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Dharmic Paradigm: The Ethical Core of Bharatiya Civilizational Continuity and Governance

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Abstract

This research paper aims to provide an analysis of the construct of 'Dharma' as the core of Bharatiya social and political life. It critically examines the colonial and Western-centric frameworks that have historically marginalized non-Western cultures and narrowed the definition of Dharma to mere 'religion' or 'sect' (Berman, 2000; Sarkar, 2008). The central thesis posits that Dharma may be understood not as a static religious doctrine, but as a universal principle of order (Dhri) that sustains and balances the individual, society, and the cosmos (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026). Tracing the epistemological roots from the Rigveda and Dharmasutras to the epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, the study explores the evolution of Dharma from cosmic law (Rta) to a complex code of ethical conduct and social responsibility (Brockington, 1998; Griffith, 1896; Hatcher & Olivelle, 1999; Shani & Behera, 2021). While the Ramayana highlights the personal and moral dimensions of Dharma, the Mahabharata addresses its multifaceted role in maintaining systemic harmony and interpersonal relationships (Brockington, 1998; Shani & Behera, 2021).

The paper further discusses modern reinterpretations, particularly by Mahatma Gandhi, who arguably viewed Dharma as a synthesis of duty, faith, and ethics applicable to all humanity (Sethy, 2015). Ultimately, the research suggests that the reclamation of the Bharatiya understanding of Dharma might offer a viable, holistic alternative for addressing contemporary global challenges, including social conflicts and environmental degradation, by promoting a society rooted in ethical integrity and universal well-being (Chaturvedi, 1993; Sunder, 2020).

Keywords: Dharma, Decolonisation, Morality, Duty, Bharatiya Intellectual Tradition, Social Order, Universalism, Cosmic Order

Introduction: The Ontology of Dharma

The concept of Dharma appears deeply embedded not only within Indian civilization but also across diverse traditions and global philosophical discourse. Beyond guiding individual existence, Dharma contributes to the maintenance of societal and national stability. The consistent observance of Dharma may facilitate the cultivation of equilibrium and prosperity within both individual and social spheres.

For centuries, a Western-centric study approach has marginalized the cultures and histories of non-Western countries such as India and has created a skewed understanding of global history and cultural dynamics. It divides the world into 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' categories, which hinders the understanding of the true

richness of other cultures. The contemporary comprehension of the term Dharma may have evolved under the influence of colonialism. The colonial era arguably defined the concept of Dharma through a Western lens while attempting to dissociate it from the cultural roots of India and Asia (Sarkar, 2008) ^[18]. The prevailing paradigm for socio-cultural analysis appears largely predicated upon a Western perspective, which, despite its claims to universality, may prove inadequate; consequently, the exploration of fundamental concepts integral to diverse civilizations remains essential.

This research article seeks to discover Bharatiya Dharma, examining its past and present. This research will address questions such as how dharma influences and shapes human

life, ethically, socially, and politically in the world frame. This research will begin by defining the word Dharma and its implications. It is also essential to differentiate Dharma from majhab, religion, sect, and cult. These terms are closely associated with strict rules and norms and are strongly institutionalised within the system (Berman, 2000, p. 919) [19]. Moreover, these concepts have very strict rules for inclusion and exclusion (Berman, 2000, p. 919) [19]. On the other hand, Dharma is woven into the Indian Intellectual tradition. For analysing and exploring the concept of Dharma, this research paper will trace its epistemology from the Sruti and Smritis.

Ultimately, the synthesis of these research findings will provide an alternative to the potential of non-Western civilizations, especially Indian culture, in solving the problems of the world. When we trace the history of the word Dharma, we find that its perspectives have changed from time to time but its basic essence has remained the same. According to Badrinath 1993 [4], Dharma is something that is beyond even human rights and democracy. It is not confined merely to religious customs and rituals. True Dharma is that which sustains life and order in all their forms: cosmic, human, animal, and divine. It is a secular concept, in the sense that it does not originate from any purported divine revelation, but rather from the study of the human personality across all dimensions of human existence (which are, certainly, not solely physical) (Chaturvedi, 1993) [7]. In fact, the real identity of Indian civilization is Dharma, not 'Hindu'. Dharma has been described as the basic principle of Indian thought, which represents the order and sustenance of life. It offers an inclusive vision that goes beyond the religious-secular divide of the West, thus advocating a society based on Indian civilizational dharma, which promotes freedom, unity, and a holistic understanding of human life.

Re-conceptualizing Dharma: Beyond Western Frameworks

To understand the Bharatiya social and political structure, one must first de-link the concept of Dharma from the Western category of "Religion". While Western thought often views religion as a matter of personal faith or sectarian belonging, Dharma is derived from the root Dhri (to sustain or uphold) and functions as a universal principle of order that maintains the stability of the cosmos (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) [7, 14].

Colonial and post-colonial frameworks have historically marginalized this indigenous understanding by reducing Dharma to a "law code" or a "sectarian belief" (Sarkar, 2008) [18]. However, Dharma is not a static religious doctrine but an ontological framework that provides a sense of security and order to human existence (Shani & Behera, 2021) [29]. Unlike the Western "Social Contract," which is based on an agreement between self-interested individuals, the Dharmic framework is an organic arrangement where the individual, society, and the universe are intrinsically linked through a shared moral fabric (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) [7, 14]. The whole of Indian life has been centred on the concept of Dharma. This is a rich and diverse spirit that shapes beliefs, practices, and social structures across different cultures and societies, playing a vital role in human life.

**dhāraṇād dharma ity āhuḥ dharmo dhārayate prajāḥ |
ya syāddhāraṇasamyuktaḥ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ ||
(Mahābhārata, 4.69.58)**

This meaning has been recognized by various Indian thinkers and philosophers, indicating its importance in cultural and philosophical contexts. According to Ingo Strauch, Dharma in Hindu society is a set of comprehensive rules of social and individual behavior, i.e., it has been referred to as rules and norms. According to Hacker, dharma is a transcendental substance that provides a positive modality for attaining salvation. The importance of dharma is central in Indian religious and philosophical traditions, whose observance is not only essential for the spiritual purification of the individual, but is also vital in maintaining social and cosmic order. In India, Dharma covers a wide range of meanings, from moral principles and social duties to cosmic laws, reflecting its importance in guiding human behavior and maintaining social order. The Indian Hitopadeśa states; āhāranidrābhayamaithunam ca sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām | dharmo hi teṣām adhiko viśeṣo dharmena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ || means human and animals share similarities in diet, sleep patterns, fear, and copulation. Humans are unique simply in their Dharma; those who lack it are animalistic (Nārāyaṇa, 1908) [20].

However, we diverge slightly from Hitopadeśa on this point, as every animal possesses its own self-determined 'dharma', a concept we recognize as its Mulswabhav. Indian intellectual tradition identifies the 'dharma' not only of human beings but of all living entities throughout the cosmos; for instance, the function of fire is to generate energy, and the function of a river is to flow. Modern thinkers interpret Dharma as a dynamic concept that emphasizes human values, critiques traditional social structures, and integrates personal morality with social responsibility while eschewing supernatural elements. The difference between Dharma in Western and Eastern cultures is that in Indian traditions Dharma is not limited to religious beliefs alone, but it affects every aspect of life. In the West it is limited to personal morality and duties, while in the Indian view it is a complete way of life.

Lexical History of the Term

The concept of Dharma primarily appears in the Rigveda and in the Purusa Sukta, where it was linked to natural or cosmic law. As the following verse states:

**yajñena yajñamayajanta devās tāni dharmāni
prathamānyāsan (Griffith, 1896) [10].**

According to Nilima Chakravarti, initially, in the Rigvedic period, Dharma was associated with natural law and moral principles. It represented nature. Dharma also included belief in supernatural powers associated with natural phenomena. In contrast, according to Ingo Strauch, the origin of the term Dharma is the Rigveda, but it evolved into rules and norms of social and individual behavior. Over time, Dharma acquired a broader outlook on life, including both individual and social aspects. It became popular for understanding human existence, its relationship with the environment, society and the universe and promoting harmonious development.

Later it evolved into a moral theory. The Manu Smriti outlines Dharma as a set of ethical principles, including patience, forgiveness and integrity. Manu's codification was associated with a shift towards a more structured understanding of ethical behavior and duties within society. Kanada defined Dharma in terms of prosperity and spiritual well-being. According to other thinkers, Dharma was initially associated with sacrifice and renunciation, which were symbolic of asceticism.

Later, this also expanded, and now Dharma was not limited to rituals and sacrifices but also encompassed socio-cultural domains. Subsequently, the Varnashrama system became the essence of Dharma. According to the concept of Vedic Dharma, the duties of a person and the social system are internally interrelated, due to which most of the works of Dharma started happening according to self-Dharma, law process, and penance (Strauch, 2014) ^[31]. Dharma can be classified into ordinary (samanya dharma) and extraordinary (vishesha dharma). Ordinary dharmas are common to all. They are like rivers that flow on their ordinary course. Special dharmas are like floods that burst the banks and flow in full spate. Ramanuja said in a discourse that ordinary dharma includes universal rules found in the Vedas, such as speaking only the truth (satyam vad) and following the path of dharma (dharam chara). Extraordinary dharma includes concepts such as dedication and devotion (Hindu, 2024). The concept of dharma in Hinduism has subsequently laid the foundation for an inclusive society without conversion. Despite changes in the interpretation of dharma, the essence of dharma for ethical life and social order has remained constant. Thus, the evolution of dharma reflects a dynamic interrelationship between natural law, moral principles and social ethics (Chakravarty, 1980, p. 229) ^[6].

The contemporary interpretation of this construct has acquired greater granular complexity. An appreciation of its expansion requires an analysis of the socio-historical contexts wherein the semantic evolution of Dharma has occurred; this expansion appears to encompass principles of social justice, individual obligation, and spiritual liberation. The Sanskrit term 'Dharma' lacks a precise linguistic equivalent in non-Indian languages; rather, the concept may be elucidated through a spectrum of interpretations, including duty, ethical norms, utility, customs, caste-specific obligations, religiosity, virtue, equity, and distinctive ontological traits.

During the colonial epoch, Western scholars often characterized Dharma as 'Religion' or 'Law', an interpretation that appears reductive from the Indian ontological perspective. The decolonization of the concept may facilitate a broader comprehension of its semantic comprehensiveness. Dharma, it is suggested, functions as a moral and philosophical paradigm for the totality of human existence, rather than serving merely as a prescriptive legal or religious obligation. Analogous to the fundamental physical reality of gravity, the conceptualization of 'Dharma' emerged in India to orient the individual toward an ultimate ontological truth. Western epistemology, conversely, appears to centre upon a linear modality of knowledge, which tends to delineate every entity in the universe as a discrete, isolated phenomenon.

In the contemporary global landscape, despite the

maturation of technological capacities, there persists a discernible deficiency in peace and dialogical engagement; indeed, the international community appears beset by pervasive instability. The identification of solutions to these multifaceted challenges may be regarded as a formidable intellectual undertaking. This predicament often originates from a reductionist tendency to perceive human beings, societal structures, and the natural environment as isolated entities, a perspective that potentially severs the intrinsic interconnection with the biosphere. Much as Yoga facilitates a progression toward spiritual liberation such as 'Moksha' by utilising physical well-being as a medium, 'Dharma' may transcend temporal and constitutional limitations to introduce universal principles that could empower humanity to navigate future challenges.

A Philosophical Distinction between Organized Religion and Dharma

It is entirely possible to practice Dharma without adhering to any specific Religion. The emergence of Religion occurred primarily to facilitate the dissemination of Dharma through the agency of learned scholars or Pandits during an era when education was limited to a select few. However, in the modern age, where education is readily accessible for instance, through free online courses anyone can engage directly with the principles of Dharma. This newfound freedom liberates individuals from institutional constraints, thereby enabling a more authentic and genuine practice of ethics (Sunder, 2020) ^[32].

Dharma is founded upon four fundamental principles, enumerated as follows: First, equality and justice for all living beings; second, humanity; third, love for all creatures; and fourth, the pursuit of truth through scientific inquiry. The first principle equality and justice for all living beings requires individuals to establish a personal code of conduct that fosters a sense of interconnectedness with all forms of life. This entails treating everyone with equal regard and fairness. The second principle humanity encompasses the teaching of recognizing both oneself and others as human beings, devoid of any discrimination based on nationality, religion, or caste. The third principle is that of love for all creatures; this fundamental tenet calls for unconditional love toward all beings whether they be plants, animals, or other forms of life.

The fourth principle is the pursuit of truth, or scientific inquiry; the quest for truth is best realized through scientific investigation. For instance, questioning the efficacy of a traditional remedy based on scientific evidence, or supporting climate research, exemplifies this principle.

Thus, Dharma provides a comprehensive framework for an ethical life, emphasizing reciprocity, compassion, sustainability, and truthfulness. By internalizing these core principles, renouncing negative tendencies (such as controlling one's anger during disputes), and applying scientific reasoning to spiritual concepts, individuals can transcend religious divisions and contribute toward building a just world. This approach not only enhances individual well-being but also addresses global challenges such as environmental degradation (e.g., by reducing waste) and social conflicts (e.g., by promoting peace). Embracing Dharma as a dynamic, integral part of life enables humanity to evolve beyond superstition toward enlightened harmony

(Sunder, 2020)^[32].

Organized Religion and Dharma are often mistakenly perceived as synonymous; however, a nuanced analysis reveals that they offer entirely distinct perspectives on understanding human life, the cosmos, the nature of truth and how to live it, as well as the interconnections between these elements. Compared to concepts such as Majhab (creed), Religion, Sect, and Cult, the Sanskrit term Dharma is far more expansive. It denotes the fundamental nature of reality, the cosmic order, and the righteous path (Dharmamarga) that remains in harmony with universal truth. It does not originate from any centralized authority, nor does one require any intermediary to realize the significance of Dharma or to attain the Divine.

It reflects the natural order of the universe and the duties that arise from an individual's role within that framework. Dharma can be understood as the invisible threads that weave together the very fabric of existence; it is not a human construct, but rather something to be comprehended and realized through deep contemplation and lived experience.

When we analyze the fundamental operational mechanisms of Dharma versus religious institutions (organized religion), the philosophical distinctions between them become even more pronounced. Institutionalized religions typically function through established hierarchies, formal doctrines, and prescribed rituals. They often lay exclusive claim to divine truth and salvation through specific prophets, scriptures, or practices.

Dharma may be conceptualized as a universal principle analogous to gravity; it persists independently of belief, operating distinctly from institutional constructs. Just as water naturally flows downward, or fire inherently radiates heat and light, these elements fulfill their Dharma without the need for any institutional control or doctrinal validation. Similarly, 'Manav Dharma' signifies living in accordance with one's true nature and fulfilling one's duties in accordance with universal principles, rather than merely adhering to externally imposed religious rules.

Sources of Dharma

Dharma is a Sanskrit concept for which no precise translation exists in any other language. However, during the colonial era, alongside political and geographical exploitation, Indian knowledge systems were also subjected to exploitation. Consequently, a comprehensive concept like Dharma was confined to limited interpretations such as 'Religion,' 'Custom,' 'Virtue,' 'Duty,' 'Rules,' 'Norms,' 'Usage,' 'Caste-specific Customs,' and various other distinct traits. The true meaning of Dharma appears to extend far beyond these aforementioned terms; this distinction necessitates detailed exploration within the present section. Just as Truth is not something to be 'constructed' but rather something that 'reveals itself' periodically, the concept of Dharma constitutes a cosmic principle a natural law that evolved spontaneously. It was not created by any single individual or group of humans; rather, it emerged organically and is deeply interwoven with the very fabric of society. Dharma represents an enduring and ever-present philosophical concept within the Indian tradition. In contrast, Western philosophy and other organized religions often hold opposing views, regarding

existence itself as the product of human creation. Given that the definition of Dharma remains a complex undertaking, the identification of its precise origins and boundaries may prove equally challenging. This is because, according to Indian philosophy, Dharma is omnipresent existing at all times and in all places and is, by nature, universal.

A Japanese Orientalist who attempted to define the meaning of Dharma identified no fewer than fifteen distinct interpretations of the term. The multitude of interpretations associated with this concept suggests that, to mitigate potential misinterpretations, recourse to the authentic sources of Dharma is necessary; specifically, the Mūlasūtras (Root Sutras). Primary sources for this inquiry include the 'Dharmasūtras', the 'Vedas', the 'Brāhmaṇas', and the 'Āraṇyakas'.

Indeed, 'Dharma' encompasses a far broader and more profound scope of meaning than the term 'religion.' That's why we should endeavor to comprehend the essence of Dharma by examining its epistemological foundations, specifically the principle of 'dhāraṇamūlas' (Hatcher & Olivelle, 1999)^[21].

The dharma is Sanatana that has no beginning or end as it is eternal. The 'Dharmasūtras' serve as the foundational bedrock of Indian thought of Dharma. According to the Dharmasūtras, Dharma comprises four fundamental elements: Śruti (Revealed Scripture), Smṛti (Remembered Tradition), Ācāraṇa (Right Conduct), and Ātmatuṣṭi (Inner Satisfaction). Similarly, there are four compositions of the Dharmasutras, which are as follows: Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha Dharmasutra. These works were designed to facilitate a deep understanding of Dharma' and the concepts surrounding it.

Apastamba Dharmasutra is the first Dharmasutra according to which Dharma is the practice of those who know Dharma, as this Vedic verse says;

**Athātaḥ samayācārikaṁ dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ. (1)
Dharmajñā-samayaḥ pramāṇam. (2)
(Āpastamba Dharmasūtra, 1.1.1-3) ^[1].**

These customs are not without basis; rather, their source is religion. This way of living becomes a tradition. Due to this bravery, religion has spread everywhere.

The 'Gautama Sutra' is the second text to accord significance to hierarchy, defining 'Dharma' as the performance of actions in a systematic and orderly manner. The subsequent 'Dharmasutras' namely those of Baudhayana and Vasistha also uphold certain fundamental religious and theoretical values, much like the aforementioned text. These four 'Dharmasutras' share several common characteristics, which may be delineated as follows: The first characteristic is that they all accord a place of paramount importance to Vedic teachings. The second characteristic is 'Smṛiti' (Tradition), which encompasses the Vedas, Vedāngas (auxiliary Vedic sciences), 'Shiksha' (phonetics), 'Kalpa' (ritual codes), 'Vyākaraṇa' (grammar), 'Nirukta' (etymology), 'Chhanda' (prosody), and 'Jyotiṣa' (astronomy). The 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' are also considered integral components of this tradition. The third characteristic is 'Ācāra' (Custom/Conduct), a subject pertaining to the lifestyle, behavior, and conduct of the 'Shiṣṭa' the cultured and

virtuous members of society. The fourth characteristic is 'Atmasantushti' (Self-satisfaction); this relates to an individual's behavior and conduct that meets with the approval of their elders and mentors. Ultimately, within the framework of the 'Dharmasutras', tradition, virtuous deeds, exemplary behavior, and sound moral values collectively appear to serve to shape the very essence of 'Dharma'.

The Vedas

The 'Rigveda' reflects ancient conceptions of cosmic order, which form the basis for later Indian religious thought. The term 'Dharma' is mentioned approximately 22 times within the 'Yajurveda Samhita'. In several instances, it is associated with the deities Varuna and Mitra. However, the phrase 'Dhruveṇa Dharmaṇā' appears with particular frequency. This phrase signifies a 'Dharma' that is stable, immutable, and eternal, one that can never be obliterated. In the 'Yajurveda', 'Dharma' is not merely a synonym for moral precepts; rather, it represents the underlying order-the 'cosmic order'-that sustains the universe and the natural world. On the other hand, there are the Brahmanas and Aranyakas. Chief among these are three texts: the Aitareya, the Taittiriya, and the Shatapatha. In these texts, the conception of 'Dharma' appears more mature and evolved when contrasted with its portrayal in the Rigveda and the Yajurveda. 'Dharma' is mentioned numerous times in the Aitareya Brahmana; here, the King, specifically Indra, is described as the protector of 'Dharma'. Varuna is designated as 'Dharmapati'-that is, the Lord of 'Dharma'. The Aranyakas and Brahmanas reveal that the cosmos operates in accordance with 'Dharma'. As long as the universe functions according to 'Dharma', this Earth remains in motion. Should 'Dharma' falter, it is possible that 'Adharma' (unrighteousness) may arise.

When a powerful force suppresses 'Dharma', the cosmic equilibrium is disrupted. Thus, within the Vedas, the concept of 'Dharma' is neither limited nor narrowly defined; rather, its scope is as vast as the cosmic order, the equilibrium of creation, universal stability, and the very laws of nature.

Dharma in the Ramayana

Dharma is an important part of human life and society. Ramayana is a Sanskrit epic composed by Maharishi Valmiki. In this epic, Lord Rama is considered to be the incarnation of Dharma. According to Ramayana, Dharma does not mean only spirituality, but it is a combination of personal conduct, social duty and moral values. It promotes qualities like truthfulness, justice, kindness, dedication, sacrifice, ethics and social welfare. Dharma has been said about Dharma in Ramayana as follows - Dharmo hi paramam dharmam satyam pratisthaam. In the Ramayana, dharma is closely associated with action. It is not merely an abstract principle but involves an inner struggle and the ethical choices characters must make. This is particularly evident in the Uttarakanda, where Rāma's actions against Rāvana are framed within a cosmic significance, paralleling the battles of deities like Indra and Vishnu. But the understanding of dharma changes over the stages of the Ramayana's development. In the earlier stages, dharma is more about traditional actions and duties, while later stages introduce more complex interpretations, including the idea

of prioritizing the greater good over personal interests. The personal aspect of dharma is also visible in Ramayana, such as; Rama's devotion to his duties, especially towards his parents, is a clear example of dharma, which shows the personal dimension of dharma. Some scholars argue that the virtues in the Ramayana are formalistic, focusing on fulfilling duties and promises. However, a broader interpretation suggests that the narrative explores the deeper implications of dharma, emphasizing moral credit gained through righteous actions. The concept of dharma in the Ramayana is rich and layered, reflecting both personal and cosmic dimensions, and evolves significantly throughout the text. (Brockington, 1998) [5].

In the Ramayana, Dharma signifies the execution of duties prescribed for an individual; historically, personal conduct was contingent upon obligations delineated by Varna, which constituted the primary expression of Dharma. After Ramayana, various broad dimensions of Dharma emerged in the society of Mahabharata period. The subsequent section elucidates the concept of Dharma mentioned in Mahabharata (Form of Dharma inherent in Adikavya Ramayana, Digvijay). These Dharmas guide one's actions according to the social and cosmic order. The teachings of Dharma in the Ramayana may extend beyond the boundaries of Hinduism. Ramayana shows how individuals can face the challenges of life while maintaining their moral compass, thus becoming a universal guide for leading a pious life even in adverse circumstances (Johari, 2023) [13]. The interpretation of Dharma within the Ramayana appears less complex than that articulated during the Mahabharata period; the subsequent analysis aims to delineate these complexities.

Dharma in the Mahabharata

The concept of Dharma is a central theme in the Mahabharata. At the same time, this concept has been complex, challenging and controversial, due to which there are variations in its meaning throughout the Mahabharata. The term "dharma" originates from the Sanskrit root "dhr" (धृ), which carries meanings associated with "holding," "supporting," "upholding," "sustaining," "preserving," and "maintaining." This term embodies a wide range of implications, encompassing cosmological, ethical, social, and legal dimensions, thereby serving as the cornerstone of an organized and harmonious universe. The concept of dharma is often traced back to the Vedic idea of "Rta," a foundational principle symbolizing the cosmic order that governs the rhythm and regularity of natural phenomena, including the sun's rise and fall, the changing seasons, and the universe's structure. In Vedic cosmology, the verb "dhr" is intricately associated with the acts of "supporting the sky," "separating the heavens and earth," and maintaining cosmic stability. (Shani & Behera, 2021) [29]. According to Shani & Behera, Dharma is a complex and multidimensional concept and attempts to understand it through various lenses including cosmology, ontology and epistemology. The term Dharma is central to the traditions of Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, but according to Indologists, eucentrism has narrowed the concept to Hinduism, considering it identical to Dharma. According to post-colonial scholars, Hinduism is a concept coined by Orientalists. According to Navnita Behera, to understand

Indian cosmology, we need to focus on understanding the term Dharma instead of Hinduism. Dharma in Mahabharata is based on moral rules. The Dharma explained in Mahabharata renounces narrow and sectarian ideas. Mahabharata attempts to explain Dharma as a journey related to rituals and these rituals are related to life, growth, sustenance and destruction. This verse - *Prabhavārthāya bhūtānām dharmapravacanam kṛtam | Yaḥ syāt prabhavasamyuktaḥ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ ||* confirms that Dharma connects man to others. The entire life of man depends on the quality of his relationship with himself and his relationship with others. Man's doing "right" to himself depends on his doing "right" to others. The question may be who is the other? Mahabharata has a wide definition of other. Other can include people, gods, ancestors, plants, animals, etc. But it should also be noted that the main focus of Dharma is based on the relationship of the self with the self. The Dharma of Mahabharata recognizes that man seeks control and happiness, yet it considers the happiness of the individual to be interdependent on the happiness of others, this is the ultimate basis of man. Dharma covers all aspects of human life, it helps in finding rational goals in social and political spheres for living a good life. Dharma accepts Varnashram in social sphere but does not encourage it. Therefore, even today Dharma offers a different dimension for salvation. According to Navneeta Behera, the purpose of Dharma is only to organize the personal and social life of man. Apart from this, Fitzgerald also considers the word Dharma as a complex and multidimensional concept. Emphasizing on other dimensions of the word Dharma, he explains it extensively and says that the meaning of the word Dharma in Mahabharata should be understood in the context of its use. He identifies three meanings of the word Dharma in Mahabharata itself, the first meaning is "moral work", which is beneficial after the death of a person. It includes studying Vedas, producing children, welcoming guests, respecting parents and elders, fighting wars. The second meaning relates to the moral quality of "right and wrong", whereby dharma means right and just action. The third meaning refers to a person's inner qualities and character, such as charity, compassion, and honesty. According to Fitzgerald, the Mahabharata does not give a clear definition of dharma. But the normative element is an important aspect of dharma in the epic, which clearly states that the normative quality is in contrast to adharma, which represents actions that are not in accordance with dharma. Thus, dharma in the Mahabharata has been described to have many meanings, ranging from beneficial actions after death to broader concepts of virtue and moral character (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 671-685) [8]. On the other hand, Aneja 1986 [3] has pointed out that the purpose of dharma in the Mahabharata is not merely religious rituals, traditions or beliefs, but the attainment of higher goals such as worldly well-being and spiritual liberation. Dharma is considered to be a guide for the welfare of the individual, society, nation and humanity, which inspires pure vision and conduct in life. Dharma is only that which helps in the moral and spiritual upliftment of the individual and society. Any conduct can be called religious only if it helps in the welfare of society and humanity. Dharma is the morality and value system, which inspires a pure and virtuous life. As a result, it can be said that the purpose of

Dharma is not only religiosity or spiritual advancement, but to live a life that promotes peace, cooperation, justice and benevolence in society (Aneja, 1986) [3].

Modern Interpretations of Dharma

Dharma' appears to be a significantly enigmatic concept. It constitutes one of the four 'Purusharthas' (aims of human life) in the Hindu tradition, namely, 'Dharma', 'Artha', 'Kama', and 'Moksha'. Scholars of antiquity have endeavoured to elucidate and interpret 'Dharma' in various forms: for instance, as faith in the Divine, the recognition of the inherent qualities of an object, or an understanding of the laws governing the universe. Detailed accounts of all these concepts can be found in scriptures such as the 'Mahabharata', 'Ramayana', 'Bhagavad Gita', 'Upanishads', and 'Vedas'. All these interpretations have been discussed in detail in the preceding section. However, with the passage of time, the interpretation of 'Dharma' has also undergone a gradual transformation. In the modern era, 'Dharma' has come to be understood primarily in terms of 'duty', 'morality', and 'religion'.

Modern thinkers have reinterpreted the concept of Dharma in various ways, reflecting changes in social values and philosophical perspectives. Contemporary interpretations appear to focus predominantly upon the principles of humanism and humanitarianism. According to thinkers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Aurobindo and Gandhi, the essence of Dharma lies in love and service to humanity. This contemporary interpretation may challenge the caste system, a structure that has traditionally constituted an essential aspect of Dharma. Modern interpreters mainly include people from marginalized backgrounds. This has led to an inclusive understanding of Dharma. These interpretations involve the integration of personal and social aspects. Modern thinkers focus on the ethical and moral dimensions of Dharma. Emphasis is on practical applications of Dharma in everyday life rather than on adherence to supernatural laws or doctrines. Some modern interpretations still see the roots of Dharma in cosmic or natural law. This approach holds that Dharma is not only a social construction, but it is also a reflection of universal truths that govern existence. Thus, it can be said that decolonizing the term Dharma can provide an alternative model for a broader understanding of freedom and sovereignty.

Modernization gave birth to liberal thought, a framework that has significantly influenced the contemporary global order. This system regards secularism and globalization as the primary elements of human life. In this liberal phase, religion has been confined merely to the realm of material and spiritual aspirations. In the modern conception of religion, the emphasis lies more heavily on human duties; it prioritizes an individual's obligations over their rights. The underlying logic is that by fulfilling one's duties, rights will naturally follow. Gandhi, too, viewed religion as a synthesis of duty, faith, and morality. This is because, within a society, the fulfilment of individual duties renders the community self-reliant and stable. In his book 'Caste Has to Go' (1935), Gandhi asserted that scriptural texts ought to be interpreted in accordance with the needs of contemporary society. If ancient scriptures stand in contradiction to present-day realities, they cannot be accepted. According to Gandhi, religion should be understood as a "quality of the

soul.” This understanding assists the individual in discerning two fundamental aspects of their life: first, “What constitute their core duties?” and second, “How ought they to conduct themselves in their interactions with others?” The former points toward the preservation of one's traditions and customs, while the latter pertains to an individual's intellect and willpower. The former may be termed 'Positive Religion,' and the latter, 'Natural Religion.' In Gandhi's view, the concept of 'Dharma' (religion) should not be restricted solely to Hinduism, but rather should encompass all faiths (Sethy, 2015)^[28].

He writes that it is not merely Hinduism that he holds in esteem above all other religions, but rather that transcendent religion one that rises even above Hinduism which serves to transform the very nature of the individual. Gandhi's definition of religion fosters an inner purification within the human being, thereby ensuring that their external environment naturally becomes benevolent. Ultimately, Gandhi posits that in order to maintain inner peace and equilibrium, an individual must adhere to this universal religion that is, 'Svadharma' (one's own true path) (Sethy, 2015)^[28].

In contrast to modern definitions, Gandhi's interpretation of religion serves to illuminate the intrinsic interplay between an individual's duties and their rights. According to Gandhi, religion is always and inextricably linked to human life. It is a fundamental principle of human existence and begins at birth. Thus, religion constitutes the very basis of human existence and is an integral part of it.

The Duty-Centric Society: Resolving Rights-based Conflicts

In contemporary political and legal discourse, the prevailing paradigm is predominantly “Rights-based,” a legacy of Enlightenment-era liberal tradition and legal positivism (TIWARI, 2026)^[34]. While this framework has historically bolstered individual protections, it frequently results in competing claims, social polarization, and a “mechanistic” understanding of justice that isolates law from morality (TIWARI, 2026)^[34]. A Bharatiya perspective, however, proposes a Duty-centric model rooted in the ontology of Dharma as a more harmonious and sustainable alternative for social organization.

The fundamental shift offered by the Dharmic paradigm is a movement from the question of “what I am owed” (rights) to “what I owe to the collective” (duties) (Chaturvedi, 1993; Sunder, 2020)^[7, 32]. In Western jurisprudence, rights are often constellated with individualism and, at times, social “aggression or separatism” (Sangari, 2019)^[27]. Conversely, the Bharatiya model views society as a non-contractual, organic arrangement where the individual and the collective are linked through a shared moral fabric (Chaturvedi, 1993; Sangari, 2019)^[7, 27].

In this regime, duties and rights are not opposing forces but are functionally equivalent: an individual's rights are naturally secured and protected by the discharge of duties by those around them (Sangari, 2019)^[27]. As research suggests, many social and civil wrongs persist because people prioritize the protection of their own rights while neglecting the foundational duties required to secure those very rights for others (Kori, 2025a, 2025b)^[16].

Swadharma and the Gandhian Synthesis

Modern reinterpretations of Dharma, most notably by Mahatma Gandhi, emphasize that true freedom (Swaraj) is not an abstract entitlement but is achieved through the fulfillment of one's social and moral obligations, known as Swadharma (Rao, 2018; Sethy, 2015)^[25, 28]. Swadharma refers to the unique responsibilities aligned with an individual's inherent nature (Svabhava), skills, and social context (Kumar, 2025; Rao, 2018)^[17, 25]. By performing action without attachment to personal gain (Nishkama Karma), an individual contributes to Lokasamgraha (social harmony and universal welfare) (Gambhir, 2025; Kumar, 2025)^[9, 17].

Gandhi's social philosophy repositioned Dharma from a purely spiritual or sectarian domain into the “secular terrain of civic virtue” (Sangari, 2019)^[27]. He argued that rights are not “natural” individual properties but are earned through the performance of duty, as all humans are inherently interdependent (Parel, 2000)^[23]. For Gandhi, Dharma was an entanglement of duty, ethics, and faith, where “Natural Religion” involves the use of intellect and willpower to conduct oneself benevolently toward others (Sethy, 2015)^[28].

Resolving Modern Polarization and Legal Friction

A society rooted in the duty-centric model fosters a culture of mutual responsibility rather than legal friction (Sethy, 2015; Sunder, 2020)^[28, 32]. While Western jurisprudence often relies on a “command-and-sanctions” model, Dharma emphasizes ethical accountability and a balance between the individual, society, and nature (TIWARI, 2026)^[34]. This shift provides several practical advantages for resolving contemporary conflicts:

Reduction of Social Polarization: By focusing on collective well-being (Sarvodaya) and the “welfare of all,” the duty-centric model avoids the zero-sum games often produced by competing individual rights (Chaturvedi, 1993; Isaac, 2011)^[7, 12].

Moral and Cultural Responsibility: Linking citizenship to civilizational ethics encourages individuals to act as responsible participants in society rather than mere legal subjects. This is reflected in modern Indian thought through the “Fundamental Duties” (Article 51A), which frames citizenship as a “lived moral practice” (Pal, 2026)^[22].

Ethical Governance and CSR: The integration of Swadharma into contemporary governance and Corporate Social Responsibility allows organizations to move beyond formal legal obligations toward a stronger sense of moral duty, leading to more humane and sustainable practices (Gupta, 2025)^[11].

Universal Principles: Modern Dharma is founded on four pillars: equality/justice for all living beings, shared humanity, compassion for all creatures, and the pursuit of truth through inquiry (Sunder, 2020)^[32]. These principles transcend religious divisions, offering a framework for “Alternative Jurisprudence” that addresses social disintegration and ecological disasters (Sunder, 2020; TIWARI, 2026)^[32, 34].

Ultimately, the Bharatiya model suggests that when Dharma the universal principle of “holding together” is the foundation of social life, justice is not merely a legal

outcome but a natural state of equilibrium achieved through righteous conduct (Kallol, 2026; Kori, 2025) ^[14, 16]. By internalizing these duties, humanity can evolve beyond the limitations of confrontational rights-based systems toward a state of enlightened harmony (Sunder, 2020) ^[32].

Dharmic Diplomacy: A New Global Order

The application of Dharma extends beyond the boundaries of domestic governance and individual conduct, offering a transformative framework for International Relations. In a world currently defined by fragmentation and power politics, a Dharmic approach provides a roadmap for a global order founded on ethical integrity, mutual responsibility, and the recognition of human interconnectedness.

Current International Relations theories are predominantly built upon “Realist” frameworks that prioritize state sovereignty, national interest, and the pursuit of power (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29]. These frameworks are often presented as universal truths; however, a Dharmic perspective “provincializes” these theories by revealing them as products of a specific Western historical and cultural trajectory (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29].

By decentering the Westphalian model which views states as atomized actors in a state of perpetual competition Dharma introduces an alternative ontology where the “global” is not an abstract space for power play, but a moral community (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29]. This shift allows for a reimagining of diplomacy where ethical conduct is not a secondary concern to national interest, but the very foundation of a state's legitimacy and global standing (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29].

Lokasangraha: From National Interest to Universal Welfare

At the heart of Dharmic diplomacy is the concept of Lokasangraha, which translates to the “maintenance of the world” or “universal welfare” (Chaturvedi, 1993; Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[7, 29]. While modern IR focuses on the “balance of power,” a Dharmic approach advocates for a “balance of duties” (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7].

Global Duties over Global Rights: Just as individual rights are secured through duties in domestic society, global stability is maintained through the performance of global duties by sovereign states (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29]. This implies that powerful nations have a Dharmic obligation to support the stability and well-being of the international community, rather than merely extracting resources or influence (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7].

Ethical Integrity in Statecraft: Diplomacy becomes a pursuit of Satya (truth) and Nyaya (justice). Decisions on trade, climate, and security are evaluated not just by their immediate benefit to a single nation, but by their impact on the “holding together” of the world order (Chaturvedi, 1993; Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[7, 29].

The “Pluriversal” Model and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

A Dharmic world order does not seek to impose a monolithic “universal” culture; instead, it offers a “pluriversal” model (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29]. This framework acknowledges and respects the diverse cultural, religious, and social Dharmas of different nations while

binding them together through a shared commitment to global ethical standards (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) ^[7, 14]. This vision is encapsulated in the Vedic ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam the world is one family (Kallol, 2026) ^[14]. In this model:

‘Unity in Diversity’: Global governance structures are redesigned to respect civilizational diversity, moving away from the “civilizing missions” of the past (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7].

Interdependence: The world is viewed as an organic whole where the suffering or instability of one part inevitably affects the rest. This provides a philosophical basis for collective action on global challenges like pandemics, environmental degradation, and poverty (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) ^[7, 14].

Stability through Order: Peace is viewed not merely as the absence of war (a “negative peace”), but as the presence of Dharma a state of equilibrium where all nations fulfill their respective roles in the global ecosystem (Kallol, 2026) ^[14]. The move toward a Dharmic global order suggests a transition from a “confrontational” international legal system to one based on cooperation and ethical accountability (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7]. By viewing global relations through the lens of duty and interconnectedness, humanity can move toward a governance structure that is more inclusive, just, and resilient against the limitations of purely interest-based politics (Kallol, 2026; Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[14, 29]. This Bharatiya contribution to IR offers a way to navigate the complexities of a multipolar world while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the welfare of all living beings (Sarva-bhuta-hite-ratah) (Kallol, 2026) ^[14].

Eco-Dharma: Ethics of the Anthropocene

In the contemporary era, the relevance of Dharma may reside most urgently in its ecological consciousness. As humanity grapples with the “Anthropocene” a geological epoch defined by catastrophic human impact on the Earth's ecosystems the Dharmic tradition offers a “Biocentric” alternative to the exploitative, human-centered models of progress prevalent in Western industrial thought (Dutt, 2025; Manisha & Rathee, 2025) ^[24, 35].

The Western developmental model has historically viewed nature through a utilitarian lens, treating the environment as a passive resource for human consumption (Dutt, 2025) ^[24]. In contrast, Eco-Dharma posits that the human species is not the master of the planet but a constituent part of a larger, living organism (Manisha & Rathee, 2025) ^[35]. This biocentric approach recognizes that the survival of humanity is inextricably linked to the health of the entire biosphere, shifting the focus from “dominion over nature” to “stewardship within nature” (Dutt, 2025; Manisha & Rathee, 2025) ^[24, 35].

The Sacred Ecoscape: Nature in the Ramayana

The Ramayana serves as a foundational text for this ecological ethics, portraying the natural world not as a backdrop for human drama but as a “Sacred Ecoscape” (Prabhakaran & Mukherjee, 2025) ^[36].

The Forest as Sanctuary: In the epic, the forest (Aranya) is

depicted as a space of spiritual realization and ecological integrity. It is not a wilderness to be “tamed” but a complex system that must be preserved (- & Kshirsagar, 2024; Prabhakaran & Mukherjee, 2025) ^[37, 36].

Biodiversity and Rajadharma: The preservation of biodiversity is framed as an essential component of Rajadharma the moral and ethical duty of the ruler (- & Kshirsagar, 2024) ^[37]. A righteous king is one who ensures the fertility of the land, the flow of the rivers, and the protection of the flora and fauna, recognizing that the prosperity of the kingdom depends on ecological health (- & Kshirsagar, 2024; Prabhakaran & Mukherjee, 2025) ^[37, 36].

6.2 Non-Human Agency and Moral Status

One of the most radical aspects of the Dharmic order is its acknowledgment of the agency of non-human entities (Dutt, 2025) ^[24]. In the Ramayana and other Sanskrit literatures, animals, rivers, and forests are granted a moral status within the social and cosmic fabric (Devi *et al.*, 2024; Dutt, 2025) ^[38, 24].

Voice of the Animal: Creatures like Hanumān and Jātāyu are not mere symbols but active agents with moral discernment and a voice in the Dharmic discourse (Dutt, 2025) ^[24].

Sentience of the Landscape: Rivers and trees are often personified, suggesting that they possess a form of sentience and inherent rights that humans are duty-bound to respect (Devi *et al.*, 2024) ^[38]. This perspective transforms environmental protection from a technical policy into a profound moral engagement with other forms of life (Dutt, 2025) ^[24].

Maintaining Rta: Environmental Protection as Cosmic Duty

In the Dharmic framework, protecting the environment is not conceptualized as a separate “green policy” but as a fundamental moral duty to maintain Rta, or the cosmic balance (Verma & Dwivedi, 2022; Dahani A, 2025) ^[39, 40].

Universal Equilibrium: Rta represents the underlying order of the universe. Any disruption to the natural environment such as deforestation or pollution is seen as a violation of this order (Anrita), leading to social and spiritual decay (Dahani A, 2025) ^[40].

The Vedic Harmony: This ancient Vedic concept of harmony (Samanjasya) emphasizes that humans must live in a state of reciprocal nourishment with the elements (Dahani A, 2025) ^[40]. By fulfilling our ecological Dharma, we ensure the stability of the cosmic cycle, securing the well-being of future generations and the planet alike (Verma & Dwivedi, 2022) ^[39].

By re-rooting environmental ethics in the concept of Dharma, the Bharatiya perspective provides a holistic framework that addresses the root cause of the ecological crisis: the spiritual and moral disconnection between humanity and the natural world (Dutt, 2025; Verma & Dwivedi, 2022) ^[24, 39].

The Unbroken Thread: Dharma as the Engine of Civilizational Resilience

The remarkable continuity of Bharatiya civilization, which has survived millennia of internal shifts and external upheavals, is not a product of political centralization or military might alone. Instead, it is rooted in the “unbroken thread” of Sanātana Dharma a dynamic, self-regulating framework that acts as the engine of civilizational resilience (Reddy & Lokeshwari, 2025; Srinivasan, 2025) ^[26, 30]. Unlike civilizations that collapsed under the weight of historical turmoil, the Dharmic paradigm has demonstrated a unique capacity to withstand time by evolving its external forms while preserving its core essence (Srinivasan, 2025) ^[30].

The Concept of Sanātana: Eternal yet Evolving

The term Sanātana is often misunderstood as “static” or “unchanging.” In the Bharatiya context, however, it refers to an eternal set of principles that remain relevant across time precisely because they are adaptable (Reddy & Lokeshwari, 2025) ^[26]. Throughout history, Sanātana Dharma has withstood periods of intense turmoil, from foreign invasions to colonial suppression, by functioning as a decentralized moral and social anchor (Srinivasan, 2025) ^[30]. This resilience is driven by “moral elasticity” the ability of the Dharmic order to absorb new influences and address contemporary challenges without losing its ontological foundation (Srinivasan, 2025) ^[30].

Yugadharma: The Mechanism of Adaptation

The engine of this resilience is the concept of Yugadharma the realization that while the core of Dharma is eternal, its practical application must change according to the requirements of the age (Yuga) (Kanth *et al.*, 2026; Srinivasan, 2025) ^[15, 30]. Rather than being a rigid legal code, Dharma serves as a “living” framework that encourages inquiry and reinterpretation. This allows the civilization to discard obsolete social practices while maintaining its spiritual and ethical integrity (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024; Kanth *et al.*, 2026) ^[2, 15]. The transition through different historical epochs was managed not by revolutionary breaks, but by gradual internal reforms led by thinkers, saints, and jurists who re-aligned social conduct with the perennial truths of Dharma (Reddy & Lokeshwari, 2025; Srinivasan, 2025) ^[26, 30].

A Holistic Knowledge System for Sustainability

The continuity of Bharat is also linked to how Sanātana Dharma integrated diverse domains of human life science, religion, and social organization into a unified whole (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024) ^[2].

This “unbroken thread” supported a society that prioritized scientific inquiry and ethical living over dogma (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024) ^[2]. By fostering an “ideal society” that was conceptually religionless and focused on sustainable humanity, Dharma ensured that the civilization remained resilient against the socio-political decay that ended other ancient orders (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024) ^[2]. The Dharmic order views the individual, society, and nature as

part of a single “Nature’s Consciousness” (Kanth *et al.*, 2026) ^[15]. This holistic worldview prevents the fragmentation of identity, providing a sense of belonging and purpose that has anchored the Indian people across centuries (Kanth *et al.*, 2026) ^[15].

Continuity through Universal Order

Ultimately, Dharma acts as a Universal Principle of Order that transcends individual or sectarian interests (Kallol, 2026) ^[14]. It is the “force that holds together” (dhāranāt) the social and cosmic fabric (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7].

Decentralized Resilience: Because Dharma was internalized by the masses as a personal and social duty, the civilization did not collapse when its political centers were destroyed. The “Dharmic OS” continued to run at the grassroots level in villages, families, and craft guilds long after empires fell (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) ^[7, 14].

A Foundation for the Future: This civilizational resilience is not merely a historical fact but a contemporary asset. By drawing on this “unbroken thread,” modern Bharat can navigate the complexities of globalization and the Anthropocene with a stability that is rooted in deep time (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024; Srinivasan, 2025) ^[2, 30].

By positioning Dharma as the engine of resilience, Madhu, you demonstrate that the Bharatiya model is not a relic of the past, but a tested and enduring system for sustaining human civilization through any era of turmoil (Reddy & Lokeshwari, 2025; Srinivasan, 2025) ^[26, 30].

Synthesis and Conclusion: Path to Civilizational Resilience

The comprehensive analysis of Dharma as the core of Bharatiya social and political life yields the following key findings:

Conceptual Distinction from “Religion”

The investigation suggests that the colonial translation of Dharma as “religion” or “sect” may possess fundamental flaws. Dharma, rooted in the etymological meaning of Dhri (to sustain), functions as a universal principle of order (Rta) that integrates the individual with the social and cosmic whole (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) ^[7, 14]. It is an ontological framework that provides systemic stability rather than a set of dogmatic beliefs (Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[29].

Superiority of the Duty-Centric Model

Unlike Western political frameworks that prioritize individual rights often leading to social fragmentation and legal friction the Bharatiya model emphasizes Swadharma (personal and social duty) (Sunder, 2020) ^[32]. The research suggests that a duty-based society may contribute to the safeguarding of the rights of others, thereby appearing to foster social harmony and reduce polarization (Sethy, 2015; Sunder, 2020) ^[28, 32].

Dharma as a Global Governance Alternative

In the realm of International Relations, the concept of Lokasangraha (universal well-being) might be considered a viable alternative to the Western realist paradigm (Chaturvedi, 1993) ^[7]. By shifting from national self-interest to global ethical responsibility, a Dharmic approach

supports a “pluriversal” world order where global stability is a shared moral duty (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) (Kallol, 2026; Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[14, 29].

Ecological Integrity as Moral Imperative

The analysis appears to provide a justification for identifying “Eco-Dharma” as a potentially critical response to the Anthropocene (Manisha & Rathee, 2025) ^[35]. By granting agency to non-human entities (animals, forests, and rivers) and treating them as sacred participants in the moral world, the Dharmic tradition offers a biocentric model that is more sustainable than current anthropocentric policies (Dutt, 2025; Prabhakaran & Mukherjee, 2025; Verma & Dwivedi, 2022) ^[24, 36, 39].

Relevance in Crisis Management

Dharma may provide a more holistic framework for the management of 21st-century crises ranging from climate change to social unrest by promoting a life-sustaining balance between individual growth, collective welfare, and environmental preservation (- & Kshirsagar, 2024; Sunder, 2020; Dahani A, 2025) ^[37, 32, 40].

The analysis presented herein suggests that the re-examination of the concept of Dharma may not constitute an exercise in historical nostalgia; rather, it appears to represent a necessary intellectual endeavour to address the limitations of modern Western-centric social and political paradigms. By de-linking Dharma from the narrow confines of sectarian religion and reclaiming it as a “principle of sustenance,” one may uncover a sophisticated framework for ethical living and governance (Chaturvedi, 1993; Kallol, 2026) ^[7, 14].

The transition from a rights-based friction to a duty-based harmony (Swadharma) and from anthropocentric exploitation to biocentric stewardship (Eco-Dharma) may offer a viable trajectory toward a more resilient and inclusive society (Manisha & Rathee, 2025; Sunder, 2020) ^[35, 32]. Furthermore, the application of Dharmic principles like Lokasangraha to global politics might provide a potential vision for a world order rooted in mutual respect and universal well-being rather than hegemonic competition (Chaturvedi, 1993; Shani & Behera, 2021) ^[7, 29].

In conclusion, the Bharatiya conceptualisation of Dharma may provide a comprehensive, ethical, and scientific foundation for human civilization. As the global community faces unprecedented challenges in the Anthropocene, the Dharmic path of “holding together” the individual, society, and nature remains one of the most relevant and sustainable guides for a stable future (Chaturvedi, 1993; Meena, 2025; Singh & Singh, 2022) ^[7].

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