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**CONTRIBUTION OF HINDU METAPHYSICS AND ETHICS TO
GLOBAL ETHICS**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE M.A (Master of
Arts) – HINDU STUDIES- IN THE SCHOOL OF
RELIGION AND CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
KWA ZULU NATAL**

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DATE SUBMITTED : APRIL 2004

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1.1 Objectives and Need for the Study

Hindu Metaphysics and Ethics have for centuries developed and evolved with the purpose of guiding human thought and action. In this regard, S. Radhakrishnan notes in his book, *Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, that

Indian philosophy has its interest in the haunts of men, and not in a supra-lunar solitude. It takes its origin in life, and enters back into life after passing through the schools (McDermott (ed) 1970: 69).

Radhakrishnan together with other contemporary scholars such as Dasgupta, Aurobindo etc. have attempted to construct the Indian Metaphysical discourse with practical and social relevance and have developed an initial framework in which such an hermeneutical trend could be raised. However, their contribution of Hindu metaphysics and ethics to the global ethical discourse has been limited. This is perhaps the most serious gap in Hindu metaphysical and ethical studies. It is further noted that the world is rapidly becoming a global village. With the increase in communication and technology, political economies and social philosophies are in active dialogue with each other; religious traditions and spiritual philosophies are brought into closer contact with secular interests

and socio-political worldviews. Societies and communities are no longer in social, political, cultural or religious isolation. They are expressing tendencies to mature and develop through assimilation and influence into global institutions with global relevance.

Moreover, it is assumed that the dialogue between different socio-political and ethical worldviews and philosophies of life, being based on contradicting conclusions, are bound to cause tensions with each other and are also obliged to progressively influence each other, consequently shaping modernistic ideological trends and approaches that stand in need of demonstrating its universal relevance to the human condition and its destiny. However, it is inevitable that tensions that arise between ideological systems may ultimately stimulate fanaticism and fundamentalism and therefore threaten and disrupt world peace and security. Notwithstanding this, the world is in need of peace, co-operation and security, which can be produced through a global ethic, which should be developed by the global community.

In the light of the postmodern processes of globalization, there are growing concerns about the challenges that face not only the human condition, but also the planet as a whole. Statistics reveal that the world population is rapidly growing more than ever before and therefore poses several challenges to the planet. This rapidly growing world population is bound to put a strain on the world's resources *viz.* on landownership, agricultural yields and food

distribution, genetic and energy resources, and the environment. The issues of fertility and natural mortality are bound to arise. These issues do impact on the fundamental value systems of communities. Furthermore, the social issues of abortion, cloning, sterilization, euthanasia, sexual morality, animal rights, environmental ethics, racism and affirmative action, poverty and distributive justice etc. do present challenges to the ethical foundations of individuals and societies. In the evolving post –modern society these issues put traditional ethics and legal rules into tension.

The concomitant challenges of poverty, violence, racism and sexism are bound to impact on global peace and security and a better quality of life for all. The current land crisis in Zimbabwe, the poverty in many parts of the developing world, the war in Iraq, the political violence in Palestine and Israel, the increase in the threat of nuclear weapons (Korea, India, Pakistan), the poisoning of the global atmosphere and environment by increased industrialization are challenges of our age. Many of these challenges reflect a fundamental ethical crisis that the global community faces. Therefore, the world stands in need of a global ethic that is influenced by the ethical values of all religious and cultural traditions. Furthermore, the evolution of a global ethic needs to be contextualised against the backdrop of the challenges that face the human condition and the planet as a whole in order for it to be of global relevance.

Ethics has formed a central part of religion and over the centuries it has largely been confined to the realm of faith systems. The foremost source of religious ethics are the spiritual texts of the various faith systems. Traditional ethics have been largely structured on a sectarian and provincial basis. Its association with metaphysics and theology cannot be denied nor overlooked. Under uncontrolled circumstances, traditional religious ethics have declined to strict and compulsive dogmas. Being based on Divine authority, traditional ethics have largely being grounded on the vision of an individual or a specific group of individuals. It has mostly been articulated in mystical or metaphorical language and has played a pivotal role in connecting the empirical reality with the ultimate destiny.

It must be noted that against the backdrop of global change and challenges, there is a need for a conceptual global ethical framework, which could govern and guide human action at the global level. It is necessary that the global ethical discourse be based on the principle of inclusivity and should include political, economic, social, religious, and scientific dimensions. In order for this to emerge, traditional philosophy and ethics must be made, to some degree, compatible with socio-political ideologies through a global dialogue. It is also necessary to construct, through this global dialogue, a conceptual paradigm as a foundational framework for a global ethic. There is also a compulsion to formulate concepts that have universal relevance in their application and to compose ethical theories that will encompass a multi-disciplinary

interpretation. I further believe that there is a need to develop a post-modernistic methodological approach in constructing a global ethic that can be significantly rooted in a multi-disciplinary paradigm. It is obvious that the methodological approach of traditional ethics have been limited in many respects. Moreover, there is a need for a neo-hermeneutical framework of principles to be produced in order to interpret and understand traditional philosophy and ethics in the context of multi-disciplinary reality.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the nature and character of *Brahman*, *Atman*, the individual and the World in the context of Hindu metaphysics and the nature and character of the notion of *Dharma* and *Karma* in the context of Hindu ethics and to evaluate its contribution towards developing a theoretical, methodological and hermeneutical framework, for a contemporary global ethic. It must be noted that Hindu metaphysics covers a wide range of approaches viz. the *Samkhya*, the *Yoga*, the *Vaisesika*, the *Mimamsa* (the *Uttara Mimamsa* and the *Purva Mimamsa*), and *Nyaya*. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus will mainly be on the *Vedanta* of the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* and the interpretations of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*. This study will not attempt to prove which one of these traditional scholars is best suited for the modern global ethical discourse. On the contrary, it will survey the general and specific principles articulated by them which will be evaluated for the purposes of constructing and developing the global ethical discourse.

This study is also an inquiry into a historical-hermeneutical process, a search for the patterns of change in metaphysical and ethical notions in a particular context. As the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman*, the world, *Dharma* and *Karma* are the essence of Hindu Metaphysics and Ethics, changes in the understanding of these notions in the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita* will be closely connected to the way in which they can be interpreted in different contexts. The specific focus will be the way in which these traditional ideas can contribute to the development of a post-modern global ethical discourse.

It must be noted that the age of globalization is underpinned with the ideas of collectivism, universalism and integration. The focus of the global mind is no longer on the humanistic trend, it is expanded to include transcendental and natural categories eg. Universal divine space and the planet as a natural environment. Therefore, Hindu metaphysical and ethical thought must develop to incorporate as well as expand the principles of integration, collectivism and universalism and not be treated as isolated systems of thought. As much as the history of *Vedantic* hermeneutics demonstrates the clear distinctions that formulate itself between the various *Vedantic* schools, such distinctions need not be sustained within the context of the global discourse. Given the different standpoints of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*, they collectively have a role to play in constructing the global ethical discourse. This thesis proposes that Hindu metaphysics, limited to the *Vedanta* of the *Vedanta Sutra*, the

Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita* and the interpretations of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*, and together with the Hindu traditional and contemporary ethical discourse, can integrate itself with the trends in the western ethical discourse in order to collectively contribute a foundational framework for the global ethical discourse to evolve a global ethic.

1.2 Literature Survey

The notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and the material world are deeply rooted in *Upanishadic* thinking and continue into the *Bhagavad Gita* over an expansive period of time. These notions constitute the bedrock of Hindu metaphysics. Although these concepts have been interpreted over the ages by both traditional and contemporary thinkers such as *Shankara*, *Ramanuja*, *Madhva*, Radhakrishnan, Das Gupta, Aurobindo and Gandhi, they have not been dialogued with global ethical issues. It must be noted that the notions of *Brahman* and *Atman* are dealt with in the *Upanishads* from two very divergent positions, *viz.* from the absolute and relative point of views. Both these viewpoints provide a significant basis for the interpretation of global ethics. The notion of *Brahman* is transformed from an Absolute abstract idea in the *Upanishads* into a purely Personal Supreme God in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This adequately reveals the flexible nature of the notion of Brahman, which is of significance to the construction of the character of global concepts. All these ideas collectively need to formulate themselves into a conceptual paradigm that

will reflect the integration of global thought for the purpose of constructing the global ethical discourse. The global ethical discourse cannot be sustained by a singularist position but must reflect a pluralistic and an all inclusivist trend if it is to have influence and relevance on the global community. Therefore, this study will not attempt to demonstrate which *Vedantic* school is best suited for this purpose, but will attempt to illustrate the collective contribution that all *Vedantic* thinkers can make to the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, Hindu metaphysical and ethical ideas need to positively contribute to expanding and interpreting global thought systems that can contribute towards the global ethical discourse.

- ◆ Dr S. Radhakrishnan, in “*Indian Philosophy*”, Vols. 1&2, 1999, surveys the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and Material World as well as the general nature and character of Hindu ethics within the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. He also deals with these concepts in the context of the *Advaita* and *Visisadvaitic* traditions of *Shankara* and *Ramanuja*. His analysis is purely limited to the way in which these concepts have been interpreted and the way in which they can be systematized for modern day scholasticism. However, these concepts have not been dialogued with contemporary western ethical discourse and the global ethical discourse.

- ◆ William Beidler, in his book “*The Vision of Self in Early Vedanta*”, 1975, does a detailed analysis of the Self in two main *Vedantic* scriptures viz. the

Upanishads and the *Gita*. He examines the notion of self in the context of the traditional concepts of *Purusha*, *Atman* and *Brahman*. This analysis is an important one in that it surveys the notion of the Self from a comparative perspective and it is easy to see the development of this notion. However, this study has concentrated on the analysis of the notion of the Self and it does not develop this analysis into the ethical discourse.

- ◆ Surendranath Dasgupta, in “*A History of Indian Philosophy*”, Vols1-5, 1941, deals with these metaphysical concepts very briefly in the *Upanishads* and *Gita*. In his presentation of the *Upanishads* he does not raise the issue of ethics, however, in dealing with the *Gita* he raises the issue of ethics in conjunction with Buddhist ethics. He deals with *Shankara*’s school of *Advaita Vedanta* very extensively but focuses very briefly on the theories of world appearance, *Atman*, *Jiva*, *Ishvara* and *Vedanta* ethics. He also deals with *Ramanuja*, *Madhva*, and *Nimbarka* in a similar way. This analysis is significant in that a systematic development of philosophic thought can be discerned but a clear construction of the influence of metaphysical concepts on ethical notions are absent.

- ◆ Paul Deussen, in his book, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 1906, deals very extensively with the notion of *Brahman* and *Brahman* in relation to the universe and the *Atman* in the context of the *Upanishads*. Deussen also gives consideration of the issue of ethics in the *Upanishads* but deals with it in the

context of the traditional ethical institution of *Varna*. Here also it is evident that Hindu metaphysical and ethical concepts have been confined and interpreted in the context of the Hindu worldview and very little was done to construct a framework for it to participate in a global ethical discourse.

- ◆ Another Western scholar, Gough Edward, in his book, *Philosophy of the Upanishads: Ancient Indian Metaphysics*, Vol.4, 1882, ventures to explore the notions of *Brahman*, *Maya*, the Self and the World in the *Upanishads*. A detail analysis of the *Mundaka*, *Katha*, *Brihadaranyaka* and *Svetasvatara Upanishads* is undertaken to construct an understanding of the metaphysical concepts. A dialogue of the *Upanishadic* worldview with the western metaphysical and ethical worldview is absent.

- ◆ Dr Priti Sinha in his book, *The Philosophy of Advaita – A transition from Shankara to Sri Aurobindo*, 1986, presents a comprehensive analysis of the concepts *Brahman*, *Atman* and the nature of the world as it is interpreted in the philosophies of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*. This analysis deals with the precise interpretations of these concepts within the respective schools. Although, he does raise very briefly a few ethical issues, it is clear the emphasis was more on *Vedantic* metaphysics than on ethics.

- ◆ W.S Urquhart, in his book, *The Vedanta and Modern Thought*, 1986, does raise the issue of the place of ethics in *Vedanta* and deal with this issue in

the context of the destiny of the soul. However, his approach was confined to examining the place of ethics in the context of the *Advaita* tradition and it left little room to really understand the extent to which ethics evolved within the *Vedantic* tradition.

It is quite evident that Hindu metaphysics and ethics were largely examined and analyzed to further the understanding of the traditional conceptual and hermeneutical frameworks rather than to assess the contribution they can make towards developing a global ethical discourse. Noting this serious gap, this study will venture to explore the way in which Hindu metaphysics, within the context of the *Vedanta* of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*, and Hindu ethics, in the context of the traditional and modern discourse, can collectively contribute to the global ethical discourse.

1.3 Key Critical Questions

This study will venture to explore how the metaphysical notions of *Brahman*, *Atman*, and concept of World, are understood in the traditional philosophy of *Vedanta*, viz. the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* and how these notions have been interpreted by traditional thinkers such as *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* and modern day eastern and western scholars.

Furthermore, this study will also explore the way in which the ethical notions of *dharma* and *karma* have been understood in the traditional philosophy of *Vedanta*, viz. the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, and how these notions have been interpreted through time. It will also explore trends in contemporary Hindu ethical discourse.

Thirdly, this study will examine the major ethical ideological trends in globalization and what challenges they present.

Finally, this study will explore what kind of contribution traditional *Vedantic* metaphysics and ethics can make towards the construction of a conceptual, methodological and hermeneutical framework for the development of the global ethical discourse in which the principles for a global ethic can be established.

1.4 Research Approach and Methods

This study will attempt a conceptual analysis of the Metaphysics of the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* through the interpretations of western and eastern scholars to construct a theoretical framework for the concepts of *Brahman*, *Atman* and the World. This will be followed by an analysis of these concepts within the traditional schools of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* and modern day thinkers of *Vedanta*. A critical

evaluation of the suitability of these metaphysical concepts will be made and an assessment of how they relate with modern day ethical trends based on the criteria of relevance. It will also explore the main theoretical assumptions of these concepts and establish the hermeneutical principles that inform the interpretation of these concepts. It must be noted that *Shankara's* interpretation of the *Vedanta* is one of the dominant schools that are felt strongly even to date, and it will be important to explore how *Shankara* dealt with these metaphysical concepts. The rationale to include the contribution of *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* is that they stand as formidable opponents of *Shankara's* approach. The modern day scholars such as Radhakrishnan, Aurobindo, Surendranath Dasgupta, Paul Deussen, William Beidler have been grouped as “insiders” and “outsiders” and it is vital to explore, in the context of the cultural and academic differences between them, the variety of trends that deal with key concepts in Indian thought. The combination of ancient and modern interpretations is an invaluable contribution to the expansion of philosophic studies. A full analysis will be made of the way in which the ancient and modern day culturally diversified scholars handled ethical problems in Indian thought. However, this study will not limit itself to any one school but explore the full contribution of the three schools *viz. Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva.*

Secondly, a detailed analysis of the notions *dharma* and *karma* will be undertaken in the *Vedanta Sutra, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita* through the interpretations of western and eastern scholars. A construction of a theoretical

basis for these concepts will be pursued and a critical evaluation of the suitability of these traditional ethical concepts will be undertaken to assess how these ideas relate to modern day ethical trends.

Finally, this study will survey contemporary literature, from both a western and eastern perspective, and identify socio-ethical ideological trends in globalization and examine proposals made towards constructing a global ethic. This study will also critically examine some of the challenges that face globalization and possible solutions to them.

One of the central problems to any study dealing with concepts from an individual worldview is that of linguistic difficulties. This study must take into cognizance the difficulty in translating Sanskrit concepts from the Hindu worldview to English, which is largely dominated by referents from the Judaic-Christian tradition. For the purpose of enhancing the objectives of this study, an attempt will be made to demonstrate the possibility of linking traditional Indian metaphysical concepts to western notions with the objective of establishing a globalized vocabulary.

1.5 Background To Primary Scriptural Sources

The conceptual framework for this study is largely based on the ideas derived from the *Prasthanā Traya*, viz. the *Vedānta Sūtra*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad*

Gita. It must be noted that there is a vast array of scriptural sources in the historical development of Hinduism and it is very difficult to cover this plethora of material. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the discussion is limited to key texts which acquired, over time, canonical status within the metaphysical discourse. The *Prasthanā Traya*, in the hands of *Vedānta* scholars, medieval and contemporary specialists, acquired the status of primary sources reflecting the metaphysical ideas. *Vedānta*, unlike many other Hindu philosophic systems attained more popularity and a dominant status in contemporary Hindu metaphysical thinking. I have therefore taken these three texts viz. the *Vedānta Sūtra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, as having the dominant position in Hindu metaphysics and hence my decision to limit myself.

1.5.1 Date of the Primary Scriptures

One of the important considerations for this study is the ascertaining of the date of these scriptures. One must admit that any attempt to date these primary scriptures have generated several problems that have not been completely resolved. For instance, there are some western scholars who suggest that the *Bhagavad Gita* was written after Jesus Christ (Swami Gambhirananda 1991: xiii). Swami Gambhirananda, who quotes the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, notes that the *Bhagavad Gita* is not only pre-Christian in origins, but also, it is pre-Buddhistic (ibid. 1991: pxliiii-xiv). In support of this position he notes the views of scholars such as Telang, R. J Bhandarkar, S.Radhakrishnan

and Dasgupta and all of them agree that the *Gita* arose between 300BC and 500BC (ibid. 1991: xiv). Furthermore, Radhakrishnan observes :

From its archaic constructions and internal references we may infer that it is definitely a work of the pre-Christian era. Its date may be assigned to the 5th century BC though the text may have received many alterations in subsequent times (Radhakrishnan 1948: 14).

Similar differences exist even in dating the *Vedanta Sutra* and the *Upanishads*. Given these various proposals it is, it is safe to simply say that the primary scriptures viz the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* are of pre-Christian origins and this suggests an independent Hindu orthodox context to their socio-ethical principles.

1.5.2 The Upanishads

The *Upanishads* occupy a central position in the history of Indian philosophy and have been described as the “kernel of the whole of post-vedic Indian philosophy” (Urquhart, 1986: 21). The *Upanishads* have had a tremendous influence and is still having a colossal predominance in the minds and hearts of people all over the world. Dasgupta notes one western scholar who had this to say about it:

From every sentence deep, original and sublime thoughts arise and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit.... In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishads*. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death (in Dasgupta, 1941: 40)

Noting the above, it is firstly necessary to probe into how the different scholars went about analyzing the *Upanishads*. In this regard, a survey of the methods of Paul Deussen (a western scholar) and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (an eastern scholar) will be reviewed. Thereafter, an examination of the notion of “*Upanishad*” is undertaken to form a critical reflection of the chronology and methodology of the *Upanishads* that is used in arranging the historical sequence of the *Upanishads*. It will also be meaningful to explore the major texts that constitute the traditional authority of the *Upanishads*, their subject matter and the pattern of interpretation they have been subjected to. This reflection is necessary to inquire into the suitability of the *Upanishads* as source material for the study of Hindu metaphysics and ethics.

Paul Deussen, in dealing with the overview of the *Upanishads* assembles the following issues that he dealt with viz. (i) the *Upanishads* in the context of the *Vedas* (ii) the meaning of the word *Upanishad* (iii) the earliest origins of the *Upanishads* (iv) the extent of the *Upanishads* (v) the *Upanishads* of

Badarayana and *Shankara* (vi) the most important collection of *Upanishads* (vii) the fundamental conceptions of the *Upanishads* and their significance (viii) the *Upanishads* in relation to Philosophy and Religion (Deussen 1906: 5-44). Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, deals with the general philosophy of the *Upanishads* and takes up the following issues for discussion (i) the concept of *Upanishad* (ii) the teachings of the *Upanishads* (iii) number and date of *Upanishads* (iv) the problems discussed in the *Upanishads* (v) the nature of reality (vi) *Brahman* (vii) *Brahman* and *Atman* (viii) creation (ix) the individual Self and (x) *karma* and ethics in the *Upanishads* (Radhakrishnan, Vol. 1, 1923: 137-267). It is explicit that both Deussen and Radhakrishnan approached the study of the *Upanishads* in almost similar ways, though there are also marked differences between them. Notwithstanding this, it is conclusive, from the study of the overview of both Paul Deussen and Radhakrishnan that the *Upanishads* can serve as an important source reference in terms of undertaking an analysis of traditional Hindu metaphysics and ethics.

1.5.3 The Conception of “Upanishad”

Paul Deussen, in examining the concept of *Upanishad* submits that this concept refers to the secret and mystical teachings that are transmitted from a learned and spiritually realized teacher to an “ethically deserving student” (Deussen 1906: 12-13). Dasgupta also notes that the significant point about the secrecy that surrounded the teachings of the *Upanishads* is that they were supposed to

be taught to pupils who practiced supreme moral restraint (Dasgupta 1941: 38). Dasgupta, likewise, quotes MaxMuller's analyses of the word *Upanishad* and notes that the concept *Upanishad* refers to the act of sitting down near a teacher and submissively listening to him (Dasgupta 1941: 38). Radhakrishnan is in complete agreement on this meaning of the term *Upanishad*. However, he adds that the term *Upanishad* is also known as the "*Vedanta*". (Radhakrishnan 1923: 137). To *Shankara*, the word *Upanishad* refers to that which destroys inborn ignorance and leads to the liberation of a soul through pure knowledge (Dasgupta 1941: 38). It is apparent that the *Upanishads* are very confidential teachings that are aimed at providing spiritual insight into metaphysical matters to the morally pure minded. Notwithstanding this, it can serve as an essential source material to guide the construction of a global ethical discourse through its metaphysical and ethical reflections. This will serve as a means to lift the *Upanishads* from the levels of secrecy and engage them in the public discourse. This means that the *Upanishads* need to be removed from their traditional ethical setting and placed within the context of the global ethical setting. Therefore, there is a need to develop new methods of engaging the meaning and purpose of *Upanishadic* teachings and provide a much greater space for their interpretation. For the purpose of developing a global ethical discourse, the collective system of *Upanishadic* thought needs to be considered and not any single stream. However, it is not the purpose of this study to focus on a particular hermeneutical trend or standpoint of the *Upanishads* but to establish

the contribution that their metaphysics and ethics can make to the global ethical discourse in general.

1.5.4 Subject Matter of Upanishads

It must be noted that the period of the *Upanishadic* development spanned between 100BC to the current era and the orthodox position mentions that there are 108 texts belonging to this genre. Deussen notes that the primary subject matter of the *Upanishads* revolves around two fundamental conceptions *viz.* *Brahman* and *Atman* (Deussen 1906: 38). In this regard he says:

If we strip this thought (*Brahman* and *Atman*) of the various forms, figurative to the highest degree and not seldom extravagant, under which it appears in the *Vedanta* texts, and fix our attention upon it solely in its philosophical simplicity as the identity of God and the soul, the *Brahman* and the *Atman*, it will be found to possess a significance reaching far beyond the *Upanishads*, their time and country, nay, we claim for it an inestimable value for the whole race of mankind (Deussen 1906: 39).

Deussen deals with the conception of the *Upanishads* strictly in its relation to philosophy and religion, but he leaves out correlating it to the ethical discourse. Furthermore, his suggestion that the notion of *Brahman* and *Atman* may have a

far wider relevance than just being confined to the philosophic context of the *Upanishads*, raises the hope of the positive contribution these concepts can make to the global ethical discourse. Dasgupta notes that many of the *Upanishads* are linked with the older portion of the *Vedas* (Dasgupta 1941: 30). This is very significant because the *Upanishads* form part of a larger religious tradition and it provides direct evidence of the continuity and development of metaphysical and ethical thought from the *Vedic* period to the *Upanishadic* period itself. In fact, Radhakrishnan confirms that the *Upanishads* contain the essence of *Vedic* teachings (Radhakrishnan 1923: 138). He strongly suggests that the philosophy of the *Upanishads* can be accosted from two fundamental approaches (i) metaphysics and (ii) ethics (ibid. 1923: 151). Although the subject matter of the *Upanishads* does not deal with the relationship of metaphysics and ethics in terms of the objectives of this study, it will be possible to establish key ideas from it in order to establish a post-hermeneutical relationship between them and to forward a contribution from them for the purpose of a global ethical discourse. The deep dialectic method on which the subject matter of the *Upanishads* has modeled itself into is an important method to take into the global ethical discourse which can be used to substantiate the framework for the formulation of a global ethic.

1.5.5 Interpretation of Upanishads

One of the main challenges to understanding the *Upanishads* is its hermeneutics. Dasgupta makes a very interesting observation about the

interpretation of the *Upanishads*, where he notes that on the matter of ultimate truths it is very difficult to arrive at objective conclusions just based on individual reason and opinion (Dasgupta 1941: 41). This means that reason, as the Kantian and western ethical schools may propose, is insufficient to interpret and understand the truths of the *Upanishads*. This shifts the content of the *Upanishads* from a purely empirically objectivist position into a meta-objective area. Dasgupta also observed that the traditional schools of *Vedanta*, in order for them to be heard, went to great lengths to show that the *Upanishadic* texts supported them. They interpreted the *Upanishads* to demonstrate that they alone represented the true *Vedantic* doctrines (ibid. 1941: 41). This is further confirmed by Radhakrishnan who noted that:

Different commentators, starting with particular beliefs, force their views into the *Upanishads* and strain their language so as to make it consistent with their own special doctrines (Radhakrishnan 1923: 140)

Dasgupta suggests that a modern interpreter of the *Upanishads* should overlook the claims of the traditional exponents and look at the *Upanishads* not as a systematic treatise but a repository of diverse thoughts (Dasgupta 1941: 42). He further suggested that a modern interpreter should not agree to the claims of the traditional interpreters but should take the texts independently and separately and determine their meanings keeping a close eye on the context in which they

appear (Dasgupta 1941: 42). Dasgupta being aware of the highly subjective nature of the content of the *Upanishads* attempted to project a fairly objective approach to it. However, the centuries of contribution made by the classical thinkers cannot be totally ignored. Their sectarian and school based hermeneutical approach need not be entrenched in the context of the global ethical discourse. In fact, the collective contribution of ideas must be used and reinterpreted for the purposes of constructing a conceptual paradigm for the global ethical discourse. It must be noted that this method will contribute positively to the objectives of this study.

1.5.6 The Vedanta Sutra

The *Vedanta Sutra*, also referred to as the *Brahma Sutra*, or the *Sariraka Sutra* forms part of the triple canon of *Vedanta* known as the *Prasthanaya traya*, which is the most authoritative canonical texts in Hindu orthodoxy (Urquhart 1986: 39). It is significant to establish a general background to the *Vedanta Sutra* in order to evaluate its contribution to this study. It must be known that there is a notable overlap in the content of the *Vedanta Sutra* and the *Upanishads*. However, for the purpose of this study both these scriptures will be investigated to gain absolute clarity on the concepts dealt with.

This *Sutra* is compiled in prose form and is served as compressed material which is suitable for memorizing and they also serve as lines of communication

between the new and the old schematic character which allows for considerable variety and development in interpretation (Urquhart 1986: 39-40). Urquhart observes that the *Vedanta Sutra* omits certain aspects of doctrine and it emphasizes others and over a period of time it acquired a distinctive character of its own which contributes to renewed interpretation by commentators (ibid. 1986: 40).

Srinivasa Chari, in his book, *The Philosophy of the Vedanta Sutra*, notes that the *sutras* are compiled in aphoristic sentences and are encapsulated in a few cryptic words which are deeply interwoven with philosophic ideas (1998: ix). The general structure of the *Vedanta sutra* is divided into four chapters (*adhyayas*) and each chapter is further divided into four parts (*padas*) (ibid. 1998: xx). The central theme of the *Vedanta Sutra* is the study of the *Brahman* as an ultimate metaphysical reality (ibid. 1998: xx). The first chapter (*adhyaya*) is devoted to discussing the nature of *Brahman*, the second chapter (*adhyaya*) concentrates on upholding the thesis of the first chapter and examines the nature of individual self (*jiva*) in its relation to *Brahman*, the third chapter (*adhyaya*) is about the nature of the universe and its causal relationship with *Brahman*, the fourth chapter (*adhyaya*) is about the nature of the means of attaining *Brahman* and the final chapter (*adhyaya*) focuses on the nature of the Supreme Goal (Srinivasa Chari 1998: xxi-xxiv).

For the purpose of this study it will not be relevant to make a detailed analysis of each and every *sutra*. However, it must be noted that an examination of the

five main themes will be undertaken in order to establish the contribution it can make to the global ethical discourse. Since there are several classical interpretations to the *Vedanta Sutra*, for the purpose of this study, the interpretations of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* will be focussed on.

1.5.7 Bhagavad Gita and Vedic Literature

The *Bhagavad Gita*, of 700 verses spoken by Lord *Krishna* to *Arjuna* on the Battlefield of *Kurukshetra*, has served as the foundation of Hindu philosophy and ethics for a large part of the modern era and has assumed greater popularity than any other Hindu religious text since the *Vedas*. It is firstly necessary to place the *Bhagavad Gita* in the context of the Hindu literature in order to construct its socio-ethical principles. From the viewpoint of Hindu orthodoxy, the *Vedas* are proclaimed to be the earliest source of Hindu thought and are accepted as the highest authority on spiritual and ethical matters. The *Vedas* extend into the *Samhita*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*. Swami Gambhirananda notes that the *Gita* ranks as one of the greatest religious books in the world and he suggests that it occupies a position next only to the *Upanishads*. (Swami Gambhirananda 1991: xviii). Radhakrishnan further notes that the *Gita* has been recognized for centuries as an orthodox scripture of the Hindu religion possessing equal authority with the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma Sutras* and the three together form the triple canon (*Prasthanatraya*) (Radhakrishnan 1948: 15-16). The *Bhagavad Gita*, being part of the continuity

of the thought systems of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta Sutra*, can be submitted as an important source material for the study of Hindu metaphysics and ethics.

1.5.8 Gita and Mahabharata

One of the unique features of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that it is referred to as *Gitopanishad*, belonging to the *Upanishad* literature (Swami Prabhupada 1972: xxv), yet it is located in the epic literature viz. the *Mahabharata* and is found between the 23rd and 40th chapters of the *Bhismaparva* (Nilkantan 1989: 21). There are several modern critics who have advocated the view that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a later composition than the *Mahabharata* (Majumdar 1989: 21). However, some Hindu scholars, such as Aurobindo did not accept this assumption (ibid. 1989: 74). The presence of the *Bhagavad Gita* in the *Mahabharata* is significant in that it captures the socio-political and ethical context of it, which may serve as the basis to evaluate the principles that underpin the ethical system of the *Gita*. This issue will be taken up later on.

1.5.9 Interpretation of Bhagavad Gita

The *Bhagavad Gita* belongs to a rich ancestry of hermeneutics. Swami Gambhirananda identifies the classical interpreters of the *Gita*, such as *Shankara*, *Ramanujacarya* (eleventh century AD), *Madhvacarya* (1199-1276),

Vallabhacarya (1479), *Kesava Kasmiri* (1162), and modern day commentators, such as *Vijnana Bhiksu*, *Jnaneswar* and *Tukaram*, *BG Tilak*, *Mahatma Gandhi* and *Sri Aurobindo* (Swami Gambhirananda, 1991: xix). One of the interesting features of the hermeneutic tradition of the *Gita*, is that, each interpreter forwarded one's personal position regarding its central teaching. Lokamanya Tilak regarded the gospel of disinterested action, as an independent and even primary way to God realization, to be the central teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Varma 1974: 164). Aurobindo also interpreted the *Gita* as a "metaphysic of the fusion spiritualized action and supramental mysticism" (ibid. 1974: 164). Referring to the many schools of interpretation on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Varma concludes that none of those interpretations is the final and decisive word on the scripture (ibid. 1974: 165). He says that:

I think that the various interpreters from Sankara downwards referred to above are only partially justified in their points of view (ibid. 1974: 165).

Radhakrishnan observes that the:

Commentaries on the *Gita* were written by the teachers in support of their own religious thought and metaphysics, since the author of the *Gita* suggests that the one eternal truth which we are seeking,

from which all other truth derives, cannot be shut up in a single formula (Radhakrishnan 1984: 16).

This varied interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* reveals a kind of less rigid hermeneutic attached to it, and its deeply globalized nature of thought thereby allowing for further interpretations that would reveal the full relevance of it for a post-modern global ethical discourse. Furthermore, the individual interpretations cannot be contested against each other to establish which is best suited for this study, but it will be collectively used to construct the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse.

1.6 Conclusion

The *Prasthanas Traya*, viz the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* serves as an ideal cultural relic to unfold the conceptual essences of the *Vedic* tradition in order to enhance the objectives of this study. Despite the different periods in which they developed, their metaphysics and ethical notions seem to compliment each other and reveal a progressive development, which is essential for the global ethical discourse. Being developed during the pre-Christian era discloses an individual system of thinking outside of the western models of thinking and it needs to be given serious consideration for the global ethical discourse. The subject matter of the *Prasthanas Traya* generally demonstrated a development structure to the system of metaphysics and ethics

and it further presented itself as a deeply interwoven and synthesized system of metaphysics and ethics. The dialectic method, which is deeply, incorporated into the *Prasthanā Traya*, forms an essential tool for furthering the dialogue of metaphysics and ethics, which can eventually be integrated into the global ethical discourse to synthesize the global ethical thought systems. The hermeneutical tradition of the *Prasthanā Traya* provides evidence of the individualistic ways in which global realities can be interpreted and therefore serves as a model for a global hermeneutical framework

CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND TO HINDU METAPHYSICS AND GLOBAL ETHICS

In the last chapter, the research design for this investigation, that was outlined, explored the general background of Hindu primary scriptures as the sources of reference for Hindu metaphysical and ethical thinking. In this chapter, this study will present a background to Hindu metaphysics and the global context for ethical thinking.

2.1 Approach to Metaphysics

Dasgupta makes a clear distinction between the approaches of the Europeans and Indians to metaphysics when he says that the European mind is satisfied with a theoretical and rational enquiry into Reality whereas the Indian mind, though it depends on rational enquiry, it always demands real experience to verify net results (Dasgupta 1941: 64). He maintains that the main justification of all metaphysical enquiry is to grasp the nature of Reality (ibid. 1941: 64) and to articulate it through a consistent theoretical framework. However, he notes that:

[t]here is a deeper and more or less unanalysable tendency of the mind to come to a truth which will not only be logically

unassailable, but should also be felt as an experience (ibid. 1941: 65)

He establishes that in most branches of human enquiry, whether it is science or philosophy, there is some sort of satisfaction obtained by direct experience (ibid. 1941: 66) which therefore leads him to the conclusion that an enquiry after Reality is not just an intellectual exercise but to be felt in experience (Dasgupta 1941: 76). He furthermore believes that an enquiry into the Ultimate reality should harmonize all experiences (ibid. 1941: 68). It must be noted that both the notions of reason and experience have a contributory role to play in the development of the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse. The global ethical discourse cannot rest solely on the rationality model, which advocates reason as the primary contributor.

NK Devaraja, in dealing with the issue of an approach to philosophy, identifies that the main task of philosophy is posing problems and offering solutions which is coined in ontological and epistemological terms (Devaraja 1973: 11-12). He also sees the central focus of the philosophical problem concentrated not on the actual existence of man but on the meaning, direction and significance of one's life in the universe (ibid. 1973: 12). In this regard he says:

Philosophy, in other words, is concerned essentially with the phenomena of values as reflected in man's spiritual life.... These are

the traditional cognitive, aesthetic, moral and religious value (ibid.

1973, p12)

He sees the philosophical approach to be based on an analysis of the structure of values, an investigation of the conditions and criteria that evolved them (Devaraja 1973: 12). He also notes some of the shortfalls in the traditional approach to philosophy, firstly, a lack of interest in social and political philosophy, secondly, an absence of a clear understanding of the nature and scope of philosophy, therefore leaving a gap in the understanding and assessment of the past systems of thought and thirdly, the over concentration on the analysis of thought and language and lesser concerns with the normative problems relating to moral and religious life (ibid. 1973: 14-22). Notwithstanding this, he sees the history of philosophy as being of paramount importance in that it relies on the relevant information of the past to construct and retard plans for the future (Devaraja 1973: 20-22). K. Damodaran, on the other hand, advocates the view that the task of philosophy is to give new meaning and content to man's life by answering the deeper questions about the world and his relations to it and solve the problems of a changing society (Damodaran 1967: 501). The inclusion of metaphysical aspects to this study, therefore, assumes relevance for the global ethical discourse because of its intent to root itself in practical life, values and the unity of the world reality.

2.2 The Conceptual Paradigms of Metaphysics

NK Devaraja notes that there are two central conceptual paradigms in metaphysics *viz.* the nature of reality and the metaphysics of the immanent type that seeks to present a general account of all forms of being (Devaraja 1973: 36-37). He points out very strongly that metaphysics when compared to science has made absolutely no progress (*ibid.* 1973: 38). He also highlights the point that metaphysical statements are rendered to be meaningless nonsense against the standpoint of the principle of verification of the logical positivists (*ibid.* 1973: 38). He also points out that metaphysical conceptions articulated by Aristotle, Spinoza and Leibnitz and even in Jainism, Nyaya, Samkhya and *Vaisesika* have very little use in practice and are less favorable and fruitful than scientific conceptualizations (Devaraja 1973: 40). This view only examines metaphysics as a directly related issue to science but fails to consider a mutual relationship between them. Scientific conceptualizations have a precise place in the factual discourse while metaphysical conceptualizations have a functional role in the ethical discourse. Both systems have relevance for the global ethical discourse and therefore cannot be compared by using a common set of criteria. However, he notes that the basis of metaphysical conceptualization lies in redefining and organizing categories and conceptions in the mental environment (Devaraja. 1973: 40). But he does not state for what purpose. It is suggested that such redefining take place for the purpose of contributing to the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, he notes that while

the earlier analytical philosophers, including the logical atomists and neopositivists, concentrated metaphysics on the determination of factual meanings of statements, the new conception of philosophy dissociated it completely from the factual discourse but concerned itself with the uses to which various kinds of discourse were put by the ordinary man (ibid. 1973, p41). However, for the purpose of this thesis, metaphysics needs to be concentrated on contributing to the global ethical discourse for the purpose of integrating individualized ethical thought systems into a global ethical system. It must be noted that the contestation of conceptual paradigms is irrelevant for the global ethical discourse. Each and every perspective of life has a contributory role to play in the construction of the conceptual framework of the global ethical discourse. Therefore, the global ethical discourse is inclusive of science and metaphysics as they mutually relate with each other.

One of the key conceptual frameworks postulated by traditional thought, which is thought that is embodied in the traditional Hindu scriptures, is the close and inseparable connection of man's inner nature, society and the external world (Damodaran 1967: 492). This model is very significant for the global ethical discourse because it is proposed that the global ethic be formulated from a vision that is deeply integrated. The global ethic must be based on what is good not just for man alone but for man in an integrated relationship with nature and divine space. Damodaran also observed that God was transformed from the transcendent reality to an immanent reality, who was within the grasp

of the universe and a God full of beautiful attributes *viz.* goodness, beauty, truth and love (Damodaran 1967: 489). This method of the transformation of God from a position of transcendence to immanence is *important* to the global ethical discourse. From a metaphysical point of view, it is suggested that the ultimate guiding principle, while expressing itself as an abstract ethical reality must be able to transform itself into a practical vision that is common to the global community. Furthermore, one of the central criticisms that are leveled against Hindu thought is that it negates the reality of the world. In response to this issue, K. Damodaran notes that such a negation theory is a distortion of Indian thought and he affirmed that Indian thought was optimistic and life affirming (ibid. 1967: 486). It is this life –affirming background to Hindu metaphysics that must contribute to the global ethical discourse rather than a vision of world-negation.

2.3 Modernism and Metaphysics

K. Damodaran observes that modern ideas have a tremendous impact on traditional societies and social and political changes have become irresistible and human capabilities have expanded (ibid. 1967: 488). Globalization is one such process of social and political change, which are not only extending the human capability but also creating expectations for a global metaphysical and ethical thought system. He also notes that any philosophy which is not in harmony with the aspirations of the people for industrialization, economic independence, freedom from exploitation, etc. is worthless in the present

context (Damodaran 1967: 489). It may be added that any philosophy, which is unable to contribute to the development of the global ethical discourse, is also worthless. On the issue of the relevance of philosophy, PT Raju is quoted as suggesting that philosophy should be made socially useful and traditional spiritual philosophies have to be modified and must cover the values of this world and should give it spiritual direction (in K. Damodaran 1967: 490). Furthermore, philosophy should be made globally useful and if there is any modification that is needed for philosophy, it must be focussed on generating global values as against particularistic values. This study is attempting to establish itself along the lines of this modernistic trend by suggesting that the traditional *Vedantic* systems needs to be interpreted in the context of the global dialogue for the purposes of contributing to the global ethical discourse.

2.4 Challenges of Metaphysics

NK Devaraja notes that an inherent difficulty that faces metaphysics is a formulation of a satisfactory conception of the ultimate reality (Devaraja 1973: 39). It is suggested that the general aim of metaphysics should be to formulate a conception of the ultimate reality that is common to the world community and that can have ethical relevance. This redefines metaphysical purpose and adds greater value to its creativity. Much of the contestation in, metaphysical activity is hermeneutical, which can be overcome with a neo-hermeneutical vision that suggests a universal methodology. Also, one of the challenges facing

metaphysics is its synthesis with science. It must be noted that science, being based on empirically verifiable data and a secular-materialistic approach, cannot be translated into *a-priori* assumptions based on trans-material phenomena on which the entire conceptual and methodological framework of metaphysics rests (Damodaran 1967: 491). However, the relationship between science and metaphysics needs to be brought into a conceptual unity in order for it to make a contribution to the global ethical discourse. It is not the objective of this study to synthesize science with metaphysics but to search for a mutual relationship between them. The global ethical discourse is the principal basis on which such a mutual relationship can develop. This mutual relationship is necessary because science can objectify a global ethical foundation through metaphysical reflection.

2.5 Global Ethics

2.5.1 The Nature of the Human Person

One of the primary questions that have dominated the philosophical world is: what is the essence of man? It must be admitted that there are several views on this subject. While the Greek rationalists and Kant defined man as a rational being, Freud declared that man is fundamentally irrational and he is only superficially rational. (Pandey 1991: 3). It is beyond doubt that the element of rationality exists in man; therefore the theory of ethical rationalism needs to evolve within the context of the global ethical discourse. The framework for

such a theory must be based on common and universal reason whose character must be negotiated. It is also noted that man is also defined as a social being although this tells us very little about his nature (Pandey 1991: 3). As a social being man must not just be seen in the context of his own community but as part of the global society. It is as a global or universal social being that he can appreciate the need for a global ethic.

The existentialists held the view that man is existence and is not with an essence because existence is prior to essence (ibid. 1991, p4). The global ethical discourse cannot adopt the position of the existentialists that suggest the absence of “essences”, as a paradigm of thought, to be integrated into ethical thinking. In fact, it is by the notion of “essences” that the mutual identity of man, the world and the divine can be incorporated into an ethical dialogue. This means that the conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse must incorporate the notion of “essences” as a part of the hypothetical paradigm to develop a global ethic. Furthermore, such a paradigm cannot rely on the methodology of the reductionists, which prescribe pure intellectualism, as a means of understanding these essences but must also incorporate pure subjective experience as well. However, scholars such as Marx, Freud, Erich Fromm have attempted to construct a notion of the essence of human nature but their results were varied. Notwithstanding the varied results from this scholarship, the integration of these findings in the global ethical discourse is *important*.

2.5.2 Science and Man

One of the leading modern scientists Descartes, known as the father of modern western philosophy, proposed that space is the fundamental reality and mathematics is the language that reveals it (Pandey 1991: 12) and this revolutionized the whole outlook of man and spirituality. What Descartes failed to conceptualize, due to the limitation of his methodology, is the notion of divine space and global ethical language. For the purpose of the global ethical discourse divine space and ethical language need to form a noosphere around empirical space and mathematical language and not one system disproving the other. Pandey observes that contemporary science has made an immense contribution to making man a superman but at the same time it has also brought out the inhuman in man that may lead to the ultimate destruction of humanity (ibid. 1991: 19). Therefore, science cannot be isolated from the global ethical paradigm. The main tool of science is reason. Although scientific reason is limited, and it cannot grasp the infinite and arrive at final truth, the rational principle of science must be incorporated into the global ethical discourse because it can guide global ethical reflection, evaluation and judgement (Pandey 1991: 22).

2.5.3 Humanistic Trend

Raju observes that there have been several forms of humanism developing ranging from the scientific, evolutionary, pragmatic and catholic, and common to all these forms was man and his values (ibid. 1991: 15). During the commencement of the modern era, after World War 2, there was a shift in philosophy and that is to acknowledge man and his values as primary, and the type of humanism that was evolving ensured that man cannot be ignored (Pandey 1991: 16). Raju suggests that philosophy is about the whole of human life and therefore science and the analytic spirit should not destroy human values (ibid. 1991: 16). He notes:

Now, there is the dire necessity of reconstructing ourselves. We have to understand ourselves, understand man behind all his activities, scientific, ethical, spiritual (ibid. 1991: 17).

The quest to know the nature of man is fundamental to many nations. Socrates declared “know thy self”, the *Upanishads* have stated “know thy Self” and even Confucius in China made a similar appeal (ibid. 1991: 17). Raju also notes that:

The whole world is coming together more intimately and consciously than ever before, the problems of each have become

the problems of all. It would be interesting and useful, therefore, to know how man, his nature, his ideals and values were understood by each tradition (1991: 17)

Max Otto, a psychologist suggested that the essential nature of man can be discovered by studying monkeys and reductionism, on the other hand, proposed that man can be reduced into material components and can be understood from a purely materialistic point of view (ibid. 1991: 23). However, there is also the suggestion that ethics distinguishes man from animals and scientific progress while developing the intellect in man has ignored the ethical nature in man (ibid. p1995, p23). Man is a complex being with an inward and outward nature and collectively can be classified as a material being, psychological being, social being, ethical being, religious being and a rational being (Pandey 1991: 24). Radhakrishnan is of the view that whether man is eastern or western and inspite of all the cultural differences, man's basic urges, instincts, desires and ideals are the same (ibid. 1991: 28-29). Northrop made an *important* suggestion that man is essentially the same everywhere and that man can assimilate the values of every part of the globe and benefit from them (Pandey 1991: 35). Therefore the construction of a global ethic based on the essential features of man's being is proposed in this thesis. The metaphysical method is best designed to probe and establish the essential nature of the universal personhood. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the metaphysics of *Vedanta*, which is a major philosophic system of thinking of the Indians, will

be explored to establish the essential condition of personhood, which will be used as a contribution in the global ethical discourse. However, the global ethical discourse cannot be resting on a purely humanistic trend. It is suggested in this thesis that it needs to incorporate the ethical basis of the nature world (plant, animals, and planet) and divine space.

2.5.4 Global Philosophies

In this section, a general background to the conception of man within Greek, Indian, Jewish and Chinese thought will be presented. It is anticipated that this background will form the global framework against which the integration of metaphysical and ethical ideas will take place. The various philosophies of the world *viz.* Greeks, Chinese, Indian and Jewish suggest that the ethical activity of man is watched by God and each of them approach the understanding of the nature of man differently (Pandey 1991: 310). However, for the purposes of the global ethical discourse, ethical systems that are outside the control of God and the different understandings of man, must be reconciled into a universalistic ethical system. This reconciliation allows for the development of a conceptual-methodological framework from which a global ethic can be derived.

2.5.4.1 Greek Thought

The ideal man in Greek thought is the “lover of wisdom” and scholars like Aristotle, Plato and Socrates attach great importance to rational knowledge and

its cultivation (Pandey 1991: 310). It is also noted that Plato not only emphasized knowledge but he also wanted the lower parts of the soul to be guided by reason (ibid. 1991: 310). The Greeks extended the notion of man's relationship and, unlike the Chinese, they saw man not only in relationship with society but also with the cosmos (ibid. 1991: 131). In Greek philosophy, man is one with nature, neither is man above nature or nature above man, there is no dichotomy between man and nature (Pandey 1991: 314). The fundamental assumption is that nature is not opposed to man and through nature man is not only one with nature but is one with other men and must live according to nature (ibid. 1991: 314-315). In Greek thought the central idea was that the individual cannot be studied apart from society because there is this conception that the personality of man is formed by society and grows in society (ibid. 1991: 319). Socrates and Plato showed that society is a reflection and projection of human nature (ibid. 1991: 320). Greek philosophy also proposed that reason is not confined to society and therefore it transcends society (ibid. 1991: 320). Aristotle believed that God is the first cause of the universe and is of Pure form without matter (ibid. 1991: 325). It is held that the conception of reason is with ethical significance because the rational is good (Pandey 1991: 325). The Greeks proposed that a virtuous man is one who controls his lower nature by his higher nature, which is reason (Pandey 1991: 361). In the case of the Greeks, the general basis of good is not God's commandments but human nature, which may even include factors that, transcends society (ibid. 1991: 323).

2.5.4.2 Indian Thought

Among Indians it is saintliness that is emphasized, which the Greeks did not (Pandey 1991: 311). In the Indian way of life the recognition of the wise was on the basis that he is able to discriminate between the eternal and the transient and that his ultimate urge is for the eternal (Pandey 1991: 311). The Indians differed from the Greeks in that they proposed that the essence of man is *Atman* and not reason (ibid. 1991: 313). And one may say that if the *Atman* is the highest good then man is essentially Good (ibid. 1991: 313). Furthermore, in Indian thought, the social nature of man was not given due attention and there was a strong sense of individualism and the notion of society extended to include humans, spirits, gods, and a Supreme Deity (ibid. 1991: 322). Indian philosophy exhorts man to rise above social virtues and to transcend society through the path of renunciation (ibid. 1991: 324). The Indians separated these two relationships and held the view that the relationship between man and man eventually leads to God (ibid. 1991: 325). In Indian thought, ethical relationship is transcended and transmuted into blissful communion (ibid. 1991: 327). In Indian philosophy there is an insistence that ethics be transcended because of Love (ibid. 1991: 328). The Indians accepted ethical relativity and ethics became the primary requirement in qualifying the search for God (Pandey 1991: 329). One very important question that is raised is whether we can derive moral and ethical laws from a Transcendent God (ibid. 1991: 329). It must be noted that it is very difficult to gain complete grasp over God's nature, therefore, it is very difficult to deduce ethical laws from his nature (ibid.

1991: 329). The fundamental question that dominated the minds of ethicists is: how is ethics derived? It must be noted that mysticism produces a disregard for ethical values and if religion preaches nothing but communion with the Divine, then it can also become a danger to ethics and to a disciplined social life (ibid. 1991: 330). It is suggested that any religion, which is detrimental to ethical discipline, needs re-modeling (ibid. 1991: 330) and perhaps re-interpretation. Indian philosophy holds that man can be virtuous through self-surrender and through non-egoity *ie.* becoming one with the Supreme (ibid. 1991: 361-362). However, non-egoity, by itself is not enough for the positive guidance of man (ibid. 1991: 363). PT Raju notes that:

A truly non-egoistic man cannot be immoral; but in positive morality he lacks guidance. Where non-egoity is over-emphasized, public morality becomes weak, and even private morality becomes infirm, irresolute and inconstant and even evasive” (Pandey 1991: 365).

This non-egoity cannot be extinction or pure negation of oneself, but transformation of man into the universality of the spirit (ibid. 1991: 367). Non-egoity is considered to be the completion of ethics and therefore ethical training is considered in *Vedanta* to be the prerequisite to spiritual practice (ibid. 1991: 368).

2.5.4.3 Jewish Thought

In Jewish thought the ideal man is the ideal image of God and a person becomes an ideal image if he embodies the ideal of righteousness (Pandey 1991: 311). This notion of the divine image of man is also present in Greek and Indian thought in one way or the other. Plato spoke of the rational part of the soul as being in the likeness of God and the Indians spoke of man's consciousness as the reflection or image of the *Atman* or the Supreme spirit (ibid. 1991: 311). Judaism also insisted on man's usefulness to society and emphasized the ethic of love for one's neighbour (ibid. 1991: 312). In Jewish thought, man is not only the image of God but also the product of physical nature, however, nature is subservient to man because God creates the world for man to show his righteousness (ibid. 1991: 315). It must be noted that righteousness is the key to Jewish ethics and it gets its meaning from God's concern for man (ibid. 1991: 321). So Jewish ethics is based on God's concern for man. In Jewish society morality is good because it was dictated to from God (ibid. 1991: 323). In Jewish thought there is no separation between man's relationship with man and his relationship with God and man's relationship with God is considered to be an intensely ethical relationship (ibid. 1991: 325). The Jews believed that the ideal of life was the sanctity of life itself (Pandey 1991: 361). The Jews also believes that a virtuous man is one who accounts to God for his actions (Pandey 1991: 361).

2.5.4.4 Chinese Thought

In Chinese thought the ideal man is a sage whose primary concern is for the welfare of society (Pandey 1991: 311-312). The Chinese philosophy does not aim at God realization or at righteousness with reference to God but is deeply humanistic, its importance is only focussed in reference to man (ibid. 1991: 312). The virtue of love, human heartedness is considered higher than righteousness, in fact righteousness is believed to be derived from human heartedness and man's conduct (ibid. 1991: 313). The Chinese is of the view that human nature is fundamentally good (ibid. 1991: 313). They understood nature to be human nature and not the physical nature and they essentially considered the original nature of man as good (ibid. 1991: 315). For them, virtue, although having its root in man itself, cannot be realized except in the context of society (ibid. 1991: 321). It must be noted that Chinese philosophy is similar to the Greeks because they base their philosophy of virtue on the study of human nature (ibid. 1991: 323). Virtue belongs to the original human nature and therefore ethics is viewed as autonomous in Chinese thought (ibid. 1991: 324). In China, *certain* philosophies did not depend on God for deriving its ethical relationships; it did not care for communion with Him (ibid. 1991: 327). On the contrary, it projected an ultimate Good, which was beyond the relativity of good and evil (ibid. 1991: 327). The Chinese on the other hand wanted social stability, good government and virtuous men (ibid. 1991: 361). The

Chinese believed that a virtuous man is one who is true to his feelings and one who is situated in love and affection (ibid. 1991: 361).

From the analysis of the various philosophies of life, it becomes apparent that man is essentially the same all over the world. However, he is conceptualized in a variety of ways. It is noted that the aspirations and expectations of what is good generally correlate to some extent. Despite the slight variation in the understanding and interpretation of man's relationships, a global perspective of man's nature suggests the inclusion of nature and the Divine. The elements of rationality, humanism, theism and non-egoity that underpin the individual ethical systems must be integrated into the global ethical discourse in order to formulate the global ethic that is common to all. Furthermore, these various philosophies cannot be isolated from each other because they have formed the bedrock of the ethical discourse within their specific communities. Therefore, these philosophies need to be integrated into the global ethical discourse so that they can participate in the dialogue to chart out the foundational principles of the global ethic.

2.6 Basis for an Ethical Theory

Furthermore, Prasad, in dealing with Hindu ethics, makes a clear distinction between moral action and moral thinking although at some point both will have to go together (Prasad 1989: 1). In the global ethical discourse it is vital to take

into consideration the link between moral action and moral thinking as a principle underpinning global ethical theory. It is noted that moral reflection or thinking is central to ethical theories in general and it involves mental operations such as intellectual maturity (ibid. 1989: 2). In the development of the global ethical discourse such reflection and intellectual maturity serve as essential tools for the construction of the conceptual ethical paradigm. Prasad also notes that to form an ethical theory it requires intellectual ability and maturity (ibid. 1989: 3). In order to construct an ethical theory the theorist must do ethical evaluation, which means that he must be able to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad, permissible and not permissible and thereafter systematize his moral judgements (Prasad 1989: 3). This method of ethical evaluation can be a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse. In the context of a variety of ethical constructs, a global ethicist that is constructing the global ethical discourse must be able to make effective moral judgements which arises from global ethical evaluation and reflection. It is also noted that ethics or normative ethics is largely derived through moral speculation or theorizing (Prasad 1989: 3). It is necessary to propose that if the global ethic is to be underpinned by a normative ethical basis, then moral speculation needs to be within the framework of a global ethical discourse rather than an individualized ethical system. Formulation of an ethical theory is an endeavor, which aims at reconstruction of values and obligations (ibid. 1989: 4). In the context of the global ethical discourse, such a construction is done through the negotiation and integration process rather than through

marginalization or assimilation. An ethical theorist does not pass value judgements, he simply gives the principles on which value judgements may be passed (ibid. 1989, p4). This is precisely the method that the global ethical theory requires *viz.* universal ethical principles to be the foundation of the global ethical theory on which individual moral judgements are made.

Metaethics is not ethics and it does not aim to present an ethical system. In the words of Prasad: "It is a second order enquiry mainly concerned with the analysis of logical behavior of moral concepts, judgements, and arguments etc." (ibid. 1989, p5). A metaethical inquiry depends on moral language and it proceeds to analyze the meaning of moral expressions, their logical behavior and to examine the nature of reasoning behind moral judgements (Prasad 1989: 5-6). The model on which such Metaethics is structured clearly reveals its individualized normative basis, however, there is a need to develop a global metaethical theory in which a universal moral language and moral expression can be subjected to analyses. Such a global metaethical model needs to analyze the trends within the global ethical discourse as a point of departure. Furthermore, an *important* consideration is one's ethical theory of reasoning and ethical theory of meaning in the development of an ethical system. It must be noted that Metaethics is involved with understanding and explaining what is involved in doing ethics or ethical evaluation and ethics aims at presenting an ethical moral system (Prasad 1989: 7). In order to formulate an ethical rule or concept, it requires sound knowledge of the person and his environment and

not just the background of his moral language (ibid. 1989: 9). It must be noted that such a method is limited in the context of the global ethical discourse. The global metaethical model needs to search for the common essence in human nature and link this with not only the natural environment but also with divine space in order to construct global ethical rules and concepts. So the ethical methodology requires radical revision in light of the emergence of the global ethical theory.

Naturalism in ethics is about the moral expression of any natural or empirical object and supernaturalism refers to things that are metaphysical or divine and therefore non-natural (ibid. 1989: 19). Prasad suggests that natural things are those which can be known by use of normal means of experience within the empirical world (ibid. 1989: 19). The fundamental thesis of naturalism is that all moral expressions can be transformed into *certain* factual expressions (Prasad 1989: 20). Supernaturalism also maintains that moral judgements are factual and they are facts about the nature of ultimate reality (ibid. 1989: 21). Both naturalism and supernaturalism can be subjective, relative and objective in interpretation. Prasad suggests that natural things are those which can be known by use of normal means of experience within the empirical world (Prasad 1989: 19). Naturalism as an ethical trend must therefore have relevance for the global ethical discourse. The notion of natural objects assuming moral value is central to the conceptual development of the global ethical discourse.

Supernaturalism, on the other hand, also maintains that moral judgements are factual and they are facts about the nature of ultimate reality (Prasad 1989: 21). Moral judgements can be both scientific and empirical and at the same time capable of being true or false on the basis of intuition (ibid. 1989: 22). So a theory is non-natural or intuitional if the moral features are non-natural, however, it can also embody subjectivist and relativist elements as well (ibid. 1989: 23). Prasad suggests that naturalism and supernaturalism are reductive theories because one reduces moral expressions to expressions about empirical or metaphysical realities (ibid. 1989: 25). Prasad holds the view that moral expressions are largely cognitive because they are informational-giving (ibid. 1989: 27). The integration of supernaturalism and naturalism with empiricism and ethics is the basis of the conceptual paradigm partly proposed by this thesis for the development of the global ethical discourse. There is a need for the inclusion of intuition as a contribution to the framework of the epistemological theory of the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, the reductive method in ethical theory is necessary to ensure that moral value is underpinned with empirical significance and global relevance.

Prasad suggests that in the ethical discourse it is *important* to have a concept of rationality (Prasad 1989: 131). He proposes that the concept of rationality must recognize that something can be reason for something else and that one should know or understand the logical liabilities and responsibilities that goes with it (ibid. 1989: 131). He also suggests that everything is not a reason for

everything else and that everything may not necessarily have reason, notwithstanding the fact that there are things for which reason exists (ibid. 1989: 131). To have a good concept of rationality means that one must have the ability to distinguish between reasons and non-reasons, weak reasons and strong reasons, worse reasons and better reasons etc (ibid. 1989: 131). Prasad's proposal for the notion of rationality to be part of ethical theory is a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse. However, it must be added that rationality also has its limitations and must be brought within the global framework of ethical theory development.

Prasad also notes that the concept of God has been considered necessary in order to justify the morality of particular action as well as to justify the entire system of morality (ibid. 1989: 149). While God may have its relevance in individual ethical systems, within the context of the global ethical discourse, there is a need to identify a universal guiding principle that can justify the global ethical system.

2.7 Background to Hindu Ethics

Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Center, New York notes that Ethics in Hinduism is largely informed from spiritual concepts and it forms the basis of the Hindu spiritual way of life ([.htmthanks.htm](#)././vices.htm vices.htm). Notwithstanding the fact that right conduct is deeply interwoven

legalistically, its spiritual value cannot be disregarded (ibid. thanks.htm/.vices.htm). This would imply that the global ethical discourse must attempt to reconcile legalistic ideals with spiritual ethics. He also observes that Hindu ethics is essentially different from scientific ethics, which is empirically characterized, and it is also different from utilitarian ethics whose purpose is to secure the maximum utility for a society by eliminating friction and guaranteeing for its members a harmonious existence (ibid. thanks.htm/.vices.htm). Hindu ethics is linked with an ultimate reality which is considered to be the highest good and therefore it assumes a subjective personal character in order to fulfill that ultimate destiny through the removal of impurities (ibid. thanks.htm/.vices.htm). The notion of *dharma*, which is the cornerstone of Hindu ethics, is the foundation of objective ethics in that it is based on the paradigm of “means-end” and therefore *dharma* serves as a means to the ultimate end (ibid. thanks.htm/.vices.htm). It is difficult not to apply the idea of universal ethics to Hinduism because Hindu ethics apply to every human being (ibid. thanks.htm/.vices.htm). As much as Hindu ethics is deeply spiritual and can be separated from scientific and utilitarian ethics, in the global ethical discourse, it needs to be integrated with science and utilitarianism. Furthermore, the ultimate reality must have social and individual relevance if it is to function as an ethical end. Such an ultimate end cannot, in the global ethical discourse, be a sectarian and individual ethical end but a universal end.

Furthermore, it is largely maintained among Hindu scholars that Hindu ethical doctrines are derived from scriptures and carry with them scriptural authority (thanks.htm./vices.htm). However, such scriptures must embody universal relevance if they are to serve as sources of knowledge for the global ethical discourse. No single scripture can have absolute claim over ethical matters in the global ethical discourse. It is also held that ethical action defined social duties and responsibilities and was designed to promote social welfare (thanks.htm./vices.htm). This is an *important* contribution that Hindu ethics can make to the global ethical discourse. The social duties and responsibilities of the world cannot be formulated by a single ethical system. It must emerge from the framework of the global ethical discourse so that it is suited to global needs. There existed the concept of “paying the debt” to the gods, rishis and ancestors as a means to realise the highest good (thanks.htm./vices.htm). As much as this may be the case, Hindu ethics was characterized as being deeply individualistic rather than social because it emphasized individual ethical striving as a means for social ethical fulfillment (thanks.htm./vices.htm). The individualistic nature of ethics is necessary for the global ethical paradigm in that it can be integrated into the human rights culture. The chief disciplines of subjective ethics are austerity, self-control, renunciation, non-attachment, and concentration (thanks.htm./vices.htm). These subjective ethical elements, although founded rooted and in Hindu thought, is essentially universal and therefore ideal for the global ethical discourse because it is common to the global community.

In Hindu thought it is clearly evident that the ultimate goal for attainment is the supreme abode of the all-pervading divinity and one's true identity is the very basis and core of one's individuality (Joshi 1991: 3). The notion of one's supreme abode as the ultimate destination of ethical striving needs to be a universal one. It is *important* to global ethical theory that a transcendent global culmination point be constructed, which is common to the global community and is equally recognized by them. Joshi notes that the Indian theory of ethics is closely related to the theory of metaphysics because the end of an ethical journey is a metaphysical state and this is clearly articulated in the Kathopanishad (1.2.24):

One who has not ceased from immoral conduct, who is not composed and is not self controlled, whose mind is not quiescent cannot attain Him through intelligence (ibid. 1991: 3).

The linking of ethical theory to metaphysics is a method that needs to construct itself within the global ethical discourse. However, it must be based with the vision of universalism. Joshi also notes that Knowledge of the self is the highest virtue and ignorance of the true nature of the self is the root of all evil in the Indian perspective (Joshi 1991: 4). Joshi further notes that when one is the knower of *Brahman* one is not tainted by evil actions, therefore one is above good and evil (ibid. 1991: 5). Scholars like Mackenzie concluded that the Hindu conception of God being attributeless, if applied logically, prevents the

development of ethics in terms of social service and therefore Hindu ethics is anti-social and lacks a philosophical basis (Joshi, 1991: 5). However, Mackenzie did not take into consideration the role of an attributeless God serving the basis for a universal guiding principle for the development of a global ethical theory. Joshi further notes that Hindu ethics is based on a threefold scheme of spiritual life (I) social or objective morality (ii) subjective or psychological morality and (iii) transcendental life (Joshi 1991, p6). It is not the objective of this thesis to lean on any one side of these models of ethical thinking. On the contrary, these three models need to be integrated into the global ethical discourse. This means that for the purpose of developing the global ethical discourse, no single ethical model can be used as a basis for evolving the global ethic. All streams of thinking need to be brought within a workable framework from which a model for global ethics can be structured.

2.8 Conclusion

It is clear that modernistic trends can be identifiable in traditional metaphysical thinking. However, the contribution of philosophy to the development of ethical systems must be probed. This is a vital contribution that the Hindu metaphysical systems can make to the global ethical theory. It is also apparent that Hindu metaphysics is not completely transcendent but is closely associated with practical life. Therefore, Hindu metaphysics assumes ethical relevance. The relevance of metaphysics to ethics is an *important* contribution to the

objectives of this study. Although the *Advaita* system of Hindu metaphysics reveals a deeply absolutistic trend, its practical relevance may be doubted. However, *Advaita* may serve as an important theoretical model to further the theory of abstractness, which may have metaphysical application for the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, the *Visistadvaita* system of metaphysics may seem to be dialectically opposed to the *Advaita* system, yet its theistic notion of an ultimate guiding principle with moral attributes may serve as a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse. It is reaffirmed that the objective of this thesis is not to lean on *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* or *Nitya* for an ethical and metaphysical contribution but to use all three standpoints within the global ethical discourse.

It also became evident that Hindu metaphysics aimed at harmonizing all experiences. This is a vital method of the global ethical discourse because the evolution of a global ethic depends on the synthesized experience of the global community. A further contribution that traditional Hindu metaphysics can make to the global ethical discourse is its ability to reconcile rational and spiritual elements into a holistic system. This capacity, together with its structural parts for achieving this, will be able to contribute towards integrating rational and spiritual elements in the global ethical discourse. Global ethics cannot be individualized on the side of rationality or spirituality but must reflect the ethos of both. Hindu metaphysics is clearly revealing the close connection between man, nature and society and this contribution is the bedrock of the global trinity

for global ethical discourse. Notwithstanding the challenges of defining the nature of ultimate reality and the relationship between science and metaphysics, it is quite evident that a global ultimate reality cannot be defined by any particular perspective and that science and metaphysics can share a mutual relationship for the purpose of the global ethical discourse. Although the category of rationalism has been emphasized, the formulation of a global ethical rationalism is what is needed for the global ethical discourse. This is based on what is reasonably good for the global community. Hindu metaphysics and ethics can make a vital contribution developing what is reasonably good for the global community. It is also concluded that the individual notion of “personhood” needs to develop into a global social being in order for one to assimilate and practice global ethics. It also became evident that the categories of rationalism, non-egoity, ultimate reality and humanism are the central parts of the global ethical systems and these must be integrated into the global ethical discourse for a global ethic to evolve. Furthermore, Hindu ethics, with its notion of *dharma*, which can produce individual, social and transcendental ethics, can make a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse.

CHAPTER 3 HINDU METAPHYSICS: CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The main focus of this chapter is the critical examination and evaluation of the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and World. Within the limited scope of this study we shall try to trace the origins and development of these concepts in the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and also through the interpretations of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja*, *Madhva*, and other contemporary western and eastern scholars. One important observation that needs to be noted is that methodology and philosophy are not functionally autonomous. While scientists are not unanimous in their formulation and choice of method, philosophers are divergent in their methodology (DP Chattopadhyaya 1996: 316). The method outlined here primarily aims to analyze the central *Vedantic* metaphysical ideas for the purpose of linking these notions to the Global ethical discourse.

3.1 Hindu Metaphysics

The main focus of the Hindu scriptures is the concepts of *Brahman*, *Atman* and the World, which constitutes the essence of the subject of Hindu metaphysics. This study will focus on analyzing the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and World from the interpretation of the texts of the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, the classical *Vedantic* thinkers viz. *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and

Madhva and contemporary western and eastern scholars, with the objective of constructing a deeper understanding of Hindu metaphysical notions. This study will firstly explore the theory of the knowledge of *Brahman*. In this regard, this theory presents two fundamental problems viz. the knowability and unknowability of *Brahman*.

Paul Deussen, in his book, *The Philosophy of Upanishad*, deals with the issue of *Brahman* in the *Upanishads* in the following way: he takes up the following issues related to the notion of *Brahman* viz. (I) the possibility of knowing *Brahman* (ii) the definition of *Brahman* (iii) symbolic representations of *Brahman* (iv) the essential nature of *Brahman* and (v) *Brahman* and the Universe (Deussen 1906: xii). Deussen did not take up the ethical function of *Brahman* in the *Upanishads*. Although this may appear to be a gap in his analysis, it also raises a doubt as to whether the *Upanishadic* thinkers considered *Brahman* as serving an ethical function. Notwithstanding this, it must be noted that the traditional metaphysical construction of the notion of *Brahman* can make a contribution to the global ethical discourse. It is the objective of this thesis to illustrate this contribution in the context of the global ethical dialogue.

3.2 Meaning and Definition of Brahman

It is imperative to firstly trace the meaning of the term *Brahman* in order to understand it contextually in *Vedantic* literature and to try and outline its

precise nature and character. In this regard, an attempt will be made to trace the origins of the notion of *Brahman* and to further try to construct a meaning of the concept from an etymological standpoint and also from the import of the *Upanishads*.

The earliest evidence of the notion of *Brahman* in the Vedic literature can be traced to the *Rig-Veda*. However, William Beidler notes that the notion of *Brahman* was not fully developed in the *Rig-Veda* and it evolved in the latter parts or concluding portions of the *Veda*, viz. the *Upanishads*. (The Vision of Self in Early *Vedanta* 1975: 65). During the *Vedic* times, the concept of *Prajapati* was fairly popular as the notion of the Ultimate Reality but scholars have noted that, concepts of ultimate reality were constantly changing. Beidler also notes that the concept of *Brahman* was progressively constructed into an ultimate reality replacing the earlier idea of *Prajapati* (ibid. 1975: 65). It is apparent that the conception of an ultimate reality is an evolutionary conception in Hindu thought and no single concept is used in a definite sense to represent it. It is this idea of an evolutionary notion of the ultimate reality that should form the basis of the ultimate guiding principle in the global ethical discourse. The ultimate guiding principle cannot be grounded on a fixed conceptualization but must allow it to constantly grow and develop with time.

In most scholarships, the common methodology used in unfolding the meaning of Sanskrit words is by examining their root meanings or etymological design.

Although there are problems with such a methodology, it nevertheless provides some insight into the source of meaning to the concept. In this regard, Beidler notes that the etymology of *Brahman* may not present a holistic understanding of the concept and therefore suggests the method of surveying the *Upanishads* as a more reliable technique in order to develop a more profound meaning (Beidler 1975: 65). Notwithstanding this, Radhakrishnan uses the method of constructing the meaning of *Brahman* from the etymological contributions of *Shankara*, and the *Brahmanas* (Indian Philosophy, Vol. 1, 1923: 52-53). Moreover, Srinivasa Chari observes that the etymological method of interpreting the notion of *Brahman* was largely used by classical interpreters such as *Ramanuja* and *Shankara* and not by *Madhva* (The Philosophy of the *Vedanta* Sutra: A Study based on the Evaluation of the Commentaries of Samkara, Ramanuja and *Madhva*, 1998: 2). Although the methods used by scholars in approaching this problem may vary, their results seem to contribute to a more complex and varied comprehension of the concept.

From an etymological standpoint, the term *Brahman* is derived from the root word “*brh*”, which means, “to grow, to burst forth” (Radhakrishnan 1994: 52). Radhakrishnan further notes that *Shankara* (the teacher of *Advaita Vedanta*) derives the notion of *Brahman* from the root “*brhati*”, which means to “exceed, eternity and purity” (ibid. 1994: 52). It becomes apparent that no exact English equivalents can be found for the notion of *Brahman* and secondly, it embodies a diverse level of meaning. Added to the problem of finding an exact English

equivalent for a *Sanskrit* term, is the problem of interpreting *Sanskrit* terms. Beidler notes that *Sanskrit* terms are liberally used in a symbolic way and therefore complicates the method of arriving at precise meanings (Beidler, 1975: 65). Furthermore, on the issue of the meaning of *Brahman*, Radhakrishnan observes that it demonstrates great fluidity and therefore the notion of *Brahman* is very flexible in its meaning (Radhakrishnan 1994: 52-53). The problem with such an observation is that Radhakrishnan does not point out very clearly how the fluidity of meaning is derived. It is essential to understand the “fluidity” method because it will contribute immensely to expanding the meaning of the concept of *Brahman* to meet the needs of a changing society in the future.

Beidler, on the other hand, establishes that the meaning of *Brahman* is related to the notion of “prayer” and he follows Max Muller and Deussen in attaching this meaning and he believes that this meaning is located to a pre-*Aryan* period (Beidler 1975: 65). Although this meaning is radically different from the one established through the etymological method, it attempts to add to the historical development of meaning to the concept of *Brahman*. In following the method of surveying the *Upanishads* to establish the meaning of *Brahman*, Radhakrishnan conceptualizes *Brahman* as the Supreme Reality of the *Upanishads* (Radhakrishnan 1994: 52). The notion of *Brahman* was seen as the infinite, the eternally pure, sacred knowledge, as the guiding principle of the universe and the forming of kinship between the aspiring spirit of man and the

spirit of the universe (ibid. 1994: 52-53). At this point it is suggested that the global ethical discourse cannot do away with the notion of a transcendent reality. If there is to be a global transcendent reality which can serve as the backdrop to the sphere of the sacred then such a transcendent reality must assume the function of a global guiding principle. It will be the objective of this thesis to construct a notion of the ultimate guiding principle for global ethics based on the contribution made by the notion of *Brahman*.

Furthermore, Radhakrishnan also observes that the reality of *Brahman* is based on spiritual experience and due to the close affinity between God, nature and inner life, the reality of God was established by analysis of the facts of nature and inner life (Radhakrishnan 1994: 53-54). Firstly, it appears that Radhakrishnan uses two concepts interchangeably viz. *Brahman* and God. In the Western theological discourse, the concept of God has its own level of meaning and whether we can equate the concept of *Brahman* to God may present challenges. Although Radhakrishnan does not clarify in what sense he is using the word God, it becomes apparent that the concept of *Brahman* and God are treated as transcendental categories. Secondly, it is also evident that the notion of *Brahman* is rescued from its philosophic abstractness and is given a Cosmic personality as the “guiding principle” with ethical categories. The idea of a “guiding principle” may suggest that the notion of *Brahman* may embody some kind of an ethical function. Finally, *Brahman* is projected as a Reality that is connected to “nature” and to the “inner life” of being. This is a

very significant interpretation because the notion of *Brahman* demonstrates, in some way, the kind of subtle unity that underpins existence itself. The idea of the relationship between *Brahman*, nature and the inner life of man is central to the global ethical discourse. This study will pursue to examine the precise nature of this relationship.

It is quite evident that Indological scholars attempt to search for meaning of *Brahman* in two distinct ways, firstly, from the study of the earliest literary sources and secondly, through the method of etymological interpretation. The etymological method may have limitations but it serves as an essential tool to explore, within its framework, for extended meaning. Although there may be varying results on the etymological approach from that of surveying the Hindu literature for the purpose of interpreting the notion of *Prahman*, it is reasonable to follow both methods in order to get a more complete understanding of the notion of *Brahman*. It is also clear that *Sanskrit* words are very difficult to interpret directly into English because they embody very complex philosophic meaning. This is evident in the varied translations that the scholars attribute to the concept “*Brahman*”. However, it is indisputable that the notion of *Brahman* is connected to meanings that are both transcendent and immanent and it relates to both abstract and practical earthly realities. This is very significant because the notion of *Brahman* can contribute to the development of the idea of a transcendent global guiding principle, which must be seen to be both transcendent, towards which human beings can aspire and at the same time

immanent, in which moral and ethical value can be added to the objects that it encapsulates. Another interesting feature that can be consummated on the idea of *Brahman* is that it has both a personal and an impersonal constituent. This is very notable because it integrates easily with the world's religions, which mainly advocate the Personal aspect of the Divine as a source of moral value.

The notion of *Brahman* appears to be flexible in meaning largely because it is very perplexing to fix it to any specific definition. It can be safely concluded that apart from a Cosmic function, a moral function can be attributed to *Brahman* based on the general understanding that many functions are attributable to it. Although a partial meaning is attributed to the *Brahman*, it must be stated that the term *Brahman* seems to be beyond all definitions. It follows that the notion of *Brahman*, which cannot be fixed to a specific meaning, however, assumes a moral value. Therefore, the global guiding principle cannot be fixed to any specific meaning attributed by an individual community or specific time. It must embody global meaning and be suited for all times.

3.3 Knowledge of *Brahman*

In the last section a detailed analysis of the term *Brahman* was pursued and it is apparent that the notion of *Brahman* is very complex and embodies profound levels of meaning. In this section the key question that needs to be taken up in

constructing a conceptual framework of *Brahman* is, whether knowledge of *Brahman* is possible?. This is a vital question in that it sheds light on the method of modeling knowledge on categories that are transcendent and beyond objective reality. This analysis will explore the sources of knowledge of *Brahman*, the categories of knowing *Brahman* within the traditional metaphysical discourse and the connection of ethics in knowing *Brahman*. This analysis will attempt to evaluate whether the structural parts and methods of the knowledge of *Brahman* can contribute to forming a framework for the ultimate global guiding principle.

It has been traditionally accepted that the *Vedas* are the primary source of knowledge of the Ultimate reality. Therefore, the *Vedas* were attributed an anomalous status and given supreme authority by the orthodox schools of Hindu thought. In this regard, Deussen notes that both *Badarayana* and *Shankara* attribute supernatural origins to the *Veda* therefore declaring it to be the “breath of God” and consequently making it “infallible” (Deussen 1906: 55). Although this may represent a kind of extreme viewpoint to the objective researcher, it must be noted that such an attitude towards scriptures aim towards marking out an empirical line of authority on matters that are deeply subjective. However, it is suggested that the scriptures cannot be regarded as the ultimate source of knowledge, individual experience is also taken into consideration. Deussen further notes that the entire doctrine on *Brahman* is constructed on the *Vedantic* texts and only where the text is doubtful does one

resort to the aid of experience (ibid. 1906: 55). It can be concluded that knowledge of *Brahman* is accessible both through the *Vedantic* scriptures and through spiritual experience, therefore *Brahman* is not confined to the statements of the texts alone but is also verifiable by spiritual experience. Although this method may present problems in arriving at a precise understanding of *Brahman*, it nonetheless allows flexibility in the cognition of transcendent notions, which are so essential for the purpose of this study.

While establishing that the *Vedas* are the primary source of knowledge of *Brahman*, the scriptures themselves reveal their limitations in expressing *Brahman*. The Mundaka Upanishad notes that there are two kinds of knowledge viz. higher and lower, with the lower knowledge being the knowledge of the scriptures and the higher knowledge being knowledge that apprehends *Brahman* (Radhakrishnan 1994: 627). Moreover, the lower knowledge also refers to the empirical sciences and the higher knowledge refers to the spiritual sciences. Both systems of knowledge are integrated in the *Vedas*. Furthermore, Deussen inquires into the *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.1-2; 6.1) where reference is made that the students having mastered all the scriptures were unable to answer the fundamental questions of the Ultimate reality (Deussen 1906: 57). This clearly attest to the fact that knowledge of *Brahman* is beyond any empirical or objective means. This creates challenges for this study from the point of attempting to formulate a method as to how a conceptual framework for the ethical discourse can be derived. Therefore it is

suggested that the knowledge of *Brahman* must be positive if it is to contribute to the global ethical discourse.

Beidler, on the other hand, also takes up the issue of the problem of knowing *Brahman* in Hindu metaphysics. He identifies three vital categories in respect of “knowing” viz. “*vidya*”, “*jnana*”, and “*vijnana*” and explicitly distinguishes between each of them (Beidler 1975: 90). He views “*vidya*” as “sense knowledge”; “*jnana*” as “wisdom” derived from the *smriti* and *sruti*; and “*vijnana*” as “direct insight into the nature of that known” (Beidler 1975: 90). He further elaborates on the notion of “direct insight” (*vijnana*) and sees it as comprising of two elements viz. “effort” and “grace” He uses the notion of “direct insight” (*vijnana*) to explain the empirical unknowability of the *Brahman* in the *Upanishad*. (Beidler 1975: 90-91). His conclusion is that *Brahman* can only be realized through “direct insight” (*vijnana*) (ibid. 1975: 91). It is definite that knowledge of *Brahman* is beyond “sense knowledge” (*vidya*) and knowledge of the scriptures. The method of knowing *Brahman* is trans-empirical in character and therefore is beyond any objectivist means and it consequently suggests an indirect assumption of *Brahman*, since it cannot be known directly. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

It is the Highest and this highest is the all; there is none beyond and there is none other than it. To know it is to know the highest and by knowing the highest to know all (The *Upanishads*, 1971: 245-246).

The theory of “direct insight” (*vijnana*) suggests an alternative method of knowing or establishing knowledge of transcendent realities. In this regard, Deussen identifies the idea of “preparatory means” as an integral part to the theory of “direct insight” (*vijnana* which he derives from the *Upanishads* and which reads as:

There are three branches of duty, sacrifice, study and almsgiving- Austerity, indeed, is the first. The second is the pursuit of sacred wisdom, dwelling in the house of the teacher. Absolutely controlling his body in the house of the teacher, is the third. All these attain to the worlds of the virtuous. He who stands firm in *Brahman* attains life eternal (*Chandogya Upanishad* 23 1)

In the opinion of Deussen, this text proposes the study of the *Veda*, the performance of sacrifice, almsgiving, penance, fasting, asceticism and living with one’s teacher as means of knowing *Brahman* (Deussen 1906: 60-61). This is considered to be true knowledge. To Aurobindo, the knower of such knowledge is one who sees the lower things in the light of the Highest, the finite from the view of the infinite (Aurobindo 1971: 248). Moreover, this text also reveals that there is some association between ethical behavior and the notion of *Brahman*. It is apparent that ethical behavior is the means to knowing *Brahman*, which is described in empirical language, as the world of the

virtuous. It must be noted that the knowledge of *Brahman* is not regarded as the means to knowing *Brahman* but is regarded as an ultimate object in itself and it can be assumed that ethical behavior serves as the means to knowing *Brahman*. The knowledge of *Brahman* cannot fall into the category of the empirically objective sciences of knowing. Because the notion of *Brahman* is beyond all forms of objective examination, it can be concluded that the idea of *Brahman* is trans-empirical and therefore beyond any form of objective interpretation. The notion of “knowledge of *Brahman*” is not a category of means but a category of an end in itself. Therefore normative ethics, in the context of the *Upanishadic* speculations, are the means to the end of knowing *Brahman*. Notwithstanding this, the notion of *Brahman*, as an ultimate category, can be subjected to a philosophic inquiry and analysis for the purpose of understanding the nature of the ethic that is connected to it.

Furthermore, the notions of supreme authority and supernatural origins of specific scriptures are a challenge to the global ethical discourse. The global guiding principle cannot constitute itself from specific scriptural authorities or on supernatural origins. It must arise from the common experience of the global community. The global guiding principle cannot be objectified into a defining framework of a specific community but must allow itself to be objectified in a universal sense. Therefore, to structure it on a trans-empirical foundation, allows it to be interpreted for specific global purposes. The global guiding

principle must be seen as an ethical end for the global community and must be visited as the transcendent end of empirical global ethics.

3.4 The Essential Nature of *Brahman*

In the last section a detailed analysis of the notion of knowledge of *Brahman* was taken up. It became evident that the knowledge of *Brahman* is not based on methods of the empirical world nor can any form of knowledge adequately capture its essential nature. However, it does make an essential contribution to constructing the discourse on the global guiding principle. Notwithstanding this, this study will pursue to examine the ontological nature of *Brahman* and the nature of *Brahman* in relationship with the world and *Atman*. This analysis is necessary because this study aims to establish the extent to which the nature of *Brahman* can contribute to the Global ethical discourse and in developing a Global Guiding Principle. Furthermore, this study will also venture to analyze the meaning and purpose of the world order in relationship to the *Brahman* in order to establish the foundation for a global moral and ethical discourse. Finally, this analysis will venture to explore the relationship between the *Atman* (the individual) in relationship with the *Brahman* in order to establish the extent to which the notion of individual can serve as a basis of being part of a global morality.

3.4.1 The Reality of *Brahman*

In taking up the issue of the essential nature of *Brahman* it will be meaningful to reflect, firstly, on the reality of *Brahman* in the context of the notions of “*sat*” and “*asat*”. Is the nature of *Brahman* a reality or non-reality and what is the significance of this to the global ethical discourse? This analysis will examine the scriptural contradictions on the nature of *Brahman* and through the interpretation of classical and modern scholars be able to define in a clearer way the nature of the reality of *Brahman*. Furthermore, the intent of this analysis is to establish the nature of the reality of *Brahman* and explore the way in which such a reality can underpin the global ethical discourse.

In the *Upanishads*, the following texts can be cited which deals with the issue of the reality and non-reality of *Brahman*:

The Sun is *Brahman*-this is the teaching. An explanation thereof (is this). In the beginning this (world) was non-existent. It became existent. It grew. It turned into an egg (Chandogya Upanishad: 3.19.1) In the beginning, my dear, this was Being alone, one only without a second. Some say in the beginning this was non-being alone, one only, without a second. From that non-being, being was produced (Chandogya Upanishad: 6.2.1) Non-existence, verily, was

this (world) in the beginning. Therefrom, verily, was existence produced. That made itself a soul (Taittiriya Upanishad: 2.7.1)

It is evident that these texts contain contradictory statements on the original source of existence. These contradictory statements simply reflect the opposite ways in which reality can be projected and interpreted. However, it is not the purpose of this study to explore the debate that underpins this contradiction but to establish a justification for the nature of *Brahman*.

Furthermore, this study will attempt to examine the notions of “reality” (*sat*) and “non-reality” (*asat*) in the context of *Advaitic* interpretation and its relation to the *Brahman*. This analysis will also examine the association of the notion of “reality” (*sat*) as a moral value; the connection of “reality” (*sat*) to *Brahman* and *Atman*; the concept of “non-reality” (*asat*); *Ramamuja’s* and *Madhva’s* conception of reality.

It is noted that the notion of “reality” (*sat*) is used in a wide sense to incorporate the ideas of goodness, praiseworthy action, steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and charity (Arapura 1986: 5-6). Although the notion of “reality” (*sat*) is illustrated as an absolute reality, it is also depicted as a moral reality with values of “goodness” and “righteousness”. The association of the notion of “reality” (*sat*) with *Brahman* is the principal character and objective of the *Upanishads* and this clearly suggests that *Brahman* as “reality” (*sat*) is a

moral reality. A moral reality illustrates a reality in which “good” and “evil” can be discerned through association with transcendental phenomena. One of the perceptible methods employed by the *Upanishads* is to link up every important concept with *Brahman* and the notion of “reality” (*sat*) being connected to *Brahman* is no exception. Arapura notes that the notion of “reality” (*sat*) shares an equivalent position to the concept of *Brahman* and *Atman* in the *Upanishads* (Arapura 1986: 7) and there are cases where it stood for phenomenal reality not covered by the concept *Brahman* (ibid. 1986: 8). The incorporation of the transcendent and phenomenal reality with the notion of “reality” (*sat*) suggests that both these realities are moral realities. The establishment of the link between the transcendent and phenomenal moral realities is essential for the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse. He also notes that the notion of “reality” (*sat*) is used ambiguously, it is sometimes used in the sense of *Brahman* with or without the totality of phenomenal things and sometimes in the sense of the world, with or without *Brahman* (Arapura 1986: 9). It is explicit that the notion of “reality” (*sat*) represents a reality that is definable in terms of *certain* characteristics *viz.* goodness, sacrifice, charity etc, notwithstanding the apparent ambiguity that is attached to its application. If *Brahman* is linked to the notion of “reality” (*sat*) then it would be safe to link *Brahman* to the notion of Goodness even if this is not the dominant position of the *Upanishads*.

The notion of *asat*, “not being”, on the other hand, was viewed by *Shankara* as being a condition that denoted *Brahman* and it was not a state of absolute void (Damodaran, 1967: 249). This suggests that the notion of *Brahman* is both “reality” (*sat*) and “non-being” (*asat*) in nature. Although *Shankara*’s construction of reality is supersensible and independent, without needing the support of anything to be in existence (Radhakrishnan 1923: 533), he does not isolate such a reality from the apparent empirical nature of phenomenal reality. Notwithstanding this, *Shankara* understood *Brahman* as a reality that was beyond the phenomenal, the spatial and the temporal; it is a reality, which is not a cause of phenomenal reality (Radhakrishnan 1923: 534-535). It is apparent that *Shankara*’s reality was beyond the objective of a moral reality.

Ramanuja, on the other hand, conceptualizes the ultimate reality as a determinate whole, which is not bereft of the empirical variety (Sinha 1986: 166). He sees reality as a loving God and not an absolute metaphysical Absolute (ibid. 1986: 167). *Ramanuja* sees this reality as one and it is qualified by the conscious soul and the non-intelligent matter (ibid. 1986: 167). So both conscious realities and non-conscious realities (matter) seem to find themselves within the commonness of divine space. It must be noted that this paradigm is clearly distinguished from philosophic materialism, which isolate the conscious and emphasize the material. The principle of the association of the conscious and non-conscious within the sphere of divine space is an important contribution to the global ethical discourse.

Furthermore, *Madhva* conceptualizes reality as an object of knowledge and he believes that those things that are an object of valid experience can be ordained as real (Sinha 1986: 199-200). On this basis, he accepts God, soul and matter as being equally real (ibid. 1986: 200), therefore suggesting that all three are an object of valid experience and consequently are real. Furthermore, *Madhva* advocates two primary concepts as part of his dualistic philosophy, viz. *svatantra* (independent) and *paratantra* (dependent). *Madhva* sees God as the independent reality while soul and matter are dependent realities (ibid. 1986: 201). He also suggests that the highest ontological status of *Brahman* is dependent on the principle of independence (ibid. 1986: 201). He observes that both soul and matter are dependent on God for existence, knowledge, and activity (ibid. 1986: 201). *Madhva*, created an ideal notion of reality, through the principles of dependence and independence, that could explain the relationship between the individual personhood with the global guiding principle.

It is apparent that these classical thinkers approached the notions of “reality” (*sat*) and “non-being” (*asat*) very positively. Their views range from the absolutist position to the deeply theistic position. If *Brahman* is constructed as a positive reality on which the world categories are dependent then the understanding of it serving as a guiding principle for the construction of a global ethic becomes a prospect. Furthermore, the interpretation of the *Vedantic*

notion of “reality” *sat* as symbol of moral values is very significant because its connection to the *Brahman* suggests that even the *Brahman* itself as an ultimate reality is a moral reality.

Based on the analysis of these texts, Radhakrishnan proposes that the ultimate reality is “being” and not “not-being” (Radhakrishnan 1994: 954). He also contends that the notion of “not-being” as the first principle, as may be assumed by *certain Upanishads*, is not absolute but is a relative position (ibid. 1994: 54). However, Beidler analyses these verses (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.7.1) and compliments the view of Radhakrishnan that the notion of “reality” (*sat*) may be used as an “empirical being” or “existent reality” and the notion of “non-being” (*asat*) may refer to “not-being” as a reality prior to existence or creation or in reference to an empirical reality but not in any absolute sense (Beidler 1975: 68). It is quite evident that both Radhakrishnan and Beidler have failed to view the nature of “reality” (*sat*) as an ethical reality, however, they related the *Vedantic* notion of “reality” (*sat*) as an empirical reality. Notwithstanding this, the general association of the *Vedantic* notion of “reality” (*sat*) as a moral value is still upheld, and both Radhakrishnan and Beidler have allowed for the connection of (*sat*) as an empirical reality with (*sat*) as a transcendent reality. The central purpose for such a connection in the global ethical discourse is for moral accountability. It is suggested by this thesis that moral accountability at both the empirical and transcendent levels be an integral part of the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse.

Radhakrishnan concludes that the reality of God (*Brahman*) is based on the fact of spiritual experience and it can only be justified in spiritual experience (Radhakrishnan 1994: 53). This view may hold strongly within the religious worldview but is bound to present challenges for a global worldview. Therefore, it is suggested that the reality of the ultimate guiding principle, which is central to the global ethical discourse, be justified by a negotiated metaphysical system, which can be accommodated, by both the secularist as well as the world religions. Furthermore, it must be noted that the idea of a “divine being” as the basis of the first principle or the first cause is significant because it attests to a Conscious, Intelligent Cosmic Reality underpinning the foundation of existence and not an abstract Cosmic Vacuum. It is much easier to attribute to such a “being” a moral or an ethical role. This suggests that there may be a metaphysical basis for ethical thinking and moral action. However, it is not the objective of this thesis to uphold the conception of “being” above “non-being”, but to demonstrate the contribution of all metaphysical notions to global thinking, since the principle of global thinking incorporates all thought systems. Furthermore, Radhakrishnan also notes that some of the *Upanishadic* speculations relate the principle of reality to naturalistic elements, which have their source from being (Radhakrishnan 1994: 55). This affirms in a positive way that there is some relationship between the created order and the Transcendent Being, an issue that will be taken up in the next section.

It is quite evident that the classical and modern day thinkers projected a very positive image of the ultimate reality, an image that has positive empirical relevance. This principle of “moral empirical relevance” needs to be contributed to the notion of global guiding principle within the global ethical discourse. The global guiding principle must assume the image of a global moral ideal with empirical relevance. For such a purpose, *Shankara*’s notion of an absolute reality beyond empirical aptness may appear to be irrelevant. Furthermore, the global guiding principle cannot be seen as a principle that is transcendent to the empirical phenomenal reality, it must add moral value to both the conscious and unconscious categories of phenomenal reality. While the global guiding principle may substitute the place of a Personal God, it must not assume a position of independence from phenomenal reality but must demonstrate interdependence. Such a global guiding principle must be justified through a profound metaphysical system that is negotiated by the global community, viz. all those that live on this planet.

3.4.2 *Brahman* and the World Order

In the last section an analysis of the *Vedantic* notions of “reality” (*sat*) and “non-being” (*asat*) were pursued and it became apparent that while there was justification for interpreting the ultimate reality as an ethical reality, the hermeneutical tradition seems to have concentrated on the feature of a metaphysical reality. Furthermore, it is established that the global guiding

principle can be a moral reality with empirical relevance. Notwithstanding this, if it is assumed that *Brahman* is an abstract absolute which is independent and unconnected to a world reality, then such a conception may present challenges for evolving a Transcendent Reality as a Guiding Principle for the evolution of a Global Ethic. However, the notion of abstractness may have relevance for the global ethical discourse. It is suggested that the notion of abstractness produces greater freedom in the interpretation of the ultimate reality than any fixed meaning attached to it. Therefore, the notion of abstractness need not be unconnected to a world reality but may have empirical relevance from a hermeneutical point of view. Furthermore, this challenge of the notion of abstractness that is beyond the world reality may raise one fundamental question: does the world reality have any meaning in relation to this abstractness? In response to this, Albert Schweitzer once said:

The ethics of action is hard hit by the assertion that the world has no meaning. Man cannot engage in ethical action in a world with no meaning. His ethical life in such a world must be limited to keeping himself pure from it. But if, further, the reality of the world is denied, then ethics altogether ceases to have any importance (in *Philosophy of Sri Madhvacarya*, 1962: 204).

In light of this, the notion of abstractness must not be constructed with the intent of denying meaning to the world. On the contrary, it must serve as a

qualifying principle for the global guiding principle from a hermeneutical point of view. Furthermore, it will also be necessary to establish the precise relationship between the notion of *Brahman* and the created world in order to develop meaning for the world. The leading question is whether there is a link or connection between *Brahman* and the created world order and what is the nature of this link in the context of traditional thought and how can that contribute to the global ethical discourse? Firstly, this analysis must probe into *Upanishadic* theories that explain the relationship between God and world. Secondly, the *Vedanta Sutra* text will be examined to establish the relation between *Brahman* and the world. Thirdly, the *Bhagavad Gita* will be considered in determining a view on the issue of the relationship between *Brahman* and the world. Finally, this analysis will probe into the method and interpretation given by classical *Vedantic* teachers and contemporary Eastern and Western scholars to explain this relationship. Because this study seeks to establish the contribution of metaphysics to developing a global ethic, a comparative study of the different philosophic positions will not be attempted.

This study will probe the verses of the *Upanishads* to establish the precise way in which *Brahman* is related to the world and the ethical status of the world. It is the objective of this thesis to establish that the world (including the nature world and the planet) has a moral status based on its relationship with divine space. It will also examine the theories postulated by Paul Deussen based on the *Brahman*-world relationship. In this regard, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

(1.2.1) states that in the beginning there was nothing whatsoever and everything was covered by hunger (Radhakrishnan 1994: 151). Then *Brahman* exercised his Cosmic mind and willed, through worship, the created order (ibid. 1994: 151). This hymn also notes that *Brahman* actually divided Himself as a Supreme Person into the different aspects of the Cosmos (ibid. 1994: 152). Again in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.1) we are told that in the beginning, this world was only the self in the shape of a person (Radhakrishnan 1994: 163). This hymn goes on to say that the *Brahman* divided itself and transformed into different parts of the created order (ibid. 1994: 165).

It is clear that the *Upanishads* did not in a direct way suggest that the ultimate reality had an ethical status or not. However, it must be noted that the *Upanishads* are generally submitted as primary relics of thought on the nature of *Brahman* and its relationship with the world as a metaphysical discourse rather than an ethical discourse. Beidler, on the other hand, noted that the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* features very little discussion on the relation of *Brahman* to creation, however, it is in the later *Upanishads* that this discussion is pursued (Beidler 1975: 76). He notes that it is in the theory of involution rather than the “substrata evolution” theory that the relation of *Brahman* with the world can be clearly analyzed and in the theory of involution, the world is seen literally as *Brahman* (ibid. 1975: 77). He also observes that *Brahman* is linked to the world through the conception that *Brahman* is found as the self of the heart as is stated in the *Katha Upanishad* (4.12; 6.17). If it is assumed that

the *Brahman* is a moral Being, then the world and individual also presumes a moral status on account of its association with *Brahman*.

Furthermore, in examining the *Upanishads*, Deussen establishes 4 principal positions in general that explain the relation between God and the Universe *viz.* (I) realism – which advocates that matter exists independent of God and is the creative power of the world (ii) theism – which proposes that God is the creator of the Universe out of nothing (iii) pantheism – which promotes the idea that God creates the universe by transforming himself into it and finally (iv) idealism – which suggests that God alone is real and the universe is just a mere illusion (Deussen 1906: 160). He adds that all these positions are found evident in the *Upanishads* (*ibid.* 1906: 161). Although the *Upanishads* do not present a single vision for the relationship between *Brahman* and the universe, it however affirms through its speculative method that there is a deep connection between *Brahman* and the Universe. This connection attributes Divine meaning and purpose to the created order and further serves to justify the ethical basis to this order.

Besides, in attempting to establish a relation between the *Brahman* and the world, a fundamental question must be raised *viz.* what is the purpose of creation? There are many answers to this question. Beidler observes that creation has the purpose of heading towards *Brahman* because it is the ground of its existence (Beidler 1975: 82). *Brahman* is projected as the ultimate

substratum of creation, being its source and its ultimate destiny. There are some that believe that the creation of the universe is cyclical and eternal, therefore there is no real need for a rational justification for its purpose. If the world order has a moral substance then it is inevitable that we must assume that there is a moral destiny. The return of the world order into *Brahman* is the culmination of the ethical destiny. In the context of the global ethical discourse, the notion of ethical destiny needs to be included into the global conceptual-methodological paradigm. This would mean that moral action is connected to this ethical destiny. It cannot be accepted that the world order is without an ultimate purpose and is merely by chance.

Now this study will venture to examine the *Vedanta sutra* in order to establish the nature of the relationship between *Brahman* and the world. This reflection will focus on *Brahman* as the first cause, and the notions of “all pervading self” (*sarvatman*) and “Inner controller” (*antaryamin*) to justify the relationship between *Brahman* and the world.

In the *Vedanta Sutra*, clear reference is made to account for the origin of the world in *Brahman*. Srinivasa Chari uses Sutra (1.1.5), to characterize *Brahman* as the Sentient Being, which reads:

On account of Thinking (being attributed to the first Cause by the scriptures, the Pradhana) is not (the first Cause referred to by them);

it (Pradhana) is not based on the scriptures (Swami Vireswarananda 1996: 31)

It is conclusively established that the sentient nature of *Brahman* is authenticated by its function of “seeing” and “resolving” and it is *Brahman* as a Sentient Being and not “matter” (*pradhana*) that is the cause of the World (Srinivasa Chari 1998: 11). The significance of this point adds to the fact that from a religio-philosophic perspective, there is a clear cognition of a Sentient Reality being the First Cause of the Cosmos and therefore there is divine purpose and meaning within it. However, this assumption stands in contestation to scientific paradigms that propose that “matter” (*pradhana*) is the First Cause and the only cause of the World. If the world is produced out of matter, then there can be no real justification for a moral or ethical purpose in it. By the scriptures affirming a Conscious Reality behind the world order, there would be ample grounds to justify an ethical purpose for this world order. It is the objective of this thesis to demonstrate that the world order cannot be without a moral status and that the connection with the notion of *Brahman* attributes to it a moral status. Therefore, the global ethical discourse needs to establish that the global guiding principle accords moral status to the world order on account of it being of a moral status.

Srinivasa Chari also interprets the notion of “*sarvatman*” to imply that *Brahman* is the entire universe in the sense that it is the *Atman* or the Self of

everything in the universe (Srinivasa Chari 1998: 2^o). On the basis of this understanding, it would be logical to say that all elements or constituents of the universe are ontologically of equal moral value. The natural law that governs all that is in the universe is the principle of essential equality. It is noted that the term “*antaryami*” refers to one who controls from within or is the Inner Controller (ibid. 1998: 33). The *Vedanta Sutra* (1.2.18) notes:

The Ruler within of the gods and so on (is *Brahman*) on account of the qualities of that (*Brahman*) being mentioned (Swami Vireswarananda 1996: 71.)

Srinivasa Chari also establishes that it is the *Brahman* and not the individual soul that is the “inner controller” of all created entities (Srinivasa Chari 1998: 34). The notion of “inner controller” (*antaryamin*) is very crucial to the global ethical discourse because it presents the idea that there is no absolute freedom in the individual existence. This means, that every individual is bound to a transcendent ethical reality, which is *Brahman* or the global guiding principle. This also means that an individual cannot see his/her self outside of a Cosmic Intelligent reality or global guiding principle.

This investigation will further explore the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is believed to be the culmination of the *Vedic* literature, to ascertain the nature of the

relationship between the *Brahman* and the world. In this regard selected verses will be highlighted and analyzed.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna declares:

I am the source and the dissolution of the Universe. There is naught else higher than I, O Dhananjaya: in Me all this is woven as clusters of gems on a string (Sastry 1977: 210).

My womb is the great *Brahman*; in that I place the germ; thence, O Bharata, is the birth of all beings. Whatever forms are produced, O son of Kunti, in any wombs whatsoever, the Great *Brahman* is their womb, I am the seed giving Father (ibid. 1977: 380-381).

Sridhara Swami in his commentary notes that there is no independent cause outside of God for the destruction and origin of the universe (Swami Vireswarananda 1972: 216-217). Although Sri Jnanadeva notes that it is matter that spreads out the entire universe of created things but this matter is grounded in the Divine essence (Bhagwat 1954: 167). The *Gita* expands the vision of the *Upanishads* and declares that the Ultimate reality is not only the source of the gross material world but is also the source of moral and ethical values. In the *Gita* (it says:

Intelligence, wisdom, non-illusion, patience, truth, self-restraint, calmness, pleasure, pain, birth, death, fear and security, innocence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, beneficence, fame, shame, these different kinds of dispositions of beings arise from Me alone (Sastry 1977: 260).

Swami Chinmayananda notes that the notion of creation is often conceptualized as the world of physical forms. However, it also includes both mental and intellectual category (Swami Chinmayananda: 615). It is these categories that give rise to ethical constructs. So ethical constructs are ultimately linked with the Ultimate Reality through the intellectual and mental realms. This provides a further justification of the role of rationality in the ethical process. It is in the *Bhagavad Gita* that we can finally see the moral substance of the world reality and the ultimate reality being the source of moral values. Just as the gross physical universe emanates from the *Brahman*, moral and ethical values also have their source in Him. This is significant for the global ethical discourse, because it suggests that the global guiding principle should be the source of moral and ethical values. Therefore, the global ethical discourse needs to evolve a negotiated metaphysical system that will be able to contribute towards deriving ethical values from the global guiding principle.

The above section examined the traditional texts, which clearly revealed the close affinity between *Brahman* and the world, and the moral status that is

accorded to the world on account of this connection. This study will now examine *Shankara's* proposal of the relation of *Brahman* and the world. Attention will focus on the "snake-rope theory"; the world as illusion; the concepts of *Maya* and *avidya* and the two standpoints of interpretation. It is important to note that the central method used by *Shankara* to advocate his case for a Cosmic reality is based on the *Brahman* analogy of the "snake-rope theory". One of *Shankara's* key assumptions is that the world is an illusion and *Brahman* alone is real. He justified the illusory appearance of the world and the indisputable reality of *Brahman* on the analogy of the "snake-rope" (Radhakrishnan 1923: 561). *Shankara's* argument of the illusory nature of the world was based on his primary position that both *Brahman* and the world cannot be equally real at the same time (ibid. 1923: 561). He bases the unreality of the world on the following assumptions that the world of experience is not present at all times (ii) the world is sublated by true knowledge (iii) the recognition of the higher condemns the lower level of unreality (iv) the world is changing (ibid. 1923: 562-563).

It must be noted that *Shankara's* intention was to construct a metaphysical reality that was in direct contrast to that of the *Buddhi*.¹³ He did not pay much attention to an ethical discourse. If we accept the assumptions of *Shankara* then it would mean that there is no room for a moral foundation. Whatever moral foundation we attempt to construct, will stand as an illusion and with no real purpose in relationship to the reality of his *Brahman*. What may have been true

for *Shankara* then may not necessarily be relevant for today. Therefore, *Shankara's* method of understanding the *Brahman* needs to be re-examined.

Furthermore, *Shankara* proposes that since the world cannot be real it is *Maya* (illusory), which is not the essential truth of the eternal *Brahman* (Radhakrishnan 1923: 565). *Shankara* proposes that the world has its origin in *Brahman* but *Brahman* is not identical to the world because *Brahman* and the world exist as reality and appearance (ibid. 1923: 566). *Shankara* proposes that there is no real relationship between the world and *Brahman* and whatever perceived relationship there is, is cognitively indefinable (ibid. 1923: 566). He conceptualizes the world as finite and conditioned and raises the question of the possibility of it having a source from the infinite which he sees as impossible, and declares it as the mystery to human understanding (ibid. 1923: 567). The relationship between *Brahman* and the world is seen as indefinable because the infinite is not the cause of the finite (ibid. 1923: 565). The notion of *Maya* registers our finiteness and points to our gap in knowledge (ibid. 1923: 569). *Shankara* attempts to show that the world, although it hangs on *Brahman*, does not affect *Brahman* (ibid. 1923: 569). This kind of causality shows that the cause can produce an effect without undergoing any kind of changes (ibid. 1923: 569). This does pose a challenge to the ethical discourse, however, the idea that the *Brahman* can assume the function of a universal guiding principle can still be pursued.

One of the challenges faced by philosophers is the understanding of the notion of *Maya*. In the context of *Shankara's* philosophy, *Maya* is described as “not-being” because only *Brahman* is conceptualized as “being” and at the same time it cannot be “non-being” because it is the source of the world appearance (Damodaran 1967: 254). *Shankara's* notion of *Maya* was described as “negligible” from the ultimate standpoint, as “real” from the empirical standpoint and as “indefinable” from the standpoint of logic (ibid. 1967: 257). *Maya* was not an independent entity, it was an integral part of *Brahman* although *Brahman* was independent of it (ibid. 1967: 256). Arapura also deals with the notion of *Maya* in the context of the *Brahman* discourse. He notes that the *Maya* concept is one of the most controversial philosophical concepts that have captured the attention of Indian metaphysicians for a very long period (Arapura 1986: 23). He also notes that the notion of *Maya* and *avidya* (false knowledge) are seen as one theory and acknowledges the progressive development of these notions within the *Advaitic* tradition (ibid. 1986: 23). It is clearly evident that *Shankara* actually interpreted the notions of *Maya* and *avidya* along the lines that served the purpose of furthering his non-dualistic vision. (ibid. 1986: 24). Arapura notes a very significant point and that is that the philosophers task is not to prove that the world exists, on the contrary, to explain the way the world exists – this knowledge is vital in the search for phenomenal meaning (ibid. 1986: 26-27). Arapura confirms that *Maya* does not mean world-denial (ibid., 1986: 37) and he sees *Maya* as the ground for the provisional distinction between the world and *Brahman* (ibid. 1986: 37).

It becomes evident that *Shankara* explored a method that evolved the construction of new meanings in order to sustain his metaphysical position. This method needs to be adopted within the framework of the Global ethical discourse. Although the notion of *Maya* may have little relevance for such a discourse, it nonetheless has to be given a fresh interpretation in light of the deeply pragmatic nature of the global reality.

Furthermore, one of the primary positions of *Shankara* on the issue of matter is that it does not exist (Damodaran 1967: 249). His denial of the objective reality of the material world rests on a mystical experience (ibid. 1967: 250) and not an empirical experience. The phenomenal world, at the empirical level of experience was unreal and merely illusory (ibid. 1967: 250). *Shankara* focussed his vision of the world on a kind of illusory existence in which he declared that it is neither real nor unreal. This position of *Shankara* will put him into direct conflict with the reality of the global society, which is profoundly empirical. However, *Shankara* does not deny the nature of the empirical reality but simply interprets it as an illusion.

Shankara also created a dependent relationship between the illusory nature of the world and the unchanging nature of the *Brahman*, and this dependent relationship revealed that the world cannot exist without *Brahman* and that *Brahman* was not dependent on world for its reality because it alone had an

independent existence (Damodaran 1967: 255). *Shankara* rested his conception of the phenomenal world on principally two standpoints *viz.* the empirical and the Absolute. The world appearance from the empirical standpoint is based on the assumption that it is real but from the absolute standpoint as unreal (Damodaran 1967: 257). It must be noted that in most instances it is based on this method of interpretation that *Shankara* is often misunderstood. This confirms that *Shankara* does not deny the empirical existence in total. However, it must be admitted that he gives very little attention to the ethical discourse.

At the very outset, any ethicist studying Hindu metaphysics will choose to leave out *Shankara* completely because his abstract notions of *Brahman* may serve no real purpose for an ethical discourse. This may be a premature decision because the theory of “abstractness” is developing significance in contemporary discourse on globalization, a matter that will be taken up later and the notion of *Shankara's Brahman* may have relevance. *Shankara's* absolutist paradigm serves as a model for an ultimate Guiding principle and can also serve as a common starting point for a Global Other Reality. *Shankara's* principle of the two levels of interpreting world reality *viz.* the empirical and the absolute level with both having some connection to each other is a useful tool for global philosophical hermeneutics.

Now, this study will venture to examine *Sri Ramanuja's* proposal on the *Brahman* –world relationship. This reflection will focus on Nature of *Brahman* in relationship with the world, *Brahman* as the cause of the world, the nature of the link between *Brahman* and the world, *Brahman* as a basis of Moral good and the nature of reality of the world.

Sri Ramanuja drew a complete distinction between *Brahman* and the world and human beings and concluded that this *Brahman* is not tainted with the evils of the world (Damodaran 1967: 262). In so doing *Sri Ramanuja* establishes that the *Brahman* is the highest vision of a transcendent moral good. In constructing the notion of the *Brahman*, *Sri Ramanuja* establishes a link between the *Brahman* and the world by affirming that *Brahman* created the world out of Himself (Damodaran 1967: 262). He further structures the existence of man and nature on the existence of *Brahman* and therefore establishes an inseparable connection between man, nature and *Brahman* (Damodaran 1967: 264). *Ramanuja*, furthermore, describes God as One that transforms Himself into the manifold world (Sinha 1986: 167). It is also noted that the manifold diversity cannot be denied and it is impregnated by the One reality, *Brahman* (ibid. 1986: 167). *Ramanuja* also notes that God is the material, efficient and assisting cause of the world and in the midst of all modifications that goes on in the world, *Brahman* (God) remains unaffected and immutable under all transformations (ibid. 1986: 172). *Sri Ramanuja's* thesis seems to contribute more positively to the proposition that the world order is a moral order and with

ethical meaning and purpose and which can positively contribute to the global ethical discourse.

Sri Ramanuja rejected the assumptions of philosophic materialism, which considered the material world as the only reality (Damodaran 1967: 263). In fact, he advocated the thesis that the world with all its diversity is as real as the Absolute *Brahman* (ibid. 1967: 263), which was contrary to that of *Shankara*. He perceived the world as imperfect and limited but not illusory (ibid. 1967: 263). In *Sri Ramanuja's* organization of his thesis of the world reality, he recognized the notions of subject and object and understood them as real and eternal with a permanent relationship existing between them (ibid. 1967: 264). Although this conceptual paradigm lays the basis for the development of empiricism, *Sri Ramanuja* connected the empirical relationship between object and subject to *Brahman* by suggesting that *Brahman* is manifested through this relationship (Damodaran 1967: 264). The theory of subject-object relationships together with the emphasis of an empirical paradigm have tremendous relevance for the global ethical discourse.

It must be noted that the primary position of the *Visisadvaitists* is that there is only one God or *Brahman* who is the creator of the universe and is qualified with an infinite number of auspicious attributes and is free from all imperfections (Srinivasa Chari, 1988: 223-224). *Sri Ramanuja* proposes that *Brahman* is not only the efficient cause but also the material cause of the

universe and as such *Brahman* has for its body the entire world of sentient and insentient beings (Swami Vireswarananda. 1996: xlii). He also maintains that *Brahman* and the world are of different natures and they are related as cause and effect (Swami Vireshwarananda 1996: xlii).

Sri Ramanuja projects a profoundly theistic conception of the *Brahman*-world relationship. There are several ethical principles that can be justified on the basis of his metaphysics *viz.* to seek defense for moral action and to account for one's moral action. The theory of God with attributes can contribute to establishing a framework of universal moral values. A personal God can be interpreted to represent perfect moral actions. This construct is a proposal that will be made relevant in devising a Global Ethic.

Furthermore, this study will examine the classical thesis of *Madhva* whose contribution to Indian dualistic thinking has been profound. This investigation will centre on God as the Cause of the World, God as a Moral World Order, Theory of subject and object, the Reality of the world, and the Theory of Evolutionary Change in Nature.

Madhva suggests that God is only the instrumental and efficient cause of the world and not the material cause while *Prakriti* is the material cause of the world order (Urquhart 1986: 204). This means that *Brahman* is not the transformation of itself into the world. *Prakriti* has been accepted as dependent

on *Brahman* (Sharma 1962: 235). It is also accepted as the direct material cause of the universe and the three *gunas* (*satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) (ibid. 1962: 235). *Madhva* also submits that God, is a morally perfect being, is the cause of the moral-order in the world (Urquhart 1986: 205). He advocated the reality of the subject- object relationship and he saw this relationship as the basis of true knowledge (Damodaran 1967: 267). *Madhva* affirms his position on the status of the world by stating that the world is not illusory, it had a real existence in space and time (ibid. 1967: 268). He advocated the theory that the objects of the world originated from evolutionary changes in nature (ibid. 1967: 270). If it is assumed that nature, which is part of the *Brahman*, has moral substance and value then it may be submitted that the objects of the world also embody such moral value. *Madhva's* metaphysical positions may have relevance for the global ethical discourse and it demonstrates through the theory of the object-subject relation the foundation of a relationship between moral value and the objects of the world.

Now, this study will explore the way in which contemporary scholars have interpreted the relationship between *Brahman* and the world. This reflection will concentrate on the notions of *Hiranyagarba* as the “world soul” and the “inner controller”; the nature of relationship between *Brahman* and world and the “passive” and “active” principles of *Brahman*.

Radhakrishnan, moreover, takes up the issue of *Brahman* and the world by referring to the concept of *Hiranya-garbha* which he sees as the “world soul” that is expressed through the environment and who is organically bound with the created world (Radhakrishnan 1994: 61-62). He also makes a very clear distinction between the “world soul” and the Supreme transcendent reality. In this regard, he observes that while the world and “world soul” is organically related and is interdependent, there is no such relationship between the Supreme and the world (ibid. 1994: 63). This clearly reveals that while God is transcendent of the creative process and unaffected by it, it is also integral to it through the “world soul”. Furthermore, Radhakrishnan projects the understanding that the nature of *Brahman* is not just “a featureless Absolute but it is all this world” (ibid. 1994: 64). It can be presumed, therefore, that the “world soul” has a moral function in relationship with the world. Radhakrishnan does not deal with the world soul encapsulating such a moral function, but such an interpretation will not be in conflict with his intent.

Dasgupta, on the other hand, sees *Brahman* as the essence in both man and the universe (A History of Indian Philosophy, 1941: 48). He sees *Brahman* as the creator of the universe through the transformation of the Divine Self and is situated as the “inner controller” of the created universe (Dasgupta 1941: 48). Dasgupta is also in agreement with Radhakrishnan that the *Brahman* is the most passive and unmoved principle of the universe but unlike Radhakrishnan he is unable to differentiate the active principle in *Brahman* into the categories

of *Hiranya-garbha*, *Īshvara* etc. (Dasgupta 1941: 48). Therefore, he sees *Brahman* as both the active and passive principle at the same time.

The *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* seem to affirm very positively that there is a deep and profound connection between the created order and the *Brahman* itself. The notions of “Inner controller” (*antaryamin*) and “all pervading self” (*sarvatman*) suggest an integral unity between the world and *Brahman*. This confirms that the world is not here by chance but it incorporates divine meaning and purpose and therefore has a moral and ethical purpose as well. As much as *Shankara* attempts to project the illusoriness of the world, his contemporary thinkers affirmed the moral relevance of both God and the world.

Furthermore, from a metaphysical position, it becomes apparent that Radhakrishnan did not compromise the unchanging nature of *Brahman* by associating it with the world. However, the “world soul” is of the substance of *Brahman* and therefore assumes a more objective relationship with the world. It is not clear from the submission made by Radhakrishnan whether such a “world soul”, which is an active agent in the creative process, has an ethical substance or character. It can be assumed, on the basis that *Brahman* is the ultimate guiding principle of the universe that the “world soul” is also the “moral or ethical soul” of the universe. This idea becomes clearer when Dasgupta takes the *Brahman* as the “inner controller of the universe”. For such control to be

exercised, it has to be founded on some law or principle that can equate itself to a universal moral or ethical principle. Srinivasa Chari also supports this notion of the “inner controller”. Srinivasa Chari also establishes the link between the *Brahman* and the world on the basis of the *Vedanta sutra* text. The interesting feature of this proposal is that it stands in contestation of the proposal of scientific paradigms. In fact it does not oppose the scientific suggestion that matter may be the first cause, but it extends itself to identify the “world soul” of *Brahman* which the scientific method is fairly limited in comprehending. Notwithstanding the fact that the *Brahman* stands transcendent to the creative process, it is connected to the world order through the “world soul” and as the first cause of the world, it serves as an “inner controller” of the universe and therefore contributes to a Cosmic moral function. Furthermore, the *Gita* enunciates the relationship between matter and the world and finally concludes that even the great *Brahman* is the source of ethical values through the mental and intellectual categories.

3.4.3 Nirguna and Saguna *Brahman*

In the last section, this study explored the relationship between *Brahman* and the world by tracing its development from the *Upanishads* through the classical and contemporary interpreters. It is established that the metaphysical discourse has positively contributed to the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse to the extent to which it would promote the development of a

framework for a Global ethic. Moreover, there is ample justification for an ethical interpretation of metaphysical concepts to render it possible to contribute to the global ethical discourse. In this section, this study will focus on the nature of *Brahman* as the “manifest” and “unmanifest” reality. In this analysis, an examination of the two concepts of *Brahman*, viz. Saguna and Nirguna will be undertaken through the *Upanishadic* texts, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vedanta Sutra* in order to construct an overview of the nature of *Brahman*. Furthermore, an analysis of the interpretation of classical *Vedantic* thinkers as well as contemporary western and eastern scholars will be undertaken. The central objective of this examination is to evaluate the notion of *Brahman* as a manifest and unmanifest reality and to probe into the assumptions that construct this discourse with the intent of assessing the contribution it can make to the global ethical discourse.

Firstly an analysis of specific *Upanishadic* texts will be made and an interpretation of these texts through the scholarship of Radhakrishnan and Beidler will be undertaken. This analysis will focus on selected verses that deal with the negative and positive predicates of the *Brahman* and the rationale for such predicates.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, it is stated:

Verily, there are two forms of *Brahman*, the formed and the formless, the *mortal* and the *immortal*, the unmoving and the moving, the actual (existent) and the true (being) (Radhakrishnan 1994: 192-193).

It is quite evident that the *Upanishads* conceptualized *Brahman* as both the manifest reality and the unmanifest reality. In this regard, Beidler observes that the notion of *Brahman* is not restricted to its *nirguna* and *saguna* features, the *Upanishadic* teachers have surpassed these two categories and have introduced a third category, which is the notion of “*Parabrahma*” (Beidler 1975: 93). He also notes that the manifest *Brahman* (*saguna*) is often expressed in positive predicates and the unmanifest *Brahman* (*nirguna*) is expressed in negative predicates as is evident in *Īśa* (5); *Katha* (2.21) and *Mandukya* (7) (ibid. 1975: 93). In the *Īśa Upanishad* and *Mandukya Upanishad* it is stated:

It moves and it moves not; it is far and it is near; it is within all this and it is also outside all this (Radhakrishnan 1994: 571). It is unseen, incapable of being spoken to, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, un-nameable the essence of the knowledge of the one self, that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, such they think, is the fourth quarter. He is the self. He is to be known (ibid. 1994: 698).

Radhakrishnan notes that these apparently contradictory statements do not suggest that the writer is experiencing a mental imbalance, on the contrary, the writer is struggling to describe divine experience through the limitation of human thought and language (ibid. 1994: 571). He further notes that due to limitations, the Absolute can only be expressed through negations, however, it is not a void (ibid. 1994, p571). In commenting on the verse from the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Radhakrishnan notes that this description is beyond the description of the subject-object categories (Radhakrishnan 1994: 698). Radhakrishnan notes that man's highest good consists of entering into this, the self, making it the center of one's life (Radhakrishnan 1994: 699). Beidler in concurrence with Radhakrishnan also observes that the *Brahman* cannot be limited to empirical predicates and cannot be denied of them because such denial will constitute a limitation of the Supreme (Beidler 1975: 94-95). Moreover, he is of the view that the nature of *Parabrahma* is indicated through more of contradictory predicates because it reveals that it is beyond language distinctions (ibid. 1975: 95). As much as the *Upanishads* project a dualistic conception to the *Brahman*, the *nirguna* serves, in the *Upanishads*, as the highest moral end of man while the *saguna* adds moral value to empirical existence.

This study will continue to examine the notions of *nirguna* and *saguna* in the context of the *Vedanta Sutra* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. This analysis will focus

on *Brahman* as the Supreme Person, Bliss as the Highest Good, human imperfections and *Brahman*, and the concept of *Īshvara*.

In this regard, Srinivasa Chari explores the *Vedānta* sūtra (1.1.20), and notes that:

(The one) within (the sun and the eye is *Brahman*) because Its characteristics are mentioned (therein) (Swami Vireswarananda 1996: 44)

and he concludes that *Brahman* is a Supreme Person who possess a spiritual divine form and is different from the exalted individual souls (Srinivasa Chari 1998: 19). This means that no human imperfection or limitation can be attributed to the *Brahman*. In this instance, the Absolute reality is not given an abstract identity, which cannot be readily used as a divine reference for ethical guidance. The *Brahman*, therefore, stands for that which is possible in the human condition. In addition to this, Srinivasa Chari concludes, on the basis of analyzing *Vedānta* sūtra (1.1.12), which reads:

(In the passage) “The Self consisting of Bliss” etc (*Brahman*, which is spoken of as the tail, is put forward as an independent entity and not as something subordinate to Anandamaya, the Self consisting of

Bliss) on account of the repetition (of *Brahman*) in many passages of that chapter (Swami Vireswarananda 1996: 31).

that the nature of *Brahman* is Blissful. He uses the following arguments to substantiate his position (i) that the *Upanishads* speaks of *Brahman* as the one, which causes joy (ii) the same *Brahman*, is described in the mantra portion of the *Vedas* as *anandamaya* (Srinivasa Chari 1998: 15). It is clear that the *Vedanta Sutra* upholds the notion that the nature of the ultimate reality is blissful, a condition or state that is opposite to misery, pain and suffering. If the *Brahman*, in this context, is assumed to be the Highest Good, then the Highest Good must be presumed to be Bliss and which can form the basis of an Ultimate Moral Being.

Furthermore, in the *Bhagavad Gita* the Supreme *Brahman* is described as a Supreme Person. Dasgupta notes that *Brahman* in the *Gita* is used in the sense of God or *Īhvara*, which is accepted as the Supreme principle (Dasgupta, Vol.2, 1941: 474). 1UIn the *Gita*, although the notion of the *nirguna Brahman* is evident, the *saguna Brahman* is said to be the upholder of the *nirguna* principle (ibid. 1941: 474). The *Bhagavad Gita* projects the Divine as being the essence of moral substance. In chapter 4, verse 7, it is noted that whenever there is moral confusion, the Lord manifests to restore moral order. So it can be presumed that the Divine is of universal moral substance.

This study will continue to review the notion of *nirguna* and *saguna* in the context of *Shankara's Advaita* philosophy. This analysis will focus on the theories of the two *Brahman*; the nature of the *nirguna*; *nirguna* and the Supreme Person; *nirguna* and the concept of time; the notion of Personal God; Concept of *shvara* and the inconsistency of the *saguna* principle.

In *Advaita* the theory of two *Brahmans* is strongly advocated. This theory basically upholds the view that *Brahman* has two natures *viz.* the higher and the lower, (I) the higher nature is defined as the Absolute which is beyond all differentiation, transcendental, supra-relational and beyond all thought and speech (ii) the lower is *Brahman* that is conditioned by *Maya*, a personal God endowed with attributes (Srinivasa Chari 1988: 229). *Shankara's Brahman* has no genus, no qualities, does not act and is related to nothing, has no internal variety; it has nothing different from it, nothing similar to it and no internal differentiation and is opposed to all empirical distinctions. (Radhakrishnan, 1923: 535). Furthermore, *Shankara's Brahman* transcends the relative and the absolute, the finite and the infinite because if it is infinite then it will be a mere negation of the finite and therefore this absolute is not a "person" (ibid. 1923: 536). The notion of *nirguna* is applied to *Brahman* because it is seen by *Shankara* as trans-empirical and not an object of human thought (ibid. 1923: 536). *Shankara's Brahman* is unrelated to time because the events of time have no meaning for it and all time relations are beyond it (ibid. 1923: 537).

The *nirguna* feature of *Brahman* presents tremendous challenges to attribute to it the notion of an Ultimate Good. However, such abstractness allows for some level of global interpretation, which will make it relevant for the global ethical discourse. However, *Shankara's Brahman*, in the context of the theory of abstractness, has relevance to the contemporary ideological approaches to human existence.

Moreover, *Shankara* considered a personal God as a determinate reality. *Shankara* is of the view that God's existence is not different from the existence of other objects and therefore God will be subject to the category of being finite just as all other objects are finite (Radhakrishnan 1923: 542). According to *Shankara*, *Īvara* is supposed to be the material and efficient cause of the world (ibid. 1923: 544). *Shankara* compares God to rain which simply helps plants to grow and what they grow into depends not on the rain but the seed (ibid. 1923: 549). Each new life is dependent on one's moral qualities (ibid. 1923: 549). The concept of *Īvara* is only made possible to explain the changing phenomenal reality which cannot be really attributable to *Brahman* which is unchanging (Radhakrishnan 1923: 555). *Brahman* is beyond subject and object, but when it is perceived as a subject dealing with an object it becomes *Īvara* (Radhakrishnan 1923: 556). *Ishvara* is the mediating principle between *Brahman* and the world and it shares the natures of both (ibid. 1923: 557). *Īvara* is an active agent in the world and it is subject to time (ibid. 1923:

558). To *Shankara* the *saguna Brahman*, which is the *śhvara*, is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions and therefore cannot be the highest Reality.

Shankara attempted to construct a Reality that is metaphysically perfect but with very little consideration for its practical operations. It is also evident that *Shankara* had no philosophic plans for incorporating the moral and ethical into his metaphysical scheme. On the other hand, *Shankara's* absolute may have relevance as a starting point to ground global ethics on an ultimate reality but this may require a revision of his interpretation. Furthermore, the notion of *śhvara* underpinned as an active agent in the world order may have relevance for the global ethical discourse.

Notwithstanding this, this study will probe the contribution of *Sri Ramanuja's* interpretation of the *saguna* and *nirguna Brahman*. This analysis will centre on the nature of *Brahman*; the *Brahman* of attributes; the functional role of *Brahman*; the interpretation of the *nirguna* and *saguna*; the relationship between the *nirguna* and the *saguna*; *Brahman* as the Supreme person; the Notion of *Avatar*; Concept of *śhvara* and the concept of the two *Brahmans*.

Firstly, *Sri Ramanuja* refuted the propositions of Metaphysical Idealism, which proclaimed that Absolute consciousness was the only Reality therefore denying any reality outside of itself (Damodaran 1967: 263). He constructed his thesis of the *Brahman* on the idea that it is eternal and Blissful (ibid. 1967, p262) and

it is distinct from the individual soul and the world (ibid. 1967: 262). He proposed that the *Brahman* is possessed of attributes such as wisdom, power, auspiciousness etc. (ibid. 1967: 262). *Sri Ramanuja* attributes a functional role to *Brahman* as the arbiter and controller and perceives this control to extend over both organic and inorganic objects (Damodaran 1967, p264). He also conceptualizes the Absolute as an organic whole with parts, a substance with attributes (Sircar 1987: 168). *Sri Ramanuja* deals with both the notions of *nirguna Brahman* and *saguna Brahman*. He does not see the *nirguna Brahman* as a barren abstraction. He attaches equal value and importance to both the *saguna* and *nirguna Brahman* (ibid. 1987: 168).

Sri Ramanuja does not admit to the distinction of *Brahman* as transcendental and empirical but sees the Supreme Reality as simultaneously *nirguna* and *saguna* (ibid. 1987: 169). He conceptualizes the *nirguna* in the sense that *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* do not exist in essence because the *saguna* has all auspicious qualities that belong to the Supreme (ibid. 1987: 169-170). *Sri Ramanuja* conceives of the *Brahman* as the Highest person with infinite excellent qualities (ibid. 1987: 168). This *Brahman* has qualities such as brilliance, compassion, beauty etc which are attributes that are eternal, boundless co-ordinate and not contradictory (ibid. 1987: 169). *Sri Ramanuja* advocates the notion of avatar as the descent of God to participate in the moral upliftment of the world (Sircar 1987: 175). He sees this *Brahman* reality as being beyond the grasp of man and it is only through the incarnation that man has access to this Divine reality

(ibid. 1987: 176). The incarnation serves the purpose for moral elevation and emotional exaltation (ibid. 1987: 176).

He further suggests that the nature of *Brahman* cannot be subjected to two natures and at the same time cannot be limited by the two forms (Swami Vireswarananda, 1996: xlii). According to *Visistadvaita*, the ultimate reality or *Brahman* is the personal God of religion (Srinivasa Chari 1988: 223). *Ramamuja* also notes that *Brahman*, in its true nature, is formless although it is perceived with forms and as a formless entity it is not subject to *karma* (Swami Vireswarananda 1996: xli). *Visistadvaita* does not accept the theory of the two *Brahmans* and reaffirms its position of the Ultimate reality being *Brahman* with infinite attributes (Srinivasa Chari 1988: 230). The *Visistadvaita* standpoint is that the *nirguna Brahman* is not attesting to a *Brahman* that is attributeless but affirms a *Brahman* that is free of all inauspicious qualities (Srinivasa Chari 1988: 231). The notion of *Īhvara* as the bodily *Brahman* is used and is produced out of *Brahman*'s free will for the benefit of the devotees to enable them to offer prayers and do meditation (Srinivasa Chari 1988: 232).

Sri Ramamuja's Brahman seems to focus on an identifiable reality in which both moral and ethical relevance can be sought. The integration of the Absolute and the Personal and the association of the Absolute with the world order create ample room to develop a theory for moral justification within a metaphysical ideal. The theory of transcendent attributes can also contribute to establishing

global values that are immanent in the human condition and can further provide a basis for social ethics.

This study will further explore *Madhva's* conception of the *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman*. This analysis will investigate the independence of *Brahman*; the attributes of *Brahman*; *Brahman* as the Highest Perfection; the unlimited nature of *Brahman*; *Brahman* as the Supreme Person; the concept of *nirguna* and *saguna*; Notion of *avatar* and concept of *shvara*.

Sharma notes that the independence of *Brahman* from the individual soul and matter is the most vital part of *Madhva's* conception of God (*Sharma* 1962: 324). Such independence does not suggest that there is no relationship between the individual soul and the world and *Brahman*. Instead it suggests that *Brahman* is unchangeable in relation to the soul and the world. *Madhva* conceives of God as being above change and limitation. *Madhva* further notes that God has infinite attributes, which are absolute, and he bases this on the assumption that there can be nothing, which is absolutely attributeless (*Arapura* 1986: 201-202). Notwithstanding this, he notes that even the *nirguna Brahman* possesses attributes of oneness, divinity, transcendence and immanence (*Sharma* 1962: 331-332). He conceptualizes God as the highest form of perfection conceivable by the human intelligence and needs to be understood in terms of the unlimited pervasion of time, space and fullness of attributes (*ibid.* 1962: 329).

Madhva also proposes that the *Brahman* is a Supreme Person, who is indescribable only because He is incomprehensible; is equally transcendent and immanent; and is knowable only through scriptures and is ultimately obtainable (Arapura 1986: 203-204). He accepts that the *nirguna* is trans-empirical and is superior to the products of matter (Sharma 1962: 332). *Madhva* notes that the *saguna* is not the absolute becoming a personal god, or a reality endowed with empirical attributes (ibid. 1962: 333). He also notes that it would not be possible to establish the negation of attributes because the *nirguna* text even advocates the notion of attributes (ibid. 1962: 335). *Madhva* sees the Supreme *Brahman* as a person who embraces the whole of life of the world and not someone standing above the world order (ibid. 1962: 343-344).

Madhva advocates the notion of *śhvara* as the guide, controller and is passively present in the soul and matter (Arapura 1986: 203). He sees the Supreme manifesting Himself periodically in different *avatars* and he sees all the manifestations as being equal in status. He basis this view on the assumption that the same Infinite expresses itself in all ranks equally (ibid. 1986: 206-207). *Madhva* also notes that there are no degrees of fullness or partialness or completeness to *avatars* (Sharma 1962: 354). He has no preference for any particular *avatara* of God and treats all of them as equal in rank attributes and powers (ibid. 1962: 354-355).

Madhva's interpretation presents a number of possibilities of conceptualizing a Supreme Guiding Principle based on Universal values and for making such a Supreme Being immanent in a global moral world order. His theory of an absolute governed by attributes creates sufficient room to evolve a global ethical framework for universal values. The notion of the avatar may be taken up to represent an ideal or perfect human condition based on global ethical values.

This study will now probe contemporary interpretations of the notions of *nirguna* and *saguna*. In this regard, Radhakrishnan also identifies two vital concepts of the *Upanishads* that contribute to the understanding of the *Brahman* viz. the “*nirguna*” and “*saguna*” and suggests that both these notions are not different from each other (Radhakrishnan 1994: 64). Although both these are technically referring to two separate conditions of the *Brahman*, they are ultimately found integrated in the whole of *Brahman*. Radhakrishnan's central position is that the Personality of God cannot be subjected to human formulations and therefore should not be attributed with human qualities (ibid. 1994: 65). Radhakrishnan holds the view that the Absolute can only be described in negative terms and that these negative characters should not suggest that the *Brahman* is non-entity (ibid. 1994: 67-68). Dasgupta also shares a similar view with Radhakrishnan and maintains that the *Brahman* cannot be described by any positive content, which is limited by cognitive thought (Dasgupta 1941: 44-45). Aurobindo, while maintaining this standpoint

goes on to add that even the negation theory cannot be applied to *Brahman* for it will limit it and he believes that *Brahman* cannot be limited by saying that “it is not this or not that” (Aurobindo 1996: 322). Although Aurobindo attributes this absolutist vision to the *Brahman*, he also believes that this Absolute *Brahman* is “self evident to itself and to the spiritual being” (ibid. 1996: 323).

In this regard he said:

But although thus indeterminable to Mind, because of its absoluteness and infinity, we discover that this Supreme and Eternal Infinite determines itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths (Aurobindo 1996: 322-323)

Beidler also notes that the unmanifest *Brahman* (*nirguna*) is one without a second and stands in contrast to the manifest *Brahman* (*saguna*) which in reality is one and the same (Beidler 1975: 84). He issues a word of caution on the interpretation of *Brahman* by stating that the notions of the manifest and unmanifest *Brahman* must be viewed coherently to avoid the development of any form of dualism which might render the concept of *Brahman* to criticism (ibid. 1975: 84)

Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, postulated the theory of the “integral nature of the Supreme Reality” by suggesting a logical succession to its nature *viz.* the Absolute (*Brahman*), the Creative Spirit (*śhvara*), the world soul (*Hiranya-*

garbha) and the world (Radhakrishnan 1994: 65). Such a conceptualization makes it possible to hold the ultimate reality above any sectarian vision and at the same time creates the flexibility of the world ideas of god to be instituted in the *Īshvara* and to be ultimately linked to the *Brahman* thus creating a basis for a global notion of an ultimate reality.

From the above submission, it is quite evident that the notions of a *nirguna Brahman* and *saguna Brahman* are indisputable in the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is very difficult to say which of these two conceptions were upheld above the other. In the classical hermeneutical tradition it becomes evident that trends developed to either emphasize the *nirguna* or the *saguna* and the integration of both the *nirguna* and the *saguna*. Furthermore, in the contemporary hermeneutical tradition, it becomes obvious that scholars attempt to emphasize either of these conceptions or try to bridge these conceptions into a sort of conceptual philosophic hierarchy. There is a serious omission of the part of the interpreters to integrate any moral and ethical relevance to these ideas or even establish them as Transcendent guiding principles for moral and ethical behavior. However, this study will venture to develop the relevance of both these conceptions together with their associated conceptions for developing the global ethical discourse.

3.4.4 Unity of *Brahman* and *Atman*

In the last section this study endeavored to establish the understanding of the concepts of *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman* in the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* and also through the interpretations of classical and modern thinkers. It is quite evident that the idea of *Brahman* is both deeply transcendent as well as profoundly immanent. However, in this analysis we will explore the relationship between the *Brahman* and *Atman* through the texts of the *Upanishads*, and the interpretation of classical and modern thinkers. In this part we will analyze specific texts from the *Upanishads*. The central objective of this examination is to establish a concept of personhood based on the traditional metaphysical discourse and to contribute aspects of this to the global ethical discourse.

In the famous *Sandilya vidya*, which is found in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, the oneness of the individual soul and the Supreme *Brahman* is affirmed (Radhakrishnan 1994: 392). In this regard, the *Chandogya Upanishad* says:

This is my self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice, than a barley corn, than a mustard seed, than a grain of millet or than the kernel of a grain of a millet. This is myself within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than these world (ibid. 1994: 391-392).

One of the primary objectives of the *Vedic* seers was to demonstrate some kind of unity between the notion of *Brahman* and *Atman*. Deussen observes that this perception of unity between the *Brahman* and *Atman* was rooted in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* viz. *Rig-Veda* 1.164 and 10.129 (Deussen 1906: 85). He also notes that the notion of *Brahman* and *Atman* are used as denoting the first principle and are also applied synonymously in the *Upanishads* (ibid. 1906: 86). Radhakrishnan supports the view that the *Brahman* is the *Atman*, however, he looks at the *Brahman* as the cosmical principle and the *Atman* as the psychological principle (Radhakrishnan 1923: 169).

Beidler, furthermore analyses the nature of the self as *Purusha* in the context of the *Upanishads*. He notes that the concept of *Purusha* in the *Upanishads* is largely limited to the notion of personality, the person or individual, notwithstanding the fact that it is sometimes used in the context of *Atman* (Beidler 1975: 16). He also notes that the *Upanishadic* view of the self rests at the physiological and psychological levels and the analysis of man are largely sensory and egocentric in nature (Beidler 1975: 17). He notes that the theory of the *kosha* derived from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* adds to the ontological analysis of the *Purusha* (Beidler 1975: 24) which gives greater clarity of the nature of the individual. He documents the operation of the *Purusha* through three vital mental conditions viz. the waking, dream and the dreamless states (ibid. 1975: 25-26).

One of the critical issues is trying to justify the notion of the self with the conceptual paradigm of the subject-object relationship. The *Upanishads* seem to emphasize the idea that the self can never become the object, it is the pure subject (Radhakrishnan 1923: 152). Notwithstanding this, the *Upanishads* reveal that the self is not an abstract formal principle, but an active universal consciousness and from this standpoint it is both the subject and the object and it is the universal self that is both immanent as well as transcendent. (ibid. 1923: 157). The *Upanishads* conceptualize the self as the sole reality, which contains the facts of nature as well as the histories of experience (ibid. 1923: 158). It also demonstrates the reality of the self in the states of waking, dream, deep sleep and *turiya* (ibid. 1923, 158).

It is clear that the *Upanishads* have documented a purely metaphysical relationship between the *Atman* and the *Brahman* as well as the understanding of personhood. However the notion that the self is a psychological and physiological reality has some bearing for the global ethical discourse. The *Upanishads* theory also reveals that the nature of personhood is essentially spiritual. However, it has not articulated the nature of “personhood” as a moral or an ethical being with metaphysical essence.

This study will probe the concept of *Atman* and its relationship with *Brahman* based on the interpretation of *Shankara*. This analysis will focus on the root

meaning of the concept of *Atman*; the three connotations of the *Atman*; the *Atman* as the essence of existence; the *Atman* beyond knowledge; its existence in relation to the body reference; the nature and character of the self; the conceptions of empirical and universal selves; the relation of *jiva* and *Brahman*; and finally the relation of *jiva* and *Īhvara*.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that the root sense of the concept of *Atman* is derived from the *Vedas* and it refers to “breath” or “vital force” (Beidler 1975: 44). Deussen suggests that there are three connotations to the concept of *Atman* viz. the corporeal self, which is the physical self, the individual self, which is the self free from the body and as a knowing subject is distinct from the object, and finally the Supreme self, in which the subject and object are no longer distinguished (in Beidler 1975: 44). This notion of the self-reveals that a person is more than a body self, it is also a spirit self. The connection of the supreme self, which is the foundation of moral value, to the individual person adds moral value to “personhood”. The *Atman* is the essence of one’s existence on which the vital breath, the senses, the internal organ and the bodily identity are dependent (Radhakrishnan 1923: 476).

Shankara suggests that it is not possible to know the self (*Atman*) by means of thought and he maintains that though the self is beyond our knowledge but it is known to exist on account of itself (ibid. 1923: 476-477). *Shankara* says that it is both known and unknown (ibid. 1923, p477) and proposes that the notion of

Atman is developed once we divest it from all that surrounds it, discriminate it from the bodily frame and strip it from all experience (ibid. 1923: 480).

The notion of Self, presented by *Shankara*, as an absolutely abstract entity, equivalent to nothing, to which no moral or ethical standard could be derived. It is described as undifferentiated consciousness because it is unaffected even when the body is reduced to ashes or the mind perishes (ibid. 1923: 480). For *Shankara*, the *Atman* is pure consciousness, which is not dependent on any object to be reflected on (ibid. 1923: 482). *Shankara* also notes that no action is attributable to the *Atman* since action is a limiting agent therefore his conclusion is that the *Atman* has no agency and can have no limitation placed onto it (ibid. 1923: 483). *Shankara* also holds the view that the *Atman*, which has no other existences, is not a person (ibid. 1923: 484).

Shankara distinguishes between the empirical self and the absolute self (ibid. 1923: 595). The empirical self is an agent of all activity (ibid. 1923: 595). *Shankara* sees activity as essentially painful and there must be a need to free oneself from it (ibid. 1923: 595). It is *avidya* that causes the sense of the empirical self (Radhakrishnan 1923: 596). The individual soul is connected to *buddhi* or reason (ibid. 1923: 596). It is the *jiva* that rules the body and the senses and it is connected with the fruits of action (ibid. 1923: 598).

One of the challenges in Indian thought is to capture a complete understanding of the Universal self. In this regard Radhakrishnan notes the method of *Shankara* :

[t]hat we get the notion of the *Atman* if we divest it of all that surrounds it, discriminate it from the bodily frame with which it is encompassed, strip it of all contents of experience. To the logical minds it may appear that we have reduced it to a bare potentiality of thought, if not mere nothing, but it is better to regard it this way than as a whole of parts or a thing with qualities or a substance with attributes. It is undifferentiated consciousness alone which is unaffected even when the body is reduced to ashes and the mind perishes (Radhakrishnan Vol. 2, 1923: 480).

Shankara proposes the notion of error to explain the confusion between the *Atman* and the body-mind complex (ibid. 1967: 250). *Shankara* attempts a conceptual unity between the notions of *Brahman* and *jiva* by advocating that the differences between *jiva* and *Brahman* did not exist and any such difference expressed in individual existence is merely through illusion (ibid. 1967: 250). *Shankara* conceptualized the individual as the *jiva* and he saw this *jiva* as the same as that of *Brahman*, self illumined, infinite and free (ibid. 1967: 257).

Shankara's interpretation of the concept of self (*Atman*) was indeed transcendental or trans-empirical. He conceptualized the notion of *Atman* or Universal self as “primal, eternal, and immutable facthood” (Sinha 1986: 72), a homogenous consciousness (ibid. 1986: 74), all pervading (ibid. 1986: 76), beyond space and time (ibid. 1986: 77). His central objective was to project the oneness of reality and articulate this absolute unity in the oneness of the subject and the object and therefore identifies the soul as *Brahman* itself. (Sinha 1986: 72). *Shankara* establishes the concept of *Atman* as the universal self, which is not deduced from empirical knowledge but which is self-manifested and self revealed and therefore is not dependent on any form of knowledge (Sinha 1986: 72-73). In this regard Radhakrishnan says :

Yet we cannot think away the self, for there is no consciousness or experience possible apart from it. Though it escapes our knowledge, it does not entirely escape us. It is the object of the notion of self, and is known to exist on account of its immediate presentation. It cannot be proved, since it is the basis of all proof and is established prior to all proof (Radhakrishnan Vol. 2, 1923: 477).

Shankara's universal self forms the ontological basis for the individual empirical self (Sinha, 1986: 73). He sees the universal self as the essence of consciousness and bliss and is devoid of enjoyment and activity (Sinha 1986:

74). His universal self is not associated with mind or the properties of mind such as pleasure and pain and it is transcendent of being an object of consciousness (ibid. 1986: 74 -75). The reality of the universal self is found embedded in the act of experience (ibid. 1986: 76). This notion of the universal self can contribute to the construction of the idea of a universal or global person.

Shankara makes a clear distinction between the concepts of *jiva* and *atma* and depicts the former as phenomenal while the latter is transcendental (ibid. 1986: 78). *Shankara* interprets the empirical self (*jiva*) to be an imaginary construction without a real ontological basis (ibid. 1986: 78). Although *Shankara* sees the *jiva* and the *Atman* as ultimately one, he demonstrates the former as being the object of self-consciousness and the latter only known through supra-intellectual intuition (Sinha 1986: 78-79). The relationship between the empirical self and the universal self is mysterious and not known through the common forms of knowing (ibid. 1986: 79). However, the relationship of the empirical and the universal self is significant to construct the notion of ethical dependence.

Radhakrishnan notes that:

Each function and faculty, the gross body and the vital breath, the senses and the internal organ, the empirical “me” appear only on

the basis of and in relation to the *Atman* (Radhakrishnan, Vol. 2, 1923: 476).

Shankara also deals with the notion of *ġvara* in the context of the *Brahman*. Here also, *Shankara* views the *jiva* and *ġvara* as being the same from the transcendent standpoint and different from a phenomenal standpoint. He constructs the concept of *jiva* as an agent, an enjoyer, one that feels pleasure and pain, as being ruled, with limiting adjuncts such as ignorance, desire, and actions. *Shankara* also deals with the notion of *ġvara* in the context of the *Brahman*. Here also, *Shankara* views the *jiva* and *ġvara* as being the same from the transcendent standpoint and different from a phenomenal standpoint. He constructs the concept of *jiva* as an agent, an enjoyer, one that feels pleasure and pain, as being ruled, with limiting adjuncts such as ignorance, desire, and actions (Sinha 1986: 83-85). It is clear that *Shankara*'s notion of the *jiva* falls within the perspective for moral application. It is not beyond moral application.

Shankara attempted to construct a universal reality that was undifferentiated and coherent. However, his explanation of the Universal self can become a positive global concept for the global ethical discourse. There must be a more concrete relationship between the universal self and the empirical self. The absolute unity of reality may serve as a substratum but it cannot be the ultimate fact of life. This will destroy all forms of moral and ethical relevance and any form of social conscience. It will be necessary to review and reconstruct

Shankara's ideas in order for it to make a contribution towards the global ethical discourse.

This part will attempt to probe into the thesis of *Sri Ramanuja* and *Madhva* on the relationship between *Brahman* and *Atman*. This analysis will focus on the meaning of the *Atman*; the relationship between the individual soul and the *Brahman*; *Brahman* as the controller of the soul; the nature and character of the soul; the soul and *karma* and finally the goal or destiny of the soul.

Ramanuja suggests that the term *Atman* is derived from the word “anu”, which means, “atomic” (Sinha 1986: 80). *Upanishadic* texts viz. the *Svetasvatara* and *Mundaka Upanishad* support the view that it is small in comparison to the Supreme self (ibid. 1986: 180). The primary assumption of *Sri Ramanuja* is the *Jivatma* or individual soul has a distinct existence from *Brahman* although it was united with *Brahman* (Damodaran 1967: 262). It is clarified that the individual soul was different from *Brahman* but was not independent of Him and the *Jivatma* was sustained and controlled by *Brahman* (ibid. 1967: 262). *Sri Ramanuja's* conception of the soul is based on the following general assumptions: that it is eternal, conscious and pure; it is a minute particle which could enter into lifeless unconscious matter; that consciousness and vitality are inseparable aspects of the soul; *karma* connects the soul and the body (Damodaran 1967: 263).

Ramanuja suggests that the soul is an individual in relation to the absolute and it is not absolutely independent (Sinha 1986: 179). He also proposes that the self is both subject and object within the scheme of objective reality (ibid. 1986: 180). According to *Ramanuja*, the soul is intrinsically blissful, pure and perfect, however the apparent limitations to the soul are caused by individual *karma* (Sinha 1986: 182). *Ramanuja* also notes that the eternity of the soul is an essential condition for morality (ibid. 1986: 182). He suggests a triune reality of God in which man and nature is found ultimately reconciled in a state of unity in variety (Sinha, 1986: 183). He also submits that the soul is subjected to control, support and protection from the Lord and further notes that such control is not detrimental to the freedom of individual souls (ibid. 1986: 181). Notwithstanding that the soul is distinct from *Brahman*, *Sri Ramanuja* establishes that the soul has for its ultimate aim communion with *Brahman* (Damodaran 1967: 265).

Sri Ramanuja presented a notion of personhood that is connected to the transcendent reality, which is a moral reality. He also suggested that an individual is not subjected to absolute empirical freedom and therefore is controlled by a transcendent guiding principle. The fact that the *Atman* can enter into matter suggests that individual personhood has equal moral value with other objects of nature. Being blissful and perfect suggests that it is of inherent moral quality. *Karma* is the basis of moral action that can either enhance the ethical destiny of the soul or limit it from the goal of spiritual

communion. Sri *Ramanuja* proposes an ideal model of the unity of man and nature in the context of divine space for the global ethical discourse.

Madhva, on the other hand, conceptualized the *Brahman* as distinct from the *jiva* and the world and he saw all three entities as eternal (Damodaran 1967: 267). The one concrete proposal advocated by *Madhva* is that *Brahman* is an object of realization (ibid. 1967: 267). He conceptualized the *Brahman* as an independent reality while the *jiva* was seen as a dependent reality (Damodaran 1967: 268) *Madhva* also advocates the doctrine of *pancabheda* which is based on the assumption that the notion of difference constitutes the essential part of things (Sinha 1986: 207). He distinguishes the notion of *Atman* from that of matter and God and holds that differences also exist between each soul both in its embodied state and released state (ibid. 1986: 208). *Madhva* suggests that the soul is both the knowing subject as well as the object of its own knowledge (ibid. 1986: 208). *Madhva* suggests that the soul can never be equal to God and he basis this on the assumption that God has an intrinsic superiority over the soul (ibid. 1986: 210).

Madhva, in upholding the distinction of the *Brahman* from world and the soul demonstrated its moral incorruptibility and therefore its perfect condition, while soul and world face moral imperfections. If the *Brahman* is the object of realization, then it is the highest ethical end towards which an aspiring soul must attempt to achieve. Therefore ethical excellence is a prerequisite for God-

realization. The individual cannot be independent from a moral ideal. The differences between individuals are acknowledged and therefore the moral value attributed to "person" is both individual as well as collective. The superiority of the Guiding principle allows for moral transformation of individual towards the highest moral end.

Furthermore, it is clear that *Sri Ramanuja* attempted to construct a metaphysical reality, which is conducive to a moral ethical discourse. His notion of the individual soul in relation to the *Brahman* brings into operation the principle of moral accountability and moral grounding. These are two essential principles for the global ethical discourse. *Madhva* on the other hand proposed the recognition of the difference of individual souls which is also going to contribute significantly to the global ethical discourse.

This part will probe into the conception of *Atman* in relation to *Brahman* through the interpretation of the contemporary scholars. This analysis will focus on a psycho-physiological analysis of being; the relationship between the micro and macrocosm; the *Purusha* as the agent; the relationship between *Purusha* and *Atman*; the *Atman* in relationship to action and embodiment; the *Atman* as a goal; the connection of mental impressions to *Atman*; the ultimate nature of *Atman* and universal self; the equation of individual to the universe; the 5 *koshas* as a basis of individuality; the destiny of the soul based on ethical excellence; integrated nature of existence and *Brahman* as a basis of social

equality. These variables have been included to assist in determining the deeper nature of “person” and to develop an understanding that will contribute to the evolution of a global ethical framework.

It became evident that the microcosmic dimension of reality (the finite) was never isolated from the macrocosmic dimension of reality (the infinite). In this regard Beidler notes:

From this it seems necessary to conclude that on the level of Purusha there must have been general agreement in the *Upanishads* that the microcosm was not different in its basic structure from the macrocosm (Beidler 1975: 30).

Beidler also conceptualizes the *Purusha* as an embodied self with a phenomenal character and is described as the active side of the *Atman* (Beidler 1975: 44-45). It would appear that the *Purusha* is the agent of the *Atman* and there is a close connection between the essence of our being and the expressed behavior of our nature.

Beidler also suggests that there is a relationship between the self as *Atman* and the “embodied self” (*Purusha*), notwithstanding the distinctions that exist between them, and on the evidence of the *Aitereya* (1.1; 1.3.12) and *Taittiriya Upanishads* (1.6), the *Atman* is located in the inner recesses of the heart and it

serves as the inner guide to the “embodied self” (*Purusha*) (ibid. 1975: 45-46). He says that “the *Atman* is the essence, the ultimate and true nature of the *Purusha* expressed on the highest” (ibid. 1975: 46) This means that human action is connected far more deeply than just the psychological and physiological levels. As the inner guide, the *Atman* can be seen as a moral agent for right action.

Beidler takes up the issues of action and embodiment related to the *Atman* and the response to this is rooted in the Hindu nature of work and desire, which is seen to be mainly egocentric (ibid. 1975: 47). His conclusion is that the *Atman* is not active and any activity associated with the *Atman* is related to the egocentric “embodied self” (*Purusha*) (ibid. 1975: 48). So the *Atman* is seen as pure consciousness unaffected by the movements of worldly life, yet it is the inner guide to human existence. In fact, there is very little to refute the notion that the *Atman* is transcendent to all action. Notwithstanding this position, Beidler notes that the *Atman* is *adhithana*, although not active by itself but by serving as a goal it stands as an ultimate reference to which all actions are directed (Beidler 1975: 50). Beidler addresses the issue of the embodiment of the *Atman* with the suggestion that being the essence of the “embodied self” (*Purusha*), it allows for the egocentric *Purusha* to evolve to the essential nature of the *Atman* (Beidler. 1975: 51). This is an interesting view in that it is less monistic in nature and it suggests that human life has a moral significance and

that evolution of being needs to take place at a moral level in order to arrive at the essence of life itself, which is the *Atman*.

Beidler also takes up the point about the latent mental impressions and its association with the *Atman* and the designing of the future bodies (ibid. 1975: 52). Although this may be viewed to be very mystical in content, the ontological nature of the *Atman* leads one to make logical propositions that suggest, in the form of a universal justice system, that the unchanging reality of the *Atman* is an opportunity for the *Purusha* to evolve towards its highest ethical end. Human action is not ends in themselves but they are means to a moral end. The motions in human activity through time and space are justified on the grounds of the unchanging nature of the *Atman*.

Beidler furthermore takes up the issue of the ultimate nature of *Atman* and makes a clear distinction of it from any grossly created entity. (Beidler 1975: 55). He therefore suggests that the *Atman*, which is a consciously functioning unit, be without multiplicity and is viewed as a cosmic person or a universal self (ibid. 1975: 56). In facing the contradiction between the *Atman* as the transpersonal reality and at the same time found immanent in the heart of being, he suggests a dipolar theory to resolve this contradiction. He suggests that the *Atman* is dipolar with having an individual pole, which is the foundation for the individual personality, and the universal pole, which advocates its impersonal nature (ibid. 1975, p56). Although these concepts may appear to be

contradictory, they express with limited objectivity the mysterious nature of the *Atman*. Although the dipolar theory explains the two contexts that the *Atman* is found expressed, there is a clear indication and confirmation of the connection between the personal dimension and the impersonal dimension.

Urquhart observes that in discovering the deepest nature of ourselves we also discover the fundamental nature of the universe (Urquhart 1986: 30). In the consideration of the individual personality, it is inevitable that the formula *tat tvam asi* (that thou art) is going to be raised. He notes that this formula expresses the equation of the individual self with the universe and the universe with the self in the highest sense (Urquhart 1986: 31). He also notes very positively that the true self of each individual when known thoroughly is discovered to be not at all individual but the essence of the individual self is realized in the inevitable identification of the *Atman* with *Brahman* (ibid. 1986: 31). In the conception of the soul's identity, there is a further conception such as the subtle body, which is seen to be the nucleus of the soul and which constitutes subtle gross elements and which continues to exist even after the death of the gross body (ibid.1986: 160). In the vision of the individual identity, the conscious and unconscious levels of the soul in the form of organs of senses and actions and the vital air sheaths are described as maintaining the human condition (ibid. 1986: 161). The idea of a transcendent destiny of the soul is evident in Hindu texts and these destinies have been graded from a highest condition of communion with *Brahman* to the lowest condition of

returning into animal existence or going into an abode of punishment. These destinies seem to be worked out on the basis of ethical excellence in one's life (ibid. 1986, p163). The nature of the ultimate destiny is described as a perfect communion, a state where fulfillment of purified desires and ultimate state in which there can be no lower stage (ibid. 1986, p168).

This conception of the unity of the *Brahman* and *Atman* supports the idea of an integrated existence in which the transcendent reality is at the same time the immanent reality. This connection between the transcendent and the immanent has tremendous value for evolving an ethical system because it provides an ultimate ground within the "immanent space" for the principle of moral justification.

Damodaran evaluated *Shankara's* thesis and concludes that if *Brahman* was the only Truth and if all phenomena, all objects including human beings were *Brahman*, would it be wrong to conclude that all men must be recognized as equals (Damodaran 1967: 259). He continued that the same *Brahman* is manifest in a *Brahmin* and *Sudra* and therefore there can be no justification for a caste system or for any social inequalities (Damodaran 1967: 259).

3.5 CONCLUSION

It is quite evident that the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and world is deeply enveloped in the metaphysical discourse and very little attention was given to interpreting these ideas for the purpose of contributing to the ethical discourse. It must be noted that the metaphysical discourse aimed at transcending the nature of reality to a state of absolute metaphysical perfection, which undoubtedly is a moral-ethical end. However, it demonstrated the irrelevance of the empirical nature of moral reality. The main reason for such an outcome is due to the relative nature of the empirical constitution and therefore the relative nature of the empirical moral reality that the connection between the absolute and empirical became a challenge. The Indian thinkers seem to have locked themselves into an ideological law that prescribes that the finite i.e. the empirical cannot fit into the infinite absolute. The category of finiteness must be given up for the sake of the absolute. If this ideological rule has to stay, then it will present a challenge to the empirical global ethical discourse. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the absolute needs to be interpreted in the context of being a common factor to a world of variety. It also became apparent that the notion of *Atman*, which reflected the inner personality of a person, was essentially equal in all persons and of similar value in all created objects. Despite the various conceptualizations held by the traditional interpreters of Vedanta, the nature of personhood was primarily based on the principle of having ontological moral value. Through the tradition of classical and modern interpretations, evidence of making the Indian metaphysics more practical and relevant to the global way of life is noted. The primary basis of

this thesis is to render global ethical relevance to the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and the world so that it can contribute to formulating a framework for a Global ethic. This is possible because of the flexible nature and the universal character of the notions of *Brahman* and *Atman*.

CHAPTER 4 HINDU ETHICS : THE TRADITIONAL DISCOURSE

In the last chapter, the study focussed on Hindu metaphysics and concentrated on the theoretical notions of *Brahman*, *Atman* and the world in the context of the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* as well as from the interpretation of classical thinkers such as *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* and other contemporary thinkers. It has been noted that the metaphysical discourse is not completely isolated from the empirical ethical discourse although it embodies absolute categories that surpass all forms of ethical relativism. Notwithstanding this, the study explored the metaphysical interpretation of the Indian idealistic and theistic thinkers and has observed that both systems of thinking can make a positive contribution to the global ethical discourse. There are traditional ethical concepts such as *dharma* and *karma* that seem to link itself to the historic metaphysical discourse for the purpose of explaining the ultimate purpose of human action and destiny. Therefore this study will examine how the notions of *dharma* and *karma* will contribute to the development of the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse. In this regard the traditional ethical discourse is rooted in the *Prasthanas Traya* of *Vedanta*, viz. the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. This study will venture to explore the origins and development of ethical ideas from the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*.

4.1 The Ethical Vision of Vedanta

The broad ethical vision of the *Vedas* is incorporated in the various texts viz. the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and more importantly the *Vedanta Sutra*. The development of *Vedantic* metaphysics, as we have noted earlier in the thesis, is primarily based on the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Therefore the broad ethical vision of *Vedanta* is drawn from these three primary sources.

In the ensuing discussion in this chapter, my discussion on the broader ethical vision of *Vedanta* takes into account the ideas drawn from the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* and by its classical interpreters such as *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*. Since the interpretation of the *Vedanta Sutra* by classical interpreters viz. *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* has been largely supported from the *Upanishadic* text and the *Bhagavad Gita*, some understanding of the ethical vision of the *Upanishad* and *Bhagavad Gita* will help clarify the *Vedantic* ideas of ethics better.

4.2 The Ethical Vision of the Upanishads

In this section, an examination of the ethical vision of the *Upanishads* will be ventured into. The main purpose of this investigation is to establish the way in which the ethical character of the Hindus developed in the *Upanishads*. In this analysis, we shall examine the criticism of an absence of ethics in the

Upanishads, the aim of moral action, the law of ethical action, the virtues of the *Upanishad*, *Brahman* as *dharma*, the absolute and empirical imperatives of moral action, the psychological basis for moral action, justifying ethics on metaphysical constructs, the notion of harmony of existence, the notions of *ashrama* and *varna dharma*, moral action and ritual action, renunciation of the world, the role of reason, understanding and knowledge in ethical action and the method to realize ethical ideal in the *Upanishads*. These issues constitute the basis of the ethical vision of the *Upanishads*.

Although there are several criticisms that the *Upanishads* have neglected to construct a sound ethical vision, Radhakrishnan observes, on the contrary, that the *Upanishads* have insisted on the importance of an ethical life and the practice of moral virtues (Radhakrishnan 1994: 104). Michael, in his book, *Radhakrishnan on Hindu Moral Life and Action*, observes that moral action in the context of the *Upanishads* was grounded in the basic aim to become one with the Absolute (Michael 1979: 35). This meant that the ethical vision of the *Upanishads* was solely for human beings because only they had the capacity to realise this Absolute (Michael 1979: 35). However, there is also the metaphysical insight that all things evolve from the Supreme and will finally return to it. Therefore, there is a basic ethical essence in all things that direct this ultimate union.

It must be noted that the ethics of the *Upanishads*, is therefore, subsidiary to this ultimate goal. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.4.5), the law of ethical action is established in the following way:

According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good; the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action and bad by bad action (Radhakrishnan 1994: 272).

This forms the basis of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm and it reveals that the law of action is basically universal; it applies to all persons. However, the only problem within this law is deciding what is considered virtuous and what is bad. This issue is a contextual one and may vary from one set of circumstance to another. Notwithstanding this challenge, the *Upanishadic* paradigm shared a clear vision of what is considered good and what can be the basis of an ethical life viz. sacrifice, asceticism, liberality, integrity, non-injury to life and truthfulness (Radhakrishnan 1994, p108). Further to this, Radhakrishnan establishes the following virtues that constitute the ethical principles of the *Upanishads* viz. self-control (*dama*), self-discipline (*tapas*), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), silence (*mauna*), charity (*dana*), compassion (*daya*) (ibid. 1994: 109-111) and on the basis of this he concludes that the *Upanishads* adopt a profoundly spiritual view of life (ibid. 1994: 111). Added to this are the virtues of selflessness, detachment, self-realization, self-renunciation, liberality, right

dealing, non-injury, truthfulness, kindness and compassion for all, (Radhakrishnan 1923: 212-220). It is quite clear that the ethical values of the *Upanishads* are both individualistic and social in nature and they aim at evolving the human condition towards its highest end. Furthermore, these ethical values demonstrate a universal character, which suggests that it can contribute to a global ethical paradigm on individual and social ethics. Although these ethical principles constituted the essence of social and individual value during the Upanishadic period, their relevance for the modern global ethical discourse must be considered.

Moreover, one of the important features observed by Michael is that *Brahman* as the highest ethical principle is *Dharma* and is the self in every human being (Michael 1979: 39). In this regard, it must be noted that the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm makes provision for a Transcendent ethical reality, an absolute ethical being which is immanent within the empirical nature of existence as *dharma*. Therefore, this paradigm creates variables of “absoluteness”, in the notion of *Brahman* and an “empirical relative”, in the notion of *dharma*, in its ethics. The connection between these two is that the empirical relative variable serves as the means and the absolute ethical variable serves as the end. In this context, even the notion of evil is established against the backdrop of a metaphysically absolute reality and is therefore defined in terms of one’s alienation from what is real. Likewise, Radhakrishnan establishes that it is the Self that is the overseer of all actions, who executes justice, who restrains evil

and allots goodness (Radhakrishnan 1994: 105-106). In the context of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm, ethical action is governed by a metaphysical reality and therefore there is no absolute freedom to ethical action.

The *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm constructs a psychological basis for the performance of good and evil and it links such intents with Divine purpose (ibid. 1994: 107). Therefore, Radhakrishnan notes that the fundamental ethical inclination emerges from the inward nature of a person and he connects this inward world with this psychological basis (Radhakrishnan 1994: 107). It must be noted that an individual is driven towards ethical action largely because of the constitution of the inner world. Radhakrishnan also sets the ethical framework of the *Upanishads* against the backdrop of two metaphysical ideals viz. the ideal of becoming one with God and the ideal of the world originating from God and seeking its final resting place in God (Radhakrishnan 1923: 207). He places morality as subsidiary to the perfect ideal of the Eternal Reality (ibid. 1923: 208), however, this does not reduce the significance of this morality. He adopts the method of justifying the practice of ethics on metaphysical constructs viz. the love of one's neighbour is justified on the metaphysical notion of the oneness of reality (Radhakrishnan 1923: 209). He raises the contestation of the finite and the infinite within man as a moral struggle between what is good and evil (ibid. 1923: 210), thus implying that the infinite is ultimately good.

It is essential to identify that the inward nature of a person cannot be isolated from the ethical discourse. Although the Indian ethical ideal was largely theistic, it demonstrated that ethics served as a means towards an ideal. There is clear evidence that fundamental ethical action can be justified on metaphysical thinking. The unique feature of the Upanishadic ethical system is that it accords ethical value on abstract categories as the finite and infinite. These conceptual ideas from the *Upanishads* will be able to positively contribute to the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse.

Furthermore, Radhakrishnan notes that during the transition from the *Vedic* period to the *Upanishadic* period, the ethical emphasis was placed on living in harmony with the world by discharging one's duties and responsibilities to the gods, men and animals (Radhakrishnan 1923: 131). It is clear that the notion of world in Hindu thought does not just refer to the human world. It is consequently evident that the notions of duty and responsibility formed an integral part of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm. Moreover, these duties were clearly defined and they were orientated towards a metaphysical end and not an empirical end. In fact, empirical contradictions and shortfalls did not matter as long as the empirical ethical norms defined rationally its relation to a metaphysical context. Besides, the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm operated not only in the context of a human world but also in the context of a "nature world" and "spirit world". This is indeed a unique feature of this paradigm.

The *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm also incorporated ethical institutions, such as the *varna* system and the *ashrama* system. Both these institutions will be examined in detail a little later. However, for this purpose, Radhakrishnan notes that *ashrama dharma* was introduced during this period and it emphasized the duties for the different stages of life (Radhakrishnan 1923: 132). In fact the *ashrama* system and *varna* system throw sufficient light on how duty and responsibility form the basis of a moral social order that served a metaphysical end. While these ethical institutions served a given purpose within the *Upanishadic* paradigm, they declined in time into unethical practices. Notwithstanding this, Radhakrishnan pointed out that caste duties depended on character and not birth (ibid. 1923: 222) thus demonstrating the rightful place for caste duties within the ethical paradigm. He also noted how the flexible classless society declined into a rigid caste based society that suppressed freedom and progress and promoted class exclusiveness (Radhakrishnan 1923: 133) although he does not account for the precise factors that led to this. It must not be assumed that traditional ethical systems have embedded in them weaknesses that may result in their deterioration. It is possible that outside forces may have been responsible for such decline.

Although the idea of caste is totally contrary to the human rights culture, the notion of ethical value attached to specific duty for the purpose of social order is an *important* idea that can contribute to the global ethical discourse. The functional differences in duty and responsibilities call with them ethical value

and it is this principle that must be dialogued with in the global ethical discourse.

It has generally been held that the *Vedic* era was deeply ritualistic, therefore, ethical action was grounded on ritual action. In fact, Radhakrishnan notes that Godliness rested on good works and truth speaking and not on the mechanical performance of rituals (Radhakrishnan 1923: 131). The notion of good works and truth speaking are not limited in interpretation generally and within the context of the *Upanishads*. Within the context of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm, there are several interpretations that may hold for these two ideas. In fact, these notions may even be included into the global ethical discourse with very little difficulty.

In many ethical theories man is seen as a moral agent. However, in the context of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm man is seen as a mediator between nature and God (Radhakrishnan 1994: 105). Although Radhakrishnan does not get into the specifics of this role it leaves sufficient room for interpretation. In the context of the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm it is observed that man alone can act as a moral being and agent, therefore, mediation may suggest the specific responsibility that man has towards the nature world. If God is the symbol of absolute goodness then man can play the role of communicating this goodness to nature. The harmony of God, man and nature is fundamental to the *Upanishadic* ethical paradigm.

Due to the deep mystical nature of the *Upanishadic* speculations, interpreters have often created a perception that the *Upanishadic* ethical ideal advocates complete renunciation of the world. Radhakrishnan notes that while the ethical system of the *Upanishads* emphasized the notions of detachment and equanimity, he clarifies that the spirit of renunciation did not call for the neglect of social duties (Radhakrishnan 1994: 106). In fact, ethical action was deeply rooted within social action in the form of social duty and responsibility. Furthermore, the *Upanishads* did not call for the forsaking of the world but rather for the realization of the presence of God in the world of nature and society (Radhakrishnan. 1923: 219).

Radhakrishnan emphasizes the role of reason and understanding in the ethical frame (ibid. 1923: 211). Although these may not be the ultimate instruments, they are vital as a starting point. On the issue of knowledge, he saw morality preliminary to it and believed that all works must be performed with knowledge and that knowledge must not be viewed in a narrow sense but must realise itself in ethical works. (Radhakrishnan 1923: 223-225). The means towards realizing the ethical ideals of the *Upanishads* rested with meditation, concentration, contemplation, cleansing one's mind, prayers and fasting (ibid. 1923: 220-221). These provided the basis on which ethical realization could take place with the purpose of actualizing the ethical goal.

His concluding remarks were:

Moral activity is not an end in itself. It is to be taken over into the perfect life. Only this has transcendental worth...In this state the individual being is absorbed in the Supreme. This alone have transcendental worth, but the moral struggle, as preparing the way for it is not useless (Radhakrishnan 1923: 230)

It is interesting that Radhakrishnan reached such a conclusion because he follows the hermeneutical scheme of *Shankara* and *Shankara* found that there was a need for one to transcend ethics in order to actualize the final goal. In general, the *Upanishadic* vision seems to be summed up in the above point that moral action is subsidiary to a metaphysical ideal. It is evident that the *Upanishads* did place emphasis on ethics because it projected ethical action as a pre-requisite for metaphysical communion. It is this idea of union with the ultimate reality that constituted the framework of the *Upanishadic* ethics. Relative morality and its contradictions were not the main focus of the *Upanishads*. The law of ethical action revealed the principle of its universal intent. It is largely the connection of ethical action to the metaphysical ideal that renders ethical laws universal. An examination of the virtues of the *Upanishads* reveals that they also have a universal character and can easily contribute to the global ethical discourse. The need to use metaphysics in the traditional ethical discourse is demonstrated in the way the notion of *dharma* is

lifted from its empirical categories of application and linked with the ultimate reality, the *Brahman* itself. This suggests that empirical ethical categories cannot be isolated from its metaphysical ideals. Both empirical and absolute imperatives are required to give full expression to moral action and for justifying moral action. Within the *Upanishads* the principle of justifying ethical action rests on how such action can be justified in the context of its metaphysical relevance. Metaphysical relevance forms the basis of ethical justification. The advantage of the metaphysical-empirical ethical paradigm is revealed in the fact that it results in harmony amidst the variety and diversity. Radhakrishnan discloses a fresh interpretation to the ethical paradigm of the *Upanishad* by raising moral action from its ritual inclination and by redefining the issue of renunciation. He raises the traditional ethical discourse to the level of a more universal ethical discourse by suggesting the role of reason, understanding and knowledge. It is on the foundation of such a hermeneutical framework that this study will venture to construct a proposal of a global ethic for the global ethical discourse.

4.3 The Ethical Vision of the Bhagavad Gita

In this investigation, the study will explore the basis of the ethical vision of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The main objective of this investigation is to establish the background of ethical ideas and approaches that can be used to contribute to the global ethical discourse. In the last section an explication of the vision of the *Upanishadic* ethics was pursued and it became increasingly clear that the

traditional ethical discourse is rooted to metaphysical ideals which makes it possible to establish universal laws for human action. Furthermore, it is noted that *Upanishadic* ethics serve as a prerequisite for a metaphysical ideal. However, in this analysis, this study will probe into the list of virtues in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the distinction between virtue and vice, the notion of equality, the idea of a universal ethical standard, the unity of inner spirituality and outward action, the ethical nature of “means”, the nature of social duty in *Bhagavad Gita* and the relationship between social duty and spiritual ideal. This study will also explore the *Bhagavad Gita*'s ethical activism, the notion of *svadharma*, the impact of attachment and desire on human conduct, universal altruism, the morality theory based on the principle of sameness and finally the oneness of the absolute value and the diversity of the “means” as basis to explicate the ethical vision of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

K. Damodaran notes that the *Bhagavad Gita* being a popular poetic exposition underpinned by a profound philosophic discourse between Krishna and Arjuna and forming part of the great epic the Mahabharata, emphasized the notion of human action (Damodaran. 1967: 186). He therefore implies that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a textbook of human ethics. Michael, on the other hand, observes that the *Bhagavad Gita* deals with ethical issues in great detail (Michael 1979: 55). In chapter 16 verse 1-3, a list of virtues is outlined viz. fearlessness, purity of mind, knowledge and concentration, charity, self control, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, uprightness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger,

renunciation, tranquillity, aversion to fault finding, compassion to living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty and steadiness, vigor, forgiveness, purity, freedom from malice and pride (Michael 1979: 56). These virtues provide insight into the acceptable character of an individual in the context of his day to day life and the context of the ethics dealt with in the *Gita*. It must be noted that the distinction between virtue and vice is clearly defined in the *Bhagavad Gita* (ibid. 1979: 58). However, in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord *Krishna* describes the character of a moral person as one who sets aside selfish desires, who feels self-contentment, who is absent of ego, not affected by the duality of the world, one who does not think about the fruits of what one does, and one who commits to duty for the sake of duty (Joshi 1991: 91-92). As much as these moral values were applicable to individuals in the context of their caste duties, they share a universal basis.

Furthermore, K. Damodaran observes that the ethics of the *Gita* have arisen from a liberal philosophic outlook (Damodaran 1967: 192). This meant that the ethics of the *Gita* did not emerge from an orthodox system of closed values just passed down from one generation to another but it emerged out of the freethinking and contextual situation in which *Arjuna* and *Krishna* found themselves. The notion of equality that he advocates is based on two fundamental proposals viz. the linking of individual souls with one another which is encapsulated in the idea of injury to another is an injury to oneself (ibid. 1967: 192), and secondly, that the notion that the Lord is immanent in all

may mean that all human beings from *brahmin* to *chandala* are equal before God (ibid. 1967: 193). Both these principles consist of ethical essences that point to the notion of justifying the human rights principle of human equality and dignity. Therefore the ethics of the *Gita* can contribute to theoretical propositions towards the global ethical discourse that add meaning to the notions of human equality and dignity.

In the ethical discourse, it is often submitted that its methodology is in quest of a universal ethical standard. In this regard Mess notes that:

Hinduism recognizes no universal ethical standard. The standard varies according to the degree of development of the individual or the group. It varies even according to the stages of life of the individual or the group (Mess 1986: 18)

This does not mean that the various people cannot establish a universal ideal among themselves. To find one central idea of good may present challenges to the ethical discourse.

Sri Aurobindo notes that the central interest of the *Gita's* philosophy and Yoga is to effect a kind of unity between the inner spiritual truth in its most absolute and integral realization and the outer actualities of man's life and action (<http://www.searchforlight.org/Gita>). He notes that the *Gita* sets out with an

ethical problem in which we have on the one side the *dharma* of the man of action and on the other side the ethical sense which condemns the means and the action as a sin (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>). The issues of truth, right and justice; and wrong and injustice are at the forefront of the mental conflict facing *Arjuna*. The issues of individual suffering, social strife, social disturbance as a result of the violence and battle and the right moral attitude is placed before *Arjuna* before the commencement of the battle (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>). Aurobindo notes that a spiritualized ethics insists on Ahimsa or non-injury and non-killing as the highest law of spiritual conduct (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>), yet social duty demands the very opposite. This is ethical conflict and therefore such conflicts are resolved by making reference to ultimate ends.

Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo notes the struggle between social duty and an absolutist ethical idea and suggests that an inner spiritual direction may point away from life and may aim at a celestial supracosmic state, which is beyond the state of birth and death (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>). Having said this, he maintains that the *Gita* insists on the performance of social duty and accepts *Ahimsa* as part of the highest spiritual ethical ideal (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>). Therefore, he asserts the compatibility of human action and spiritual life lived in union with the Infinite (ibid. <http://www.searchforlight>) as a resolution to ethical dilemmas.

Hiriyanna notes that the *Bhagavad Gita*, not only concerns itself with the problems of conduct (ethics), it touches upon metaphysical questions as well, which form the background to the ethical teaching (Hiriyanna 1993: 117). He concludes that the central part of the *Gita's* teaching is activism (ibid. 1993: 118). This activism, in the *Gita's* sense, refers to duties or social obligations in accordance with custom and tradition (Hiriyanna 1993: 118-119). The ethical paradigm of the *Gita* emphasized the notion of focussing on the act and neglecting the result, in other words, making the action the end in itself (ibid. 1993, p119). In this regard, Hiriyanna stated:

An important consequence of following this principle of action is that one can act with complete equanimity. Desire or self interest when allowed to have its sway over us may blind us to what is right, and even when we succeed in choosing to do the right deed, undue eagerness to secure its fruit may induce us to swerve from the path of rectitude (Hiriyanna 1993: 119-120).

Hiriyanna believes that the *Gita's* ethic is to engage in action within a social order and abandon the idea of deriving personal benefit from such action (ibid. 1993: 120). He highlights the *Gita's* emphasis of *svadharma* (one's own *dharma* or social obligation). The purpose of performing these selfless duties is to purify the heart and for subserving the purpose of God (ibid. 1993: 125).

Both of these lead to self realization and God realization in which the realm of good and evil is transcended (ibid. 1993: 126).

Dasgupta notes that the ethics of the *Gita* focuses on uprooting attachments to pleasures and controlling desire because attachment and desire are the seeds of frustration, and anger (Dasgupta Vol. 2, 1941: 496-498). He also notes that the *Gita* does not make a case for universal altruism that one should live only for others (ibid. 1941: 501). He observes that when action is performed without attachment and for action sake, then the evil effects of the action will not affect or impact on the performer (Dasgupta 1941: 503). He notes that the ethical theory of the *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims that the goodness and badness of an action does not depend upon the external effects of the action but upon the inner motive of the action (Dasgupta 1941: 507). Therefore, the morality theory of the *Gita* proposes a deeply subjective basis (ibid. 1941: 507). Dasgupta notes that the ethics of the *Gita* emphasizes duty and responsibility as a social obligation (ibid. 1941: 509). He also notes that the virtue of *samatva* (sameness; balanced) is the great ideal of the *Gita* which is exercised in three contexts viz (I) subjective sameness which is the equanimity of the mind in joys and sorrows, praise and blame, and in all situations in life (ii) objective sameness which refers to regarding all people good, bad or indifferent a friend or enemy, with equal eyes and seeing them the same (iii) level of transcendence refers to a state of self realization (ibid. 1941: 511-512) in which all are seen as manifestations of God.

Radhakrishnan notes that the end that we seek is becoming *Brahman*, which is the absolute value (Radhakrishnan Vol. 1, 1923: 553). He notes that the end is the same no matter whichever standpoint we take (ibid. 1923: 553). The *Gita* demonstrates that different pathways are not ultimately different but lead to the same goal (ibid. 1923: 554). This can become the basis of debating the common ultimate end.

The virtues highlighted by the *Gita* correlate with that of the *Upanishads* and emphasize individual and social ethical conduct. The distinction between virtue and vice is clarified in the *Gita* and such a distinction is calculated on the basis of its relationship to the ultimate end and not the contextual nature of action. The presupposition of the immanence of God in the heart of all is an ideal notion to support the idea of the human equality and dignity. However, this idea of unity is not confined to the human world but also extends to the nature world and the spirit world. It is conclusive that it is difficult to establish a universal moral action in the empirical plane. This difficulty is resolved by connecting outward action to the inward spiritual sphere. The ethical discourse generally links moral action to the psychological sphere, however, the *Gita* proposes a link to the inward spiritual sphere. It is this link that will establish the ethical nature of the means. The *Gita's* ethical activism advocates the ideal of fulfilling social obligations through individual duty (*svadharma*). Psychological activity can impact on ethical conduct and therefore

psychological purity through duty is prescribed. The *Cita* does not propose a philosophy of universal altruism but a morality based on equal vision.

4.4 The Place of Ethics in Vedanta

In this investigation, the study will probe the place of ethics in *Vedanta*. Scholars have often articulated that *Vedanta* is a post ethical metaphysical system, therefore leaving very little room for ethical interpretation. This study will evaluate whether such a position is true and if not, then to what extent can the *Vedanta* contribute to the global ethical discourse. In this analysis, this study will investigate the nature of ethics and the ultimate state; the conception of perfection and good; ethics and duality; the transcendence of ethics in *Advaita*; the nature of activity in *Advaita*; the validity of ethics in *Advaita*; the doctrine of inherent divinity; the aims of ethics; ethics and a character-less reality; and the depreciation of personality as a system to establish the place that *Vedanta* gives to ethics. The fundamental question that needs to be raised is whether *Vedanta* contributes to ethical endeavor? Whether ethical principles have their place in the ultimate state? Can ethical life be maintained in its fullness on the basis of the doctrine of abstract and unmodified identity between characterless Absolute and us? These questions are the starting point in the exploration of the place that *Vedanta* gives to ethics.

Urquhart notes that the ethical achievement of a pious man is not the final and that his ethical gains are not carried forward to the ultimate state (Urquhart 1986: 172). This, in reality, will mean that there is no real relevance for ethics. This is a position that differs fundamentally from that of Radhakrishnan, which was articulated earlier. It is also observed from a *Vedantic* standpoint, that the notion of perfection is considered as a higher ethical concept than the concept of good and the latter is confined to finite experiences and not to the ultimate reality as a whole (ibid. 1986: 172). So the higher ethical standard will be absolute perfection instead of what is relatively good. One of the central proposals of the traditional ethical theory is that ethics belongs essentially to the sphere of duality and is not within any sphere in which activity is denied or transcended (Urquhart 1986: 172). This is because ethics is embodied in moral action and not simply in ethical thinking and theorizing.

Shankara understood that ethical endeavor was impossible without individuality and personality. (Urquhart 1986: 173). It is not possible to deny one's individual existence or sublimate it in the context of ethics. Ethical notions are connected to individuality and personality. He also maintains that ego cannot be got rid of in moral progress and as long as ego is present it is impossible to attain the highest (ibid. 1986: 173). Therefore, his conclusion is that ethics must be transcended or left behind (ibid. 1986: 173). *Shankara* could not see a direct place for his metaphysical ideas in the context of the traditional ethical ideas. However, *Shankara's* ideas need to be re-evaluated in relation to

the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, Urquhart, issues the warning that just because *Shankara* assigns a subordinate place to works, does not mean that they have no importance at all and he concludes that there is a close connection between *Vedanta* teaching and the practice of higher virtues (ibid. 1986: 174).

Urquhart also observes that “Depreciation of the individual seems to result inevitably in a depreciation of ethics”. (ibid. 1986: 174). Therefore, the idea of depreciating the individual is of little significance to the global ethical discourse. Instead *Shankara*’s understanding of the empirical individual identity needs to be collaborated with the global ethical discourse. If this point is to be taken into consideration then the notion of the individual and social life must aim to reach and abide in perfection. If this is so, then one must give absolute validity to ethics (ibid. 1986: 175). In *Vedanta*, it must be noted that while highest condition of the soul may not necessarily be the highest ethical state (ibid. 1986: 175), the evolution of the individual towards the highest condition has ethical relevance. So the notion of the individual cannot be depreciated or reduced in value.

Now on the issue of inherent divinity, one of the problems with the doctrine of the inherent divinity, which affirms that God is found within man, is that it equalizes man with God. If man can claim that he is godlike, he therefore does not stand in need of any ethical improvement (Urquhart 1986: 176) In response to this, Radhakrishnan notes that “God is not in man in such an obvious fashion

that he can possess Him absentmindedly and without a struggle. God is present as a potential or a possibility” (in Urquhart 1986: 177). This means that every individual has the potential of realizing the Divine that is situated within. The process of realizing this Divinity is an ethical one. Therefore, it would be incorrect to assume that on declaring one’s inherent divinity, one has perfected the human condition. Furthermore, the doctrine of inherent divinity consumes all superficial and artificial distinctions in social relationships, where one’s own self is conceived as the other (Urquhart 1986: 178). This doctrine forms a powerful theoretical base for the principle of equality in the human rights discourse and the global ethical discourse. However, the common criticism of this doctrine is that it allows for social injustice when one promotes one’s own interest thinking that in so doing the interest of the other will be promoted because all are one through the self. This criticism does not carry because in the context of the doctrine of inherent divinity, there is the doctrine of “duty” which is prescribed for each individual. Notwithstanding the fact that every individual is ontologically linked, there is also the need for the individual to perform his prescribed duty for the benefit of society.

Urquhart observes that there is a fundamental deficiency in *Shankara*’s concept of identity because it is not differentiating enough to provide a basis for social ethics (Urquhart 1986: 178-179). Urquhart says:

[a]n identification with others which is associated with a denial of their reality as individuals is absolutely fatal to ethical endeavor of a social character (ibid. 1986: 179)

It is observed that the notion of identity in the context of a characterless *Brahman* means nothing that has importance for ethics (ibid. 1986: 181). In this regards Urquhart says:

Ethics refuses to be satisfied with a characterless Absolute. It demands a Reality having a character, which may constitute our goal (Urquhart 1986: 182)

It must be noted that the conception of an eternal self which is conceptualized as ultimately unchangeable stands in no need to add good qualities or remove bad ones (Urquhart 1986: 182). Ethics depends on a sphere of reality in which it may work and be characterized by common experience, which takes into account the evil, and sorrow of the world and does not relegate these to the sphere of unreality (ibid. 1986: 183). Individual personality is not an accident or anomaly but is normal to the universe and therefore ethics cannot be secured if it is associated with the depreciation of the personality (Urquhart 1986: 187). Urquhart's conclusion is summed up as follows that God must be brought from the negative to the positive organic relationship with the world through contact with history and must be made present in endeavors in men (ibid. p190).

However, for the purpose of this study the notion of *Shankara*'s "individual personality" must not be allowed to be depreciated but be given a new interpretation. Furthermore, while Urquhart may find little significance of a negative notion of the ultimate, an interpretation of it for the purposes of satisfying the global quest may be relevant for the global ethical discourse.

It is inevitable to conclude that there is very little room or relevance for personal or social ethics in an ultimate state. However, the ultimate reality must serve as a absolute substratum to be reinterpreted and be given social relevance by the global community. Furthermore, if the ultimate reality stands for an absolute point of reference, which is with character and is the final goal of existence, then it is easy to find a place in it for ethics. Whilst global ethics can be derived from the *Advaitic* tradition its relevance for a dualistic system cannot be ignored as well. In fact the ultimate ends of *Advaita* need to give validity to a global ethical system if such ultimate ends are to be of common human relevance. If *Advaita* aims to depreciate the nature of individuality, then it will destroy ethics. Therefore ethics must rely on and direct the interpretation of the empirical individual in the context of its relation to the ultimate goal. Even the doctrine of inherent divinity, which may present hermeneutical challenges, gives added meaning to ethical behavior. So the idealists and theists of *Vedanta* both have a contribution to make in developing the global ethical discourse.

4.5 The Concept Dharma

In the previous section we explored the ethical vision of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita* and established various ethical ideas that constitute the general traditional ethical discourse in Indian thought. However, in this reflection we will focus on the analysis of the notion of *dharma*, which is considered to be the cornerstone of traditional Hindu ethics.

4.6 Definition of Dharma

In this part a detailed analysis of the concept of *dharma* will be pursued. This analysis will focus on the root meaning of the term *dharma*, the definition given by the lawgiver *Manu*, the relationship between the concept *dharma* and *rita*, *dharma* as an action concept, the basis of *dharma* for moral, social, and religious meaning, the relation of *dharma* to subsidiary concepts, and the notion of *dharma* in Scriptures. This analysis will give sufficient light on the meaning of the term *dharma* and the manner in which it has been used in the traditional ethical discourse. It is proposed that the theoretical features of the notion *dharma* will be able to contribute to the presuppositions of the global ethic.

Mess notes that the term *dharma* is derived from the root “*dhri*” which means support, sustain, maintain, hold or keep (Mess 1986: 6). Bhagavan Das defines the idea of *dharma* as follows:

That which holds a thing together, makes it what it is, prevents it from breaking up and changing it into something else, its characteristic function, its peculiar property, its fundamental attribute, its essential nature, is its *dharma*, the law of its being, primarily (in Mess 1986: 11).

Furthermore, it is noted that *Manu* defines *Dharma* in terms of the following virtues: “contentment, forgiveness, self control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness and abstention from anger” (Mess 1986: 11-12). *Manu* also notes that *dharma* is taken in the sense of good works or merit performed by an individual which will be carried by the individual beyond Death (ibid. 1986: 12). It is noted from the contribution of *Manu* that the notion of *dharma* is strongly associated with the idea of Divine Justice in which both cause and effect tend towards some form of equilibrium (ibid. 1986: 13). It is clear that *Manu*’s interpretation reveals that ethical constructs have metaphysical relevance and is also linked to eschatological ideals.

There is also a keen relationship between the notion of *dharma* and *ṛta*. Mess notes that the notion of *ṛta* is used in the sense of law and order in the *Vedas* and it assumes the function of being a sustaining principle of the higher and lower worlds (ibid. 1986: 9). It is furthermore noted that the notion of *ṛta* has an ethical character and it also stands for social and moral order, with the social order being an instrument of the moral order (Mess 1986: 9). Following the line of Max Muller's interpretation of the word, it is possible to establish that the word *ṛta* refers to Law or Nature or Moral Law (ibid. 1986: 9). Furthermore, following the interpretation of Rudolf Otto, it is possible to establish that the notion of *ṛta* means, order, to regulate and is expressed in social life as a binding order of morals, customs, laws and manners (ibid. 1986: 10). It is clear that the notion of *dharma* and *ṛta* have functional similarities.

Lipner also notes that the notion of *dharma* means that which "bears up" (Lipner 1994: 86). He further notes that among the traditional Hindus, the term *dharma* refers to the essential characteristic or basic property of a thing (ibid. 1994: 86). He also records that *dharma* can have a physical, moral, social and religious connotation depending on the context it is used (Lipner 1994: 86). Lipner refers to *dharma* as one of the most important "action concepts" in the history of Hinduism (Lipner 1994: 83). He clarifies this notion of *dharma* as a normative concept, which serves as a reference point for everyday implementation (ibid. 1994: 83).

Swami Vivekananda, on the other hand, notes that the term *dharma* signifies the law of inner growth by which a person is supported in his present state of evolution and is shown the way to future development ([htmthanks.htm/.vices.htmvices.htm](#), p5). Prasad also notes that the notion of *dharma* is generally explicated in terms of the following subsidiary concepts *viz. sadharana dharma, varnashrama dharma* and *svadharma* (Prasad 1989: 286). According to the *Purva Mimamsa*, *dharma* is that good is determinable by the *Vedic* commands (Joshi 1991: 187). So that which is enjoined by the *Vedas* is virtue and that which is prohibited by the *Vedas* is sin (ibid. 1991: 187).

In the *Bhagavad Gita* the notion of *dharma* is translated as duties and ceremonies (Govender A 2002: 31). *Dharma* is seen as moral or religious values operating at the basic social unit *viz.* the family (ibid. 2002: 31). Swami Prabhupada translates the word *dharma* in the *Gita* to mean religion (ibid. 2002: 31). In the context of the *Gita* the highest moral value was to fulfil one's function or duty (ibid. 2002: 32). The concept of *dharma* is also used in the sense of righteousness, knowledge, discipline and advancement (ibid. 2002: 32). It is also noted that the idea of *dharma* can be said to be synonymous with the idea of selfless action (ibid. 2002: 33). In the *Gita* the concept of *dharma* is very closely related to the notion of *karma* and the *gunas* (ibid. 2002: 33-34). It is noted that in the religious texts as the *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata Purana* the notion of *Dharma* is depicted as a mythological person, revealing moral lessons (Mess 1986: 6-7).

In the *Dharma shastras*, it is possible to establish that the notion of *dharma* can be translated as a legal compromise between the ideal and the actual (Mess 1986: 14). This perhaps allows for a relativistic interpretation of *dharma*. In fact, much of what is found in the *Dharma Shastras* is accepted as Law, this means that *dharma* can also be translated as common law (Mess 1986: 14). On the issue of the difference or conflict arising between Shastra and rational law, the authority of reason is generally upheld (Mess 1986: 15).

It is quite evident that despite the root meaning of the concept *dharma*, it has assumed a variety of secondary meanings. It is very difficult to pin the notion of *dharma* to an exact area of meaning. Right from the time of *Manu* to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the concept *dharma* evolved a moral, social and religious meaning. It is anticipated that this concept may even contribute to the Global ethical discourse with renewed meaning. It is also observed that the notion of *Sanatana Dharma* is associated with the idea of universal *dharma*, which became the foundation for the idea of international law (Mess 1986: 16) and it has raised the understanding of the notion of *dharma* into a universalistic theme.

4.7 Sources of Dharma and Textual Conflicts

In the previous section we explored the meaning of the concept *dharma* in various contexts. In this part, we will explore the different sources of *dharma*

and the procedure in resolving textual conflicts and conflicts in *dharma*. The main rationale behind this analysis is to establish the method that is used in resolving conflict. The development of the global ethical discourse is bound to bring many cultures and worldviews into conflict, and it is necessary to establish a method as to how such conflicts can be resolved. This analysis will focus on the conflict between *sruti*, *smriti*, *sadachara*; the non-scriptural sources of *dharma*; the hierarchy of scriptural authority; the principle of majority opinion; the sanction to override scriptural authority; the principles of *Lokavidvasta* (popular view), *mahajana* (view of great people), and *kalivarja* (historical changes in society) and the issue of textual absolutism.

Joshi notes that in Hindu ethics *sruti*, *smriti* and *sadachara* are valid sources of the knowledge of *dharma* (Joshi 1991: 185). He also notes that *dharma* cannot be known by perception or inference therefore *sabda* is the only means of knowing it (Joshi 1991: 187). He maintains that customs; common usage and practices of saints constitute legitimate sources of *Dharma* (Joshi 1991: 187). All *Dharmashastras* and *Dharmasutra* are also essential sources of *dharma* (ibid. 1991: 188).

If there is a conflict between the *sruti* text, *smriti* text and *sadachara*, the general rule accepted is that the preceding source will hold greater authority than the succeeding one (ibid. 1991: 188). If the *smriti* is in conflict with the *sruti* then the authority of the *sruti* is upheld etc. If there are two *Vedic* texts

that are in conflict, then the conflict is resolved by holding that one of the texts states a general rule and the other states a special rule (ibid. 1991, p188). According to the *Gobhila Smriti* the opinion of the majority should prevail in the case of conflict between the *smriti* (ibid. 1991: 188).

Joshi further notes that when public opinion disapproves of that which the *smriti* has sanctioned, then according to *certain smriti* texts themselves that which is consequently *lokavidvasta* should be dropped (ibid. 1991: 189). He notes that this is an *important* concession to society for overriding scriptural authority in *certain* cases (ibid. 1991: 189). Such concepts were availed for sanctioning social changes. This does not mean that public opinion is always progressive but it justifies the point that moral and ethical knowledge cannot always be based on textual sources (Joshi 1991: 190). Furthermore, this suggests that values and norms that are sanctioned by the scriptures are not immuned from the impact of social changes.

Joshi notes that sometimes the conflict among all sources of *dharma* is so intense that all attempts at legitimizing it through scriptures are given up then the path followed by the great mass of virtuous people should be adhered to (Joshi 1991: 190-191). Joshi also notes that people can change the norms and rules or choose among the conflicting ones as individuals or as groups (ibid. 1991: 191). This provision can be used to evolve new directions for social

morality as well as individual morality and this principle is known as *mahajana* (Joshi 1991: 191).

The principle of *kalavarja* illustrates the necessity of taking into account the historical changes in the consciousness of the people through time (ibid. 1991: 191). Through this principle it becomes intelligible as to how changes in social consciousness may lead to changes in the nature of moral sanctions (Joshi. 199: 191). The tension between scriptural texts and social changes is a contemporary one and therefore requires a modern day solution. Joshi notes that extreme textual morality has never worked because social change, experience and observation, moral sensibility and public opinion have always threatened textual absolutism (ibid. 1991: 193).

It is evident that there are both scriptural and non-scriptural sources of *dharma* in Indian thought. There is a very systematic method of dealing with conflicts in *dharma* between the scriptural texts. It is also important to note that in certain instances majority opinion may be taken into account to establish a *dharmic* principle. There is also a rule to override a scriptural injunction if such an injunction is against the spirit of progress. The principles of *Lokavidvasta*, *mahajana*, *kalivarja* allow for greater mobility in establishing principles of *dharma* for the global ethical discourse and it prevents scriptural absolutism.

4.8 The Character of Dharma

In the last section we focussed on the various sources of *dharma* and the principles that inform the formulating and evaluating of *dharmaic* action. In this part of the analysis we will focus on *dharma* in relation to the different stages of one's life; the relation and integration of *dharma* to different perspectives of life; its relation to action; *dharma* as a means to ethical ends; *dharma* transcends culture of rights; *dharma*'s relation to order and choice; *dharma* and functionality; the relation of virtue and function; and finally *moksha* as the basis of justifying *dharma*. This analysis fundamentally outlines the character of *dharma* for the purpose of understanding the kind of contribution it can make to the global ethical discourse.

Mess notes that *dharma* is conceptualized according to the different stages of an individual's development and it is related to the different fields in which individual's work (Mess 1986, p22). He also notes that the notion of *dharma* has significance for the religious person, the ethical person, a legal person, a psychologist as well as a philosopher (Mess 1986: 22). Therefore, the notions of religious law, standards for good and evil, protection of right, tradition, common law and consciousness of unity can all be traced to the notion of *dharma* (ibid. 1986: 22).

Furthermore, the nature of *dharma* involves action and not flight from action (ibid. 1986: 23). Mess notes that there are many kinds of work which ranges from physical labor, emotional, mental and spiritual work that falls within the sphere of *dharma* (ibid. 1986: 23). In the fourfold purpose of life, material well-being (*Artha*), sensuous and sensual experience (*Kama*) and moral perfection (*Dharma*) are subsidiary to spiritual liberation which is the final end of man (ibid. 1986: 25-26). Mess also notes that the performing of *dharma* led to the ethical ends of health, wealth, pleasure, happiness and bliss (ibid. 1986: 28) which was part of the lifestyle of the Hindu. He also notes that *dharma* brings happiness if all discharge their own duties to the community and social groups or to the world as a whole, regardless of rights (ibid. 1986: 30).

Lipner notes that the notion of *dharma* consisted largely of rules and regulations which expressed socio-religious ideals (Lipner 1994: 83). From a socio religious perspective, *dharma* upholds private and public life and therefore establishes social, moral and religious order (ibid. 1994: 86). He notes that at the heart of this concept there are two tensions *viz.* order and chaos and between choice and necessity (ibid. 1994: 86). These tensions do impact on the ethical discourse either positively or negatively.

It must be noted that *dharma* has a relative nature and therefore does not proclaim an exclusive absolute state of Good or Evil ([htmthanks.htm/.vices.htmvices.htm](#), p5). To impose a single concept of Good is a social

injustice and therefore any attempt at defining Good is done in the context of realizing God which is the basis of the unity of existence (ibid. [htmthanks.htm](#). [./vices.htmvices.htm](#), p5).

Prasad also notes that the concept of *dharma* is not only social but also functional in the sense that every one has to follow some *dharma* because the *dharma* of an individual is located in a social function (Prasad 1989: 284). The virtue of a man is in performing his function (ibid. 1989: 284). Prasad also notes that the notion of *dharma* is deeply integrated with *svadharma*, *varnashrama dharma* and *sadharana dharma* and it does not allow for degeneration or exploitation of one order by another (ibid. 1989: 290-291). It is also noted that for some Indian thinkers the *dharmic* life is nothing but a condition for the attainment of *moksha* and *moksha* is the ultimate justifier of *dharma* (ibid. 1989: 299) The problem that may be associated with this is that a liberated person may have no purpose for any morality. This can only happen if the person is situated outside the human society (ibid. 1989: 301). Therefore, Prasad notes that *moksha* may be an amoral ideal (ibid. 1989: 301).

It is quite clear that the concept of *dharma* is multifaceted in character, it has a unifying function or a global function and it is deeply rooted in life. The concept of *dharma* appears to be very relative in nature in that it clearly defines the different stages of one's life. The different stages of life will require different functions, duties and responsibilities and this is adequately catered for

in the concept of *dharma* which is very flexible in character. Human life is fairly complex and it involves various perspectives such as the religious, the social, the economic, political, ethical etc. In this context the notion of *dharma* is adjusted to each of these perspectives, defining their essential character and responsibilities. In fact, it is like the inner guiding principle of every action. Not only is *dharma* the ethical standard for moral action, it is at the same time the means to an ethical end. This suggests that the “end” of moral action must justify the “means” of moral action and the “means” must justify the “end”. The unique feature of the notion of *dharma* is that while it compliments the culture of human rights, it also transcends it. This transcendence is based on the fact that it has an ultimate goal to fulfil.

4.8.1 Svadharma

In the last section this study ventured to establish the character of *dharma* in a multifaceted context. It became evident that the concept of *dharma* is more than just an ethical concept, it is a social, economic and political concept as well. In this part, this study will analyze the subsidiary notion of *dharma viz.* the concept of *svadharma*. This reflection will focus on *svadharma* as an individual professional duty; the links with rebirth; the relation of *svadharma* and *sanatana dharma*; and *svadharma* as caste duties. The notion of *svadharma* is situated in traditional professional ethics and it is the objective of this thesis

to establish the theoretical features of this notion and evaluate the extent to which it can contribute to the global ethical discourse.

Mess notes that the notion of *svadharma* is taken as the *dharma* of an individual, which is limited to the effects of one's previous life and which hampers one's present unfoldment (Mess 1986: 17). This would mean that *svadharma* is a determined phenomena rather than one taken by free will. It also refers to the inmost law that points to the evolution of the individual member of a social group (ibid. 1986: 19). This notion of *svadharma* may be extended to include not only the individual but also the social group and the state. It is a concept that applies individually as well as collectively to a group of people engaged in the same duty. Lipner notes that *svadharma* meant applying this universalistic ethic of *sanatana dharma* in the circumstances of one's own life (Lipner 1994: 228). This means that there must be no contradiction between the universal ethic and the individual ethic. This is an important theoretical contribution to the global ethical discourse.

Prasad, on the other hand notes that *svadharma* really means *varnashrama dharma* but the word gives the impression that what it denotes is related to man's nature in some inviolable manner (Prasad 1989: 286). In this context it would mean that individual duty as an individual ethic is performed within the scheme of collective ethics. Prasad also notes that the concept of *svadharma* literally means "one's own *dharma*" (ibid. 1989: 287). In making reference to

the *Bhagavad Gita*, he notes that the concept of *svadharma* is used in the sense of caste obligations (ibid. 1989: 288). One may also interpret *svadharma* to mean a set of professional obligations, with such obligations being based on the skill and competency of the individual (Prasad 1989: 288). Prasad notes that *Krishna* describes *svadharma* as doing such actions which one is fitted to do in virtue of his nature or his psycho-physical make up (Prasad 1989: 288). This may not be possible if caste duty was considered on the basis of birth. Prasad further notes that the concept of *svadharma* is similar to the notion of *varnashrama dharma* but may have an emotive advantage based on the fact that it calls an action one's own *dharma* thus creating an impression that *dharma* has an intimate category to it (ibid. 1989: 288). He finally notes that the notion of *dharma* has built into it an element of obligatoriness, in which one is obligated to do what his *svadharma*, enjoins him to do (ibid. 1989: 289).

The notion of *svadharma* is precisely referring to an individual form of action carried out by an individual, society or state in order to fulfil a particular end. In some interpretations it can stand for professional duties and ethics. In the classical understanding the notion of *svadharma* was linked to rebirth and it seems to justify itself in the context of the rebirth theory. It also referred to social duty that an individual took on in continued fulfillment of some form of Divine justice, and in which the individual believed that he was trapped by previous *karma*. However, the individual had choices to change the condition or state of his being. Furthermore, the concept of *svadharma* is testimony of the

possibility of universal *dharma*, at the level of the absolute, to function at the level of the particular. In other words, global truths and ethics must have individual and specific relevance; it must be translated for a specific situation or context. The notion of *svadharma* represents this trend.

4.8.2 Sadharana Dharma (Personalistic Virtues)

In the last section we examined the notion of *svadharma* as an individualistic professional ethic and the possibility of it representing the idea of particularistic ethics against the backdrop of universalistic ethics. In this part, this study will explore the notion of *sadharana dharma*. This analysis will focus on the interpretation of *sadharana dharma* by *Manu*, Lipner and Prasad; the contextual variation of its meaning; the element of choice and freewill associated with it; its democratic and liberal nature; its universal nature; its association with social obligation and behavior.

Manu submits the following as part of *sadharana dharma* viz. non-injury, truth, not stealing or coveting, purity, control of the senses (Lipner 1994: 223). *Manu* also considers *ahimsa* as an important moral practice and suggests that it is a central part of *dharma* (ibid. 1994: 223) *Manu* notes that *Kshatriyas* were exempt from the injunction not to injure because it was in their line of duty to commit to the act of violence (ibid. 1994: 224). *Manu* suggests that there are certain types of injury that were meant for the fulfillment of the *Veda* that was

exempted from being called *himsa* (violent) (ibid. 1994: 224). There were also examples of permissible violence in animal sacrificial rites (ibid. 1994: 224). It is noted that the practice of *suttee/sati*, which is a suicidal form of self-injury, was recommended in traditional society and although it was recommended, it was not enforced upon woman (ibid. 1994: 225). There is also evidence of the tension between *sadharana dharma* and *svadharma* observed in Hindu ethical practice. During the 19th century the notion of *sanatana dharma*, during the times of Ram Mohon Roy, assumed an egalitarian ethic embracing women and untouchables (Lipner 1994: 228). By the time of Gandhi the notion of *ahimsa* also assumed a universal ethical status (ibid. 1994: 228).

Prasad refers to *sadharana dharma* as universal *dharma*, which contain obligations that are binding upon everyone (Prasad 1989: 286). He notes that everyone has the obligation to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness, mercifulness, forgiveness, selflessness, non-violence, hospitality to guest's etc. (ibid. 1989: 286). Prasad also notes that the virtues that constitute *sadharana dharma* can be required only of a man living in a society, it makes no sense for such obligations to be fulfilled by a person who belongs to no society (ibid. 1989: 287).

It is quite evident that classical and modern day interpreters have given a very flexible interpretation to the notion of *sadharana dharma*. This form of *dharma* is universal and is applicable to any person irrespective of caste, race, gender

etc. It has the element of free will and choice in it, therefore, it is suited to a more democratic and liberal context. Although it is an individualistic ethical system, it is also applied in a social context for social harmony and purity. It will make an impressionable contribution to the global ethical discourse.

4.8.3 Ashrama Dharma

In the previous section we focussed on the notion of *sadharana dharma* as a universal ethic suited to a democratic and liberal social context. In this section, this study will explore the concept of *ashrama dharma* and its relevance for a global society.

Michael notes that *ashrama dharma* was formulated during the Vedic times and therefore it was more suited to the social context of those times (Michael 1979: 111). Individual life within the Indian social system was divided into four stages viz. *brahmacharya* (life of study and preparation for earthly life), *grihastha* (married life and active participation in social and political activities), *vanaprasthana* (a stage of retirement) and *sannyasa* (a life of worldly renunciation) (Damodaran 1967: 60) The *brahmacharya* is initiated into the study of the *Vedas* and is subject to a detail code of behavior that governs his/her relationship with men and women in all waiks of life (Lipner 1994: 93). At this stage, the student was governed by rules that decided his code of conduct in the presence of the teacher, the teacher's wife, and the

cultivation of virtues such as celibacy, truthfulness, obedience, humility, self control (ibid. 1994: 93). The next stage of life was the *garhasthya* (householder) which was crucial for social stability. The special duties of the householder were referred to as the “five great sacrifices” or *pancha* “*mahayajna*” (ibid. 1994: 95). These duties range from celebrating the *devas*, the ancestors, life in the world, human existence and *Brahman* (ibid. 1994: 95). Thirdly, the *vanaprasthya* (forest dweller) was a stage in which an individual progressively detached oneself from active life and focussed on serenity. The forest dweller was to remain a celibate, be sparsely clothed, practiced austerity, depended on nature and begged for food (ibid. 1994: 96). The final stage is that of the *sannyasa* or a complete renunciate. A *sannyasa* was to recite a few verses of the *Veda*, beg for his food, dwell where no kitchen smoke is seen. Although these four stages of life have their origins in the remote periods of the *Vedic* era, their general character has relevance for a global society.

4.8.4 Caturvarna Dharma System

The *caturvarna* system has been subject to intense criticism from scholars because aspects of its contemporary translation are in violation of the human rights culture. However, this analysis will focus on the technical difference between the concepts of *varna* and *jati*; the justification of caste duties; caste mobility through fulfillment of duty; origins of caste system in *Vedas*; concept of a classless society; natural components of the *varna* system; role of social,

economic and productive factors influencing *varna*; the notion of hereditary rights; the aim of the *varna* social system; *varna* and racism; the fourfold division of society; the nature of social duty; the theory of race superiority; social evolution through ethical fulfillment; modern interpretation of caste duties; social duty and after life; level of caste position and moral restraints; social inequalities and injustices; concept of mutual social service and the issue of the relations of professional ethics and ethics. This analysis will produce theoretical positions, which can be evaluated for its relevance to the global ethical discourse.

The *caturvarna* system is often referred to as the “caste system”. There are however, technical differences between the caste system or *jati* system and the *Varna* system. It must be noted that the basis of the caste system is rooted in a person’s self-evident inborn inequality at the physical, intellectual, and spiritual level and people are being born into the lower and higher castes as a result of actions in their previous birth may be assumed as the foundations of the Hindu argument for the *caturvarna* system ([. htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm](#), p3). It is also assumed that by discharging the duties determined by one’s caste, a person becomes qualified for birth in a higher caste in a future life ([ibid. htm thanks.htm. /. /vices.htmvices.htm](#), p3). This will mean that caste duties were decided by birth instead of the psycho-physical inclination of the individual. It must be noted that there are traces of social mobility between the castes, the *Brahmin* was demoted to *Shudra* and the *Shudra* promoted to Brahmin on the

basis of fulfillment of virtue (ibid. [htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm](#), p4). Although through social changes the caste system deteriorated to levels of unacceptability, in its revised form, it has upheld the caste of the *Brahmin* which it advocates as an ethical goal which human society should strive for (ibid. [.htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm](#), p4).

K. Damodaran observes that the earliest reference of the *caturvarna* system can be traced to the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig-Veda* (Damodaran 1967: 58). He notes that in the earliest days of the *Aryan* civilization there existed a classless society (ibid. 1967: 57) and it was through the growth of productive forces and material conditions that necessitated the emergence of functional roles of the *caturvarna system* (ibid. 1967: 57). He supported the idea that the four divisions were natural components of society with degrees of specialization and these divisions were shaped largely by social development, productive forces and economic factors (Damodaran 1967: 58). However, the persons that fitted into these duties were also supposed to be decided naturally, instead, the issue of birth decided the duty. It was through the passage of time that these positions became a matter of hereditary right (Damodaran 1967: 58). K. Damodaran observes that the *varna* system was structured on specific duties and responsibilities and the stability of the social order rested on the nature of relationship between the various classes based on collective rights and duties (ibid. 1967: 59)

Lipner notes that the notion of *Varna*, derived from its Vedic origins, was a term that may have racist connotations (Lipner 1994: 89). However, the *caturvarna* refers to the four caste orders of traditional Hindu society viz. the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* (ibid. 1994: 89). He confirms that membership to each *varna* was generally determined by birth (ibid. 1994: 89). Lipner also noted that the *Brahmin* (i) belonged to an exalted status (ii) presided over the sacrificial ritual which was the seat of spiritual and social power (iii) were referred to as gods among men (iv) was considered superior to all other *varnas* (v) and had the special duty of reciting, practicing and teaching the *Vedas* (ibid. 1994: 89). He notes that the *Kshatriya* were (i) kings and rulers (ii) responsible for the preservation of justice (iii) tasked to protect society (ibid. 1994, p90). He further noted that the duty of the *Vaisya* (i) was to engage basically in trade and commerce and the *Sudra* (i) belonged to the lowest *varna* (ii) not initiated into the rights and responsibilities of the *Veda* (iii) had to serve the three higher classes (iv) could win virtue and acquire ethical approval (Lipner 1994: 91).

Mess notes that the term *varna* has been mistranslated into *jati* (caste) and has created much confusion in Western thought (Mess 1986: 50-51). He also notes the challenge of translating the word *varna* and sometimes refers to it as “class” and at other times as “natural class” and in some instances to “social order” (ibid. 1986: 52). According to the Cambridge History of India, the conception of *varna* literally meant “color” and it referred to the difference of

race, the superiority of the white skinned over the dark skinned (ibid. 1986: 53). This appears to be more or less like the Colonial paradigm of racial superiority and whether this paradigm can be used to justify the interpretation of the notion of *varna* needs to be taken up. Mess notes that in the *Brahmanas* the notion of *varna* assumed a cultural implication and it celebrated altruistic behavior above egoistic conduct with the leading idea being the sociality of the individual (ibid. 1986: 54). It is also noted that in the *Vayu Purana*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata Purana* there is reference to the fact that during the Age of *Krita*, there was no *varna*, there was a classless society (ibid. 1986: 55). Mess notes that there is some form of social evolution from one social order to the next with the ideal being that of *Brahmana* (ibid. 1986: 57). This means that an individual could evolve along the social ladder on the basis of ethical fulfillment to the state of *Brahmana* until there is complete liberation. Mess suggests that the theory of *Varna* does not refer to Hindu society, but to the human society in general (ibid. 1986: 79).

It is further suggested that (I) persons concerned with guidance, education and psychological unfoldment (such as teachers, medical men, psycho-analyst, the priest) (ii) persons involved with regulative *dharma* (persons of legislative executive powers, business magnate, the military man, the policeman (iii) persons with a distributive task (in business, traffic, intercourse) and persons with a productive task (in agriculture, industry, industrial arts) – all these people are specialists in their own right (Mess 1986: 80). These four classes

have been interpreted in the modern language as the spiritual and psychological, the ruling and regulating, the distributive and finally the productive duties of life. (Mess 1986: 81). The key issue is whether there exists a distinction between professional duties and morality? It becomes apparent that professional duties and ethical values seem to produce the same desired result which final communion with God. It will be interesting to see how this model develops in a pluralistic post-modern society.

It also becomes apparent that within the theory of *varna*, the issue of social duty is placed above individual rights (ibid. 1986: 127). The idea of social duty was underpinned with the thinking that observance of duty will lead to *svarga* and infinite bliss and if violated will lead to the demise of the world order (ibid. 1986: 128). Another feature that is observed is the higher one's caste, the greater the moral and ethical restraints and rules placed on that individual (ibid. 1986: 129). Mess notes that although the *varna* system advocated a natural hierarchy, it did not mean that each order was socially unequal to another (ibid. 1986: 153). Mess advocated the notion of *Brahman* as the basis of explaining the equality of nature (ibid. 1986: 154). It is undoubted that the social duties were marked with certain degrees of privileges if we compare the *Brahmans* and *sudras*, however, this was not overemphasized and had deep psycho-spiritual reasons for them. The order of *Sudra* was justified on the grounds of providing social service to the higher classes (Mess 1986: 156). Mess interprets this social service as mutual and as performing one's *dharma* (ibid. 1986: 155).

From a spiritual point of view the work of all four *varnas*, of whatever kind it is, leads towards perfection which was observed to be a very much later development in the Vedic period (ibid. 1986: 156). There are also several examples in the literature to demonstrate that sudra born persons were spiritual instructors of *Brahman* born persons (ibid. 1986: 156). This evidence of social mobility stands against the issue of the compulsion of duty as a result of birth.

Finally, Prasad notes that caste groups are professional groups and caste ethics is professional ethics and to claim that these ethics are unalterable because they are created by God is to claim that professions and ethics are unalterable (Prasad 1989: 253). Prasad notes that to allot to professional ethics the place of ethics is a conceptual mistake because not doing one's professional duty is a professional lapse and not a moral lapse (Prasad 1989: 254). However, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna allows for professional ethics to usurp the place of ethics (ibid. 1989: 254). *Arjuna* was placed in a moral dilemma because he wanted to know whether it was morally right to fight in view of the consequences of fighting (ibid. 1989: 254). In this context, *Krishna* demonstrated that not doing one's duty would result in social disapproval as well as losing the final goal.

It is quite evident that the notion of *varna* presented many challenges for interpretations. In its traditional sense, it referred to the fourfold natural duties of society and in its deteriorated form it assumed the title of *jati* and

represented one's hereditary right to professional duties. Within the context of a traditional society and its worldview, the *varna* system could be very easily justified, but it is very difficult to maintain the system in its traditional form and to find any modern day relevance for it. Although caste mobility was previously possible through fulfillment of duty, today social mobility depends on levels of functional specialization and has nothing to do with ethical conformities. The *Vedic* idea of a classless society is a modern day communist ideal. However, right from the *Vedic* times it became apparent that society cannot be without division and class differences. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that productive economic and social forces, which are the dominant forces of the post-modern society are demanding specialized functions. The theory of *Varna* being associated with racism or race superiority may be difficult to prove given the clear evidence of it representing a functional purpose in society. It is also possible to show that the traditional functional roles of *varna* can very easily be translated into modern day social functions. The one important lesson that reveals the deep connection of the social and the spiritual in traditional Hindu society is the fact that social duties were linked with the ethical goals of after-life. This meant that social functions were deeply interwoven in ethical norms. This becomes clear when one observes that the different social functions carried various levels of ethical and moral restraints with it. Although social inequalities and injustices were evident in the traditional *Varna* system, such inequalities and injustices were mere interpretations and were never viewed as such. All members of society were

given responsibility and duties. Injustice would come about only when duty was violated. It must be noted that the *varna* system has many positive elements that could contribute to the modern day global ethical discourse.

4.8.5 Purushartha – Theory of Human Values

In the previous section a detailed analysis of the notion of *caturvarna* in the context of the traditional worldview was pursued. A detailed examination of the functional structure of society and the ethical roles those individuals were obliged to perform. In this analysis we shall examine the concept of *Purushartha*. This reflection will focus on the four goals of human life; the relation of the goals to sacrificial tradition; the concepts of *pap* and *punya*; the meanings of *artha* and *kama* in relation to *moksha*; the concept of *moksha*; the nature of Hindu ethical striving; *moksha* as a trans-moral concept; the social nature of *trivarga*; the principle of regulation. The main purpose of this analysis is to establish theoretical positions that can be evaluated for its relevance to the global ethical discourse.

It is noted that in Hinduism there were largely four important goals viz. *artha* (prosperity); *Kama* (gratification), *dharma* (religious merit) and *moksha* (liberation from *samsara*) (Lipner 1994: 159-160). Lipner also notes that these three goals initially centered around the *Vedic* sacrificial tradition with *artha* referring to the means required to fund the *Vedic* sacrifice, *kama* meant the

satisfaction gained from the fruits of the sacrifice, and *dharma* meant the religious merit acquired by regular and proper performance of the sacrifice (ibid. 1994: 160). He also notes that the pursuit of *artha* and *Kama* was set in an ethical context and was not opposed to *dharma* (Lipner 1994: 160). The terms *pap* and *punya* are generally used to indicate merit and demerit in the traditional ethical discourse (ibid. 1994: 214).

Artha is generally translated as prosperity and therefore is underpinned by the idea of wealth. It must be affirmed that Hindus recognize wealth as a legitimate and indispensable ethical property and must be used for individual and social welfare upliftment (.htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm, p6). *Kama* refers to sense pleasure and it is encouraged as long as it promotes spiritual freedom and is not in violation of *dharma* (ibid. .htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm, p6). The hedonists alone regard sense pleasure as an end in itself. Prasad notes that *kama* means desire but in the theory of *Purushartha* it denotes the satisfaction of desire which results from the fulfillment of desire (opcit. 1989, p278). He notes that the word *kama* does not include in the commonly accepted version of the theory a desire for *moksha* (ibid. 1989, p278).

Moksha is the highest ethical goal that emerges as a result of ethical striving. *Moksha* is related to the idea of absolute freedom from the finiteness and limitations of worldly experience (opcit. .htmthanks.htm./vices.htmvices.htm, p6). So the Hindu ethical striving is transcendental and post-empirical in

nature. Prasad notes that *moksha* is denoted as the highest to which *dharma* is treated as the means (Prasad 1989: 279). *Moksha* denotes freedom from the chain of birth and death, freedom from *karma* and is taken as a purely intrinsic value of the highest order (ibid. 1989: 279). *Moksha* cannot be said to be a moral goal because it is odd to say that a man who is not interested in seeking *moksha* is not interested in leading a moral life or one who is not a *mukta* (liberated) is not a moral person (Prasad 1989: 305).

Prasad notes that the theory of *Purushartha* is central to classical Indian ethics (ibid. 1989: 275). Etymologically, *Purushartha* means that which is aimed at or desired (ibid. 1989: 277). It denotes both positive and negative desires (ibid. 1989: 277). Prasad notes that this theory appears to depict the complete life-plan of a viable citizen (ibid. 1989: 280). He also notes that *artha* and *dharma* are social goals, which can be sought only in the social world by the social man (ibid. 1989: 281). Prasad observes that *dharma* is a regulator in the context of *artha* and *Kama* and an individual who pursues them must not transgress *dharma* (ibid. 1989: 282).

The four traditional human goals have evolved from the *Vedic* vision of life and they constitute elements that are evident in a modern society. Although these four values have been rooted within the context of the sacrificial tradition, it is easy to give to them fresh interpretations. Such interpretations are evident in the works of most modern day scholars. Although the concepts of merit and

demerit have their beginnings in the traditional ethical discourse, these concepts have immense value for the contemporary ethical discourse. Defining what is ethical and unethical is what results in the actualization of demerit and demerit. As much as the concept of moksha is trans-moral in character, it represents an ideal or an end in which ethical fulfillment culminates. The notion of *dharma* serving as a social regulator is vital in the ethical discourse. Every moral action is determined by some form of regulator that prevents the content of that action from deteriorating to immorality.

4.9 Karma

In the foregoing section, we concentrated on the concept of *Purushartha* as a set of socio-spiritual values and demonstrated their place in the ethical scheme of life of the *Vedic* people. We also identified the key ethical values of the traditional society and how they are derived and with what purpose. In this section, the analysis will focus on the notion of *karma*. This analysis will examine the nature of *karma*; *karma* and rebirth; *karma* and the consequence theory; types of cyclic *karmic* actions; the issue of freedom and determinism; *karma* and intentional action; *karma* and the law of causation; *karma* and god; the theory of reward and punishment; *karma* and bondage; *karma* and non-attachment; *karma* and duty and accounting for human diversity.

Mess believes that the notion of *karma* is related to the notion of *dharma* (Mess 1986: 20), however, he does not show precisely how this relationship is brought about. About the nature of *karma*, Lipner notes that there is a link between certain kinds of *karma* and the fruits that they produce, whether it is good or bad (Lipner 1994: 230). Traditional methodology always leads us to tracing ethical notions in the scriptures. In this regard, Lipner notes that the notion of *karma* and rebirth are not clearly evident in the *Samhita* portion of the scriptures (ibid. 1994: 230). Notwithstanding this, he observed that it is only in the *Upanishads* that there is a clear reference to these ethical principles (Lipner 1994: 230). One of the central assumptions to *karma* is that good *karmic* action leads one to acquire a good birth by being born in the home of a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* or *Vaisya* and those who perform poor *karma* will take birth among dog, pigs or *chandala* (Lipner 1994: 231). This traditional understanding urged individuals to perform good action in order to avoid the lower birthforms. It is also clear that ethical action is consequential in the *Vedic* tradition. Therefore, there is some connection between moral striving and the attainment of salvation, which is represented by the notion of *karma* (ibid. 1994: 232).

One of the primary methods noted by Lipner on the traditional ethical discourse is not to reject totally any previous teaching but to assimilate it into a new synthesis (ibid. 1994: 232). Therefore, the *karma* paradigm needs to be understood in the context of the contemporary ethical discourse so that it may contribute towards a global ethic. The notion of the four types of *karma*

documented by Hindus viz. (i) *prarabdha* which refers to *karma* that is maturing in one's life, which one has no control over (ii) *kriyamana karma* – refers to present *karma* or *karma* in the making (iii) *samcita karma* – this is accumulated *karma* which is not being activated (ibid. 1994: 237) and (iv) *agami karma* which are the foundations of explaining the cycle of *karma*. There is a subtle difference between *kriyamana* and *agami karma* in that the former is limited to the present life whereas the latter is extended to the future and determines the future. These three principles work towards accounting for the system of moral justice that is found in the world. However, there is no absolute form of determinism enveloped in this theory. Lipner notes that while it is not possible to gain control over the genetic make up and other determinants of life there is a *certain* amount of freedom that an individual exercises in what one chooses in life (Lipner 1994: 237). So he concludes that there is a balance between deterministic forces and that of free will (ibid. 1994: 237).

Prasad, on the other hand, notes that belief in the law of *karma* is widely accepted by all schools of classical Indian thought (Prasad 1989: 210). The reason for examining the notion of *karma* is that almost all-modern interpreters have claimed it to be a central part to Indian ethics. In analyzing the notion of *karma* as an ethical concept, Prasad uses the term *karma* in the sense of normal or intentional action (ibid. 1989: 213). Moral action is not only understood in terms of its physical expression but also in terms of its psychological intent.

One of the characteristic features of the law of *karma* is that it applies to both human and non-human beings (Prasad 1989: 213). This indeed declares the universal operation of this moral law and it must therefore be interpreted in this context. It is noted that the law of *karma* is the counterpart in the moral world of the physical law of uniformity and is also referred to as the law of conservation of moral energy (ibid. 1989: 214). The law of *karma* is similar to the law of causation, which stipulates that every cause has an effect and an effect is the antecedent cause of another effect (ibid. 1989: 214). The law operates in such a manner that an individual gets what he deserves. The law stipulates that good action leads to happiness and bad actions lead to unhappiness. Prasad notes that it is this postulate of what the individual deserves as a result of his actions that makes the law of *karma* a postulate of morality (ibid. 1989: 215). This is perhaps a very challenging part to the ethical theory because there are several problematic questions that can be raised around this issue. However, this study will concentrate on the elements of *karma* that can contribute to the global ethical discourse.

Prasad notes that the consequences of *samchita* actions can be avoided by the attainment of right knowledge (ie. knowledge of the ultimate reality) but those of *prarabdha* cannot (Prasad 1989: 217). He notes that all actions are morally relevant or important (ibid. 1989: 221). The theory of *karma* is closely associated with the notion of rebirth, which stipulates that every birth is a rebirth preceded by death and every death is a death succeeded by a rebirth

(ibid. 1989: 223). The theory of rebirth basically allows for the principle of “what one deserves” to be fulfilled (ibid. 1989: 223). This is a unique feature of an ethical theory and that is to see it operate across births with the intent of meeting out absolute justice. The theory of *karma* normally accepts a threefold causation of joys and sorrows viz. (i) those that are attributable to one’s own action (ii) some to the actions of others (iii) and some to events (ibid. 1989: 224). However, in most instances the effects caused by the actions of others and of events is interpreted as effects of one’s own actions through those agents (ibid. 1989: 225). Therefore ethical action is deeply individualistic from the point that the effects are considered to be directed to the individual and they account for the fruits of one’s action, irrespective of the source of the initiating action.

Prasad also notes that there is a theistic version to the law of *karma* in which God is viewed as the moral administrator of the world (Prasad 1989: 225). It is noted that it is God that evaluates the moral worth of our action and decides what we deserve on account of them (Prasad 1989: 225). This theory may present several problems until we clarify this god as a “world god” that is acceptable to all. Also built into the theory of *karma* is the conception of reward and punishment. Prasad notes that whether the reward or punishment is given out by human or God it must be fair and just (ibid. 1989: 227). The interpretation of what is fair and just is also problematic because it is relative because of the relative nature of the reward and punishment. It must be noted

that the consequence of right action must be empirical so that it is realizable in some visible good, notwithstanding the fact that this visible good changes from time to time. Prasad submits that a moral law is a reason providing law, a law providing not merely a reason but some sort of an overriding reason, or the criterion of such a reason (ibid. 1989: 232). This is vital, however, it must not be made an end in itself but should serve as a basis on which moral law can be derived. Prasad also notes that the law of *karma* is a retributive law and therefore is opposed to consequentialism and utilitarianism (ibid. 1989: 233). Prasad also notes that from *karmic* theory it is not possible to discern in a direct way which action leads to happiness and which to suffering and therefore he concludes that it is difficult to obtain from *karmic* theory a motivational push to act correctly (ibid. 1989: 235). It is the ethical ends that are the source of motivation for one to act ethically. Actions that result in some consequence are actions that arise from desire or motive, and are classified as intentional action or action done in order to secure something in return (ibid. 1989: 238).

Actions cause bondage and one is inevitably caught up in the cycle of birth and death (ibid. 1989: 239). Not all effects of one's actions are accounted for in just one birth, there are several births in which an individual meets out his consequences (Prasad 1989: 239). All actions whether morally right or wrong results in bondage (Prasad 1989: 239). The remedy to this problem is to perform non-attached action and to acquire right knowledge (Prasad 1989: 239). Associated with this issue is the debate of double-punishment through the

legal and ethical consequence theory. An individual who commits an unethical act may also commit an illegal act and may be punished by (i) the natural consequence of the cause-effect theory and (ii) by serving imprisonment for such a crime. It is interesting to see how this issue develops in the context of the global ethical discourse.

By non-attachment it is generally meant that the doer has no attachment, this means that there is no care or interest in the results of the action (ibid. 1989: 239). Indian classical thinkers did not create a condition of absolute desireless in action, instead they developed the idea of having desire for moksha (ibid. 1989: 240). It must be noted that attachment or non-attachment to an action does not make the action either morally right or wrong (ibid. 1989: 243). It is also noted that desireful action may result in both happiness and unhappiness while desireless action results in freedom from rebirth (ibid. 1989: 247). Prasad also notes that classical thinkers propounded the view that non-attachment destroys the causal power of action (ibid. 1989: 248) This means that if an action is performed without any desire, whether it is moral or immoral, it removes the binding nature of the action (eg. of the profession of the whore often referred to). (ibid. 1989: 248). It must be noted that the moral rightness of the action cannot remove rebirth but it is the non-attachment to the action that removes rebirth (ibid. 1989: 248).

Prasad further notes that the theory of duty is a very *important* constituent in Indian philosophy and it is generally assumed to be a moral principle (Prasad 1989: 249). In order to get rid of bondage the sole motive for an action should be for the sake of duty (ibid. 1989: 251). Prasad notes that the concordance of duty and desire does take place and from a moral point of view it cannot be called undesirable (ibid. 1989: 251). Indian moral teachers urge individuals not to tone down their desires but to have none (Prasad 1989: 257).

Radhakrishnan is of the view that people are born unequal, unequal in caste, talents, conditions and circumstances of life, physical, and intellectual and in moral endowments and it is the belief in *karma*, which explains the diversity of the human conditions (in Michael 1979: 10). Radhakrishnan also notes that *karma* signifies any action or deed and therefore every action by its nature produces an effect, whether mental, verbal or physical (Michael 1979: 11). Michael notes that in the *Upanishads* action springs from desire therefore whenever a deed is done the mind and subtle body follow the deed (ibid. 1979: 11). And it is this that connects the deed to the sphere of afterlife. Radhakrishnan sees *karma* as not a mechanical principle but an ethical one (ibid. 1979: 12). Radhakrishnan notes that the theory of *karma* recognizes the rule of law both in its empirical status as well as in the psychological and ethical levels as well (ibid. 1979: 12). Yet the doctrine of *karma* does point out the past as determined but it equally emphasizes the fact that the future is conditioned (ibid. 1979: 15). It is noted that Radhakrishnan is of the view that

the Divine element in man will exert its pressure and will direct man to choose what is best for him as a spiritual being (Michael 1979: 15). Freedom is limited by past *karma* and choice means that we limit ourselves to one among the many possibilities (ibid. 1979: 16). Michael holds that *Karma* is not a principle that absolutely determines man's future, it is not a principle of retribution and has nothing to do with hedonistic or juridical reward and punishment (ibid. 1979: 20).

The theory of *karma* as an ethical discourse presents many challenges to an objective ethicist. There are several elements in this theory that will be developed and dialogued with in the global ethical discourse.

4.10 Conclusion

It is quite evident that the traditional ethical discourse is rooted in age-old concepts, methods and specific forms of interpretation. However, the ethical vision within the context of the *Vedanta*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* seem to point towards a universal ethical ethos. It is also clearly evident that concepts have revised themselves to meet the challenges of new times and in each instance the core principle of the concept was given a fresh interpretation. It was also apparent that certain concepts are very complex and carry a host of general meanings that reveal a sort of global context to it. There is evidence to support the point that traditional ethical concepts were applied universally.

However, the urge of the human spirit to reach a perfect stage of universalism seems to produce the idea of a dualistic reality, the one being characterless and the other being with a character.

CHAPTER 5 CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN GLOBAL ETHICS

In the last chapter, the study explored the traditional and contemporary ethical discourse in Hindu thought. In the context of the traditional discourse, the study attempted to construct an ethical vision of the scriptural tradition of the *Vedanta*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, which are considered most important and authoritative in Hinduism. A further exploration of the notions of *Dharma* and *Karma* were pursued with the intent of establishing elements that would contribute to the global ethical discourse and the formulation of a global ethic. In this chapter the central focus of the study is to outline the various ethical trends that constitute the postmodern era and to examine proposals for developing a framework for a global ethic. This analysis will probe the moral tradition and its interpretation, transgressions in moral ethical traditions, change in moral traditions, methods in moral tradition, different ethical systems, cultural ethical conflict, minimal universal moral standards, and the need for macro ethics. Furthermore, this study will examine the nature of ethics and moral philosophy within the western discourse; the nature of morality; the raising of fundamental ethical questions; the basis of moral reasoning; the principles of ethical relativism, individual morality, and social morality; the Kantian model of ethics; the essence, structure and function of morality; the main trends in twentieth century ethics and the phenomenon of Globalism. This analysis will provide greater insight into the western ethical

trends, which is profoundly relevant for the post-modern global ethical discourse.

5.1 Moral tradition and Interpretation

It must be noted that the world has many moral systems and each have their origins within their specific religious, theological and philosophic backgrounds. Joel J Kupperman (In Culture and Modernity: East West Philosophic Perspectives) notes that a moral tradition does not just centre on rules of conduct, it also includes training in moral significance which calls for moral reflection or moral judgement and it must provide an interpretative scheme so that situations and actions will be perceived within the categories of a given tradition and not outside of it (Deutsche 1994: 314). In fact, it is necessary to establish a hermeneutical scheme, whether it is in the context of an individual moral tradition or a global one that will engineer new meaning in the context of this evolving contemporary ethical discourse. However, the principle that must underpin a global interpretative scheme is determined by the philosophic categories of a universal tradition. These categories must be clearly defined and must serve as a framework in which any hermeneutical scheme can function.

5.2 Transgressions in Moral-Ethical traditions

The issue of ethical transgressions is essential in any ethical discourse and the key question is: are all transgressions within the different traditions weighted equally? If not, then how are they going to be reconciled for there to be a Global ethic? Joel J. Kupperman observes that all traditions may not assign equal weight to all transgressions (Deutsche 1994: 315). In the Vedic tradition, transgressions were dealt with in terms of a natural system in which an individual degenerates into the bodies of lower species on account of moral transgression. Within the Hindu worldview, this was acceptable because of the three-world theory that they uphold *viz.* the spirit world, the nature world and the human world. However, such an interpretation may experience challenges in the global ethical context. The key point is that this issue of transgressions must be incorporated into the global ethical discourse.

5.3 Change in Moral Traditions

Joel J Kupperman observes that moral traditions change over a period of time and that such changes are not only the result of philosophical argumentation or intellectual movement but it may constitute responses to the changes in the structure of society (Deutsche 1994: 316). This is a significant observation in that it reveals that hat those ethical traditions that are deeply rooted in philosophic and intellectual movements may not necessarily depend on an alteration of their

paradigms in order to effect change within their conceptual or methodological frameworks but may also be influenced by changes in the structure of society.

Bimal K Matilal notes that cultures together with their ethical systems face internal and external challenges therefore causing change, development and mutation (Deutsche 1994:152). He further asserts that:

A culture that does not react and change with time is as good as a dead one or it is dying, or at best it maintains a fossilized form of existence, fit to be turned into a museum piece (Deutsche 1994: 152)

He quotes the work of comparative ethnographers that have pointed out that *certain* core values which are unique to each culture show some resilience to change in the midst of interaction with other cultures (ibid. 1994: 152). He specifically highlights historically conditioned and environmentally generated values, which are shaped by myths, rituals etc. which offer the greatest resistance to change (ibid. 1994: 153). Notwithstanding this, he notes that they yield to slow change almost imperceptibly (ibid. 1994: 153). These observations are vital to the ethical discourse from the standpoint that ethical systems are dynamic systems, which must offer themselves for change.

Moral systems cannot remain stagnant there must be progress within their systems. Joel J Kupperman captures the notion of moral progress and sees its necessity, notwithstanding the general opprobrium it faced during the nineteenth century. He clarifies the basis on which he sees moral progress, firstly not on an improvement in actual behavior or the elevation of the peaks of human behavior, but he proposes to view it analogously (ibid. 1994: 317-318). I would like to submit that If the traditional ethical system of Hindu thought is to make a contribution to the development of a global ethic, which amounts to universal moral progress, then it must also be prepared to make changes to its inner structure.

5.4 Methods in Moral traditions

It is inevitable that the issue of methodology is going to arise in the context of developing a global ethical discourse. Most moral systems are situated within the context of their traditional methods in terms of how they derive themselves and respond to challenges. In this regard, Joel K Kupperman notes that moral traditions are not static systems, they differ from one another in their methodology towards condemnation of transgressions. He further notes that there are differences between moral traditions in so far as how they see what they condemn, what they condemn, and how they condemn it (Deutsche 1994: 316-317). It will become obvious that the specifications of individual methodologies will have to adjust itself in light of a universal methodology that

underpin the development of a Global ethic. However, such changes in methods must not create internal tensions to the point where moral systems resort to withdrawal.

5.5 Different Ethical Systems

Bimal K Matilal notes that there are various theoretical paradigms such as Singularism, Pluralism, Relativism, Conservatism that constitute a scheme in the context of ethical discourses (ibid. 1994, p141). In this analysis the study will examine these different ethical systems and test them against the standpoint of this thesis, which is the contribution towards a Global ethic.

5.5.1 Pluralism

Bimal K. Matilal notes that Pluralism allows freedom of choice and a multiplicity of the concept of common good (Deutsche 1994: 141). One of the principle assumptions of pluralism is its liberal character and its desire to accommodate diversity, which stipulates the need for the basic agreement about the indispensability of mutual toleration (ibid. 1994: 141). However, one of the challenges faced by the pluralistic paradigm is its ability to devise a judicious blending of social and political institutions that will accommodate such diversity (Deutsche 1994: 141). He also expressed the view that pluralism is not relativism (ibid. 1994: 142). He observes that the diversity of human groups

and the plurality of human goals are very ancient (ibid. 1994: 142). He also notes that the plurality that we experience is only apparent and falsely created and with our rational wisdom we can see through this veil of appearance and experience directly the deeper unity of mankind (ibid. 1994: 144). It must be noted that in the global ethical discourse the pluralistic paradigm is very popular. However, the challenge to this system comes from the exclusivist groups. Are there a common goal and a unified good for all human beings? This is a vital question. As we march into the global age, human beings are realizing that there is a need to set common goals, which impact on the survival of human existence as a whole.

5.5.2 Singularism

The main assumption of this paradigm defies the thought that there is a variety of conceptions of good (Deutsche 1994: 141). Bimal K Matilal noted that the socio-political thinkers of the nineteen and twentieth centuries aimed for a singularist goal in which there was a single unified conception of good which is desirable for all human beings (ibid. 1994: 142). He notes that authoritarianism has been the breeding ground of Singularism and anti-pluralism. (ibid. 1994: 142). He maintains that it is impossible for a singularist to be tolerant and sincere and respect another's way of life (ibid. 1994: 144-145). This paradigm may serve as a challenge to march forward in the development of a global

ethic. The Global ethic cannot be developed with a single-minded effort, on the contrary it must consider the contributions from all perspectives of life.

5.5.3 Relativism

The foundation of this paradigm holds that one such conception of good is as good as any other, with there being no overarching standard (Deutsche. 1994: 141). Bimal K. Matilal points out that ethical norms are regarded as being immanent or embedded in cultural norms and when these cultural norms vary then ethical relativism becomes an inevitable conclusion (Deutsche 1994: 145). He further maintains that each culture has its own axiomatic construction of reality which is an integral part of one's world view and that each ethical system is embedded in such an axiomatic construction of reality (ibid. 1994: 145). He also notes that some sort of relativism exists between cultures (Deutsche 1994: 153). There are shifts in moral positions from one moral tradition to another and such relativistic schemes are inevitable. However, such relativism must not be destroyed, on the contrary, it must be used to develop a common global ethic in which relative positions which are not in conflict with common positions can be tolerated.

5.5.4 Conservatism

This paradigm mainly articulates the view that one's own conception of good is the best one. (Deutsche 1994: 141). Bimal K Matilal arrives at the conclusion

that we cannot say that one particular way of life is best for the whole of humanity (ibid. 1994: 142). It is clear from this description that conservative thinking will not be adequately able to contribute to the global ethical discourse. In fact, it will become the source of conflict and tension for any effort made to develop a global ethic.

5.5.5 Individualism

Horace Greeley made the remark in 1853 that this is an age of individualism in which the individual has the right to do as he pleases (Deutsche 1994: 303). In the opinion of Hilary Putnam, individualism can mean the doctrine of individual rights (ibid. 1994: 303). There cannot be an absolute individual right. However, individual right can be exercised in the context of what are commonly good and right and not what is individually good and right.

5.6 Cultural – Ethical Conflict

Bimal K Matilal is of the view that each ethical system is unique to its own culture and there cannot be any real confrontation between one culture and the other (Deutsche 1994: 145). He observes that cultures and societies of the present day are not watertight compartments, they interact with each other either violently or peacefully and through this process there is value trade-offs and value rejections (ibid. 1994: 151). He makes a very clear conclusion that

world cultures and sub-cultures do flow into each other, interacting both visibly and invisibly, eventually effecting value rejections and value modifications at every stage (ibid. 1994: 151-152). He proposes that where there is a conflict between universal and the particular morality then the universal morality should override the particular (ibid. 1994: 156). Global ethical systems cannot be constructed from conflicts but through co-operation. Global terrorism is a symptom that ethical systems are in conflict and they are leaving very little room for interacting for the purpose of moral progress.

5.7 Ethical System/s and Values

Bimal K Matilal notes that ethical systems are built on faith, myths, rituals, kinship systems and standards of interpersonal behavior (Deutsche 1994: 147). K. Damodaran notes that ethical values are not mere reflections of economic and social conditions and are not mere products of economic and political change, they depend on man's experiences and reactions to the environment and relation to the world (Damodaran 1967: 495). He sees a mutual relationship between moral values and social development. In this regard he said:

Ethical values which are prescribed and upheld in isolation from the socio-economic conditions often lose their significance and have no authority today (ibid. 1967: 500)

Therefore, the global ethical discourse must set for itself a framework, which allows for dialogue between all these variables for the purpose of producing a global ethic.

5.8 Minimal Universal Moral Standard

Hilary Putnam raises a fundamental question as to whether ethics should be universalistic or should rather be rooted in the forms of life of particular traditions and cultures (Deutsche 1994: 229). This is a very critical question for the global ethical discourse. Bimal K Matilal believes that there is a minimal universal moral standard, which is applicable to all human beings (ibid. 1994: 150). He also believes that the notion of an ethical law demands some universality (ibid. 1994: 150) which takes into account the desires of the global community. He also advocates that the notion of “minimal morality” must be distinguished from the natural law doctrine and the singularist paradigm (ibid. 1994: 150) because minimal morality must embody a universalistic application. His foremost observation is that the natural law doctrine lacks the flexibility as well as amenability to contextual interpretation as compared to the minimal universal morality doctrine (Deutsche 1994: 150) and should be revised or reformulated in light of the global ethical discourse.

He believes that there is a basic moral fabric in all societies, which holds human beings together (Deutsche 1994: 153) and which must be identified for

the purpose of constructing a global ethic. He also maintains that there is a rational side and a contingent side to morality and he conceptualizes the rational side as common morality which is dictated by the common concerns of humans while the contingent side, which is historically and geographically conditioned, varies from culture to culture (ibid. 1994: 154). Therefore for the purpose of the global ethical discourse it is incumbent that the rational side be advocated and the contingent side be revised. He uses the methodology of the traditional Indian ethicists in justifying a distinction between general moral duties and particular moral codes (Deutsche 1994: 154). He proposes three cardinal moral virtues as common to world religions *viz.* respect for life, truth telling, and prohibition of adultery.

Bimal K Matilal corresponds the notion of non-violence to the idea of respect for life and extends these notions to include the non-killing of both humans and animals (Deutsche 1994: 155). He commits to recognizing “self preservation” and “Self defence” as the only justifiable reasons for killing and highlights the contextual variation of opinion on the issues of abortion and euthanasia (ibid. 1994: 155). Bimal K Matilal identifies truth telling or prohibition against lying as a universal moral virtue and he illustrates the varying contexts in which this principle operated (Deutsche 1994: 156). He made reference to the Kantian absolute as well as the Indian contextualism of this notion. K. Damodaran is of the view that moral standards must be linked with man’s effort to achieve on this earth the ideals of peace, freedom, equality, fraternity and justice through

suitable changes in social, economic and political environment (Damodaran 1967: 494). Such efforts were evident in the life and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

5.9 Contextual Interpretation

Bimal K Matilal observes that in *certain* ethical issues there is a need for contextual interpretation. However, if there is a move towards the principle of universality then contextual interpretation may have to be excluded (Deutsche 1994: 155) He observes that specific universal morals renders itself for contextual interpretation, depending upon individual societies. His firm position is that such contextual interpretation does not concede to relativism. In this regard he says :

Contextual interpretation is needed because the universality of some of these principles suffers (and shrinks) when we deal, as we must, with a particular formulation of them in reference to particular languages or social practice (ibid. 1994: 157)

This is a vital indicator for the global ethical discourse. Contextual interpretation is necessary within the transitional phase of a global ethical paradigm. As much as individual ethical systems may identify with a universal system from the level of common ground, human experience is always

interpreting itself in the context of individual ethical systems. Therefore universal values must be contextualised within individual ethical experience without contradiction.

5.10 The Need for MacroEthics

Karl-Otto Apel (in *Culture and Modernity: East West Philosophic Perspectives*) notes that there is an urgent need for macroethics, which he views as an *important* task of philosophic ethics and sees as a new feature in the historical development of ethics (Deutsche 1994: 261). He identifies challenges to conventional ethics, which he sees as being restricted to human relations within small groups and merely fulfilling the duties of professional roles within social systems (ibid. 1994: 261). He justifies the call for a new ethical system on the basis of the impact the international economy and world markets is having on conventional morals and the evolving new relationship between humankind and nature (ibid. 1994: 264). He notes that technological skills and achievements have always been ahead of moral responsibilities and that there is a need to organize a sense of collective responsibility (ibid. 1994: 264). In this regard he makes the following comment :

Thus it appears that in both dimensions of cultural evolution, namely, that of technological interventions in nature and that of social interaction, a global situation has been brought about in our

time that calls for a new ethics of shared responsibility, in other words, for a type of ethics that, in contradistinction to the traditional or conventional forms of ethics, may be designated a (planetary) macroethics (Deutsche 1994: 264)

He notes the proposal of Konrad Lorenz who suggests the need for a biological evolution so that a new quasi-instinctive disposition of morality based on human reason may arise (ibid. 1994: 265). He also notes the view of Nobel prizewinner Friedrich August von Hayek who makes a call for ethics of human solidarity and social justice based on a global scale (ibid. 1994: 265). He finally concludes that the new ethics, macroethics cannot be based on either the quasi-instinctive feelings or on conventional morals, because it requires a rational foundation, which must transcend all traditions (Deutsche 1994: 265). The justification for a new ethical system cannot be limited to just economic and human-nature relationships, it must encompass human governance, power and control as well.

It is inevitable that macroethics or global ethics would commence with a conceptual paradigm that is rooted in philosophic ethics, however, global ethics requires an integrated conceptual framework and therefore cannot be confined to philosophic ethics alone. A conceptual framework that must see the development of new ideas that can encompass integrated meaning.

Conventional ethics being firmly fixed in human relationships must be revised in light of an integrated approach.

Karl Otto Apel notes that science has called for a new rational ethics and by its monopoly of the definition of rationality, it has blocked the way for a rational grounding of ethics (Deutsche 1994: 266). He further notes that the modern age is a planetary civilization where culture, science, technology and economy have been unified (ibid. 1994: 269). He clarifies the point that a universally valid ethics for humankind does not mean a prescribed uniform style of ethics for the different socio-cultural forms (ibid. 1994: 269-270). On the contrary, he proposes a form of pluralism of individual forms of life in which universally valid ethics based on equal rights and equal co-responsibility for solving problems of humankind is respected (ibid. 1994: 270). In his opinion, co-responsibility is a principle of ethics and it goes even beyond any ethical sense of justice and conventional forms (ibid. 1994: 274-275)

5.11 The Nature of Ethics or Moral Philosophy

It is also necessary to understand the precise nature of ethics or moral philosophy from a western perspective in order for this study to make a vital contribution towards constructing a framework for the global ethical discourse.

It is substantive to understand the types of thinking that underpin moral philosophy and to evaluate whether such thinking is relevant for the

development of a global ethic and in what ways can such thinking be applied in the global ethical discourse.

It is noted that Ethics is a branch of philosophy, and as such it refers to moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgements (Frankena 1973: 4). It is assumed that moral philosophy arises when we think for ourselves in critical and general terms and achieve autonomy as moral agents (ibid. 1973: 4). It is proposed that three kinds of thinking relate to morality (i) descriptive empirical thinking which attempts to describe the phenomena of morality or try to construct a theory of human nature that impacts on ethical issues (ii) normative thinking refers to raising the debate of what is right, good or obligatory and then forming a normative judgement as a conclusion and (iii) the third form of thinking is analytical, critical or meta-ethical thinking, which falls outside the framework of empirical or normative thinking and it raises questions about the meaning and use of moral expressions, about finding justifications for value judgements, finding explanations for the distinctions between moral and non-moral and searching for meaning to concepts such as “free” or “responsible” (ibid. 1973: 5). It is observed that the trend in the modern world is to exclude empirical and normative thinking from ethics and to depend more on meta-ethical thinking.

5.12 The Nature of Morality

The examination of the terms ethics and morality is needed in order to understand the context in which these terms have been used and to conceptualize a possibility to define the term Global ethics along similar lines. Frankena notes that the term ethics is not always used as a branch of philosophy it is also used as another word for morality (Frankena 1973: 5). It is also observed that the terms moral and ethical are used as equivalents to what is right and good as opposed to what is immoral and unethical (ibid. 1973: 5). The problem with these concepts is their association with the notions of what is right and good. Although the idea of what is right and good may vary from one individual to another, the common term ethic or morality is used to refer to the varying notions of right and good. However, the concept of global ethic must refer to what is relative and standardized for each individual and at the same time commonly good to all.

Frankena notes that morality is a social enterprise, for it exists for the individual and it goes on to exist even after him and it is also social in its origins, sanctions and functions (Frankena 1973: 6). It is essential to consider the extent to which morality becomes the instrument of a society. Firstly, it must be confessed that humanity as a whole, is made up of many minor societies each governed by its own sense of morality. Each moral situation in its individuality will be of very little relevance for a global society. If morality

has its social origins, functions and sanctions, then it is also possible to conceptualize the arising of a global morality within the context of a global society.

At some point or the other, the question of individual desires and interests are going to be raised in the context of morality and how are these going to be accommodated in a developing global ethic. Frankena notes that it is not characteristic of the moral point of view to submit to individual desires and interests of what is right and wrong and suggests in Freudian terms that morality is the function of the “superego” (Frankena 1973: 7). This would mean that within the context of the ethical discourse there is no compartmentalization of morality, and it is possible to serve a very much larger interest than just individual interest.

5.13 The Fundamental Ethical Questions

This part will focus on some of the fundamental questions raised in order to establish a source for moral and ethical thinking. In this regard the analysis will focus on a rationale to justify right action; the compulsions for right action; the role of reason in moral judgements; an examination of the following theories: (i) the law theory, (ii) the moral fact theory, (iii) the moral sense theory, (iv) the theory of intuitionism, (v) the theory of rationalism, (vi) the theory of calculative rationalism, (vii) the response theory and finally the emotive theory.

This analysis aims to establish the fundamental issues that underpin the construction of an ethic.

Baier raises a fundamental question in his book, *The Moral Point of View - A Rational Basis of Ethics*, Why should we do what is right? (Baier 1958: 6). This question intends establishing the intent and the rationale for doing what is right. In response there may be various answers, however, he continues to explore a justification for morality by examining what benefit or advantage an individual can gain from being moral whether in this life or in the afterlife (Baier 1958: 6). It must be noted that, within individual ethical systems, there is in-built some advantage that the individual can strive for. However, noting the variety of backgrounds that people come from, it becomes increasingly challenging to think of a common advantage to which human beings can strive for in justifying their moral behavior. He suggests that right action is advantageous because the world is designed in this way (Baier 1958: 7). One of the fundamental points he raises is a quest for a reason to justify moral action and he raises the debate whether God's reason is sufficient to justify moral action as against man's reason for right action.

Baier also explores a second question and that is: why do we do what is right? He examines the first assumption that all men always seek their greatest pleasure, their greatest happiness and greatest advantage and that they do the right thing only when they believe that these things coincide (Baier 1958: 14).

It must be noted that doing the right thing does not always result in pleasure and happiness. If an individual acts solely because it produces happiness and advantage then he may fail to act righteously if such advantage is not present. He also rejects the assumption that human beings can act only from a desire for the greatest possible advantage on the ground that there is no truth for such a theory (ibid. 1958: 14).

Baier further examines the assumption that reason can have nothing to contribute to the establishment of moral judgements. He basis this assumption on Hume's suggestion that morality is not a matter either of empirical fact or of relations between ideas and a matter of taste (Baier 1958: 15). However he uses Kant in the dialogue between reason and desire. Kant suggests that by reason we know what is right and wrong and reason determines our conduct (ibid. 1958: 16). There is a further assumption that says that a conscience or sense of duty which drives us to do what is right and avoid what is wrong (ibid. 1958: 16) It is also proposed that the environment plays an *important* role in modifying conscience, however, there is no conclusive proof that we are born with propensities leading to right conduct (ibid. 1958: 17).

Baier takes up the third question: how do we know what is right? and he evaluates the following theories *viz.* the "law theory", the "moral fact theory" and the "emotive theory" in light of this question. The "Law theories" are based on the fundamental supposition that morality is a system of commands, rules or

laws issuing from some authority (Baier 1958: 18). Notwithstanding this basic proposal, the law theory is beset with the following problems (i) who is the authority that issues the commands (ii) how *certain* are we that the commands or laws are correct or incorrect (iii) if it is issued by a perfect being how sure are we that it came from a perfect being (ibid. 1958: 21). These questions place the law theory under some degree of pressure.

The “moral fact theory”, is based on the conjecture that morality is a system of facts, namely moral facts, which are stated more or less correctly and accurately in the moral convictions of a group (Baier 1958: 19). Baier clarifies that one knows moral facts by a special moral sense, by intuition or by reason, however, his conclusion is that none of these can provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how we know what is right (ibid. 1958: 22). The “moral sense theory”, on the other hand, proposes that we have a special moral sense, an inner eye which enables us to see the rightness or wrong-ness of *certain* sorts of action (Baier 1958: 22). Baier notes that the only problem to this theory is that there is no such inner organ to determine moral sense (ibid., 1958: 22).

Furthermore, the theory of intuitionism suggests that it is our intuition, which works like a sixth sense, that tells us what is right and wrong (Baier 1958: 23). One of the serious challenges facing the theory of intuitionism is that of verification. The question is how do we verify intuition and what is gained from intuition as true or false? On the other hand, it is proposed that the theory

of rationalism, which is based on the presumption that we know by reason what is right and wrong (Baier 1958: 24). Calculative rationalism suggest that reason enables us to tell what is right by working out what is a means to our end (ibid. 1958: 24). The limitation of this proposal is that it cannot tell us what is the proper goal and how we can come to know that (ibid. 1958: 24-25). However, categorical rationalism asserts that reason can tell us what are proper ends to aim at and what are the best means to that end (ibid. 1958: 25)

The response theory is based on the assumption that morality is a system of responses to *certain* sorts of behavior (Baier 1958: 19). In other words, this theory advocates the idea that moral utterances are not about conduct but are about responses to conduct (ibid. 1958: 20). This theory faces two problems (i) to find the method whereby to single out those feelings that are characteristically moral (ii) the difficulty to solve the question of whose feelings, responses or attitudes should count (Baier 1958: 26). Finally, the emotive theory rests on the assumption that moral utterance express moral feelings aroused in the speaker by people and their conduct (ibid. 1958: 20).

It is quite evident that there is no clear-cut answer to justifying right action. Moreover, any form of justification may have limited relevance and they are constantly changing. In a global society, there is more than one stakeholder that is involved in contributing towards a global ethic; therefore, there will be different degrees of rationale applied to justify ethics. The new framework for a

global ethic must consider this challenge and be able to propose a common rationale that is accepted to all.

5.14 Moral Reasoning

In the last section, this study explored the fundamental theories in ethical thinking that inform how we develop a rationale for justifying our moral actions. It has been noted that there is no single way of justifying moral action, moral justification is largely contextual. In this section, this study will examine the principles of moral reasoning. One of the principle features of modern ethical theories is the issue of moral reasoning. The question that needs to be raised is what type of reason will be considered morally adequate? It must be noted that different people, coming from different worldviews have their individual forms of reasoning. It is evident that human action is reasoned differently in different contexts. One of the critical issues that will influence the development of a global ethic is that of individual morality. In this regard, it is the issue of the right of the individual to decide what is good for him/her. This issue may seem to be a challenge or a good thing; the question is how is society going to respond to *certain* moral issues? However, this analysis focuses on the following issues *viz.* ethical relativism, the principle of individual morality and the principle of social morality. These three principles constitute an essential feature of the global ethical discourse.

5.15 Ethical Relativism

The fundamental position of ethical relativism is that moral truth or ethical truths are not absolutely true but true relatively to a particular society or individual. This means that there is no absolute notion of Truth or a common factor that links humanity together morally. Furthermore, the cultural relativist position is that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the norms of individual societies (Olen, et al. 1992: 5). This means that contradiction in moral values may occur, with each individual society exercising its own moral sense. The individual relativist may argue that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the individual's own commitments (ibid. 1992: 5) and not that of a social group. Although ethical relativism forms an important part of the ethical discourse, it must be noted that there are several opponents to rigid forms of relativism. One of the challenges that face ethical relativism is establishing a global ethical standard. This problem can be resolved by searching for an ethic that is common to all and that may not necessarily be rooted in an individual's cultural or religious tradition. Negotiating a global ethic is bound to lead to moral disputes. It is apparent that there is no decisive way to settle moral disputes (Olen, et al. 1992: 5). It must be noted that morality is not just a matter of taste or desires, there are norms and commitments that we engage in for reasons and therefore these reasons must be carefully examined. (Olen, et al. 1992: 5)

5.16 Principles of Individual Morality

Olen (et al.) have noted that moral rules are not arbitrary, they are there for good reasons (Olen, et al. 1992: 6). Morality is not just a matter of rules, if reason requires us to change them, we must do that, because there is no moral rule that is exceptionless (ibid. 1992: 6). This is an *important* point and should form part of the framework of the global ethical discourse. The principle of utility is based on the assumption that there must be a balance of happiness over unhappiness (ibid. 1992: 7) This principle also makes possible the making of a choice between different moral rules in order to maximize happiness (ibid. 1992: 7). Olen (et al.) concludes that the principle of utility cannot be the final option for all moral decisions because the problem with this principle is that it fails to take into account the happiness of all (ibid. 1992: 8). The idea of what may be good for one may not be good for another is central to this principle.

The principle of fairness is based on the assumption that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Olen, et al. 1992: 9). Olen suggests that respect for other persons is one of the fundamental moral principles and it is based on the Kantian notion of respect which stipulates that one should never use other people merely as a means to further one's own ends (Olen 1992: 9). Olen suggests that to respect persons one must see them as autonomous, with their own reasons for acting with their own goals and aspirations and with the ability to decide how to reach the goals (ibid. 1992: 10).

Olen notes that moral principles focus on individual obligation to others and how we ought to act towards others (Olen, et al. 1992: 11). On the other hand, ethical thought focuses on the human good of human life and when taken together they constitute the good life for human beings (ibid. 1992: 11). The basis of determining human excellence in human activity is derived from the Aristotelian idea of examining the human artifact and determining whether it is good or bad. (ibid. 1992: 11). It is a known fact that some of the human excellence is distinct while others are commonly accepted and these human excellence are often called virtues (Olen, et al. 1992: 11). Olen takes up the idea of the natural purpose of man and establishes it on the proposal of Aristotle who believed that everything in nature has both a natural purpose as well as a social purpose (ibid. 1992: 11). Aristotle established that the natural purpose of a human being is happiness (ibid. 1992: 11-12). He also suggested that a good part of this happiness is to fulfill one's social roles by living well ordered lives which is not given to extremes and is based on deep reason (ibid. 1992: 12). Olen takes up the issue of social roles and raises the question of compassion for the dying, respect for nature, mercy for convicted criminals, understanding pregnant woman, and concern for fetuses in the context of social role and human excellence (ibid. 1992: 12).

It is inevitable that we submit that some people see religion as providing the final word on moral questions and that people often turn to religion for

guidance on moral issues (Olen, et al. 1992: 13). The role of God in moral matters is based on the assumption that God made the world and put the human being in it with some purpose and that God is both the source of moral and physical laws in the universe (ibid. 1992: 13). Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic thinker, postulated the view that moral laws of God are natural laws embedded in nature and human reason (Olen, et al. 1992: 13). God is not only the source of morality; He is also the best authority on morality (ibid. 1992: 13). While these proposals may hold firm in a strong debate, but the following challenges needs to be given due consideration (I) how *certain* we are that we know what God really wants (ii) different religions give conflicting answers to moral questions (iii) religious individuals give their individual consciences as ultimate answers to moral questions (ibid. 1992: 13).

It must be noted that the principle of utility, the principle of fairness and the Aristotelian idea of happiness form an integral part of the global ethical framework and they cannot be ignored when constructing a global ethic. Each of these ideas has significance and relevance for human existence and moral regeneration.

5.17 Principles of Social Morality

One of the sound principles of social morality is social justice, whether we agree with what such a justice requires or not (Olen, et al. 1992: 14). Social

justice primarily aims to eradicate all forms of inequality of opportunity and allow individuals equal access to all that brings them the greatest happiness. Olen proposes that Individual rights be submitted as part of social morality and individual rights are largely determined by the Bill of Rights that is embedded in the political Constitution of a country. These rights rest on the principle of equality, justice, human dignity and freedom. The main problem underlying the Bill of Rights and the issue of social morality is the interpretation in the different contexts. It must be noted that part of the individual rights is “natural rights” of an individual. The main proposition of natural rights is that every individual has the legal right to do whatever we have the natural right to do without any interference and this proposition is supported and advocated by persons like John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Nozick (Olen, et al. 1992: 15). However, the problem with this approach is that while individual rights may legitimize action for individual benefit, it may be the source of unhappiness or may impact negatively on others. For example, while a person may claim to have the right to abortion, this right may impact on the right of the fetus to life.

Furthermore, Olen proposes the principle of equal treatment as part of social morality and underpins it on the following basis (i) that there must be equal treatment before the law (ii) there should be equal opportunity for all without discrimination (iii) finally equal treatment requires equal results (Olen, et al. 1992: 17-18). Olen also suggests that the general welfare or the common good

of public interest is part of the principle of social morality and he rests this responsibility largely on the shoulders of government (ibid. 1992: 18). On the issue of equal treatment, it must be noted that the plant and animal life also form part of the social ecosystem of man. Therefore, the principle of equal treatment must extend to include them as well. Olen notes that public decency in the form of creating a healthy moral environment where there is the promotion of sex between married people, prevention of excessive drunkenness in public, and disorderly conduct in public and restrictions on private behavior such as homosexual behavior and pornography and prostitution etc (Olen, et al. 1992: 19). It is noted that in a pluralistic society the various independent centres of power viz. family, the press, religion, business and labor organizations, government, do not have unlimited power and each institution is given the freedom to pursue its own ends (ibid. 1992: 21). No individual centre of power can be given unbridled power, which may lead to exploitation. Olen notes the following challenges in moral reasoning (I) different moral questions may present different moral answers sometimes contradicting each other and therefore, making choices very difficult (ii) such moral dilemmas lead to moral skepticism.

The global ethical discourse needs to embrace the principle of social morality, despite the fundamental challenges it poses. If there is to be a global ethic then Hindu thought must be interwoven into both the principles of individual and

social morality and it must also be able to deal with the issue of ethical relativism.

5.18 The Kantian Model Of Ethics

In the last section we explored the basis of moral reasoning in the western ethical discourse. It became apparent that the notions of ethical relativism, individual and social morality is central to this discourse. However, in this part, focus will be given to the contribution of Immanuel Kant to the western ethical discourse. Kant adequately captures the ethical discourse of the nineteenth century; therefore it will be useful to make reference to him. This analysis will examine the Universal Law and the Principle of Humanity; the categories of duty and the Metaphysics of Morals; the Religion of Reason and Freedom and the Criticism of Utilitarianism.

Immanuel Kant was born in Konigsberg, Prussia, around 1724 in a devout Pietist family. (Natalya 1989: 201). It has been noted that his ethical theories were far more influential than his epistemology and metaphysics and his ethical theories were found in two books *viz.* “the Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals” (1785) and “The Critique of Practical Reason” (1787) (<http://www.utm.edu/research>). Kant’s primary focus for his ethical vision was deontology which deals with the nature of duty which he expressed in his

famous statement: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." (ibid. <http://www.utm>).

To Kant, the notions of God, immortality and freedom were beyond the limits of theoretical understanding (Natalya 1989: 207). These issues were more of metaphysical significance. He proposed a fundamental notion to action and that is willing, willing something is determining yourself to be the cause of that thing and determining yourself the means to it (ibid. 1989: 208). To Kant, a moral rule does not say "do this if you want that" but simply "do this" and is expressed in a categorical imperative (ibid. 1989: 208). According to Kant, in the phenomenal world, due to its temporal nature and the principle of causality, every event has a cause and there can be no freedom (Natalya 1989: 209). But the noumenal world does not exist in time and a spontaneous causality is possible for it, it also leaves room for belief in the freedom of will (ibid. 1989: 209). To Kant, the freedom of will provides the content of morality and its motive (ibid. 1989: 209). It is noted that moral law, which is a categorical imperative, governs freedom, which determines the moral nature of actions (ibid. 1989: 209).

The will, Kant says, is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law. When we act, whether or not we achieve what we intend with our actions is often beyond our control, so the morality of our actions does not depend upon their outcome. What we can control, however, is the will behind the action.

That is, we can will to act according to one law rather than another (<http://www.utm>). The morality of an action, therefore, must be assessed in terms of the motivation behind it (ibid. <http://www.utm>). The only thing that is good without qualification is the good will and all other candidates for an intrinsic good have problems *viz.* courage, health, and wealth can all be used for ill purposes, (ibid. <http://www.utm>) and therefore cannot be intrinsically good. Happiness is not intrinsically good because even being worthy of happiness requires that one possess a good will (ibid. <http://www.utm>). The good will is the only unconditional good despite all encroachments. Misfortune may render someone incapable of achieving her goals, but the goodness of her “will” may remain (ibid. <http://www.utm>).

Kant recognized the ultimate worth of persons by acknowledging that every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means (Olen, et al. 1992: 32). Kant suggests that human beings who are rational beings are designated as “persons” and other beings that are dependent on nature and are not a rational being have relative worth and are designated as “things” (ibid. 1992: 32). Such “persons” are an object of respect (ibid. 1992: 32). The very existence of a human being is an end in itself and its worth does not arise as a result of another action (ibid. 1992: 32). This approach of Kant therefore places humans above all other living objects such as trees and animals. This idea may result in the exploitation of the lower by the higher factors of life. Furthermore, Kant noted that human beings are moral agents as lawgivers and for him

morality consisted of relating every action to legislation in which no action was inconsistent with a universal law (ibid. 1992: 33). Kant proposed that in the realm of ends whatever has a price can be replaced with something equivalent, but whatever is above all price has a dignity and he proposed that morality and humanity alone has dignity (ibid. 1992: 33). An important contribution that Kant has noted is the inherent dignity of human beings and their role in social development through the development of universal laws. However, the weakness of this thesis is that it fails to take into consideration the idea that plants and animals share some degree of dignity as humans and therefore need to be treated in a way that does not result in them becoming the mere means to an end.

5.18.1 Universal Law and Humanity

According to Kant, duty is just duty without any purpose and this is the law, which he projects as a universal law (Olen, et al. 1992: 211). Duty without a purpose can be understood as duty based on selfless action, an idea that is similar to the notion of *svadharma* in Hindu thought. Kant holds the view that only a rational being has capacity to act in accordance with law or principle (ibid. 1992: 211) which therefore excludes all animals. The maxim is the principle on which you act and it embodies the reason for the action (Olen, et al. 1992: 211). He also suggests that your action must be a means to your end and your end must be consistent with your happiness (ibid. 1992: 211). Kant

attempts to construct a universal law from every maxim and he notes very brilliantly that where there are contradictions that arise there can be no such universal law (ibid. 1992: 212-213). Kant also basis his thesis on the proposal that one always acts with some end in view (ibid. 1992: 214). It would mean that if there were no end in view then man would not act. Kant notes that ends/goals provides us with positive reasons (i) purposes to be achieved and (ii) negatively – things that we must not act against (ibid. 1992: 214). Kant believes that absolute value cannot be found in things that we desire, because they get their value from the fact that we desire them (ibid. 1992: 214). Kant also suggested that every rational being exist as an end in himself (ibid. 1992: 214).

Kant proposes that the only thing that has unconditional value is “good will”. He basis his conclusion on the following premises (i) that ultimate value springs from a source which is unconditionally valuable (ii) a thing has unconditional value if it derives its value in itself and maintains this value under all conditions (iii) goodwill – because it’s the object of our own choice which we take to be good and the source of value is not in the object but rests in us, not our desire and needs but our humanity, rational nature and capacity for rational choice (Olen, et al. 1992: 214). Kant says that it is our rational nature in its perfect state that is “good will” (ibid. 1992: 214). Kant also suggested that we must act so that we treat humanity as an end and never as a means (ibid. 1992: 215). We must attribute the same kind of value that we attribute to our humanity to the humanity of others as well (ibid. 1992: 214).

Kant sees violations of perfect duty being brought about when the power of rational choice is made subordinate to *certain* conditions (Olen, et al. 1992: 215). One who uses deceptive methods to undermine the freedom of choice and action brings about violation of perfect duty (ibid. 1992: 215). Deception is unjustifiable no matter what end it serves, for the good end is the object of every rational being (ibid. 1992: 215). The principle of humanity is based on the following understanding (i) we realise our humanity and develop our talents and powers and rational capacities (ii) acknowledge others as a source of value (iii) treat their chosen ends as good (iv) pursue their happiness as they see it (v) all human pursuits to be seen as good as long as everyone agree with them (Olen et al. 1992: 215).

5.18.2 Categories of Duty: The Metaphysics of Morals

Kant's Metaphysical Principle of Justice deals with the issue of both natural right and acquired right (Olen, et al. 1992: 216). No person has the right to interfere with the freedom and property of another; however, the use of coercion is authorized (Olen, et al. 1992: 216). Kant believes that freedom is an innate right and also suggests that objects be considered as property and be given a moral status (ibid. 1992: 216). The person who transgresses the rights of others is bad, the person who simply conforms to the law, merely does what is owed but the person who conforms to the law because he or she has made the

rights of humanity his or her end is morally good (ibid. 1992: 218). Kant describes 4 (four) categories of duties of virtue [inner freedom] (i) perfect duties to oneself, to preserve and respect the humanity in one's own person; (ii) imperfect duties to oneself, to develop ones humanity, intellectually and physically (iii) duties of love for others, to promote their happiness (iv) duties of respect for others, including the respect for their rights (ibid. 1992: 219). Kant believes that a world in which every one's rights are respected is a world in which complete external freedom is achieved (ibid. 1992: 219). Kant notes that a free will must have its own law or principle, which it gives to itself and which makes it an autonomous, will (ibid. 1992: 222). He maintains that moral law arises from an autonomous will and that free will and moral law is identical (ibid. 1992: 222).

Conceiving of a means to achieve some desired end is by far the most common employment of reason. But Kant has shown that the acceptable conception of the moral law cannot be merely hypothetical (<http://www.utm>). Our actions cannot be moral on the ground of some conditional purpose or goal. Morality requires an unconditional statement of one's duty (<http://www.utm>). The argument for the first formulation of the categorical imperative can be thought of this way. We have seen that in order to be good, we must remove inclination and the consideration of any particular goal from our motivation to act (<http://www.utm>). The act cannot be good if it arises from subjective impulse, nor can it be good because it seeks after some particular goal, which might not

attain the good we seek or could come about through “happenstance” (<http://www.utm>). If we remove all subjectivity and particularity from motivation we are only left with will to universality. The question "what rule determines what I ought to do in this situation?" becomes "what rule ought to universally guide action?" What we must do in any situation of moral choice is act according to a maxim that we would will everyone to act according to (*ibid.* <http://www.utm>).

5.18.3 The Religion of Reason and Freedom

To Kant the object of moral law is Highest Good, virtue and happiness (Olen et al. 1992: 224). The highest Good is the systematic totality of good ends to which the moral law directs us (*ibid.* 1992: 225). He holds that happiness is not the utmost *importance*, the desire for your own happiness must not stop you from doing what is right (*ibid.* 1992: 225). He notes that happiness is conditionally valuable and when its condition is met, it is a genuine good (*ibid.* 1992: 225). It must be noted that sometimes it is impossible to achieve the Highest Good (*ibid.* 1992: 225) It is also noted that in the phenomenal world the results of our actions are influenced by the forces of nature and actions of others and not only our intentions and therefore the attempts to realise the good is diverted by these forces (*ibid.* 1992: 226). Kant also notes the role of the Author of Nature who is conceptualized as one who designed the laws of nature, who is omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good and who has

attributes ascribed to God (Olen, et al. 1992: 226). He notes that the Highest Good is possible if we believe that end is possible (ibid. 1992: 225-227).

Freedom plays a central role in Kantian ethics because the possibility of moral judgments presupposes it. Freedom is an idea of reason that serves an indispensable practical function because without the assumption of freedom, reason cannot act. So reason has an unavoidable interest in thinking of itself as free. That is, theoretical reason cannot demonstrate freedom, but practical reason must be assumed for the purpose of action. Having the ability to make judgments and apply reason puts us outside that system of causally necessitated events. In its intellectual domain, reason must think of itself as free. It is dissatisfying that he cannot demonstrate freedom, nevertheless, it comes as no surprise that we must think of ourselves as free. In a sense, Kant is agreeing with the common sense view that how I choose to act makes a difference in how I actually act.

5.18.4 Kant's Criticism of Utilitarianism

Kant's criticisms of utilitarianism have become famous enough to warrant some separate discussion. Utilitarian moral theories evaluate the moral worth of action on the basis of happiness that is produced by an action (<http://www.utm>). Whatever produces the most happiness in most of the people is the moral course of action that one should follow (ibid. <http://www.utm>). Kant has an

insightful objection to moral evaluations of this sort. The essence of the objection is that utilitarian theories actually devalue the individuals it is supposed to benefit (ibid. <http://www.utm>). If we allow utilitarian calculations to motivate our actions, we are allowing the valuation of one person's welfare and interests in terms of what good they can be used for (ibid. <http://www.utm>). It would be possible, for instance, to justify sacrificing one individual for the benefits of others if the utilitarian calculations promise more benefit and doing so would be the worst example of treating someone merely as a means and not as an end in themselves (ibid. <http://www.utm>). Another way to consider his objection is to note that utilitarian theories are driven by the merely contingent inclination in humans for pleasure and happiness, not by the universal moral law dictated by reason (ibid. <http://www.utm>). To act in pursuit of happiness is arbitrary and subjective, and is no more moral than acting on the basis of greed, or selfishness (ibid. <http://www.utm>). All three emanate from subjective, non-rational grounds. The danger of utilitarianism lies in its embracing of baser instincts, while rejecting the indispensable role of reason and freedom in our actions.

The Kantian model to ethics holds several elements that are vital for the global ethical discourse. Firstly, the issue of the freedom of choice or will is central to the human rights culture and allows for human freedom. However, such freedom of will needs to be reconciled with the idea of determinism, which partly arises from the theory of rebirth in Hindu thought. It has also become

apparent that the Kantian model suggests that moral law is integral to legal law. However, it must be noted that there are several challenges to reconciling moral law with legal law. Notwithstanding this, the Kantian model proposes a view that is essential for the global ethical discourse in which global morality is matched with international law. The concept of human dignity is well captured in Kantian ethics; however, the ground principle on which such dignity is based is discriminative of other living entities. This may be a challenge for Kantian ethics in the global context.

5.19 The Essence, Structure and Function of Morality

In the last analysis, a detail inspection of the Kantian model of ethics within the context of the western ethical discourse was pursued. In this section, this study will examine the essence, structure and function of morality in general. This analysis would establish fundamental principles and guidelines that could contribute to the theoretical development of the global ethical discourse.

One of the challenges in social life is the multitude of interpretations there are to morality and ethics (Natalya 1989: 97). The essence of morality constitutes (I) experience of worldly wisdom where an individual is taught to be virtuous and to secure immortality of the human soul (ii) doing one's duty as a means of upholding social order (iii) promoting public good and removing squalor and injustice of life (iv) imposing responsibilities on man and help curb the animal

instincts in him (ibid. 1989: 97). These essences may work well from a religious perspective; however, consideration must also be given to the non-religious perspective as well. It must be noted that morality is not enclosed in any single sphere of human activity; it is all pervasive (Natalya 1989: 98). Morality is objectively multifunctional, it can safeguard a social system or undermine it (ii) it can unite people or divide them (iii) it gives value and meaning to human existence (iii) is marked by continuity and it can be seen as a qualitatively distinct social phenomena (ibid. 1989: 99). The specific character of morality is understood by knowing its role and function and it is on this basis that it is different from science, law or art (ibid. 1989: 99). The difference between science and morality is that scientific theoretical methods differ from religious assimilation of the world (ibid. 1989: 99). While the centre of science is the problem of truth, the centre of morality is the problem of behavioral standards (ibid. 1989: 99). Therefore, morality is seen as regulating man's behavior between good and evil (ibid. 1989: 99). It is noted that science contains elements of value attitude towards the world and morality incorporates the truths of science, which necessitate moral choice (Ibid. 1989: 100). The conclusion reached is:

Each of the methods of assimilating the world is not only original and independent but is inseparable from the other methods. Supplementing one another, they perform the same task, which

brings them together, promoting society's progress (Natalya 1989:

100)

It is noted that moral imperatives are supported by special psychological mechanisms *viz.* conscience and a sense of duty which are peculiar to morality alone (ibid. 1989: 102). Conscience demands that a person does good and resist evil and duty commands a person to be honest, to adequately meet his responsibility and to maintain his honor and dignity (Natalya 1989: 102).

The main concern of the philosopher of ethics is to try and single out the principal function of morality. It is suggested here that regulation is the principal function of morality, and it takes place through regulation of behavior through moral standards; notwithstanding the fact that it is not the sole regulator (ibid. 1989, p103). From the other social regulators *viz.* legal, administrative, technical etc. moral regulation should be distinguished from legal regulation (Natalya 1989: 103). It must be noted that legal regulation is bolstered by social institutions e.g. the state and this may not be the case for moral regulations (ibid. 1989: 103), notwithstanding the fact that in history the traditional Indian states supported moral standards. However, conscience and duty are nominated as the personal regulators of human behavior (ibid. 1989: 128). Furthermore, duty is a high moral obligation and has become an internal source of voluntary submission to attain and preserve one's moral values (ibid. 1989: 132). Awareness of one's duty meant adopting a social and class stand

and consciously choosing a worldview or a system of standards and norms that suited it (ibid. 1989: 133). It must also be noted that in a morally advanced person duty harmonizes with conscience and inner conflicts may arise in individuals as a result of duty clashing with one's conscience (ibid. 1989: 133-134).

In developing the global ethical discourse, the essence and function of morality cannot be overlooked. In fact the essence, structure and function of morality differ from one community to another. The objective of the global ethical discourse is to formulate a global essence, structure and function for an integrated system of morality and ethics.

5.20 Moral Principles

It is noted that moral principles generally define moral standards and are distinct from moral standards (Natalya 1989: 190). One of the challenges to the development of moral principles is the historical contestation of collectivism (selflessness, altruism) and egoism (individualism, self-seeking leanings) (ibid. 1989: 191). Egoism is often viewed as greed of a single individual and it must be learnt that each individual is defined in terms of one's social values which is perceived as his own and for which one is prepared to make sacrifices (ibid. 1989: 191). In fact, one cannot live in a society and be independent of it, social interests form the core of the individual's personality (ibid. 1989: 191). It must

also be noted that egoism is not restricted at the level of the individual, it also manifest in the form of group, territorial, social egoism, family egoism corporate, community and patriotic egoism (ibid. 1989: 192).

The principle of humanism reveals continuity between collectivism and moral experiences (Natalya 1989: 195). The organic part of humanism advocated (I) the need for compassion (ii) respect (iii) and love for fellow mankind (iv) each person's right to happiness (v) equal opportunities for human growth and development (ibid. 1989: 196). Part of humanism is communist humanism which is based on (I) universalism (ii) respect and love for all persons (iii) that each individual has the equal right to happiness (iv) that there must be equality through practical relations (Natalya 1989: 201).

It must be concluded that the moral principles of egoism and collectivism form an important trend in the western ethical discourse. There are advantages and disadvantages to them, which must be examined and evaluated in the context of the global ethical discourse.

5.21 The Main Trends in Twentieth Century Ethics

In the last section of this study, an investigation of the essence, structure and function of morality and moral principles was attempted. In this section a general examination of the main streams of ethical thinking within the western

discourse will be pursued. This analysis will present a clearer picture of the ethical paradigms that need to be critically evaluated and integrated into the global ethical discourse in order to formulate a global ethic.

5.21.1 Existentialist Ethics

One of the founding proposals of existentialism is that man is left alone with himself therefore is absolutely free (Frankena 1973: 298). It is also noted that existentialists are of the view that the individual's moral freedom is complete independence from the outside world and outside influence (ibid. 1973: 299). It will be challenging to understand how the external factors such as the objects of the external reality cannot influence an individual's freedom. They further maintain that the freedom of man's will is manifested through its capacity for self-determination independent from any influences from the natural and social environment (Frankena 1973: 299). Existentialism considers man, who possess freedom of will and the environment which is subject to the principle of causality as being two alien, isolated and separate realities (ibid. 1973: 300). The existentialists advocate that the individual has an absolute right to life, a right that cannot be taken away by any necessity or any kind of violence (ibid. 1973: 301). His life should be worthy and dignified and that his right to happiness is superior to all other rights (ibid. 1973: 301). These submissions will be dialogued with Hindu thought for the purposes of developing the global ethical discourse.

5.21.2 Neopositivist Ethics

The two powerful trends that are evident in this school are emotivism and the linguistic analysis of the language of morality (Frankena 1973: 301). One of the trends of the neopositivists is philosophical subjectivism, which interprets the world as having no depth and complexity and having no ontological significance for man (ibid. 1973: 303). In terms of this thought system the facts and values of life are viewed as two separate categories (ibid. 1973: 304). This would mean that moral precepts would lie beyond the sphere of science (ibid. 1973: 304). Neopositivism focuses on the correlation of moral values and facts and their common feature is that moral judgements cannot be reduced to facts (ibid. 1973: 304). It is noted that this methodological principle, according to which knowledge has no philosophical significance while the world outlook and practical value problems cannot be an object of scientific analysis paves the way for skepticism, relativism, and nihilism in ethics (Frankena 1973: 304). It must be noted that the logical positivist scientism which is founded on the idea of the universal applicability of the language of science and which led to the development of emotivism in philosophy concluded that moral judgements cannot be verified in the positivist sense and that they differ from scientific notions (ibid. 1973: 304). It must also be noted that morality and science are different ways of assimilating the world and their languages differ, therefore there is no reason to despise morality because it is not science to refuse

recognition of science because it is not morality (Frankena 1973: 305). This issue of the relationship between morality and science is essential for the global ethical discourse and it must be considered from the point of how these two variables can operate together without any contradiction.

5.21.3 Phenomenological Ethics

The basis of phenomenological ethics does not deny that there is a possibility of scientifically substantiating moral standards and therefore differs from the neopositivists standpoint (Frankena 1973: 309). Phenomenological ethics ranks values into the following hierarchical categories pleasant and unpleasant, vital values (life, health) and spiritual values (ibid. 1973: 310). To phenomenologists, morality is associated with an orientation at higher values (ibid. 1973: 311). Phenomenological ethics are an *important* trend in that they attempt to dialogue morality with scientific method and they formulate clear categories of values, which inform the human will. This trend does not isolate spiritual values but also incorporates it into their scheme of ethics.

5.21.4 Neo -Thomist Ethics

This system of ethics involves relating the origin, essence and goal of morality with the idea of God (Frankena 1973: 312). While most philosophical ethicists identify the supreme good to be happiness, this school identifies it with God

and developed a notion that activity directed to God (the most perfect Being) is the criterion for perfection (ibid. 1973: 314). Thomas advocated the idea that happiness on earth was impossible, incomplete and not in full bloom and it was only attainable after death (ibid. 1973: 314). Neo-Thomist's view is that the purpose of moral values is to guide a person to fathom God and attain happiness after death (ibid. 1973: 314). It is evident that the meaning of human life is carried beyond this life and it includes the sphere of afterlife (ibid. 1973: 315). Another challenge that needs to be pursued is that religious morality imposes limits on human activity and freedom which is aimed at reaching humanistic goals and improving the life of society against the behavior to earn God's forgiveness (Frankena 1973: 315). Modern Thomism advocates that man is placed between heaven and earth and being a mortal, he is a unity of body and soul and therefore, he is different from dumb animals that cannot reason (ibid. 1973: 316). Although Neo-thomism acknowledges the freedom of will, it is subject to striving for the Supreme good (God) and is interpreted in a theological sense (ibid. 1973: 317). The freedom of man's will is largely engendered by God and its purpose and the final goal is defined by God (ibid. 1973: 318). Neo-Thomist ethics generally articulate a deeply theological basis to the western ethical discourse. The elements of God, happiness, moral judgement and choice are vital to the global ethical discourse.

5.21.5 Naturalism in Ethics

Naturalism bases its doctrine on the assumption that the individual behavior is naturally determined (Frankena 1973: 320). Contemporary western philosophers believe that goodness is inherent in human nature while the opposite may also hold true that man is essentially evil, selfish and aggressive (ibid. 1973: 322-323). It is noted that man lives in two conflicting dimensions the natural and the social (ibid. 1973: 323).

5.21.6 Deontological Theory of Ethics

It is vital to recognize the two important deontological ethical theories *viz.* act deontologism and rule-deontologism (Frankena 1973: 17). The basic postulation of act-deontologism is that general rules can be built up on the basis of particular cases and may be useful in determining what should be done in later cases (ibid. 1973: 17). It offers no standard whatsoever for determining what is right and wrong in particular cases. Its method of determining right is by becoming clear about the facts and then forming judgement about them in the form of a decision (ibid. 1973: 23). It offers us no criterion or guiding principle for moral judgement (ibid. 1973: 23). Rule-deontologists hold the view that the standard of right and wrong consists of one or more rules either concrete ones or abstract ones (Frankena 1973: 17). Rule deontologists distinguish between actual duty and prima facie duty (Frankena 1973: 26). It is

noted that what is actually right is what ought to be done in a particular situation, however, every rule of actual duty has an exception (ibid. 1973: 26). Prima facie duty is always a rule/obligation that one must try to fulfil. Deontology is an *important* method in the ethical discourse and can serve as an essential tool for the formulation of moral judgements.

5.21.7 Ethical Egoism

The fundamental tenets of an ethical egoists are (I) an individual promote for himself the greatest possible balance between good and evil (ii) when an individual is making moral judgements in the context of others he should go by his own advantage (ibid. 1973: 18). An ethical egoists may hold any kind of theory of what is good and what is bad (ibid. 1973: 18). Frankena notes that “It seems doubtful therefore that ethical egoism can serve as an acceptable basis for this *important* part of morality” (ibid. 1973: 19). Psychological egoism, on the other hand, is a view that all men are selfish in everything that they do and the motive from which anyone acts is self-interest (Di Leo 2002: 29). Furthermore, ethical egoism is a view that advocates the way that men ought to act and the focus of action is what is in one’s own interest (ibid. 2002: 29). This means that a person is always justified in doing what is best for one’s own interest without consideration of the effect on others.

It is quite evident that the western ethical discourse is made up of several divergent ethical positions with each attempting to base ethics on its own philosophic grounding. It also became apparent that there are several ethical approaches to the ethical end of happiness but no single ethical system seem to adequately reconcile the ethical diversity. The methods adopted by the western ethical theorists are mainly humanistically inclined.

5.22 The Phenomenon of Globalism

In the last section the study probed into the various ethical trends that have influenced the western ethical discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It became evident that the various systems have a deeply human interest at their core and they attempt to demonstrate what is in the best interest of mankind. However, in this section, this study will examine the phenomenon of globalism. In this analysis will shall focus on the notion of globalization as a western phenomenon; the meaning of globalism; and the integration of activities.

Sri. S. Gurumurthi, at a lecture given at the International Symposium on the *Gita* held in December 2000, suggested that Globalization is more a western experience and it has impacted through the exploitation of nature, it has altered the relationship between man and nature and it has enhanced the notions of individual liberty and freedom (<http://www.bharatvani.org/>). He views the idea

of global exchange together with global trade, global understanding and global harmony as being part of the human program (ibid. <http://www.bharatvani.org/>). He notes that globalization is more about the continued imperialization and colonialism by the west and it is not about global understanding and harmony (ibid. <http://www.bharatvani.org/>).

Oliner (et al.) notes that the idea of “Global” refers to something much larger than just the physical features of the earth (1995: 178). According to the Webster’s Dictionary the term global is linked to ideas such as “comprehensive”, “all inclusive”, “involving the whole world”. Oliner (et al.) further notes the following view on the meaning of globalism:

Globalism implies a whole world, not merely the earth but something beyond, in which humans are no longer the exclusive frame of reference but part of an intricately interdependent ecosystem. Making the global connection means personally relating to and feeling responsible for this totality, even if understanding escapes us (Oliner, et al. 1995: 178)

It is noted that the following elements to a large extent contribute to the phenomenon of globalism *viz.* deep respect for natural systems and diverse life forms, an intuitive sense of human equality, an appreciation of human attributes that can create a more humane future (Oliner, et al. 1995: 178). Two

fundamental principles *viz.* “stewardship” and “restoration” are identified as guiding principles within globalism. “Stewardship” calls upon people to leave the world’s human and non-human resources to no less depleted state than it is found now and “restoration” calls upon people to repair and replenish the world’s human and non-human resources (Oliner, et al. 1995: 179).

Oliner (et al.) suggests that global thinking is one way that can positively contribute to globalism. One characteristic of global thought is that it is abstract and therefore it is advantageous because it helps keep people focussed on the larger picture as they act locally because global thought can inform local action (1995: 179). However, Wendell Berry is of the view that “globalism” is too abstract and such abstractions are responsible for the world’s problems and instead of helping people orientate to the larger picture they are actually removing people from the local contexts in which they are most effective (ibid. 1995: 179). Alan At Kisson disagreed with this position and is of the view that individual actions have an effect on the global and therefore abstractions are useful because they deepen understanding and inspire benevolent visions (ibid. 1995: 179). Therefore, globalism requires a vocabulary that is inclusive of the notions of equality, diversity, respect, peace, and care which is applied universally (ibid. 1995: 179).

It is noted that Ecumenism, which began among the Protestants, is starting to accept religious pluralism and the vision of the unity of humankind. Oliner

notes that we are entering an ecumenical age in which the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist must contribute towards a Global Ethic which must serve as a minimal ethical standard for all humankind (ibid. 1995: 182). It is noted that The Global Ethic Project was launched at the 100th anniversary meeting of the Parliament of World's Religions which met in Chicago in 1993 and adopted a preliminary document by Professor Hans Kung titled "Toward a Global Ethic" (Oliner, et al. 1995: 182). This document calls on all civilizations and cultures, including religious cultures to reject the age of monologue, isolation, domination and absorption of others and embrace the age of dialogue (1995: 183). It also calls for individuals and religious traditions to work for universal human rights, justice, peace and conservation of the earth and to assume responsibility to enhance human freedom, dignity, and value all living and non-living things, conscience, relationships between women and men, and other related specifics (ibid. 1995: 183). Each group must wrestle with the problem of reconciling unity and diversity, pluralism and particularism and detecting, analyzing and distinguishing those elements which can be mutually enriching from those which are pernicious and destructive (ibid. 1995: 183). Such issues can arise in the context of an abstract idea contributing to an alternate future (ibid. 1995: 183).

As much as the phenomenon of globalism may have a challenging face to it, it nonetheless focuses on a progressive global resolution of the world's problems. The deeply integrated nature and character of global phenomenon is a totally

revolutionized idea for the 21st century and beyond. The world can no longer be seen as isolated communities but a global community living in relation to a Cosmic existence.

5.23 Proposed Global Ethical Paradigms

In the last section, this study probed into globalism as a phenomenon. However, in this section, this analysis will focus on proposed global ethical paradigms within the western discourse.

Robert Muller, retired Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, pointed out that there is a shift in the global interest from that which was deeply humanistic and interwoven in the human rights culture to that of placing the interests of the planet above that of man. (<http://www.usao.edu/~facshaferi/BERKELEY.HTML>, p1). It must be noted that in 1992 the International Council on Human duties drew up an International Declaration of Ethics, Human Duties and Responsibilities and they used the government agency to take up ethical issues concerning the planet at the level of the United Nations (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). It must be noted that the United Nations is becoming the international agent of the globalization process. Muller is of the view that the notion of what is good and evil is changing and since we are in a global context, the global family or humanity must define what is good and bad in light of the wisdom of philosophy and

spirituality (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). He believed in the emergence of a global ethic towards the planet earth which must be protected by a world court of ethics and all this must be done for the sake of the human family (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>).

It must be noted that a clear definition of the minimum standards of ethics is necessary and it should emerge through the participation of the global partners through the process of a consensus-generating dialogue (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). One of the notable characteristics of the 16th-century "Age of Discovery" was the dominating and colonizing of the rest of the world by Christendom and the ideological cultures of the West (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). This phase resulted in the ignoring and absorbing the other cultures and religions and a struggle for Colonial superiority (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). This was not satisfactory for the human interest and by the 20th century there was evidence of the emergence from an Age of monologue to an Age of Dialogue (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). It must be noted that this century is realizing that social sub-structures have a very limited grip on understanding the whole of reality. In fact, the different religions are coming to realise that they don't have a total monopoly in understanding Reality, therefore the urgent need for global dialogue in which people are able to discern from others, that which will deepen their understanding (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). The global dialogue needs to be interreligious, interideological and intercultural in nature and it must direct not only how

humans perceive and understand the world and its meaning, but also on how they should act in relationship to themselves, to other persons, and to nature (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>). It must be noted that a global consensus on the fundamental attitude toward good and evil and the basic principles to put it into action is needed (ibid. <http://www.usao.edu/>).

It is further noted that another level of ethics needs vital concentration and that is planetary or global ethics (<http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>). The ethical system is no longer an individual system, with its isolated thought structures, but it is also a shared system in which manifests public and universal morality (ibid. <http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>). Allenby also notes that there is a need for a fundamental ethical base, which does not discriminate against groups, or individuals based on their stage of development, discourse, religion or culture (ibid. <http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>). It must be noted that if an ethical system only reflects one discourse eg. market capitalism, environmentalism, culture or religion then it cannot be considered to be a global ethical system (ibid. <http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>). Allenby further notes that natural and human systems are intertwined and they cannot be separated, and environmental issues are linked with scientific, technological, cultural, social, institutional, and natural systems in such a way that the network of these relationships is relevant for the analytical and ethical whole (ibid. <http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>). He also notes that in complex systems one cannot expect everyone to behave the same because different people have different functions, constraints and cultural

values and therefore a Global ethic needs to recognize this complexity and must knit different kinds of activities into an ethical whole (ibid. <http://www.att.hu/ehs/ind>).

Rastan takes up the issue of global governance and suggests that the quality of such governance depend on the acceptance of a global ethic, which must guide and direct action at all levels of the global society (<http://www.nott.ac.uk/law/hrlc>). In this regard he says:

People have to see with new eyes and understand with new minds before they can truly turn to new ways of living. That is why global values must be the cornerstone of global governance (ibid. <http://www.nott.ac.uk/law/hrlc>).

5.24 The Need for a Global Ethic

Against the backdrop of the collapse of communism and the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism against secularism and the consequent acts of global terror, there is an urgent need for a global ethic (opcit. <http://www.usao>). Scholars are recognizing that such an ethic cannot come into being haphazardly or willy nilly, but rather there should be a conscious focusing of energy and thought on such a development (ibid. <http://www.usao>). The engagement of scholarly institutions and scholarly efforts from various disciplines, inclusive of

religion must be utilized through dialogue and negotiations for the development of such an ethic (ibid. <http://www.usao>).

It must be noted that ethical systems of individual religious and cultural groups carry with them *certain* standard values, which influence our attitude towards the world (ibid. <http://www.usao>). It must also be noted that not all-ethical systems are fixed in written form, there are some that are ingrained in many different forms and are transmitted from one generation to another. Another characteristic of ethical systems is that they are inextricably braided into the self-understanding and sense of belonging of the members of that community and they reflect the deepest and most stable value structures which hold the community together (ibid. <http://www.usao>). It has been observed that ethical systems are resistant to change and at the point of contact with other systems there is bound to be some degree of conflict (ibid. <http://www.usao>).

John Hick notes that the survival and flourishing of the human family requires a basic ethical outlook, a set of ethical principles on which all streams of human culture can concur and which can be used to positively influence human behavior (<http://astro.ocis.temple.edu/~dialogue/Center/hick.htm>). He also advocates the need to uncover and cultivate the ground for human unity from the multiplicity of nations, cultures, social systems, religions and ideologies (ibid. <http://astro>). Hick observes that individualistic, democratic, liberal, historically minded, and a science-orientated outlook is what constitutes in a

very comprehensive way the ethos of modernity (ibid. <http://astro>). He advises us to take note of the significant variations within the global mind-set and the influence of these variations on the framework and structure of a global ethic as well as the presuppositions that are reflected in it (ibid. <http://astro>). Hick observes that in the West the main voice of moral consciousness that formulates and propagates ethical principles remains with religions (ibid. <http://astro>). He therefore suggests that their teachings constitute the natural starting point for the search for a global ethic (ibid. <http://astro>).

From observational experience it is evident that the West today is largely secular, with only a marginal religious influence, which has floated down through the culture. Much of the rest of the world is more strongly religiously influenced. But in the West, as well as elsewhere, the main voice of moral consciousness, formulating and propagating whatever ethical principles we recognize, remains that of the religions. Their teachings thus constitute the natural starting point for the search for a global ethic. Hick notes the introductory comment of Leonard Swidler that all the major traditions teach a form of the "Golden Rule" of treating others as one would oneself wish to be treated, be recognized as an *important* point of departure towards a global ethic (ibid. <http://astro>). He concludes that to be a moral person is basically to regard, with a universal human insight, others as sharing the same value as oneself (ibid. <http://astro>). John Hick proposed a method for the formulation of

a framework for a Global ethic, which is a very interesting one, and in this regard he says:

In this first stage of the search for a global ethic, rather than getting the peoples of other cultures to debate our Western draft, agreeing or disagreeing with it as the only document on the table, we should say: "Here is the kind of draft that comes naturally to us in the industrialized West. What kind of draft comes naturally to you, and to you, and to you?" And then the next stage beyond this should be to bring a plurality of drafts together and see what comes out of the interaction between them (ibid. <http://astro>).

Lee Penn proposes that Hans Kung's document "Toward a Global Ethic", can serve as a basis for a new ethic (<http://fatima.freehosting.net/Articles/htm>). Lee notes that the notions of self-determinism and self realization can only be rendered legitimate if there is human self-responsibility and global responsibility (ibid. <http://fatima>). It is also noted that egoism in all its forms such as class thinking, nationalism, sexism must be rejected because they prevent authentic global humanhood (ibid. <http://fatima>). Lee also points out that the present world context is saddled with the burden of endless lies and deceit, swindling and hypocrisy, ideology and demagoguery, which includes representatives of religions who dismiss members of other religions as of little value and who preach fanaticism and intolerance instead of respect,

understanding, and tolerance (ibid. <http://fatima>). There is a need for religious respect, tolerance and understanding as the basis for the global ethic. Lee also notes that condemnable forms of patriarchy, of domination of one sex over another, of exploitation of women, of sexual misuse of children still constitute disposition of part of the current world order (ibid. <http://fatima>). Lee proposes that the new global order must constitute a language that must be socially beneficial, pluralist, partner sharing, peace-fostering, nature friendly and universal (ibid. <http://fatima>). It is inevitable that the Global ethic would not be bound to any particular religious scripture or tradition.

Lee also strongly recommends Kung's proposal for respect for all life as a basic ethic of all humanity, however upon the suggestion of Kung disputed moral questions such as abortion and euthanasia should be excluded from this principle (ibid. <http://fatima>). Lee notes that any attempt to remove the "granite foundation of faith" from the moral order may lead societies to moral degradation and therefore into a moral crisis (ibid. <http://fatima>).

One of the serious challenges of forming a global ethic is the question of population control and the impact of overpopulation on the planet's resources and life support system (ibid. <http://fatima>). There are suggestions that governments should define how many people each nation can support (ibid. <http://fatima>). There is also a call made to control the results of one's lovemaking (ibid. <http://fatima>).

It is suggested that the Law of Rebirth be taught so that it would be able to bring about a profound change in the racial attitude to life and sex, to birth and parenthood (ibid. <http://fatima>). It is further noted that a lack of sexual control has brought into the world thousands of unwanted children whose appearance is solely the result of accidental and uncontrolled sexual relations, and in no way indicates the planned intention of the parents to offer experience to incarnating souls (ibid. <http://fatima>).

Lee notes that there is no place for inhumanity, fanaticism and social exclusion in a global society (ibid. <http://fatima>). Lee notes the prominence of Kantian notion that every human being is always to be treated as an end and never as a means (ibid. <http://fatima>).

UNESCO has suggested that there is a need for a fundamental change in perceptions and values and for a renewal of culture in order to address the challenges of the 21st century in the form of unequal production and consumption patterns between the rich and the poor nations, ecological mismanagement (<http://www.unesco.org/>) UNESCO notes that ethical values are the principal factor in social cohesion and they are the most effective agent of social change and transformation (ibid. <http://www.unesco>). UNESCO suggests that education in the broadest sense will play a pivotal role in social transformation (ibid. <http://www.unesco>). It is noted that there is a need for an

integrated ethical concept which embraces thinking in terms of human rights and responsibility, intergenerational equity, solidarity, justice, democracy, freedom of expression, and tolerance (ibid. <http://www.unesco>). UNESCO is of the view that the link between ethics and science will be key to solving many of the problems of the future and also noting the moral responsibility that humanity has for the future generations (ibid. <http://www.unesco>). UNESCO suggested that scientific and technological progress should not be harmful to life on earth (ibid. <http://www.unesco>).

Mae-Wan-Ho, a Chinese scholar, notes that the contemporary debates on technology are calling for the isolation of science from technology and ethics and to see it in isolation from society as a whole (<http://www.i-sis.org/newethic.php>). Mae-Wan Ho proposes that there is a need for a holistic ethic of science that can guide us in the safe and sustainable use of increasingly powerful technologies (ibid. <http://www.i-sis.org>). It would be impossible to leave out science from the global ethical debate because it has been affecting every aspect of the daily lives of the global population (ibid. <http://www.i-sis.org>). Mae-Wan Ho also notes scientific philosophers such as Descartes and Francis Bacon who proposed a philosophic-scientific paradigm that suggested a dualism of existence into matter and spirit which largely prompted the domination of humans over nature and the universe (ibid. <http://www.i-sis.org>). This view could be traced to the Judeo-Christian tradition in which human beings were considered to be created in the image of God and

have immortal souls, while animals and the rest of nature are there to be used by human beings (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>). Mae-Wan Ho concludes about the mechanistic tendency of science by saying that:

Mechanistic science has created a dysfunctional social *milieu* and a globalized economy which is destroying our planet and failing to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the vast majority of humanity (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>).

Mae-Wan Ho notes that it is symbiotic and mutualistic relationships that sustain life in total (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>). He proposes Jim Lovelock's Gaia theory of the earth being one super-organism and the propositions of quantum theory that suggest that we are inseparably entangled with one another and with all nature (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>). He notes that it is a holistic, organic perspective that permits us to provide a basis for a new ethic of science that can reshape society and transform the meaning of life (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>). His final words are:

Science can transcend the dominant *status quo* to reshape society for the public good, which is also the private good. We begin to appreciate how the purpose of each organism and species is entangled with that of every other. Our humanity is a function of this entangled whole, and we cannot do arbitrary violence to one

another, nor to the nature of other species without violating our own. The ethic of science is no different from that of being human (ibid. <http://www.i.sis.org>).

5.25 Principles for a Global Ethic

It must be noted that in formulating the fundamental principles that can inform the development of a framework for a Global ethic the consideration of the global crisis in the economy, ecology and politics cannot be ignored (<http://www.weltethos.org/dat>). The problems of unemployment, poverty, hunger, destruction of families, death of children, corruption in politics and business, social and ethnic conflicts, abuse of drugs, organized crime and the collapse of the ecosystem are some of the challenges that must inform the shaping of a global ethic (ibid. <http://www.weltethos.org>). It must also be noted that religion has also been misused for purely power-political goals in inciting aggression, fanaticism, hate and xenophobia (ibid. <http://www.weltethos.org>). It is noted that there is a fundamental consensus among religions about minimum values, which can be the basis of a global ethic (ibid. <http://www.weltethos.org>).

It is important that every individual recognizes that he/she has a global responsibility for global order through human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth and through opposing all forms of inhumanity (ibid. <http://www.weltethos.org>). It is also noted that a Global ethic needs to be

based on the spiritual and religious convictions of people in which there is a recognition of an ultimate reality and there is dependence of power and hope through prayer for the preservation of planet earth and the enhancement of the welfare of humanity (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). The Global ethic must be realized in the fundamental unity of humanity and the furtherance and commitment to the human rights culture in its principles of human dignity, freedom, justice and equality which is presumed by a consciousness of responsibility and duty (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). In developing a global ethic it cannot be based on an ideology of a unified religion but a consensus of binding values, standards and personal attitudes (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). One of the fundamental principles of the global ethic is that every human being must be treated humanely and therefore there must be the dismantling of mutual arrogance, mistrust, prejudice, and even hostile images, and thus demonstrate greater respect for the traditions, holy places, feasts, and rituals of people who believe differently. (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle also suggests that what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). Furthermore, this principle urges us to reject all forms of egoism, selfishness, whether individual or collective, whether in the form of class thinking, racism, nationalism or sexism (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>).

Another principle that needs to be considered is the commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle is

not limited to humans alone but is extended to include the plants and the animals as well as living in harmony with nature and the cosmos. (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). The principle of commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order is also vital for a Global ethic (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle is underpinned with the assumption that the economic and political power be utilized for the service of humanity in a spirit of compassion and care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled and the lonely (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). Furthermore, there is a need for mutual respect, moderation and modesty in which there is composure and inner peace instead of greed and lust for prestige (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). The framework for a global ethic must be informed by the principle of tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle implores every individual to cultivate truthfulness, to constantly seek the Truth and serve the interests of Truth (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). The principle of equal rights and partnership between men and women must form the basis of the framework of a Global ethic (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle fosters the idea that there is no domination of one sex over the other or any form of sexual exploitation (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). This principle fosters a meaningful social relationship in the form of marriage and family life based on love and which is worthy of human beings (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>). Finally, there is a need for the transformation of both individual and collective consciousness and also transformation in the area of ethics and values for there to be a common Global ethic (ibid. <http://www.weltethos>).

5.26 Conclusion

The western ethical discourse is largely influenced by empirical analytical thinking which largely shapes the human perspective of what is good., free and responsible. The empirical methodology is largely objectivist in its approach and attempt to develop a moral basis that can be conceptualized within human reason. The ethical theories proposed within the western ethical discourse suggests that there is a variety of ways in which the individual arrives at what is good. Although some of the theories may appear to contradict each other but they represent in very broad sense the aspirations for the good. The proposals for the global ethical discourse suggest that no perspective can achieve the objective of developing a global ethic on its own. The development of a global ethic requires a multi-disciplinary approach and an integration of thought systems.

CHAPTER 6 THE GLOBAL ETHICAL DISCOURSE

The main focus of this thesis has been to explore the contribution that Hindu metaphysics and ethics could make to the global ethical discourse, which can constitute the foundational framework for the evolution of a global ethic. This study focussed on the notion of the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), the status of the world and individual personhood (*Atman*) as the foundation of the metaphysical investigation. Furthermore, it also examined the traditional ethical concepts of *dharma* and *karma* in Hindu thought. In the last chapter, this study explored the trends in nineteenth and twentieth century ethics and also examined proposals for a global ethic. In this chapter, this study shall aim at constructing a conceptual framework for the global ethical discourse with contributions made mainly from Hindu metaphysics and ethics.

The *Prasthanas Traya*, which includes the *Vedanta Sutra*, *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, are the essential sources for understanding traditional Hindu metaphysical and ethical concepts. Although their exact dates cannot be fixed, their metaphysical and ethical thinking is dominantly pre-Christian. Its main subject matter is to examine the nature of reality and the nature and essence of the world and the human condition. These categories are critical to the global ethical discourse. It became apparent that the metaphysical and ethical thought from the *Upanishads* to the *Bhagavad Gita* was developmental and flexible in interpretation. These concepts were very easily translated for the purposes and

times in which the translators lived. It also became clear that scholars used these traditional texts as a source of reference for developing ethical ideas and practices.

6.1 Expanding Moral Value

While noting that the traditional metaphysical conceptual-methodological framework rested on the understanding that man is a moral being and agent, the global ethical discourse must develop and expand this framework to include moral value to non-human objects and realities such as animals, nature and the planet. There is a need to revolutionize this traditional framework because its ethical formulations are largely based on the assumption that man alone is a moral being and that the context for such a morality is founded on the religious, rational and social nature of man as a reality. The global ethical discourse, which forms the basis for evolving the principles of a global ethic, cannot be solely humanistic. Those that held the view that metaphysics is purely about human life need to develop a hermeneutical setting in which such an approach to metaphysics is changed. The hermeneutical setting must allow for traditional metaphysics to analyze non-human categories as ethical categories.

6.2 The Theory of “Essence”

The global ethical discourse cannot adopt the position of the existentialists that suggest the absence of “essences”, as a paradigm of thought, to be integrated into ethical thinking. In fact, it is by the notion of “essences” that the mutual identity of man, the world and the divine can be incorporated into an ethical dialogue. This means that the conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse must incorporate the notion of “essences” as a part of the hypothetical paradigm to develop a global ethic. Furthermore, such a paradigm cannot rely on the methodology of the reductionists, which prescribe pure intellectualism, as a means of understanding these essences but must also incorporate pure subjective experience as well.

Furthermore, the traditional conceptual-methodological theory of essences has recognized that the core of man is good, although there is variation in the expression of what is this “good”. To some, it is reason, to others, it is pure consciousness, human nature, obedience to a Divine will etc. It is quite clear that the categories of reason, human nature and obedience to divine will cannot be universally applied to sustain its qualification of attributing goodness. The application of the notion of “goodness”, it seems, was limited to man and failed to incorporate other realities. It is possible to expand the interpretation of the notion of pure consciousness as a universal category, incorporated into the

essence of all manifest reality that could contribute to a universal goodness in all manifest realities.

6.3 The Theory of Inward-Outward Nature

The conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse needs to embody the inward and outward nature of realities in order to attribute ethical value. The idea of limiting the inward-outward context solely to man is insufficient to the global ethical discourse and it needs to include all manifest realities. The global society have developed the methodology to understanding the essence of the inward nature of man, however, their methodology have limited them only to such a reality. The neo-hermeneutical framework must accord inward existence to all manifest realities in order to attribute ethical value. This thesis suggests that the traditional notion of *Brahman* and *Atman* of Hindu metaphysics can make a vital contribution in this regard.

The traditional ethical and metaphysical discourse has made one very subjective, yet a spiritually objective suggestion is that there is an inward nature to human existence. Hindu metaphysics have suggested that the essence of this inward nature is the soul, which is common to all humans and therefore serves as a justification for ethical action. The principle that can be evolved from the traditional metaphysical and ethical model is that ethical action can be justified on the inward essence or nature of the objects of reality. This principle

can be useful to the global ethical discourse in that it suggests an inherent unity of mankind based on the commonness of the inward essence. That human beings can respond more positively towards each other in the spirit of love based on the character of their inward selves. This perhaps will formulate itself as a global ethic that is directed to produce the outcome of global peace and co-operation.

The theory of the inward nature is also founded on the idea that God is immanent in all living things. This idea deeply suggests that there is a common humanity based on the principle of the immanence of God in all. Therefore, the global ethical vision of a human rights culture based on the principle of equality and human dignity can be enhanced through this contribution. Furthermore, this theory also suggests that the doctrine of inherent divinity is an integral part to it. Notwithstanding the fact that the doctrine of inherent divinity may pose practical problems to empirical ethics, suggesting that there is no need for ethical improvement. However, this is a challenge for Hindu hermeneutics. It is suggested that the doctrine of inherent divinity proposes that God is potential for man to become perfect. The doctrine of inherent divinity assumes the position that all mankind are fundamentally the same, therefore this principle can serve as a powerful presupposition to the human rights notion of equality and human dignity.

This theory of inwardness correlates with the Kantian idea of the human serving as the end in itself. In fact, the theory of inwardness goes beyond the Kantian ethic of the human being an end in-itself and suggests that all manifest realities must be seen as an end in itself. Therefore, this theory makes an ideal contribution to the formulation of the global ethic. So the notion of human dignity is not simply derived from the Kantian proposal that man is a rational being, but it can be derived from the proposal that suggests that man and objects of nature are inherently divine irrespective of their rational status.

6.4 The Concept of Environment

The notion of “environment” is important to the global ethical discourse. In the traditional conceptual-methodological framework, the notion of environment was segmented into isolated categories of social, natural and the divine with man being the controller of this environment. The problem with such a conceptualization is that it led to domination of purpose and eventual exploitation. The conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse needs to integrate these isolated categories with the intention of seeing a common purpose. It is suggested that the notion of divine or sacred space, which is the subtlest of all environments, be expanded into an all-pervading reality. This will attribute sacredness to the social and the natural environment as well and therefore render them as ethically substantive. It is on

the basis of this understanding that man's relationship with nature and the planet will be one of co-existence rather than domination.

6.5 Global Ethical Epistemology

One of the central issues that underpin the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse is its epistemology. Within the traditional conceptual-methodological paradigm, the source of knowledge was deeply subjective, scriptural and hermeneutical. However, the global perspectives of knowledge also include objectivist approaches. The ultimate guiding principle cannot just be subjected to an objectivist enquiry. For the ultimate guiding principle to locate itself within the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse, it must also be the object of a subjective hermeneutic. While the objectivist rely mainly on sense knowledge, the role of intuition cannot be ignored. While religious texts contain intuitive knowledge, they cannot become absolute sources of knowledge. The process of verification and validation cannot just be objective, there is a need for personal experience as a means of verifying and validating. As much as these may operate the subjectivist model, such a model is necessary to enhance the global substance of knowledge. It is suggested that the notion of *Brahman* can provide a theoretical pre-suppositional framework for the ultimate guiding principle. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the theory of a global ethical epistemology be developed. Such a theory must incorporate both the objectivist

and the subjectivist methods of knowing, verifying and validating. It must also expand to incorporate not just the human reality, but also the realities of nature and divine space as objects of knowing.

6.6 The Position of Theism

The idea of reality is also important to the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse. Traditionally, the notions of reality were separated into objective and subjective spheres. The subjective sphere generally reflected a theistic outlook while the objective sphere of reality rested on a deeply empirical and worldly foundation. The theistic expression of reality conceptualized a Personal God, which was the focus of morality. The problem with such an assertion is that there was plenty of intellectual movement in the exact moral meaning and purpose of God and this theistic reality varied in outlook from one community to the next. The global ethical discourse needs to develop a concept of reality that embraces both the subjective and objective spheres and also reflect a profoundly universal moral status. It is suggested that the *Upanishadic* notion of “*sat*” can make a vital contribution to the theoretical formulations of this reality. It is further suggested that a transcendent independent reality, which is the essential character of “*sat*”, be the basis of the universal moral order. The universal moral order is a permanent unchanging order and a transcendent source for the Guiding principle. Furthermore, this

universal moral reality must be all-pervading reality and as such must be both transcendent and immanent in nature.

6.7 The Nature and Character of World

One of the important considerations of the traditional conceptual-methodological paradigm was the nature and character of the world. Through the years, various ideological and teleological views have been expressed on the nature and the character of the world, which includes theistic, pantheistic and idealistic views as well. Furthermore, fundamental questions have been raised about the precise purpose of the world-creation. The idealists propound a view that suggests that there is only one absolute reality, and the world, therefore, is a mere illusion in relation to this reality. While idealism creates a kind of abstract cosmic vacuum, it is unable, at the same time, to generate place for moral and ethical value. The denial of the existence of the world is the basis for there being no justification to ethical and moral values. Therefore, idealistic thinking seems to be of very little significance to the conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse. Theistic views may have some relevance; however, there is much disagreement about what is the precise nature and character of God. There are also challenges to the nature and purpose of God's intent in the world-creation process. So theistic views cannot be adopted, as they currently are, into the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse because of their sectarian bias.

It has already been suggested that a Supreme Guiding principle is necessary in the context of the global ethical discourse, however, such a guiding principle cannot be translated into a Personal God. Therefore, the nature of such a guiding principle needs to be absolute and abstract so that, individuals may construct perceptive realities of it for their specific and collective purposes. The nature of *Brahman* is an ideal construct for this purpose. As much as the nature of *Brahman* is abstract, different people conceptualize it differently and therefore it serves the individual interest as well as collectively binds everyone and everything into a cosmic unity. As much as the Indian realist may project this *Brahman* as an absolute abstract without purpose for a world-creation, Indian theists have suggested that such an absolute abstract have purpose for a world-creation and therefore constitute moral and ethical relevance. The idea of the connection of the world-creation to an absolute moral Principle is essential for the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse. This connection suggests that there is moral purpose and value in the world-creation process. Therefore the world, together with its natural and sacred environments has moral value.

6.8 Universal nature of Personhood

One of the central ideas postulated by the Indian idealists, mainly *Shankara*, is the notion of the oneness of the *Atman* (soul) and the Ultimate principle

(*Brahman*). This postulation is connected to the link between the psychical and the cosmic principles. However, the main purpose of such a link is to sublimate the identity of the egocentric self into the identity of the cosmic self. Such an interpretation will be of very little significance to the global ethical discourse. The conceptual-methodological framework of the global ethical discourse requires the link of the psychical and the cosmical principles for the purposes of developing ethical relevance. However, the essential principle that underpins the metaphysical connection between the individual self and the cosmic self is the substantive and qualitative oneness of the individual self. This means that the essential nature of all human beings is the same and therefore, their moral and ethical value will also be the same. Furthermore, the notion of the self in Hindu metaphysics is not confined to the bodily self of humans but it also extends to cover all living entities in nature.

Apart from Hindu metaphysics concentrating in analyzing the notion of the ultimate principle, it also proposes a view of the egocentric self or the empirical self. Hindu metaphysics largely followed the methodology of understanding the nature of personhood from the physiological, psychological and spiritual dimensions. The theory of the “*koshas*” provides sufficient insight into the traditional understanding of the nature of personhood. However, this metaphysical understanding is based on a purely subjectivist cognition and may create challenges to the objectivist investigation. Notwithstanding this, it is concluded that ethical positions cannot be absolutely based on objectivist

notions but must also incorporate subjectivists views, which are not sectarian but mainly universal in outlook. So from this perspective, it is suggested that the conceptual-methodological framework of the global-ethical discourse classify the nature of an individual into three main categories for ethical purposes viz. the physiological, the psychological and the spiritual. It is also suggested that these three dimensions be seen as co-existing for the purpose of ethical functioning and is given universal relevance.

It cannot be denied that the main objective of the Indian realists, under the direction of *Shankara*, was to establish a notion of personhood that transcended all empirical connections and which aimed at constructing a “pure self” that was beyond the prospect of any ethical discourse. Such an idealistic construction would have very little significance for the global ethical discourse. The notion of an “empirical self”, cannot rest on the foundation of an illusionary making. On the contrary, it is central to the global ethical discourse. Therefore, the body-mind-intellect relationship is pivotal to the notion of personhood and it embodies ethical relevance in the context of the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, *Shankara* proposed the idea of a universal self, which was devoid of activity and enjoyment, therefore, beyond the categories of ethical application. However, the notion of *Shankara*’s universal self needs to be interpreted in the context of its empirical relevance and it is suggested that it serve as a model to unite the world community into a common humanity. Therefore, the notion of a universal self must follow *Shankara*’s method of

transcending categories; however, it must transcend those categories that attribute distinction to it rather than transcend phenomenal categories in total.

The traditional theistic conceptual paradigms, as articulated by Sri *Ramanuja* and *Madhva* may present challenges to the contemporary global ethical discourse. The acceptance of the notion of a transcendent guiding principle can be agreed upon. However, the abstract nature of such a guiding principle may be justification for a varied interpretation and for global recognition. Moreover, the interpretation of this abstract guiding principle into a personal reality with divine attributes must also gain universal acceptance. Although, such a contribution may be increasingly relevant for the theist, its recognition by the global community has always been a challenge. The qualification of the guiding principle with universal values such as love, peace, truth etc. are the basis for ethical relevance. The important contribution that the traditional Indian theists have proposed is the notion of “dependence” on such a guiding principle. For there to be any ethical grounding for the global ethical discourse, it is suggested that there be a “dependence” relationship between “personhood” and an ultimate guiding principle irrespective of whether the guiding principle is understood as an abstract or a personal entity.

Furthermore, the notion of the eternity of the soul is also vital to the ethical discourse. In the traditional theistic proposal, the idea that the soul continues to exist after death provides the space for the continuation of the moral scheme.

However, the global community has not recognized the notion of soul in a uniform way. In Hindu metaphysics, the notion of soul and its eternal character are central to the traditional ethical discourse. The idea of justice as an ethical ideal can only be articulated in its true sense within the theory of the eternity of the soul. Therefore, it is proposed that the global ethical discourse must incorporate this vision of the eternity of the soul into its conceptual paradigm.

Moreover, the conception that the soul can enter into matter positively suggests the unity of the objective and subjective spheres of reality. The material dualistic scheme of thought generally suggests that matter is distinct from spirit and this theory has resulted in the domination of nature by man. However, the traditional conception of the unity of the spirit and matter, is essential for the global ethical discourse from the standpoint that it recognizes the essential synthesis of nature and spirit.

6.9 Theory of Inherent Ethical Value

In the traditional Hindu ethical discourse the notions of *ṛta* and *satya* suggested a theory of the essential nature of things with ethical value. Both these notions applied to the empirical and Cosmic level of existence. This means that the entire manifested order embodies ethical value based on the principle of *ṛta* and *satya*. Furthermore, the traditional Hindu ethical discourse identified the finite and the infinite as embodying ethical value. It must also be noted that both

these notions are used in a very universal sense in the Hindu discourse and this is a vital contribution to the global ethical conceptual paradigm. This thesis proposes that the global ethic must attribute ethical value to all finite and infinite categories through the method of recognizing the essential nature as ethical. The notion of an inherent ethical value is an important contribution that the traditional Hindu ethical discourse can make to the conceptual paradigm of the global ethical discourse.

6.10 The Means - End Theory

Another interesting feature of the Hindu traditional ethical discourse is its notion of ethics being subsidiary to the ultimate goal. This idea suggests that ethics is the means to some transcendental end. The structure of this idea propounds the view that ethical values must be associated with a transcendent end. Within the global ethical discourse it is very difficult to arrive at the precise nature of this ultimate end. However, the notion of the ultimate guiding principle serving as an ultimate end may be useful. The structure of the global ethic must assume the character of serving as a means towards a universal end. The universal end may not necessarily be a God or an Absolute abstract entity; it can also be that which provides common fulfillment to the global community.

In the traditional ethical discourse, the notion of *dharma* served as a global ethic towards the ultimate realization of the *Brahman*. Such a construction may

serve a limited interest. For the purpose of the global ethical discourse, the ultimate reality must translate into a centre of common fulfillment. This suggests that ethical action should culminate in a kind of universal satisfaction that is realizable by the global community within empirical experience.

6.11 Absolute empirical freedom

Within the Hindu traditional ethical discourse there are several suggestions that direct that ethical action be governed by a trans-empirical reality. This means that action was restricted and limited to a proposed framework within which spiritual actualization was made possible. The principle that underpins this notion is that of “control” and “limited freedom”. In the traditional ethical discourse, the notion of *dharma* in its various translations served as a spiritual, legal and social regulator. This did not mean that human freedom was curbed, it merely propounded that human freedom must function within agreed limits. This principle is a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse, because the structure of global ethics cannot allow for unlimited freedom to human action. On the contrary, the traditional ethical model rightfully suggests that various agencies of regulations should be in place to ensure that the global interest of man, nature and the universe is protected.

Furthermore, Indian theists have suggested that this transcendent Absolute is an immanent reality both as a “world soul” and “individual soul” and therefore serves as an “inner controller”. This suggests that an individual’s existence is not by chance but is governed by a higher intellectual and moral purpose. Although, the notion of “inner controller” may suggest that the individual be bereft of individual freedom, it also proposes that the individual does not have absolute freedom in the empirical context. This notion of “controlled freedom” is an important contribution to the conceptual-methodological paradigm of the global ethical discourse. Furthermore, the Divine found in all things adds equal moral value to all created objects. This notion of the immanence of the Divine within the world-creation also negates the position of philosophic materialism that attests to the world being the only absolute reality. The notion of the Absolute guiding principle cannot be structured as just an abstract reality but it also must project a qualitative reality, which can serve as a perfect source of moral values for the global ethical discourse.

6.12 The Theory of Duty and Responsibility

Although the traditional ethical discourse was not rooted in a profound human rights vision, it never failed to construct a vision for individual and social duties and responsibilities. This theory of duty and responsibility is based on the principle of what is in the best interest of the collective and therefore it assumed ethical value. The notions of *ashrama dharma*, *svadharma* etc. were

constructed with the view of improving the status of the individual through ethical fulfillment and for the purpose of maintaining social stability. In the traditional constructs of Hindu metaphysics, it became clear that duty and responsibility was extended to the individual, to nature and the environment and to the realm of divine space. Man was conceptualized as part of the Cosmic ecosystem and therefore had to perform his individual duty so that order and stability in the Cosmos was maintained. This theory is not based on the notion of choice but on the law of necessity, what needs to be done in order for there to be preservation of order and stability. Although this theory of duty and responsibility stands above the culture of human rights, it is not opposed to the spirit of it. This construction is a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse because it suggests that global ethical action must be based on duty and responsibility, it must be motivated by what is necessary for human and global existence. Therefore this theory forms an ideal basis for global action and collective responsibility towards the global crisis.

6.13 Theory of Ethical Justification and Accountability

The traditional metaphysical and ethical model is constructed on the paradigm that suggests that the Divine is the ultimate ground on which moral justification and accountability rests. This model is riddled with various metaphysical and theoretical problems. There is no doubt that the principle of justification and accountability are essential to the ethical discourse, however, it needs to be

founded on a more reliable and universal ground. The traditional metaphysical paradigm has conceptualized the idea of *Sat or satya* that means “truth”. This principle of an ultimate truth and an immanent truth is proposed as the basic ground on which the process of ethical justification and accountability should rest. This means that a global ethical action can be justified and accounted for on the principle of Truth, since truth is common to all. Furthermore, the compatibility of human action towards an ethical goal can be enhanced, basically based on the principle of truth.

6.14 The Theory of Selflessness

The traditional ethical discourse suggested that human action, in the form of individual duty and social responsibility must be based on the standard of selflessness. This simply meant that an action is considered ethical if one does not seek personal benefits from the action. The ethical essence of the action was largely determined by the inner motive of the action. The inner motive of the action must transcend all levels of personal gain. This is a vital theory for the global ethical discourse because man’s duty and responsibility to the planet and the environment requires an attitude of selflessness. It is also assumed that selfless action formulates a basis for “action in unity” without regard for issues of gender, race, religion etc.

6.15 The Theory of Equanimity

In the traditional ethical discourse, the notion of “*samatva*” was fostered with the understanding that all things must be perceived with the vision of “sameness” or equanimity. This proposition rests on the metaphysical assumption that the essential nature of all things is the same. This theory therefore suggests that there is fundamentally no difference in the moral value of an animal, plant and a human being. This theory will be a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse because it suggests that ‘here exist a fundamental unity in existence. This theory, therefore, allows all levels of racism, sexism and tensions between feminists and animal rights action groups to be resolved on the basis of the commonness of their essential nature. It also directs human action with an attitude of respect towards all manifested realities.

6.16 Universal Moral Action

In the traditional Hindu discourse the notion of *karma* conveyed the basis of moral action at the individual and societal level. The structural features of this idea were underpinned with a universal character that suggested that it fundamentally is a “moral law”. The principle of a moral law is rare in an ethical discourse because ethical values are mostly relative. The notion of *karma* assumed that all forms of action (verbal, physical and mental) are underpinned by an ethical premise. Therefore, it accounted for universal justice

through a metaphysical method. The principle of “intentionality” was central to this moral law and it suggested that the effect of any action is based on the intent of the action. This is similar to the Kantian position and therefore allows for the correlation of the Hindu and western ethical discourse on this point. For the purpose of the global ethical discourse, the intent of ethical action should be founded on the basis of what is good for the global community and not what is just suited to individual communities.

This law also proposed a metaphysical continuity of births, in which, the individual accounts for all his actions. The ultimate objective was to transcend this cycle of empirical action. This law is universal from the point that it can stand independent of a personal god. It is based on the notion of “as you sow, so shall you reap”. This is a universal principle; therefore the theoretical assumptions of this law can make an important contribution in constructing a framework for a universal moral action. Furthermore, these theoretical assumptions can serve as a basis for modeling a hermeneutical scheme in which the issue of moral reflection and judgement can be understood in a global sense. The notion of *karma* can contribute to the global moral tradition as a rule of conduct. The propositions of the law of *karma* can also contribute to the conceptual framework that explains aspects of ethical transgressions. The cause effect theory of the law of *karma* can adequately explain the way in which ethical transgressions will be dealt with. The law of *karma* is compatible with the Kantian ideal of “the freedom of will”. Being associated with the notion of

dharma, it regulates the freedom of will or choice in the context of the universal guiding principle.

6.17 Objective of Hindu Metaphysics

As much as Hindu metaphysics is deeply rooted in mystical and speculative thought, which in turn is rooted in the subjective human experience, it is constructed to guide human thought and action. The objective of Hindu metaphysics is not to limit its speculations on the unique religious experience of individuals but rather to establish the connection of the cosmic unity that underlies reality. Therefore, Hindu metaphysics can make a vital contribution to the global ethical discourse in that it projects an awareness of a reality that transcends all cultural limitations and boundaries. Furthermore, the nature of the reality in which human thought and experience is erected largely influences the character of the moral and ethical values and principles that it develops. In this regard a global, cosmic reality which transcends all limitations and narrow interpretations is an ideal context for the expansion of global principles and values.

Indian Metaphysical thinking was not just rooted in reason and speculation but also in deep experience. It is interesting to learn that Indian metaphysics not only strives to grasp the nature of ultimate reality, it also attempted to solve problems within a changing society. Globalization is part of social change and

will inevitably give rise to problems and challenges. However, Indian metaphysics can be used to make an important contribution to the resolution of these problems. One of the problems that arise from globalization is the need to formulate a global ethic and in this regard, Indian metaphysics can make a vital contribution. The traditional conceptual-methodological framework in which ethical thinking rested, revolved around the categories of the ultimate reality, the inner nature of man, the society and the world. It is not aimed, in this study, to integrate this conceptual-methodological framework to the factual discourse of the postmodern society. On the contrary, it is important to recognize that this conceptual-methodological framework can form an essential basis for the structuring of the global ethical discourse. As much as metaphysics may seem to present a widely speculative approach, such speculations in Indian thought was more positive and life affirming. Although science and metaphysics cannot be integrated due to their differential conceptual-methodological frameworks, metaphysics has the role of serving as a guiding principle to scientific endeavour.

6.18 The Concept of *Brahman* – Ultimate Guiding Principle

In examining the meaning of *Brahman* both etymologically and from the survey of the *Upanishads*, it is conclusive that the concept of *Brahman* is rooted in multiple of meanings. It is also significant to note that this notion of *Brahman* is evolutionary in character and it allows itself to expand in meaning.

Its meaning contributes towards understanding the nature of Reality, which is not only empirical, as the objectivist scientists project it, but it is also transcendent and infinite. The notion of *Brahman* is unique in that it does not close itself to interpretation and therefore can be classified as a functional Reality as much as it is an abstract reality. As a functional reality, it serves as an ultimate object of reference for justifying a basis for ethical behavior. The foundation of a Global ethic needs a construct of reality that is unlimited to interpretation, both to the theological and empirical communities and the notion of *Brahman* whose meaning is evolutionary in character serves as an ideal conceptual reference.

It is also necessary to note that the idea of *Brahman* being the Cosmic Guiding principle is very crucial. The conceptual-methodological framework for a global ethic must rest on the notion of an ultimate guiding principle. For centuries human beings have evolved their system of ethical behavior from some Divine source. The problem that is connected with such a source is that it was not the ultimate source of reference for all people. People generally divided themselves on the basis that they differed about what the precise nature and character of the ultimate source was. But among religions, there is a common denominator that whatever the ultimate source was, it was the source of Absolute Good and therefore the ultimate guiding principle. There may also be differences in the view as to how the ultimate principle guided and precisely what it guided on, however, there is agreement that it did serve as the source of

guidance. The notion of *Brahman*, whose meaning stands above any sectarian notion or ideological classification, may be an ideal reference for the construction of a reality that can serve as an ultimate guiding principle.

One of the limiting facts about *Brahman* is that the traditionalists relied deeply on the scriptures for the source of understanding it. However, there was also room for transcending the scriptures and resting one's knowing of *Brahman* on spiritual experience. The problem of spiritual experience is that it is a deeply subjective category. However, the ultimate guiding principle for a global ethic needs to be beyond any individual set of scriptures and it must belong to a practical tradition that allows not only for a subjective experience but also for an objective interpretation. The fact that *Brahman* cannot be and is not confined to the interpretation of the scriptures suggests that it can be rendered as a global concept defining the framework of the ultimateness of reality. The construction of such a reality may be useful for the global religious community.

6.19 *Dharma* – The Basis for a Global Ethic

In the traditional ethical discourse it became evident that the notion of *dharma* was used in a variety of senses and contexts. It also became apparent that the notion of *dharma* represented an inner value or universal value of that which is right in various contexts. Therefore, the notion of *dharma* was applied in the social, political, economic, religious and moral contexts. The concept of

dharma also served as a regulatory principle in situations of power such as the state, family etc. It also applied to people of different classes and races. So in essence, the notion of *dharma*, in the context of the Hindu worldview is a global ethical concept. It is also evident that the notion of *dharma* has been interpreted in traditional Hindu medical ethics and environmental ethics. It can be used ideally as a global applied ethical concept. It is also suggested that the global ethical framework evolve a concept that is similar to the notion of *dharma*, which can serve as a global ethical concept, which binds all perspectives of living with an ethical foundation. The continuation of the use of the notion of *dharma* as a global ethical concept needs to be negotiated.

The proposal that the concept of *dharma* be the foundation of a global ethic rests on the following motivation. Firstly, the notion of *dharma* as *Sanatana Dharma* assumes the character of international law. This system of law is based on fundamental ethical standpoints that are common to the global community. International law need not presume only a political sense but can be interpreted to represent the general ethical sense of the global community. This incorporates what is common to the global community. Therefore values such as Truth, Love, Peace, Non-violence etc., while serving as individual ethics can also be characterized as universal ethics or global ethics. The concept *sanatana dharma* embodies these values as its main framework.

Furthermore, the notion of *dharma* as an ethical construct is not derived from a single exclusionist's contribution, on the contrary, it develops from a variety of sources *viz.* custom, usage, practices etc. which, although may vary from community to community, can be evolved into a common good. This is a categorical strength of the concept of the notion of *dharma*. From this perspective, it will be able to construct global customs and practices from the contribution of individual customs and practices therefore uniting the global customs into a common ethical vision.

The real capacity of the notion of *dharma* is that it is dynamic and not limited to a single definition or ideology. It is constantly evolving in meaning and meeting the needs of a changing society. The notion of *dharma* is not resilient to change and it can be truly described as a “developmental concept”. Furthermore, it is compatible with the pluralistic vision in accommodating diversity. Like pluralism it is able to formulate itself as a principle of unity amidst the diversity. Moreover, this pluralistic foundation to *dharma* allows for value tradeoffs towards an ultimate transcendent end. This is the precise nature that is required of a global ethical concept, therefore, it is proposed that the concept of *dharma* be negotiated as a global ethical concept

Furthermore, the concept of *dharma* is also compatible to the human rights culture because it advocates the idea of choice. Being based on the principle of relativity, it can be interpreted for various situations and contribute to the

ethical relativistic theory. The issue of social justice can be very easily reconciled with the notion of *dharma*. It has a unique ability of reconciling all ethical goods into a universal absolute. Being based on a functionalist model, it can be useful in developing the global ethical duties and responsibilities towards the world.

As *svadharma*, it can define the character of individual duty and professional ethics for a global community. Therefore, it is not in conflict with the notion of individualism, which suggests a culture of individual rights. However, it guards against individual rights being interpreted as an open mandate for a person to do as he pleases. Because the principle of *dharma* is linked to *Brahman*, the universal guiding principle, and it suggests that individual choice must fall within the framework of a universal guiding principle.

As *sadharana dharma*, it can formulate itself into universal individual ethics that serves as a common morality, based on rationality, for the global community. It also incorporates the cardinal virtues of (i) respect for life (ii) prohibition of adultery (iii) non-violence etc, which are common moral values for the global society.

As *sanatana dharma* or universal *dharma*, this traditional paradigm does not allow the concept of the particular to be dominant over the principle of the universal. Therefore, the universal guiding principle also serves as the ultimate

background against which the individual or particularistic ideas are interpreted. Furthermore, the notion of *sanatana dharma* is directly correlated with the Kantian position that moral action must be based on what is commonly good. As *ashrama dharma*, it can suggest the scheme for a productive lifestyle. As *caturvarna dharma*, it can propose the unity of the global temperaments within specific paradigms of productive action. Finally, as *Purusharta dharma*, it can define universal ethical values that are common to the human nature.

6.20 Conclusion

The notions of *Brahman* and *dharma* and their relations to the world and individual can make an important contribution to the conceptual framework of the global ethical discourse. However, the traditional methodology needs to be re-evaluated in the context of the global methodological trend that attempts to unify the world and the academic thought systems. The interpretation scheme cannot be rested on a pure metaphysical plane but must be able to translate itself to a profoundly empirical scheme, which is the foundation of the global ethical discourse. The specific principles of the global methodology and hermeneutic has not been the main focus of this thesis. However, the theoretical contribution of the Hindu metaphysical and ethical discourse will be able to expand the framework of the developing global ethical discourse which can serve as a framework for evolving a global ethic.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In chapter One of this study, the research design focussed on the key critical issue of the contribution that Hindu metaphysics and ethics can make to the global ethical discourse. This thesis proposed that Hindu metaphysics, through the notion of *Brahman* in relation to individual and the world and the notions of *karma* and *dharma* can make theoretical contributions to the expansion of the global ethical discourse. The research design identified a serious gap in the traditional Hindu metaphysical discourse, which reflected the absence of traditional Hindu metaphysics and ethics participating in the postmodern global dialogue.

In chapter two a background of the Hindu scriptures which served as the primary source for Hindu metaphysical and ethical thinking. It also took up the issue of Hindu metaphysics, in the context of the *Vedantic* systems of *Shankara*, *Ramanuja* and *Madhva*. Furthermore, this study also presented a background to the post-modern challenges to metaphysical thinking and designed a framework on the nature of man from a global perspective.

In chapter three, this study explored the primary propositions of Hindu metaphysics from the *Vedantic* perspective. It examined the development of the notion of *Brahman* in the *Prasthanas Traya* by probing and analyzing specific textual references and the interpretations of classical thinkers such as *Shankara*,

Ramanuja and *Madhva* and contemporary western and eastern scholars. This study also investigated the conception of the world and the nature of personhood from the *Prasthanaya traya*, the classical and contemporary thinkers.

In the Chapter four, this study explored the notion of *dharma* and *karma* in the traditional Hindu ethical discourse. The various levels of the meaning of *dharma* and *karma* was surveyed and a conceptual analysis of these concepts was constructed. Focus was given to the notion of duty and responsibility, selfless action, individual and social ethics, the traditional Hindu scheme of life and the theoretical aspects of the law of *karma*.

In chapter five, this study explored the contemporary post-modern global ethical discourse. This analysis constructed a framework of 19th and 20th century ethical trends and the proposals made for a global ethic. The central focus of this analysis was based on the western discourse on ethics.

Finally in chapter six, this study proposed a conceptual theoretical framework from traditional Hindu metaphysics and ethics towards the global ethical discourse. It proposed the notions of *Brahman* as an ultimate guiding principle for the global ethical discourse and suggested that the concept of *dharma* be negotiated as a global ethic.

It became evident that the global ethical discourse shifted its primary concern from man to the planet as a whole. It also became evident that the development of the global ethic cannot be the effort of any single thought system or community but requires the contribution of the global community. The global ethical discourse needs to reconcile metaphysical, ethical and scientific discourses. Although these three discourses cannot be integrated, it became evident that they share a mutual interest for global ethics. One of the central methods that became identifiable through this study is the incorporation of the various ideas. In order for there to be a justification for a global ethic, this study did not attempt to establish a single standpoint but assimilated all relevant ideas into the global ethical dialogue because the global ethical system cannot be constructed as an individual system but a shared system.

It also became apparent that the traditional hermeneutical principles and methodological approaches can serve as essential tools for the analysis of empirical and philosophic global phenomena. The modernistic methodological approaches in global ethical studies can truly be advanced by the dialectic systems of Indian metaphysics. Hindu metaphysics and ethics reveal a generally universalistic foundation, which enhances dialogue with worldviews of the global society.

The principles of collectivity, integration and universalism, which underpinned this thesis, were genuinely evident in Hindu metaphysics and ethics. It also

became evident that the contemporary ethical discourse, together with the ethical discourse of the 19th and 20th century can integrate itself with the Hindu traditional metaphysics and ethics for the purpose of developing the post-modern global ethical discourse.

It also became evident that the global ethic rested on fundamental values such as respect, tolerance, non-violence, life of truthfulness, human rights, duty and responsibility towards which both Hindu metaphysics and ethics made a vital conceptual and theoretical contribution.

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