Ethics in Indian Perspective and its Relation to Western Ethical Thought

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Abstract: This paper explores the intricate relationship between classical Indian ethical frameworks and prominent Western ethical theories, aiming to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and potential for mutual enrichment. Specifically, it examines how foundational Indian philosophical concepts such as *dharma*, *karma*, and *moksha* (Bharadwaj et al., 2024) resonate with or diverge from Western notions of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics (Bilimoria, 2021). This paper investigates the complex interplay between Indian and Western ethical paradigms, underscoring their points of convergence and divergence, while underscoring the distinctive contributions of Indian philosophy to moral philosophy at large. Western ethics typically prioritizes rationality, empiricism, and existentialism, whereas Indian philosophy, drawing from foundational scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishads, centers on notions such as *dharma*, *karma*, and *moksha* (Bharadwaj et al., 2024). The analysis elucidates how Indian ethical systems, especially those delineated in the Dharmaśāstras, provide sophisticated insights into duty and virtue that enhance comparative philosophical inquiry (Mondal, 2024; Raimondi & Jain, 2024).

Ethical reflection has profoundly influenced human behavior and societal cohesion throughout history. Distinct ethical systems emerged in Indian and Western contexts, shaped by their respective philosophical foundations and cultural milieus. Indian ethics arose within a spiritual-metaphysical framework, intertwining *dharma*, *karma*, *ahiṃsā*, and *moksha*, wherein moral existence is inextricably linked to self-realization and personal metamorphosis. Western traditions, by contrast, evolved via rational deliberation, yielding virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism—each furnishing methodical strategies for moral deliberation and social equity. This study conducts a comparative evaluation of these paradigms, delineating their affinities, disparities, and pertinence to modern issues. It contends that Indian ethics imparts contextual nuance, empathy, and ecological consciousness (Bharadwaj et al., 2024), while Western ethics affords analytical precision, universality, and institutional efficacy. A synergistic exchange between these traditions holds potential for crafting an equilibrated ethical model suited to contemporary dilemmas, including technological ethics, environmental stewardship, and global disparities.

Keywords: Indian ethics, *dharma*, *karma*, virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism

1. Introduction

Ethics pertains to the examination of moral principles, obligations, and aspirations that direct human actions. Although moral considerations transcend cultures, ethical constructs diverge across philosophical lineages. Western ethics predominantly accentuates rational self-determination, universal axioms, and methodical moral vindication, in contrast to Indian thought, which amalgamates ethics with metaphysical exploration and spiritual maturation.

Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions in Indian philosophy conceive ethics not solely as prescriptive norms but as a transmutative trajectory fostering alignment between the self, society, and universal order. Ethical living is intertwined with self-mastery, benevolence, and emancipation from *dukkha*. Western philosophy, conversely, has engendered formalized theories addressing virtue cultivation, dutiful action, and outcome evaluation.

This paper undertakes a comparative scrutiny of Indian and Western ethical traditions, probing their core tenets and illustrating how their amalgamation can advance current ethical deliberation.

2. Literature Review

Academic discourse on Indian ethics accentuates *dharma* as the pivotal moral compass for personal deportment and communal equilibrium. Hiriyanna posits that Indian ethical contemplation fuses moral accountability with spiritual attainment. Radhakrishnan similarly maintains that Indian ethics is inseparable from metaphysical inquiries into selfhood and ultimate reality.

Comparative studies have discerned affinities between Aristotelian virtue ethics and the Indian focus on character cultivation and self-restraint (Raimondi & Jain, 2024). Gandhian principles of non-violence and truthfulness have enriched international dialogues on peace, equity, and ethical defiance. Western theories, meanwhile, pervasively shape contentions in human rights, bioethics, and political theory, affirming the salience of rational and institutionalized ethics (Bilimoria, 2021).

3. Methodology

Employing a comparative-analytical philosophical approach, this research juxtaposes canonical Indian ethical notions with principal Western theories via hermeneutic exegesis and conceptual dissection. It identifies convergences, divergences, and normative corollaries, appraising their applicability to present-day ethical quandaries (Mondal, 2024).

4. Indian Ethical Perspective

At its core, Indian ethics rests on *dharma*—encompassing righteousness, duty, and cosmic propriety. Diverging from inflexible edicts, *dharma* is situational and interdependent, attuned to personal stations, societal obligations, and life phases (Mondal, 2024). The *Bhagavad Gītā* exemplifies this through *svadharma*, advocating dutiful execution devoid of result-oriented attachment.

Karma doctrine buttresses ethical rectitude by associating volitional deeds with repercussions, instilling vigilant moral awareness. Thus, ethical behavior transcends extrinsic incentives, rooted in cognizance of causal continuity (Bharadwaj et al., 2024).

In numerous Indian traditions, ethical endeavor culminates in *moksha*—deliverance from *samsara* and nescience. Virtues like *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *karuṇā*, and *vairāgya* are indispensable for spiritual ascent. Buddhist and Jain ethics amplify this via universal empathy and reverence for sentience (Raimondi & Jain, 2024).

5. Western Ethical Traditions

Western ethics spans multifaceted paradigms. Aristotelian virtue ethics foregrounds character edification and *phronesis* for *eudaimonia*, viewing moral growth as habituated rational praxis (Raimondi & Jain, 2024).

Kantian deontology pivots on duty derived from rational autonomy, positing that moral acts adhere to the categorical imperative, affirming personal dignity and principled uniformity (Bilimoria, 2021).

Benthamite and Millian utilitarianism appraises deeds by their utility in augmenting aggregate happiness, prioritizing the greatest good for the greatest number through consequentialist calculus (Bilimoria, 2021).

6. Comparative Analysis

Indian and Western ethical traditions reveal both shared moral concerns and important philosophical distinctions. One major area of convergence is the emphasis on moral character formation. Indian concepts such as *dharma* and *karma* encourage disciplined action and ethical responsibility, which parallel Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kant's duty-based moral reasoning in shaping moral dispositions (Raimondi & Jain, 2024). However, Indian ethics moves beyond moral behaviour toward spiritual liberation, with *moksha* representing the highest ethical goal—an element that is generally not central within secular Western ethical frameworks (Bharadwaj et al., 2024; Bilimoria, 2021).

Differences become more evident in the treatment of moral universality. Western theories, particularly deontology and utilitarianism, tend to formulate universal moral principles grounded in rational justification (Bilimoria, 2021). In contrast, Indian ethics often adopts a context-sensitive understanding of duty, where *dharma* may vary according to *varṇa*, life stage, and situational responsibilities (Mondal, 2024). This reflects a relational and socially embedded conception of morality rather than rigid universality.

Despite these differences, meaningful complementarities can be identified. The principle of *ahiṃsā* strengthens utilitarian commitments to reducing suffering, while the doctrine of karma promotes awareness of the long-term consequences of actions, thereby enriching consequentialist moral reflection (Bharadwaj et al., 2024). An integrative ethical approach that combines Western analytical clarity with Indian holistic and spiritual insight could therefore offer a more balanced framework for addressing contemporary global ethical concerns.

Aspect	Indian Ethics	Western Ethics	Convergence/Divergence
Core Focus	Dharma, karma, and moksha	Virtue, duty, and utility	Convergence in moral cultivation
Approach	Contextual and spiritually grounded	Rational and universalistic	Divergence in universality
Goal	Self-realization and liberation	Eudaimonia and social welfare	Potential philosophical complementarity

7. Conclusion

This comparative inquiry indicates that Indian and Western ethical systems can be understood as complementary rather than opposing traditions. Indian ethics contributes depth through its focus on spiritual development, interconnectedness, and contextual moral responsibility, whereas Western ethical frameworks provide conceptual precision and systematic methods for moral reasoning.

A synthesis of these perspectives offers significant promise for contemporary ethical discourse. Integrating the contextual richness of *dharma* with deontological universality and utilitarian sensitivity to consequences can generate a nuanced and adaptable ethical model (Bharadwaj et al., 2024; Bilimoria, 2021; Mondal, 2024; Raimondi & Jain, 2024). Such a framework may be particularly valuable in navigating modern ethical

challenges that demand both cultural sensitivity and rational clarity. Future scholarship may further explore the practical implications of this synthesis within applied ethics and global moral philosophy.

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