



**THE SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY**

**COMPARATIVE READING OF BHAGAVAD-GITA AND UNIVERSAL  
DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS FROM THE BRANCH OF PHILOSOPHY  
CALLED ETHICS**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE COURSE: MASTERS OF GLOBAL STUDIES**

**SUBMITTED BY**

**SARINA ARYAL**

**STAVANGER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research is comparative study of universal declaration of human rights and Hindu ethics. The research also tries to understand ethics through philosophical stand point and uses it as a tool to evaluate the two ethical tradition. Even though these two ethical trends seem very different in the first glance but they do share some of the core ideas of global harmony, stability and plurality. Nevertheless, there are plenty of differences in ethical and cultural framework of these ethical traditions. The analysis is categorically divided into three sub-sections focusing upon the notion of conduct, concept of right and wrong, idea of collective and individual and the last one discusses about the meeting point of the two trends.

**Comparative reading of Bhagavad-Gita and Universal Declaration of Human Rights from  
the branch of philosophy called Ethics.**

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study is to develop basic understanding of two diverse ethical traditions, namely, United Nation declaration of Human Rights and Hindu Ethics from Bhagavad-Gita. In both ethical traditions, we will try to focus upon the concept of right and wrong conduct, compare them, try to understand both from the perceptive of each other, gain insight of their contributions and ambiguities. Towards the conclusion, this study will also try to gain insight from these two ethical traditions, try to find common grounds between two, consequently due to which inclusion of values and ethics from the both ethical trends is possible for the benefit of global residents.

The main reason that drives me to this title is scarcity of projects done in Hindu text in Master thesis at MHS comparison to other religious text. Likewise, there are very few which try to look upon Hindu religious text from the perspective of global ethics. Furthermore, I have always have been passionate about knowing ethical aspects of Hinduism and this opportunity felt like right gateway to build my understand on Hindu ethics. These two are the motivating factors for this research work.

The main purpose of the research is to draw parallel and analyze the differences and similarity between Hindu ethics, referencing Bhagavad-Gita and Global ethics, referencing the United Nation's declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, the ethics in the current research is not limited to religious ethics or certain traditions or ideologies; it will try to first understand ethics philosophically and after that try to address ethical narratives of Bhagavad-Gita and declaration of Human Rights. There are many texts in Hinduism which moralizes on ethics or discuss about moral behaviors but due to time constriction and other reasons, it is not possible to include all. Besides that, Bhagavad-Gita is one of the most important religious texts for Hindus. So, this research project will focus upon Bhagavad-Gita only. The research will try to understand Hindu ethics, define ethics from a Hindu religious perspective and try to see if it has some values to offer which can contribute in the formation of global ethics.

Moreover, UN universal declaration of human rights, published on 10th December, 1948, is another text that will be extensively used in the current research. Among different conventions and declarations, human rights was chosen due to its global influence and standing. The mentioned declaration is one of the most adopted and translated documents universally. Even though there are disagreements and reservation regarding UDHR universal appeal, nonetheless, it is one of the influential international conventions. And the UDHR is inclusive as this right is not applicable to one group, community, gender, age or race of people but for all, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender or nationality. It promotes freedom to all human being on the planet and regards human rights as inalienable right of every human. It elucidates, what are the basic actions or conduct that all human should be allowed to perform, regardless of class, ethnicity or gender. So, the objective of the research is also to understand global ethics through UDHR and it tries to identify its effectiveness and shortcomings and compare it to Hindu ethics from Bhagavad-Gita.

The theoretical tool of the research will be ethics. Therefore, while analyzing these two texts, Bhagavad-Gita and UDHR , the study will fully focus on the notion of ethics and will try to draw parallel between two ethical traditions and may ignore any other implications other than ethics. Ethics has multiple implications therefore in this project it is impossible to disuses all ethical aspects, hence the primary concern of this research will be to focus upon the definition of conduct, the concept of right and wrong and on notion of peace and stability.

Ethics in this research means moral principles which guides human behavior. And often ethics is founded upon religious teachings, culture and values of given society which constantly influences our behaviors, thinking and actions. Ethics is pervasive in society and it is constantly influencing our behavior and guides us to separate right from wrong, moral from immoral. However, to find fault and to see parallel between other culture and tradition we need to de-attach ourselves from our own cultural lenses. Nevertheless, for the establishment of global ethics, it is essential that one de-attaching oneself from the known and try to understand other culture and traditions so one is able to finding common grounds which is beneficial and agreeable for most. For that reason, the current research work will first try to comprehend ethics not from the religious standpoint but rather will try to understand ethics as a branch of philosophy. As the ethics is elusive term, it can have myriads of meaning in different situations

and to different people, at times it may be concept of right and wrong, religious belief one holds, regulations of law or pre-defined behavior in society, therefore, it is very imperative to define and understand what we mean by ethics? The question shall be addressed in the following chapter through discussing different definitions of ethics given by different philosophers from past to contemporary times. This discussion will help to understand the meaning of ethics from multiple perspectives and draw upon the fundamental characteristics of ethics that can be traced in most of the definitions. The insights gained from the different theories regarding ethics will be used as a vital tool to compare and evaluate UDHR and Hindu ethics from Bhagavad-Gita.

Ethics is a search of wisdom; it is trying to come to an understanding, what is right and wrong and good or bad. It is done with the help of reasoning and from ancient philosophers to modern social scientist are on constant search of it. UN declaration of Human Rights also tries to establish wisdom wherein basic rights of each individual is applauded. It affirms four basic freedom to all individuals, that is, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. These are the conducts or activity that all being on the earth are allowed to execute according to declaration. Besides that, it also directs all the member states to promote and respect these fundamental rights and freedom to all without any reservation to race, sex, language and religion. Therefore, it is undeniable fact that ethics are usually shaped by social, political, legal, economical, cultural and religious factors of a given society. Many of our actions are guided by the ethical teaching of society and environment we grew in.

Values, ethics and concept of right and wrong constantly influence our behavior and it guide us to make decide upon, what is good or bad, right or wrong and moral or immoral. Because we are brought up in given culture and nearness to our culture we fail to see fault in our own culture, Therefore, we regard our culture as the normal one and our values, ethics and concepts as best and logical. As a result, we tend to see our culture as the best one, deep down we have a desire to see the ethical tradition we grew in as the global ethics, but it is next to impossible as it is not the complete reality because we create our realities through the social construction that we live in.

The global ethics should be applicable for all people; it should comprise views and ideas that are suited for multiples. It seems next to impossible to find the ethics that can be feasible to all the people around the globe; however, it is quite possible as most of the world traditions are teaching

same things like: not to hurt, kill, steal or lie others and try to promote kindness, truthfulness, honesty and compassion. So, by studying different ethical traditions we can see that in fact we can find so many parallel ethical values in almost all of them. So, global ethics should be that the concept or value which can be established across cultures, religious communities or different ethnic groups. Hence, the aim of this research work is also to find core ethical teaching in Hinduism through Bhagavad-Gita and try to find those which resonates the ideal of global ethics and promotes the idea of harmony and pluralistic society.

Furthermore, the research work will not only explain or describe the two ethical traditions, it will also take in the consideration of the critics of UN declaration of Human Rights and Hindu ethical tradition. In addition, the research will also try to analyze one from the perspective of other. On doubt there are plenty of similarities between two, as both of them promote good conduct, and promise just society through social justice. But, there are many questions raised by different communities on universality of UN declaration of human rights and likewise, even though Hindu scriptures like Bhagavad-Gita and Vedas are very central to Hinduism, Hindu ethics have also been changing with time, it is redefined and restructured to meet the need of time. It has been influenced by changing international law, agreements and new technological developments.

To sum up, the research will discuss and try to understand, Hindu Ethics and Global Ethics and try to see parallel and contradiction between them. Therefore, the primary text that are being used are Bhagavad-Gita and UN declaration of Human Rights (1948), these are the two pillars on which the research will be based on. UN declaration will be used to exemplify the global ethics, it will be the prime text through which global ethics and its success will be discussed. Likewise, Bhagavad-Gita will help us to understand Hindu ethics more closely and we will try to analyze and understand Hindu ethics. Lastly, the research will discuss the similarities and contradictions found in both the texts, the Bhagavad-Gita and UN declaration of Human Rights, regarding righteous human conduct.

In addition, ethics will play vital role to logically understand and develop innovative insight from these two ethical traditions. The research work will try to see both traditions from lenses of ethics that will be developed in the second chapter. Hence, the finding of the research will be the understanding of two ethical traditions and contribution they can make to the global ethics.



## **Chapter Two**

### **WHAT IS ETHICS?**

Usually people take ethics as something distant, far from the understanding of common man, something that are discussed by seasoned philosophers in huge universities' room. Nonetheless,

Ethics deals with values, with good and bad, with right and wrong. We cannot avoid involvement in ethics, for what we do – and what we don't do – is always a possible subject of ethical evaluation. Anyone who thinks about what he or she ought to do is, consciously or unconsciously, involved in ethics. (Singer, 2001: V)

Furthermore, moral philosophy also concerns with capacity to decide if what one is doing correctly or not and not being under constant influence of traditional rules and directed by laws of society.

Moral Philosophy arises when, like Socrates, we pass beyond the stage in which we are directed by traditional rules and even beyond the stage in which these rules are so internalized that we can be said to be inner-directed, to the stage in which we think for ourselves in critical and general terms ... and achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents. (Frankena, 1973:4)

In an academic milieu ethics is a fraction of philosophy faculty, as Frankena writes, "Ethics is a branch of philosophy; it is moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgments." (Frankena, 1973:4) The inception of ethics was to make harmonious state. Morality is needed to solve and maybe get rid of conflicts and create peace. In addition, "[...] we need priority-rules, not just because they make society smoother, nor even just to make it possible at all, but also more deeply, to avoid lapsing individually into states of helpless, conflict-torn confusion. In some sense, this is 'the origin of ethics' and our search need take us no further." (Midgley, 2001:11) Because of this fact, diverse communities and culture hold same core foundational value. Therefore, there is an existence of global ethics, without common value or belief, which would not have been possible otherwise. The basic ideologies of not hurting others and showing compassion exist across cultures. The shared common priorities,

values and ideals make it possible for us to have shared morality. Hence, “Morality needs, not just conflicts, but willingness and a capacity to look for shared solutions to them.” (Midgley, 2001:12)

Primarily, ethics is divided in three broad categories: meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Meta-ethics is seeking for validation for normative judgment, it is both theoretical implication and moral referencing based on which a person decides if one has committed moral action or not, whereas, normative ethics is following of compulsory or socially acceptable norms and values. The last one, applied ethics relates to obligatory ethical obligations in given situation for example, medical, business, military ethics.

[...] distinguish three kinds of thinking that relate to morality in one way or another.

1. There is descriptive empirical inquiry, historical or scientific, such as is done by anthropologists, historians, psychologists and sociologists. Here, the goal is to describe or explain the phenomena of morality or to work out a theory of human nature which bears on ethical questions.
2. There is normative thinking of the sort what Socrates was doing in the *Crito* or that anyone does who asks what is right, good, or obligatory. [...]
3. There is also “analytical,” “critical,” or “meta-ethical” thinking. This is the sort of thinking we imagined that Socrates would have come to if he had been challenged to the limit in the justification of his normative judgments. (Frankena, 1973: 5)

Ethics can be interpreted in numerous ways with numerous definitions and explanations. It can mean the ability to judge right from wrong. For some it is based on religious beliefs and teachings, while for others it may be what law defines as civil behavior, so for different people it has multiple meanings. Nonetheless, ethics is not about feelings only, because at times feelings lead one away from being ethical. Likewise neither being religious nor following religious ethics is a complete definition of ethics because ethics is universal, as it applies for all,

not only to one religious group. In addition, law is also not synonyms to ethics because laws are dynamic, and what is considered at one point of time may change with time and perception of the masses, for this end of slavery and women suffrage are the best examples. Moreover, ethics is not certainly doing all that is socially accepted or prescribed. So, from burrowing from Frankena, ethics is “morality and its problems and judgments, or with moral problems and judgments.” (Frankena, 1973:5) Ethics is search, a search for wisdom, seeking what is right for most and this exploration is done through the aid of reasoning, therefore, not only top brains, academicians or philosophers but individuals and society as a whole is in continuous search of ethics.

Writers, government leaders, historians, and ordinary citizens also conduct ethical inquiry, although they may not call it that. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*, and Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, as well as discussions at the bridge table and in college dormitories, exemplify at various levels the same questing spirit and desire for wisdom. (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:2)

Nevertheless, ethics is a socio-political construct, it is constructed with adherence to local political, legal, social, cultural aspects, in fact these are the forces that shape the ethics of the society. In addition, it is undeniable fact that religion plays very significant role in social and cultural norms and values, therefore, explicitly or implicitly ethics is affected by the religious belief and consciousness of the society. And in many states, we can observe that the laws and policies of the state are heavily influenced by religious teachings and practices. Furthermore, every human action is governed by the behavior we learn as a member of the society. We judge our actions whether it is good or bad through the ethical premises we have pre-learned in a given society. We set our and others’ moral standard based on those ethical premises and judge. Likewise, not only our behavior but also our ways of thinking perceiving things are influenced by the moral principles of the society. “We all have beliefs in accordance with which we judge actions and characters, our own and those of others, to be right or wrong, good or bad; we have aspirations that we strive to realize; and we have a conception, dim or clear, of the best way to live.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:3)

To trace the roots of ethics, we can observe, in ancient times ethics was practicing, what religion taught or preached, it was attaining satisfaction for oneself, So for many ethics or virtue was obedience to God's commands, and highest satisfaction was achievement of salvation. But with time this was not enough as people faced many practical problems in day to day lives and the religious text became less and less of value. "Since many people today do not believe, as the ancients did, that there is just one definite way of living which is best for everyone, and since many think we cannot resolve our practical problem on the religious basis, the question of modern western ethics are unavoidably still our own question." (Schneewind, 2008:147).

If there is no God or natural order to define highest good or morality, then how should one decide what is difference between good or bad? The first line of thinking came during seventeenth century in Europe, the popular belief of the time was that God's law and command is what everyone need to adhere to and it requires everyone to behave in a certain way and it is good for all, "[...] while Hobbes aroused almost universal opposition for his assertion that morality serves human selfishness, the natural lawyers nonetheless agreed that humans are unruly beings, needing strong governmental control." (Schneewind, 2001:149) Furthermore, similar to first name? Hobbes thinking, the third Earl of Shaftesbury claimed that individual on herself is able to judge one's actions, and our actions are good if we approve of the person and the situations. "Shaftesbury thought that our moral sense must even be our guide in determining whether allegedly divine commands came from god or from some demon. Morality thus became an outgrowth of human feelings." (Schneewind, 2001:149)

However, for Socrates, virtue was re-discovering what already existed in soul. Refuting the claim that injustice is more profitable and pleasurable than justice and brings happiness, Plato (year?) clarifies ethics upon two fundamental factors, first the soul of all human beings has three basic components: reason, passion and desire, and second the character of the individual depends upon development of these three faculties and the prominence of one over other. Plato defines justice as,

Each of the three elements of the soul (psyche) is involved in moral behavior, and each when it carries out its proper function, is characterized by an appropriate

virtue: governing the soul of reason constitutes wisdom; rational regulation of desire constitutes temperance; the support of reason by the passions constitutes courage; the harmony of the three faculties constitutes justice, which is overarching virtue. The same kind of analysis applies to the functioning society, because for Plato, the state is the “individual writ large.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:15)

In addition, for Plato moral virtue is founded upon knowledge of good. But yet, the absolute idea of good is not fully understood by the human mind because the idea of good cannot be explained in single statement. Plato argues good to be different than knowledge and pleasure, he tries to explain good with analogy to the sun. “Thus sight requires not only the eye and the object of sight but also the sun, which is the source of light. In the same way, understanding requires not only the mind and the objects of understanding but also the Good, which is the source of intelligibility.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:17) Meaning, just like in darkness we see nothing; we are able to see only after light/sun shines upon visible objects, similarly, “truth can be known only when illuminated by the Good.” So through the means of analogy of sun Plato have drawn parallel to soul’s vision and eye’s vision.

Consequently, Aristotle defines highest good as happiness. Happiness is the ultimate aim of all our actions. All our actions aim at achieving end, and these ends are used to achieve another ends. For instance, we study to achieve academic degree but the academic degree is not the end but rather means to achieve job, and again job is not the end, it is just a means to achieve money and success and this may again not be the true end. Only happiness has its end. Therefore, it is the ultimate end and all our actions are directed to achieve this. “Among those who are sufficiently mature to discuss ethics, there is verbal agreement that the ultimate human good is happiness, but opinions about its precise nature vary.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:25) However, the complicated component is to gain consensus of what makes people happy. Subsequently, ultimate end of the ethics is to find the answer to what makes people happy. Nevertheless, finding the answer to this question is not very easy as every individual life is different and there are so many different variables to consider. In addition, Aristotle defines an action of the balanced soul in agreement with virtue as ultimate good. “His definition of

happiness contains two vital concepts: 'Activity of soul,' which means the exercise of reason, and 'in accordance with virtue,' which describes the quality of the performance." (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:26) Aristotle argues moral virtue as inclination to act in the correct manner and it is a balance between insufficiency and excess vices. Hence, moral virtue is learnt through habit and practice.

The virtues corresponding to the two functions of reason are the intellectual and the moral. The wise individual personifies the intellectual virtues, whereas the continent person typifies the moral virtues. The former's excellence is attained through instruction and evidenced by knowledge. The excellence of the latter is produced by habits of choice and expressed in practical actions tempered by both the circumstance and the individual. (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:28)

Aristotle focuses on importance of reason for one to perform moral action. Moreover, he also clarifies that at times people aim at the good but because of ignorance of what is good, aim at vice instead. Therefore, when making a choice one should use one's rationality. "Aristotle maintains that we should not choose activities by how pleasant they are. Rather, although good activities are pleasant, and are choiceworthy because they are pleasant, their pleasantness is a function of their goodness, not vice versa. (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:31) So, for early philosophers, morality was engrained in human nature, and while doing good to oneself they also did good to others.

Likewise, seventeenth century philosopher Shaftesbury believed virtue to be born out of feelings. But for David Hume, virtue was not only born out of our feelings because he found out it to be un-agreeable with the case of justice. "Hume argued that what benefits society is having an accepted practice of following known rules of justice, even if the practice causes hardship in some cases." (Schneewind, 2001:150) Therefore, at times when justice is delivered it is not always balance where everyone receives good, for instance, even if you steal thousands from a millionaire to help the poor, law will pronounce it as a stealing not the act of morality. Furthermore, Hume also argued that to follow the set law or not, also arises from our feelings and desires.

In other respect, Kantian ethics defines morality in terms of freedom. Immanuel Kant argues that morality comes from human nature; it is adherence of unconditional obligation. It is something that must be done under any circumstance but in order to do it, we need to oblige ourselves.

The clue to Kant's view is freedom. When we know we morally must do something, we know we can do it; and this can only be true if we are free. Freedom in action excludes determination by anything outside ourselves, and it is not merely undetermined, or random, behavior. The sole way in which we can be free, for Kant, is if our actions are determined by something within our own nature. (Schneewind, 2001:151)

To conclude, Kant elucidates that by following god's will or somebody else's authority, we cannot be moral as our actions are not guided by our own will. Therefore, the external sources does not make us moral rather it should come from individual free will so it can be moral and individuals can experience true freedom. Likewise, to act morally, the compulsion to act correctly must come from the law that we ourselves have decided to follow and adhere to. Respectively, for Kant, morality is not the highest good, neither it is for the good of everyone. Rather, he perceives morality as the logical way of how everyone should act. "Each of us, Kant holds, can methodically think out whether a planned action is allowable or not by asking: can I without self-contradiction will this plan to be law according to which everyone always acts? Only if I can am I permitted to act on it?" (Schneewind, 2001:151) Therefore, the Kantian position is to find what is logical or right rather than which action will deliver the good results.

On a contrary, for Marxist, historical setting is very important to understand the morality of the given society. Karl Marx (year?) finds both society and individual fastened together with means of production. Therefore, ethics, morality and definition of virtue are determined by people who own up the means of production and they are not built upon reason rather they are built upon material forces that shape them.

Marx maintains that the more sophisticated forms of human intelligence – morality, religion, politics and so forth – are determined by the economic

conditions of a given society and have no independence status. For example, moral values are ideological in character (that is, they are not products of pure reason but are the effects of material forces that are their source). (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:190)

As a result, there are no moral or ethical principles that are established across generations, the forces, which own up the means of production and distribution, decide upon the ideology and morality of the given society. Marx also introduces the theme of “alienation” wherein in a capitalistic society, human are just a commodity as they do not have right over their labor and are directed and guided by others. Because of this alienation, people lose their dignity and creativity and become “mere cog in the industrial complex”. Under these circumstances, the attainment of freedom is only possible through revolution. “This state of affairs will be rectified only when the inevitable proletarian revolution takes place In brief, true freedom will be expressed when the masses take control of the instruments of production.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:193) Establishment of classless society will make all the animosity vanishes and moreover, since moral principles were created because of the class conflict, they will become obsolete. Hence, the moral principle will lose its essence. Here, we can see similarity between Kant and Marx as Kant also focuses on omission of external forces to established moral principles as they curtail individual freedom. He clarifies that if we have set law in our hearts by ourselves to act in certain rational ways. then we do not need moral guidelines, as it comes from inward. This is the true freedom.

Poles apart from rest, first name? Nietzsche’s ethical theory is divergent as he draws upon the distinction between “master-morality” of aristocrats and “slave-morality” of lay men. “There are then, different ethical terms for the two moralities: the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is made by the aristocrat, whereas the opposition of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is the invention of the slaves. Motivated by resentment, the latter call ‘evil’ those characteristics that the aristocrats most honor in themselves.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:215) Master-morality is where the master is the one who creates values and in a way, it is self-aggrandizement. Nevertheless, slave-morality does not take in all that master has to offer, it sorts it out with skepticism and only those that help to lessen the pain of life are taken. Hence, slave-morality is utilitarian morality. The



aristocratic are nobler, and are gifted with creativity and intelligence, and they are ferocious and barbarian, not only physically powerful but also have intellectual power. On the other hand, slave-morality does not censure creative egoism, which is the core of master-morality. “The psychical impotence of the ‘herd’ is reflected in the morality it produces. The basic principle of all slave-morality, Nietzsche tells us, is resentment of the aristocratic spirit. For example, altruism, a typical slave ideal, denies the value of creative egoism that is central to master morality.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:216) Nietzsche further argues mitigation of violence, preaching of peace, suppression of exploitation and pain, is not living and it will eventually lead to “decay and dissolution”. “Continuing in the same vein, Nietzsche condemns the ideal of peace and universal equality, exposing their life-denying qualities. Exploitation and competition, he argues, characterize all living things, because they are the very essence of the will to power.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:217) Thus, for Nietzsche life is inclusive of violence, oppression, exploitation so one should cope and survive – essence of the will to power. In addition, Nietzsche regards, Christianity and Judaism as dishonest since they are destroying European empire because both of these religions make people weak by taking away human nature from them. “Nietzsche assigns to Judaism and Christianity the primary responsibility for the dishonest morality that is exhausting European civilization.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:218) These two philosophers do not promote evolutionary revolution and destroy the will to power and egoism eventually destroying creative, intellectual and barbarian power of individuals. Besides that, Nietzsche views that future philosophers will understand the importance of barbarian actions and suffering and he believes, there should be transvaluation of values so that will to power can be materialized.

Correspondingly, according to Jean Paul Sartre, personal will or choice is very much prominent as personal choices create individuality, “ [...] in creating the man we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:280) As an individual, we think too much about the world at large and make ourselves unhappy and this is the source of human anxiety and suffering. Therefore, due to fact we try to be humanist rather than an individual being we cause ourselves misery and angst. Radical freedom for Sartre is when the human being is able to make their own choices persistently in his or her own life. By choices means all the decisions from

selecting what to eat to whom to be friend with. But, on the topic of morality, Sartre explains that since there is no existence of God and there is no predetermined law or nature, that has authority over human at birth, therefore, one is entirely responsible for one's action. "For Sartre, human freedom and the denial of God's existence place us in the precarious position of being solely responsible for our actions. There are no a priori guidelines to give direction to our lives. This is a brute fact that each of us must face." (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:281) As a result, for Sartre morality is an individualistic principle as individuals make their own choices and are accountable to them.

## **2.1 Summary**

The present day discussion of ethics and understanding of ethics is hugely influenced by the western philosophical tradition. Aforementioned passages try to understand ethics from ancient to present day through selected philosophers and their position on what is ethics, morality and virtue. Through the discussion, this chapter tries to understand pragmatic questions related to ethics: What is good? What is moral and what is not? All the theories that are normative ethics as all of them are regarding how one should conduct one's action.

In ancient times, ethics was guided by the religion. They tried to follow religious scripture for the attainment of good to all. But with the development of science and arising of new problems, people were forced find other alternatives than religion as it could not answer all the issues raised with time. The first generation of philosophers believed ethics to be natural law, something arising within human nature, which is innate inside all. They believed we just need to nourish it and with practice and habit we can develop it. For Aristotle, the highest good was happiness again. It is in human nature to search for happiness. Therefore, our happiness is derived from the rational choices we make which in long may bring in happiness to all. At the same time for others, morality or virtue was the extension of human feelings so it was born with feelings one had towards other beings.

Taking the departure from happiness and virtue, Kantian ethics introduced us to Freedom, what is true morality and freedom. He defines human beings as capable forming their own morality, if

one can decide upon one's moral action without any external pressure or forces, then only in true sense one is free. For Kant, freedom is also practice of one's free will. Kant also does not perceive morality as the highest good. So, rather than focusing on what good it might bring, one should focus on what is logical form of action that applies for all. Further, with Marx, we gained new perspectives on the existence of morality, for Marx, in society, morality is needed because of the present social conflict. If there were proletarian revolution no morality is needed, as morality and ethics are created by the ones who own the means of production to control the laborers. So, for Marx also morality is innate which does not require any regulations or guidelines.

Nietzsche introduced us to master-morality and slave-morality. Master-morality is the promotion of individuality, creativity and taking life as it comes, whereas slave-morality is herd mentality, which tries to homogenizing everything to elevate pain and suffering. So, for Nietzsche suffering, anxiety and pain are parts of life and by over-coming it we give will to power which is true essence of life. In addition, Nietzsche also believes religion to be grand-narratives, which try to subdue people by preaching on dishonest morality.

We also touched upon the deontological ethical endeavors of Sartre, who believes we are just in absurd reality and on our own. We decide upon our choices and create who we are. At time, by being humans, we bring pain and suffering to ourselves, so we ought to think for ourselves. Therefore, morality for Sartre is individualistic and we are ourselves accountable for our actions. These were very distinct lines of thinking which will be very interesting to evaluate and draw parallel to religious, Hindu ethics and global ethics. However, the following chapter will try to illuminate upon the theory of global ethics and try to understand human rights as global ethics, and further, why and how it has succeeded.

## **Chapter Three**

### **GLOBAL ETHICS**

There are multiple agencies which has made the world a global village, because of international trade, immigration, international networks and support groups, it is nearly impossible to stay isolated in this globalized world. Due to these factors, the volume of interaction in different levels from trade to international relationships to diplomacy flourishes and flows across boundaries.

Globalization denotes the intensification of worldwide social relations and interactions such that distant events acquire very localized impacts and vice versa. It involves rescaling of social relations, from the economic sphere to the security sphere, beyond the national to the transnational, transcontinental and transworld. (Held and McGrew, 2007: 2)

This connectedness influences nations regardless of boundaries because technology and interaction has created so many common shared social spaces where global citizens can share their opinions and reactions. Not only ideas but also these spaces are responsible for generating global pop-cultures which seem to encourage both global western consumerism and lifestyle embedded in products, for instance, Hollywood movies, McDonald's and Coca Cola which are global brand names.

In recent times, because of ever-growing social media and in the age of social networking, we are never isolated; constantly and frequently we are bombarded with new information, news, world politics, crisis and about different issues of the world. The question we all need to consider is: is this development positive? Or, has it brought problems that affect our lives? Due to, new technological development, we live comfortable lives and enjoy longevity and with blurring of boundaries there are greener pastures to explore both for academic purposes or business endeavors. Nevertheless, because of our connectedness we also face many common problems, for instance, terrorism, global warming, environmental deterioration, global infectious disease threats, and humanitarian crisis on superficial level. And in deeper level it has detrimental effects

on local culture as it erodes local culture and way of life. “There have been many impassioned ethical debates about the benefits and costs of these processes of globalization, including their effects on inequality both within and between societies, their consequences for the environment, and the way they are uprooting and displacing traditional ways of life.” (Kymlicka, 2008:1)

Correspondently, Benjamin Barber very eloquently describes the prospects that world today is looking forward to in his exceptionally well written article “Jihad vs McWorld”, he describes the world being divided in two extremes, one craving for tribal past while other looking forward to globalized future. He writes,

The first scenario rooted in race holds out the grim prospect of a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened balkanization of nation-states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe, a jihad in the name of hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and mutuality: against technology, against pop culture, and against integrated markets; against modernity itself as well as the future in which modernity issues. (Barber, 2008: 32)

In both extremes the fate of humankind seems bleak and sad. Even though we are surrounded by new technologies and inventions, at the same time, we live in a time where terrorism and civil wars are part of day-to-day lives of many global citizens. The second reality of the world that Barber presents is equally appalling. He portrays,

The second paints that future is shimmering pastels, a busy portrait of onrushing economic, technological, and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize peoples everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food – MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s – pressing nations into one homogeneous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce. Caught between Babel and Disneyland, the planet is falling precipitously apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment. (Barber, 2008: 33)

Therefore, we need to address and see the affects of globalization from the multiple locations; only one-sided perception can give birth to incomplete truth of the world today. The impacts are visible in many parts of the world. Barber claims “[...] the tendencies of both Jihad and McWorld are at work, both visible sometimes in same country at the very same instant.” (Barber, 2008: 33) The two different realities world merging together and rise of tribalization are the fact of today’s world, we long for our tribal past, yet, we are intrigued by new forms of information and technologies that are no longer restricted by boundaries. For instance,

Iranian zealots keep one ear tuned to mullahs urging holy war and the other cocked to Rupert Murdoch’s Star television beaming in *Dynasty*, *Donahue*, and *The Simpsons* from hovering satellites. Chinese entrepreneurs vie for the attention of party cadres in Beijing and simultaneously pursue KFC franchises in cities like Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Xian where twenty-eight outlets serve over 100,000 customers a day. The Russian Orthodox Church, even as it struggles to renew the ancient faith, has entered a joint venture with California businessmen to bottle and sell natural waters under the rubric Saint Springs Water Company. (Barber, 2008: 33)

Consequently, it is a high time for formulation of ethical boundaries to have some kind of control over this division and collapsing of two realities which has been creating tension and conflicts. Furthermore, since these issues have global affects, it is neither manageable by individual nation or community. Solutions cannot be generated locally because these are matter of global scale. Therefore, formulation of policy for common practice is of utmost importance. Ethics and values relating to the issue of global concerns should be constructed in order to tackle with global problems and crisis. And it is undeniable fact that globalization is pervasive in almost every society and it is here to stay so it has become a necessity to construct global ethics. However, since we live in multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic world addressing diversity is also equally important when formulating global ethics. Kymlicka writes,

It is difficult to overstate the gravity and difficulty of this task. We live in a world where entire populations and blocs of nations look for moral guidance to different religious and cultural traditions. And while these different moral traditions all

contain elements that allow and encourage cooperation across religious, cultural and national lines, they also may mandate conflicting norms and incompatible social arrangements that render cooperation difficult. (Kymlicka, 2008:2)

Because of diverse cultural and religious tradition, the concept of good and evil differs from community to community. Moreover, each culture has its different set of rules and regulations to define, what is moral and what is not. So, to bring together diverse mindset in one place may ignite sparks as even minor issue regarding clothing or gesture may create misunderstandings. And even trickier is to have open discussion about freedom, sexuality and women's position in society as these are very controversial topics among many cultures. Although, the fact is that almost all world religions and cultures deep down promote same notion of non-violence, forbids evil and injury to others.

Most people tend to believe that their culture as normal and right as they are raised in it and think it is best if their culture becomes the one that can have influence on others. But finding common grounds with all is equally important to develop sustainable form of regulations which is acceptable to all. And norms established with any means of coercion and manipulations can only escort to dictatorship and conflict but not to global ethics among global communities. "[...] it is widely recognized by most traditions today that the attempt to impose one's values on others is both illegitimate and unrealistic." (Kymlicka, 2008:2) Thus, the best way to establish global values and ethics is not through coercion or manipulation but through creation of platforms where global dialogues and debates can take place for the formulation of global ethics, which shall be equal and beneficial for all citizens of the world.

Even though it is hard task to make all agree upon one concept and come to consensus to build ethical policies that can be applicable across boundaries, however, the successful implementation of some international laws give us hope. Accreditation of UN declaration of human rights is one of such examples, which is synchronized in legal system of many nation-states. The nations that have endorsed UDHR acknowledge human rights as an inalienable right, which is endowed to every human. "People from all regions of the world and all religious and cultural backgrounds,

have been able to appropriate the language of human rights, and use it to articulate their ethical concerns.” (Kymlicka, 2008: 3)

Nonetheless, the country acknowledges human rights in their own cultural and political parameters but the fact remains that almost all of them promote the idea that every human is endowed with basic rights, right to practice freedom of speech, act and right to follow religion of choice. Moreover, it is the nation that defines human rights in their legal system considering its cultural and religious practices. The accommodation of human rights in legal system is done with help of dialogue, debates and discussion among concerned groups, intellects and policy makers. The process of discussion and accommodation makes the implementation more contextual and in long run it makes the law appropriate for the given community. Therefore, cautious accommodation and careful implementation is much more important than formulation of the law. Durability and accountability can be gained by mutual understanding and dialogue, which is the only means for the success of global ethics.

Due to globalization, information flows from one part of the globe to other very easily, due to migration people are not only confined to their own culture but are able to experience multiple cultures. Because of these encounters people are able to acknowledge the presence of multiple values, norms, cultures, traditions and religions among diverse societies. This knowledge and acknowledgement also has played a vital role for the successful implementation of human rights in many countries. Nonetheless, the implementation is possible only through persuasion but not through violence or coercion. Though in history the concept of might was right and wars were fought to make others do as one wished but at current times, persuasion and communication are important weapon and brings about lasting effects. Kymlicka argues,

While the contemporary doctrine of universal human rights was built upon the shared values of the world’s ethical traditions, that doctrine has in turn exercised a profound influence back upon those traditions, reshaping how they interpret their texts and practices in a more egalitarian and post-colonial direction. (Kymlicka, 2008:5)



Thus, the formulation and accreditation of human rights is not one culture overpowering other or coercion but it is promotion of free dialogue and freedom to all. It promotes basic right to all across boundaries, not considering, sex, race, age, ethnicity or nationality. The success of human rights and its adherence by many nation-states has instigated the importance of global ethics. The success has also highlighted the benefits it can have upon people living all over the globe. However, human rights do allow force or coercion but only when the right of people is in danger and human integrity is at jeopardy. To conclude, these kind of international rights and ethical practices promote and warrant basic right to all, which is same and equal to all. For this reason, global ethics has to offer a lot for the positive and harmonious world, nevertheless, while formulating it consensus of majority, participation of all and support of many is vital. And global ethics should contain the concepts or values which are shared across communities and can be adopted in diverse societies.

### **3.1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The United Nation was not a unique invention as there were institutions before United Nation to oversee international affairs and mitigate conflicts, for instance the League of Nations (1919), nevertheless, it failed as it could not prevent the World War II where 70 million people lost their lives during the six years of war. The death of human was very horrific as cities were bombed and many ended up in concentration camps established by the Nazis across Europe.

Jews and others deemed unfit by the Nazis for civil society were forcibly placed in the concentration camps and used for slave labor until they died of starvation, disease, fatigue or other reasons. Others were placed in extermination camps, where they were systematically murdered, most usually through use of gas chambers. (Darraj, 20210:17)

After such atrocities against human lives, the world community agreed upon that never such crisis will befall upon human kind; nonetheless, it was only possible if all nation-states of the world come together in cooperation and form a body which could operate in international scale. The declaration was formulated on December 1948 at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris and was

adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It was drawn after the devastation of Second World War, and it was the first legal document which adorned every human with inalienable rights. The declaration promotes basic rights of freedom of speech, freedom to belief, freedom of movement, freedom from fear to all. The United nation Charter, “reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person” and it also instructs its member states to uphold “universal respect for, and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” (www.un.org)

Even today, the document has not lost its relevance as it is a holy grail for human rights activists. The declaration consists of 30 varied articles elucidating on political, economical and social rights of every human on globe. Therefore, it is considered universal as it acknowledges every human no matter where we are, who we are or to whom we are born to. Since, it was formulated after the horror of the war and holocaust in Europe; it is the vow of nations involved to ensure that such level of cataclysm never fall upon human race again. According to human rights, the human dignity of all should be recognized by all nations, governments no matter what. Hence, all humans are free and equal. Article 2 states, “[...] with no distinction given to their race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” (www.un.org)

### **3.1.1 Universal human standard and equality**

The declaration is addressed to the whole human race which establishes common standard for all nations and humans and it also directs each individual or social body to keep the basic rights of human in their mind and achieve the equal state to all through the means of education and teachings.

Now therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and

education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of the Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction. (Morsink, 1999:35)

The address focus mostly on individuals, in addition the document also asks groups, nations, governments and states to create an environment through teaching and education where these rights are followed. Article 25 states that:

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

Besides, it also defines universal definition of human rights and clarifies which are the basic rights. And in the case of humanitarian crisis, it has provided world with basic standard to judge upon. Moreover, the standard assures that human rights definition is not defined by an individual nation rather it is an international standard upon which all nations and individuals can be judged. Even though critics see UDHR as imperfect but nonetheless it does emphasize upon individual, it put human dignity first than community or national. Furthermore, it is a known fact, any community, culture or group is composed of individuals. Although right regarding community or nation over individual sounds logical, nevertheless at times, these notions are abused to suppress individuals to keep hegemony of some. Understanding these facts, UDHR protects individual rights which does not undermine value of community or a nation, rather it ensure protection of each. Article 1 of UDHR states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” (www.un.org:2015)

Moreover, everything is dynamic in this world, nothing stays in one state which so eventually, whether it is individual or culture when it comes in contact with other ideas and concept; it is bound to be influenced. Consequently, the right that does not seem culturally appropriate at the moment for a community may in the long run be a necessity for the same community.

### **3.1.2. Promotes democratic conduct**

Since, human rights and its adherence by many nations, the basic right of every individual is secured by the constitution of the land; it has become a rule of law. A democratic system always promotes human rights and abstains power to be concentrated in few hands which can ultimately lead to abuse. Mahatma Gandhi defines democracy as, “I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong.” (www.mkgandi.org) Similarly, the human rights promote equality, there is no difference between sexes, races or class. Article 2 mentions,

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, free, non self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. (www.un.org )

The idea that democracy is “by the people, for the people, to the people” (Abraham Lincoln) means all authority rests on people and at the heart of democracy lies the consent of the people. Moreover, democracy also means the protection of people’s right and under democratic rule the

decision making power rests upon people of the state. As a result, the fundamental principle of democracy is equality of all citizens.

The exercise of this fundamental political right requires a guarantee of crucial freedoms –to express one’s thoughts and opinion without fear, to seek and receive information, to form associations and to assemble in a peaceful manner to discuss public affairs amongst others. Accommodation of the views of minorities is essential to prevent democracy from degenerating into despotism by the majority.  
<http://www.parliamentarystrengthening.org/humanrightsmodule/pdf/humanrightsunit2.pdf> (accessed on 1st April, 2015)

Human rights promote democratic societies, which promote human dignity of all individuals. UDHR fundamental value of freedom and equality of all is assured by any democratic society.

### **3.1.3. Promotes international peace and stability**

One of the core sentiments of the declaration is to achieve peace and stability. It encourages nations to maintain friendly relation among themselves. And furthermore, it also emphasizes that through attainment of human rights and equal rights for both the sexes, social progress is guaranteed which consequently leads to better living standard. In addition, it also clarifies that the rights should be acknowledged and understood by all to have full fledged human rights to all. The Preamble states,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge, ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

By promoting basic rights, equality and democracy to all, the ultimate end of UDHR is to obtain international peace. Not only by preaching, but also the United Nation has power to impose sanctions on nations and groups who violate human rights. Furthermore, most international development assistance offered by different agencies or concerned group are attached to the country's human right record. Besides that, UDHR promotes education as it considers education as basic human rights. Education is a right just like the right to freedom of speech, food and shelter. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states,

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

Education not only empowers an individual, it empowers human and national development. It is a passport through which one can explore limitless opportunities and autonomy. In a long run, it helps to achieve peace, stability, improve health condition and economic growth, likewise it reduces poverty. Therefore, member states regardless of poor or rich are encouraged to educate

all children. As a result, it fosters economic growth, better living standard, inclusive political participation and stability. The end of education for everyone is to achieve sustainable development.

### **3.2 Criticisms**

Despite the popularity of the UDHR, it has been criticized. Many times the allegation against the declaration is that it ignores and fails to address cultural differences that exist in different parts of the world. We all do not think alike, our perceptions are always colored with the biases of society we grow in. Therefore, how can UN declaration of human rights have universal implication, how can single declaration represent every single individual of the world; when we all have different experiences and different individuality. Our thinking, values, moral standards are shaped by the society we live in, depending upon in which cultural upbringing we have grown in the value system of each individual may differ, what seems so sacred for one may seem very secular to another. Even siblings born out of same parents have difference in opinion. As a consequence, the possibility of UDHR interpretation and meaning among multiple communities are diverse, therefore, through one single document, how can it be possible to draw one single meaning acceptable for all.

The cultural challenge to the universality of human rights arises from three distinct sources -- from resurgent Islam, from within the West itself, and from East Asia. Each of these challenges is independent of the others, but taken together, they have raised substantial questions about the cross-cultural validity – and hence the legitimacy – of human rights norms. ([www.colombia.edu](http://www.colombia.edu), Ignatieff 2001)

In the initial phase of the human rights declaration, all member states did not participate, for instance The Saudi Arabian delegation refrained from final voting. They could not agree upon wording of Article 16, equal marriage rights and Article 18, right to change religion or belief.

The Saudi Arabian delegation proposed a wording for Article 16, which it felt would not conflict with the marriage laws of most Muslim countries. The Third Committee rejected that amendment. It read as follows: “Men and women of legal matrimonial age within every country have the right to marry and found a family.” This wording leaves out the present nondiscrimination clause, according which no limitation should be placed on this right due to a person’s religion and which therefore objects to the Muslim interdiction to marrying someone of another faith, if one is a Muslim. (Morsink, 1999:24)

Many critics have defended the Saudi Arabian stand point arguing that the draft of the declaration is prepared by the authors from the western world and have only thought from the perspective of western civilization and overlooked others. So, in a way declaration is preference to one culture or thinking against other which established western civilization as superior, therefore, tries to enforce their ideals to all countries in the world. Hence, to some UDHR is a draft prepared on the biases of western thinking, as a result it fails to take in account cultural diversity in the world.

The freedoms articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights make no sense within the theocratic bias of Islamic political thought. The right to marry and establish a family, to freely choose one's partner, is a direct challenge to the authorities in Islamic society that enforce the family choice of spouse, polygamy, and other restrictions on women's freedom. In Islamic eyes, universalizing rights discourse implies a sovereign and discrete individual, which is blasphemous from the perspective of the Koran. ([www.colombia.edu](http://www.colombia.edu), Ignatieff 2001)

Moreover, it is a coercion of Western values upon rest of the world. “The West now masks its own will to power in the impartial, universalizing language of human rights and seeks to impose its own narrow agenda on a plethora of world cultures that do not actually share the West’s conception of individuality, selfhood, agency, or freedom.” ([www.colombia.edu](http://www.colombia.edu), Ignatieff 2001)



The universal notion in UDHR comes for the fact that it directly addresses, not to the government, institution or nation rather it address all the human and talk about individuals across the globe but still it is often called neo-colonist ploy to control people of rest of the world. Many schools of thoughts have come together to clarify this trend:

This current of thought has complicated intellectual origins: the Marxist critique of the rights of man, the anthropological critique of the arrogance of late-nineteenth-century bourgeois imperialism, and the postmodernist critique of the universalizing pretensions of Enlightenment thought. All of these tendencies have come together in a critique of Western intellectual hegemony as expressed in the language of human rights. Human rights are seen as an exercise in the cunning of Western reason: no longer able to dominate the world through direct imperial rule, the West now masks its own will to power in the impartial, universalizing language of human rights and seeks to impose its own narrow agenda on a plethora of world cultures that do not actually share the West's conception of individuality, self-hood, agency, or freedom. ([www.colombia.edu](http://www.colombia.edu), Ignatieff 2001)

Furthermore, Ignatieff argues that each culture has the value system to judge what is good and what is not and it can decide upon the meaning of good living. And they can pursue that as long as it does not violate the right of individual who are part of the culture. The change comes with time, experience, necessity and exposure.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Even among the criticisms, UDHR has been accepted by three out of four nations in the world and the declaration has been endorsed by majority. It is obvious fact that UDHR is not perfect; nonetheless, its advocacy of human dignity across the cultural boundaries cannot be ignored. Though many consider it to be a Western imposition, therefore, not applicable for all but the importance should be given to its ability to protect individual interests not its origin. Besides that

it is pro human, it supports and promotes human dignity regardless of race, sex, ethnicity or nationality.

UDHR states all are equal and we all have equal right to voice our opinions no matter from where we come from. Since, there are voices in the room, there is bound to be discussion, agreement and disagreement.

Because the European voices that once took it upon themselves to silence the babble with a peremptory ruling no longer take it as their privilege to do so, and those who sit with them at the table no longer grant them the right to do so. All this counts as progress, as a step toward a world imagined for millennia in different cultures and religions: a world of genuine moral equality among human beings. But a world of moral equality is a world of conflict, deliberation, argument, and contention. ([www.colombia.edu](http://www.colombia.edu), Ignatieff 2001)

For all, now is the high time to think for way forward rather than indulging in rhetoric which can bring forth peaceful society. Rather, than focusing in western or eastern, we can consider the power it has given us to voice our opinions without being uninterrupted. Discussion and debate are the part of the process to further improve and innovate, even though in its limitedness and narrowness to being bounded upon only individual being yet it is very powerful and valuable as gives shared platform, shared standard for us all to stand upon as equals. And, addresses human needs as basic from where different ideas and concepts can grow upon.

## **Chapter Four**

### **RELIGIOUS ETHICS**

Religion is almost ubiquitously in every part of the world and is equally part of our day to day lives, our thinking, our imagination and existence. “It is impossible to think of Western Culture without its Jewish and Christian influences, the Arabic world without Islam, India without Hinduism and East Asia without Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The face of humanity would be hardly recognizable without the highlights of religion.” (Dobrin, 2002:4) The most plausible answer to this phenomenon seems to be that it gives answers to the question of existence and bring some coherence in this chaos. “There is a seemingly endless welter of information in the environment, so the brain forms patterns, which in turn become the narratives, stories and theories that help guide us in our survival. These are stories of/from? our creation and belonging. These stories also provide structure and cohesion to our experiences, so that life is given meaning and purpose.” (Dobrin, 2002:4)

In the world that we live in today, there are varied religious ethical traditions. And these ethical traditions are constantly influencing and guiding large masses on how to live a good life. To some extent ethics and religion are connected as modern day laws, policies, rules and regulations are influenced by religious teachings and practices. “The circumstantial evidence abounds: ethical norms form a large part of religious teachings, which, for their part, correspond closely to the norms of secular ethical theories.” (Berg, 2001:525) Whether we like it or not, the reality is, in present globalized world for good or bad, religion is one of the most powerful powers. Since, there is high interaction of culture and religion it is vital to understand how these are influencing each other. “For those theorists and community leaders undertaking constructive and normative moral reflection within their own traditions, critical awareness of the interactions among the world’s religions seems extremely important as well” (Schweiker, 2005: xvii)

Typically, in all religious tradition, the word good is a synonym to God, likewise to be morally good is god’s will. But moral principles or ethics are not always founded on religion or any world’s religion. We can see these instances for great philosophers of the past who at times challenged the religious authorities and credence. “The inspiration of Socrates, and the memory

of his conviction and execution on the charge of impiety, meant that ethics was also a challenge to the authority of religious beliefs.” (Schweiker, 2005:1) Nevertheless, even if religion guide humans on how to lead a good life, difference between good and evil, it is not limited only on that, the spectrum that religion covers is not only ethics, it holds upon itself much broader implications. “Most scholars agree that a religion includes several features: convictions about what is most important in life (experiences like birth and death, sex and sorrow), ritual actions, beliefs about the whence and whither of existence, codes of conduct, communal life, and also experiences of transcendence (e.g., enlightenment, redemption, mystical insight).” (Schweiker, 2005:2) Some argue, “[...] while religion may always have some connection to morality, it sometimes plays a supportive, not central, role in its formation i.e. religion may be seen as a necessary sufficient ingredient for ethical behavior.” (Dobrin, 2002:10)

The term religious ethics signify the association between religious and moral living, meaning when one introduces religious teaching for the moral life. Not only for moral organizations but also religion is employed to resolve day to day problems, had people brought religion to quotidian. “Religious ethics entails the critical inquiry into complex ways of religious and moral life, but often also indicates the constructive use of religious sources in meeting current problems.” Schweiker, 2005:3) Religions provide instruction on living through the means of norms, rituals, folklore, teachings followed by the answer to question of existence.

[...] religious morality as dispositional, a set of guidelines requiring reflection which when rightly understood in particular contexts leads to a virtuous life. Morality is something to be cultivated and the primary goal of moral education is to foster good judgment so as to behave virtuously. Emotions play a role here, as they are linked to creation of an authentic and autonomous response to life’s demands. Ethics, then, is a blueprint by which to approach living life that takes care of those in need and family distributes goods and services. (Dobrin, 2002:10)

Furthermore, it is also people’s way of living to following religion they practice, the definition of morality that may vary from one tradition to other. These may be answers that followers find in their religion which shapes the moral fiber of the follower and steer their conduct. “From the perspective of actual traditions, religious ethics must be conceived as examining various features

of how the moral space of life is conceived and enacted in life.” (Schweiker, 2005: 5) Often in religions, to derail from the morality there are some outer agents which influences self. These forces exist in the world and individual both and religions try to comprehend them from multifaceted perspectives of social and psychological scenarios which has lead to moral failure. For the mitigation of these failures most religions employ agencies or agents through which perceptive of the situation can be gained and to understanding these ways out or agencies is a part of religious ethics as they always exists as a default setting whenever question regarding morality comes.

In the religions, forces other than self, insofar as we can speak of a self, are at work in the world and in the individual. Each of the religious traditions, furthermore, examines complex psychological and sociological mechanisms that lead to moral failure, delusion, and conflict – mechanisms like inordinate craving (Buddhism), distorted loves (Christianity), ritual impurity (Hinduism), violation of ancestral bonds (African and Native-American ethics), and systemic, social distortion. An agent is set amid forces that must be considered in attaining valid understanding. Inquiry into what it means to be an agent within these rich accounts of moral reality is the fundamental dimension of religious ethics simply because these ideas are presupposed in all other moral questions. (Schweiker, 2005: 9)

It is obvious fact that even though there are different religious traditions, fundamental ethics of them all are common and they often offering guidance and revelation. Religious ethics prescribes guidelines for followers on their moral conduct and gives them premises to judge right from wrong.

#### **4.1 Hindu Ethics**

Ethics is often considered as Western innovation but Hindu texts for centuries have been prescribing notion of *Dharma* that is a moral and social order to all its followers. *Dharma* also

demarcates right and wrong, good and evil additionally also enlightening on customs and traditions. *Dharma* is multifaceted as it has multiple applications,

*Dharma*, as we said, is an all-embracing conception and is perhaps unique to Indian thought. But the term is also rather diffuse as it has many and varying meanings, beginning with 'fixed principles' in the Vedas and ranging from 'ordinance, usage, duty, right, justice, morality, virtue, religion, good work', 'function or characteristics' to 'norm', 'righteousness', 'truth' and much else. (Bilimoria, 2001:46)

*Dharma* is not compulsion upon individuals rather it is a notion that needs to be understood and realized by individuals willingly. The etymology of the word *Dharma* is Sanskrit's *dhir* meaning to 'form, uphold, support or to sustain'. And, it without doubt signifies these notions as it directs, upholds and controls the spiritual truth of its followers. "[...] to a Hindu *Dharma* suggests a 'form of life' whose sanction lies beyond individual and even group or collective preferences." (Bilimoria, 2001:46) To layman *Dharma* is what one ought to do? They do not try to deconstruct the notion from multiple angles. For exemplar,

While the ethicist or religious thinker will develop complex epistemological theories or debate the nature of value and the validity of some conception of a norm, this is not the concern of the most people. As the Bhagavad Gita opens Arjuna, standing beside Kṛṣṇa watches a bloody battle unfold between members of his family. Should he join the battle? In the struggle of decision, a host of forces might be active, the advice of a god (Kṛṣṇa), duties bound to class or social role, bonds of love. Here too is a basic question: "what ought I or we to do?" (Schweiker, 2005:7)

Ethicists and lawmakers try to mold religious teachings to apply it to practical usage and more or less the laws which resonate ethos of the land is more agreeable and implantable to the masses. So often we may observe that national laws are frequently influenced by the majority's religious practices, which has already been accepted as cultural characteristics. There are diverse sects of Hindu ethics, discussed in various Hindu scriptures which are near to impossible to discuss in this small

project; therefore, discussion for the current project will be Hindu ethics concerning only Bhagavad-Gita. And in following discussion Sanskrit diction shall be used which is unavoidable, nevertheless, the meaning of the terms will be clarified with proper explanations.

#### 4.2. Bhagavad-Gita

Structurally Bhagavad-Gita is dialogue between Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna in the middle of battlefield and it is part of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Arjuna is in dilemma as it is his obligation to fight the *Dharma Yuddha* (righteous War) and on other hand with whom he is fighting are his own relatives and teachers. But, Arjuna is constantly counseled by Krishna to part take in this righteous war as it is his duty as a warrior to institute *Dharma*. Even though *Dharma* is very vague, but in context of Bhagavad-Gita it means, what is right and duty.

Bhagavad-Gita stands as one of the powerful and decisive Hindu scripture while addressing about ethics and it has influence over contemporary Hindu thinking. The credit for popularity of Bhagavad-Gita goes to, to some extent, its capability to relate to reality as it is able to portray two opposing trends, one of abstinence, non-action and at the same time prescribe one to action of moral obligations.

The Gita locates itself in the middle of two opposing traditions: Nivritti (abstinent), the austere path of anti action (echoing non-Vedic asceticism), and Pravritti (performative), the doing of social and moral duties. Each had ethical ramifications for its time and their response codes and rules were in competition and conflicts. (Bilimoria, 2001:49)

The Bhagavad-Gita raises lot of ethical questions, should I kill my own relatives to be correct? The conflicting question is solved through synthesis of both fulfillments of duty and abstinence which is called *Nishkama karma*, ‘disinterested action’.

What this implies is that one does not forsake one’s apportioned duties and performs them in complete disregard to fruits or consequence. Action is universal necessity, and the individual has a ‘right’ (adhikara) only to the performance of

the action and not to its fruits. (2.47). The argument is that it is not acting that enslaves, but rather the thought that one is the cause, the agent and enjoyer of the act; stripped of this linear casual thinking no action can be binding on the self, which is free to start with. (Bilimoria, 2001: 49)

Therefore, *nishkama karma* means ‘actions that are devoid of desire, the work without expectation of results’. Furthermore, Krishna also suggests that we have obligation or duty to work but not its future gratifications regardless of good or bad. Our action, work ought to be devoid of expectation of effects. This is one of the central ethical themes of Bhagavad-Gita.

#### **4.2.1. *Dharma*: Character and Conduct**

The fundamental characteristic of *Dharma* is behaviour, *achara*, meaning the manner one ought to behave. And if one has good behaviour or character than one can earn *Dharma* which raises the quality of life. By accumulating *Dharma* one can obtain both spiritual and material benefits in both present life and after life. Hence, the highest form of *Dharma* is having right behaviour and good conduct. It is basis for austerity, *tapas*. And if one follows in the path of *Dharma* with good conduct one can gain power, virtue, wealth and good life.

All religions try to establish ethics and morality to its followers to obtain order in society, it is one of the functional characteristics of religions. Likewise, Bhagavad-Gita also teaches about right conduct through *Dharma*. Conduct is action of the individual to achieve something which is instigated by will. It is the manner in which one thinks, behaves and acts. After thinking, the action takes place, then it becomes conduct.

Lord Krsna, the possessor of all opulence said: Fearlessness, pure heartedness, established in the wisdom of discrimination of spirit and matter by the science of uniting the individual consciousness with the Ultimate consciousness, charity, self restraint, performance of sacrifice study of Vedic scriptures, austerity, uprightness, nonviolence, truthfulness, aversion to fault finding, compassion to all being, absence of avarice, gentleness, modesty and determination. O Arjuna,



radiance forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice, absence of pride arise in one born of the divine nature. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 16:1, 2, 3, bhagavad-gita.org, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

According to Bhagavad-Gita without good conduct *Dharma* is inconceivable. It not only leads to spiritual path but it is also a step towards realization of the God. If one is not careful with one's conduct it is impossible to advance in spirituality and realization of God or salvation is out of context. Moreover, good conduct does not only mean action, it also means to be honest, to have purity of thought, speaking truth and right action. Furthermore, one should not hurt or injure anyone even in one's thought, by words or action. One who has good conduct should abstain from bad thoughts, negative action and vile words. Bhagavad-Gita is also one of the *smritis* in Hindu, the text which can be remembered and are infused with code of conducts. Parallel to Bhagvad-Gita similar notion of conducts can be found in Manu Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti and Parasara Smriti. According to these texts, the one who follows the right path that is code of conduct and lives a righteous life, is able to attain *Moksha* (liberation), freedom from the cycle of death and re-birth.

The individual consciousness situated in the material energy certainly experiences the three modes of material nature produced by the material energy; the beguiling infatuation of these three modes of material nature is the cause of beings innumerable births superior or inferior in the wombs of variegated life forms.(Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 13: 22, bhagavad-gita.org, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

To live righteous life one need to live moral life and furthermore living a righteous life and moral life is living happily and harmoniously with all beings, be it humans, animals or nature. Through this kind of living one can achieve *Moksha* (liberation). But followed by ethical life one should also have purity in one's heart and clean conscience. A virtuous individual has all these merits and follows the path of *Dharma* strictly regardless of obstacles and impediments. Under no circumstances that individual will budge from the path of moral living, therefore, following the path of *Dharma* requires persistence and patience. According to Hindu Scriptures, Yudhishtira, the eldest of Pandavas, was the epitome of *Dharma* as under any influences he never left the path of righteousness. "The intelligent renunciate endowed with the nature of

goodness, freed from all doubts, neither disdains disagreeable actions nor becomes attached to agreeable ones.” (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 18:10 bhagavad-gita.org, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015) Hence, one of the important aspects of Hindu ethics is to correct one’s conduct, to follow the moral path and develop good conduct through which one can obtain *Dharma* which is central for both present live and afterlives.

The nucleus of *Dharma* is both purification of mental and physical actions, it is withdrawing from the sinful actions and practicing right conduct. Bhagavad-Gita, acknowledges that all evil arises from selfishness. The selfishness can be noticeable in multiple aspects; it can be over ambition, lust, desire to achieve more or greed. Due to these tendencies, a person may have negative attitude of hatred, dishonesty, flattery and insincerity.

This was gained by me today, I shall obtain this according to my desires, this wealth is mine and in future more also will come. This enemy has been killed by me and furthermore I shall kill other enemies: I am the controller, I am the enjoyer, I am perfect, powerful and happy. I am rich and aristocratic, is there another who is like me? I will perform sacrifice, I will give in charity, I will rejoice, thus the demoniac are deluded by ignorance. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 16:13, 14, 15, bhagavad-gita.org, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

To get rid of these negative tendencies, one has to realize that all these desires and aspiration arises from the body as human body is perishable and root of these tendencies are senses, one has to learn to abstain and eliminate selfishness. Thus, one has to rise beyond bodily needs and attraction of senses and practice what is good, divine and leads to spiritual growth. Besides, all evil actions generate misery not satisfaction or content. Therefore, to be free from misery, one has to follow the path of *Dharma* or good conduct.

#### **4.2.2. The Concept of Right and Wrong**

Religion all over the world has its own prescribed concept and values of evaluating what is wrong and right, what is correct of doing things and what is not. There may be existence of

different premises upon which right and wrong is evaluated. At times, there are moral standards recommended by religious scriptures and they operate like a law that should influence the behavior of individuals in the society. Nevertheless, religion is very vital in implanting notion of right and wrong among the individuals in the society.

According to Hindu tradition, *Dharma* resembles good and *aDharma* evil. These two are the principle in Hinduism to address the issue of good versus evil. “It is significant that Lord Krishna here repeats the words ‘this *Dharma*’ (*asya Dharmasya*) noted earlier: “Even a very small amount of this *Dharma* saves one from great danger, for there is no loss in such an endeavour, and it knows no diminution.”” (Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 2:40, krishna.com, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

Nevertheless, the notion of right and wrong is contextual; the right course of action may vary according to circumstances. The right action in one scenario may prove incorrect in other. As a result, the concept of right and wrong is time and context dependent. For instance, one who harbours feelings of stealing and plans to do this every day but is not able to commit any theft, is more wrong than one who has stolen but has repented and learnt from one’s actions. Sometimes, it is even correct to speak a white lie when circumstances demand, for instance, to save someone’s life is applauded for their action not chided. Similarly, by speaking if one harms another person and brings suffering to many is more wrong than lying. Hence, the action which brings more good and less injures are good and takes one closer to god and spiritual end. In addition, the actions that are performed in accordance to Holy Scriptures are good and those which are done against the scriptures, are wrong.

Furthermore, selfishness clouds our judgement, therefore, one who is selfish is unable to judge good from bad. The meaning of right conduct in Bhagavad-Gita is therefore not necessarily not committing any sinful act but rather it is to be on right path and be reflexive of one’s action and learnt from past wrong. The essence is to one should not do to other what one does not want for oneself. For that reason, the action which brings happiness, good and rejoice to others is good. And it is not good conduct if one’s actions bring unhappiness, pain and injury to others. The principle is to treat others the way you like to be treated by others. If one is able to follow this

principle then it consequently generates bliss and one is on the path of *Dharma*. The popular saying in Hinduism is “*Ahimsa Paramo Dharma*”, meaning non-violence even in one’s thinking, speech or actions is the greatest good. If one is able to live by this rule one will never commit sin.

Ahimsa is the highest *Dharma*. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching. - Mahabharata XVIII:116.37-41. (himalayanacademy.com, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

From the basics, the ideal is to spread happiness through correct actions and it is right, that means *Dharma* and spreading pain and hatred is wrong, *aDharma*. By doing this one can be one with the Supreme Being. Moreover, there is also assurance that being on the right path brings goodness, positivity and one is safe as good *karma* attracts good. In addition, any action which brings peace of mind is right and action that brings restlessness, agitation and suffering is wrong. The action which unites the self with spirituality is correct and which takes one away from spirituality is incorrect. One of the Hindu Spiritual leaders, Swami Vivekananda states, “The test of ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the *bhakta*, he is the yogi, he is the guru of all.” (himalayanacademy.com, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

To sum up, the right and correct conduct helps one to cultivate virtues and eventually through it one is able to progress in spiritual path which leads to realization that self is, in reality just a party of Supreme Being. This realization one to achieve *Moksha* which is a state away from the cycle of death and rebirth. Nevertheless, it is vital to follow the principle of good conduct to be able to achieve *Moksha* and be one with the Supreme self. But it is not an easy task to follow in the path of *Dharma* continuously, it takes cultivation of self-restraint, modesty and patience.

According to the Bhagavad-Gita,

But a man of inner strength,  
whose senses experience objects

without attraction and hatred,  
in self control, finds serenity.  
In serenity, all his sorrows  
dissolve;  
his reason becomes serene,  
his understanding sure. (Sarma, 2008:128)

To stick to these virtuous traits is not only good for all but also bring one's liberation for the cycle of birth and rebirth. Though it is hard to stick by, if one practices one succeeds. Neither should one leave the path of righteousness for instant gains because right conduct brings eternal gains, happiness and liberation.

#### **4.2.3. Aspiration of Collectivism**

According to Hindu ethics, collectivism supersedes the individualism as in all being there is one atman, soul, that is similar in all. As a result, hurting others also means hurting oneself because the whole world is one soul of Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is achieved at the condition of pure consciousness. Therefore, one of the founding ethical traditions of Hinduism is collectivism.

The *atman* is same in all beings, the same energy resides in all. Even in animals the soul is the same as in human beings. Therefore, the soul brings unity among all. As the Upanishads have illustrated, the neighbour is in truth, the part of your soul and self and the separation is mere illusion. Therefore, to love is to express one's love for the divine, to injure other is injuring divine and oneself as well, to assist other is assist oneself because same consciousness resides in all. According to Bhagvad-Gita,

*na jayate mriyate va kadacin  
nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah  
ajo nityah sasvato 'yam purano  
na hanyate hanyamane sarire"*

Sri Krishna said: The soul is never born nor dies at any time. Soul has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. Soul is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. Soul is not slain when the body is slain.

[\(Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2:20, gita-blog, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2014\)](#)

Even though, the rivers are many but they all flow to one ocean. Therefore, the Hindu prayer preaches, “*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu*” means ‘let the whole world be happy’. Furthermore, when two Hindu meet they acknowledge each other presence through clasping both palms together which is called “*Namaskar*” or “*Namaste*” is ‘I celebrate divinity in you’. The basic essential truth is that the God is omnipresent; God is formless, devoid of qualities (*nirguna*), is realized only through following *Dharma*, only by those who have progressed in the spiritual path and achieved *moksha*.

Not only living beings but also all gods are manifestations of the one Supreme Being and responsible for different cosmic tasks. It is similar to different roles that an individual portrays, as a student, mother, wife, daughter, employee and wife, even though these are different tasks with different responsibilities; nonetheless, the individual is the same. From time to time, the multiple avatars are the manifestation of the single God. In Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna clarifies to Arjuna that,

yada yada hi *Dharmasya*  
glanir bhavati bharata  
abhyutthanam a*Dharmasya*  
tadatmanam srijamy aham

“Whenever and wherever there is a decline in virtue/religious practice,  
O Arjuna, and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend Myself,  
i.e.

I manifest Myself as an embodied being.” (Bhagavad Gita: 4.7, gita-blog, 9<sup>th</sup>  
March, 2014)

Therefore, even in chaos there is an order and at metaphorical level, it all comes to one collective and good of those collective individuals.

### 4.3. Conclusion

Everyone is thriving to live good lives, people employ different notions to live a happy and content life. For many, religion provides solace and guidance in this chaos and crowd. Some argue that religion is vital for ethical living as it maintains and controls social order and sets common obedience toward particular behaviours. Religions are ever present in all democratic and pluralistic societies. Followers of each religious community try to judge and reflect upon one's action on the teachings of the religion one is brought up with. Religious ethics are judgement of right or wrong conduct, moral or immoral living based upon the religious ethics one holds. There are many religious ethics in the world, among those Hindu ethics is one. The chapter discusses Hindu ethics based upon Bhagavad-Gita.

For most Hindu, ethics equates to *Dharma*, *Dharma* has multiple meanings according to context, nevertheless at its basics it is right conduct. It is voluntary following of *Dharma* that helps one to follow in the path of spirituality which ultimately leads to self-realization leading to *moksha*: the complete freedom. *Moksha* is the state of being one with the Supreme Being, away from the cycle of death and rebirth. Furthermore, one of the important ethical aspects of Hinduism is realizing god in all creation of god. Even though, we have different physical appearances and aspirations, nevertheless, the soul that lives inside us all is the same. It is a part of the Supreme Being, as result if you hurt others you get harmed, if you love others you get love.

The one text that is being discussed extensively in this chapter was Bhagavad-Gita. Bhagavad-Gita integrates various dimensions of ethical teachings; it is spiritual foundation for many Hindus. It calls upon moral action and instigates one to perform duties of life, keeping in consideration spirituality and *Dharma*, 'good conduct'. The Bhagavad-Gita is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in the battlefield, the battle of Mahabharata. The battle signifies both internal and external battles. The internal battle is going inside Arjuna's head if it is correct to fight with his own relatives for the kingdom he does not even want, and the other is the real

battle of Mahabharata. In this process Krishna reveals that it is Arjuna's *Dharma* to fight, he needs to fight in order to restore his *karma*. Furthermore, Krishna also explains to Arjuna, there is no death of the soul, as the soul is part of the Supreme Being; we only shed body at the end of each round of cycle of birth and death. The importance of cycle is to get an opportunity to accumulate enough *Dharma* through one's conduct to obtain *moksha* at the end. After *moksha* there is no cycle of birth and death, one attains enlightenment and this is the end of the worldly cycle of life and death. The Bhagavad-Gita ends with Krishna asking Arjuna to choose either the path of good or evil. By fighting in the battle, Arjuna is fulfilling his *Dharma*, as it is his obligation to correct the balance of good and evil.



## **Chapter Five**

### **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

Our worlds collide as the globe today has turned into a single community because of instant communication and means of transport. But in this global village we live in, there are diverse world views, tradition, cultures, ethics and religions being practiced. Even though, very few world religious leaders are powerful enough to influence world trade, economy, or politics, hence without any doubt their decision affects us all.

Religious leaders may play an important role in forming public opinion. They can insist on the relevance of spiritual and moral considerations. they have helped to maintain public alarm at the enormous stockpile of nuclear weapon and other means of mass destruction. They have voiced public outrage at the starvation of millions of people, as a result of hunger, war, injustice and an unfair pattern of international trade. (Braybrooke, 1992:8)

The task of bringing all world religions together in a platform for a dialogue and debate is a herculean one. Nonetheless, it has happened many times, “At a number of interfaith conferences, statements have been made affirming some shared values and sometimes making specific suggestions about moral behavior.” (Braybrooke, 1992:4) The topic of ethics has been always part of these conferences, while some are skeptic about modern invention of global ethics, “Human rights, for example, is in one sense a recent concept, but some would claim that it derives from the age-old moral teaching of the religions.” (Braybrooke, 1992:4) because of the disagreement and abstinence of the Arab world during the drafting of UNDHR which shows the deep reservations between nations with different religious orientation. Therefore, this project will not try to criticize the two ethical trends but rather analyze the apparent accord and discord between two. “Religions are complex entities and ethical behavior is related to beliefs. These differ widely between religions. Is it possible to hope that the world religions may share values if they do not share beliefs?” (Braybrooke, 1992:4) Hence, it is hard to speculate the take of religious trend upon world ethics, it may vary according to religious beliefs, however, we certainly can compare and analyze the similarity and difference between two.

### **5.1. Dictation of moral fibre and behaviour**

While tracing the definition of proper human conduct we can begin from the philosophers of seventeenth century who were the one to take departure from the thinking that everyone should adhere to Gods commandment and behave in the way it is prescribed in the religious scriptures. Hobbes argued that morality was nothing more than a way to serve human selfishness, while others believed that if there is no natural order, humanity does require a “strong governmental control.” (Schneewind, 2001:149) The similar arguments was expressed by the third Earl of Shaftesbury who believed that as a conscious individuals with power of reasoning we ourselves are cable to guide our conducts and approve if it is good or not. “Morality thus became an outgrowth of human feelings.” (Schneewind, 2001:149) Likewise, Aristotle believed that good conduct was action that gave one highest happiness as every action is aimed at achieving the end which is happiness. The action we conduct does not have the end they are followed by another action but only happiness has an end. “Among those who are sufficiently mature to discuss ethics, there is verbal agreement that the ultimate human good is happiness, but opinions about its precise nature vary.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:25) Therefore, achievement of happiness is ultimate goal of all our actions, nevertheless, answer to what makes one happy is a complex one because every individual life is different and there are various factors affecting different individuals. However, Aristotle resolves this crisis and argues, “His definition of happiness contains two vital concepts: ‘Activity of soul,’ which means the exercise of reason, and ‘in accordance with virtue,’ which describes the quality of the performance.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:26) Thus, through one’s conscious conduct one develops moral virtue. According to Aristotle, reasoning is vital to perform moral action but the reasoning may not be always valid and correct. Contrary to rest of philosopher, David Hume argues feelings may not always give birth to virtue as at times feeling may be against the case of justice, however, to follow the rules of justice is directly propionate to individual choice and feeling. Furthermore, Immanuel Kant defines ethics as freedom. Kant argues, morality should come from within, it should be willing, involuntary act not an obligation enforced by outer forces. “When we know we morally must do something, we know we can do it; and this can only be true if we are free.” (Schneewind, 2001:151) On the other hand, for Marxist, history plays the vital role as morality

of the given society is just a power play for means of production and we are just cog in the machine following the system created by some who own the means of production.

Every society has its set of rules dictating social customs, rules and duties for an individual, group or community. These rules define notion of ethics, moral conducts and behaviours. In addition, some of these rules are written while others are implied. Moral behaviour can be defined as a set criteria derived from culture, religion or law which is defined by code of conduct. Every human behaviour is governed his/her socialization. Our conducts are guided by the pre-learnt moral notion as a member of given society. We set moral standard based upon the ethical notion we learnt from society and on the basis of our learning we judge others. Not only the human actions but also our thinking and judgments are influenced by the moral standards that we learn from our society. According to Denise, White and Peterfreund, “We all have beliefs in accordance with which we judge actions and characters, our own and those of others, to be right or wrong, good or bad; we have aspirations that we strive to realize; and we have a conception, dim or clear, of the best way to live.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:3) The conduct is an activity of an individual in order to achieve something which is driven by will, to be concise it is the way how one acts, behaves and thinks as only after realizing one is driven for action.

The conduct defined by UDHR is directed toward nation and concerned groups. It asks international communities and nations to guard human dignity. Further, it has a public dimension to it as it is not about one single individual rather the concern is for the human being all over the world regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender or nationality. Article 1 of UDHR states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” (www.un.org:2015) However, in Bhagavad-Gita, the moral behavior or *Dharma* is how one executes one’s conduct, *achara*. It is defined and elaborated in terms of an individual; it may differ person to person as how much *Dharma* one has accumulated depending upon one’s behavior. Good behavior or conduct equals to more *Dharma* which increases quality of life with material and spirituals benefits. Therefore, it tries to implement notion of *Dharma* on individual basis. Bhagavad-Gita defines two kind of order being born in this world, one divine another demonic. The following actions are considered good conduct and are possessed with one born in divine order:

Lord Krsna, the possessor of all opulence said: Fearlessness, pure heartedness, established in the wisdom of discrimination of spirit and matter by the science of uniting the individual consciousness with the Ultimate consciousness, charity, self restraint, performance of sacrifice study of Vedic scriptures, austerity, uprightness, nonviolence, truthfulness, aversion to fault finding, compassion to all being, absence of avarice, gentleness, modesty and determination. O Arjuna, radiance forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice, absence of pride arise in one born of the divine nature. (Bhagavad-Gita, 16.1, 2, 3, bhagavad-gita.org, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

Nevertheless, both of the ethical trends focus upon good conduct without which happiness is not possible in both the contexts. What is considered as good conduct however, varies in two ethical trends. For UDHR, protection of human dignity is of utmost importance, the preamble of UDHR declares, “Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,” (www. un.org:2015) So, the conduct is more or less address to larger public or institution which are the protector of their citizens, the burden of securing human rights is the conduct prescribed for the nation. Through the declaration UN is asking member states to uphold the human rights and formulate the policies which will assist the rights of all citizens and not hinder them.

In ancient times, human conduct in society was always guided by the religious teachings, people practiced according to their belief and teachings, and in the process they gained satisfaction, so for many it was not only God’s command but also way to achieve salvation. Similarly, according to Bhagavad-Gita without good conduct *Dharma* is unachievable, only through *Dharma* or good conduct one can progress towards the realization of the god or obtain *moksha* (liberation). The righteous living is a gateway to attainment of *moksha*, autonomy for the cycle of re-birth and death. The definition of good conduct is to be honest, have purity of thoughts, speaking truth and doing right action by not injuring others. And opposite to good conduct, bad conduct is possessed by one who is born with demonic nature. These people seemingly understand neither action nor inaction. Purity and good conduct, righteousness is not present in them. They think

that the universe is not real, it is without control and lacks governance without set order. Therefore, they are only driven by desire and lust. They are deluded as a result of which they are ambitious, possessed with hypocrisy and have hundreds of desires, which give rise to lust and anger.

Persons of demoniac nature cannot understand actions in their best spiritual interests and actions in their worst spiritual interests; there is never purity, nor good conduct nor even truth in them. The persons of demonic nature say, the entire cosmic manifestation is unreal, without a creator, without a supreme controller, without cause, originating from mutual cohabitation due only to lust, no more than this. Accepting this vision the demoniac being deficient in spiritual intelligence having lost contact with their soul; degradedly engage in abominable activities to influence the destruction of the universe. Addicted to insatiable lusts, the demoniac, irrational due to arrogance, vanity and conceit, out of illusion endeavor for impermanent things engaging in impure acts by premeditated vows. (Bhagavad-Gita, 16.7, 8, 9 & 10, bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

The whole chapter 16 in *Gita* distinguishes between demonic and divine conduct. Desire, wrath and greed are said as the three gates to hell and it destroys the human soul, so *Dharma* is abstinent from these three. One should follow the Vedic scriptures for realizing what is good and what is evil; and these scriptures assist them to be in the path of right.

The three kinds of doorways to hell are lust, anger and greed; therefore these three are so destructive to the embodied self must be abandoned. O Arjuna, a person being liberated from these three doorways of nescience, performs austerities for the embodied self; thereafter reaching the supreme goal. (Bhagavad-Gita, 16.21, 22 bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

The foundation of *Dharma* is both purity in one's mental and physical actions, it is withdrawing from lust and greed which is generated by sense. According to Bhagavad-Gita all evil arises from desires, it can manifest it in multiple forms from over ambition to greed to achieve more. Because of these factors, a person develops negative attitudes of hatred, betrayal, flattery and

deceit. To distance oneself from these negative energies one has to rise above bodily needs and abstain from attraction of senses, practice good conduct with eventually lead to realization of supreme. Besides that, evil actions only generate unhappiness and discontent, to be free from misery one ought to follow the path of *Dharma*. Lord Krishna elucidates Arjuna,

O Arjuna, entering demoniac wombs birth after birth, these fools receives an even more abominable destination unable to achieve me. One who transgresses the injunctions of the Vedic scriptures whimsically acting under the impulse of desire, never attains perfection, neither happiness nor the supreme goal. Therefore the injunctions of the Vedic scriptures in ascertaining what should be done and what should not be done are your authority; knowing the ordinances of the Vedic scriptures as prescribed, you should perform actions in this world as a matter of duty. (Bhagavad-Gita, 16.20, 23, 24. bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

However, it was not possible for religion to answer every question as people faced many practical problems and religious prayers or texts could not solve the crisis. “Since many people today do not believe, as the ancients did, that there is just one definite way of living which is best for everyone, and since many think we cannot resolve our practical problem on the religious basis, the question of modern western ethics are unavoidably still our own question,” Schneewind (2008:147) writes about the secularization of the mind. As a result, there was establishment of UDHR, the preamble states:

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law. (www.un.org:2015)

After the devastation of two World Wars, the institution of United Nation and UDHR was the need of the time. Even though, it was mutual understanding among member nations, nevertheless, the declaration is directly addressed to human race as a whole and asks nations to ratify equal standard for all humans. Besides that, it directs its member nations to keep in mind the rights of each human. The Preamble states,

Now therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of the Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

[www.un.org:2015](http://www.un.org:2015))

The present section of the analysis was focused upon the concept of conduct, in one hand UDHR is more focused upon the national and societal role for the protection of human dignity. Furthermore, it also asks nation-states to create an environment where individual rights are valued as its primary manifesto is to protect human rights whereas Bhagavad-Gita defines conduct in more private light as it is addressing and focusing upon individual role and conduct. It focuses upon the way of living of each individual and it asks one to create and work on ones character to obtain more *Dharma*.

## **5.2. Dichotomy of Right and Wrong**

The part of moral philosophy also confers about the capacity to decide right from wrong, nevertheless, the said capacity is constantly affected by the religious values, traditional norms and laws of the society. Frankena elucidates, morality is established only when “[...] we think for ourselves in critical and general terms ... and achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents.” (Frankena, 1973:4) For Plato, morality is knowledge of good but as humans we are unable to

understand the idea in one statement. And also, he differentiates among good, pleasure and good with analogy to the sun, the meaning of which is truth can be revealed only when it is illuminated with good. In addition, Aristotle defines moral action upon capacity of reasoning, therefore, while making choice one should use one's rationality. "Aristotle maintains that we should not choose activities by how pleasant they are. Rather, although good activities are pleasant, and are choiceworthy because they are pleasant, their pleasantness is a function of their goodness, not vice versa." (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:31) Marxist thinkers argue, there is no morality or ethics, rather they are notions implanted by generations of the few who own the means of production and distribution. On the contrary to Marxist assumption, Fredrick Nietzsche draws the distinction between good and evil and says it is made by aristocrats. Nietzsche is against the idea of peace and universal equality as it denies one environment of competition and denies quality living which are very vital for will to power. "Continuing in the same vein, Nietzsche condemns the ideal of peace and universal equality, exposing their life-denying qualities. Exploitation and competition, he argues, characterize all living things, because they are the very essence of the will to power." (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:217) Furthermore, Nietzsche is seemingly against Christianity and Judaism as he believes them to be dishonest.

All ethical trends comprise of concepts of right and wrong conduct, these notions help one to live life content as they suggest what actions are good or bad in particular situations. These concepts attempt to answer the questions of morality, by clarifying the concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice and virtue and vice. Similarly, the concept of what is right in Bhagavad-Gita is caste based while UDHR promotes the concept of democracy, every democratic action is good and the action which is against the institution of freedom is wrong.

Bhagavad-Gita's address to every single human being, it is intended for each one of us, it depicts the duties each one of us need to perform and it is hierarchical. Moreover, it is caste-based and class based, it is not equal for all, therefore, the conduct prescribed varies as it differs from caste to caste. "O best of the twice born brahmanas please note those who are especially qualified amongst us to lead my military forces, for your information I am naming them." (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 1:7, bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)



Furthermore, Krishna's word clarifies that, rejection of desire generated by senses, achievement of selfless peaceful mind, exercise of *yoga*, following of Vedic scriptures and adherence to caste system one can achieve the liberation from cycle of re-birth and death. In addition, he argues one should not be concerned about the results of one's deeds but merely ensure one's duty is done properly. In chapter 4, verse 13, Krishna explains about the origin and function of the caste system in Hinduism, "The four divisions of human order were created by me according to differences in quality, activities, and aptitude; although the creator of this, know me as the non-doer being immutable." (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 4:13, [bhagavad-gita.org](http://bhagavad-gita.org), 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015) Furthermore, it is stated that, "You should perform your prescribed Vedic activities since actions are better than renouncing actions; by ceasing activity even your bodily maintenance will not be possible. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 3:8, [bhagavad-gita.org](http://bhagavad-gita.org), 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015) In Vedic culture there are four *varnas*, namely, *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra*. They comprise of a four-fold system. The three attributes attached to the four folds are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* respectively. *sattva guna* is associated with *brahmins* and are assigned with tasks of academics and meditation, *rajas guna* is associated with *kshatriyas* and *vaishya*. The former are warriors and show bravery, and the latter are farmers or traders. Whereas, *tamas guna* is associated with *vaishyas* and their job is to serve others. Therefore, Krishna in Bhagavad-Gita mentions that enlightenment can be reached by all but by performing the social and religious duties assigned to one's caste without expectation of fruits.

Whereas, UDHR promotes democratic conduct as the member nation have pledged to secure the basic right of every individual which is done by the inclusion of human rights in the constitution of the country. It is a rule of law to protect human rights; everything that violates the human rights is wrong and is punishable by the law. Not only democratic governance always protects human rights, it also stops power to be accumulated in the control of few which leads to tyranny. Democracy is the system of the people where citizens of the nation are the true rulers and decision makers. The UDHR is democratic which means it is equal for all regardless of class, gender, or race. The UDHR, Article 2 mentions,

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion,

political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent truth, non self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org) )

In addition, in democratic system there is also protection of human rights and this is considered to be good for both the people and the states as it gives freedom to act. As a result, both Human rights and democracy promotes equality to all. In both, citizens are free to practice political rights, which are the following: freedom to express ideas and opinions without any reservation or fear, get access to information, freedom to protest in peaceful manner, discuss public affairs. Likewise, both promote inclusion of minorities and their views are also one of the fundamental principles of the basic human rights. Hence, human rights endorses democratic system and governance which prioritize the equal human standard to all individuals. The core of human rights, namely, freedom and equality is assured in democratic society.

The articles of UDHR are also focused upon general human conduct, it address all regardless of groups, nation or boundaries. It articulates that individuals, communities, countries and government should contribute to create an environment through teaching and education so these basic rights of all are maintained. Article 25.1 states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org):2015)

Furthermore, it does not segregate humans into categories, from the position of UDHR all are equals. Moreover, it has proved basic standard for judgment upon which any nation can be judged in case of humanitarian crisis. Human rights does not differ according to race of a person

or leverage of the nation rather it is an international standard based on which all nations, institutions and communities can be scrutinized.

According to Bhagavad-Gita, *Dharma* symbolizes good while *aDharma* evil. “Even a very small amount of this *Dharma* saves one from great danger, for there is no loss in such an endeavour, and it knows no diminution.” (Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 2:40, krishna.com, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2014) *Dharma* is conduct which brings happiness and good to other and which takes one closer to realization of Supreme Being. However, the action which cause injuries and suffering to others takes one away from spiritual path. In addition, it is equally important to perform duties prescribed by Vedic Scriptures to be in right path, therefore, the actions conducted against the moral standard to Vedic Scriptures are wrong. A person can never achieve freedom from reactions to activities without first performing prescribed Vedic duties; neither can perfection be attained by renouncing them as well. “O Arjuna, one who in this world does not apply the procedures prescribed and established by the Vedic scriptures; that person living in sin wastes their human life captivated by sense gratification.” (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 3:4, 16, bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

Besides that, Bhagavad-Gita also emphasizes on the actions that do not bring injury to others. The action which does not harm others and brings happiness is good. And it is bad if it brings unhappiness and suffering to others. The essence is to treat others like you want to be treated. “*Ahimsa Paramo Dharma*” is very common Hindu phrase meaning non-violence is the supreme good. If one is able to follow the path of *Dharma* and abstain from wrong, one can realize the Supreme Being and freed from the cycle of re-birth and death. Not only it brings eternal *nirvana* but also in the present life it brings positivity and peace as good *karma* attracts good. Nevertheless, bad *karma* brings sufferings, agitation and dissatisfaction. Hence, right conducts are those which help the individual to cultivate virtues and *Dharma* through which eventually that individual is able to progress in spiritual path leading to realization of Supreme Being. After this process, one obtains *moksha*, liberation from the cycle of re-birth and death. Even though it is hard to control one’s senses, it is possible through constant practice.

Ethical trends around the globe have their own standard principles to judge the right from the wrong, however, the criteria may differ in case of global ethics. Law may be influential but religious ethics are based on religious teachings and tradition of centuries, thus are more powerful.

The aforementioned section of the analysis discussed the concept of right and wrong defined by two ethical trends. While one was very democratic as it was equal for all and promoted human rights regardless of caste, class or gender, however, Hindu ethics was seen caste/class based.

### **5.3. Communal versus personal**

Plato assigns ethics to be individual, according to which ethics depend upon two fundamental factors, first: the soul which is further divided in three elements, namely, reason, passion and desire, and the second is the behavior of individual that depends upon the fact, how these three factors are developed and also upon the prominence of one over other. While for Kant, the individual surpasses the communal as Kant focus upon the concept of self will or free will in the formation of morality and ethics. It should not be forced upon by external agencies rather the decision should come from within. Kant also clarifies that morality is not the highest good and it may not be good for everyone. So rather than focusing upon good Kant focuses upon what is logical and reasonable. On the other hand, from the Marxist point of view, ethics is communal as ethics and morality are grand narratives invented by one who own the means of production. The definition of ethics and morality are agreed upon by the masters of means of production and distribution. Moreover, they do not stand upon reason or logic but rather they are built on material forces.

Marx maintains that the more sophisticated forms of human intelligence – morality, religion, politics and so forth – are determined by the economic conditions of a given society and have no independence status. For example, moral values are ideological in character (that is, they are not products of pure

reason but are the effects of material forces that are their source). (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:190)

In addition to this, Jean Paul Sartre emphasizes on personal will and choice as they create individuality in the chaos. For Sartre unhappiness comes from chaotic world therefore rather than being humanist we should focus upon ourselves and our individual choices. Furthermore, Sartre clarifies, since there is no existence of God and no pre-formulated law of nature, therefore, one is entire accountable for one's action. "For Sartre, human freedom and the denial of God's existence place us in the precarious position of being solely responsible for our actions." (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008: 281)

Parallel to aforementioned different ethical premises, one of the great differences between two trends is while one is focused on well being of community but the other places the individual at center. In Bhagavad-Gita, in the beginning of the battle, Arjuna is anxious and sad when he sees that he needs to fight with his kith and kin.

O Krsna I do not see any good in slaying kinsman in this battle, nor do I desire victory, nor a kingdom or even happiness. O Krsna, of what value are kingdoms, what value is living for happiness if they for whom our kingdom, material pleasure and happiness is desired: preceptors, fatherly elders, sons; and grandfatherly elders, maternal uncles, fathers in law, grandsons, brothers in law and relatives are all present on this battle field ready to give up their kingdoms and very lives. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 1:31, 32, 33, bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

The Bhagavad-Gita is a dialogue between Arjuana and Krishna in the battle field of *Kurukshetra*. Krishna asks Arjuna to fight even though he is skeptical as it is his duty, part of the cosmic plan and for the establishment of justice and truth. Krishna states,

Moreover considering your righteousness you should not falter; indeed for upholders of justice there does not exist a more appropriate endeavor then a battle for righteousness. O Arjuna, happy are the upholders of justice who achieve a battle of this kind presented by its own accord and which is a wide open path to

the heavenly planets. However if you do not engage in this war of righteousness then abandoning your natural spiritual duty and reputation you will incur sinful reaction. (Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 2:31, 32, 33, bhagavad-gita.org, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015)

On the contrary, in UDHR, the individual is at the centre, the declaration focuses on each human beings and their lives.

According to Bhagavad-Gita, the collective good surpasses the individual as all living creatures are part of Supreme Being, therefore, one soul, *atman*, which means to hurt other means to hurt oneself. And achievement of the Supreme Being is only possible at the state of pure consciousness. Hence, one of the central characteristics of Hindu ethical trends is that of collectivism. The similar energy is present in all being as result the soul of all beings are part of one Supreme Soul. Bhagavad-Gita mention, “Sri Krishna said: The soul is never born nor dies at any time. Soul has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. Soul is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. Soul is not slain when the body is slain.” ([Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2:20, gita-blog, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2014](#)) The soul of Supreme Being not only is present in living beings but also plethora of gods and demigods are manifestations of the Supreme Being. In Chapter four of Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna reveals that in fact multiple avatars of different gods across the ages are in fact manifestation of the Supreme Being. “Whenever and wherever there is a decline in virtue/religious practice, O Arjuna, and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend Myself, i.e. I manifest Myself as an embodied being.” (Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 4:7, gita-blog, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2014) For these reason, in bedlam also there is harmony as everything melts down to one pure consciousness.

The fourth category is discussion on the focus upon the collectivism or individualism in the two trends. In Gita, Krishna asks Arjuna to fight not for himself but for the greater good of humanity. Even though Arjuna doubts his action at present, he fights for greater good but contrary to this UDHR directly address to individual and the central focus is upon each individual and individual rights.

## 5.4. Synthesis

Ethics and morality are required to make disciplined societies, it is required to get rid of conflicts and maintain peace. Mary Midgley in *The Origin of Ethics*, argues that ethics are not only required to make society to function appropriately but it is also required “[...] to avoid lapsing individually into states of helpless, conflict-torn confusion. In some sense, this is ‘the origin of ethics’ and our search need take us no further.” (Midgley, 2001:11) Therefore, as a community we hold on essentials same core foundational convictions. Due to which there is a similarity and UDHR resonates not only with Hindu ethical tradition but also with multiple ethical traditions. The concept of non-violence and compassion are found across cultural boundaries. This shared values and understanding makes the foundation of global ethics a possibility. Hence, to establish global ethics we do not search for the conflict between two rather we try to find synthesis for shared solutions.

Resembling all religious trends who promote peace, non-violence and justice, these two ethical trends also promotes concept of pluralism and upholds stability. UDHR pledges to establish peace and constancy, it persuades nation-states to keep friendly relations. Moreover, it advocates for equal right of all human being across the borders and better living standards for all. UDHR is one of the means to secure world peace and stability after the devastation of two World Wars. The declaration is not only written but United Nation has been playing a crucial role in the places of humanitarian crisis. For instance, post-Cold War era (1990-2000), role of the UN in Somalia and Rwanda was very vital in the condition of violations of human rights and threat to peace and security. In addition, the international assistance are often provided to countries which are in dire straits and development assistance are offered to those which has uphold the value of human rights through different international agencies and INGOs. In the midst of criticism, UDHR is one of the successful international laws as it has been sanctioned by three out of four nations and has been proven affective national policy making. Even though taken as a western invention, and unacceptable to some but the value it entitles to each individual is certainly imperative. The popularity of UDHR is also because of its pluralist concept as it is pro-human regardless of race, sex, ethnicity or nationality. UDHR is equal for all to voice their opinions and express their freedom. The Preamble states,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge, ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

Likewise, people follow the religion to live good and happy life. For many religions provide comfort and guidance amidst of unknown. The foundation of religion is also to emphasize in ethical living and to maintain order in society by sets of common obedience to certain conducts. In today's pluralistic society, multiple religions are present, therefore, acknowledgement and understanding of other culture, religious tradition is vital. And it is equally essential to understand their ethical implications.

According to Bhagavad-Gita, ethics equates to *Dharma*, even though, *Dharma* can be interpreted from multiple perceptions but the basic meaning of *Dharma* is to follow right conduct. And if one follows *Dharma* through self realization than one can progress in the path of spirituality which eventually helps one to attain *moksha* or liberation from the state of re-birth and death. Another, essential concept is to see one soul in all creation, although we have different priorities, appearances and ambitions, the soul that resides in all is same, the fraction of the Supreme Being, therefore, it is unethical to hurt others, to hurt other is to, to injury oneself. Sri Krishna said, "The soul is never born nor dies at any time. Soul has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. Soul is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. Soul is not slain when the body is slain." ([Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 2:20, gita-blog, 9<sup>th</sup> March,](#)



[2014](#)) Underlying principles of most ethical traditions are to promote peace and happiness so most preach, “not kill, not to injure others, to stay away from gluttony and same the same notion is promoted in above discussed ethical trends. Besides that, the concept of plurality is ever present in Hinduism, which is shared by UDHR. Furthermore, there are morals and values in Bhagavad-Gita that can be able to address the need of present time as it promotes plurality and communal duty. It encourages the idea of plurality, to be accommodating to many faiths in religiously pluralistic society. Heinrich von Stietenron writes, “[...] our problem would vanish if we took Hinduism to denote a socio-cultural unit or civilization that contains a plurality of distinct religion.” (Von Stietenron, 2001:33) It promotes good conduct and self control. The notion of *Dharma*, not to injure others, resonates commitment of UDHR. So, it is easily conspicuous that both ethical trends endorse peaceful and pluralistic society. Both are very inclusive as both are accommodating to people of multiple ethnicity, Bhagavad-Gita sees all as the fraction of one supreme soul while UDHR acknowledges right of all regardless of class, ethnicity, gender or nationality.

Ethics is an exploration of insight, an attempt to find what is good for majority, and reasoning plays a crucial role, therefore, not only religious tradition but also whole humanity is in constant search of which is agreeable to all. “[...] ordinary citizens also conduct ethical inquiry, although they may not call it that.” (Denise, White and Peterfreund, 2008:2) Nevertheless, we as individuals are constantly affected by the socio-cultural and religious practices of our societies, because of this fact we can observe that the laws of many states are heavily influenced by the majority religion they practice, for instance, laws in many countries of Middle East. Morality means also to develop the reasoning capacity to be able to decide what one is doing is good or not, not being blinded by tradition and religion, Frankena argues, “[...] we pass beyond the stage in which we are directed by traditional rules and even beyond the stage in which these rules are so internalized that we can be said to be inner-directed, to the stage in which we think for ourselves in critical and general terms ... and achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents.” (Frankena, 1973:4) Even though, there is hierarchy in Bhagavad-Gita, but due to changes in world view the concept of caste is changing in Hindu societies. There is amalgamation of both tradition as well as modern global ethics.

The caste system is gradually being replaced by a class system. Modernization has both compelled and helped various ethnic and caste groups to participate in any profession. The taboos of untouchability, commensality, and endogamy are slowly and hereditary occupation no longer works in modern Nepali Society. (Regmi, 1999:108)

The old practices are disappearing as modern changes are encroaching the socio-political realities of many communities. The fact is, in current situation not all practical problems are solved by looking at religious texts, therefore, "[...] since many think we cannot resolve our practical problem on the religious basis, the question of modern western ethics are unavoidably still our own question." (Schneewind, 2008:147) In addition, it is also a known fact that many countries, which have a majority of Hindu population adhere to UDHR and other international bodies, rectify many international treaties and convention, so UDHR is also integrated in Hindu societies. One of the fine examples is Nepal where 80.7% of the population follow Hinduism and Nepal is a member of the United Nation and has ratified UDHR. Besides that many Hindu reformers are working for the change for unequal traditional practices, "Rammohan Roy, founder of the Brahmo Samaj, advocated equality for all persons regardless of caste or sex, on the grounds that all human are God's creatures.... Mahatma Gandhi was fearless in seeking the rights of untouchables, whom he called Harijans or children of God." (Braybrooke, 1992:18)

The Last part of the analysis is synthesis, drawing parallel upon the concept of Pluralism and promotion of stability and greater good of humanity.

## Chapter Six

### INSIGHT

Many people adhere to the religious teachings and are willing to dictate their behaviour according to moral prescribed by the given religion. Many look upon religious authorities to guide them what to do. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the basic premise of moral behaviour is what is good for human beings and how one should live civilized life. According to Peter Singer, ethics is not something far-fetched, it is part of every human activity, "We cannot avoid involvement in ethics, for what we do – and what we don't do – is always a possible subject of ethical evaluation. Anyone who thinks about what he or she ought to do is, consciously or unconsciously, involved in ethics." (Singer, 2001: V)

However, the definitions of ethics is highly influenced by western thought and religions. In antiquity, ethics equate to religion, everything good was what religions prescribed. But with changing times and development of science and technology, people's reasoning and empirical data offered mind boggling interpretations and perceptions. Great philosophers of the past propounded the idea of natural law, which applied universally to all human beings. They believed in natural law, something that is inherent in nature. For most Greek philosophers ethics was within us, which only needed to be habituated and practiced, while for others highest good was happiness. But with later generations of philosophers freedom was of great concern. For Immanuel Kant, the moral action with practice of free will is in the truest sense freedom and morality is the highest good. For others, we are never free unless there is establishment of socialist society after proletarian revolution. According to Marxist notion no morality is need in classless society as it is inherently present in all humans. Furthermore, the modern thinker Frederick Nietzsche promotes suffering, anxiety and pain because for him by over-coming we have the will to power, a true sensation of freedom and life. Whereas, post-modernist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre believes that we all exist in absurd reality so we are on our own without higher power to guide us in this chaos. Therefore, the choices we make, shapes our character. As a result, morality for Sartre is individualist.

Moving away from this theoretical argumentation of ethics, we tried to understand UDHR and Bhagavad-Gita or Hindu ethics through the means of comparison, evaluation and analysis. Human rights is vital for any community as in recent decades we can observe both citizens of the nations and world at large are constantly challenging the governments who disregard human rights. Additionally, the value of life seems to be present in most tradition, "The frameworks of other civilizations and religions were different, but there too were ideas which could be developed to support human rights." (Braybrooke, 1992:10) Furthermore, the declaration of UDHR owes much to The Second World War as this was the conception period for the UDHR. Even after criticism, UDHR has been a massive success as it is one of the most ratified documents by majority of the nations. It is equal in a sense that it advocates for human dignity across borders and among diversities. Therefore, it is pro-human and upholds human dignity as it is most vital for human rights. It is a known fact that UDHR has contributed in creation of peaceful societies. UDHR has a global affect and with the influence of the global level, there is bound to be discussion and debates about UDHR. Nonetheless, the criticism is not always negative as it is the part of the process to be further affective and effective.

Good life is desire of all, people employ many principles to live happy and comfortable lives. And to many, religions offer guidelines to find happiness. Religions are present in every society, greater than before in today's democratic and pluralistic societies. The practitioners of the given religious communities interpret and shape one's action according to religious teachings and practices. Among many religious traditions, Hinduism also has its own ethical tradition. In Hinduism ethics equates to *Dharma*, even though *Dharma* has multiple connotations but at essence it means right conduct. In addition, Hinduism is based upon the concept that all beings have one transcendental goal of life that is to be one with the Supreme being and get liberation from the cycle of re-birth and death. Therefore, god-realization is at the center of Hindu faith. Further, ethical commitments and morality is all tied with god-realization as one can realize god only after being in ethical path or *Dharma*. *Dharma* is ethical behavior and also religious practices, it is a means through which one can attain the *moksha*. Therefore, one performs the right action for one's progress in spiritual path but not because it is an inborn right of others. The progress in spiritual path is determined by one's action or how one lives. A human being

progresses if she or he does good and distances oneself from path of spirituality if one commits evil deeds.

Since the inclusion of all the Hindu scriptures was not possible the present research work concentrates on Bhagavad-Gita. The Bhagavad-Gita is a theological text representing the Hindu ethical trends. It is a synthesis between ancient Hindu Vedic religion and rationalization of Hindu ethics. It has both ethical and spiritual dimensions to it. Gita encourages moral action and promotes to perform one's duties without expecting the benefit from it. Besides, it also illustrates the Hindu society categorized in different caste. The four caste are namely, *brahmin*, priests; *kshatriya*, warriors; *vaishya*, traders; and *shudra*, servers. But in reality there are multiple sects of these castes and truth does not bear likeness to description of scriptural ideals. The text is both hierarchical and liberal at the same time as it divides people in different segments but, nevertheless, unlike Vedic text, it offer even *moksha* for low birth women, traders (*vaishya*) and laborers (*shudras*). It is mentioned that, by being constantly in the path of *Dharma* they can also obtain the liberation from the cycle of re-birth and death. Furthermore, it also elucidates that people should follow one's duty but free from desire and it should be done without any selfish motives, than one can obtain *Dharma*. Towards the end, the chapters of Gita discuss about the moral standards, which differentiate between right and wrong.

The thesis tries to analyze aforementioned two ethical trends, namely, UDHR and Bhagavad-Gita ethics. In an attempt to achieve clarity the analysis is divided in four sub-segments where different aspects of these ethical trends are discussed. The first category is dictation of moral fibre and behaviour. The given section discussed about the guideline given by each tradition about the discussion of moral behaviour of the person. In retrospect, past philosophers have given different theories regarding human conduct, some believe it to be innate, while others argue it to be arising from feelings and for some it is free will. However, under UDHR, the protection of human dignity is the right conduct and it asks each individual and nation-states to safe guard the dignity of human person. While on the other hand, Gita advocates the *Dharma*, which is right conduct, meaning one needs to be cautious of one action, that one's action may not injury others or cause suffering to others. The underlying factor, the welfare of all humans is similar but the framework they are defined in are different as the UDHR is addressing to nations

and public at large and instructing them on their conduct while Gita is more focused upon individuals and their conducts. Therefore, the basic difference is on the fact that to whom the two texts are addressed to. One is very public about its declaration while the other is very private and individualist about the human conduct.

The second category of analysis was the dichotomy of right and wrong. This section of the analysis tries to find out how the two ethical trends differentiate right from wrong. The concept of right and wrong differs among different philosophers, Plato believes it to be present on us all, the capacity to judge right and wrong, Aristotle accredits it to reasoning, while Marx believes it to be grand design of the Bourgeois, whereas, Nietzsche sees it as will to power. And furthermore, both the ethical trends acknowledge the fact that injuring others is wrong and helping others is right but the basic difference between the two is the fact that the declaration is very liberal, equal and democratic while Gita segregates people in different categories. UDHR promises human dignity to all regardless of class, ethnicity, gender or nationality, whereas, Bhagavad-Gita divides people in different categories, namely, *brahmin*, priests; *kshatriya*, warriors; *vaishya*, traders; and *shudra*, servers. The text is contradictory as it divides people in different segments but at the same time it offers *moksha* or liberation for low births as well. Hence, through the analysis we come to understand that one is democratic while other is class infused.

The fourth section of analysis was collectivism versus individualism. For Plato ethics and morality is individual as it is inherent in all, but for Marx, it is communal as it is part of Bourgeois narrative, while Kant tries to extend it from individual to society. For Sartre, it is individual as we are on our own in the world without any guidance. The declaration is more focused on individual being as it is addressed to individuals themselves, it is neither directed towards a specific community or nation but to each individual on the planet. Therefore, from the perspective of UDHR, the individual is at the centre while others are in periphery trying to create an environment where individual life and human dignity is secured and protected. But, contrary to this, it is not Arjuna's choice to fight the battle, it is Krishna who encourages him to take upon his arms and fight, for the greater good of humanity. Krishna argues that later generations will curse him if he is not able to fulfil his duty as warrior. Furthermore, Krishna also argues that we

all are manifestations of the Supreme being so there is no I or you. Hence, one focuses upon the individual while other on the communal. The last category tries to find synthesis between the two trends and is able point that both trends promote the concept of pluralism, peace and stability.

Lastly, the interreligious understanding and dialogue is necessity of today. Even though there are many differences among the nation-states, even then they are united by the common aspiration of human freedom and righteous living. Attempts of these organizations (UN) to establish a global ethics and encourage the peace and understanding in the world communities. As it has international influence it is very vital for the world today.

Furthermore, it is not time for hostility or religious rivalries, but it is time for coming together as one community. It is important that to be able to address modern challenges, it is necessity to form universal ethics that can be more practical and acceptable to many. Religious extremists or fanatics only bring conflict, therefore it is the need of time to form a platform for interreligious dialogue and better understanding among each other. Hence, focus should be upon search of global ethics, the ethics concerning human freedom or peaceful society, which is demand and priority for all beings. Therefore, the agenda should be "[...] the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us" (Braybrook, 1992: 9)

Throughout the centuries, people of different faith are searching for human welfare and peace due to inspiration they get from their religious teaching, but religious leader at times use the same religious teaching to arouse violence and terror. But with times, the situation is changing, people's faith on world peace and inherent right of others are increasing. As a result of which there is establishment of global ethics, supranational organization like UN and interfaith dialogues.

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