman with Atman, each term came to signify the eternal ground of the universe, including the ground of man's being and the being of nature. Thus, in the course of his speculation, the Indian sage "at last reached the goal of his long quest after unity – a goal which left all mythology far behind and was truly philosophical."
The Chāndogya Upaniṣad records a famous passage illustrating this Brahman Ātman doctrine. Śvetaketu, son of Uddālaka Āruni, having completed his Vedic studies, “returned at the age of twenty-four, conceited, thinking himself to be learned, proud”. His father said to him:

“Śvetaketu, my dear, since now you are conceited, think yourself learned, and are proud, did you also ask for that teaching whereby what has not been heard of becomes heard of, what has not been thought of becomes thought of, what has not been understood becomes understood?”

Finding the son to be ignorant of the knowledge of Brahman, the father proceeds to impart divine knowledge to him. He posits an ultimate source called Sat or Being. Its essence lies in consciousness. Sat thought to itself: “Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself!”

Through its act of procreation, Sat brought the whole of the universe into being, including human existence. The unitary World-Soul is thus the immanent reality of nature and of man. Āruni explains to Śvetaketu: “That which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Ātman (Soul). That art thou, Śvetaketu.”

This story, along with cognate passages, has five lessons of ethical import. First, the Upaniṣads postulate that the ethical ideal of realizing one’s unity with Brahman is the highest goal for which man can strive. Herein lies man’s ultimate value, his greatest bliss, his truest freedom, his deepest peace. By uniting with the Brahman, the Ātman transcends all such vicissitudes of mortal existence as hunger and thirst, sorrow and confusion, old age and death. “As the sun, the eye of the Universe remains far off and unaffected by all sickness that meets the eye, so also the One, the Ātman, who dwells in all creatures, dwells afar and untouched by the sorrows of the world.” Thus, no state can excel the state of realising one’s identity with Brahman.
Second, the Upaniṣads teach that though this state of perfect knowledge is so exalted, it is possible to achieve the ideal in one’s present life. True, there is the view that Brahma-realisation is only reached after death; but there is also the view known as jivanmukti, which states that mokṣa (liberation) can be reached here and now. The Katha Upanisad affirms: “when all the desires the heart harbours are gone, man becomes immortal and reaches Brahma here.” The shift in the doctrine of mokṣa from the eschatological realm to the empirical realm is ethically significant. In place of the speculative basis contingent on faith, mokṣa is given a philosophical basis contingent on reason and will. The goal is still in the distant future, and few there are who attain thereto, but it is no longer a hypothetical future. The end is assured from the beginning as moral progress is made through various stages of life. The saint who reaches this goal expresses his cosmic identity in the phrase “Aham Brahmāsmi” (I am Brahman).

The third lesson is that liberation is not a new acquisition. It is the knowledge of Brahman, not the product of that knowledge. Causation is inapplicable to Brahman because Brahman, is being, not becoming. If mokṣa were the product of the knowledge of Brahman, then, having had a beginning, it would also have an ending. “Arising from non-existence, it would again dissolve into nothingness.”

Fourth, since mokṣa is not acquired from without but realized from within, the mokṣa doctrine becomes the basis for moral optimism in that the capacity of the present life to achieve perfection is fully recognized.

Fifth, the story of Śvetaketu shows there is a correlation between self-knowledge and morality. The former is the foundation of the latter. The presence of pride and self-conceit in Svetaketu was a sure sign to his father that the boy lacked knowledge of Brahman. It was self-contradictory for an enlightened person to entertain such vanity in his heart, because only the pure in heart see Brahman. Enlightenment presupposes the radical elimination of all manifestations of egocentricity.
Though mokṣa is the present perception of eternal Reality, ignorance prevents men from reaching it. So, just as those who do not know the spot might go over a hid treasure of gold again and again, but not find it, even so all creatures here go day by day to that Brahman-world (brahma-loka) [in deep sleep] but do not find it; for truly they are carried astray by what is false.

Untruth lies in the empirical view, which accepts diversity as the sole truth about the world instead of probing deep until the unity of Brahman is reached. Metaphysical error translates into evil on the moral level. Whereas in the Rg Veda, evil lies in the contradiction of the will of the gods, and while in the Brahman as it was mostly deviation from sacrificial rectitude, in the Upaniṣads evil arises out of the mistaken notion that Reality is finite. Finiteness breeds desire. Ignorantly imagining that he is separate from others, man sees other as rivals in the fight for individual survival. All of the evils, which alienate man from man, and man from nature are due to the false consciousness of individuality. Such men are prisoners of suffering, sickness, and death because they ignorantly desire what is sensuous and finite.

How does one overcome such ego-desires or ahaṁkāra? It is at this point that the Upaniṣads insist on the indispensability of the ethical life. Identity with the Supreme is impossible for one who has not become “calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring and collected.” Only through purification and concentration ahaṁkāra is overcome. However, because ahaṁkāra is deeply embedded in man’s ego, it cannot be eradicated suddenly or automatically. Hence the need for an ascetically progressive period of moral discipline covering one’s entire life.

Many important ethical and axiological doctrines follow from the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic teachings on the nature of Reality as the supreme spirit, which is both immanent in the world and transcendent of the world. The doctrine of karma is one such doctrine, which follow from this metaphysical teaching. The Sanskrit word “Saṁsāra” means the flow of life from beyond birth to beyond death. If Brahman is the
eternal Reality, and if we are not different from it, birth cannot be our beginning, nor death our end. The soul is eternal, though it appears to be born and to die. Birth and death are the changes that affect the body like growth and decay.

It is maintained that the kind of birth, the soul takes and the type of enjoyment that falls to its lot are determined by its own past. The term *karma* mean work and the result of work. The Law of *Karma* states that the sphere of morality is an ordered realm. It is the moral equivalent of the physical law of causality. "As you saw, so shall you reap"—this is the motto. The present has come out of the past, and our future shall depend upon our present. As the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad puts it. "As is an man’s desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such is the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself." (IV 4,5). Thus, the twin doctrines of *samsāra* and *karma* relate to the empirical life of individual human beings. While the concept of *samsāra* and *karma* relate the empirical life of individual human beings. While the concept of *samsāra* tells us that this world order involves constant change, the Law of *Karma* gives us the principle governing the course of change.

Different ways of attaining *mokṣa* have been suggested. *Mokṣa* is the eternal nature of the self, and not a spatio-temporal state. What prevents the soul from realizing it is its own ignorance or *ajñāna*. When ignorance is removed through wisdom of the nature of the self, one attains release from the bondage of *samsāra*. *Jñāna-yoga* is the path of self-knowledge, which effects the final deliverance. It consists of three stages: *śravāṇa* or study of the Vedanta, *manana* or reflection on what the texts teach, and *nididhyāsana* or continued meditation on their support. Through these stages ultimately the darkness of ignorance is removed by the light of self-knowledge.

Another method is the method of action, known as *Karma-Yoga*. This doctrine is set forth in the Bhāgavad-Gītā. It is taught in the Upaniṣads too, especially in the Ḫṣa Upaniṣad (1-2), where it is said: "through the renunciation of that (the chang-
ing world) mayest thou enjoy; don’t covet anyone’s riches. In this way alone the deed adhere not to the man.” Thus, the object of *Karma-Yoga* is to remove selfishness from the mind of the individual man. The *Gītā* teaches *Niskāma Karma* (desireless action). But desireless action is a difficult thing since every action normally arises out of some desire. This is a problem for the ordinary mortals. The answer to this problem is provided by another aspect of spiritual discipline viz., *Bhakti-Yoga* or the path of devotion. In this path, *Karma* is transmuted into *Prema*, devotion to God or love of an ideal. This is one way for the attainment of *mokṣa*: However, ancient Indian thought emphasizes that all these three paths of *Jñāna, Karma* and *Bhakti* lead to the same goal of Self-realisation and release from the bonds of *samsāra*. The *Gītā* lays emphasis on the synthesis of these three paths for the realisation of the goal.

According to the Upaniṣads, the highest goal of man is the ethical ideal of realising one’s unity with the Brahman. Here in lies man’s highest value, his greatest bliss, his truest freedom, his deepest peace.² Further, the Upaniṣads have given a philosophical basis for *mokṣa* or liberation when it is pointed out that Brahman can be realized through knowledge. The purity of the body and mind has been stressed upon in order to know the Ātman. The control of the lower animal impulse is prescribed. The struggle between reason and passion is vividly described in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad as the struggle between *sreyas* (the morally excellent) and *preyas* (what to most is dearer than the good, that is, what pleases).

The purpose of the personal and social ethics was to build up soul force, which alone realizes the Ātman is realized. The *Brahādāranyaka Upanishad* says: “having become calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring, one should see the Self in the Self.” It is not our intention to explicate the further stages of religious development; suffice it to say that on the highest stage of contemplation one attains an immediate certainty to Brahman. When the supreme knowledge of the Ātman is realised, the individual is transported beyond the ethical plane to the religious plane. This is the
level of moksa or supreme liberation. On this level one is not only beyond evil, but also beyond the good, for the one presupposes the other. The Brāhādāranyaka Upaniṣad paradoxically describes this state of freedom: “In the highest state a thief is not a thief, a murder is not a murder. He is not followed by good nor followed by evil, for he then overcomes all sorrows of the heart”.

The secret of this state is that the enlightened one is devoid of fear and is therefore untroubled about the past. “Him does not afflict the thought, why have I not done what is good, why have I committed sin”. The reason he is fearless is because, whereas on the moral level the individual is the doer, on the religious level he is no longer a doer. The individual is now identified with the Ātman who is essentially a non-doer, and hence, for the Ātman the issue of good and evil simply does not arise. The Absolute is above all moral distinction’. Thus, the categorical imperative that one ought to do what is good is significant only on the moral level because here the battle between the Ātman knows no struggle, the battle ceases; therefore, the command to do what one ought to loses its former meaning. Regrettably, this supra-ethical teaching of the Upaniṣads is taken for the antithesis to morality.

Ethical Thought in the Bhāgavad-Gītā

The teaching of the Bhāgavad-Gītā has for its starting point the misery of mundane existence. The soul is viewed as trapped in the cycle of rebirths because impeded empirical consciousness deludes it into imagining that it is dependent on the body and that it undergoes all the sufferings of finite existence. Essentially, the soul is quite independent of the body; but as long as it is ignorant of its true nature, it remains a prisoner in “this perishable, unhappy world.”

In the light of the human predicament, ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are defined in relation to the soul’s release from or resignation to the weary round of rebirths. Release leads to the attainment of Nirvāṇa, poetically described in these words of Krṣṇa: When the embodied soul transcends these three gunas, whose origin is in the body, it is freed from birth, death, old age and pain, and attains immortality.
The *sumnum bonum* is approached from metaphysical and theological points of view. Metaphysically, it is the identity of the Ātman with Brahman. “He who is happy within, whose joy is within and whose light is within; that yogin becomes Brahman and attains to the bliss of Brahman.” Theologically, the goal of life is union with Īśvara: “He who is disciplined by the *yoga* of practice and meditates on the supreme person, his mind not straining after some other object, he reaches, O Partha, that supreme divine Spirit.”

Neither identity with Brahman nor union with Īśvara is possible without the aid of practical morality. Morality provides the “foundation on which the superstructure of the holy life culminating in Nirvāna is built.”

The Gita’s formula for ethical activism is a synthesis of two conflicting modes of discipline, both of which were considered orthodox paths to salvation.

The first form of discipline was known as *pravṛti* or ‘active life’. Those who embraced this ideal engaged in Vedic rituals and all of the duties prescribed in the Kalpa Śūtras. The motive for their actions was reward in heaven. The object of desire did not mitigate the basic selfishness of these religious rites. Their selfishness lay in being devoted to the fruit of action, and it made little moral difference as to where the fruit were reaped – on earth or in heaven.

The second form of discipline was known as *nivṛtti* or ‘quietism’. Those who espoused this ideal abandoned all religious and social obligations, replying solely on *Jñāna* or knowledge as the pathway of salvation. It was their reasoning that since all actions – good and bad – must have their consequence in reincarnations, the most direct way to escape the evil to rebirth was minimizing all ‘works’, good ones included.
The Gītā counters the preceding argument that karman is evil and should be abandoned because it leads to rebirth by making a shrewd analysis of human behaviour. It does not stop with karman, but goes beyond karman to kāma. Behind the deed lies the desire. Aversions and attachments determine a man’s behaviour; therefore, a man’s real enemies are not actions but passions. Actions are only the motor manifestations of the impulse to love or to hate.

The Gītā’s expression for detached activism is karmayoga. Karmayoga treats that act as an end in itself and not as a means to another end. The classic formulation of karmayoga is contained in these words: In action only hast thou a right and never in its fruits. Let not thy motive be the fruits of action; nor let thy attachment be to inaction.

Thus, in the principle of karmayoga the Gītā synthesises the positive elements of pravṛtti and nirṛtti. “While it does not abandon activity, it preserves the spirit of renunciation. It commends the strenuous life, and yet gives no room for the play of selfish impulses. Thus it discards neither ideal, but by combining them refines and ennobles both.” Explain in this way, karmayoga sounds ethically desirable. It is said to impart inner poise, self-mastery, and to free one from passion and pride. But granting yoga is desirable; is it possible?

Examine the Gītā’s description of the Sannyāsin. “He who does the action that should be done without concern for its fruits, he is a Sannyāsin, he is a yogin, not he who does not light the sacred fire and performs no rites.” Sannyāsa renunciation is described here as an inward attitude – not something connected with outward works. Psychologically, this detached attitude seems impossible. All voluntaristic activity presupposes decision, and there can be no decision without desire. Human behaviour, unlike the instinctive behaviour of animals, is always motivated; hence its moral character. How then are we to understand Gītā’s description of the Sannyāsin as one who performs his prescribed duty “without concern for its fruit”?
Upon closer examination it becomes clear that the detachment which the Gita inculcates is only in respect to worldly aspirations, such as the desire of Arjuna for the recapture of his ancestral kingdom. Preoccupation with mundane interests prevents the mind from attending to the needs of the inner life and must, therefore, be eliminated. But while karmayoga enjoins the renunciation of all temporal ends, its concept of the Self does provide motivation for seeking ends in consonance with its higher nature. When the Self’s destiny is conceived of as achieving oneness with Brahman, yogins are told to “perform actions only with the body, the mind, the intellect or the senses, without attachment, for self-purification.” The concluding words, “for self-purification,” illustrate the sole purpose for which the Gita legitimates motivated action. In serving society the yogin is perfectly disinterested, performing works “only with the body,” and so on, but this detached action is not without motive. Its motive is cleansing of the heart whereby the goal of self-realisation is achieved. In the case of those yogins whose hearts have already been cleaned, they are encouraged to work for the welfare of the world, and also to set ideals for others.

Similarly, when the Self’s destiny is conceived within a theological framework, the devotee is told, “Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest, whatever thou givest, whatever austerities thou performest, do that, O son of Kunti, as an offering to Me.” The concluding words, again, illustrate the ultimate objective of all the service that is performed as God’s work. The devotee disinterestedly performs divine service to place himself in the hands of God-eternally secure. Arjuna is assured, know thou that My devotee never perishes.

Up to this point we have explored the ethical meaning of karmayoga, which teaches that a man must perform his duties as a member of society without any thought of personal gain.

*Value in the two Epics*

The Rāmāyana along with the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas constitutes the epic literature of India, comprising the Itihasa and the Purana, the study of which has
been rightly stressed as necessary for the correct interpretation of the Vedas. For over two thousand years, the Rāmāyana like the Mahābhārata has been influencing deeply the religious and moral thoughts. Swami Vivekananda has declared that the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata are the two encyclopaedias of the Hindus portraying an ideal civilisation, which humanity has yet to aspire after. According to MacDonnell, "Probably no work of world literature, secular in its origin ever produced so profound an influence has on the life and thought of people as the Rāmāyana."

The Rāmāyana is regarded as a Dharma Šastra, a sacred text teaching righteousness. It expounds the principles of eternal law (sanātana dharma) and presents the ideals of good conduct (sadācara), which is one of the bases of dharma according to the Smritis. The Rāmāyana is a nitiśāstra expounding lofty ethical ideals. The importance of moral virtues - simple living, modesty restraint, obedience to elders, charity and humanity - is fully stressed. One can gather from the Rāmāyana a string of ethical thoughts that have become proverbs.

The Mahābhārata is an epic, which is encyclopaedic in nature and contains whole chapters on religion, mysticism, and philosophy. The different system of philosophy, i.e. the Yoga the Saṅkhya, the Vedanta, and the Lokayata and the spiritual practices of many religious sects, such as, Saiva, Pāñcarātra, Śākta, Saura, Nandidharma, and others are described in this epic. Along with the Vedic element, this epic refers to the worship of Viṣṇukṛṣna, Brahma and Rudrā Śiva. The Bhagavad-Gīta, which forms the essence of the Mahābhārata, describes Vasudeva Kṛṣna, the incarnation of Narayana-Viṣṇu "to be all", the Supreme Being.

The Mahābhārata is also Dharma Sastra, which sets high standard of morality in human life. The doctrines of Yājñavalkya, Pāñcaśikha, Devala, Bhīṣma, Sanat-Sujatate, are Śri Kṛṣna, and imbued with the spirit of mysticism. The ultimate goal of life is expressed in various terms such as nirvāṇa, ānanda, and amṛta, the heavens of various gods, the world of the Fathers, and the hell also find their place. The goal of
humanity is to become free from the series of births and sorrows. It has been pointed out that both pleasure and pain are ephemeral (anitya), and that we must learn to bear them with composure.

The Mahābhārata describes the four puruṣārthas. Dharma is the code of life, the bond that keeps society together. The Śāntiparvan ordains: “Whatever is not conducive to social welfare, and what you are likely to be ashamed of doing, never do it. Whereas dharma is the genus and applies to all, the āśramas and varnas are the species. It is generally ordained that one should observe rules of caste (Varnāśrama dharma). A person is expected to fulfill his duties and obligations as a householder. The observance of ācāra (custom) is regarded as obligatory for all. In the case of conflict of opinion, one is to follow the footsteps of the great authorities.

The Mahābhārata teaches universal morality, love of all human beings, and renunciation of the world. These come under the category of nīti. This epic also enunciates the doctrine of Karma and states that by knowledge a person becomes free from the bond of rebirth. Discussions on the different types of whether destiny or self-effort prevails Karma, and on the problem in life are also met with. There is a general tone of ahimsā (non-injury) in the story of king Uparicara in the Narayaniya section of the Mahābhārata, and also in dictums like, “that which is conducive to the utmost welfare of human being is the truth.”

The summum bonum of life is to have perfect peace of mind and joy, which does not know sorrow in this world and the next. The Mahābhārata teaches for the first time the liberal doctrine that there cannot be any barrier of caste, creed, or sex in the pursuit of emancipation. The Bhagavad-Gītā teaches the three yogas- of karma, bhakti, and Jñāna- and points out that God showers His grace on any devotee irrespective of caste, creed and sex, and that even the offering of a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or a little water, with devotion, is acceptable to Him, the Lord of the universe. The
whole attempt of the Mahabharata is to bring together the diverse philosophical systems of the time. The Gitā is a unique scripture in this direction.

The two great epics, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata may be regarded as the treasure of philosophical and ethico-spiritual values. The Rāmāyana gives great importance to the ideal of dharma, which is the path of righteousness. Dharma is regarded as the chief factor that shapes man’s life. Lord Rama who is called Māyādāpurūsa or the Noble Personality is the embodiment of all virtues. He is also considered as the protector of dharma.

The Mahābhārata represents the attitude of the Hindu mind towards the problems of higher thought and wisdom. The ultimate goal of life is expressed in various terms as nirvāṇa, ananda and amṛta. The goal of life is regarded as freedom from the series of births lead to sorrows and sufferings. The Mahābhārata describes the four puruṣārthas or the goals of life. Great emphasis is laid on dharma. Dharma is the code of life, the bond which kups society together. The summum bonum of life is to have a perfect peace of mind and joy which does not know sorrow in this world and the here-after. The Bhāgavadgītā, which forms a part of the Mahābhārata gives a synthetic approach to the paths of jñāna, karma and bhakti as we have stated above.

The Bhagavadgītā is the heart of the Mahābhārta. The Gitā was developed out of the philosophical content of the Upaniṣads. But unlike the metaphysical content of the Upaniṣads, the Gītā is practical. It emphasises bhakti (devotion) and dharma (moral law). The Gītā has influenced the shaping of Hindu ethics throughout the ages.

*Ethical Thought in the Dharma Sutras, Dharma Śāstras, Epics*

Up to this point we have studied the ethics of the Vedic period based on an examination of Hinduism’s śruti literature. Our present task is to study the development of Hindu ethical thought in smṛti literature covering the period 500 B.C. to 300 A.D.
*Smṛti* means, “that which is remembered.” It incorporates all authoritative texts outside the Vedas. For the purpose of ethics, the most important works in this collection are the *Dharma Sūtras, Dharma Śāstras,* and the two epics.

The *Dharma Sūtras* are aphoristic codes (*sūtras*=threads), succinctly designed to teach students the general principles of *dharma* or moral law. The sanctions for ethical behaviour was religious and not judicial. There is nothing systematic about these textbooks, nor are their treatments of law very thorough. In the area of civil and criminal law their teachings are negligible. Among these early law books the most significant for our purpose are the *Dharma Sūtras* of Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasistha, and Āpastamba. They date from approximately the sixth to second centuries B.C.

The *Dharma Śāstras* date later than the *Dharma Sūtras* are more precise and complete. Like the early law books, the *Dharma Śāstras* are not too keen about legal distinctions and technical definitions as they are concerned with moral duties. The most authoritative text on the subject of *dharma,* professing divine origin, is the Laws of Manu. It is claimed: “What Manu says is medicine.” The date of its composition is sometime between the first century B.C. and the second century A.D. Next in rank to the code of Manu is the Yājñavalkyasmṛti. It is later than Manu, probably belonging to the early Gupta period when there was a renaissance of Brahmancial culture.

The Mahābhārata and Ramāyana are the two most cherished works of popular Hinduism. “There is hardly a Hindu who has not heard the stories and teachings of these epics from childhood, imbibing them as it were with his mother’s milk.” The epics are splendid illustrations of the evolutionary character of Hindu thought, having undergone successive accretions and transformations over a period of four to five centuries.
The Mahābhārata or “Great war of the Bhāratas” is a history of the conflicts between two royal houses, the Pāndavas and Kauravas. Its present form was substantially completed by the second century B.C. It reflects an era when Hinduism was being challenged by such heterodox movements as Jainism and Buddhism, and attempting to come to terms with the new liberal spirit that was in the air. Its voluminous verses contain teachings pertaining to statecraft, religion, and morals. In its later portions its heroes are much taken up with performance of religious duties. The comprehensiveness of its religious and ethical teaching is enunciated in its final section: “Whatever is worthy to be known in matters relating to the welfare of man is here; and what is not here is nowhere else to be found.”

The heart of the Mahābhārata is the Bhagavad-Gītā; indeed, the Gītā is the heart of Hinduism itself. “The song of the Lord” was developed out of the philosophical matrix of the Upanishads, but unlike the metaphysical preoccupation of the Upanishads, the spirit of the Gītā is practical. It emphasises bhakti (religious devotion) and dharma (moral law). As the incarnation of Vishnu, Kṛṣṇa the charioteer engages in a charming dialogue with Arjuna the warrior-prince who is up against a prodigious moral dilemma. In the course of arguments and counterarguments, important issues of moral duty are raised and the ethical validity of disinterested action is clearly explained. Because of its unparalleled influence in shaping Hindu ethics through the ages, a special section has been devoted to the ethical thought in the Gītā.

The second epic, the Rāmāyana, is more secular and smaller than the Mahābhārata (recensions vary from 50,000-90,000 lines, against the Mahābhārata’s more than 200,000 lines). It imparts the kinds of ideals that most characterise the personal, domestic, social, and public life of the Hindus. Like the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyana gradually developed into a textbook of dharma. Valmiki, the author, probably gave poetic form to the Rāma legends he had collected in approximately the third century B.C. However, extant versions of the poem date from about 200 A.D.
The story is about Rama who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. As the embodiment to dharma, he defeats Ravana the king of the demons. Sita, Rama’s wife is the epitome of womanly virtues because of her faithfulness and unwavering devotion of her husband. The ethical influence of the Rāmāyana has been popularised through devotional movements in which Rāma and Sita are worshipped as divinities. Mahatma Gandhi was inspired by the epic’s ideal or Rāmarājya in his nonviolent struggle for India’s independence. Judged by its impact both on India’s leaders and the masses of her illiterate people, the prophecy in this poem seems to be correct, that as long as mountains stand and rivers flow on the face of this planet, so long shall the fame of the Rāmāyana story and its author be perpetuated.

With this thumbnail sketch of the literature, we turn to its contents. The smṛtis continue to maintain the Upaniṣadic ideal of enlightenment as the summum bonum. Their institutionalization of the third and fourth aśramas emphasizing the ideals of contemplation and renunciation as the means to liberation, attest to the smṛti’s acceptance of this philosophical ideal. At the same time, the smṛti literature continues the tradition of the Brāhmaṇas with a view to evolving a define order of Brahmanical society. Thus, by espousing the ideals of the Upaniṣads and the Brāhmaṇas, the smṛti writers unite “the realm of desires with the perspective of the eternal”. However, of these two goals, the practical goal receives greater attention than the transcendental one. This evidenced by the formulation of the puruṣārthas (human values) constituting the ‘aims of man’. The three aims (trivarga) emphasised are: dharma, artha, and kāma. The puruṣārthas provide the psycho-moral basis for the aśrama scheme.

The key to understanding Brahmanical society is found in the first puruṣārtha, namely dharma. Indeed, dharma is the key to understanding the whole of Hindu culture, past and present. The Sanskrit root meaning of this protean word is dhr, ‘to hold together.’ It is a development of the earlier Rgvedic idea of Ṛta, which, as we have seen, represented cosmic law operating in all phenomena – natural, religious, and moral. It provided the Vedic seers will the ethical norm by which men
could relate to nature, to one another, and to the gods. In the smṛti period this law permeating the whole universe was called dharma. Within the social order, dharma was explicitly defined in terms of certain duties and obligations, which were codified in the great law books. These codes of social behaviour are divided into three main classes: Varnadharma—duties pertaining to the four castes; Āśramadharma—duties pertaining to the four stages of life; and Sadhāranadharma—common duties binding on all persons, regardless of caste or station in life.

The preceding ideal social structure provided the framework within which all questions of social and moral behavior were answered. Dharma, expressed through specific duties and obligations, served as the criterion for ethical conduct. Ethical decisions were to be resolved, not on the basis of the private conscience, but social conscience. The authority of the social conscience lay in the Vedas, the smṛtis, and in the practices of good men. Only as a last resort could the individual determine moral behaviour through his own conscience and the satisfaction of his heart. Thus, there is no gainsaying the fact that the ethics of the smṛtis is authoritarian, being rooted in revelation. Even when the individual makes his own decision in some unusual situation, it must entail the rational application of Vedic authority.

We will start with the special duties known as Varnadharma. The basic social ideal is the division of society into four castes: Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śudras. These divisions are of divine origin. The Brahmin was created from the mouth of Brahma; the Ksatriya from his arms; the Vaiśya from his highs; and the Śudra from the Lord's feet. The ethical implication of the divine origin of caste is that it is an integral therefore, it is morally incumbent that one obediently accepts his role in compliance with "sacred law."

To the Brahmin is assigned the role of "teaching and studying (the Veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms)." By virtue of his birth from Brahma's mouth, being firstborn, and possessing the Veda,
the Brahmin is considered “the lord of this whole creation.” No created being can surpass him “through whose mouth the gods continually consume the sacrificial vi-ands and the manes the offerings of the dead.” A Brahmin who dutifully performs his *dharma* is the most excellent of created beings. “The very birth of a Brâhmaṇa is an eternal incarnation of the sacred law; for he is born to (fulfill) the sacred law, and becomes one with Brahman.”

Of course, the Brahmin was expected to live up to his lordly status. As the educator of youth, the minister of religious and spiritual needs of the family, and as the protector of *dharma*, the Brahmin had to lead an exemplary life. He had to be a man of tapas, persistently striving for enlightenment. He had to be humble — “a Brâhmaṇa shall not name his family and (Vedic) gotra in order to obtain a meal; for he who boasts of them for the sake of a meal, is called by the wise a foul feeder.” The Brahmin had to “fear homage as if it were poison; and constantly desire to (suffer) scorn as (he would long for) nectar.” He had to be courteous — “a Brâhmaṇa who does not known the form of returning a salutation must not be saluted by a learned men, as a *Stâdra*, even so is he.” A Brahmin teacher was to be a man of “Sweet and gentle speech.” whose “thoughts are pure ever perfectly guarded.” He must place wisdom above wealth, and should be more ready to give than to receive.

The preceding description of the Brahmin’s character is based on Manu Smṛti, but other sources would equally support the underlying moral logic that the higher the caste, the greater the ethical expectation. By virtue of the same ethic, the sins of the Brahmin were most grievous, Gautama says: “if a learned man offends, the punishment should be very much increased”. Similarly, the Mahābhārata adds, the higher the status, the greater the punishment.

Regrettably, due to four evil influences of the caste system, the eternal norm we have just looked at did not always prevail. First, the caste system had the effect of attributing greater moral depravity to the non-Brahmin. A Brahmin violating a Śūdra’s wife was considered less guilty than a Śūdra ravishing the wife of a Brahmin.
Second, the criterion for being a good Brahmin was often more biological than ethical. The law stated it was better to give alms to a Brahmin, unworthy though he be, than to a non-Brahmin possessed of merit. In the same vein, when making offering to the gods, one must "not enquire into the qualities or descent of a Brähmana whom he means to invite. Apparently, his being a Brahmin by birth was a sufficient qualification of merit.

Third, notwithstanding the ideal calling of humility in respect of birth, there was the arrogant claim: "A Brähmana, though ten years old, and a member of the kingly caste, though a hundred year old, must be considered as a father and son," and of these two, the Brahmin was the father. With equal arrogance it is stated that should a Brahmin and Ksatriya cross paths, the Brahmin assumes the right-of-way. The real height of contempt and exorbitant self-importance is reached in the law which ordinarily forbids a Brahmin to give leftover food to non-Brahmins, but this law is waived, provided the Brahmin "shall clean his teeth and give the food after having placed in it the dirt from his teeth".

Fourth, despite the ideal the privilege entails responsibility, a great deal of the caste legislation was aimed at securing all kinds of preferential treatment for the Brahmins. These privileges included preferential treatment in respect to sacrifice, marriage, means of livelihood, offerings, property, and judicial treatment. The last mentioned privilege became the breeding ground for flagrant injustices. All of these discriminatory laws were enforced by invoking reward and punishments.

The evil influences of caste should not detract from the fact that the lawmakers did try to uphold ethical standards. A good Brahmin is still one who supports "the moral order in the world," is "deeply versed in the Vedas," and "looks to these (alone), and lives according to these." When these spiritual and ethical concerns of life are neglected, "(noble) families even are degraded."
Next, let us examine the legislations pertaining to Kṣatriyas for their ethical and moral content. The Kṣatriyas constituted the warrior caste, but all warriors were not Kṣatriyas. Even so, it was possible for non-kṣatriyas “who live by the use of arms” to move upward into ksatriya ranks as a result of devoting themselves to the duties of the warrior. From an ethical point of view, the most significant feature of this caste revolves around the king. The law-books abound with details connected to the ethics of royalty, an area we must now explore.

Government as an extension of the king was invested with the responsibility of upholding dharma, the eternal divine order or society. Prof. Basham reminds us that in ancient and classical India, government, no matter what its shape, was not an end in itself. “The Hegelian concept of the state as an organism of supernatural size and power, transcending all other entities upon earth and mystically linking man with the Absolute, is completely foreign to anything ever thought of in India.” The state as protector of dharma comes closer to the Thomistic doctrine of government as the means for promoting salvation.

The protection of dharma by government was deemed necessary because it was believed that mankind was living in an age of cosmic decline. “Kingship came into existence, in order to preserve as much as was possible of the age of gold in a period of universal degeneration.” According to one legend of the Mahābhārata, the king was divinely appointed, upon the request of mankind, to prevent life from becoming “mean, brutish and short.” And second legend has it that kingship is a purely divine imposition upon mankind, designed to help people live by the laws of dharma.

The means by which the king ruled his subject was danda (punishment). The use of force was morally legitimised because of the anarchical tendencies in man. Justifying the use of danda, Manu argues:

If the king did not, without tiring, inflict punished on those worthy to be pun-
ishment, the stronger would roast the weaker, like fish on a spit.

The crow would eat the sacrificial cake and the dog would lick the sacrificial viands, and ownership would not remain with any one, the lower ones would (usurp the place of) the higher ones.

The whole world is kept in order by punishment, for a guiltless man is hard to find; through fear of punishment the whole world yields the enjoyments (which it owes).

In addition to protecting dharma, the duty of the king was to fulfill other social needs represented by artha and kama. Thus, the duty of the king encompassed the total welfare of the people. By upholding dharma, he protected social order and brought peace and justice to the land. By promoting artha, he provided people with material prosperity and political stability. And by cultivating kama, he helped bring pleasure into the life of his subjects. All of this is significant evidence that the purusarthas had a strong hold upon the life of the people in ancient and classical India.

Proof that these values were not merely held as ideals but were actively cultivated by royalty is supplied by the testimony of early travellers. Chinese and Arab travellers have sustantiated the reports of Megasthenes on the administration of Chandragupta Maurya. Like the ideal king envisaged by such jurists as Manu, Chandragupta was a benevolent autocrat concerned with the freedom and prosperity of his people.

Motivation for such benevolent autocracy was twofold. Negatively, the ruler was afraid of rebellion if he acted otherwise. Positively, he was motivated out of a concern for dharma, and a desire to abide by the general will.

A striking illustration of the preceding is the story of King Rama. The Ramayana tells of how the king, though convinced of his wife’s conjugal purity, was
nevertheless prepared to banish her out of deference to his subjects. The people were suspicious that Sita had illicit connections while in the court of Ravana, and the guilt of her deed could bring ruin to the realm. Rama had no such doubts, but was willing to bow to the will of the people. This shows that even within an autocratic form of government without any formal checks and balances on the ruler’s power, the king could not act unrighteously or in unashamed arbitrariness.

Turning from the ethics of domestic affairs to that of foreign affairs, we find that the chief ethical principle of royalty was expediency. The Arthaśāstra reflects a situation in which several “mini” kingdoms existed in a precarious state of coexistence. It was a case of the survival of the fittest; with the big fish always ready to swallow up the little fish. In such a situation the fundamental value, requiring no higher justification, was survival itself. Any course of action making for survival was deemed politically sound and morally justifiable.

Kautilya’s principle of expediency becomes clear by examining the six-fold policy one state can adopt toward another. The six principal policy-relations are: “armistice, war, neutrality, invasion, alliance and peace. Interpreting other ancient thinkers, Kautilya recommends:

Any power inferior to another should sue for peace; any power superior in might to another should launch into war; any power which fears no external attack and which has no strength to wage war should remain neutral; any power with high war-potential should indulge in invasion; any debilitated power should seek new alliances; any power which tries to play for time in mounting an offensive should indulge in bilateral policy of making war with one and suing peace with the other.

Faced with the threat of battle, the king and other members of the military caste must consider it their dharma to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the state. “A soldier must not die in a house”.
Though the jurists consider the protection of the state by war as “righteous killing,” ordinarily, such warfare was governed by codes of chivalry. Laws for conduct proper to war are described by Āpastamba, Gautama, and Baudhayana. Manu sums up these duties for honourable warriors:

When he fights with his foes in battle, let him not strike with weapons concealed (in wood), nor with (such as are) barbed, poisoned, or the points of which are blazing with fire.

Let him not strike one who (in flight) has climbed on an eminence, nor a eunuch, nor one who joins the palms of his hands (in supplication), nor one who (flees) with flying hair, nor one who sits down, nor one who says ‘I am thine’.

Nor one who sleeps, nor one who has lost his coat of mail, nor one who is naked, nor one who is disarmed, nor one who looks on without taking part in the fight, nor one who is fighting with another (foe);

Nor one whose weapons are broken, nor one affected (with sorrow), nor one who has been grievously wounded, nor one who is in far, nor one who has turned of flight; (but in all these cases let him) remember the duty (of honourable warriors)

The ethics of war were particularly framed to protect the dignity of royalty, a fact that should remind us that the ethics we are dealing with is the ethics of royalty. The institutes of Vishnu declare:

A king having conquered the capital of his foe should invest there a prince of the royal race of the country with the royal dignity.

Let him not extirpate the royal race; unless the royal race be of ignoble descent.
While codes of chivalry were generally adhered to in usual circumstances, "in case of need," duties of morality yield to demands of necessity in which the only thing considered sacred was the preservation of the state. Thus the ethics of political theory was completely situational.

Next, we examine the dharma of the Vaisyas. By the time of the Śūdras the Vaisya caste was shorn of some of its earlier nobility. Distinctions between Vaisyas and Śūdras were becoming progressively diffuse. The chief cause for this ignominious descent was not even remotely connected with moral considerations but with externalities of professionalism. The Brahmins had developed a positive antipathy toward some Vaisya occupations such as trade, agriculture, and cattle breeding. So despised were these professions that under no circumstance could a Brahmin personally engage in them. Baudhayana states the penalty for any infraction of the law: Let him treat Brahmins who tend cattle, those who live by trade, (and) those who are artisans, actors (and bards), servants or usurers, like Śudras.

Evidence of the Vaisya's humiliation was apparent in several discriminatory ways. For instance, a Vaisya guest was to be treated on par with a Śūdra in respect to all of hospitality.

Though the Vaiśya was reduced to a despicable object because of the menial nature of his profession and because of his occupational and marital contacts with Śudras caste, nevertheless, by virtue of being an Āryan, he still retained certain religious and status privileges.

On the other hand, Śūdras who had assimilated the habits and manners of their masters while serving as domestics were granted certain religious, civic, and professional rights and privileges, as we shall see.
The Āryanised Śūdra was treated as possessing a moral character and was expected to behave in accordance with "truthfulness, meekness, and purity". He was not considered permanently defiled, but could cleanse himself through such purificatory ceremonics as "sipping water," and the washing of the "hands and feet. He could also take part in minor religious ceremonies, such as offering the Pākayajñās. Professionally the Śūdras was encouraged to "serve the higher castes" as a way of gaining merit, but he could also "live by (practicing) mechanical arts. The Śūdra serving and Āryan had the right to full support, even when disabled. Materially, some of these Āryanised Śūdras were well off, possessing hoards of wealth.

Despite these and other allowances made to certain select Śūdras, the majority was still a despised lot, especially the ones who were nonacculturated. Another passage from Gautama starkly brings out the arbitrary and unjust way in which the activities of this caste were rigidly defined.

A Śūdra who intentionally reviles twice-born men by criminal abuse or criminally assaults them with blows, shall be deprived of the limb with which he offends.

If he has criminal intercourse with an Āryan woman, his organ shall be cut off, and all his property be confiscated.

If (the woman had) a protector, he shall be executed after (having undergone the punishments prescribed above).

Now if listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac.

If he recites (Vedic texts), his tongue shall be cut out.

If he remembers them, his body shall be spit in twain.

If he assumes a position equal (to that of the twice-born men) sitting, in lying down, in conversation or on the road, he shall undergo (corporal) punishment.

When all of the castes within the hierarchical system follow their own appointed dharma in the manner prescribed, harmonious results ensue, both in this life and the next. Harmony is the proof of the divine origin and character of the social structure. This explains the severity with which violations of dharma were handled.
The scriptures warn of the dire repercussions attendant upon a failure to preserve the system. The Bhagavad-Gītā, through its own “domino theory” of social degeneration, describes the consequences of caste violations.

In the ruin of a family, its immemorial laws perish; and the laws perish, the whole family is overcome by lawlessness.

And when lawlessness prevails, O Krishna the women of the family are corrupted, O Varshneya, a mixture of caste arises.

And this confusion brings the family itself to hell and those who have destroyed it; for their ancestors fall, deprived of their offerings of rice and water.

By the sins of those who destroy a family and create a mixture of caste, the eternal laws of the caste and the family are destroyed.

The men of the families whose laws are destroyed. O Janārdana, assuredly will dwell in hell; so we have heard.

The moral principle regulating rebirth in accordance with the varna system is the law of karman. A good life merits birth in a high caste; but the deserts of an evil life are rebirth in a low caste. Thus, one’s present caste is determined by the past, and has a moral basic. A man should, therefore, make atonement for past misdeeds by adhering to the dharma of his won Varna, and by practicing a life of virtue. In this way he acquires great glory and ascends to a higher birth in the next life.

This moral explanation of caste as the social consequent of an individual’s past karman seems to answer the question about how the system was allowed to prevail without any serious protests against it on the part of the downtrodden. The despised Śūdra, ridden roughshod over by members of the higher castes, could not think of cursing his overlords; after all, both he and they were only reaping what they had sown. In such an ethos it was impossible for some Indian Karl Marx to raise the cry: “Śūdras of Hindustan arise, you have nothing to lose but your caste,” and get a following – on moral ground!
The second major aspect of dharma, having examined the ethics of Varnadharma, is the scheme of Āśramadharma. In the earlier period the stages of life were less definite than is the case in the law books. Now, for Manu and the other law makers, the āśramas are clearly four in number. These writers devote a great part of the in material to a treatment of the dharma belonging to each stage, especially the second one.

The Brahmacarya state is entered upon through the upanayana saṃskāra. This initiation ceremony takes place for a Brahmin at age eight; for a Kṣatriya at age eleven; and for a Vaiśya at age twelve. Before the ceremony, the boy is a virtual Śraddhas; after the ceremony he is a dvija or twice born. He is now born into the world of the Ārya, and all its privileges and responsibilities will be taught to him during his years of Vedic studentship.

The Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra gives detailed descriptions of the elaborate rites of initiation, the intention of which was to create a sense of dignity, duty and responsibility within the student. The rituals were not important as ends in themselves, but were means for generating ethical values. Regrettably, some of the earlier dharma writers, such as Āpastamba, attribute magical properties to the upanayana ceremony, which detracts from its moral aspects. Yājñavalkya is silent about these superstitions, such as the promise of longevity, manly vigour, and so on, which suggests that they were not believed in during his time.

The type of teacher-student relationship envisioned by the educational system is dramatised in one part of the upanayana ceremony. The Āśvalayana Grhya Sūtra stipulates: On the region of the student’s heart the teacher should place his hand with the fingers stretched upwards and say: ‘Into my vow I put thy heart; after my mind may thy mind follow: with single-aimed vow do thou rejoice in my speech; may God Brihaspati join thee to me.
The joining of student to *guru* involved the student living in the residence of the teacher. The importance of this step for mental and moral development of the student was profound. It provided him with an optimum environment for personal growth under the tutelage of a man who by training and character was best qualified for the nurture of his emotional and intellectual capacities. The epics cite several teachers remembered both for their erudition and quality of life; men like Visvāmitra, Vasistha, Sandipani, and Dronācārya, only to mention a few.

Because the *guru* was responsible for bringing to birth the mental and spiritual potential of the pupil, he was honoured as the pupil’s father Apastamba says:

*He from whom (the pupil) gathers (*ākinoti*) (the knowledge of) his religious duties (*dharmān*) (is called) the Ācārya (teacher). Him he should never offend.*

*For he causes him (the pupil) to be born (a second time), by (imparting to him) sacred learning. The (second) birth is the best. The father and mother produce the body only.*

Honour to the teacher was shown in several concrete ways. The relationship was to be reciprocal: Loving him like his own son, and full of attention, he shall teach him the sacred science, without hiding anything in the whole law. And he shall not use him for his own purposes to the detriment of his studies, except in times of distress.

The pupil who, attending to two (teachers), accuses his (principal and first) teacher of ignorance, remains no (longer) a pupil.

A teacher also, who neglects the instruction (of his pupil), does no (longer) remain a teacher.

The purport of education was the moral and intellectual growth of the students. These two elements were never separated. Indeed, the latter was contingent upon the former. According to the Sacred Law, only the person who is pure may be instructed in the Veda.
Neither (the study of) the Vedas, nor liberality, nor sacrifices, nor any (self-imposed) restraint, nor austerities, ever procure the attainment (of rewards) to a man whose heart is contaminated (by sensuality).

Moral culture not only preceded intellectual culture, but was the weightier of the two: A Brāhmaṇ who completely governs himself, though he knows the Savitri only is better than he who knows the three Vedas, (but) does not control himself.

The secret of self-control was not so much a matter of restraint and repression as “a constant (pursuit of true) knowledge.” In pursuance of virtue the student of dharma was expected to be grateful, non-hating, intelligent, pure, healthy, non-envious, honest, energetic. Sexual purity was highest in the list of virtues. A Brahmaçārin was forbidden “to gaze at and to touch women, if there is danger of breach of chastity. He may “talk to women only for what is absolutely necessary” should a beach of sexual morality accord, the student must sacrifice an ass at a crossroad to the goddess Nirṛti, don the skin of a donkey; and for a period of one year, proclaim his asinine deed.

The presence of virtuous fruit in the student’s life indicated that true knowledge had taken root. Says the Mahābhārata: “Knowledge of the sāstras is said to bear fruit when it produces modesty and virtuous conduct.”

Thus, the cultivation of the moral life through simplicity, austerity, chastity, and obedience, leads to the pure, undistracted development of the intellect, Manu limits the intellectual curriculum to a study of the three Vedas. but, by the time of Yājñavalkya, the Brahmaçārin’s studies were expanded to include the Purāṇas, Nārāşamsis, the Gāthikās, the Itihāsas, and the Vidyās. The Vidyās included professional training in such subjects as medicine, astrology, military arts, music, and so forth. All of these braches of knowledge were integrated with the sacred knowledge of the Vedas, thus linking expertise with ethics, and the acquisition of information with the development of character.
Two negative effects of Brahmacarya discipline need to be mentioned are passing. Firstly, since the transition from one state of life to the other was to be smooth and natural, it was inevitable that the ascetical outlook moulded in the student stage should be carried over into that of the householder stage. Some students continued the life of celibacy by becoming Sannyāsins directly, which gives some indication of the impact of the ascetical training of which they were rigorously subjected.

The second negative effect of student life was the inculcation of what N.K. Dutt describes as the “pride of scholasticism” among the professed scholars. compounded with racial and sacerdotal pride, the pride of scholasticism elevated barriers between Brahmans and non-Brahmins. In this way “the good effect of the strictness of Brahmacyara in specialising learning and in enforcing high moral discipline was neutralised by the increased rigidity and hauteur of caste, which is one of the many factors making India a land of contrasts”.

The second āśrama is that of the householder. The Gārhasṭhyā stage of life was considered of supreme importance for several reasons. First, as Gautama points out, the Gārhasṭhyāsrama is the source of the other āśramas “because the other do not product offspring”. Second, Yajñavalkya correctly observes that this was the only stage in which all of the puruṣārthas were jointly realised. Third, it is opinion of all the writers that the family was basic to the caste system. It provided the regulartory machinery for the strict enforcement of caste, informing its members of their duties, and imbuing them with the caste spirit. These are some of the reasons why the householder stage was given a central place and why the ethical codes governing it were invested unequivocally with divine authority.

The rules of dharma regulating the Gārhasṭhyāsrama are voluminous in scope, intricate in detail, and often variant in prescription.

We start with the list of ethical duties prescribed for the householder by
Yājñavalkya. It consists mainly of ritual, procreative, and conjugal functions of the family.

A householder should perform every day an Smrti rite (that is, a domestic rite prescribed by the Sacred Law, smriti) on the nuptial fire or on the fire brought in at the time of the partition of ancestral property. He should perform a Vedic rite on the sacred fires.

Having attended to the bodily calls, having performed the purificatory rites, and after having first washed the teeth, a twice-born (Aryan) man should offer the morning prayer.

Having offered oblations to the sacred fires, becoming spiritually composed, he should murmur the sacred verses addressed to the sun god. He should also learn the meaning of the Veda and various sciences....

He should then go to his lord for securing the means of maintenance and progress. Thereafter having bathed he should worship the gods and also offer libations of water to the manes.

He should study according to his capacity the three Vedas, the Atharva Veda, the Purânas, together with the Itihásas (legendary histories), as also the law relating to the knowledge of the Self, with a view of accomplishing successfully the sacrifice of muttering prayers (japa-yajma).

Offering of the food oblation (bali), offering with the proper utterance (svadha), performance of Vedic sacrifices, study of the sacred texts, and honouring of guests- these constitute the five great daily sacrifices dedicated respectively to the spirits, the manes, the gods, the Brahman and men.

He should offer the food oblations to the spirits (by throwing it in the air) out of the remnant of the food offered to the gods. He should also cast food on the ground for dogs, untouchables, and crows.

Food, as also water, should be offered by the householder to the manes and men day after day. He should continuously carry on his study. He should never cook for himself only.
Children, married daughters living in the father’s house, pregnant women, sick persons, girls, as also guests and servants—only after having fed these should the householder and his wife eat the food that has remained.

Having risen before dawn the householder should ponder over what is good for the Self. He should not, as far as possible, neglect his duties in respect of the three ends of man, namely, virtue, material gain, and pleasure, at their proper times.

Learning, religious performances, age, family relations and wealth—on account of these and in the order mentioned are men honoured in society. By means of these, if possessed in profusion, even a shudra deserves respect in old age.

The passage is self-explanatory, but a few comments are in order. Mention of the five daily sacrifices points to a broadening of ethical awareness as compared with the earlier notion of the three debts to the ancestors, gods, and sages.

The concept of daily sacrifices also shows the sense of obligation and interdependence the grhaṣṭha felt toward his total environmental—seen and unseen, animate and inanimate. This awareness motivated him to engage in ethical actions out of feelings of gratitude and belonging.

Gratitude easily spilled over into liberality—“the grhaṣṭha should never cook for himself!”

What is cooked for himself must first be shared with guests and members of the household, including servant who were Śūdras. It was an iron law of the householder: service before self.

To ensure that the householder had time to “ponder over what is good for the Self,” he had to rise before drawn! The good is defined in terms of three cardinal values: dharma, artha, and kāma. By including kāma, Yājñavalkya emphasized a value dimension of personality that is not given equal recognition by other writers. For instance, Manu and the Mahābhārata sometimes overlook kāma, emphasising only the acquisition of dharma and artha.
The concluding verse classifies the things for which the householder was honored by society. Learning (knowledge having both intellectual and ethical aspects) stands first. Then follow: religious performance, age, family relations and last of all, wealth. Money was not devalued, but dharmic concerns always held it in a state of relativity to spiritual values. Even poor Śūdra possessing spiritual and moral qualities was to be treated with the highest honour.

Special attention should be given to Yajnavalkya’s description of the duties of the householder to his wife. He must be solely devoted to her, having become one through sacramental bonds; he must satisfy her sensuous yearnings, only refraining from sexual intercourse on inauspicious days. Care of the wife is essential because through her the householder begets sons whereby; the family is continued, both in time and in eternity.

This brings us to our second ethical concern: attitude toward women. This subject is a tangled web, laced with many contradictions and inconsistencies. Sometimes women is warshipped as a goddess; at other times she is shunned as a tentress. She is praised as the personification of virtue, and is branded as the incarnation of vice. Though honoured as a given, she is a prisoner in her own cattle.

The ethical thoughts of the Hindus have further been developed in the Smṛti literature covering the period 500 B.C. to 300 A.D. Smṛti means, “That which is remembered”. It incorporates all authoritative texts outside the Vedas. The most important Smṛti works are the Dharma Sūtras, Dharma Śāstras, and the two epics (referred to above).

The purpose of the Dharma Sūtras is to teach the students the general principles of dharma or moral law. The important books are the sūtras of Gautama, Baudhāyāna, Vasistha, and Āpastamba. They date from approximately the sixth to second century B.C. The Dharma Śāstras date later than the Dharma Sūtras. The most
authoritative Dharma Śāstras is the Laws of Mau, known as Manusmṛti, written between first century and second century B.C. Next in importance to the code of Manu is the Yājñavalkya smṛti written probably in the 5th century A.D.

The Smṛtis continued the tradition of the Vedas and Upanishads in the pursuit after the sriyas and preyas. But more importance is given to the practical ends of individual human beings. This is evidenced by the formulation of the puruṣārthas (human values) constituting the aims of man. The three aims (trivarga) emphasised are: dharma, artha, and kāma.

The Sanskrit root meaning of “Dharma” is “dhr”. “to hold together”. It is a development of the earlier Rg Vedic idea of Rta, which represented cosmic law operating in all phenomena natural, religious and moral. It provided the Vedic seers with the ethical norm by which men could relate to nature, to one another, and to the Gods. In the Smṛti period this law permeating the whole universe was called dharma. Within the social order, dharma was explicitly defined in terms of certain duties and obligations, which were codified in the great law books. These codes of social behaviour are divided into three main classes: Varnadharma – duties pertaining to the four castes; Āśrama dharma – duties pertaining to the four stages of life; and Sadharanadharma - common duties binding on all persons, regardless of caste or station in life.

The king was invested with the responsibility of upholding dharma, the eternal divine order of society. The protection of dharma by government was deemed necessary because it was believed that mankind was living in an age of cosmic decline. Professor Basham says that in ancient and classical India, government was not an end itself. He said: “The Hegelian concept of the state as an organism of super-natural size and power, transcending all other entities upon earth and mystically linking man with the Absolute, is completely foreign to anything ever thought of in India.”¹ The state as protector of dharma comes closer to the Thomistic doctrine of government as the means for promoting salvation.
In addition to protecting dharma, the duty of the king was to fulfill other social needs represented by artha and kāma. Thus, the duty of the king was the total welfare of the people. By upholding dharma, he protected social order and brought peace and justice to the land. By promoting artha, he provided people with material prosperity and political stability. And by cultivating kāma, he helped bring pleasure into the life of his subjects. All of this significant evidence that the puruṣārthas had a strong hold upon the life of the people in ancient and classical India.

Yājñavalka defines the good in terms of the three cardinal values: dharma, artha, and kāma. By including kāma, Yājñavalkya emphasized a value dimension of personality that is not given equal recognition by other writers. He also referred to the things for which a householder is respected by the society. Learning (i.e. knowledge having both intellectual and ethical aspects) stands first. Then follow: religious performance, age, family relations, and last of all, wealth. Money was not underestimated, but dharma concerns always held close relationship with spiritual values. Even a poor Śūdra possessing spiritual and moral qualities was to be treated with highest honour.

The yājñavalka Smṛti gives a long list of ethical duties prescribed for a householder. It consists mainly of ritual, recreational and conjugal functions of the family. Mention has been made of five daily sacrifices (pañca mahāyajña) points to a broadening of ethical awareness as compared with the earlier notion of the three debts (rta traya) to the ancestors, gods and sages. The concept of daily sacrifices also shows the sense of obligation and interdependence the householder felt toward his total environmental—seen and unseen, animate and inanimate. This awareness motivated him to engage in ethical actions out of feeling of gratitude. Gratitude leads to liberality and charity. The householder should share his food with others, including people belonging to the lower strata of the society. This generates the sense of “service above self”
The prescription of service towards other runs: “He (householder) should offer the food oblations to the spirits (by throwing it in the air) out of the remnant of the food offered to the gods. He should also cast food on the ground for dogs, untouchables and crows.

Food, as also water, should be offered by the householder to the manes and men day after day. He should continuously carry on his study. He should never cook for himself only.

Children, married daughters living in the fathers house, pregnant women, sick persons, girls, as also guests and servants – only after having fed these should the householder and his wife eat the food that has remained...

Having risen before dawn the householder should ponder over what is good for the self. He should not, as far as possible, neglect his duties in respect of the three ends of man, namely, virtue, material gain, and pleasure, at their proper times.

Learning, religious performances, age family relations and wealth on account of these and in the order mentioned are men honoured in society. By means of these, if possessed in profusion, even a sūdra deserves respect in old age.

The above passage is self-explanatory. It lays down the noble duties to be performed daily by an ordinary householder. Thus, the Dharmaśāstras have described comprehensively about the ideals and values of man’s life.

**Standpoints of the Six Philosophical systems**

Discussion about the values, especially about the moral values, continued from he śūtras and smritis to the period of the Darśanas or the philosophical systems. The development of philosophical thought to the age of the Darśanas was the national legacy of the attack of Buddhism and Jainism upon the dogmatic foundation of traditional Hinduism.
The word *darśana* means “vision” or “point of view” (from the root *dṛs*, meaning “to see”). The six classical systems of philosophy, which are based upon the Vedas, are regarded as six points of view from which the single orthodox tradition may be considered. Despite their varying viewpoints, these independent systems are taken to be “complementary projections of the one truth on various planes of consciousness, valid intentions from differing point of view like the experiences of the seven blind men feeling the elephant, in the popular Buddhist fable. These six systems are Sākhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśesika, Mimāmsa and Vedānta. The last two are known as *Karmakānda* (based on the karma aspect of Vedas) and *Jñānakānda* (based on the Jnana aspect of Vedas) respectively.

These systems believe in the spiritual reality of the soul and seeks to realise it in its true form. They are also close to the ends of life and seek to solve the problems of life. They are not concerned with abstract intellectual pursuit only. They faithfully mirror the ideals and values of the people. They also believe that liberation is the ultimate end to man, and that it enables man to free himself from the shackles of ignorances and from the bondage of the worldly miseries. The root cause of bondage, according to these systems, is ignorance, which consists in the identification of mundane existence with the reality and not knowing the true nature of the ultimate Reality, which alone is truly real.

The Darśanas also see moral system in microcosm and macrocosm alike. The universal moral system is termed: “Ṛta” in the Vedas, ‘Apurva’ in Mimāmsa and ‘Adṛṣṭa in Nyāya Vaiśesika. According to this doctrine gods, living beings and plants, all move in accordance with one universal moral pattern. This moral system is manifested through the theory of *karma* in the life of an individual. According to it, the results of actions are always with us in the form of impressions (*samskāras*) and they direct the course of our life. The world (*samsāra*) is regarded as the dhramatic stage where every body is preordained to perform his part according to his *karma* liberation is nothing but emancipation from the bondage of *karma*. Different Darsanas have suggested different solutions for the attainment of liberation.
All these philosophical systems concur, "the summum bonum of life is attained when all impurities are removed and the pure nature of the self is thoroughly and permanently apprehended and all other extraneous connections with it absolutely dissociated". The systems recognize three levels of moral development. On the objective level, the need to the Varnaśrama scheme of life is emphasized. On the subjective level, purity of heart (citta śuddhi) is insisted upon. With clean heart one must work disinterestedly and unselfishly. At the transcendental level the good is no longer an object of labour but a realized reality. The liberated man transcends the plane of moralistic individualism while bond to the orbit of saṁsāra. He is beyond the good and the evil.

The common ethical concepts, such as Avidyā, Karma, Dharma, Saṁsāra, Jivanmukti, provide the basis for the six philosophical systems. These ideas are taken from the Vedas, and by virtue of accepting the validity of the Vedas, these system are called āstika, to be distinguished from the nāstika systems (Buddhism, Jainism & Cārvāka), which deny Vedic authority.

In addition to these points, their vision of the great world rhythm – endless succession of creation, maintenance and solution – make these philosophers believers in progress. Their belief in the possibility of discovering truth provide them with the necessary impetus to incarnate its essence in progressively greater degrees. Thus their attitude towards life is positive and not negative. The charge of pessimism against Indian philosophy is, therefore, not tenable.

Regarding the importance of the problem of value in Indian Philosophy, professor S.K. Maitra has rightly pointed out that according to Indian philosophers, the essential nature of Reality is value, because Reality is characterized as Saccidānanda. He said "This conception of Saccidānanda was perhaps the grandest achievement of our ancient culture". It refers to the three dimensions of reality, namely, Sat or the dimension of existence, Cit or the dimension of consciousness or reason, and
$Ananda$ or the dimension of bliss or value. Professor Maitra maintained "the whole standpoint which looked upon Reality as $Saccidananda$ might be called the standpoint of Reality as value". 5

3. F. Max Muller, *six systems of Indian Philosophy*, London, 1928.
4. S.K. Maitra’s article on *Indian Theory of Values* in Radhakrishan and Muirhead (ed), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 385.