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Unit – 3 : Indian Ethics

The Concept of Dharma in Indian Tradition

An humble exercise - to spell out the semantic nuances of dharma to prepare a background and foreground against which the metaphysical, moral and sociological issues pertaining to dharma are addressed to. It goes without saying that dharma is most respectable a notion as well as one which has fallen into utmost disrepute. Dharma has all through become the focal point of controversies because of the confusions associated with its usage and practice.

Of the varied connotations, fivefold senses of dharma stand out as central and conspicuous, viz. Dharma as (a) Eternal moral order, (b) Constitutive properties of things and beings, (c) Moral imperative, (d) Regulative principle and (e) Institutionalized practices. In the following, we shall examine how the ontological sense of the term, i.e., dharma in the sense of the ultimate moral order, is of seminal significance, for it lends meaning to the other uses of the term.

Human awareness is self-reflective. It has persuaded man to seek to uncover the secret of Nature and Man himself. The grand design and orderliness in Nature keep us baffled. From the beginning, the perceptive ingenuity of man has led him to take note of an order in the world of human actions. This is termed dharma (moral order). As natural order is explained in terms of the casual principle, the uniformities in the domain of voluntary actions are explained by an appeal to the underlying moral calculus. Now the nagging question is: Are the two different orders to be understood in terms of two different kinds of laws? The seer philosophers of the past arrived at the singular conception Rta to account for the immanent order in the cosmos, of which the laws of Nature and the laws of Karma are but two different variants. More recognition of order is not enough, as it needs to be explained why at all, there is order. This led them to the concept of Brahman (the transcendental subjectivity consciousness) as the primordial agent and substratum of the phenomenal manifold. The One has become many and lies quiescent in every finite expression of it. Rta is nothing but Brahman subsisting as the immanent intelligence of the cosmos. It is Rta, which expresses itself in form of the natural and moral order. In moral domain, Rta again has twofold expressions, viz. Satya (truth) and Dharma (righteousness). Satya is conceptual apprehension of Rta whereas dharma is its actional expression. As Brahman is all-pervasive, the order is ubiquitous. The universal order has its instantiation in the particulars as their characteristic essence (dharma). In the inanimate, it is discovered as Vastu dharma and in the animate, it is termed Jaina dharma.

Every object has its essential property without which it ceases to have existence and identity. It is dharma of water to flow downward and that of fire to burn and emit heat. Similarly, all living beings display their characteristic want of hunger, thirst, sleep, sex etc. Significantly, human beings constitute a distinct universe of their own. Because of being more evolved, Consciousness, dormant in nonhuman existents, finds explicit expression in the form of Rationality and Free-will. In the evolutionary scale, every creation shows the tendency of unfolding its latent potentiality, and grows into the next higher state. There is the implicit nisus towards the state of absolute equilibrium in which the whole creation has its genesis. It is self-consciously felt as the urge to attain the state of beatitude and bliss (ananda) in the human beings. The conscious effort to be restored to the state is termed as Manava dharma or Bhagavad dharma.

Bhagavad dharma makes us goal conscious. Goal determines direction of movement. But what is really called for is the movement towards the goal. The question of, moral imperative, i.e. ought or ought-not, is determined by twofold considerations, i.e. disposition ability, circumstances on one hand, and Nature of the ultimate end on the other. In other words, ought is determined by both can and is. Concept of svadharma assumes that the duty of individual is to be determined by innate disposition (which in turn is determined by the relative dominance of the gunas of Prakrti (sattva, rajas, tamas) and ability to do. Guna and karma constitute svabhava (one's Nature), which determines one's duty. People in the society can be classified into four fundamental types (varnas) according to guna and karma. They are Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya and S'udra. Duties of the respected varnas follow from guna and karma constituting svabhava. The fourfold classification of varnas corresponds to four basic types of social needs. The Brahmana is to offer enlightened guidance, the Ksatriya to extend physical security to the individual and the collective body, the Vaisya, to guarantee social security by way of providing the fundamental needs for all and the S'udra to offer services to the rest. Discharge of svadharma (varna dharma) ensures optimum utilization of the individual's potentiality while promoting the cause of collective well-being (lokasamgraha), the ultimate social goal. Varna dharma specifies one's station in society whereas asrama dharma is determined by the stage of life that a person has to pass through willy-nilly. Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa as 'ramas enjoin duties and responsibilities, helping a person to pursue individual excellence, while discharging one's participatory function in society building. Thus, Varnas 'rama dharma refers to the ethical imperatives, which are determined by contingencies of time, place and person. On the other hand, Sadharana dharma refers to a set of obligatory duties. They point to the

commonalties in the moral domain, binding upon every individual, irrespective of one's station and stages in life.

Human existence is trifarious, i.e. physico-psycho-spiritual. Varnas'rama dharma and Sadhrana dharma proffer the criteria for determining the ought. But the real existential challenge is to determine the exact content of ought in respect of the trifarious needs. Liberation (moksa) and collective well-being (lokasamgraha) have been conceived respectively, as the personal and social goals. Pursuit of one promotes the other. But the individual has to harmonize the subjective and the objective in the existential mode. Kama and artha refer to the physico-psychic and psychic needs of the individual which need to be fulfilled as a prerequisite for satiating one's spiritual longing (moksa). Artha is seen to have only instrumental value for the pursuit of Kama. Kama is the end and artha is the means in the relative framework of empirical living. But one always stands in need of a criterion for determining the right end and the right means. One can raise the question of ought-not both with regard to end, i.e. kama and means, i.e. artha. Here, dharma comes to one's rescue. Dharma plays the role of regulative principle by which the individual is helped to pursue both artha and kama in a manner which facilitates one to attain moksa. Bereft of dharma, desire (kama) tends to degenerate into blind passion and pursuit of wealth (artha) into avarice. Dharma as regulative principle works out the existential modus operandi, enabling the individual to utilize the practical to expedite the pace of progress to the transcendental. Purusarthas offer a value scheme showing how the physical and the psychic, when regulated by dharma, can be harnessed for the attainment of moksa.

In common parlance dharma came to be identified with different institutionalized practices, sects and cults. Dharma, in the sense of cardinal values, constitutes the very basis of every religion. It lends rationale to the body of beliefs, set of practices, do's and don'ts that go under the name of Religion. Value as a system of oughts and ought-nots remain as mere abstraction, unless and until the values manifest in and through the behaviour and conduct of individuals. Religions came into being in their attempt to promote excellence in the individual and social body through inculcation of values in the individual and Collective psyche. In course of time, dharma came to be identified with the beliefs and practices. As a result, the superficial, contingent features of religions were mistaken for their essence. This accounts for the so-called religious diversities and inter religious dissensions. Therefore the paradox: Religions, despite their avowed mission of promoting unity and harmony through dissemination of personal and social values like love, mutuality, service, sacrifice have become the virtual instruments of promoting

mistrust, hatred, fanaticism and violence at large. This had led people to shun the so-called sacred (religious) and seek the secular (non religious). Plurality of religions is a historical inevitability. A religious system is improvised by its founder in order to help his contemporaries to address to the prevailing exigencies. However, what is called for is the undiminished vigilance on the part of the followers so that they don't sacrifice the principles, the essence in favour of excrescences, the sacred in favour of the so-called secular.

Creation is an inexplicable marvel. From the very dawn of civilization, probing minds have sought to unveil ultimate secrets of the phenomenal. What has remained perpetually enigmatic to the rational minds is the very design and grandeur of our universe. Planets, stars and galaxies move on their fixed orbits with absolute precision. Things have their unalterable properties. Like begets like. In the animate world, plants, insects, reptiles, animals, birds and human beings are so constituted that they live best when they live the life of mutual interdependence. Think of any object, big or small; it exhibits symmetry or internal harmony. As above, so below. If the Sun is the nucleus of the solar system, which holds on to the planets and satellites, a tiny atom is also a miniature replica of the solar system with a nucleus, and electron spinning with definite velocity. Think of a cell! The texture and labyrinth is mind-boggling. Then, what is of an organism! Scientific investigations have made significant breakthroughs in deciphering the workings of Nature.

Their explanations are couched in the Principles of Causality. The scientist explains a phenomenon in terms of its determining antecedents, which in turn are explained in terms of their preceding conditions and so on. What they achieve is a discovery of factors in the causal nexus. Science can hardly answer: Why are these uniformities at all? Why does an effect follow a cause in a determinate way? Of course, one may dispute the thesis of design in drawing our attention to the perceived freaks or aberrations in Nature. The dreadful visitations of flood, cyclone and pestilence that takes lives in a sweep; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions that trap us unawares; avalanches that engulf us on their way; nuances of weather that haunt us with uncertainty etc. do apparently point to an antithesis. It would suffice to point out that the so-called irregularities or abnormalities do not point to the caprice of Nature but are necessary points in causal sequence. There can always be a causal and rational explanation of the so-called accidents. In Nature, nothing is accidental, everything is incidental. Besides, the perceived disharmony is only transient, just as sickness is a passing phenomenon in the life of a person. The disorders and irregularities are settled in harmony in the long run. Given the facts of uniformities,

the scientists offer description, explanation and prediction of them, but can hardly explain why things behave as they do. Why don't things change their properties every now and then so as to make prediction impossible? We cannot think how the universe would have been like if there were no harmony and order. Could there be a creation at all? Scientific exploration takes order and harmony to be axiomatic. Perhaps, to look for a rationale behind the order shall be dubbed as unscientific or a-scientific.

Brahman & Rta

The phenomenal owes its explanation to the Noumenal. The Unconditioned is invoked to account for the Conditioned and the Absolute, to explain the relativities. The dogging impulse to answer the ultimate why's of creation led the ancient philosophers to arrive at the notion of Brahman, Rta, Satya and Dharma. Reality in its transcendent stance is Brahman. Brahman by its sheer yolution manifests itself as the many. The diversities and the hierarchy in the created manifold point to the varied ways in which Brahman expresses itself in and through the particulars. Rta does not stand for the perceived order but the immanent principle on account of which there is order. In Rg veda, Rta is referred to as the primeval. Description of Rta bears striking affinity with Brahman as the most primordial. Rta is conceived as the presiding principle in which the cosmos is poised and the power by which it is regulated?

One comes across parallel descriptions in S'vetas 'vatara and Taittiriya upanisada where Brahman is delineated as the ultimate guardian and the ruler. Brahman is also thought as the ultimate arbiter. The foregoing observations suggest that as the_ transcendent principle, Brahman and Rta are indistinguishable. They are not two, but twofold expressions of the same substance. Brahman and Rta refer respectively to the transcendent and immanent aspects of the cosmic reality. Reality in respect of transcendental subjectivity is Brahman and as the immanent intelligence, running in and through the manifold manifestations, animate or inanimate, mobile or immobile, natural or human, it is termed Rta. In the sense, both Brahman and Rta are ontological.

Rta & Satya

Rta, is the unchanging universal beneath the changing particulars, the eternal behind the ephemeral, the noumenal protasis of the phenomenal. The unalterable Nature of Rta is termed Satya (truth). Truth is defined as the non-sublatable. Unlike untruth it does not suffer from consequences. Hence, Satya and Rta have been used synonymously. It is mentioned that both Rta and Satya arise from the divine penance.

Satya is the unalterable nature of Rta in relation to the relative and changing particulars. In epistemology, Satya is defined as conformity to Reality. In axiology, Satya refers to the speech, which is in conformity with reality. It means satya is ontologically grounded in Rta. Mental perception of Rta is satya. The time honoured maxim, Truth eventually triumphs, not falsehood, suggests that whosoever treads the path of satya, i.e. one who lives in consonance with the cosmic order (Rta) is sure to come out victorious in the long run. This is the chief purport of epics and mythologies. Rta, being the inviolable Order, settles scores in its favour. Therefore, any attempt, which seeks to thwart the Order is sure to get crushed or court ruination.

Rta & Dharma

Dharma is used in very many senses. Varied shades of meaning of the term make it difficult to provide any one particular definition. Etymologically, it is derived from the root 'dhr' which means to uphold or sustain. In this sense, it is used interchangeably with Rta. It is said that the forces of Nature rule according to dharma. Dharma always comes out victorious. It means that whosoever follows the way of the cosmic order (dharma) is bound to be crowned with victory. The moral order is irrevocable. Hence, ultimate well being of the individual and society consists in obedience to it. Those who protect and promote dharma are protected by it. The parable of the king and Goddess Laxmi is quite illuminating.

Deeply moved by the hardships of his poor subjects, the king orders to run a market in a remote village. To encourage the sellers, he makes an announcement promising that he would buy anything that remains unsold. This encouraged people to come together for buying and selling, thereby fulfilling their long-felt needs. One day, an old lady approaches the king humbly saying that one of her idols has remained unsold. People are averse to buy it as it happened to be that of Alaxmi. The king buys the idol as he considers it his dharma to keep the pledge. He retires to bed but in the first hour of the night wakes up to the uncanny presence of Goddess Laxmi who tells him that she is under constraints to leave the palace because of the presence of Alaxmi. By bringing Alaxmi the king has offended her and that Laxmi and Alaxmi cannot coexist. The king pleads innocence saying, that was his dharma as a king to keep his vow, and that he brought Alaxmi under the moral constraints of dharma. Laxmi could not but leave. Then comes Narayana who follows Laxmi with the plea that the king has offended Gods and Goddesses by making room for Alaxmi in the palace and that in the absence of the Goddess of wealth, the place is not worth living. The king again entreats him, expresses his moral predicament and his helplessness there upon. One by one, Gods and Goddesses follow suit to utter agony of

the king. In the last but one hour, the king wakes up again to the sound of the imposing presence of Dharmaraj, the God of dharma. When he asks the king that would also have to leave the palace, as all else have left, the king retorts: "Oh god of dharma"! You cannot leave me as it is only for you (for dharma) that everything has happened. Dharmaraj feels morally fettered to stay on. Then the king retires to bed only to get up to a sound from the main entrance. To his utter consternation, he finds a long cue of Gods and Goddesses, with Laxmi standing in the front, with her head hung in shame, and Narayana behind her, asking the king to let them in. Narayana explains that they are no more sought, adored and worshipped by the mortals because Dharma is not with them. Thus, the king is protected by dharma for he staked everything to abide by dharma. Dharma stands for the universals, which uphold moral order. Needless to say that ontological use of the term dharma is primary and imparts significance to other usages of the term.

Human beings constitute an integral part of the natural order. Human body is subject to the laws that otherwise explain all other biological phenomena. It is subject to birth, growth, decay and extinction. An animate being lives under the propulsion of natural drives and instincts. However, unlike other living counterparts, the humans have a universe of their own. Human existence is distinctive because of their unique possessions, viz. Rationality, Normative awareness and Free-will. They have the innate ability to have a sense of ends.

and means, ought and ought-not, the pleasurable (preya) and the preferable (s'reya). Under the sway of baser propensities, men become prone to seek things that afford transient pleasure or serve their immediate interests. But they possess the capacity to follow the way of the preferable, i.e. the superior path by nullifying the limiting influence of the crude. In other words, human beings inhabit a moral universe. Actions are what human beings do with rational deliberation. Actions are characteristically different from events. Events are caused, whereas actions are willed. An event is determined by the act of willing on the part of the agent. Willing is always intentional. Hence, intention, purpose or goal is built into the very Nature of action. Given an existential predicament, the human agent has choices before him. He is free to choose any one of the courses, deemed proper. But an action having been performed, the agent is not free to choose the consequences. Consequences follow an action as necessarily as an effect follows the cause. In other words, action and consequences constitute a casual nexus. As is the action, so is the consequence. No virtuous action goes unrewarded and no vicious action goes unpunished. This is precisely the law of Karma. It points to the fact that as causal uniformities explain order and predictability in Nature, there are uniformities, which

explain the action-reaction nexus in the moral domain. It is worth noting that the moral universe is not discontinuous with the natural universe. Rather, they constitute one continuum. Rta has both moral and a-moral expressions. It is the protasis of both the natural and the moral universe. As the substratum of the orderliness in Nature, it is a-moral but as the ultimate ground of the karmic law, it is moral and termed dharma. So, dharma, as the principle of righteousness, is nothing but Rta, functional in moral domain. Dharma as a moral universal is conceived as Adrsta in Vais 'esika system and Apurva, in Purva Mimamsa.

Adrsta literally means the unseen power. Adrsta is understood as the primordial principle on account of which the atoms configure themselves to produce compounds and actions are followed by merits or demerits. Though Adrsta is unintelligent, it is verily the underlying principle, which presides over the natural and moral order. Good and evil actions are inalienably bound to their respective consequences. Effects follow their causes because of Adrsta. It imparts initial motion to atoms and regulates the whole gamut of evolution. Since Adrsta is construed as unconscious, one fails to understand how such unintelligent principle can account for the all-pervasive order. This perhaps led Vais 'esika thinkers to invoke the existence of God as the efficient cause, who makes Adrsta functional. But postulation of God, over and above Adrsta, raises more problems than it solves. So, they subject themselves to the usual criticisms levelled against dualistic metaphysics, Rta is not conceived as independent of Brahman. It is nothing but Brahman poised as the underlying continuum of the manifest reality.

Apurva

Apurva has exclusive moral overtone in Purva mimamsa. Every action is intentional. Hence, it is performed with a view to securing the desirable fruits or results. For Mimamsakas, dharma is that which induces one to righteous action. Prescriptions and prohibitions goad individual to perform actions that are in conformity with religious ordinances and restrain from actions that are at variance with them. So both do's and don'ts are action-guiding or injunctive. Mimamsakas believe in the ultimate efficacy of rites and rituals and the invariable nexus between actions and their results. Jaimini brings in the concept of Apurva to explain the necessary connection between action and consequences. Good having been performed, the reward cannot be denied and Evil, having been perpetrated, the punishment cannot be withheld. This is possible because of the causal potency, which brings the consequences in the wake of action. Though imperceptible, the existence of Apurva, must be presumed in order to account for the karmic uniformity. Apurva, which binds actions to its consequences, has its locus either in

the action or in the agent. Apurva literally means that which did not exist before. It is non-existent before the performance of the action. When an action is executed, it begins to acquire a force (potency), which fructifies depending on the contingencies of time, place or person. The agent, in the process of performing the action, acquires certain potency on account of which the consequences are appropriated to him. The moot issue is: Apurva being unintelligent, it is hard to comprehend how it begins to impregnate either action or agent with a sense of purpose. What is the locus of Apurva? Does it not presuppose an all-pervasive order?

A closure reflection on the Nature of Apurva brings it to the fore that the purported causal potency predicted of it is teleological. Action does not merely have the capacity to attract consequences but is directed only to certain specific consequences as are appropriate of the Nature of action. If good actions attract merits, the bad actions do necessarily invite demerits. If Apurva is treated as mere efficiency, then it would merely admit the fact of order showing that the karma and karmic fruits are invariably related. However, it hardly explains as to why there is order at all. This puts one under logical compulsion to postulate an intelligent agency as the unseen invariable. If the intelligent agent is thought to be external, then the view will be fraught with irreconcilable difficulties that rank dualism is heir to. On the other hand, if Apurva is viewed as potential intelligence, then it will be indistinguishable from the vedantic notion of Rta. Such difficulties obviated in the vedantic framework where Rta is conceived as intelligence, immanent in the cosmic moral order. The foregoing discussions on Dharma, Adrsta and Apurva go to suggest that moral laws are inexorable and inviolable and function irrespective of our knowledge and ignorance of them. The notion of Universality of moral laws constitutes the very foundation of of the law of karma, Dharma and adharma, in the derivative sense, refer to the merits and demerits that accompany the performance of the good or evil deeds. By doing the action, an agent remains bound to the merits or demerits that necessarily accrue to him. As prarabdha it accompanies one beyond the grave. The reactions of actions stored in the potential form (samskaras), awaiting congenial circumstances to be actualized. In this sense, dharma refers to the moral continuum in and through series of lives, punctuated with phenomena of birth and death. Hence, it is urged that one should do dharma to all the beings one can. When Narada appears before Dhruva to dissuade him from rigorous penance, he replies that life is an uncertainty. Death being the only certainty, which may visit a mortal at any moment, one should seize the opportunity of practicing dharma even from childhood. The Oriya poet Madhusudan Rao sings: I must earn dharma, the precious wealth, right from my early days. Life is uncertain, who knows when shall death come and overtake us by surprise! Dharma in the aforesaid sense, points

to the fact of moral determinism. Against this backdrop, it is worthwhile to examine the concept of decadence of dharma (dharmasya glani) Lord Krsna says; As and when there is decadence of dharma and the reign of adharma, we incarnate myself to save the righteous by obliterating the evil. Moral determinism points to an order which the mortals cannot upset, obstruct or revoke. Despite power, right and opulence, Kamsa could not undo the order (dharma) nor could the, Kuravas. However, unlike other living counterparts, human beings have the capacity to deviate from the path of righteousness (dharma). The state of Nature is one of harmony and mutual concordance. Apart from occasional interference by the free-will wielding creatures, i.e. human beings, Nature always evolves for the better and higher.

The animate and inanimate existents evolved by internal compulsion of Nature, i.e. Rta. But when it comes to human beings, the evolutionary scenario is characteristically different. They have latitude to either move in tune with the cosmic order, i.e. the way of dharma, or make retrograde march by misuse of their free-will. Freedom is double-edged sword. It needs a direction. When it is invested with a righteous goal, it ensures good of the individual and the society, eventually. When actions of the individuals are in consonance with dharma (moral order), one becomes participant in the cosmic process. Conversely, if people by and large, under the blinding influence of the lower instinct and propensities like sex, power, pelf and pride take to the evil ways, there is decadence of dharma. Society experiences unrest and instability. Cardinal values are thrown to the fore winds. Evildoers come to have ascendancy in social hierarchy and pilot the destiny of mass. People wedded to values, court suffering in the hands of the perpetrators of adharma. At such social juncture (yogo sandhi), dharma is dislodged from its native state by adharma. Only such time of social crisis become propitious for the advent of the Great. He does not come to establish dharma because dharma is eternal (s 'as 'vata), but only for its restoration (dharma samsthapana). It means that human beings are free to opt for either good or evil. Those who embrace evil are sure to meet ruination. On the other hand, those who seek to preserve and promote dharma come out triumphant in the long run. Nature has the built-in potency to curb evil by meting out punishment to the evildoers. Advent of the great has only a catalytic role. Jsta is nothing but dharma incarnate. Lord Krsna declares, I am the abode of Brahman, the imperishable and the immutable the dharma eternal and the perennial Bliss. Since He is the very source of dharma, His ways fall beyond the ambit of dharma. The very axioms of righteousness owe their significance to His ways. He cannot be the subject to the canons of morality because His ways become the very paradigm with reference to which the concepts of morality are defined. So by attaining Him one become exalted to the trans-ethical state whereof one

remains beyond dualities of good or evil. Ista is also the custodian of the moral order (dharma). Having had the realization, Arjun says: you are imperishable the ultimate being, worthy of knowledge. You are the ultimate abode of the universe, the immortal guardian of the eternal dharma and you are verily, the pristine purusa. Begetter of righteousness (dharma) as He is, he appears in moments of extreme decadence to restore dharma in its rightful place.

Classical texts exhort everyone to speak the truth and practice dharma. As already discussed, Satya in the sense of agreement with reality, is grounded in Rta. Satya is the human perception of the reality. When Satya (truth), conceptualized by the mind, is put into practice, it is termed Dharma. Satya and dharma are the conceptual and actional expressions of Rta, respectively. In Taittiriya Upanisad, Satya is seen as more primeval than Dharma. Here Satya is accorded priority because conceptualization of it (truth) is logically prior to the practice. In Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, Satya is deemed to have professed Dharma and vice versa. Rta is ontic, Satya is conceptual and Dharma is axiological expression of the transcendental subjectivity (Brahman). Rta, Satya and Dharma constitute the inalienable triad.

Dharma, in one of its primary senses, stands for the characteristic essence or inalienable property of things and beings. From this perspective, dharma can broadly be classified as Bastu dharma, Jaiva dharma and Manava dharma.

Vastu Dharma

Things in the world can be brought under two dichotomous categories, i.e. animate and inanimate. Vastu dharma is understood as the dharma of the inanimate existents. It is a commonplace truism that every object has its essential and accidental properties. The accidental qualities are variable while the essential qualities are invariable. One can think of an object without the former, but never without the latter. The former is constitutive whereas the latter is attributive of the real. The essential property (dharma) of water is to flow downward. One cannot think of water without its tendency to flow downward, be it in the river, reservoir, test tube or in the water pool. Similarly, the dharma is of a particular end.

Nityakarmas are duties like prayer (sandhya), study (svadhyaya) which are to be performed meticulously everyday. On the other hand, naimittika karmas are binding on the individual on special occasions like funeral rites, eclipse, etc. irrespective of one's likes or dislikes. Duties enjoined by the scriptures are either of the Nature of prescriptions

(vidhis) or prohibitions (nisedhas). It is significant that both do's and don'ts presuppose the fundamental tenets of dharma.

Classification of dharma in to varnadharma, Asrama dharma, Sadharana dharma is not conclusive. Dharma sastras dwell at length on Jati dharma, Kula dharma, Gan dharma suiting to the office or responsibility that one is entrusted with. Having had a fair degree of clarifies about the Nature, content and genesis of different dharmas, one may pertinently ask: What is that which makes dharma worth its significance? Where from do the moral injunctions get their imperative force? Why ought one perform one's duty regardless of conditions and consequences? It may here be underlined that an Ought gets its ultimate justification from Is, i.e. Moral order (dharma, in the ontological sense). Dharma, in the sense of cosmic order, adduces justification to the moral paradigms and pursuits subsumed under the rubric of Varna dharma, Asrama dharma, Sadharana dharma and so on.

Dharma & Religion

In common parlance, Dharma and Religion are often used as synonymous terms. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc. are different religions professes and practiced by people at large. But dharma has hardly has _ any equivalence in English language. There are certain words in our language that get their semantic import from the socio-cultural milieu and worldview of the people. From the preceding discussions, it is amply clear that the term dharma, in the sense of cardinal values, characteristic essence and the regulative principles, is ontology-Specific. Religion, on the other hand, stands for a body of beliefs, set of practices, prescriptions and prohibitions formulated by its propounder in certain social contexts. Before getting hold of the precise relationship between the two, it is necessary to lay bare the meaning of Religion against the backdrop of wide range of meanings of the term dharma.

It is hardly possible to find a characteristic or a set of characteristics, common to all the religions without exception. Nonetheless, one can get hold of a cluster of characteristics shared by religions, by and large.

(a) Belief in God or the Transcendental

Most of the religions take God as the nucleus concept and as central to the religious way of life. God is differently conceived in different religious frameworks. There are religions like Jainism and Buddhism in which God does not find an explicit place though certain states are thought to be the summa bonum of religious pursuit. Religious quest per se presupposes a gap between the actual and the ideal. The actual refers to

the state from where one has to rise higher. The ideal is conceived as trans-empirical or non-empirical, attainable through ardent pursuit of the sacred ordinances. Actions that take one to the ultimate goal are deemed as goodness or virtue, while actions that lead us away are veritable evil. The journey from the actual to the ideal is a journey from imperfection to perfection ignorance to enlightenment. Religions differ in respect of the ways, which are eminently determined by social contingencies and contextual peculiarities. But the cherished goals of the religions have some striking likeness. In some religions attainment of Godhood is the ultimate end and in some, people aspire to be Godlike while in some others, the highest state has been thought as one of the moral perfections. Every religion, despite its peculiar way of describing the transcendental, lays down certain behavioral criteria to judge, if one has really attained the highest state. A religious belief is to be lived. Righteous mode of living provides the real test of one's belief. Dharma, in this sense, stands for righteous mode of living. Though religions differ with regard to the beliefs, they urge the individuals to practice dharma in unequivocal terms. Under this interpretation dharma can be taken as secular expression of the religious (sacred).

(b) Preceptor

Every religion has to have a profounder or prophet or a preceptor. He is adored differently as incarnation of God, son of God, messenger of God, or a personality who is Godlike or has attained godhood. Among the religious followers, he commands ultimate authority and enjoys unconditional allegiance. He is the final court of appeal in religious matters. To find refuge in him is to be perennially assured. In view of their inherent imperfections, individuals stand in need of a guide? if preceptor (guru) who shows the beacon light to help them out of the pale of the ignorance or imperfection. In some religions, man is thought as inherently capable of attain in Godhood or becoming Godlike without any mediation and in some systems, the preceptor (guru) is considered as indispensable in the Godward-journey.

(c) Scriptures

Religious induction is deemed as objective and universal in its import. After the departure of the propounder, revelations or prescriptions contained in the scriptures remains as the perpetual guide and inspiration for the followers. The ideals in the holy books find their natural way into the conduct of its followers. This is how spiritual legacy of the Master comes to be perpetuated. They are rightly taken as dharmasastras because they are supposed to enlighten us not only about the universal moral laws (dharma in its ontological connotation) but also about the regulative principles of conduct (dharma in the sense of ought).

(d) Holy and profane

Good always presupposes its contrary. Human beings are endowed with free-will. So, to obey or not to obey the moral commandment, remain an open choice before them. Holy is defined as conformity to the principle enjoined in the scriptures or by the preceptor. On the contrary, profane is associated with thought words and action incongruous with them. Holy and Profane correspond to the moral pairs, Dharma and adharma, respectively.

(e) Prayer

Prayer is devotional expression of the aspirant for the Lord. It is a form of address to the almighty in which the devotee gives vent to his thought and feeling about God, extolling his greatness, invoking His grace and sometime asking Him to help him out of the plights of life. Generally, prayers take the form of invocation to God for removing the ills and obstacles, granting worldly boons bestowing, worldly prosperity. Such prayers are nothing but the unguarded expression of our transactional psychology. Here the individual expects certain return through words of sycophancy and offering of gifts. Such religious modes not only betray one's ignorance about God but also undermine the dignity and holiness of the creator - creature relationship. It is motivated by the anthropomorphic prejudice that like lesser mortals, God is amenable to words of supplications, persuasion and physical gifts. If God is all-knowing and loving, it minimally means that God knows our needs better than we know them and that He would dispense the best possible in the most propitious manner. If pray one must, then one should only pray: 'O' Lord! Let thy will be fulfilled to me. The ultimate well-being of the individual consists in making oneself a fit instrument, (nimitta) in the hands of the Almighty. The importance of prayer cannot be over emphasized. It is said: Much more is wrought by prayer than the world dreams off. Every sincerest prayer is answered. God cannot but yield to the wishes of the pure and ardent hearts. Prayer makes the mind unidirectional as the individual attunes the bio-psychic rhythm to the will and ways of God. By such act, one becomes a worthy instrument through which the divine grace flows unobstructed. Kirtan is the subtlest form of address to the Almighty.

(f) Worship

The anthropomorphic bias that the supernatural agent is amenable to human persuasion, finds expression in varied forms of worship, often accompanied by elaborate modes of rites and rituals. The Aryans, in early times, were worshippers of Nature. The whole conspectus of literature was produced by them specifying the

details of the performance of rites and rituals. A whole tradition was built on it. The primitive minds were stuck with awe and wonder at the marvels of Nature. Man's utter helplessness and dependence on Nature found expression in worshipful observances. Studies reveal that, human beings, across time and place, think alike. Tree-worship, Phallus-worship are found among the simple, primitive and remote communities. The tendency to deify the formless God and to make devotional offerings to Him takes the form of Idol worship. Idol represent the ideal is pushed into the unconscious and the idol becomes the sole obsession of the conscious. Eventually one becomes the worshipper of the crude. Flow of the mind is favourably conditioned to a particular form. This constricts of mind and arrests its expansion (vistara). Of course, we may come across people who are given to idol worship and on that account, are spiritually elevated and possess sublime contact. An idol worshipper may have attained the acme of spiritual perfection, which the practitioners of Brahmavidya struggle to attain. It is so because what is consequential is not the object of worship but the act of worship, nay, the devotion and steadfastness of the mind behind the worship. But worship is not being recommended because of the inherent risk that in the process of constant ideation of the idol, one might end up with the worship of the finite and crude.

(g) Faith vis-a-vis Reason

Religion is construed as a faith of pursuit. God is an article of faith, rather than an object of sense-perception or the subject of rational discourse. Descriptions of God, accounts of Divine creation, the notion of Immortality of soul, Reincarnation are accepted on faith. The traditional views subscribing to the antithesis between faith and reason need not be restated. It is said that faith begins where reason ends. Religion on faith. Accordingly, scientific attitude is considered as irreligious and religious attitude, as unscientific. If this is conceded, then religious following will lose its respectability. It would be tantamount to irrational preoccupation, which only the naive, the credulous and the gullible can afford to embrace. A faithful is considered alone who becomes an easy prey to superstitions, prejudices and dogmas. An in-depth understanding of the logic of faith shall show that the aforesaid view is inherently unsound. Sense experience and Reason are not the only sources of valid cognition. They cannot account for certain experiences and knowledge, otherwise available to us with equal degree of certitude and objectivity. The domain of the mystical eludes the grasp of the rational or the categorical. Objectivity is to be understood only in the sense of inter-subjectivity. Cognition is objective, if and only if it can stand the test of inter subjective corroboration. Judged by this criterion, the intuitive cognition or mystical experience can very well pass off as knowledge per se, and faith shall retain the respectability of
