

## CHAPTER-I

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, my intention is to give an overall idea of the notion of *dharma* and to show its impact to the society. In this connection, an effort has been made to understand the relation among *dharma*, morality and values; and also to examine some issues regarding Indian ethics. Generally, the term *dharma* refers to some activities which are somehow connected with God, more categorically to say it suggests us to obey the different principles to offer the devotion to the God, to follow the different style of the prayer and different manners to worship the God, to observe different ceremonies and activities which are offered to create the gratification of God or Gods. All these activities are rituals. But in Sanskrit, the meaning of the term *dharma* is different from what we normally understand by it. The term '*dharma*' is constituted with the Sanskrit root word '*dhr*' adding with the suffix '*mana*'. The word *dhr* means upholding. Hence, the derivative meaning of the term *dharma* is something upholding, something sustaining. In the case of an object the essential property upholds it. Hence, the essential property of an object is its *dharma*. For, this property bears the identity of it. *Dharma* is one without which nothing remains the same. In the like manner, the essential property of man which upholds him and distinguishes him from others is the *dharma* of man, i.e., something without which man is not recognized as man in true sense of the term. Usually, the word *dharma* is translated in English as religion. But it is not correct. The meaning which is conveyed by the Sanskrit word '*dharma*' is not transmitted by the meaning of the English word 'religion'. In English, usually the word religion is meant for the custom of a group of people.

'Religion is a set of common beliefs and held by the group of people often codified as prayer

and religious law. There are as many different types of religion as there are many different types of people in the world.’<sup>1</sup>

‘The English word "religion" is derived from the Middle English "religioun" which came from the Old French "religion." It may have been originally derived from the Latin word "religo" which means "good faith," "ritual," and other similar meanings. Or it may have come from the Latin "religāre" which means "to tie fast."’<sup>2</sup>

The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* expresses the meaning of the word religion as ‘the belief in the existence of God or Gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leaders; one of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular God or Gods, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader.’<sup>3</sup> The *Collins English Dictionary* defines religion as ‘belief in, worship of, or obedience to a supernatural power or powers considered to be divine or to have control of human destiny; any formal or institutionalized expression of such belief.’<sup>4</sup> In Bengali we arbitrarily say that *jaler dharma tr̥snā nivāran karā i.e.*, the *dharma* of water is to quench thirst and *āguner dharma dahan karā i.e.*, the *dharma* of fire is to burn. Now rendering the word *dharma* with the word religion, if we translate the above two sentences that the religion of water is to quench thirst and the religion of fire is to burn, would it be right translations of these two sentences?

Though actually the meaning of the term *dharma* is something upholding, i.e., something that sustains an object, an individual, a society and the whole universe harmoniously, but unfortunately the real practice of the phenomenon of *dharma* is not so. Now-a-days, we see many things are being practiced by the name of *dharma*. Someone thinks that worshipping the Goddess *Dūrga* in a gorgeous way taking high subscription from people

against their will is their *dharma*. Someone considers that to convert people of one religion to another is their *dharma* and even fighting for this is also considered as *dharma*. Someone thinks that *dharma* is meant for chanting and dancing besides a tree after smearing it with oil and vermilion. Someone feels that to paint the body with ashes or to wear a particular dress is *dharma*. Indeed at present the picture which comes to our mind, at first, for representing the phenomenon of *dharma* is what is just said above.

Here one thing is very clear although *dharma* and the religion are not the same, but today the *dharma* has taken the place of the religion. The role of religion, (If *dharma* is taken in the sense of religion mentioned above) in the history of the evolution of human thought is very important. From the very beginning of our society religion has occupied the central position in the life of man. It would not be exaggeration, if we say following Max Muller, that the true history of man is the history of religion.<sup>5</sup> No other thing played greater role in the life of man than that of religion. We may discuss what sort of wellbeing religion has ensured for the human society; but a historical account shows that many conflicts have been occurred in the earth, of which one of the major causes is religious sentiment. Religious conflicts lead to different awful depiction of violence of the riot and even of the war including murder, bloodshed, women-torture, hampering the chastity of women, burning of the house, destruction of the temple, mosque and the church etc. *Lajja*, a novel, written by Taslima Nasrin, is the mirror of such kinds of religious conflicts. In the novel Taslima has shown, just after the destruction of the Bavri mosque in India, how the naked violence was spread upon the Hindus in Bangladesh. This novel, I think, is the vivid picture of the violence taken place in our society due to religious blind faith. Taslima writes:

The passionate and insane Hindus have destroyed the Babri mosque. Now the Hindus of the Bangladesh will have to expiate of their (the Indian Hindus) sin. The man belonging to the minority community

like Sudhamay was not left from the torture of fanatic Muslims in the year 1990, so why would they be released in the year 1992? In this year, also, the person like Sudhamay was forced to hide themselves in the cavity of mouse. Is it due to the fact that he belongs to the Hindu community or the Hindus have destroyed the mosque in India? <sup>6</sup>

Due to the misconception of *dharma* the division and mistrust among human beings have been spread throughout the country. Religion or *dharma* makes us blind. It is overall noticed that a man belonging to a particular sect or religion does not tolerate people belonging to another sect or religion. It is not that this situation is found in present day. If we go through the history, we come to know about the crusade war which is declared by the Christian to recover Palestine, the holy land of Christian being related to Jesus Christ's life, from Mahomedans. The Brahmins did not accept the emergence of Buddhists and Jainas in India. In eleventh century the Hindu king Harse of Kashmir destroyed the Buddhist temples and killed thousands of Buddhists. Jainas was attacked and their books were burnt. All this happened due to religious conflict. Division of the country on the basis of religion is a crude reality.<sup>7</sup>

Now let us deal with the relation between religion and morality. Generally, there is a moral aspect in religion, but the theologians think that religion is not merely morality; it is something beyond morality. They consider that there is a transcendental aspect in religion which is the direct apprehension of God. According to them, this transcendental aspect is seen to play a vital role in religion and this is not found in morality. In our everyday life, sometimes we come across some men lacking the faith in religion in the sense that they do not believe in God but they are highly conscious about morality. Again sometimes we notice that a man, despite dedicating his life to perform the different types of religious activities is seen to engage in serious evil deeds. Hence, it may be concluded that the religion which fails

to make a man honest, ethical, should not be accepted. In this connection, a question is raised whether morality is originated from religion or religion is originated from morality. Descartes, Locke, Paley hold that religion gives birth to morality. They think that the sense of morality comes from the concept of God. Kant and Martinue, on the other hand, observe that morality gives birth to religion. They think that we obtain the sense of religion from morality.<sup>8</sup> We should not be concerned which one has come first in man's life; rather we should be concerned which one is more related to good. The difference which we find especially between religion and morality is as follows i) Religion is God centric; on the other hand, morality is human centric. ii) Religion is an emotional experience; but morality is free from emotion. iii) Freedom of the will must be admitted in the sphere of morality; on the other hand the sphere of religion is the sphere of necessity. In spite of these differences religion and morality have something in common at least on following two issues i) both admit the immortality of the soul and ii) both are connected to absolute good. Whatever the difference and harmony are there in them, we may say that this two are the different stages of perfection of human life. In fact, morality and religion are the two stages of human experience of higher and lower respectively. Through different injunctions, one in course of time, becomes ethical.<sup>9</sup> The successfulness of religion is in this point.

Since the aim of this project is that *dharma* as a moral value i.e., *dharma* actually is nothing but moral value, Hence I am tempted to deal with the notion of value and moral value which is also connected to morality. The word 'Value' is derived from the Latin root, 'Valerie' meaning to be strong and vigorous. 'To be of value' is to have a certain worth or worthiness. Values in their stages appear as needs, emotions and interests varying in specificity, intensity and depth. For example, when a boy needs to leave his parents and go to a boarding home to pursue education, it is taught for him. But as the boy grows and knows the world around him and the realities of life, his needs, emotions and interests acquire

certain definiteness, intensity and stability in the affective live (emotions, feelings) of the individual. Thus the value formation takes place.

A widely accepted definition considers values to be conceptions of the desirable, influencing selective behavior. Thus we must know that all values contain some cognitive elements and they have a selective or directional quality. They serve as criteria for selection in action. In their most explicit form they become the criteria for judgment, preference and choice. In their implicit form they constitute grounds of decisions in behavior.

A value as Klackhohn defines is a conception of the desirable, 'and not something that is merely desired. Charles Morris talks of 'the preferential behavior in values which in other words means a choice between the good and bad.' Cattell defines values thus; 'By values we mean the social, moral and standards which the individual would like others and himself to follow.'<sup>10</sup>

Kuppaswarny B states that 'a value is a conception characteristic of a group to satisfy needs. Values constitute the base of action and can be tested in terms of behavior.' Hiriyanna states, 'one of the distinguishing features of Indian philosophy is that it has consistently given the foremost place to values'. The Sanskrit word that stands for value is '*iṣṭa*' the object of desire, since man seeks his desires consciously the Indian philosophers term 'value' as *pūruṣārtha* or human value, meaning thereby, ends consciously pursued by human beings.<sup>11</sup>

Summarizing the above views we may state, 'A value is a principal, standard or quality that is considered worthwhile or desirable. It is a consciously preferred choice of the concept of desirable behavior, satisfying the needs of interests, having an element of stability and is validated by social approval. Such behavior is standardized as norms and constitutes standards by which choices are evaluated.'<sup>12</sup>

There are so many values, such as moral value, spiritual value, aesthetic value, societal value, historical value, material value etc. Moral value is that which is associated with moral consciousness or morality. Morality is the manner of conduct or behavior. And since value regulates man's conduct; hence it must be admitted that there is a relation between value and morality. There are so many literatures from which we get the learning of the values. It was told about of four values for human life in our ancient India, viz. *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* which are known as *pūruṣārthas*, the ends of life, the achievement of life. *Pūruṣārtha* is that which man wants to have or which should be wanted. We all know that man is always active. That which works behind this kind of activeness of man as reason is called *pūruṣārthas*, i.e., human aspirations. *Satyam* (Truth), *Śivam* (Goodness), *Sundaram* (Beauty) which are called in *Cāndogya Upaniṣad* respectively *bhāti*, *priyam* and *asti*.<sup>13</sup> *Ahimsā*, *Prema*, *Karuṇā* –these all are called values as described in our ancient texts. Democracy, Socialism, Secularism, Freedom, Discipline, Responsibility, and Human Rights - these are also considered as values which we may call contemporary values.

There is another type of literature in Sanskrit called *Dharmaśāstras* which are originally concerned with the nature and exposition of moral values (*dharma*) in the form of i) virtue, ii) duty, iii) moral standard, iv) social norm, v) law. The entire sphere of moral values becomes the theme of these moral treatises (*Dharmaśāstras*).<sup>14</sup>

The *mantra* - '*Ahimsā satyamasteyam śauca saṁyamevaca; atad samāsikam proktam dharmasya pañcalakṣaṇam*' as defined by Manu states that *ahimsā* (nonviolence), *satyam* (truth), *asteyam* (not stealing), *śauca* (purity in both mind and body), *saṁyama* (controlling of the sense organs), these are features of *dharma*.<sup>15</sup> And we all know that these all are virtue. Besides these, we frequently say – '*Ahimsā parama dharma*', '*sevā dharma*', '*prema dharma*' etc. In all these statements, we find that the term *dharma* indicates virtue. That *dharma* is duty is substantiated by the term '*viśeṣa dharma*'. *Viśeṣa dharma* is that which is

assigned duty for an individual on the basis of his mental trend and capacity, which is called *svadharmā*. Krishna says that it is better to be ruined performing one's own duty than that of others, (*svadharme nidhanam śreyo paradharma bhayābhayo*).<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, *dharma* is directly considered as moral standard. '*dharmaḥ tomāke path dekhaḥbe*'. Here, the word '*dharma*' refers to moral standard, i.e., *dharma* is that which you will follow in your life as standard. Or when we assert - is such type of conduct *dharma*? (*ebhaḥbe ācaraṇ ki dharma?*), we simply indicates *dharma* as moral standard. *Dharma* sometimes is taken to be social norm and law. The injunction (*vidhi & niṣedha* of the *dharma*) which is established for the sake of the wellbeing of the society is taken into account, later on, as social norm and law.

Here, a question may be raised that if *dharma* becomes moral standard then what type of moral standard is it? There are so many moral standards as found in western ethics. Is it moral standard of egoistic hedonism or altruistic hedonism i.e. utilitarianism, or rationalism or perfectionism or eudemonism? These are all teleological aspects of morality. However, in response to this question we can say that Indian philosophy or ethics does not consider all these separately. We need as physical happiness, mental happiness and perfection of the self as for giving the happiness to others as well. That is, nothing is observed disconnectedly by the Vedic sears in Indian philosophy. It is stated in Vedanta philosophy that one who wants to be liberated should have *śama, dama, uparati, titikṣyā śraddhā (Śamdamādi-Śādhanā-Sampada)*,<sup>17</sup> These are all moral virtue. Hence, for the attainment of liberation one should practice *dharma*. And to achieve *dharma*, there is necessary to obtain physical wellness. The *Ayurveda* declares: '*śariramāddam khalu dharma sādhanam*', i.e., *dharma* is attained if and only if sound health is achieved.<sup>18</sup>

Let us examine another question with regard to Indian ethics. Purusattam Bilimoria begins to write an article<sup>19</sup> with the question that - is morality possible in Indian philosophy? Because, Hindu philosophy admits that God acts everything. He is the supreme doer. It is

stated in *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*: ‘*īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hṛddeśe’ rjuna tiṣṭhati; bhrāmayn sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā.*<sup>20</sup> The echo of same word is also found in *śākta* song (The song of those who worship the Goddess *Kālī*). The song runs as follows: ‘*tomār karma tumi kara mā loke bale kari āmi*’, i.e., Oh! Mother, you do all things; but it is to be seemed that I do. Moreover, the doctrine of *karmavāda* (except *Cārvaka*) is admitted in Indian philosophy. Some scholars think that ‘the doctrine of *karma*’ and ‘free-will’ is contradictory. They think that *karmavāda* and determinism are the same. According to them, as all the activities of one is determinate by one’s previous act, one does not have any free-will to activities. Hence, to them there is no room for free-will in Indian philosophy. In addition to this, the world is considered as the result of *māyā* in Vedānta philosophy. If it is so, morality comes under the purview of the result of *māyā*. Hence, there is no question of morality.<sup>21</sup>

To quest the answer of these questions we may point out that the doctrine of *karma* is not completely determinate. The ultimate message of this theory (*karmavāda*) is –‘as you sow, so will you reap’ (*yaman karma tamon fal*). It is maintained by the cosmic law which is called *Ṛta*. Since, ‘*kṛtanāś*’ and ‘*akṛtābhyāgama*’ (two types of corollary of the theory of *karma*) never occur. *Kṛtanāś* means the state of not achievement of the fruit, despite performing the acts. On the other hand, *akṛtābhyāgama* means the state of achievement of the fruit, not performing the acts; i.e., such a thinking that one attains good advantages, good environment, talent, wealth and happiness from the very birth, without performing good act, or that one becomes handicapped, poor, less talented, bad attributed, without doing evil act (i.e., that he attains these by chance) is considered as *akṛtābhyāgama*. If it is seen that one lives very happy after doing evil deed and we think that he will never get the punishment of his evil deed. This type of thinking is called *kṛtanāś*. In fact, it does not occur in such a way and also we do not think in such a way; rather we think that one who commits something evil must have to receive bad fruit; although it may be in his afterlife. And for this reason, i.e., in

order to avoid the objection of *akṛtābhyāgama* and *kṛtanāś* the transition of life is admitted in Hindu philosophy.

The implication of the theory of *karma* is not such that every act of us is determinate by the result of previous act. It is told, due to admitting the theory of *akṛtābhyāgama*, that if there is determinism then this determinism is nothing but self determinism. The result obtained from one's previous act, in fact, determines the present act of an individual. Even, God is kept out from this. Many schools of Indian philosophy distinguish between voluntary action and non voluntary action. If it is admitted fully determinism, this differentiation is not possible. Moreover, *pravartakatva* and *nivartakatva* of *vidhi* and *niṣeda* becomes meaningless, if complete determinism is accepted. But we observe that all schools of *Veda* admit *pravartakatva* and *nivartakatva*. And that is why, we perceive a harmonies effort to combine these two, viz, *karmavāda* and *jīvakarṭṛtva*. Further, it is stated in *Brahmasūtra* that an individual as a doer is taken into account for the meaningfulness of the scriptures (*vidhi & niṣedha* of *Śāstras*). One thing is worthy to note here that the freedom of the will is the postulation of morality, but how much we have the freedom of the will. For instance, I can say that if I will, I can move my hand but, despite having desire, is it possible to me to fly in the sky. Hence, that the theory of *karma* is an obstacle to build up the ethics is not accepted. Besides this, this freedom of the will is subject to some conditions, such as I cannot eat, although I do will, unless I become well in health, feel appetite. The freedom of the will that we avail is beautifully stated with an example by Ramakrishnadeva, an unmeasured man, that if a cow is fixed in a post with a piece of twenty centimeters' rope, it can only move within its twenty centimeter's surrounding. We must have freedom, but it is confined.<sup>22</sup> Besides this we may take another example such as the playing football. In the case of playing football there are some rules. A player is bound to obey the rules but he has freedom to pass the ball to anyone. Hence, we have freedom but this one is cramped.

It is true that the world is the result of *māyā*, as conceived in *Advaita Vedānta*. In the like manner, it is also true that the sense of morality is admitted in *Advaita Vedānta* for worldly life. This material world is false if and only if this world is perceived in the view point of ultimate reality (*pāramārthika dr̥ṣṭibhangi*), but in our day to day mundane life the moral obligation of an individual is not considered as false. One becomes pure in heart through the performance of his moral duty. And one is regarded to be competent of achieving the knowledge of Brahman or the knowledge of self only after the attainment of the cleanliness of the heart. It is stated in *Vedānta* Philosophy that one who seeks to attain the knowledge of Brahman should sincerely follow the *Sādhanacatuṣṭay* i.e. *śama, dama, uparati, titikṣā* and *śraddhā*'. Hence, it may be said that the objection against Indian ethics is not tenable also from the standpoint of *Advaita Vedānta*.<sup>23</sup>

Let us consider another issue of Indian ethics, Is Indian ethics act-deontological or rule-deontological? In search of this question, we can see that Indian ethics in most of the time is in favour of act-deontological. Situation concern is the main feature of Indian ethics. Generally we notice that violence is always restricted in our scriptures, but in order to defense own life the practice of violence has not been hatred, rather it is to be advised to kill assailant just after seeing him. Side by side, despite encompassing the instruction that truth should be obeyed by everyone with his act, mind and words (*kāya mana vākya*), we perceive that to defense one's life false word and false behave is to be supported in *Mahābhārata*.<sup>24</sup> In this case Indian ethical standpoint is act-deontological. On the other hand, we can see the Prābhākara standpoint in this regard is rule-deontological since they say duty should be performed for the sake of duty. In the like manner we see in the *Bhagavadgītā* also that Lord Krishna puts fourth his arguments owing to stimulate Arjuna to fight in the battlefield of *Kurukṣetra* for sustaining his *svadharma* (the duty of the position in the society). Here, Krishna has advised Arjuna to fight for the sake of fight in keeping a universal ethical rule in

mind. In this case *Bhagavadgītā*'s standpoint is rule-deontological. Hence, it will be difficult to say in one sentence how far such question of western ethics is logical in Indian ethics.

In concern to the subject matter of moral judgment, we see that if the motive, the means and the result are all, good, i.e., the intention (the intention means the combination of these three) is good only than we may call an action (voluntary action) good; otherwise bad. Hence, intention is the subject matter of moral judgment so far as Western ethics is concerned. Mackenzie confesses the importance of the intention in moral judgment, but he regards that the character of an individual, not intention, is the subject matter of moral judgment in true sense of the term.<sup>25</sup> Mackenzie has put forward his arguments as follows: 'when we are passing a strictly moral judgment, we think of the action, not as an isolated event, but as part of a system of life. ....it is never simply on a think done, but always on a person doing, that we pass moral judgement.'<sup>26</sup> Intention is not something isolated. There lies an inseparable relationship between intention and the character of an individual. In fact, individual's character is reflected through intention. Character is a disposition of man that he acquires in course of time by performing voluntary action. In moral judgment intention is not taken into account isolated from man. Mackenzie says: 'we judge its significance not in the abstract, but for the person who does it.'<sup>27</sup> We, generally observe that an honest person do not have evil intention. Since, morality has no holiday. Almost the same view we find in the thinking line of virtue ethics. And we see, Indian ethics is very much concerned with person, person's character, and values those he posses, in perspective of moral judgment. That is why, perhaps, Indian ethics is compared with virtue ethics by Jitendranath Mohanti.<sup>28</sup> Morality cannot be determined setting aside the character of an individual. The question with regard to morality becomes successful in connection with an individual's character or the character which one take as an ideal.

From the discourse of morality in India, it is cleared that moral judgment of an action has been taken on the basis of the competency of the up gradation of character irrespective of Vedic and non-Vedic school. At the ancient time of Hinduism in India, we have come across that the person was considered to be a great person, who was *kṣānta*, *dānta*, *jitendrio* or *ātmajñānī* in true sense of the term. Likewise, in Buddhism a person was treated to be an ideal, who was recognized as *upaśānta* or *supravudha* Brahmin.<sup>29</sup> In also Jainism the persons who have self control and also being capable of giving compassion, forgiveness were glorified to be a great person. That is why, Rabindranath said that the ultimate destination of ancient India was to reach in perfection (*brahmaṇyatā*) i.e., attainment of moral values in life, which is known as *dharma* was the aim of ancient India.<sup>30</sup>

Now I intend to give an exposition of the phenomenon *dharma* in accordance with what we actually find in our tradition. In our scriptures, four human ends are described, which is called *pūruṣārtha*. *Dharma* is the most important one of them and it has been given the first position. Both *artha* and *kāma* are essential for the maintenance of life, especially in the material world. That is why; these two are considered as human pursuit. *Artha* (wealth) is the means of the attainment of happiness. It is only means, but cannot be end. *Artha* (wealth) becomes *anartha* (destructive for the life) if it is not earned by the guidance of *dharma*. In the same manner, *kama* without *dharma* can destroy anyone's life. But *kāma* under the control of the instruction of *dharma*, can bring the welfare in individual and social life. Without *dharma* these two can fall the human beings into danger. And for this, welfare and peace of the society is to be hindered. In short, it is told that if *artha* and *kāma*-these two *pūruṣārthas* is attained by the instruction of *dharma* only then man can have social life in true sense of the term. These three human pursuits are to be understood in perspective of the welfare of the society. In all scriptures, *dharma* is accepted as restricting principle. 'dharmā-

*viradho...kāma' smi'* i.e. I am *kama* which does not contradict to *dharma*. It has got the support in the words of Sri krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā*.<sup>31</sup>

It is true that though the term *dharma* bears various meanings, but in the context of *pūruṣārtha*, *dharma* refers to the principle of conduct (*vyavohāra*) which indicates the duty of an individual in the society. In this consideration, *dharma* is pointed out with the term '*kartavatā*' by Medhatithi.<sup>32</sup> It is stated also in *Mahābhārata* that the virtuous conduct (*sadācāra*) is the source of *dharma*. *Dharma* is a moral principle that regulates man's conduct and also inspires an individual to act upon welfare of the society. Through performing of the wellbeing of the society one purifies himself. *Dharma* acts as a regulatory principle of behavior of an individual. If we analysis the term *dharma*, we observe that *dharma* is to be taken as an instrument to control the activities of man in order to harmonies the wellbeing between individual and society. There is a social aspect of *dharma*. The performance of *dharma* becomes meaningful in the context of the society. *Dharma* is admitted to bring harmony and peace among different sects of the society. *Dharma* can be substantiated with the term 'justice', frequently said in modern society. In metaphysical aspect *dharma* is described as a cosmic law which is called *Ṛta*. *Ṛta* is a threat which binds different parts of the universe systematically.<sup>33</sup>

Actually, in Indian classical texts we do not come across any ritualistic approach in the concept of *dharma* in literal sense. That is, the term *dharma* does not have any ritualistic relation; rather it is a moral principle, i.e., moral value.<sup>34</sup> Religious life (*dharmō jīvan*) is nothing but moral life. Manu's consideration with regard to *dharma* is that there is no action which is not come out by the desire (*kāma*). But the action which is governed by *kāma* cannot be praise worthy. Because, *kāma* is the result of the state of ignorant mind of an individual.<sup>35</sup> Hence, *dharma* is to be presented to restrict the limitless desire (*yathecha kāma*). *Dharma* regulates the action of man as a moral principle. For the wellbeing of an individual and also

the society *dharma* is essential. It is stated that all are ruined if we do not have *dharma*, but if *dharma* is protected, we become protected (*dharma avo hato hanta dharma rakṣiti rakṣita*).<sup>36</sup> The religion of man (*mānuṣer dharma*) is to perform duty for the wellbeing of man, society and the world. And this is the aim of Indian ethics. Indeed, in Indian concept, *dharma* and ethics is not separated with each other. In accordance with Indian ethics one should not take care of his own narrow interest, rather take care of the realization of the self through which a man becomes man in the true sense of the term and desire for the happiness of all leaving as his own. In the context of Indian ethics, we see that there are three dimensions of the phenomenon of *dharma*. These are: i) objective aspect of *dharma*, which is associated with the welfare of the society, ii) subjective aspect of *dharma*, which is related to the purification of the self, and iii) absolute aspect of *dharma*, which is linked with the extension of the self.<sup>37</sup> Hence, we can see these three elements in Hindu Ethics. S.K. Maitra observes:

‘Hindu Ethics is the social ethics and psychological ethics and culminates in the philosophy of the Absolute which is the consummation of the Spiritual life.’<sup>38</sup>

The objective or social aspect of *dharma* is exposed specially by *Varṇāśramadharmas*. The purpose of this facet of *dharma* is to serve the society. Here *dharma* means *karma* / *kartavyakarma* (the assigned duty). Through the performance of *sādhāraṇadharmas* and *Varṇāśramadharmas* an individual carries out his moral duty to the society. This duty is called the result of his objective or social morality; which is followed by S.K. Maitra as follows: ‘The *sādhāraṇadharmas* and *varṇāśramadharmas* together constitute the objective morality of the Hindus. i.e., morality as represented in the code of external acts and requiring outward conformity.’<sup>39</sup> But the accomplishment of moral duty to the society is not mere the destination of an individual, but also to achieve the purification of

the mind, body and words collectively (*kāya mana vākya*). Through the performance of *sādhāraṇadharmas* we practice the control of the self and act social duty by way of accomplishing *varṇāśramadharmas*. This aspect is called subjective morality in Indian ethics. According to Indian ethics, the purification of the mind/self is not also the end. The end is the extension of the self, i.e., the realization of the self in everything of the world. And this is called absolute morality.<sup>40</sup> To perceive all things like own self is, indeed, the criterion of moral judgment, which uttered by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā*: ‘*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo ’rjuna*’,<sup>41</sup> that is frequently said in English - ‘do unto others as you wish to be done.’ We generally see that we love ourselves, though we do not have the same to others. If we extend ourselves to others, we would be able to love others. And without love to others, wellbeing of the society is not possible in true sense of the term. Feeling of love, I think, is the metaphysical part of wellbeing.

The duty which is determined by the social status, dignity and efficiency, especially mental trend and temperament of a person is called *Varṇa dharma*. The literal meaning of the term ‘*varṇa*’ is colour, but in the context of philosophy, this term stands for the psychological trend of an individual. One’s character depends on one’s tendency and for this reason; different men obtain different efficiency in different action. And this is the cause of the division of four *varṇas*. This division is determined by *guṇa* (attribute) and *karma* (efficiency in action), not by birth which is running at present. Actually, birth based division was begun when the Brahmanism is emerged in India. It is clearly stated in the *Bhagavadgīta*: ‘*cāturvarṇyam mayā sṛṣṭam guṇakarmavibhāgaśah*, i.e.; Krishna creates this division by the attribute and efficiency of an individual.<sup>42</sup> On the basis of this principle the people of the society are divided into four classes which are *Brahmins*, *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras*. As per this division, their duties are of four types. And these duties are very essential to build up the society. If we observe the need of the society, we see that there are four types of needs

which are essential for the society just like four *varṇas* are described in our scriptures. For beautiful construction of the society, we need to give the protection of the society, to give the financial support of the society, to give the service to the society and above all to give the proper guidance of the society. The duties, assigned for different classes, are competent to the fulfillment of the said needs of the society. The *śūdras* (the people of small intelligent) will serve the society through their physical labor; the *vaiśyas* (the people efficient in business and cultivation) will give the financial support of the society, The *kṣatriyas* (the people who have valor, i.e.; the military man) will protect the society with their courage and vigor and the Brahmins will give the proper guidance of the society in the light of their wisdom and intelligence. All *varṇas* are indispensable in order to run the society smoothly. Hence, no *varṇa* can be ignored, or is to be considered as inferior.

“Each individual has to do what he can do. Social waste is prevented since the different functions in society are carried out only by the individuals who are best fitted for them. Since the individuals find that occupation which is in accord with their respective natures and nearest and dearest to their hearts, there is no room for listlessness, dissatisfaction and the consequent frustration. The satisfaction of the individuals arising from the performance of the duties of their station furthers the efficient use of their talents. Social progress is ensured, or becomes possible since each individual is eminently suited to the performance of the duty that he is allotted, spontaneously gives out his best. The naturalness with which he discharges his duty adds to the ease and grace of the performance”.<sup>43</sup>

These four classes as to four *varṇas* are necessary in a society. Hence, it may be concluded that four *varṇas* are made in order to serve diverse social requirements. The

above-mentioned view has been accepted by Swami Vivekananda also. He observes: “According to the prevalence, in greater or lesser degree of the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, in man, the four castes, the *brahmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* are everywhere present at all times, and in all civilized societies”.<sup>44</sup> The four-fold division can bring a social harmony. Because, there should have as the necessity of good scholars, protectors, tradesmen and workers in a society. If people are not given different duties, there would have been chaos which leads to a non-harmonious society.

The above mentioned duties are the duties of different *varṇas*, which are called *varṇadharmas*. Besides these, there is another one *dharma*, which is called *sādhāraṇa dharma*. *Sādhāraṇa dharma* is that which is to be carried out by all, i.e.; these duties are obligatory to all irrespective of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Forbearance (*dhṛti*), forgiveness (*kṣamā*), steadiness (*dama*), keeping the desire, absent in the practice of stealing (*cauryabhāva*), cleanliness (*śucitā*), keeping the sense organ, non-attachment to its object (*indriya nigriha*), wisdom (*dhee*), taking the information about the world (*vidyā*), truthfulness (*satya*), keeping the mentality, out of anger (*akradha*) etc are the duties of all man (*sādhāraṇa dharma*).<sup>43</sup> These duties are unconditional. But *varṇa dharma* is not unconditional duty; it is conditional as to the position of a person, i.e.; the person having good attributes and wisdom will guide, the person who has valor and strength will protect, the person, efficient for business and cultivation, will provide the essential commodities and food and the person having less intelligent will give the physical labour. In the like manner, *āśramadharmas* are conditional as these are to be carried out according to different stage of life, like the duty of the student is to learn his lesson, the person who belongs to house holder life will perform the duty of this particular stage. Though *vārṇasaramadharmas* are not unconditional like *sādhāraṇadharmas*, but these are to be practiced unconditionally by the entire persons belonging to the particular class, i.e.; one side it is conditional, another side it is unconditional. The imperative of the

duty, here, lies in the form of a ‘if-then’ statement (hypothetical statement). That is - ‘if you belong to a particular class, you have to perform particular duties, but if you do not belong to a particular class, you need not to perform the duty assigned for this particular class.

The purpose of these two *dharmas*, viz, *sādhāraṇadharmā* and *varṇadharmā* are to do the wellbeing of the society. Without forgiveness (*kṣamā*), forbearance (*dhṛti*), steadiness (*dama*), keeping the desire, absent in the practice of stealing (*cauryabhāva*), cleanliness (*śucitā*), wisdom (*dhee*), taking the information about the world (*vidyā*), truthfulness (*satya*), keeping the mentality, out of anger (*akradha*), etc (*sādhāraṇadharmā*), the good of the society cannot be ensured. Besides these, good of the society comes, when one performs his own assigned duty.

One thing is important to mention, here, that we find the concept of *svadharma* in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is nothing but *varṇadharmā*. *Svadharma* means the duty that one can do. This duty is also called *viśeṣa dharmā* as it is the duty of a particular class. Hence, *svadharma* is no more but *varṇa dharmā*. The duty (*svadharma*) of a *kṣatriya* is to fight and to give the protection of the country. In the like manner, the duty of a person, belonging to a particular class, is his *svadharma*. Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to fight in the battle field of Kurukṣetra as he belongs to the class of *kṣatriya*. Everyone is hypothecated to perform his own duties. Hence, Arjuna cannot ignore his own duty. In fact, through the concept of *varṇadharmā* the professional duty is indicated here. For being efficient in a particular profession, one is taken as belonging to a particular class. A person having the temperament of fighting belongs to the class of *kṣatriya*. And hence, to be engaged in fighting is his *svadharma*. It has a great social importance when Krishna advised Arjuna in saying that it is better to be ruined in performing his own duty (*svadharme nidhananṁ śreya*). If a less-intelligent person, who can give only physical labour, engages himself to lead the country, or

a person having courage and strength, not being engaged in the protection of the country, engages him in business, the society will not be benefitted.<sup>45</sup>

*Āśramadharmā* is the duty of different stages of life. The term ‘*āśrama*’ denotes the different stages of life. In ancient India the entire human life is divided into four stages, which are – *brahmacharya* (the student life), *gārhastya* (the house-holder life), *vānaprastha* (the stage of purification of life) and *sannyasa* (the renounced order life). A man has to pass out different stages of life and thereby he has to render different duties. One is to be prepared to enter into later stage of life, after performing the duties of previous stage. Actually the liberation is the ultimate destination of human life so far as our scriptures is concerned. And these duties of different stages of life are taken to serve this purpose. But for this, different needs of life are not to be ignored. It is true that man will be liberated, after obtaining the knowledge of *Brahman*; likewise it is also true that he has a physical existence. Human life, in fact, is a history of ascending from his material existence to divine existence. Through the performance of the duties for different stages of life, this ascending of man is possible.<sup>46</sup>

*Āśramadharmā* means the duty of different stages of life. Every man remains in certain *āśrama* in certain stage of life. His duty depends on the basis of his different stage. Through the accomplishment of the duty of a stage one becomes capable of entering into the next stage. After performing all the duties as prescribed in different stages of life an individual can generally be liberated.

*Brahmacarya*: - This stage is the first stage of human life where one learns his education. This stage of life builds the foundation of one’s whole life. Character has to be built in this stage of life through the restriction of sense organs to its objects. Character building is the ultimate aim of education. Character is never built without the education as well as training of the restriction of sense organs. The power of vitality is emerged from

restricted life, which is the source of the development of life. Accordingly, this stage of life is very important to human life. In this stage, a person prepares himself for house-hold life by practicing purity, simplicity, eagerness to the duties, restraint and endurance.

*Gārhasṭha*: - This stage is the second stage of human life. After the completion of *Brahmacarya* one is allowed to enter into the *gārhasṭha āśrama*. *Gārhasṭha āśrama* means the house-hold life. In this stage of life, a person takes all the responsibility of practical life. To keep the continuity of human race through the production of the child is the duty of this stage. This stage is not mere just for merriment of physical desire. In addition to the production of the child in this stage one has to perform social duties. These are like service to the parents, neighbours and guests etc. It is advised to perform *pancha yajña* (five sacrifices) in this stage. These *yajñas* are performed to repay the debt to them i.e. these are the concept of debt like the debt to the nature (*deva ṛṇa*), debt to the sage or wise man (*ṛṣi ṛṇa*), debt to the ancestors (*pitṛ ṛṇa*) and debt to the people or government (*nṛ ṛṇa / manuṣya ṛṇa*). These four types of *ṛṇas* have been described in scriptures. And I think there is also another *ṛṇa* i.e. debt to the nonhuman beings (*bhuta ṛṇa*) since we are indebted to them in various ways. Here one thing is worthy to mention that in western culture a man is born with some rights, but in Indian culture a man is born with some debts. *Ṛṣi yajña* means to repay the debt to those who have given knowledge and research for the welfare of the mankind. *Deva yajña* means to serve *deva*. Here the term ‘*deva*’ means *prakṛiti* (nature). The ultimate aim of this *yajña* is protect the nature, natural balance and its environment. *Bhuta yajña* means to give the food to nonhuman beings and to protect them. *Nṛ yajña* means to give the tax as well as service to the government. And *Pitṛ yajña* means to respect to our ancestors, production of the child to keep the continuity of the human race as they are the root cause of our welfare. We are indebted to them on account of the fact that there are many contributions of them in our life.

*Vānaprastha*: - This is the third stage of life. After the successful completion of house-hold life man enters into this stage. In this stage man takes shelter in the forest and practices austerity. Purification of the Self comes through the practice of penances. In fact, the aim of this stage is Self purification. After achieving of the purification of the Self, one is prepared to enter into the *Sanyasa āśrama*, the highest stage of austerity.

*Sannyāsa*: - *Vānaprastha* is fulfilled by taking of this *āśrama*. One who takes *sannyasa* does not live in a certain place or house. Always traveling is the duty of a renounced person (*sannyasin*). His vow is to do the welfare of the humanity. Renunciation to the material objects is the criterion of entering into this *āśrama*. Compassion to all leaving beings, completely free from sensual desire, equal mindedness to happiness and pain, gain and lose, same mentality to friend and foe etc are characteristics of the person who belong to this *āśrama*. A *sannyasin* has to abandon violence not only by physically but also by mentally and the statement.

A thing is important to mention here that if conflict comes between *sādhāraṇa dharma* and *viśeṣa dharma*, in such a situation what will one do? In this context, we find that when Kaikeyee send Rama to the forest and arranged to obtain the kingdom for *Bhārata*, Lakṣmaṇa became angry and told that he will kill Kaikeyee. In this situation, Rama prohibited Lakṣmaṇa to obey the duty of *kṣatriya* like braveness. He instructed Lakṣmaṇa to obey the *sādhāraṇa dharma* like *kṣamā*, or truthfulness to his father. We find here that Rama considered *sādhāraṇa dharma* as more superior to *varṇāśrama dharma*. We on the other hand come across in the *Bhagavadgīta* that Krishna encouraged Arjuna to fight in the battle field of Kurukṣetra because of the fact that fighting is the duty of *kṣatriya* which is his *varṇadharmā* or *svadharmā*. But Arjuna argued that if he fights, he will break some *sādhāraṇa dharma*. Here, we see Krishna considered *varṇadharmā* more superior to *sādhāraṇa dharma*.

From the aforesaid discussion, it may be concluded that in the case of the conflict between *sādhārana dharma* and *varṇadharmā* i.e. *viśeṣa dharma*, the duty (*dharma*) of one will have to be determined on subject to situation context.

#### Notes and References:

1. Available at: <http://veda.wikidot.com/dharma-and-religion#toc0>, accessed on 14 April 2014.
2. Available at: <http://veda.wikidot.com/dharma-and-religion#toc1>, accessed on 14 April 2014.
3. Available at: <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/learner/religion>> accessed on 15 January 2016.
4. Available at: <<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/English/religion>> accessed on 15 January 2016.
5. D Miall Eduards: *The Philosophy of Religion*, New York George H. Doran Company (1924) (1929), p.9.
6. Taslima Nasrin: *Lajjā* (in Beng.), Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, 1993, p. 15.
7. Aravinda Basu and Nivedita Chakrabarti: *Dharmadarshan* (in Beng), Farma K.L.M. Private Limited, Kolkata, 2007, p. 5.
8. Pijuskanti Ghosh & Pramadbhandu Sengupta: *Dharma O Samajdarshan* (in Beng), Banarjee Publishers, Kolkata, 2000, pp. 18,19.

9. *Ibid*, p. 20.
10. Subha Sankar Sarkar (Ed.) : *Education in India*, Netaji Subhas Open University in collaboration with Karnataka State Open University, Kolkata, 2013. p. 320.
11. *Ibid*, p. 320.
12. *Ibid*, pp. 320,321.
13. *Ibid*, p. 343
14. *Ibid*, p. 330.
15. *Manusamhita* 10/63. (*Manusamhita* [in Beng] edited by Manabendu Bandopadhyay, Sadesh, Kolkata, 2004, p. 470)
16. *Srimadbhagavadgita* 3/35.
17. Jagadishar Sanal: *Bharatia Darshan* (in Beng), Sribhumi Publishing Compani, Kolkata, 1982, p. 329. (Amita Chatarjee (Ed): *Bharatiya Dharmaniti*, Alide Publishers Limited, 1998, p. 47.)
18. Jogesh Chandra Ghosh: *Sastharaksa O Chikitsavidhi* (in Beng), Sadhana Ousadhalaya, Dhaka, p. 1. (Samarendra Bhattacharya: *Sammanik Nitividya* (in Beng.), Book Syndicate Private Limited, Kolkata, 2004 First, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, p.57.)
19. Purusattam Bilimoria: *Indian Ethics in A Companion to Ethics* edited by Pitter Singer, Blackwell, 1991.
20. *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 18/61.
21. Amita Chatarjee (Ed): *Bharatiya Dharmaniti* (in Beng.), Alide Publishers Limited, 1998, p.20.

22. *Ibid*, p. 33.
23. *Ibid*, p. 30
24. *Mahābhārata, Dronaparva*, 89/47. (*Satyājyāyonṛtamvācah*). [taken from an article entitled ‘*Dharma as a Moral Value*’ by Prof. Raghunath Ghosh, *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, Guru Gobinda Singh dept. of religious studies, Punjabi University, Patila, Spring 1997, p. 96.].
25. Samarendra Bhattacharya: *Sammanik Nitividya* (in Beng.), Book Syndicate Private Limited, Kolkata, 2004 First, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, p. 153.
26. John S. Mackenzie: *A Manual of Ethics*, Surjeet Publication, Delhi, 2004, p. 111.
27. *Ibid*, p. 111
28. Eliot Doyetsh & Ran Banteko (Ed): *Companion to World Philosophies*, Blackoel, 1997. (Amita Chatarjee (Ed): *Bharatiya Dharmaniti* (in Beng), Allied Publishers Limited, 1998, p. 28.)
29. Amita Chatarjee (Ed): *Bharatiya Dharmaniti* (in Beng.), Allied Publishers Limited, 1998, p. 27.
30. *Ibid*, 27.
31. *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 7/11.
32. . Dr. Diksit Gupta: *Nitavidya O Manavidya* (in Beng), Sharat Book Distributors, Kolkata, [Year was not found], p. 20.
33. *Ibid*, p. 20.
34. *Ibid*, p. 21.

35. Dipak Kumar Bagchi: *Bharatiya Nitividya* (in Beng), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2004, p.
36. *Manusamhitā*, 8/15.
37. Samarendra Bhattacharya: *Sammanik Nitividya* (in Beng.), Book Syndicate Private Limited, Kolkata, 2004 First, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, p. 35.
38. S. K. Maitra: *The Ethics of the Hindus*, University of Culcatta, 1963, p. 1.
39. *Ibid*, p. 4.
40. Samarendra Bhattacharya: *Sammanik Nitividya* (in Beng), Book Syndicate Private Limited, Kolkata, 2004 First, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, p. 8.
41. *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* , 6/32.
42. *Ibid*, 4/13.
43. S. Gopalan: *Hindu Social Philosophy*, Weley, 1974, p. 189.
44. Vivekananda: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram Publication Department, 1989, p. 382.
45. Dr. Diksit Gupta: *Nitavidya O Manavidya* (in Beng.), Sharat Book Distributors, Kolkata, [Year was not found], p. 24. Raghunath Ghosh: *Sura, Man and Society: Philosophy of Harmony in Indian Tradition*, Academic Enterprise, Kolkata, 1994, pp. 49-50.
46. Dr. Diksit Gupta: *Nitavidya O Manavidya* (in Beng), Sharat Book Distributors, Kolkata, [Year was not found], p. 24.