

Select Source Texts Study on Indian and Western Philosophy

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Abstract

Indian philosophical and Western philosophical texts help us to understand the ethical consciousness of the country. They also emphasize the universal way of life. Universal ethics promotes unity of existence, the divinity of human and harmony of creeds and religion. Human beings are endowed with intelligence using that they can live peacefully. Ethical system insists that human beings can live happily only by living in accordance with moral law which ensure the well-being of the entire humanity. The tradition of Indian ethical texts starting from The Upanisads and Hindu Dharma. The great traditions in western Ethics are highly influential and comparable to traditions in other parts of the world.

Keywords: Upanisads, Hindu Dharma and Traditions in Indian and Western Ethics

Source texts are the corner stone for moral edification. The ideas expounded in the ethical texts develop a healthy mind and shape human thoughts. It also brings about behavioural change and establish social order.

English Studies today include a wide range of subjects that come close to be called Literature. Philosophers and moralists have established a rich tradition of writing. Literature has always been didactic/moralistic or entertaining. Ethics guide our life and decide our future. In the techno-oriented world, there are many ethical issues and lack of ethics is discernible in a consumer culture that promotes material values at the expense of spiritual values.

Literature refers to any written or oral work. It includes oral literature (Ur texts). Oral literature is otherwise called folk literature which is either spoken or sung and some of them are transcribed nowadays. English literature has four main genres. They are poetry, drama, fiction and prose.

The expression of feelings and ideas vary in intensity by the use of unique style and rhythm in poetry. Drama is a composition in prose or verse form meant to be enacted on the stage. Fiction is a literary work of modern times especially in the form of prose. The fourth major genre of literature is prose. Prose is a neglected genre compared to the other three forms of literary writing. The form of history and philosophy is prose.

Source texts are called Ur texts (oral texts) or foundational text. In some cases, they are religious texts and in some cases philosophical texts. A source text is a text (philosophical or religious) sometimes

oral from which information or ideas are derived. In ancient Greek and Roman literature we never find religious texts but philosophical texts are found in plenty. What were spoken once have been written down for the benefit of future generations. Such texts are called source texts. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, John Dryden *Religio Laici* and Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* are both literature and philosophy.

Comparative Literature is the specific branch of literary history. Carre points out 'rapports de fait' is nothing but factual

He refers to 'rapports de fait' as clearly distinguishable and measurable connections, influences which gives sense when recalling the situation specifically in comparative studies.

Weisstein says that even within a single civilization one can find elements of consciously or unconsciously maintained traditions such as feeling, imagination and thought. Comparative Literature go beyond the shackles of time and space and uphold unity surprisingly in studies of such kind. The connecting or common strand of this study is ethics which is universal and directly related to human welfare. It is neither a comparison of genre nor a comparison of theme or motif. The writers chosen for study are not coevals and coteremporaries. No influence or imitation is perceptible between the writers from these different climes. Moreover, they do not belong to any particular movement in history with interesting parallels. In fact, the writers of the Upanishads remain largely unknown.

The Upanishads chosen for study could have been written by authors who lived centuries apart like Aristotle or Immanuel Kant. The research does away with comparative literature's preference for synchronic approach. The study goes by the principle that literature is a reservoir for the preservation and transmission of cultural and intellectual values and in this case ethical values. This study has compared ethical texts from various periods and epochs from worlds that are culturally different and religiously polemical in many ways.

The world's ancient literature is The Vedas. The Vedic literature can be classified in to four division. Rig, Yajur, Samaand Atharvaveda. Each Veda includes Samhitas, Brahmana and Sutra. Sam (together) + hita (Put) means put together (collection of mantras, hymns, prayers, litanies and invocation are methodologically combined). Brahmanas (not caste) are prose guides used by the priests to perform rituals. The Brahmanas are further divided into Vidhi, Arthavada and Upanisad. Sutra (condensed text) refers to a collection of aphorisms in the form of a manual/ expression of a general truth/principle.

The Upanisads belong to the religious, philosophical and ethical tradition of India and fundamental texts of Hinduism. They form the part of the tradition of religious literature called Vedas. Out of the 200 Upanisads, the oldest and the first ten are considered to be the most important/principal Upanisads. Many Indian writers and Western writers have translated and approached it from various dimensions. Valerie J. Roebuck translation helps modern readers to understand and approach ancient texts with their aesthetics and multifariousness. Most of the Upanisads are anonymous.

Upanisads means esoteric or mystic teaching which deals with brahma-knowledge (world's most powerful creative works). 'Upa' is near, 'ni' is down and 'shad' refers to sit. It is an esoteric teaching sitting down near. It is the practice of students learning humbly at the feet of a 'Brahmajnani' (a teacher who is one with Supreme Being). The Upanisads belong to oral tradition and the date of it is still in debate. It reveals the nature of ultimate reality and stresses the eternal search for true knowledge.

Isavasya's central idea is everthing in this moving world is pervaded by the God. Human beings are advised to live without coveting anyone's wealth and they should enjoy this world without attachment with what they have. Kena/Keno Upanisad talks about the nature of knowledge and explains self- awakening is the source of innermost strength.

Katho/kathaupanisad says that the subject is the self and it must be withdrawn from the object (physique). This upanisad is the story of a little boy, Nachiketa who meets Yama. Their conversation evolves to a discussion of the nature of man, knowledge, 'Atman' and 'moksha' (liberation). Prasna means questions. i.e. what is the origin of the various creatures? Who are the deities that sustain them? How does life imbue that body? What is the relationship between supreme godhead and the individual self?

Mundakoupanisad advises to reach the highest oneness in all being elaborate on ethical thought, knowing oneself and remaining tranquil. Mandukyaupanisad states that every creature with his senses and perception has evolved from the supreme Being. Taittiriya Upanisad also advises on ethics and morals given to vedic scholars of vedicgurukulas. It is partly a treatise on allegory and partly philosophical instruction. Aitreyaupanisad describes that mind has its various other functions such as cognition and affection. Chandogya Upanisad belongs to the Sama Veda. It insists one should contemplate the syllable OM. It philosophically explains how the syllable fulfills one's desire.

Brhadaranya kaupanisad refers death as unreal and immortality is real. Kausitaki Upanisad asks questions related to the end of reincarnation. It describes how a person is born again and again according to his karma. Svetasvatara advocates self-knowledge, self-discipline and Atman as its final goal.

Hindu Dharma, the Universal Way of Life is a translation of selected discourses of 68th Jagadguru, Chandrashekarendra Saraswathi Shankaracharya. It was translated to English by the renowned writer RGK (R. Gopala Krishnan). The original text Deivattin Kuralis a tamil translation by Ra. Ganapathy. The book not only focuses on Dharmasastra but also guides all aspects of life by throwing light on all the branches of knowledge especially linguistics, astronomy, history, physics and religion in general. Critics say Acharya relates modern concepts with ancient wisdom. He says modern concepts like those of time and space have emerged from ancient Vedas.

The Acharya's view is that the law of universe has been in force from the very beginning of time. Everything in the universe is governed by this law. If it gets disturbed it will end up in chaos and unhappiness. There is a law for each one of them. Human beings must possess certain qualities and virtues to be worthy of their life. The law governing the conduct of man is called Dharma or ethics.

Human beings are endowed with intelligence and by using this intelligence human beings violate their dharma. Human beings can live happily only by living in accordance with this law for the well – being of the whole mankind. Humans keep on craving for one thing or the other thinking and believing that it will give them happiness. Humans who think always about material needs keep violating the dharma. They never realize dharma alone could give them happiness and peaceful life.

Dharma is the term used by the sastras to reflect all the moral and religious principles which serve mankind to obtain fullness of life. Sanathana Dharma/ Hindu Dharma has fourteen basic sastras which pertain to dharma which deals with what has come to be called Hinduism.

These treatises provide people about the doctrines and practices of dharma. The term caturdasameans fourteen. Sanathana Dharma has fourteen authoritative works on dharma encompassing all aspects of religion.

The term Veda literally means Book of Knowledge. The fourteen sastras are source of knowledge called Vidhyasthanas. The term Vidhyasthana means abode of learning or knowledge. Dharmasthanas are abodes of dharma and abodes of Vidya. The fourteen abodes of knowledge are the four Vedas, six angas and the four upangas.

The Vedas are Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda, the first four of the pramanas. The Angas are six - siksa, vyakarana, chandas, nirukta, jyotisa and kalpa. The four upangas are mimamsa, nyaya, purana and dharmasastra. Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Arthasasthra and Gandharvaveda are Upavedas /Subsidiary Vedas. It is obvious that they are connected with the prime scripture.

Socrates says 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. He is considered as the first great philosopher, moralist of western civilization. In all the places and ages every human action stands on ethical sense. Throughout the ages questions about moral principles are solved.

In Greek tradition 'ethics' means good life. Hedonism believes that pleasure or happiness is the most important goal in life and pleasure is the good. In Western tradition, one regards duty and their rights as their chief ethical concept while the other gives importance to be happy and views good life as the basic concern of ethics.

Socrates emphasized that it was difficult to attain knowledge of the real truth about difficult questions, especially when it deals with ethics. For Plato, justice is the most important virtue of all the other virtues. He justifies that it brings happiness in the just person. Aristotle's ethical inquiry is concerned with experiential investigation of what people fundamentally desire for. (happiness alone is the main goal). Epicurus says happiness involves serenity – can be achieved through simple pleasures which preserve bodily health and peace of mind. Epictetus says god and the cosmic intelligence are the vital forces. The force creates all things in the universe (internally connected). The cosmic intelligence governs the universe within.

St. Augustine says love and truth are one and the same. He says further, Where I found truth, there I found my God, who is truth itself. Aquinas thought humans have two sources of truth – human faculty and God's revelation. The proper activity of human reason develops both.

Hobbes believes each individual is preoccupied with the satisfaction and pleasure of personal desires. Its continuous fulfillment is the measure of one's happiness. Butler defends theism and the traditional view that God being mystic is immanent and concerned with human affairs.

David Hume's ethical essay talks about morality and sentiment. His two great social virtues are benevolence (universally esteemed) and justice.

Kant explains the relationship between good will and duty. Human actions have moral worth if they are done as duty. He says moral action /duty is different from praise worthy behaviour (Actions out of self-interest). Mill says that the happiness of any individual depends upon his favouring of pleasures over pains. So he considered the actions which increase pleasure are good and which increase pains are bad. Soren Kierkegaard reverses the Rene Descartes statement — "I think, therefore I am" to "I am, therefore I think" or "I am, therefore I choose to do". Sidgwick's view is that the common sense can be reduced to three types. The first is "intuitive", the second is "egoistic" and the third is "utilitarian" which require complex calculations. Nietzsche's main distinction of his moral theory is between noble's master-morality and common man's slave morality.

Dewey has the traditional conceit that human beings are passive spectators in a fixed universe in which truth is eternal. G.E. Moore disagrees with the conception of ethics as an examination of human conduct. He concludes it is difficult to define good. W.D. Ross uses the term prima facie duty. He adds, any ethical theory which fails to draw distinction between these two duties is moving towards too much or too little truthfulness in its account.

The theories of A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson are comprehensible only in terms of the positivists. They regarded science and mathematics as reliable knowledge. Philosophy was treated by them as "hand maiden of the sciences".

Kurt Baier declares in general, selfish reasons are superior to reasons of immediate pleasure and moral reasons are superior to selfish reasons. John Rawls opposes the idea “noble lie” so that they can achieve well-ordered state. This social principle would degrade them to mere means.

Philippa Foot’s view is that one’s intention will play a key role in dealing with wisdom.

Annette Baier’s concept is “appropriate trust in trust” connects and supplements the moral insight of men and women. She believes that human life is pervaded by trust relationship.

The western traditions have shifted according to the changes in time and space. By establishing new traditions based on the prevailing metaphysic, the western ethics has assured continuity for more than 2000 years.

Bhagavatgita says “when you feel the suffering of every living thing in your own heart, that’s consciousness”. In The Vedas and The Upanishads, the idea of goodness or concept of dharma is emphasized as universal goodness. In Greek tradition ‘ethics’ means ‘good life’. They aimed at discovering the nature of happiness. The writings of ancient philosophers duty and right as their chief ethical concept and gave importance to happy life. They viewed goodness as the basic concern of ethics. Plato explains the idea of good is seen to be universal author. The western tradition has its root in Greek tradition.

Aristotle finds goals such as wealth and honours are insufficient and says happiness is the main goal and it depends upon the actualization of one’s reality. The four purusharthas referred in Hindu Dharma are ‘dharma’, ‘artha’, ‘kama’ and ‘moksha’. Dharma denotes good deeds/ virtuous actions. ‘Artha’ means charity done (giving away one’s hard earned money - believes that the very purpose of owning materials is for charity). ‘Kama’(or) Desire. In this process, maturity and wisdom are gained. Another significant purpose of religion is ‘moksha’ which teaches to free one from all sorts of attachments. What makes human life enjoyable is right action (dharma), possession of wealth (artha) and sensual pleasure (kama). The belief in after life, which is moksha, reduces the fear of death.

Epicurus introduces the term ‘ataraxia’ which means “freedom from trouble in the mind and pain in the body”. He says that the fear of death, the inference of the God do not have any foundation in reality. He says “as long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist”.

Katha Upanisad enquires deeply into the mystery of life and death. It explains the everlasting mystery beyond life through conversation between Yama and Nachiketa. It explains how man ripens like corn and born again and again. It also describes the path of joy and wisdom. Epictetus, a Roman Stoic understand that the God and comic intelligence are the vital force. All human beings possess the ability to understand the divine nature and the good life refers to living in accord with it. Similar views can be found in the text, The Hindu Dharma. It explains that everything in the universe is governed by the vital force from the very beginning of time.

St. Augustine says love and truth are one and the same. He further says people can discover it when they desire true knowledge. Taittiriya Upanisad says Brahman is the Truth, the knowledge, the infinite. Adisankara explains, the term ‘satya’ is derived from sat (means existence). It refers that nothing exists in reality beyond God. Satya is also the central theme in the Vedas.

Throughout the ages questions about moral principles are solved. The chief function of ethical theorists is to think about morality, profoundly and genuinely. The philosopher’s dedication in seeking the truth and pursue it whatever happens or wherever it takes forth is a tough discipline. When it comes for practicing the principles there is a great difference between the high ideals and down to earth practice of the morality people follow.

Thus the study examines various scholarly viewpoints on ethics and establishes the fact that ethical values and principles are universal, whether they are from the Orient or from the Occident.

It also proves that great minds think alike and great religious and philosophical traditions have the common core namely, the human welfare which includes happiness and peace. All religions lay down duties common to all their followers. Vedic religion advocates two types of dharma: one is common to all and the other to individual Varna.

Ethics governs our lives, and if the term dharma is used as an equivalent, then there is certainly *kala dharma* and *deshadharma* and it varies from time to time and place to place. The universal code of conduct, duties common to all are called 'Samanya-Dharma'. Individual dharma refers to special code of conduct or 'Visesa dharma' related to the vocation.

The ideas expounded in the ethical texts develop a healthy mind, shape human thoughts, bring about behavioral change and establish social order. It is fashionable to dismiss philosophy as dealing with abstractions, though they try to humanize and civilize the people like other forms of literature.

This study focuses solely on ethical principles or doctrines which shaped the moral philosophy in turn moulded the moral consciousness of the populace. The role of literature is to teach and delight. This study attempt to discover the commonalities / similarities / parallels and even stark differences between the ethical systems that are found in the West and here in India.

Studies have been conducted periodically on comparative religion, comparative philosophy, comparative history and comparative literature. But no significant study has been conducted on the source texts philosophy with particular reference to ethics. This study explores two systems of thought from two different parts of the world.

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